

# Zechariah: Israel's Greatest Messianic Prophet

By Prof. Johan S. Malan

In his study of Zechariah, the author made extensive use of the following sources: F.D. Lindsey (*Zechariah* in: J.F. Walvoord & R.B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*) and Rev. David E. Malan (*Bible study on Zechariah*).

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# Introduction to Zachariah

“Zachariah” means “The Lord remembers.” Zechariah’s father was the priest, Berechiah. His family was among the almost 50 000 Jewish exiles who returned to Jerusalem from Babylonia in 536 B.C. Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai the prophet, Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest (Ezra 5:1-2; Zech. 3:1; 4:6; 6:11). He was a young man at the beginning of his prophetic ministry (cf. 2:4).

Zechariah sought through his message to:

- Encourage a spiritual revival in Israel (1:2-3) and warn those who, like most of their fathers, would not repent (1:4).
- Inspire the people to persevere with the work of the Lord and complete the rebuilding of the temple (1:16; 4:9).
- Comfort the returning Jews who, at the time, were going through severe trials and afflictions (1:12-14).
- Impress upon their hearts the fact that they can only understand the ways of the Lord and truly serve Him through the Holy Spirit (4:6; 7:12; 12:10).
- Reveal to them the coming of their Messiah as a lowly person who would seek their salvation but would be rejected and pierced by them, only to be accepted by the entire nation on a later occasion (9:9; 12:10; 13:1,9).
- Describe the triumphant coming of the Messiah to Jerusalem, who will be revealed in power and glory with all His saints to be King over all the earth (14:4-5,9).
- Confirm to them the severe judgements that will befall the enemies of Jerusalem, who are also the enemies of God and His kingdom (14:2-3,12-13).
- Highlight key aspects of the spiritually restored Israel, who will be honoured by all nations during the millennium when leaders of these nations will visit Jerusalem to seek the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (8:20-23; 14:16).

In an often quoted statement, George L. Robinson has called the book of Zechariah “the most messianic, the most truly apocalyptic and eschatological of all the writings of the Old Testament” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*). The messianic emphasis of Zechariah accounts for its frequent citation by New Testament authors.

## Historical background

The fall of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, as well as their restoration from captivity, forms the historical background of this book. The Assyrians brought an end to the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., while Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the southern kingdom of Judea in 586 B.C. Many of Jerusalem’s inhabitants were deported to Babylon for a period of seventy years (Jer. 25:11; 29:10). During this exile the prophet Daniel received the revelation that Gentile kingdoms would be dominant over Israel until the kingdom of the Messiah has been established in Jerusalem (Dan. 2 & 7). This long period is referred to as “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24).

It is of the utmost importance to realise that the prophecies of Zechariah were addressed to the united Israeli nation composed of all 12 its tribes – they were no longer a divided nation. Unfortunately, there are people who theorise that the so-called ten lost tribes of Israel migrated to Europe and became the founding fathers of the Western nations. These people allege that only Jews belonging to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin returned from the Babylonian exile to Jerusalem. However, the groups that returned to their land were representative of all 12 the tribes. The following are the most important facts which substantiate this statement:

There was never a rigid division between the two and the ten tribes of Israel. During the 250 years of their existence, the northern ten-tribe kingdom of Israel was ruled by 19 apostate kings. There was not a single God-fearing one among them. The leaders were so incompetent and evil that many of their subjects migrated to the southern kingdom of Judah (2 Chron. 11:14,17).

Whenever a God-fearing king ruled in Jerusalem, the migration from the north recurred with great vigour. The dedication and positive reforms of King Asa had the same effect: "Then he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those who sojourned with them from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, for they came over to him in great numbers from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him" (2 Chron. 15:9).

Another reason for the strengthening of Judah and the weakening of Israel was warfare. King Asa's father, Abijah, clashed with Israel and slew 500 000 men (2 Chron. 13:17-18). Within 20 years the army of Judah had increased from 180 000 (1 Kings 12:21) to 580 000 (2 Chron. 14:8). After 40 years they had 1 160 000 men (2 Chron. 17:14-18). During the same time, Israel's army had decreased to only 7 000 men (1 Kings 20:15). These figures cannot be explained without taking the large-scale migrations from Israel to Judah into account.

People often make the wrong assumption that, in terms of 2 Kings 17:18, the whole of Israel were taken captive to Assyria in 721 BC. In actual fact, only the leaders and prominent families were exiled while the majority of poor people remained behind. The same pattern was repeated during the Babylonian captivity of the southern kingdom 134 years later (2 Kings 24:14-16; 25:11-12). According to the *Biblical Encyclopaedia*, Sargon II, the successor to Shalmaneser, indicated in his chronicles that he took 27 290 people from Israel as captives to Assyria (see 2 Kings 17:1-6).

The unfounded allegation by the British-Israel Movement and various related groups in many countries must also be considered, i.e. that the limited number of captives from Israel became dispersed to Europe and founded the white nations of the West. It is a well established fact that no such migration has occurred. There are no lost tribes of Israel who can account for the origin of all the white nations of Europe, since they are descendants of Japheth (Gen. 10:2-5) – they are not Semites!

2 Kings 17:6 mentions the Assyrian cities to which the captives from Israel were taken. In 612 B.C., the Assyrian Empire fell to the Babylonian Empire and was incorporated to the latter. The prophet Ezekiel was taken captive to Babylon in 597 BC by Nebuchadnezzar. In Tel Abib, at the River Chebar, he met with the descendants of the Israelites who were taken captive more than 120 years earlier. God spoke to him about the Israelites who continued with their rebelliousness (Ezek. 2:3; 3:14-17).

It is clear, therefore, that a group of the ten tribes was in Assyria (later incorporated to Babylonia); another group of them remained in Samaria, while a large group had already migrated to Judah. Since the Babylonian captivity of Judah, the two houses of Israel (the ten tribes and the two tribes) had a common destiny. They again merged into one nation with twelve tribes and were henceforth mentioned together. A year after Ezekiel visited the captives of Israel he cried out to God, saying: "Ah, Lord GOD! Will You destroy all the remnant of Israel in pouring out Your fury on Jerusalem? Then He said to me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, and the land is full of bloodshed, and the city full of perversity" (Ezek. 9:8-9).

There is no biblical evidence, or any credible extra-biblical evidence, which makes any mention of Israel's alleged migration to Europe. Even 160 years after Israel's captivity to Assyria it is written: "For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, until the LORD removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, **as it is to this day**" (2 Kings 17:22-23; emphasis mine).

The fact that Israel and Judah were both oppressed and held captive in the Assyrian/Babylonian region is also confirmed by Jeremiah: "Thus says the LORD of hosts: **The children of Israel were oppressed, along with the children of Judah; all who took them captive have held them fast**; they have refused to let them go. Their Redeemer is strong; the LORD of hosts is His name" (Jer. 50:33-34).

From this Scripture it is clear that the Assyrians and Babylonians contained the captives and refused to let them go. There could, therefore, not have been a major migration to Europe during this time. It was only after the conquering of Babylonia in 539 BC by Cyrus, the king of Persia, that the command was given to the captives to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2-3). It was the express will of God that the entire nation of Israel (all twelve tribes) be restored to the land of

Israel and the city of Jerusalem as their capital (cf. Ezek. 37:21-22). It is again and again confirmed that the restoration was an all-Israel affair (see Ezra 2:70; 3:1-2; 6:21; 7:7-13; 10:1-5). There are no lost tribes of Israel!

The small groups of Jews who did not wish to return to their land, eventually became dispersed to many countries in Asia and Europe, but most of them retained their identity as Jews and built synagogues to practise their traditional religion. The majority of them did not want to mix and intermarry with the Gentiles. Paul visited several of these groups on his missionary journeys. Their numbers increased considerably after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

The term 'Judah' has special significance as it refers to the royal tribe of Israel from which also the Messiah, Jesus Christ, was born. For this reason, all the tribes intimately associate with Judah. As already indicated, large groups from the northern ten tribes of Israel joined the kingdom of Judah even before the Babylonian captivity. During and after the Babylonian captivity, the term 'Jew' [derived from Judah] became established as a synonym for 'Israel'. One need only read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah to note how the terms 'Jew' and 'Israel' are used alternately to describe the same people (cf. Ezra 6:8, 16-17, 21; In Nehemiah 1:6 and 4:1 the names 'Israel' and 'Jew' are alternated in the same way).

In his book, Zechariah also alternates the terms 'Jew' and 'Israel' when referring to the restored nation. He says that after all the hostilities and hardships suffered by Israel they will ultimately be fully restored and spiritually revived, and then be accepted and greatly honoured by the nations that will also serve the Messiah during the millennium: "In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" (8:23). In 9:1 and 12:1 he refers to the same people as 'Israel.'

The post-exilic scenario described by Zechariah is that of a reunited Israeli people who were faced with the tough challenge of rebuilding the devastated city of Jerusalem, the ruined temple, and also the other plundered towns and cities. When the Babylonian Empire fell to the Persian Empire in 539 B.C., Cyrus decreed that the Jews could return to Jerusalem to rebuild their city and temple (Ezra 1:2-4; 2 Chron. 36:22-23). They returned in 536 B.C. Sacrifices were soon reinstituted on a rebuilt altar of burnt offering (Ezra 3:1-6), and in the second year of their return the foundation of the temple was laid (Ezra 3:8-13; 5:16). Neighbouring people, particularly from Samaria, opposed the work, and that, coupled with the extreme poverty of the returning Jews, undermined their enthusiasm and eventually halted the reconstruction efforts for 16 years until the rule of the Persian king, Darius. In the second regnal year of Darius (520 B.C.) God raised up Haggai the prophet to encourage the Jews in rebuilding the temple (Ezra 5:1-2; Hag. 1:1). Zechariah also encouraged the people to spiritual renewal and rebuilding the temple by revealing to them God's plan for Israel's future. In the light of this prophetic encouragement the people completed the reconstruction of the temple in 515 B.C.

### **Outline of the book**

This book is presented within the following framework:

1. Preamble (1:1).
2. The call to repentance (1:2-6).
3. The communication of the visions (1:7-6:8).
4. The symbolic act concluding the visions (6:9-15).
5. The four explanatory messages (chaps. 7-8).
6. The first revelatory oracle: the anointed King is rejected (chaps. 9-11).
7. The second revelatory oracle: the rejected King returns to Jerusalem and is enthroned (chaps. 12-14).

Following the opening call to repentance (1:2-6), Zechariah gave a series of eight prophetic night visions that he saw in a single night (1:7-6:8). These visions are revelatory in nature and are highly figurative descriptions of eschatological encouragement. According to the Walvoord & Zuck Commentary (ibid.) the eight night visions have the following basic meanings:

<b>Vision</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
The red-horse rider among the myrtles (1:7-17)	God's anger against the nations and blessing on the restored Israel
The four horns and the four craftsmen (1:18-21)	God's judgement on the nations that afflict Israel
The surveyor with a measuring line (chap. 2)	God's future blessings on restored Jerusalem and Israel
The cleansing and dedication of Joshua the high priest (chap. 3)	Israel's future cleansing from sin and their reinstatement as a priestly nation
The golden lampstand and the two olive trees (chap. 4)	Israel as the light to the nations under Messiah, the King-Priest
The flying scroll (5:1-4)	The severity and totality of divine judgement on individual Israelites
The woman in the ephah (5:5-11)	The removal of national Israel's sin of rebellion against God
The four chariots (6:1-8)	Divine judgement on Gentile nations

From these descriptions and revelations, God's love for His people Israel is very evident. He promised to restore them to their land and to make Jerusalem a praise in the earth (Zech. 1:16; Isa. 62:6-7). The Messiah, Jesus, is the appointed Mediator through whom these blessings will be bestowed upon Israel. God will not bless Israel solely because of their descent. Those who reject the Messiah will end up in a great tribulation from which only a believing remnant will be saved (13:8-9).

# Zechariah 1: The Lord Returns to Jerusalem with Mercy

The Book Zechariah deals with the spiritual restoration of the people of Israel *and* their capital city, Jerusalem – not only in Zechariah's time, but more specifically in the end-time after the coming of the Messiah. God's judgements upon His enemies are also described, and it is clear that they are also the enemies of Israel.

"In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah..." (1:1). This verse reveals the time, divine source and human agent of the opening call to repentance. The specific day of the eighth month, which began October 27, 520 B.C., is significant as the Jewish prophet dates his prophecy according to the reign of a Gentile monarch. This was a reminder to all Zechariah's hearers that the times of the Gentiles were in progress and that no descendant of David was sitting on the throne in Jerusalem. Furthermore, Zechariah was only the person who uttered this prophecy, and not its source, as the word of God came to him (cf. 2 Pet. 1:21). As a prophet, he was merely a servant and spokesman who was called and anointed to bring God's word to the people.

## Return to the Lord! (1:2-6)

A solemn warning is extended to Israel not to continue with the disobedience of their fathers as they were arousing the anger of the Lord, but rather to repent and make use of His offer of divine grace: "The LORD has been very angry with your fathers... Thus says the LORD of hosts: Return to Me, and I will return to you... Do not be like your fathers" (1:2-4). Whereas the sins of their forefathers gave rise to the desolation of the temple, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity of the nation, their own sins had resulted in delay in rebuilding the city and the temple, and in their enemies being successful in attacking and discouraging them. If they did not heartily repent they would forfeit the presence and blessings of the Lord and instead kindle His wrath upon them. He would then again withdraw from Israel and surrender them to their enemies.

The seriousness of the situation was emphasised by asking two questions, thereby calling attention to the brevity of human life and the need for timely response to God's command to repent. "Your fathers, where are they?" (1:5). They were dead from sword, famine, pestilence, and natural causes, as predicted by the earlier prophets. "And the prophets, do they live for ever?" (1:5). The implied answer was "no." Their ministries were also brief, so the opportunity for repentance which they offered should not be ignored.

The prerequisite for experiencing the blessings revealed by the prophets was a genuine and wholehearted turning to the Lord. They were not to be disobedient as were those of the former generation who were taken into exile as a result of God's certain judgement.

The need for repentance is not only a key to receiving the remission of sins and the blessings of God upon the lives of the Israelites in the Old Testament, but equally applies to us in the New Testament. Paul said: "God...commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Through repentance, a lost sinner turns to God in faith to obtain forgiveness of his/her sins, to be spiritually renewed by being born again, and to be endued by the power of the Holy Spirit to serve the Lord.

God pronounced the death penalty upon all sinners: "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:4; cf. Rom. 6:23). For this reason, there is no remission of sin without the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22; cf. Lev. 17:11). The Messiah, Jesus Christ, is the Lamb of God who shed His blood and died on the cross to make atonement for our sins (John 1:29; Rom. 3:25). Before the coming of Messiah, the Israelites had to sacrifice animals for their sins, which typologically pointed to the future sacrifice of the Messiah. But since the law was only a shadow of the good things to come, the Old Testament sacrifices had to be repeated over and over until the once for all sacrifice of the perfect Lamb of God (Heb. 10:1-18).

Under the Old Covenant it was nevertheless imperative to bring repetitive animal sacrifices as the sins of the people were provisionally forgiven, pending the coming and sacrifice of the Messiah. The law and its prescribed sacrifices were all fulfilled in the Messiah (Matt. 5:17). Paul said: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4). The continuation of Old Testament animal sacrifices in the court of the temple was imperative as it

demanded repentance from the people, it emphasised the principle that there is no atonement without the shedding of blood, and therefore kept the Messianic hope of the people alive. Since it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb. 10:4), the faithful ones in Israel were awaiting the salvation which only the Lamb of God (the Messiah) could bring to them. Isaiah said: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed... The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:5-6).

Before the Messiah came, the people of Israel had to maintain and observe the shadowy practices of the law. But in so doing, they embraced the promises of the coming Messiah and the future blessings that were in store for all believers. In the ages to come they will also, like us, glory in the Messiah (Zech. 12:10), in His atonement for the sins of the world (Rev. 5:9), in His victory over the forces of darkness (Heb. 2:14-15), and in His everlasting blessings for all believers (Heb. 11:13,39-40).

In the Old Testament, the neglecting of the temple service was always an indication of Israel's spiritual backsliding as they stopped listening to the law which convicted them of sin, and consequently ceased with the confession of sins which always accompanied their sacrifices and prayers for blessing. They forgot the Lord and became involved with sin. Turning to God always implied the restoration of the temple service, the daily sacrifices, the reading of the law and the prophets, and a fresh commitment to honour and obey the Holy One of Israel, who is mighty to save.

That is the reason why rebuilding of the temple and the reinstitution of the temple service was so important to those Jews who returned from the Babylonian exile. Zechariah strongly encouraged them to dedicate themselves to this task. Part of his motivation was the promise of the Coming One who would fulfil all the animal sacrifices as He, Himself, would be pierced for their iniquities (12:10). He will be the High Priest and King of Jerusalem *and* of the whole world (14:9).

### **The red-horse rider among the myrtles (1:7-17)**

In a single night, Zechariah saw a series of eight visions which were interpreted by an angel and which describe the future of Israel. It should be emphasised that these visions were received by Zechariah when he was wide awake – they were not dreams. He even became exhausted because of the visions and fell asleep, only to be wakened by the angel (4:1). In the visions, God's blessings to Israel bridges the centuries from the rebuilding of the temple in Zechariah's day to the restoration of the kingdom of Israel under the Messiah.

The red-horse rider among the myrtles is identified as the Angel of the Lord – that is an appearance of the pre-incarnate Messiah. The colour with which He is associated not only alludes to His blood but also to divine judgement and warfare (cf. Isa. 63:1-6). He was followed by a company of angelic riders on red, speckle (KJV) and white horses. Red symbolises war, bloodshed and judgement. A speckled horse (red with white spots) reveals a mission of judgement and mercy. White portrays cleansing and victory. The myrtle trees in the hollow (low-lying area, or ravine) symbolise the people of Israel in their humiliation, suffering and downtrodden state. This is typical of their position throughout the long period of the times of the Gentiles.

The angelic horsemen were sent to patrol the whole earth and to report their findings. They found the earth peacefully inhabited and at rest from war. This was not good news, because Zechariah knew that the restoration of Israel's kingdom would be preceded by worldwide wars and the destructing of earthly kingdoms (Zech. 14:2), as also confirmed by Haggai (Hag. 2:21-22). At the time of Zechariah's prophecies there was no sign of the nearness of Jerusalem's final restoration and salvation. This situation explains the question in verse 12: "O LORD of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem...?"

It must have been comforting to Zechariah that the Lord Himself was in the hollow among the myrtle trees. He is still in the midst of His people during their suffering and rejection by the Gentiles, and will not forsake them but fully restore them according to His promises. From verses 13 to 17, words of comfort were spoken to Jerusalem. The Lord is zealous for Jerusalem (1:14), He has chosen its inhabitants (3:2) and will not allow them to be plucked out of His hand. The

Lord has spoken the following comforting words:

**“I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy.”** This was true in Zechariah’s time when the Lord helped Israel to restore Jerusalem and the temple after His glory had previously departed from the temple and the city (Ezek. 10:18-19; 11:22-23). However, this promise also refers to the time when the Messiah will return to Jerusalem permanently to rule from there during the millennium (cf. Isa. 2:1-4; Jer. 3:17). The holy presence of the Lord will fill the temple and the city (Ezek. 43:5; 48:35).

**“My house shall be built in it.”** This refers to the rebuilding of the temple in Zechariah’s time *and* also to the building of the final temple during the millennium (Ezek. 40–44).

**“A surveyor’s line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem.”** That refers to the building and expanding of Jerusalem, particularly during the millennium, when it will be the capital of the world where the Lord will be worshipped by all nations (Zech. 8:20-22; cf. Jer. 31:38-40; Acts 15:16-17).

**“The Lord will again comfort Zion, and will again choose Jerusalem.”** When the Messiah comes again He will fulfil His gracious promises to Israel and Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 12:1; 62:6-7; Rom. 11:26-29). During Zechariah’s time, the Jews were comforted to a limited degree only. It is evident that the Lord’s full blessing and comfort will be bestowed upon them after they have concluded a New Covenant with God through the Messiah (cf. Jer. 31:31-37; Heb. 8:10-12; Ezek. 36:22-38).

### **The four horns and the four craftsmen (1:18-21)**

This second vision shows God’s judgement on the nations that afflict Israel. Horns are generally symbolic of power and usually refer to Gentile kings (cf. Dan. 7:24; Rev. 17:12). The kingdoms in question were hostile towards Israel, hence the statement: “These are the horns that scattered Judah” (1:21). The four craftsmen are powers raised up by God to destroy the nations (depicted here as horns) that fought against Israel.

The four horns may refer to all Israel’s enemies from the four corners of the earth, or, more likely, to the four beasts described in Daniel 7, which fulfil the same role as the one attributed to the four horns. These four beasts represent the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman Empires that fought, oppressed and dispersed Israel during the times of the Gentiles. Those who reject this interpretation usually say that the last two kingdoms were not known in Zechariah’s time as the people of that time were only acquainted with the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires – the remaining two were still future. However, we know that the night visions were not confined to the time of Zechariah but apply to the entire period of the times of the Gentiles.

The four craftsmen that were seen after the horns are successive powers that were used by God to destroy those powers that acted against Israel. We know that the Medo-Persians destroyed the Babylonians. After being a craftsman used of God they became a horn themselves, fighting against the kingdom and people of God. Likewise, the Greek Empire was used to defeat the Medo-Persians, while the Roman Empire terminated the Greek Empire. The Roman Empire broke up into two divisions (Eastern and Western) and was not replaced by another world empire. In the end-time, the restored Roman Empire, which will also represent a revival of all the ancient Gentile powers, will be headed by the Antichrist and destroyed by the Messiah when He returns to restore Israel’s kingdom (Zech. 14:2,12-13; Rev. 19:19-21).

We are also given an indication of how severely these nations persecuted the Jews. They “scattered Judah, so that no one could lift up his head” (1:21). The lifting up of your head indicates a measure of strength and courage. The dispersed Jews had no strength during the times of the Gentiles and were completely subjected by various Gentile powers.

The fact that Israel, after so many years, are back in their land, in control of Jerusalem, and also have the ability to defend themselves against their enemies, is a sure sign that the times of the Gentiles is drawing to a close and that the coming of the Messiah is at hand. However, since Israel still need to repent and become reconciled to God through the Messiah, their problems are far from over. The worst is still coming in the tribulation period under the false messiah.

When the Messiah was rejected by Israel during His first coming, He clearly indicated to them that they were on a course that will ultimately lead to the concluding of a covenant with the false



messiah (John 5:43). When he erects an image of himself in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, the false messiah (Antichrist) will try to annihilate all the Jews who will have broken their covenant with him. Jesus said: "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place... then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains... For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And if those day had not been shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake [Israel] those days will be shortened" (Matt. 24:15,16,21,22).

Zechariah describes this unparalleled, end-time hostility towards Israel (12:2-3), and also the fact that two-thirds of all Jews will die in the fiery trials of the tribulation period (13:8). However, God will not only use the Gentiles to afflict and judge Israel because of their continued unbelief – He will also judge the nations because they were always full of hatred towards Israel and used every opportunity to persecute and scatter them (Joel 3:2; cf. Gen. 12:3).

When will Israel and the nations heed the serious and oft repeated call to repentance? God only saves, comforts and blesses those people who truly turn to Him with their whole heart. Those who refuse to do so are living in rebellion against Him and consequently remain the objects of His wrath: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Heb. 2:3). Unsaved people must know that it is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31). He is either your Saviour or your Judge – you have the choice. "Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds. But they did not hear nor heed Me, says the LORD" (Zech. 1:4).

## **Zechariah 2. The Messiah Will Dwell in Jerusalem**

The following vision deals with God's future blessings on restored Israel:

### **The surveyor with a measuring line (2:1-13)**

The divine judgement on the Gentile nations, as revealed in the previous vision, will be followed by God's enlarging and protecting Jerusalem. The restoration and expansion of the city in Zechariah's time was promised, and, more specifically, its end-time growth after the Messiah's kingdom has been revealed. Aspects which are specifically emphasised are the city's future expansion in measurement, the size of its population, its great wealth, its spiritual revival and its safety.

To us, Christians, prophecies such as these are also very significant as they glorify God and describe the final victory and establishment of His kingdom. When we read these messages we don't envy Israel or Jerusalem, as the focus is not on Israel but on God and His glory. Jerusalem is the city chosen by God to put His name there forever (1 Kings 9:3; 11:36). He chose the Israeli people to reveal His salvation through them and their promised Messiah to the entire world (Isa. 9:6-7; 49:5-6; John 4:22; Rom. 9:4-5), and to entrust His word to them (Rom. 3:1-2). With a view to the profound significance of these facts to the entire humanity, Zechariah said: "Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for He is aroused from His holy habitation" (2:13).

The man with the measuring line is without any doubt the same one as the rider on the red horse in the first vision, which is the pre-incarnate Messiah who appeared as the Angel of the Lord in some of these visions. He came to survey Jerusalem to determine its size, wealth and spiritual state as He has great plans for this city (2:11). His message was first addressed to the young man, Zechariah, (2:4), then to Israel (2:6-12), and finally to all mankind (2:13).

Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the multitude of people in it (2:4). This prophecy was not fulfilled in the time of Zechariah nor during the years immediately following his ministry; consequently, it applies to the Messianic era when great and wonderful things will happen in Jerusalem.

The city will overflow its boundaries because of divine blessing and become an open city without walls. Because of God's presence, it will need no fortification or protection. He will be a wall of fire all around the city, and the glory in her midst (2:5). This promise looks forward to the Lord's personal presence through the Messiah during His millennial kingdom on earth. Ezekiel saw the future return of the divine glory to the temple (Ezek. 43:2-5), but Zechariah was granted a vision of the glory extending to the entire city (2:5) and also to the whole land (2:12; cf. 14:20-21).

Ezekiel's description of the glory of the Lord in the temple in Jerusalem is quite remarkable and further adds to the vision of Zechariah: "Afterwards he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces towards the east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory... The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple. Then I heard Him speaking to me from the temple... and He said to me, Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever. No more shall the house of Israel defile My holy Name, they nor their kings" (Ezek. 43:1-7).

In the light of the prosperity and blessings that were promised to Jerusalem, and also in the light of the judgements that were proclaimed about the fall of Babylon, the Jews who were still in exile were admonished to return to Jerusalem where they would live peacefully: "Up, up! Flee from the land of the north! ... Up, Zion! Escape you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon" (2:6-7). Babylon has indeed fallen two years later, but the restored Babylon will finally fall when the Messiah comes (Rev. 18). Israelites who dwell in Babylon will again be evacuated shortly before Babylon's fall: "Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues... With violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found any more" (Rev. 18:4,21). The restoration of the Jews to their own land in Zechariah's time was only a prelude to the great, end-time restoration of Israel to their land, which will be accompanied by great hostility from the surrounding nations.

Isaiah elaborated as follows on the final gathering of Israel: "It shall come to pass in that day that the LORD shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left, from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush, from Elam and Shinar, from Hamath and the islands of the sea. He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth" (Isa. 11:11-12; cf. Jer. 23:3-8).

In Zechariah 2:8-9, the messenger who is sent out by the Lord refers to the Messiah, the one who is also described as the Angel of the Lord: "For thus says the LORD of hosts: He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye. For surely I will shake My hand against them, and they shall become spoil for their servants. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me." From this portion in the Old Testament we clearly see that the first Person in the Triune Godhead, The LORD of hosts, addresses the second Person, the Messiah, who is His Messenger (cf. John 20:21). We also read about the third Person in Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings" (Isa. 61:1).

In this vision of Zechariah, the Angel of the Lord is sent to punish the Babylonian oppressors of Israel. This prophecy will find its final fulfilment in the Second Coming of Christ when He will utterly crush the enemies of Israel and Jerusalem (14:3,12-13). The restored Babylonian empire of the end-time (Rev. 18), as well as the Babylonian alliance of false religions (Rev. 17), will also be destroyed by divine judgements during the coming day of the Lord. When this mighty King, the Messiah, comes again the second time, He will not be the humble Servant who laid down His life for the salvation of sinners. This time, He will come in power in glory to destroy His enemies and to glorify His own people. Zechariah describes Him in His full Deity when he says: "In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives... Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You" (14:4-5).

It will be a day of great rejoicing in Israel: "Sing and rejoice, o daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst, says the LORD" (2:10). The remnant of Israel will all accept the Messiah (12:10), be cleansed from their unrighteousness (13:1), and be overjoyed when He restores the throne of David in Jerusalem: "In mercy the throne will be established; and One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness" (Isa. 16:5; cf. Acts 15:16-17).

At the Second Coming of Christ, the remnant of the nations will also be saved and all serve the Messiah who will reign from Jerusalem (Matt. 24:29-30). They will mourn for Him like the remnant of Israel will be mourning when they are reconciled to Him (12:10). These nations will then also belong to the Messiah and serve Him: "Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you" (2:11; cf. 8:21-22).

Jerusalem will be the hub of world affairs during the millennial reign of the Messiah (2:12). Apart from being the capital of Israel, Jerusalem will be the capital of the entire world during the millennium. Isaiah says: "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall rebuke many people; 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" (Isa. 2:2-4; cf. 24:23).

What a profound future expectation to Israel and the nations! "Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for He is aroused from His holy habitation" (2:13). This concluding verse of chapter 2 is rendered as follows by the Living Bible: "Be silent, all mankind, before the Lord, for He has come to earth from heaven, from His holy home."

We should clearly realise that the future glory which has been promised to the saved remnant of Israel, as well as saved persons from all nations, will only be enjoyed by a minority of mankind.

Most people in Israel *and* among the nations are wicked and unrepentant. Even in “good” times, God was not pleased with most of the Israelites and judged them because of their sin and unbelief (1 Cor. 10:5). Zechariah confirms the fact that most of them will perish during the coming tribulation (13:8). The same applies to the Gentiles, among whom few will find their way through the narrow gate that leads to heaven (Matt. 7:13-14).

The key verse in Zechariah 2 is the following: “And the Lord will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem” (2:12). There is not even the slightest possibility that this promise can be spiritualised and applied to the church. The spiritual restoration of the remnant of Israel as a nation will occur in the Holy Land, which was given to the founding fathers of Israel as an eternal possession (Gen. 13:14-15; 26:3; 28:13). For this wonderful promise to be fulfilled, Israel must be restored to their land in the last days prior to the Second Coming of the Messiah. The return of the Jews to their ancient land has already reached the stage where 5,5 million of the 13 million Jews in the world are back in their land. They equal the number of Jews in the USA and will soon be the largest concentration of Jews anywhere in the world. That will render legitimacy to the decisions they take and the covenants that they may conclude on behalf of world Jewry.

Zechariah graphically describes the national mourning of Israel following the coming of the Messiah (12:10-14), resulting in a holy people living in a holy land (13:1-2; 14:20-21). Jerusalem, the centre of the religious and political life of the Jews, will be sanctified as the base of their future theocratic government. The Lord will again choose Jerusalem, and bestow upon it much more glory than was the case during the reign of Solomon:

“Awake, awake! Put on your strength, o Zion; put on your beautiful garments, o Jerusalem, holy city!” (Isa. 52:1). “The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising... The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bowing to you, and all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at the soles of your feet; and they shall call you The City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel... Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, neither wasting nor destruction within your borders; but you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise” (Isa. 60:3,14,18).

The future glory of Jerusalem stands in stark contrast to the downtrodden state of this city during the times of the Gentiles. The Lord Jesus said: “Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). Saved Gentiles should have no part in the trampling and despising of this city. We should know that this city is destined to be the focal point of the Messiah’s millennial kingdom. During that time, the saved Israel *and* the saved members of the nations will proclaim: “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion in the sides of the north, the city of the Great King” Ps. 48:1-2).

Zechariah says: “Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to pray before the LORD” (8:22). “They shall go up [to Jerusalem] from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (14:16).

Are you looking forward to this wonderful future of Israel, Jerusalem and the entire Holy Land? If so, you have an obligation to provoke Israel to jealousy by the way in which you serve the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob through the Messiah, Jesus (Rom. 11:11). Also pray for their return to their own land, and for God’s special protection and blessing upon Jerusalem. The psalmist says: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: may they prosper who love you” (Ps. 122:6).

## **Zechariah 3. The Salvation of Israel**

The first three visions picture Israel's external deliverance from captivity, their physical restoration to the land, as well as their material prosperity. The question which now arises is how a holy God can have such plans with a people who are still perverted by sin? This forth vision sets forth Israel's internal cleansing from sin and reinstatement into their priestly office and functions.

The righteousness of God to which the law and the prophets testified, was fully revealed in the Messiah. He is the only Saviour of the world: "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:21-24). Israel and the nations must all be saved through faith in the Messiah (Rom. 3:30; 10:12; Acts 15:8-9,11).

### **The cleansing and dedication of Joshua the high priest (3:1-10)**

"Joshua" means "The Lord Saves" and that is the main theme of this chapter. The participants in this vision are (a) Joshua the high priest who returned with Zerubbabel from Babylon; (b) the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ already introduced in 1:11-12; (c) Satan, the accuser; (d) attending angels; and (e) the prophet Zechariah.

In this vision, Joshua represents the people of Israel as that was typical of the office of the high priest. He interceded for the nation, entered the Holy of holies on their behalf, and carried their sin. The condition ascribed to him in this vision, therefore, applies to Israel rather than to himself. The representative nature of Joshua is confirmed in verse 2, where the Lord rebukes Satan as Joshua's (or Israel's) accuser because He has chosen Jerusalem. The description of Joshua as a brand plucked from the fire also refers to Israel. After the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity, Israel was on the verge of extinction without a land, an own government or a temple; but God intervened, plucked them from the fire which threatened to consume them, and restored them to their land. In the end-time, during the reign of the Antichrist, Israel will again be threatened by complete annihilation when God will intervene and protect a remnant of them in the wilderness, after which they will meet the Messiah when He sets foot on the Mount of Olives. They will be saved (12:10), and as a spiritually revived nation be fully restored in the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.

Joshua standing before the Angel of the Lord is indicative of Israel standing before the Lord to receive His commands and to serve Him. Next to him stood Satan to oppose and accuse him (3:1; cf. Rev. 12:10). Satan first tempts people to sin. When they yield to his temptations by actively sinning, he accuses them before God as he hopes that God will judge and reject them because of their rebellion against Him. In the Old Testament, Satan's attention was focused on Israel as the chosen people of God. He knew that God had clearly warned that in cases of prolonged sin and rebellion He would surrender Israel to their enemies (cf. Deut 28:15-68). The devil's plans were fixed on the total extinction of Israel to prevent the promised Messiah from being born as a member of this nation.

Shortly after the Messiah's birth, a very evil plan was set in motion to have Jesus killed through the evil actions of Herod (Matt. 2:13-18). Although Satan did not succeed with this plot, he continued with his relentless efforts to persecute and kill Jesus, to deceive and instigate the Jewish people to reject Jesus as Messiah and to have Him executed, also to deceive and accuse all the believers in the Lord Jesus among the nations. As we are approaching the end of the church age, Satan again strongly opposes the people of Israel who are returning to their land. If he can succeed in the annihilation of all Jews (an idea that he suggested to Hitler in World War II) he can prove the Bible wrong as there are many promises of the future glory of restored Israel under the rule of the Messiah.

Satan will give the Antichrist his power, his throne and great authority (Rev. 13:2), thereby empowering him to do his destructive work in an unprecedented way on earth. After deceiving the Jews to accept him as Messiah and to conclude a covenant with him (Dan. 9:27; John 5:43), the Antichrist will become their worst enemy when they abrogate their covenant with him on the day

when he declares himself to be God in rebuilt temple (2 Thess. 2:4). Satan, the Antichrist and the false prophet will also send out evil spirits to the kings of the earth to instigate them against Israel and their coming Messiah (Rev. 16:13-14). They will deploy their armies in Israel to kill the surviving Jews and also to fight against Christ and His heavenly army (Rev. 19:19).

Satan's opposition against Israel (represented in Zechariah by Joshua) has continued unabated throughout the centuries. Although the majority in Israel have rejected the prophets *and* even the Messiah, and were consequently driven from their land into an international Diaspora lasting almost two millennia, God never rejected the entire nation (Lev. 26:44-45). There was always a believing remnant among them who did not bow the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). God severely punished Israel because of their sins but He would never reject and destroy all of them. In the vision of Zechariah, God proceeded to acquit Joshua, not because Satan's accusations were false, but because of God's gracious love for His people Israel. Satan was specifically rebuked because God had chosen Jerusalem and would save its inhabitants (3:2).

This does not mean that Israel had or has no sin. God dismissed the accusations of Satan because of His gracious provision for the remission of Israel's sins: "Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. Then he answered and spoke to those who stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And to him he said, See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes" (3:3-4). Israel only have to realise their sinful condition and repent. If they return to the Lord, He will return to them, cleanse them from all iniquity, restore Jerusalem and dwell in their midst (1:3).

King David was in a similar situation as Joshua, with spiritual garments soiled by iniquity. He was convicted of his sin and prayed the following prayer of repentance: "Have mercy upon me, o God, according to Your loving-kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me... Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, o God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You... O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart – These, o God, You will not despise. Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem" (Ps. 51:1-13,15-18). Towards the end, he prayed for the spiritual cleansing and renewal of the Israeli people (Zion), that they may have broken and contrite hearts because of their sins. He also prayed for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, which was a prophetic reference to the time after the city's future destruction because of the national sins of its leaders and their followers.

The acquittal of Joshua took the form of removing his filthy clothes, which were representative of his sins *and* that of the nation. Joshua was then clothed with festive garments, speaking of the purity associated with his forgiveness, and a clean turban, which refers to his reinstatement into the priesthood. This symbolised the forgiveness and restoration of Israel as a priestly nation, to which God has called them: "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6; cf. Isa. 61:6; 62:11-12). Peter wrote to the Messianic Jews: "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation... that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

The cleansing and future perseverance of Joshua would have highly significant consequences: "If you will walk in My ways, and you will keep My command, then you shall also judge My house, and likewise have charge of My courts; I will give you places to walk among these who stand here" (3:7). If Joshua faithfully performed his priestly duties he would have continued service in the temple, guard the temple from idolatry and other forms of religious defilement, and have free access to God's throne, like the angels who were standing there.

The Lord next affirmed the long-term significance of the vision – that Joshua and his priestly companions were symbolic of things to come (3:8-10). In their priestly cleansing from sin they prefigured the future cleansing of the nation Israel. This future cleansing was linked to the coming

of the Sin-remover who was given three messianic titles: the Servant of the Lord, the Branch and the Stone.

As the **Servant** of the Lord, the Messiah is the One who came to do the will of the Father in saving a lost world and judging those who refused to accept His mercy: "And now the LORD says, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel is gathered to Him... Indeed He says, It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You shall be My salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa. 49:5-6; cf. 42:1; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11).

As the **Branch** of David, the Messiah is the Davidic descendant who will be revealed in power and glory to end the humiliation into which the line of David had fallen: "In that day the Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing for those of Israel who have escaped" (Isa. 4:2; cf. Isa. 11:1). "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgement and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely" (Jer. 23:5-6; cf. Jer. 33:15; Zech. 6:12-13).

As the **Stone** He would be the cornerstone of the house of God in Israel *and* among the nations, as every true believer's life is built upon the foundation (or rock) Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11; cf. Matt. 7:24). Although the Messiah was rejected by Israel, He is the only true cornerstone of the house of Israel and therefore their only hope for the future: "Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame. Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, the stone which the builders rejected has become a chief cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed" (1 Pet. 2:4-8). The Messiah is the cornerstone or Saviour of those who believe on Him, and a rock of stumbling, or Judge, to those who reject Him. At His Second Coming, He will also bring judgement on the unbelieving Gentiles (cf. Dan. 2:34-35, 44-45; Joel 3:2; Zech. 14:12-13; Rev. 19:19-21). The seven eyes on the stone (3:9) picture the Messiah's complete insight and infinite wisdom. In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3).

A remnant in Israel will accept the One who will come as their precious cornerstone, and be saved on one day. God says: "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day" (3:9). That will be on the day, at the end of the tribulation period, when the Messiah appears on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem (12:10; 13:1; 14:4-5).

The expression "in that day" (3:10) refers to the whole millennium, when conditions of peace and prosperity will prevail in Israel and all over the world. "Everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid" (Mic. 4:4). Isaiah says: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the seas" (Isa. 11:9).

All these wonderful promises will only be inherited by those who have accepted the Messiah as their personal Saviour. They are the ones who will be invited to the illustrious marriage feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9). They will not wear filthy garments of sin and human righteousness, but as the bride of the Lamb they will be "arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen represents the righteous acts of the saints." The righteous acts of the saints are the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who have been redeemed by the Lord and washed in the blood of the Lamb. Blessed are those who have festive garments and will be called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!

Israel's spiritual cleansing and their restoration as a priestly nation, as described in Zechariah 3, will make them a shining light in the world and a blessing to all nations.

## **Zechariah 4. Israel as a Light to the Nations**

In the previous vision, Israel's spiritual cleansing and their reinstatement as a priestly nation were portrayed, while this one emphasises their calling to be a shining light in a dark world.

### **The lampstand and olive trees (4:1-14)**

Although the vision of the lampstand and the two olive trees refers to the rebuilding of the temple during the time of Zerubbabel, it will have its final fulfilment during the coming reign of the Messiah.

Zechariah says: "Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, What do you see?" (4:1-2). This situation reminds us of the prophet Daniel, who reacted in a similar way because of the profoundness of the revelations which were made to him. He said: "Now as he [Gabriel] was speaking with me, I fell stunned and in deep unconsciousness with my face to the ground; but he touched me and set me upright – where I had stood" (Dan. 8:18; Amplified Bible). Zechariah was also set upright and strengthened to keep on beholding what the angel was revealing to him, and to record it.

In this vision, Zechariah saw a golden lampstand with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes connected to each of the lamps. Next to the bowl were two olive trees, from which oil was supplied to the bowl which served as a vessel from where oil continuously flowed to the seven lamps to keep them burning.

The lampstand represents Israel as a light to the nations potentially in Zechariah's time, but actually so during the millennial reign of the Messiah. They will be spiritually cleansed from all their iniquities, and their testimony of salvation proclaimed among the nations (Jer. 33:7-9). They will be a blessing to the Gentiles and fill the earth with fruit (Isa. 27:6; Zech. 8:23). The glory for everything that is achieved will be given to the Messiah who dwells in Jerusalem: "In that day you will say: Praise the LORD, call upon His Name; declare His deeds among the peoples, make mention that His Name is exalted. Sing to the LORD, for He has done excellent things; this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, O inhabitants of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst!" (Isa. 12:4-6).

The constant supply of oil to the lampstand will ensure its continuous shining. In the dark night of God's judgements upon the world during the day of the Lord (the tribulation period) He will save and cleanse the remnant of Israel and make them a shining light to the world: "Arise, My people! Let your light shine for all the nations to see! For the glory of the Lord is streaming from you. Darkness shall cover all the people of the earth, but the glory of the Lord will shine from you. All nations will come to your light; mighty kings will come to see the glory of the Lord upon you" (Isa. 60:1-3; Living Bible). "You shall be named the Priests of the LORD, men shall call you the Servants of our God... you shall have double honour" (Isa. 61:6-7).

In this vision it is clearly indicated that the secret of the lamps' burning is the abundant and uninterrupted supply of oil. This is a well-known symbol of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. The Lord said to Moses: "And you shall command the children of Israel that they bring you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to cause the lamp to burn continually" (Ex. 27:20). It is only through the work of the Holy Spirit that the light of God's kingdom can shine in the world. The command to have a lampstand in the temple, with seven lamps that were to be kept burning day and night, signified the uninterrupted presence of the Lord among His people through the work of His Spirit.

The oil was also used to anoint the priests, thereby emphasising the principle that unless God anoints a person with His Spirit he cannot minister as a priest to serve God and to address the people on His behalf. "And [Moses] poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to sanctify him" (Lev. 8:12). David praised God for anointing his head with oil (Ps. 23:5). Solomon said, "Let your garments always be white, and let your head lack no oil" (Eccles. 9:8). This indicated a pure and sanctified life. In the New Testament, oil is likewise a symbol of the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 25, the wise virgins took oil in their vessels with them to keep their lamps burning. This is a way of picturing the Spirit-filled life. The foolish virgins did not have enough oil and are therefore identified as foolish, carnal believers.



In explaining the continued supply of oil to the lamps, the angel impressed upon Zechariah's heart the all-important role of the Holy Spirit in enabling people to do the Lord's work on earth – in this case the rebuilding of the temple by Zerubbabel: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. Who are you, o great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain" (4:6-7). The angel not only suggested that Zerubbabel would finish the temple through the abundant supply of God's Spirit (4:9), but that every obstacle (great mountain) to the building would be removed. The message is also clearly conveyed that human power and military strength could not accomplish the task, but Spirit-empowered workers under the leadership of Zerubbabel would be able to do so.

"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands shall also finish it... For who despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb-line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth" (4:9-10). Zerubbabel began the work of rebuilding on the ancient foundations, and he would also complete it by laying the capstone (4:7). The plumb-line in his hands symbolises his personal supervision of the building-project, and also the care that should be taken to ensure the correct vertical lines of the walls and to work according to a fixed plan.

Those who have despised small things refer to the people who did not believe that the small beginnings of the reconstruction work would lead to any significant results. The work of the Lord always has a small beginning as it is not backed by extensive manpower and vast resources of money and other support services. The work is accomplished in such a way that people would see God's blessing upon the project, and His gracious provision in all their needs. That is why Zerubbabel would bring forth the capstone of the completed building with shouts of, "Grace, grace to it!" (4:7).

The seven eyes symbolise God's world-wide scrutiny; nothing is hidden from His eyes. In His omniscience God sees and knows what everyone does: "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13). Because of His perfect knowledge He will, through the Holy Spirit, strengthen and guide His true servants who only rely only on Him (Ps. 33:18; 2 Chron. 16:9).

Towards the end of the interpretation, clarification is given on the two olive trees that supply the oil to the lampstand. The two branches with olives poured their oil into the golden pipes, through which it flowed into the bowl and then through the 49 channels to the seven lamps. The interpreting angel told Zechariah that the two olive trees "are the two anointed ones who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth" (4:14). The branches refer to the anointed priests and kings, in this case Joshua and Zerubbabel, who typify the Messiah as the Priest-King of Israel.

The final fulfilment of this vision will only be in the millennium, when Jesus will reign from the throne of David in Jerusalem (Acts 15:16-17; Rev. 19:16). God says: "In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David a Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgement and righteousness in the earth" (Jer. 33:15).

This anointed King is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, and is called a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:9-10). The abundant supply of the oil of the Holy Spirit flows from His throne of grace. As mortal men we cannot live lives that are pleasing to God unless we are regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and also continuously filled and anointed by Him to fulfil our ministries: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace in times of need" (Heb. 4:15-16).

During the Messiah's reign He will not only, through His Holy Spirit, supply divine grace to Israel but also to believing members of the nations. Israel, being spiritually connected to the divine supply of grace offered by the Messiah, will truly fulfil their calling as a light to the nations: "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit" (Isa. 27:6).

During the coming tribulation period, there will be a prelude to the Messianic era when Christ, as Priest-King, will finally fulfil the symbolism of the two olive trees. During those dark days after the

rapture of the true church, two special witnesses will be raised up by God to prepare Israel on the soon coming of the Messiah as the promised Priest-King. Their ministry will also see a partial fulfilment of the function of the two olive trees in that they will show Israel the way to the only Source of grace and divine power, and that is the Messiah Himself, who was rejected by their fathers. In Revelation, the following is said about these two men: "And I will give power to My two witnesses, and they will prophesy 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth" (Rev. 11:3-4).

Various commentators are of the opinion that the two witnesses will be Elijah and Moses in mortal, physical bodies, who will return to the land and people of Israel. However, it is not a foregone conclusion that Elijah and Moses will *personally* be sent back to earth to be slain by the Antichrist and his evil forces, which would involve Moses dying for a second time. It is more likely that two outstandingly gifted and godly Messianic Jews will be raised up in the spirit and power of Elijah and Moses. The prophecy about the return of Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord (Mal. 4:5-6) was partially fulfilled by John the Baptist (Matt. 17:10-13). But John only acted "in the spirit and power of Elijah" and thus fulfilled the typical role of Elijah to prepare the way for the Messiah (Luke 1:17). He denied that he was Elijah himself (John 1:21).

The spiritual power of Moses and Elijah was derived from God through the Holy Spirit, thus emphasising the key verse of this chapter: "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts" (4:6). These great men of God had no power or influence in themselves. Moses tried to evade his calling because of his personal weakness: "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue. So the LORD said to him, Who has made man's mouth? ... Have not I, the LORD? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say" (Ex. 4:10-12).

Elijah was also on the point of despair when he said to the Lord: "The children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life" (1 Kings 19:14). But he was also encouraged to continue with his ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. He was so mightily used of God that after he was taken up into heaven, Elisha cried out: "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" (2 Kings 2:12). Because of the mighty deeds that God did through Elijah, he was worth to Israel far more than their armed forces. He was Israel's unstoppable chariot in the struggle against their enemies. With his sudden departure they were left without defence.

There are so many pastors and spiritual leaders today who resort to human power, influence and money to do the work of the Lord. Psychological techniques of motivation are used to muster support and drive their campaigns. These are all in vain without the anointing of God's Spirit. We need Spirit-filled and Spirit-led leaders who are humble and unworthy servants of the Most High God, so His message can be clearly proclaimed and His saving grace be experienced by many people. "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts."

## **Zechariah 5. God Purifies His People and their Land**

The first five visions of Zechariah bring promises of blessing to Israel – the defeat of their enemies, the expansion of Jerusalem, its establishment as the city of the Messiah, the spiritual revival of the people of God, and the fulfilment of their divine calling as the leading people among the nations. But before the dawning of this time of blessing, God must protect His holiness by eradicating sin in Israel, thereby sanctifying them and making them worthy to inherit the promise of His coming and divine presence in Jerusalem. In the last three visions, blessing and judgement go hand in hand, as is often the case in biblical prophecies. The Messiah's blessed reign of peace and righteousness is announced, but that can only be realised after a thorough cleansing of the remnant of Israel.

### **The flying scroll (5:1-4)**

Zechariah said: "I see a flying scroll. Its length is 20 cubits and its width is 10 cubits. Then [the angel] said to me: This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole earth: every thief shall be expelled, according to what is on the side of the scroll; and, every perjurer shall be expelled, according to what is on the side of it. I will send out the curse, says the LORD of hosts; it shall enter the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears falsely by My Name. It shall remain in the midst of his house and consume it" (5:2-4).

The scroll was not rolled up but spread out so it could be read on both sides. It was the exact size of the tabernacle (cf. Ex. 26:15-25), thereby suggesting that the judgements contained on the scroll were in harmony with God's holy presence in the midst of Israel. In their former theocratic government, God ruled over His people by way of the tabernacle service, and will therefore also judge and purify the disobedient nation. The suspended position of the scroll as flying, indicate rapid entrance into and judgement on the houses of thieves and perjurers.

That the scroll had writing on both sides is reminiscent of the two tablets of the law (Ex. 32:15). The curse of the scroll is directed towards violators of the middle command of each of the two tablets – the eighth command against stealing (Ex. 20:15) and the third command against swearing falsely by misusing the Name of the Lord (Ex. 20:7). Thus the specified objects of the curse represent all those who violate the Law of God. Judgement will begin among the people of God, in Israel (Dan. 9:11). The Lord says: "The land is full of adulterers; for because of a curse the land mourns... Both prophet and priest are profane, yes, in My house I have found their wickedness, says the LORD" (Jer. 23:10-11).

The statement that the curse goes out over the face of the whole earth indicates that, during the coming tribulation period, the wrath of God will be poured out over all the wicked people everywhere – not only in Israel. Isaiah says: "Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste, distorts its surface and scatters abroad its inhabitants... The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burnt, and few men are left... They are gathered together as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison; after many days they will be punished" (Isa. 24:1,5-6,22).

Awful days of judgement, testing and refining lie ahead for Israel: "Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it" (Jer. 30:7). Zechariah says that because of the severe wickedness of Israel only a third of them will survive the coming wrath of God, and the remnant will then be refined and saved (13:8-9). They will inherit the restored kingdom of Israel and the Messiah will reign from Jerusalem: "The LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His elders, gloriously" (Isa. 24:23). John says: "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

Israel and the nations are presently living in the dispensation of grace during which the saving grace of the Messiah is proclaimed to all people – also to Israel: "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:30-31). At the end of

the dispensation of grace there will be a time of judgement for the unbelievers among all nations. Daniel prepared the Jews against the tribulation period by way of a message received from an angel: "There will be a time of anguish for the Jews greater than any previous suffering in Jewish history. And yet every one of your people whose names are written in the Book will endure it" (Dan. 12:1; Living Bible). The Messiah also warned against this time: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And if those days had not been shortened, no flesh would be saved" (Matt. 24:21-22).

### **The woman in the ephah (5:5-11)**

While the previous vision was concerned with removing sinners from the community, this vision explains the removal of a wicked religious organisation to its place of origin. Zechariah saw a woman called Wickedness who was inside a basket, or ephah, which had a lead cover. An ephah was the largest dry measure used in Jewish households. Estimates of its volume range from 25 to 50 litres. Since this would be much too small a container to enclose a woman, the ephah was apparently greatly enlarged in the vision, as the scroll was in the previous vision.

The woman symbolises the corporate wickedness, or iniquity, in the land of Israel *and* in the world. She is a mother organisation, or ecumenical body, of all the false religions of the world that have their common origin in Babylon, in the land Shinar (the present Iraq). The Messianic Jewish prophet John described this woman in a vision that he had about the coming day of the Lord:

"Come, I will show you the judgement of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus... And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth" (Rev. 17:1-6,18).

This woman, Mystery Babylon, will again take on a corporate identity in the end-time. She will emerge as a multireligious organisation which promotes all sorts of antichristian wickedness, being completely hostile towards the Triune God of the Bible – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Once she is representative of all the antichristian religions she will embody the full measure of wickedness and be relocated to her place of origin in Babylon.

Zechariah says: "Then I raised my eyes and looked, and there were two women, coming with the wind in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven. So I said to the angel who talked with me, Where are they carrying the basket? And he said to me, To build a house for it in the land Shinar; when it is ready, the basket will be set there on its base" (5:9-11).

The two women with wings like a stork are clearly part of the wicked religious organisation, since the stork to which they are likened is an unclean bird. They represent demonic forces, and the wind in their wings indicate that they will be in a hurry to take Mystery Babylon back to where she belongs in Shinar – the land of Babylonia. This is the place of Israel's exile in Old Testament times, and also the major site of ancient and end-time idolatry and rebellion against God (Gen. 11:2; Rev. 17:3-5). Walvoord & Zuck (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*) say: "This lends support to the view that the city of Babylon on the Euphrates River will be rebuilt."

Scripture makes it clear that Jerusalem and Babylon will both play a major role in the end-time. Jerusalem will be fully restored as the political and religious centre of the saved Israeli nation. The Messiah, as Priest-King, will rule the world from the throne of David. Zechariah says that the inhabitants of Jerusalem will be cleansed from all their sin and iniquity, and the land will also be purified of all traces of idolatry (13:1-2). The unclean spirits that are vested in a great number of false religions will depart from the land. They will, in great hurry, return to Babylon where they will strongly identify with the Antichrist in his bid to dominate the entire world, to destroy Israel and to kill all people who believe in the Messiah, Jesus.

During the coming tribulation period, which is also described as the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7), the Babylonian alliance of false religions (the woman called Wickedness) will be the bride of the Antichrist and enjoy great privileges during his reign. However, this marriage will be short-lived as the Antichrist and his co-rulers will execute the woman when her role is played out: "And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the prostitute, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire" (Rev. 17:16).

Walvoord & Zuck (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*) say the following about the sudden end of this wicked woman: "Revelation 17 closes with the dramatic destruction of the woman. It would seem to occur at the midpoint of the seven years of tribulation when the Antichrist will assume the role of world dictator. When this ruler in the Middle East takes on worldwide political power, he will also assume the place of God and demand that everyone worship him (Dan. 11:36-38; 2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:8). The false religion which characterised the first half of the tribulation period is thus brought to an abrupt end. It will be replaced by the final form of world religion, which will be the worship of the Antichrist as God." Paul also indicated that he will enter the temple of God, showing himself that he is God (2 Thess. 2:4). Those who refuse to worship him as God will be executed (Rev. 13:15).

A remnant of Israel will be among those who will refuse to worship the false messiah when he profanes the sanctuary, declares himself to be God, and places an abominable image of himself in the Holy of holies. Jesus warned them against this event: "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place... then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains... for then there will be great tribulation" (Matt. 24:15-21).

At the end of the great tribulation when the true Messiah returns to Jerusalem, the false messiah and his powers all over the world will be destroyed. The judgements of God will proceed from Jerusalem to all the corners of the earth. Babylon, the stronghold of the false messiah and his alliance of false religions, will be permanently destroyed by the wrath of God. The woman who will be taken to Shinar will, according to the plan of God, be taken to her place of destruction. When the Messiah will rule from Jerusalem, all traces of her will have been removed.

## Zechariah 6. Judgement on the Gentile Nations

This chapter discusses the last of Zechariah's night visions, as well as a symbolic act concluding the visions.

### The four chariots (6:1-8)

Zechariah says: "I looked, and behold, four chariots were coming out from between two mountains of bronze. With the first chariot were red horses, with the second chariot black horses, with the third chariot white horses, and with the fourth chariot dappled horses – strong steeds... And the angel said to me, These are four spirits of heaven, who go out from their station before the Lord of all the earth. The one with the black horses is going to the north country, the white are going after them, and the dappled are going towards the south country... So they walked to and fro throughout the earth" (6:1-7).

This vision is reminiscent of the first one, with horses going out from the presence of the Lord throughout the whole earth. However, the horses in this vision are harnessed to war chariots to execute God's judgement on the Gentiles. No mention is made of any riders or charioteers. The four chariots with different-coloured horses speak of the universality of divine judgement which will go in all directions throughout the earth.

The colours are significant since red symbolises war and bloodshed, black designates death and famine, white speaks of triumph and victory, and dappled denotes pestilence and plagues. These horses have a similar mission to the four apocalyptic horses described by John in Revelation 6. The white horse refers to the Antichrist as conqueror and false prince of peace, the red horse denotes bloodshed and war, the black horse typifies famine and pestilence, while the pale horse gathers a harvest for death and Hades.

The interpreting angel explained to Zechariah the significance of the horses with their chariots. The four spirits of heaven may refer to angels of divine judgement (cf. Rev. 7:1), or to the power of God's Spirit to accomplish His judicial purposes, or both. "For behold, the LORD will come with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword the LORD will judge all flesh; and the slain of the LORD shall be many" (Isa. 66:15-16).

The divine title, "the Lord of all the earth" is a millennial designation describing the universal rule of the Messiah over the earth during the future kingdom age. The north country refers to Babylon whose invasions on Israel comes from the north, while the south country refers to Egypt. The north and the south are the only directions mentioned as that would be appropriate to Israel's location. However, the other directions are implied as the chariots will go to and fro throughout the entire earth.

The horses and chariots come on the scene from between two mountains of bronze. This is highly significant since bronze symbolises divine judgement against sin. The bronze serpent which Moses made in the wilderness was a sign of divine judgement on the sins of the nation. Those who looked at the snake were pardoned and lived (Num. 21:9). The bronze snake pointed to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God on the cross, who has borne the wrath of God upon all sinners on their behalf (John 3:14-15; Isa. 53:4-5). He has walked the way of suffering because of the sins of lost humanity, therefore "His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace" (Rev. 1:15).

The two mountains of bronze in Zechariah 6 most probably refer to Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives. The valley between these two mountains is called Kidron and Jehoshaphat, an area closely associated with divine judgement (Joel 3:2). Zechariah says that the Messiah will set foot on the Mount of Olives (14:4). In Revelation 19:20 it is stated that the false messiah (Antichrist) and the false prophet will both be captured on the day of the Second Coming of the Messiah and cast alive into the lake of fire. The place where this judgement will occur is the valley between Zion and Olivet – referred to as *Jehoshaphat*, which means *The LORD Judges*.

From here, the chariots of divine judgement will go out into all directions across the globe, being commissioned to judge the wicked. Joel says: "The LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter His

voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake" (Joel 3:16). Isaiah says that on the day of the Lord everything proud and lofty will be brought down and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day (Isa. 2:12,17). The day of the Lord will come as destruction from the Almighty. This day will be cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger. He will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity. Sinners will be destroyed, and few mortals will be left alive. Babylon will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never again be inhabited (Isa. 13:6,9-12,19-20; cf. Jer 51:61-64).

At the end of this vision, God speaks to Zechariah, saying: "See, those who go towards the north country have given rest to My Spirit in the north country" (6:8). It is a well-known fact that the Bible identifies Babylon, also referred to as Shinar or the north country, as the origin of all forms of organised rebellion against God in the world. This rebellion manifested as a wide range of beliefs and institutions that emerged from Satan's kingdom, and includes all the false religions which are based on idolatry, necromancy, witchcraft, astrology, self-deification, and occult practices such as transcendental meditation, clairvoyance, astral projection, and fortune-telling. From Babylon, these beliefs spread all over the world.

Babylon is also the birthplace of political rebellion against God's order of independent nations with clear boundaries and sovereign governments (Acts 17:26). The first Babylonian world empire set the example for a number of subsequent world empires in which man exalted and even deified himself, subjected an oppressed other nations by forcefully incorporating them into the emerging world empire, and also entered into an alliance with a false world religion. The power attained by these empires was always used against the kingdom of God.

The last of these empires will be the world empire of the Antichrist, who will be the arch-enemy of the true Christ and His people, i.e. Israel and the Christian believers among all nations. The Antichrist will pretend to be a God-man (2 Thess. 2:4; Dan. 11:36) and assemble the dispersed Babylonian religion in an ecumenical body described in the Bible as Mystery Babylon, the mother of harlots (Rev. 17:3-5). He will also centralise all political authority in his world state, rebuild Babylon and control the world from there (Rev. 18).

In Zechariah 5:5-11, the false Babylonian system of worship is relocated to Babylon in preparation of her final destruction. In Zechariah 6:1-8, all the nations are judged for being dominated by the Babylonian spirit of wickedness and rebellion against God. When this task is accomplished, God's Spirit of justice and judgement will come to rest in the north country where all the evil started. The scene will then be set for the King of all the earth to take the government upon His shoulder and rule from Jerusalem.

### **The crowning of Joshua (6:9-15)**

The eight night visions were concluded with an instruction to Zechariah to perform a symbolic act by crowning Joshua, the high priest, as king: "Take the silver and gold, make an elaborate crown, and set it on the head of Joshua... the high priest. Then speak to Him, saying: Behold, the Man whose Name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of the LORD... He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a Priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (6:11-13).

Joshua represented "the Branch," the Messiah, who will build the future temple and will be both a Priest and a King. The symbolic act of crowning Joshua only has an end-time fulfilment as, during the Old Testament, it was quite impossible for a high priest to be crowned as king. The kings belonged to the royal lineage of David in the tribe of Judah, while the priests were only chosen from the tribe of Levi. A king could not be appointed high priest, neither could a high priest serve as king. However, when the Messiah comes, His priesthood will be based upon the order of Melchizedek, who was the priest-king of Salem – the place that would later become Jerusalem. He was a type of the Messiah: "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God... [was] without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually" (Heb. 7:1-3; also read Heb. 7:11-28 in connection with the Messiah's eternal priesthood).

The Branch from the house of David will be a King who shall reign and prosper (Jer. 23:5) and also build the temple of the Lord (Zech. 6:8). He will be a descendant of David in the royal lineage

of Judah, who will exercise an eternal priesthood in the order of Melchizedek. Apart from being a Priest-King, He is also the perfect God-man. As the Son of man He was born from a Jewish family, but because of the supernatural conception of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit, He is also the Son of God. The angel said to Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). It was also announced that "the Lord God would give Him the throne of His [earthly] father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever" (Luke 1:32-33).

As the Son of God, however, Jesus Christ is the great I AM who existed from all eternity (John 8:24,58). He is the Lord of all the earth, who is rightly described by Zechariah as "the LORD my God" (14:5). Many years later, the doubts of Thomas were dispelled when he bowed down before the risen Saviour of the world and reverently addressed Him as "my Lord and my God" (John 20:28). He is "the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20).

The Lord Jesus will come a second time to judge His enemies and to reign from the restored throne of David in Jerusalem. This "Son" who was born in the house of David, is destined to rule as King forever: "Unto us a Son is given; and the government will be on His shoulder. And His name will be called... Mighty God... Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David" (Isa. 9:6-7).

A remarkable aspect of Zechariah's prophecy is that Joshua was already a priest when he was crowned as king. Likewise, Jesus is already a high priest who ministers His grace to us and makes intercession for us (Heb. 4:14-16; 7:25). In the near future, the royal crown will be added to Him when He will come as the King of kings (Rev. 19:16).

The prophecy in Zechariah 6:12-13 is most significant: "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, the Man whose Name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of the LORD; Yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both."

Prof. C. Feinberg, an eminent Messianic Jew and Old Testament scholar, emphasises the profound significance of these two verses as follows: "This is one of the most remarkable and precious Messianic prophecies, and there is no plainer prophetic utterance in the whole Old Testament as to the person of the promised Redeemer, the offices He was to fill, and the mission He was to accomplish."

Soon the mighty Priest-King of Israel *and* the whole world will come to judge His enemies, to save the remnant of Israel, and to rule the world from Jerusalem. His saints will share in His glory and reign with Him as kings.



## **Zechariah 7-8. Rebuke, Repentance, Fasts and Feasts**

Zechariah received his night visions in 520 BC. Two years later, in 518 BC (the fourth year of the reign of Darius), he received four messages from the Lord. These messages were in response to a question posed to Zechariah about observing certain traditions of fasting. A Jewish delegation from Bethel came to Jerusalem to ask the prophet whether the nation should continue to fast in remembrance of Jerusalem's destruction (7:2-3). The question raised by the delegation implied a desire to discontinue the self-imposed religious observance of fasting in the fifth month, which commemorated the destruction of the city and temple by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:8-10).

The Lord gave four messages in response to this question, but the final answer is only given in the fourth message (8:18-19). The messages are as follows:

### **1. A Message of rebuke (7:4-7)**

The first divine message reminded the people that God warned their fathers through the earlier prophets that He wanted true worship – not only the outward observance of rituals without repenting of their sins (cf. Isa. 1:11-20). “When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me – for Me? When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves?” (7:5-6). God's rebuke was against empty formalism devoid of spiritual reality, for whether fasting or feasting they did it not for the Lord but for themselves. They only maintained their traditional Jewish religion without truly serving God and repenting from their sins.

Although God ordered national periods of fasting en humbling before Him during times of crises (Joel 1:14), these are not to be observed in a casual way without repentance: “Is this not the fast I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness... then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you... then you shall call, and the LORD will answer” (Isa. 58:6-9).

### **2. A Message of repentance (7:8-14)**

A clear message of repentance was again sent to Israel as that was the only way of escaping God's judgements upon sin: “Thus says the LORD of hosts: Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother. But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the LORD of hosts” (7:9-12).

The Lord was looking for the following proofs of a godly life of righteousness in stead of a self-centred life which is characterised by apathy, imperviousness, lies and evil thoughts:

- The practising of true justice. David administered judgement and justice to all his people (1 Chron. 18:14). To do otherwise is sin: “He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD” (Prov. 17:15).
- The showing of mercy and compassion to fellow-Israelites. These are divine characteristics (Ex. 34:6; Deut. 30:3) that should be shown to the needy and destitute by those who received mercy and compassion from God.
- Caring for widows, orphans or children in single-parent families, as well as foreigners and poor people. “The LORD your God... shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deut. 10:17-19). Israel, as well as all other nations, shouldn't oppress the weak and the poor, and they shouldn't despise foreigners who turn to them for help in times of need.

Israel hardened their hearts against God, refused to repent, and openly committed all the sinful acts against which they were warned. They rejected the warnings that God gave through His Holy Spirit and the ministries of various prophets (7:12). In so doing, they kindled the wrath of God upon themselves. The result is that God did not answer their prayers when they were in trouble

(7:13). Instead, they were taken captive by their enemies and scattered among all nations. God says: "I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known" (7:14). The Babylonian exile of the Jews was only a partial fulfilment of this prophecy, as it clearly alludes to their international dispersion. That only happened in New Testament times after they had rejected Jesus as Messiah.

The Lord Jesus warned Israel against their coming ordeal, and emphasised the fact that they would also be judged for condoning and perpetuating their fathers' evil deeds: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites... you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt... that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation" (Matt. 23:27-36). Abel was the first martyr in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament, and Zechariah the last one.

The generation of Jews addressed by the Lord Jesus filled the measure of their fathers' iniquities to the brim. They did not protest when Herod killed John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the Messiah. Jesus strongly denounced them for not having accepted and believed this great prophet (Matt. 21:25). After that, they betrayed the Messiah and asked for His execution (Matt. 27:22). Then, they stoned Stephen, who was the first martyr of the Messiah's church. In a long speech, Stephen reminded the leaders of the sins and rebellion of their forefathers (Acts 6:8–7:60). He likened those who killed the prophets to the leaders of his time who insisted on the death of the Messiah, and also accused them of resisting and rejecting the Holy Spirit: "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:51-52). The judgements of God came upon them.

In AD 70, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans and the surviving Jews taken captive, thereby initiating their international dispersion to all nations (Luke 21:20,24) – a situation that would prevail until the last generation of the Christian dispensation. Only then would the unsaved Jews return to their land – as indeed happened since 1948 – while heading for times of great distress before the Messiah will come to save the remnant of the nation. God's call to a national repentance in Zechariah's time will then be fully heeded.

### **3. A message of restoration (8:1-17)**

While chapter 7 resembles the call to repentance in 1:2-6, as well as the severe consequences of not complying with this call, chapter 8 reflects the promised blessings pictured throughout the night visions (1:7–6:8), being the result of a genuine repentance and change of heart. The third and fourth messages describe the restoration from the Babylonian exile during the time of Zechariah as a precursor of future blessing in the millennial age. These future blessings will extend beyond Israel and refer to a time when righteousness, justice and peace will fill the earth.

God's zeal on behalf of Zion (i.e. the people of Jerusalem) is strongly affirmed (8:2; cf. 1:14; Joel 2:18). That will lead to great blessings: "Thus says the LORD: I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem" (8:3). This promise will be fulfilled in the millennium after Christ returned to Jerusalem to rule from the throne of David (cf. Acts 15:16-17). "Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain" (8:3; cf. Isa. 2:2-3). It will be the capital of the world.

During that time, the whole remnant of Israel will be saved: "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east and the land of the west; I will bring them back, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness" (8:7-8). In a similar prophecy recorded by Isaiah, God said: "I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour... Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honoured, and I have loved you... Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, Give them up! and to the south, Do not keep them back!" (Isa. 43:3-6).

The saved remnant of Israel will be prosperous in the land (8:11-12). They will also be a blessing

to all the nations of the world (8:13; cf. Rom. 11:12). Although God is a God of righteousness who punishes sin, He is also a God of profound love and mercy who wants to forgive and restore: “Just as I determined to punish you when your fathers provoked Me to wrath, says the LORD of hosts, and I would not relent, so again in these days I am determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear” (8:14-15).

#### **4. A message of rejoicing (8:18-23)**

The Lord waited until this moment to reply to the question raised by the Bethel delegates on whether they should continue to fast and weep in commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (7:2-3). God said that the fasts would become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals (8:19). Two additional fasts are included which were not previously mentioned (cf. 7:3,5) – one on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month to remember the commencement of the siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1-2; Jer. 39:1), and one on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month to recall the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar when the city wall was breached (2 Kings 25:3-4; Jer. 39:2). These fasts were all self-imposed and had been observed for 70 years with sorrowful hearts and wrong, selfish motives (cf. 7:5-7).

However, the fasts were not terminated in Zechariah’s time and are still observed – even to this day. The prospects for the near future, during the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7), are that even more feasts will be turned into fasts (12:10-14; cf. Amos 8:10). But then, after the Messiah has come again in power and glory to fully restore Israel and Jerusalem, the fasts will be turned into feasts to reflect the joy of Israel’s spiritual cleansing and the Messiah’s millennial reign. So, there *will* come a time when Israel will no longer remember and weep over the disasters of the past but celebrate joyful feasts to the honour of their Saviour (cf. Isa. 61:2-3; 65:18-19).

The glory of the Messiah will shine far beyond Israel and illuminate the entire world, “for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). But the Messiah’s glory will be manifested so profound by the Israeli people that all the nations will notice it and desire to share in their blessings:

“Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities; the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, let us continue to go and pray before the LORD, and seek the LORD of hosts. I myself will go also. Yes, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD... In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (8:20-23).

Jeremiah confirms this wonderful future of Jerusalem: “At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the Name of the LORD, to Jerusalem; they shall walk no more after the stubbornness of their evil heart” (Jer. 3:17; cf. Micah 4:1-3). This wonderful time will only dawn after the Second Coming of the Messiah when He will set foot on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem (14:4-5).

## **Zechariah 9-10. The Kingdom of the Prince of Peace**

The final section of Zechariah's book consists of two oracles that look forward to the Messianic King and His kingdom. Chapters 9 to 11 refer, for the most part, to the first coming of the Messiah, stressing the theme of His rejection, but also giving a prophetic outline of Israel's history to the end-times. Chapters 12 to 14 focus on the Messiah's Second Coming and emphasise His enthronement as part of the grand finale of Israel's history. The two oracles contain numerous passages which are counterparts to major themes of the eight visions, thus emphasising the unity of the entire book.

### **Judgements on Israel's enemies (9:1-8)**

These verses describe the destruction of various enemies of Israel. Alexander the Great of Greece was the human cause of the destruction set forth in these verses, but his involvement is bypassed in this prophecy to stress the ultimate divine cause of the judgement on certain cities and countries. Hadrach was a city and country lying north of Hamath. Damascus was the capital of Aram (Syria) and Hamath was also a Syrian city. Westward on the coast were the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon. These were all conquered by Alexander, thus executing God's judgement on them (9:1-4). During his invasion, Alexander also destroyed four Philistine cities, i.e. Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdod (9:5-7).

Because of God's protection, the armies of Alexander twice passed the city of Jerusalem without attacking it. God said: "I will camp around My house because of the army, because of him who passes by and him who returns" (9:8). The divine defence of Jerusalem foreshadows God's final protection of the city in the millennium when Jerusalem will never again be invaded by enemies. "So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again" (Joel 3:17). The devil-inspired attempts to destroy Jerusalem directly before and again after the millennial reign of the Messiah will meet with the most severe judgements of God (Zech. 14:12-13; Rev. 20:7-9).

The destruction of enemy kingdoms, cities, governments and armies are indicative of God's judgements upon the real enemies of His kingdom – the devil and his accomplices. In the Old Testament, all the nations outside Israel were described as heathen nations with heathen kings, heathen cultures and heathen religions (Ps. 96:5). They were, in effect, worshipping the devil instead of God: "...the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God" (1 Cor. 10:20). For that reason, they were enemies of God and subject to His judgements (Judg. 5:31; Isa. 66:6).

All the heathen kingdoms are strongholds of Satan, and therefore sworn enemies of God and His people, Israel. Tyre, which is mentioned by Zechariah (9:2-4), typifies Satan and his kingdom of darkness. God says that He would cast Tyre out, destroy her power, and then she would be devoured by fire. This prophecy against Tyre was not only literally fulfilled during the conquest of Alexander, but long ago God also judged the real king of Tyre, i.e. Satan, in a similar way (cf. Ezek. 28:1-19). Satan was first cast out from heaven, after a considerable time his power on earth would be destroyed by the Messiah (Heb. 2:14), and ultimately he will be confined to the everlasting lake of fire (Rev. 20:10).

In the light of these sobering facts Israel had to be a separated people who were not to mix with the heathen nations, as they were committed to living holy unto the Lord and to only serve and worship Him (Lev. 19:2; Deut. 6:13). Any complicity with heathen nations and their evil works would be regarded as rebellion and punished by God (cf. Deut. 32:16-22; 2 Chron. 24:18). Neither Israel nor the nations have any future in God's sight without accepting and serving the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of God, whose universal rule will be established in Zion. God says: "I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion... Now therefore, be wise, o kings... serve the LORD with fear... kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him" (Ps. 2:6,10-12).

There could have been no better news to Israel that God's Son would be born in their midst: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His Name Immanuel [God with us]" (Isa. 7:14). This promise was confirmed to Mary when she was betrothed to Joseph: "And

behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever" (Luke 1:31-33).

### **Coming of the Messiah (9:9)**

Zechariah clearly describes the coming of Israel's King to Jerusalem in the form of a lowly Person who would be their Lord and Saviour: "Rejoice greatly, o daughter of Zion! Shout, o daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey" (9:9).

The expressions "daughter of Zion" (cf. 2:10) and "daughter of Jerusalem" refer to the whole nation of Israel. They were exhorted to welcome the coming King not with fear but with glad rejoicing. The announcement "your King is coming to you," refers to the long awaited King and Messiah. Isaiah says He is the Prince of Peace who will sit on the throne of David (Isa. 9:6-7). Micah says He will be a ruler in Israel, and He shall be great to the ends of the earth (Mic. 5:2-4). He will be a just and righteous King (cf. Isa. 11:1-5; Jer. 23:5-6). The expression "having salvation" denotes that He will come as a Saviour: "The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness" (Zeph. 3:17).

The Messiah presented Himself to Israel in the triumphal entry of the city, riding on a donkey (Matt. 21:1-5). In ancient times, if a king came in peace, he would ride on a donkey instead of a war stallion. Jesus rode on a donkey. Like other Old Testament prophecies, this one (9:9-10) blends two events into one perspective – events that the New Testament divides into two distinct advents of Christ separated by the present church age (cf. Isa. 9:6-7; 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-21). During His first advent He rode on a donkey and presented Himself to Israel but they rejected Him as their King. So His universal rule (9:10) will be established when He comes again, riding on a white horse, to judge His enemies and save the remnant of Israel (Rev. 19:11-15; Zech. 13:9).

### **Kingdom of the Messiah (9:10–10:12)**

At His coming, the Messiah will establish peace on earth, He will deliver Israel, He will destroy the false shepherds, and He will regather all Israel:

#### *The Messiah will establish peace on earth (9:10)*

After the final battle of Armageddon the Messiah will bring an end to warfare and establish His reign of peace on earth: "I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the battle-bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (9:10).

After this big war the nations "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" (Isa. 2:4). The Messiah will have a worldwide reign, extending from Israel to beyond the Euphrates River and across the oceans to the ends of the earth (cf. Mic. 7:12).

#### *The Messiah will deliver Israel (9:11-17)*

God's promise of deliverance and restoration to Israel is often repeated in Scripture: "Because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope. Even today I declare that I will restore double to you" (9:11-12). God's faithfulness to His covenants with Israel is His basis for delivering them from worldwide dispersion (cf. Lev. 26:44-45). The blood of the covenant obviously referred to the old covenant in Zechariah's time (cf. Ex. 24:8; Heb. 9:18-22), but that was only a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of the Messiah in the fullness of time. Peter reminded the Messianic believers in Israel that they were redeemed by the precious blood of the Messiah, as of a lamb without blemish or spot (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Only through the blood of the new and everlasting covenant can Jews and Gentiles be pardoned and made complete (Heb. 13:20-21).

God promised that in terms of His covenant with Israel, He will set their prisoners free. That did not only refer to the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon but also refers to Israel's end-time regathering from the nations to which they were dispersed. The waterless pit refers to their place of exile and the stronghold to which they must return, to Jerusalem. In the end-time, God will restore twice as many Jews, thereby emphasising the fact that His blessings in the millennium will

far exceed anything Israel has ever known.

Zechariah 9:13-17 refers to Israel's deliverance from "the sons of Greece" (9:13). Alexander the Great of Greece died at the age of 32 in 323 B.C. from malaria with complications from alcoholism. His kingdom was divided among his four generals, among whom Ptolemy was appointed over Egypt and Seleucus over Syria and Mesopotamia. During different times in history, Syria and Mesopotamia were jointly referred to as Syria, Assyria or Babylonia. From the perspective of Israel, the kings of Syria and Egypt were referred to as the king of the north and the king of the south respectively (cf. Daniel 11). These kings and their descendants often attacked and dominated Israel, particularly Antiochus and his successors from the northern, Syrian kingdom. Among them, Antiochus Epiphanies was the worst dictator. Israel was only partially delivered from "the sons of Greece" during the Maccabean period, but will be fully delivered from the end-time Assyrian tyrant. Zechariah says that "the LORD their God will save them in that day" (9:16). "That day" refers to the tribulation period, the Second Coming of the Messiah and His subsequent millennial rule.

The end-time son of Greece will be the Antichrist, or false messiah, who will rule over Syria and Mesopotamia, being the present Syria and Iraq. He will, therefore, be the end-time king of the north who will also have the title of the Assyrian and the king of Babylon. Isaiah described the deliverance of Israel from his tyranny: "Therefore it shall come to pass, when the LORD has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, that He will say, I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks... And it shall come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel, and such as have escaped of the house of Jacob, will never again depend on him who defeated them, but will depend on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God" (Isa. 10:12,20,21). They will be finally delivered from the yoke of their enemies, particularly the Assyrian, and enter a time of goodness and abundance (9:17).

#### *The Messiah will destroy the false shepherds (10:1-5)*

"The idols speak delusion; the diviners envision lies and tell false dreams; they comfort in vain... The people... are in trouble because there is no shepherd, and I will punish the goatherds. For the LORD of hosts will visit His flock" (10:2-3). God will destroy the false prophets when the Messiah, the "great Shepherd of the sheep," returns to Israel. The false shepherds are equated with goatherds, thus describing them as false prophets. Such people are not feeding the sheep, they are deceiving them and end up being goatherds – unsaved leaders who have turned their ears away from the truth by giving false hope to their equally unsaved flocks of "goats."

The Messiah is described in a fourfold way as the cornerstone, the tent-peg, the battle-bow and the ruler (10:4). As the precious **Cornerstone** He is the only foundation upon which people's lives can be built (Isa. 28:16; 1 Pet. 2:4-6). To the unsaved, He will be a stone of stumbling to destroy them (Isa. 8:14-15; 1 Pet. 2:8). As the **Tent-peg** He is a sure anchor who brings stability to His people's lives – nationally *and* individually (cf. Isa. 33:20; Prov. 14:11). As the **Battle-bow** He protects His people against their enemies (Ex. 15:3; Ps. 45:6; 110:5-6). The Messiah will not do all the fighting but will empower His people to conquer like mighty men (10:5). As the **Ruler** He will rule over the house of Israel *and* over all the earth (Mic. 5:2,4).

#### *The Messiah will regather all Israel (10:6-12)*

This prophecy refers to the final regathering of Israel just after the Second Coming of the Messiah, which will be a continuation of their partial restoration before His coming: "I will strengthen the house of Judah... I will bring them back, because I have mercy on them. They shall be as though I had not cast them aside; for I am the LORD their God, and I will hear them... Their heart shall rejoice in the LORD. I will whistle for them and gather them, for I will redeem them; and they shall increase as they once increased" (10:6-8).

God gave to Zephaniah more information on this final regathering: "The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall see disaster no more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you in His love, He will rejoice over you with singing... I will deal with all who afflict you; I will save the lame, and gather those who were

driven out; I will appoint them for praise and fame in every land where they were put to shame. At that time I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you; for I will give you fame and praise among all the people of the earth, when I return your captives before your eyes, says the LORD” (Zeph. 3:15-20).

Walvoord & Zuck (ibid.) comment as follows on these verses: “Shouts of joy will arise because Israel’s Redeemer, the Messiah King, will be in her midst. The long promised Deliverer will protect them. Wrath from God’s hand and oppression by her enemies will be gone... Instead, Israel will lift her hands, symbolic of triumph, because of the Lord’s presence and power... The nation will again be the object of God’s great love, not His wrath... Israel will rejoice; but more than that, God will rejoice! He will be singing with delight and joy because His Chosen People will be in the land under His blessing.”

## **Zechariah 11. Rejection of the Good Shepherd**

Zechariah is a prophet of hope. In chapters 9 and 10, the hopeful themes are discussed of the judgements upon Israel's surrounding enemies, as well as the assurance that they would be protected to see both the first coming of their King (9:9) *and* His second coming (9:10), while the remnant will also experience the blessings and victory that the Messiah will bring to Jerusalem and to His people (9:11–10:12).

But suddenly, in this dark chapter, we are confronted with the fact that Zechariah does not only proclaim hope and victory like the false prophets, but also divine wrath and judgement. The false prophets have prophesied concerning Jerusalem visions of peace when there is no peace (Ezek. 13:16; cf. Jer. 8:11). Zechariah was not guilty of giving people false hope when they were spiritually in error. He warned them about the dire consequences for the entire nation of rejecting the good Shepherd and accepting the worthless shepherd (the false messiah).

### **The coming of wrath introduced (11:1-3)**

The first warning about the consequences of Israel's spiritual blindness and rebellion against God was that the land and its vegetation would be devastated. Trees would be ruined and thick forests come down. The lush thicket of the Jordan would vanish. Even lions who lived in the thick woods around the Jordan River would roar because of the destruction of their natural habitat (11:1-3). That has indeed happened and Israel became a wilderness.

### **Reasons for the devastation in Israel (11:4-14)**

Zechariah was directed by God to portray Israel's true Shepherd-Messiah, then he was required to portray the wicked shepherd, pointing to the end-time Antichrist. This passage focuses attention on Israel's spiritual condition at the time of Christ's ministry, and the consequences of rejecting the true Shepherd.

The command, "Feed the flock for slaughter" (11:4) implies the action of directing the flock for something, thereby preparing them for what was lying ahead. Various prophets warned Israel about the coming wrath of God to ensure that they would be fully aware of what would happen to them should they turn their backs on God. The last two prophets, or shepherds, who warned them were John the Baptist (Matt. 3:7) and Jesus the Messiah (Matt. 23:13-39). Jesus said to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: "The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:43-44).

God had designated Israel for slaughter by the Romans because of rejecting their Messiah-King, Jesus, and instead preferring to serve a heathen king. Pilate said to the Jews: "Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him! Pilate said to them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priest answered, We have no king but Caesar! So he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away" (John 19:14-16).

The destruction of Jerusalem and the beginning of Israel's international dispersion happened in the year 70 AD. During the siege and conquering of the city 1,1 million Jews died and the remaining 97 000 were taken away as captives of wars. Many of them were sold on slave markets and the others became dispersed to various countries. Because this judgement was specifically intended for the Jews who rejected their Messiah, the disciples of Jesus were warned in advanced to leave the city. Jesus said to them:

"When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled... There will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:20-24). The Messianic Jews evacuated Jerusalem after its first siege in 66 AD, ahead of the final Roman siege in 70 AD.



The devastating slaughter of the wayward flock occurred exactly as prophesied. Their King who came as a lowly Person riding on a donkey, was rejected and crucified. They did not heed His invitation to salvation, neither His warnings on impending disaster. Who deceived them into contemplating their own downfall? This was the work of false shepherds. The spiritual leaders of Israel were blind and ignorant. They were bad shepherds who did not pity the flock but sold them to the forces of darkness (11:5). The evil shepherds had the devil as father (John 8:44) and were unconcerned on what they did to their own people. Because of their deliberate decision to reject the good Shepherd, God said: "I will no longer pity the inhabitants of the land" (11:6).

The flock would be fed for slaughter by using two staffs, called Beauty (grace) and Bonds (union). The good Shepherd proclaimed His grace (forgiveness) to the flock while stressing the survival of a united Israeli nation (the union of the houses of Israel and Judah) even despite the judgements that would befall them (11:7). "The poor of the flock" refers to the Messianic Jews who heeded the words of the Shepherd.

In 11:8 the Lord says: "I dismissed the three shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred Me." The three evil shepherds probably refer to the three political and religious leaders that Israel had because of not obeying God and accepting the authority of their Priest-King, the Shepherd. The three evil shepherds that ruled over them at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus were the high priest, Caiaphas (Matt. 26:57-68) who misguided the Jewish Council and the whole nation into rejecting Jesus as Messiah; Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who represented unacceptable Gentile rule over Israel, and wrongfully handed Jesus over to be crucified (Matt. 27:11-31); and king Herod who treated the true King of Israel with utter contempt and returned Him to His executioners without questioning the verdict against Him (Luke 23:7-11). None of the three "shepherds" acted on sound evidence, and Jesus dismissed their false accusations by not even responding to them. Caiaphas was later dismissed by a Syrian governor of the Roman Empire, Pilate was dismissed and banished because of corruption and ended his life by suicide, while Herod Antipas was dismissed and exiled until his death. They all sealed their fate in the same month when they betrayed Jesus.

The internal Jewish leaders who were basically responsible for the conspiracy against the Messiah were the chief priests, the elders, the scribes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Matt. 16:6; 21:45-46; 26:57; 27:12, 62-63). They instigated the whole nation against Jesus, even to the point of opposing Pilate when he wanted to acquit Jesus. They responded by saying: "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matt. 27:22-25). The whole flock, therefore, brought a curse upon themselves and handed themselves over to be slaughtered.

The good Shepherd then cut His staff Beauty in two, which indicates the breaking of His covenant with the evil people who had rejected Him (cf. Matt. 21:33-45). He then surrendered them to starvation, even to the extent of eating one another's flesh, and to perishing (11:9-10). These calamities came upon the generation of people who were contemporaries of the good Shepherd (Matt. 23:34-36). These dark days couldn't have overtaken them completely by surprise as they were described in detail by Moses: "If you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God... all these curses will come upon you and overtake you... The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar... They shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down... you shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the LORD your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you" (Deut. 28:15,49,52-53). These prophecies were literally fulfilled in AD 70 during the capture and fall of Jerusalem by the Roman armies.

The poor among the flock (the believing remnant in Israel) understood the warnings of the Messiah and heeded them (11:11). They escaped the impending disasters (Luke. 21:20-21) because of not following false prophets and bowing the knee to Baal.

The selling of the Messiah by the leaders of Israel is described as follows by Zechariah: "Then I said to them, If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain. So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, Throw it to the potter" (11:12-13). Israel's appraisal of the true Shepherd's worth was 30 pieces of silver, the compensation price for a slave gored by an ox (Ex. 21:32). The choice of the slave price was intended as an insult to the Shepherd, worse than a direct refusal to pay Him any wage. This prophecy was literally fulfilled:

“Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you? And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver” (Matt. 26:14-15). Later, when Judas returned the money, it was used to buy the potter’s field (Matt. 27:3-10).

The other staff of the Shepherd (Bonds) was also cut in two (11:14), and pictures the dissolving of the national solidarity of Israel. Discord within the nation was one of the important factors that led to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, followed by their worldwide dispersion.

### **Final consequence of rejecting the true Shepherd (11:15-17)**

After rejecting the true Shepherd, the flock of Israel would not only be killed, driven from their land and dispersed among the nations, but they would perpetuate their spiritual blindness and continue to heed false shepherds. In the end-time, they would be restored to their land by God to endure further afflictions and divine wrath for being just as blind and rebellious as their deceived ancestors who betrayed the Messiah (cf. Ezek. 22:19-22; Jer. 30:7). Their spiritual blindness and lack of discernment will lead to concluding a covenant with the false messiah, the Antichrist. The true Shepherd said: “I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive” (John 5:43). In their utter foolishness, being estranged from God, from His Word and from His Son, they will embrace the false messiah:

“And the Lord said... Indeed I will raise up a shepherd in the land who will not care for those who are cut off, nor seek the young, nor heal those that are broken, nor feed those that still stand. But he will eat the flesh of the fat and tear their hooves in pieces. Woe to the worthless shepherd who leaves the flock! A sword shall be against his arm and against his right eye; his arm shall completely wither, and his right eye shall be totally blinded” (11:16-17).

Israel will accept this foolish and worthless shepherd who will do the very opposite of the Messiah, the true Shepherd. The Hebrew word rendered “foolish” suggests a person who is a coarse, hardened fool. This shepherd will have no concern for the flock and its needs; he will be interested only in his own gluttony. Instead of defending the flock, the foolish shepherd will destroy it. The arm indicates his strength and the eye his intelligence. His strength will be broken and his foolishness fully revealed when the true Shepherd returns. The false shepherd and his co-ruler, the false prophet, will be condemned to the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20).

This chapter in Zechariah clearly underscores the fact that there are, spiritually speaking, only two groups of people in Israel *and* the world – the unsaved who are children of the devil (John 8:44) and the saved who are children of God (Phil. 2:15). “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12). There is no middle way; you either follow the true Shepherd or you will be following one or other false shepherd who prepares the way for the end-time false messiah, the Antichrist. As a follower of the true Shepherd you will inherit eternal life and the abundant blessings of the Lord, but the followers of the evil shepherd will reap the judgements of God and eternal death in the lake of fire.

All people have a free will and need to make a definite choice to accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Being a member of the Chosen People (Israel) or a member of a Christian church does not automatically qualify you as a follower of the Messiah. All people were born in sin and need to make a life-changing commitment to the only Saviour of the world – Jesus Christ. He was destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (Luke 2:34). David prayed: “O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death” (Ps. 13:3). Have you arisen to a new life in Him? “Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light” (Eph. 5:14). To ignore or reject Him by accepting unsubstantiated arguments that He is not really the promised Messiah and Son of God, amounts to walking in darkness and promoting your eternal ruin.

The spiritual blinding that was brought upon Israel by false shepherds will be removed during the Second coming of the Messiah. That is the subject of the next two chapters in Zechariah. Daniel confirms the fact that Israel’s transgressions will be finished and their sins brought to an end at the completion of their 70<sup>th</sup> year-week of divine history after the Babylonian captivity (Dan. 9:24). That is the coming tribulation period of seven years. Take into account that the church dispensation, or times of the Gentiles, was fitted in after the 69<sup>th</sup> year-week when Israel rejected

their Messiah-King. When the false messiah comes after the church dispensation they will conclude a covenant with him for seven years (Dan. 9:27), and at the end of this period the Messiah will come again. Then, during a national repentance, Israel's sins will be forgiven and reconciliation will be made for their iniquity. The nation will be spiritually revived to serve the Lord with pure hearts. Everlasting righteousness will dawn for Israel during the Messiah's subsequent reign of peace.

## **Zechariah 12-13. The Redemption of Israel**

In their Bible Knowledge Commentary, Profs. Walvoord and Zuck say: “Two conditions are necessary for the establishment of Israel’s future Messianic kingdom: (a) the overthrow of Gentile world powers that oppose the establishment of this kingdom, and (b) the regeneration of individual Jews who will constitute the nation when God fulfils the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. Both these conditions will be accomplished by the Lord, as seen in chapters 12 and 13. He will deliver Israel physically from her enemies (12:1-9) and He will deliver her spiritually (12:10–13:9).”

Chapter 11 is a necessary prelude to the events in the following chapters. The rejection of the good Shepherd and the acceptance of the evil one sets the scene for the restoration and spiritual renewal of Israel, the lost son (Luke 15:11-24), as described in Zechariah 12 and 13. The rise of the evil shepherd in the end-time is a necessary condition for introducing the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7), so the remnant in Israel can approach the true Shepherd with broken hearts because of their sins and afflictions.

### **Israel’s physical deliverance (12:1-9)**

Very clear statements are made about an international conspiracy against Israel and their capital city, Jerusalem. The big war against Jerusalem will end in the utter destruction of the enemy forces. The Lord, who has made heaven and earth, as well as all living creatures, has all power in heaven and on earth (12:1). He says:

“Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it... In that day the Lord will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem... It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem” (12:2-3,8-9).

The nations have stubborn, unregenerate and evil hearts, and for that reason they despise Israel and hate Jerusalem. Being under the domination of the powers of darkness, they will not recognise nor worship the Holy One of Israel. Now, in the end-time, many of Israel’s enemies in the Middle East are reiterating their ancient conspiracy against Israel by saying: “Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more” (Ps. 83:4). Divine wrath will be poured out upon the nations because of their unjustified hatred of the Jews. God says He will gather all nations against Jerusalem to enter into judgement with them because of oppressing and scattering Israel (Joel 3:2).

Hatred of the Jews (Anti-Semitism) is a completely unbiblical attitude to adopt as it brings a curse of God upon those who are guilty of harbouring and promoting this antichristian spirit. God said to Abraham, the founding father of Israel: “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Christ was born from the lineage of Abraham through Isaac, Jacob, Judah and David, “that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:14). To reject the people through whom God gave the world a Saviour (cf. Rom. 9:5), and to whom He also entrusted His Word (Rom. 3:1-4), even though that very people may still be unfaithful to God (cf. Rom. 11:11-12), is to reject the God of Israel. He will sternly deal with these enemies.

God will strike the enemies of Israel with blindness (12:4) and strengthen His people to drive off and annihilate the hostile forces. On that day they will be heroes who will achieve the victory under the leadership and with the help of the Messiah (12:6-8).

### **Israel’s spiritual deliverance (12:10–13:9)**

Israel’s salvation at the Second Coming of Christ will necessitate a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit as it will happen seven years after the rapture, which formally ends the church dispensation. The Spirit of God will lead the remnant in Israel to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. God says:

“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and

supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadat Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. And the land shall mourn, every family by itself... In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness" (12:10-12; 13:1).

Zechariah likens the death of the Messiah to that of an "only son" and a "firstborn." Mourning for an only son or a firstborn was particularly bitter and violent. With the death of an only son the light of a family was extinguished. With the death of a firstborn the honour of a family, 'the first instalment of God's blessing', and therefore the most loved, was removed. The mourning for the Messiah is also likened to the mourning for King Josiah. Profs. Walvoord & Zuck (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*) say: "The future mourning of Israel over her Messiah is likened, in the second place, to the weeping on the day when godly King Josiah, the last hope of the fading Judean nation, was slain by Pharaoh Neco II, at Hadat Rimmon, traditionally identified as a village near Jezreel, in the plain of Megiddo (2 Chron. 35:20-27). Thus the greatness of the mourning at this final outpouring of the Holy Spirit can be compared only to the weeping for a most extreme individual (Zech. 12:10) and to corporate catastrophes of the nation."

Rev. Isaac Jennings (*The Imperial Bible Dictionary*) says: "The great mourning of the last days described by Zechariah, when the whole land shall mourn, and every family apart unite in the act, refers to the repentance of the Jewish people, and their deep contrition in view of their past unbelief, when, convinced of the sin of rejecting the Messiah, they shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn, and find cleansing in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness; and so all Israel shall be saved (Rom. 11:26). Blessed are those who mourn thus (Matt. 5:4), for they shall be comforted, through the pardoning mercy of our God freely remitting all their sins, and imparting peace to their souls.

"This subject vividly reminds us of sin, as the original cause of all mourning, and of the source of all the sufferings and all the ills that flesh is heir to. It reminds us too of the blessed object of the coming of the Son of God into the world to save from sin (Matt. 1:21), and therefore, finally, to save from all mourning and all sorrow. From the day that our first parents went forth in sadness from the garden of Eden until now, earth has been a vale of tears; and such it shall ever continue to be, till the Second Coming of our Lord to create all things new, when sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and earth again, in more than primeval beauty, in greater than Edenic bliss, shall become the abode of everlasting joy!"

The land of Israel will also be cleansed from all traces of idolatry: "It shall be in that day, says the LORD of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land" (13:2). Idolatry near the time of the Second Coming of Christ will include worship of the image of the Antichrist in the temple in Jerusalem (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:14-15), though other forms of idolatry will also be present (Rev. 9:20). Associated with the eradication of idolatry will be the banishing of false prophecies which is prompted by unclean spirits (13:2-5).

The true Prophet and Shepherd of Israel is the One who was wounded for our iniquities (Isa. 53:5): "And someone will say to Him, What are these wounds in Your hands? The He will answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends. Awake, o sword, against My Shepherd, against the Man who is My Companion, says the LORD of hosts. Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered" (13:6-7).

On the day when Jesus returns and sets foot on the Mount of Olives, the remnant in Israel will see the marks in His hands and ask Him: "What are these wounds in you hands?" He will reply that He was wounded in the house of His friends. The Jews will know who His friends, or own people, are, namely the house of Israel, because they all know that their Messiah will be a descendant of King David. Why then the wounds in His hands? Isn't He a mighty King who could have averted being wounded by anybody? In a moment of great shock and disillusionment they will realise who He is – Jesus of Nazareth who was betrayed and rejected by their fathers. They will look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn for Him, because they will realise that by also rejecting Him they were party to His crucifixion.

This situation will be reminiscent of the day, long ago, when Joseph was unexpectedly revealed as king of Egypt to his brothers. Joseph was a type of the Messiah: "Then Joseph said to his brothers, I am Joseph... but his brothers could not answer him for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, Please come near me. And they came near. And he said: I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:3-5). Like Joseph, Jesus was also betrayed and sold for the price of a slave, but God anointed Him as King of the world and will make His brothers to bow down before Him for salvation. "Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, Behold, we are your servants. Joseph said to them, Do not be afraid..." (Gen. 50:18-19). When Jesus comes, His brothers will react in the same way, be forgiven and spiritually revived.

When the Shepherd was struck, the sheep were scattered (13:7). Even the Messianic Jews were scattered when Jesus was crucified (Matt. 26:31), also after His ascension (Acts 8:1). The unbelieving Jews were scattered after the destruction of Jerusalem.

Before the remnant in Israel will be reconciled with the Messiah at His Second Coming, they will be severely persecuted and also scattered by the false messiah. The Lord Jesus warned of this time when He said that there will be a great tribulation which will bring human life on the planet on the brink of extinction. He said that if those days are not shortened, no human beings will survive it (Matt. 24:21-22).

As far as the Jews are concerned, an extremely high death-toll is mentioned in Zechariah: "And it shall come to pass in all the land, says the LORD, that two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it" (13:8). That means that a death-toll higher than the Holocaust in World War II is awaiting the 13 million Jews in the world during the dark days of the great tribulation. What a horrible prospect for the unbelievers! The same applies to the Gentiles.

People shouldn't blame God for the terrible judgements that people bring upon themselves because of their unrepentant hearts. All unsaved people are heading for a worse ordeal than the great tribulation when they will be cast into the eternal lake of fire. The Messiah, as Judge of all people, will say to them: "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). John says: "And anyone not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15).

The Jews who survive the great tribulation will be refined and saved: "I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and 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 each one will say, the LORD is my God" (13:9). They are the blessed ones that will inherit the promised kingdom of the Messiah. He will rule the world from the restored throne of David in Jerusalem (Acts 15:16-17), and His people will have times of refreshing in His presence (Acts 3:19).

# Zechariah 14. The Return of the King

Walvoord & Zuck (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*) say: "This chapter pictures the triumphant return of Israel's Messiah as the divine King. Thus it portrays the fulfilment of eschatological psalms, such as Psalms 93, 96, 97 and 99, which envision the universal earthly reign of the Lord. This reign is known from other Scriptures as the personal reign of the Messiah on the throne of David. Zechariah 14 progresses from the initial plundering of Jerusalem near the end of the future tribulation, through the catastrophic judgement on the Gentile armies at Messiah's Second Advent and the establishment of His millennial reign, to a description of the worship in Jerusalem during the millennium. The fact that these events have not yet occurred points to a premillennial return of Christ, that is, His return *before* the millennium."

## The King returns in power and glory (14:1-7,12-15)

The eschatological nature of the events described in this chapter is clearly confirmed by the fact that they will occur in the coming "day of the Lord" (14:1). Jerusalem will be the focal point of apocalyptic events: not only will the city and the land of Israel be the battlefield for a physical confrontation between the kingdoms of God and Satan, but the Mount of Olives in the city will be the entry-point to the world of the King of kings after a physical absence of about two millennia. His coming will be the beginning of Jerusalem's elevation to the status of world capital. It will be the illustrious City of the Great King. Before the Messiah will formally inaugurate the dispensation of God's revealed kingdom on earth by restoring the throne of David, He will deal a crushing blow to His enemies who will be deployed under the leadership of the Antichrist and the false prophet, and obliterate their antichristian world government that will be in power at the time. He will also incarcerate Satan who will be the unseen, spiritual head of the false messiah's world empire. God says:

"I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move towards the north and half of it towards the south. Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah. Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You. It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light; the lights will diminish... but at evening time it shall happen that it will be light... And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths. It shall come to pass in that day that a great panic from the LORD will be among them. Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbour, and raise his hand against his neighbour's hand; Judah will fight at Jerusalem. And the wealth of all the surrounding nations shall be gathered together" (14:2-7,12-14).

The Lord says that He will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem. He will simply allow the multinational force from all nations to march on Jerusalem because they will, under the instigation of Satan, already have decided to destroy the people of Israel *and* their coming Messiah. Another Jewish prophet, John, said: "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty... And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon" (Rev. 16:13-14,16).

Such a big war effort by all the nations of the world is not needed to destroy the small nation of Israel. At the time when the nations will mobilise their armies for this war, it will be close to the end of the tribulation period. The number of Jews will have been drastically reduced in the heavy persecution of the tribulation, and the remaining ones will have revoked their covenant with the false messiah, and will consequently have been disarmed and driven from Jerusalem (cf. Matt. 24:15-22; Rev. 12:6,13-17). They won't be able to pose a military threat to anyone; so, why then

all the preparations for the war of Armageddon in Israel, and specifically in and around Jerusalem?

John indicated the reason for the demonic provocation of the nations. The kings of the world, who will form part of the Antichrist's world empire, will be made to understand that Israel's Messiah will come from heaven with a big, heavenly army to save the remnant of Israel and to rule the world through them, and from the city of Jerusalem. The enemy forces will lay siege to Jerusalem and await the Messiah there. John says: "And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army" (Rev. 19:19). Their main target will be Jesus, the true Christ.

It will be a bad day for the multinational force as they will be killed with the sword that proceeds from the mouth of Him who sits on the horse (Rev. 19:21). He will only need to speak a single word that will lead to their sudden destruction. Zechariah says the flesh of the enemy troops shall dissolve while they stand on their feet (14:12). "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). The Antichrist and the false prophet will be cast alive into the lake of fire, while Satan will be chained and cast into the bottomless pit (Rev. 19:20; 20:1-3).

During the dramatic event of the Messiah's coming when tremendous earthquakes will spread across the whole world, and the Mount of Olives is split in two, a very sincere and wholehearted reconciliation will occur between the remnant of Israel and their once-rejected Messiah, Jesus. The Jews who fled to the wilderness in the middle of the tribulation period will return to the Mount of Olives to meet the true Messiah. They will do so despite the great danger posed by the deployment of massive antichristian forces in and around Jerusalem as well as in other places in the Middle East. According to the prophecies in Daniel 12 they will know that 3½ years will elapse from the day on which the false messiah declares himself to be God in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, until the day on which the true Messiah will make His appearance (Dan. 12:11).

Despite their anxiety due to the great war of Armageddon that will be waged they will approach Jerusalem. At a certain stage they will despair, fearing that their hope is gone and that they will all be cut off and killed (cf. Ezek. 37:11). At that critical moment the Messiah will come and as His feet touch the Mount of Olives it will split in two while the darkness of God's judgements engulf the enemy forces. It will again be like the day when the Messiah was crucified while bearing God's judgements for sin on our behalf. It became dark in the middle of the day, but at 3-o'clock in the afternoon when Jesus laid down His life, it was light again (Matt. 27:45).

On the day of His Second Coming darkness will prevail in the middle of the day when the judgements of God are poured out upon His enemies. In that time of great confusion among the enemies the fugitive Jews will find refuge in the valley of the cleft Mount of Olives. There, at the feet of the Messiah, they will be safe. Zechariah says: "In that day there will be no light... but at evening time it will be light" (14:6-7). When it becomes light again in the late afternoon, the Jews will look on Him who came to their salvation at the critical moment when they were surrounded by enemy forces, and feared that everything was lost. They won't only be physically saved from their enemies, but also experience the spiritual salvation of the Messiah in their hearts.

### **The Messiah's millennial reign instituted (14:8-11,16-21)**

"And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them towards the eastern sea and half of them towards the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur. And the LORD shall be King over all the earth... Jerusalem shall be raised up and inhabited in her place... The people shall dwell in it; and no longer shall there be utter destruction, but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited" (14:8-11).

The whole landscape in Israel will be changed, probably due to the big earthquakes (cf. Ezek. 38:19-20; Rev. 16:18-19). In the millennium, Jerusalem will be raised (14:10). The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains (Isa. 2:2). Living waters will flow from Jerusalem to the eastern sea (the Dead Sea) and to the western sea (the Mediterranean Sea). It will be like that in summer and winter (14:8), thus indicating that the day of the Lord will extend over many years and include the entire millennial reign of the Messiah.

The Messiah will be King over all the earth (14:9). Satan will be incarcerated in the bottomless pit, which will be sealed so that he can deceive the nations no more till the thousand years are



finished (Rev. 20:3). As a result of that, the nations will live in peace, beat their swords into ploughshares and stop all military training (cf. Isa. 2:2-4; Jer. 3:17). They will regularly come to Jerusalem to pray before the Lord (Zech. 8:20-22).

One such occasion will be the annual Feast of Tabernacles: "And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (14:16). Although the devil will be bound and unable to deceive people, they will still be born with a fallen, carnal nature and need to be born again to become partakers of a divine nature. Because of their human nature they may often neglect their duties and have to be disciplined: "Whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain" (14:17).

The hallmark of the millennium will be "Holiness unto the LORD" (14:20-21). Holiness will characterise public life and it will even be written on the bells of the horses. Holiness will be the nature of all religious expressions as the cooking pots in the Lord's house, the millennial temple (Ezek. 40-43), shall be like the sacrificial bowls before the altar. This rule will also apply to private households as all cooking utensils will be holy to the Lord. There will no longer be a dichotomy between secular and sacred, as people will be holy in all their conduct (cf. 1 Pet. 1:15). In accordance with the rule of absolute holiness, there will be no Canaanite in the house of the Lord (14:22). The Canaanites were idolaters and their religious practice was symbolic of anything ceremonially unclean and ungodly (cf. Ex. 34:11-15). In the millennial temple, no such defilement will occur as the Lord will remove all idolatry from the land (13:2).

Zechariah's prophetic book began with a call to repentance (1:2-6) and is concluded with an affirmation that all will be holy to the Lord (14:20-21). Because He is the Lord Almighty and the Holy One of Israel, He will establish holiness throughout the glorious millennium. All people who belong to Him must be sanctified completely before they can appear before Him. "Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

### **The Messiah is Lord**

The most profound revelation in the book of Zechariah is that the Messiah of Israel is called LORD – the eternal and self-existent I AM. In His pre-incarnate appearance He is described as the Angel of the Lord, in His first coming to Israel as the rejected King and Shepherd who came as a lowly Person to be pierced (crucified) for the sins of all people, but in the prophetic scene of His Second Coming He is fully revealed as LORD God [Yahweh Elohim]: "Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You" (14:5). He is "the King, the LORD of hosts" who will be worshipped by Israel and the nations in Jerusalem during the millennium (14:16). Zechariah also says: "The LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be – the LORD is one and His Name one" (14:9).

The concept "one" which is also used in Deuteronomy 6:4 to describe the Person of the Lord (Yahweh) our God (Elohim), is *echad* in Hebrew, which refers to a composite unity (three Persons who, together, are one) as opposed to an absolute unity. The Triune God can indeed say: "Let **Us** make man in **our** image," and then, "...male and female **He** created them" (Gen. 1:26-27). All three Persons in the Godhead can be addressed as Lord (Yahweh) and God (Elohim). The Messiah, the Holy One of Israel, is clearly The Lord God who created the world. John identifies the pre-incarnate Christ as the Word (*Logos*) who is the Creator-God: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men... He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own [Israel], and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His Name... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-4,10-14).

He is not only Jesus of Nazareth who had His beginning in Bethlehem where He was born as the Son of Man and the Son of God – He is the timeless and self-existent God who was there before the creation: "He is the image of the invisible God... For by Him all things were created that are in

heaven and that are on earth... He is before all things and in Him all things exist... For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 1:15-17; 2:9).

When the Messiah came to Israel the first time, very few people realised who He really is. His disciples exclaimed in amazement: "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him! (Mark 4:41). They didn't realise that He made the wind and the sea. To the agnostic Jews He said: "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58), and also "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). When He said that, the Jews took up stones to stone Him. When He asked them why they did that, they replied, "for blasphemy, and because you, being a man, make yourself God" (John 10:31-33). The Jews were in peril of their lives because of failing to accept the Messiah as Lord and God. He clearly alerted them to their spiritual ruin, should they not worship Him as Lord – the eternal I AM: "You shall die in your sins, for if you do not believe that I AM, you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24; Modern KJV). He is "the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20).

Only a small remnant in Israel will come to the full realisation of who the Messiah really is, but only after having been ravaged by the false messiah with whom they will wrongfully have concluded a covenant. Frances Havergal entreats all unsaved Jews and Gentiles: "Why will you do without Him? Is He not kind indeed? Did He not die to save you? Is He not all you need?" The Lord Jesus gave a solemn promise on salvation to all who would believe in Him: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47).

It is this great Saviour about whom Zechariah spoke to his people. But despite these messages, Israel rejected Him when He came for the first time. Shortly before His ascension from the Mount of Olives, the Messiah commanded His disciples to proclaim His love and saving grace to all nations on earth (Matt. 28:19). When He comes again, the whole Israel will be saved. Then, the Messiah and His saints will rule the world in righteousness. All nations will worship the Messiah and honour His people, Israel. They will say to the Messianic Jews: "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8:23).