

Introduction

One of the truly unique features of a biblical faith is encapsulated in Christ's statement, "My kingdom is not of this world". (Jn. 18:36) Regardless of the seemingly endless and cyclical rising and falling of earthly powers vying to establish such control, God's people must take a much more global view of history, both as it unfolds in their time, and for what is to ultimately come. In the meantime, while there are certainly times when God's people experience divine protection for their present circumstances, there is always a greater protection rendered for their more permanent future situation, provided they live by faith now for what will be afforded then. But there will definitely be times when God's people will see a precursor to when everyone is ultimately judged by the phenomenon of God's intervention at times to render judgment for current circumstances, as Israel ultimately witnessed in the course of their return from the Babylonian Captivity as they resettled the land of Israel. But take note of the struggle, because as it turns out, as with most things, it is a test of faith for both sides.

¹The burden of the word of the LORD is against the land of Hadrach, with Damascus as its resting place (for the eyes of men, especially of all the tribes of Israel, are toward the LORD),

Read verses 1

Q: Where and what is Hadrach?

A: This is the only mention of it in Scripture. Because it is here associated, "*with Damascus as its resting place*", we would expect it to be associated with Assyria. Archaeology confirms its literal existence and location in the vicinity of Damascus.

Q: How does this relate to the reference to "the eyes of men"?

A: It is a way of posing the question, "What will God do about them?" as put forth by those who believe in Yahweh, be they Jew or Gentile, but "*especially of all the tribes of Israel*".

Q: Why is "the word of the Lord" here described as a "burden" against them?

A: The underlying Hebrew word "*massa*" (Strong's #4853b) can also be translated as "oracle" or "burden". In other words, divine prophetic pronouncements are portrayed as a burden someone is going to have to bear, something heavy from the Lord, a dramatic picture of how serious this is because God never fails to fulfill His Word.

Application: *This begins with a prophetic announcement for the general population to the north of Israel who were responsible for carrying away the Northern Kingdom of Israel.*

²And Hamath also, which borders on it; Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise.
³For Tyre built herself a fortress And piled up silver like dust, And gold like the mire of the streets.
⁴Behold, the Lord will dispossess her And cast her wealth into the sea; And she will be consumed with fire.

⁵Ashkelon will see it and be afraid. Gaza too will writhe in great pain; Also Ekron, for her expectation has been confounded. Moreover, the king will perish from Gaza, And Ashkelon will not be inhabited.

Read verses 2-4

Q: Who has been added to the opening list of Hadrach and Damascus?

1. Hamath – A city/region originally assigned to Israel as part of the Promised Land (Num. 13:21; Josh 13:5; Jdg. 3:3) but which has been taken and used as a military base against Israel and incorporated first into the Assyrian Empire and later the Babylonian. It is something originally belonging to Israel which has repeatedly been turned around and used against them.
2. Tyre & Sidon – Often mentioned together in Scripture, they have alternately been an ally and help to God’s people and an enemy and antagonist.

Q: Why are these being singled out at this time?

A: For the people at this time, Hamath represents the military staging point for repeated invaders, and as mentioned in v.3, Tyre and Sidon represent economic might, especially Tyre in not only its acquisition of wealth, but in being a seemingly impenetrable island fortress noted for withstanding sieges previously attempted against it.

Point: *These are kingdoms and city/states which are experiencing success politically, militarily and economically at a time when the remnant of Israel is not. They appear permanently “blessed”, when they are not.*

Q: But what is the “burden” God will place on Tyre?

A: According to v.4, she will be dispossessed, cast away, and “consumed with fire”.

Point: *Here we have a picture of the fate of all unbelievers who will experience the loss of all the earthly things in which they trusted in the course of being permanently assigned to a final destination to be “consumed by fire”. Historically, Tyre literally suffered all these things at the hands of Alexander the Great.*

Application: *Just because God’s people are not experiencing what appears to be the **success** of their enemies does not mean God is not **aware** nor in **control**.*

Read verses 5-7

Q: To whom has God now extended this “burden”?

A: Gaza, Ekron and Ashkelon are all major centers of the Philistines.

Q: Why might this list sound familiar to us?

A: It is present in the parallel pronouncement God has already given through Amos (Amos 1:6-8), Jeremiah (Jer. 25:20) and Zephaniah (Zeph. 2:4)

Q: How were these things ultimately realized historically?

A: Like Tyre, they all came true in the course of Alexander the Great’s conquest.

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⁶And a mongrel race will dwell
in Ashdod,
And I will cut off the pride of the
Philistines.
⁷And I will remove their blood
from their mouth
And their detestable things from
between their teeth.
Then they also will be a
remnant for our God,
And be like a clan in Judah,
And Ekron like a Jebusite.

Q: What is the greater issue being addressed in v.6?

A: The destruction of national pride in the course of their literal destruction.

Observation: *It is interesting to note the various mixed ethnic groups which have since occupied what we today call "Gaza" even at present experience continual internal strife due to the shifting influence of various ethnic factions. That which literally transpired with Alexander's conquest produced a lasting pattern there even to this present hour.*

Q: But what is remarkable about that which is divulged by God in v.7 concerning Philistia spiritually?

A: The simultaneous removal of idolatry, as it has done with Israel, will leave "a remnant for our God".

Q: To what is this Philistine remnant likened?

A: "...a clan in Judah, and...like a Jebusite". (v.7)

Q: What is this describing?

A: "...a clan in Judah" is not just being incorporated as full family members of God's people, but associated with the Southern Kingdom of Judah who did not separate from God's Word and ways like the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Jebusites were the original residents of Jerusalem and incorporated into Israel upon their conquest by David, a picture of the Messiah (the Son of David) bringing Gentiles into His kingdom.

Application: *Not every pronouncement by God is for absolute **destruction**, but will also work in certain cases to bring **believers** back to Him, both inside and outside His **house**.*

Read verses 8-10

Q: How might v.8 have already experienced a partial, historical fulfillment?

A: It describes how all those listed above were overtaken by Alexander the Great and the fact that he by-passed Israel while going on to conquer Egypt.

Q: But how do we know for sure this was only a partial fulfillment? How do we know that there is an ultimate, final fulfillment yet to come?

A: By its inclusion with v.9, something fulfilled by the Messiah in His First Coming yet future to Alexander, and v.10, something yet to be fulfilled by the Messiah in His Second Coming.

Observation: *These three verses are a great example how prophetic portions of God's Word often speak simultaneously to the time in which the prophet spoke, but also both of Christ's First and Second Comings.*

Q: What is v.9 an obvious reference to?

A: That which we call "The Triumphal Entry" at Christ's First Coming. (Mt. 21:5; Jn. 12:15)

⁸But I will camp around My
house because of an army,
Because of him who passes by
and returns;
And no oppressor will pass over
them anymore,
For now I have seen with My
eyes.
⁹Rejoice greatly, O daughter of
Zion!
Shout in triumph, O daughter of
Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to
you;
He is just and endowed with
salvation,

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Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
¹⁰I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
And the horse from Jerusalem;
And the bow of war will be cut off.
And He will speak peace to the nations;
And His dominion will be from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth.

¹¹As for you also, because of the blood of My covenant with you,
I have set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.
¹²Return to the stronghold, O prisoners who have the hope;
This very day I am declaring that I will restore double to you.

Q: What are the Messiah's chief attributes in His First Coming?

1. "He is just"—that is, righteous in both character and in practice, ruling in equity. (Ps. 72:104, 7; Is. 11:2-4)
2. "...endowed with salvation"—that is, His own deliverance is an assured sign of the deliverance He brings for His people.
3. "Humble, and mounted on a donkey"—that is, far removed from the worldly pomp accompanying worldly rulers and famous figures. (Mt. 11:29) he does not present Himself as the elevated eye candy by which the world celebrates its rulers.

Q: Why is it particularly significant that the Messiah comes on a donkey, whereas a normal earthly ruler of that time would come on a horse?

A: At this time, horses are not menial modes of transportation but used exclusively for military purposes. Whereas in the Second Coming Jesus will come on the white horse as a conqueror to judge, in the First Coming He comes on a donkey as a servant to pay the price for sin.

Point: In His First Coming, Christ comes in the character of "The Suffering Servant" to fulfill the work of the cross.

Q: What is v.10 referencing?

A: The work of the Messiah in the Second Coming when He establishes His Millennial Kingdom.

Q: Why are the designations of Ephraim and Jerusalem being used?

A: Ephraim is the common name for those belonging to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and in this case Jerusalem is referencing those of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. It's a promise to reconcile all the tribes of Israel under the Messiah.

Application: God has a plan for His people not just in this **historic** instance, but a complete work of reconciliation which will begin with the Messiah's First Coming to effect **spiritual** restoration, and ultimately bring **literal** restoration in the Second Coming.

Read verses 11-17

Q: What is significant about the opening designation, "As for you also"?

A: Whereas the previous verses explained the "burden" of those nations involved in the influence and affairs of Israel and how they will ultimately be addressed by the Messiah, the attention is now turned to God's people.

Q: What is the image being presented by the use of "prisoners" (v.11 & 12), "stronghold" (v.12), "bow" (v.13), "warrior's sword" (v.13), "arrow" (v.14), "blow the trumpet" (v.14), "march" (v.14), and "sling stones" (v.15)?

A: They are all elements of war.

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13For I will bend Judah as My
 bow,
 I will fill the bow with Ephraim.
 And I will stir up your sons, O
 Zion, against your sons, O
 Greece;
 And I will make you like a
 warrior's sword.
 14Then the LORD will appear
 over them,
 And His arrow will go forth like
 lightning;
 And the LORD God will blow the
 trumpet,
 And will march in the storm
 winds of the south.
 15The LORD of hosts will defend
 them.
 And they will devour and
 trample on the sling stones;
 And they will drink and be
 boisterous as with wine;
 And they will be filled like a
 sacrificial basin,
 Drenched like the corners of the
 altar.
 16And the LORD their God will
 save them in that day
 As the flock of His people;
 For they are as the stones of a
 crown,
 Sparkling in His land.
 17For what comeliness and
 beauty will be theirs!
 Grain will make the young men
 flourish, and new wine the
 virgins.

Q: What is the greater message God is delivering here?

A: He is not just greater than any earthly battle, but is actually in control so as to cause the outcome to conform to His will and purpose.

Q: What is particularly important in God telling His people, "Return to the stronghold"?

A: The underlying Hebrew word here rendered "return" is the same word used throughout the Old Testament for "repent". This is a statement which is also reinforcing that they should not trust in earthly strength, but repent and return to trusting in God their strength. It is simultaneously addressing a literal and a spiritual rescue.

Q: But what does God base things on? What is the most important criteria presented here?

A: "...because of the blood of My covenant with you". (v.11) This is the Old Testament equivalent of the work of the cross, of repentance leading to the only right and proper spiritual reconciliation in biblical terms.

Q: So what are the multiple meanings in v.16 that, "the Lord their God will save them in that day"?

A: There was the literal historical fulfillment of that time in effecting a rescue from Alexander, but then there is the greater spiritual work of not just returning to God under the Old Covenant, but what would come through the Messiah's First Coming (the work of the cross) and ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah's Second Coming (the Millennial Kingdom). It speaks to both a literal saving, a spiritual saving, and an ultimate saving.

Q: Although a warrior on behalf of His people, to what does the emphasis shift in v.16?

A: To that of a Shepherd over "the flock of His people".

Point: God is not just the ultimate Savior, but Guide as well.

Q: But how does this also fit with His role as Savior?

A: A shepherd always defends and keeps the flock.

Q: What is the wordplay in v.15 and 16?

A: Whereas the Lord "will devour and trample on the sling stones"—a representation of the enemy, God's people are here referred to as "the stones of a crown", something precious and worthy of protection. One is found in great quantity with little value, the other in limited quantities of great value.

Q: What do grain and new wine first and literally speak to for the people of Zechariah's day?

A: They represent prosperity.

Q: What do they represent as biblical metaphors?

A: The grain represents the Word and wine the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Together they are powerful promises of not just spiritual restoration, but a prolific spiritual harvest.

Application: *God's handling of the literal, earthly **issues** will experience an even greater parallel **spiritual** outcome for those following through by "the **blood** of My covenant".*

Overall Application

What may seem like a permanent state of success and prosperity by those dedicated to the world in contrary to the oppressed state of God's people, does not automatically mean that this is a permanent condition. As it turns out, God has a plan to not only provide a solution for the present situation, but is providing a permanent spiritual remedy through the Messiah in the work of the First Coming for this life, and in the Second Coming for the life to come. The political, military and economic tools of earthly institutions which seem overwhelming from an earthly point of view cannot overcome those who rely on the Savior who comes as the Suffering Servant on the donkey for this life, and subsequently on the white horse leading into the next.