

Zechariah 12-13:6 • The Battle for Israel

Introduction

It is important to pay attention to how the focus changes in the course of this chapter, not merely beginning with the nations before moving on to Israel, but in the way it narrows down to families and individuals when it comes to the Messiah. On the one hand there is going to be the earthly battle in the land of Israel for control and possession Jerusalem which the nations will inevitably lose, but there is a parallel battle for the hearts of God's chosen people Israel which He will ultimately win. This is yet another example that God's working has two distinct outcomes depending on the condition of one's heart, whether it is hardened against Him or yielded and obedient to Him. The same divine task will work on the one for judgment and the other for redemption.

¹The burden of the word of the LORD concerning Israel.

Thus declares the LORD who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him, ²"Behold, I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that causes reeling to all the peoples around; and when the siege is against Jerusalem, it will also be against Judah. ³It will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it. ⁴In that day," declares the LORD, "I will strike every horse with bewilderment and his rider with madness. But I will watch over the house of Judah, while I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness. ⁵Then the clans of Judah will say in their hearts, 'A strong support for us are the inhabitants of Jerusalem through the LORD of hosts, their God.'

[Read v.1-5]

Q: What are the attributes of God which preface what is about to be revealed?

- "...stretches out the heavens..."
- "...lays the foundation of the earth..."
- "...forms the spirit of man within him".

Point: God the Creator is sovereign over not just everything in heaven and earth, but man himself. This is a very powerful testimony that the prophecies about to be given will not just come true, but are part of the plans of the Creator Himself.

Q: First of all, how would this have been most likely received by the people of Zechariah's day?

A: Since they were encountering problems just in trying to rebuild the Temple, which actually took them 49 years, and as yet had not even undertaken the rebuilding of Jerusalem, which would come later under the supervision of Nehemiah, they would understand this to be a divine promise for the future of Jerusalem, which at this time basically lay in ruins. God is giving them great hope and the opportunity to believe in something greater to come in spite of current circumstances.

Q: How were there activities in Jerusalem having an effect with other Gentile nations at that time?

A: Under Ezra they began to rebuild just the Temple, and the requests by Gentiles who have been living in the land and rendering sacrifices to the God of the land by the command of previous conquering kings have been rejected in their desire to join with the returning Israelites to not just rebuild, but operate the Temple. They brought false charges against the Israelites which have temporarily halted the Temple's construction. In other words, on a smaller, local scale, activities in Jerusalem have already caused "reeling to all the peoples around".

Q: But to what is this prophetically pointing?

A: A future, fully restored Jerusalem which will serve as a spiritual impediment and a final event when "all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it". (v.3)

Q: Why is this NOT fulfilled in what took place in 70 AD or even when Antiochus Epiphanes IV took Jerusalem leading to the Maccabean Revolt in 167-160 BC?

A: Those may have been devastating and shared many of the characteristics predicted in Scripture, but they were carried out by a single nation, not "all the nations of the earth". There is something much bigger to come.

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains... — Luke 21:20-21a

“Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. — Matthew 24:15-16

“Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation. — Daniel 11:31

Point: Over and above even the land of Israel, the center of God’s prophetic Word when it comes to the Last Days is Jerusalem. Today there are claims on Jerusalem which not only cover a wide political spectrum with the nation of Israel and its Arab neighbors, but spiritual authority claimed by Christians, Jews, Muslims and Catholics alike.

Q: What are the main features highlighted in this passage when it comes to God’s working on a spiritual level through Jerusalem?

1. *“I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that causes reeling to all the peoples around...” (v.2)* God’s inescapable judgment is often portrayed in Scripture as given through a cup that “causes reeling” as a result of their own spiritual drunkenness. (Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15; 51:39, 57; Hab.2:16)
2. *“...I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured.” (v.3)* This is a way of stating that individual/national intentions will be turned around and brought back upon those making the ill-attempt to make Jerusalem their own.

*Why are the nations in an uproar
And the peoples devising a vain thing?
The kings of the earth take their stand
And the rulers take counsel together
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,
“Let us tear their fetters apart
And cast away their cords from us!” — Psalm 2:1-3*

Point: There is an ultimate divine use of Jerusalem where the **whole world** is concerned.

Q: What are the literal things which God will cause to take place in this final event?

1. *“...when the siege is against Jerusalem, it will also be against Judah”. (v.2)*
2. *“...all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it”. (v.3)*
3. *“In that day...I will strike every horse with bewilderment and his rider with madness”. (v.4)*
4. *“...I will watch over the house of Judah, while I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness”. (v.4)*

*For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city.
— Zechariah 14:2*

Point: There is an ultimate divine use of Jerusalem where **Israel** is concerned.

Q: What will be Judah’s response?

A: *“A strong support for us are the inhabitants of Jerusalem through the Lord of hosts, their God” . (v.5)*

Application: There is a greater **spiritual** working involving Jerusalem for both the **world** at large and **Israel** specifically.

⁶In that day I will make the clans of Judah like a firepot among pieces of wood and a flaming torch among sheaves, so they will consume on the right hand and on the left all the surrounding peoples, while the inhabitants of Jerusalem again dwell on their own sites in Jerusalem. ⁷The LORD also will save the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not be magnified above Judah. ⁸In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the one who is feeble among them in that day will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the LORD before them. ⁹And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

[Read v.6-9]

Q: What is ironic about Judah being “like a firepot among pieces of wood” in this description of its divine empowerment to “consume...all the surrounding peoples”?

A: The underlying Hebrew term for “firepot” is also used in Scripture to describe God’s rescue of Israel out of Egypt, also translated as “iron furnace”:

*“But the LORD has taken you and brought you **out of the iron furnace**, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today. — Deuteronomy 4:20*

*(for they are Your people and Your inheritance which You have brought forth from Egypt, **from the midst of the iron furnace**), — 1 Kings 8:51*

*which I commanded your forefathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, **from the iron furnace**, saying, ‘Listen to My voice, and do according to all which I command you; so you shall be My people, and I will be your God,’ — Jeremiah 11:4*

Point: What worked as a refining process for God’s people will in turn work for the destruction of their enemies. Every sign and working of God has an opposite effect on hearts hardened in unbelief from hearts yielded in obedience to His Word and ways.

Q: Has any of these things experienced fulfillment?

A: No, they are still awaiting future fulfillment.

Q: But how would this be received by the people of Zechariah’s day?

A: At a time when they are currently being harassed and their work with Jerusalem and the Temple temporarily stymied, this would be a message of hope that not only would there be a reversal of the current situation, but a far greater working of God to come.

Q: As New Testament believers, to what ultimate fulfillment do we understand this to be pointing?

A: That final gathering of the nations by the Antichrist in his march on Jerusalem at the very end of the 70th Week of Daniel.

And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. (“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.”) And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon. — Revelation 16:13-16

Application: There is a greater, final working in **Israel** to come where the whole **world** is concerned.

¹⁰I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. ¹¹In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. ¹²The land will mourn, every family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself and their wives by themselves; ¹³the family of the house of Levi by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimeites by itself and their wives by themselves; ¹⁴all the families that remain, every family by itself and their wives by themselves.

[Read v.10-14]

Q: How has the focus changed in each of these three main sections of Zechariah 12?

1. In v.1-5, the main subject was “the nations”.
2. In v.6-9, the main subject was “Judah”.
3. Here in v.10-14 the main subject is the families.

Point: *God’s message is becoming more and more personally focused.*

Q: How do we know for sure that v.10 was not completely fulfilled at Christ’s crucifixion?

A: Because John did not quote the entire verse, but only the first part.

And again another Scripture says, “THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED.” — John 19:37

Point: *John omitted, “and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn”. He quote that which was partially fulfilled in the First Coming, omitting that which would be completely fulfilled at His Second Coming.*

Q: When does Scripture indicate this will finally occur?

A: This is confirmed by Christ and the Apostle John as taking place in conjunction with the Church’s removal.

“And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. — Matthew 24:30-31

BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. — Revelation 1:7

Observation: *While “all the tribes of the earth will mourn”, Zechariah specifies that Israel will additionally follow through, “as one mourns for an only son”. There is a particular effect on Israel which initiates what we know from Scripture as a time when God completes all the outstanding promises to Israel in the Last Days.*

Q: To what is v.11 referring?

A: There is scholarly dispute about the meaning of “Hadadrimmon” because this is the only mention given to it in Scripture. However, because it is associated with an act of greater mourning taking place “in the plain of Megiddo”, it is most likely a location lost to antiquity which was associated with the death of King Josiah, the last of Judah’s righteous kings. (2 Ch. 35:22-24) Mourning for him became an annual ritual of remembrance which was supposed to last into perpetuity. (2 Ch. 25:25)

Point: *A dramatic parallel is being established between the last righteous king of Judah and the Messiah the righteous King of Israel and last King in the Davidic line in order to describe the serious depth of reaction Israel will experience. In other words, the annual earthly mourning for Josiah is but a shadow of their sincere reaction when they finally acknowledge their heavenly King.*

Q: What is significant about the four families mentioned?

1. “...the family of the house of David...” The head of the royal line.
2. “...the family of the house of Nathan...” David’s son, a supporting confirmation of the royal line.
3. “...the family of the house of Levi...” The head of the priestly line.

4. "...the family of the Shimeites..." The grandson of Levi, a supporting confirmation of the priestly line.
5. "...all the families that remain..." No one is excluded.

Observation: Things which are especially important are often found to be stated in Scripture twice. That is the most likely explanation for the double mention of each of the royal and priestly lines, that it reinforces the sincere emphasis God places upon this. But together these five categories harken back to Israel as a whole following God as originally intended.

Q: Why is there the repeated feature, "and their wives by themselves"?

A: This is a very dramatic way of emphasizing the depth and sincerity of the grief which will take place. In the culture of the time, it was not unusual to pay professional mourners to fulfill a perceived obligation to mourn someone's passing, so this is a way of indicating this is the most personal, serious experience possible.

Application: There is a greater, final working in **Israel** to come where the **Messiah** is concerned.

[Read 13:1]

Q: Why is this a distinguishing feature where Israel in the Last Days is concerned?

A: Whereas all the nations "mourn" for themselves, it is only Israel who mourns for the Messiah "like the bitter weeping over a firstborn" and therefore experiences this spiritual restoration.

Q: How do we know this is NOT speaking of a worldwide revival?

A: Because it is restricted to "the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem".

Q: How do we know that this involves finally taking Jesus as their personal Savior?

A: Because "for sin and for impurity", this can only be addressed through Christ.

how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? — Hebrews 9:14

but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. — 1 John 1:7

looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. — Titus 2:13-14

Application: There is a final **personal** working in Israel where **Christ** is concerned.

¹In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity.

²"It will come about in that day," declares the LORD of hosts, "that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land. ³And if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who gave birth to him will say to him, 'You shall not live, for you have spoken falsely in the name of the LORD'; and his father and mother who gave birth to him will pierce him through when he prophesies. ⁴Also it will come about in that day that the prophets will each be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies, and they will not put on a hairy robe in order to deceive; ⁵but he will say, 'I am not a prophet; I am a tiller of the ground, for a man sold me as a slave in my youth.' ⁶And one will say to him, 'What are these wounds between your arms?' Then he will say, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.'

[Read v.2-6]

Q: Why should the promise, "I will cut off the names of the idols" be familiar to those raised on the Mosaic Law?

A: In the course of prohibiting the worship of false gods, one of the stipulations was "do not mention the name of other gods, nor let them be heard from your mouth". (Ex. 23:13)

Q: Why is the specific use of "cut off" particularly powerful?

A: It is an action described in Scripture as something which is tantamount to total and complete destruction, not just in this life, but also consigning it to hell. For example, this is what happened to Achan and company (Josh. 7) where the destruction was not just limited to him personally, but to his family as co-conspirators, all of their possessions and property, and all that remained was a burial mound for posterity. This resulted in their name being removed, or "cut off", from the roles of God's people so that they had no inheritance or standing in this life or the next.

Q: And how would this be additionally familiar to students of the rest of God's Word?

A: This spiritual cleansing of idolatry has been previously spoken by God through prophets.

"They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God. — Ezekiel 37:23

"For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, So that they will be mentioned by their names no more. — Hosea 2:17

Point: The Hebrew word for "mentioned" in Hosea could be literally translated "re-mentioned" to show that what is being addressed is a continual, repeated action rather than a one-time slip of the tongue.

Q: How do we know that "the prophets" God is going to remove is referring to just the false prophets and not all prophets?

A: Because it is said of them in v.3 following this, "for you have spoken falsely in the name of the LORD", and in v.4 that they will finally put off the deception where they have been wearing "a hairy robe to deceive".

Q: What is significant about this feature of "a hairy robe to deceive"?

A: This alludes to both Elijah (2 Ki. 1:8) and John the Baptist (Mt. 3:4) who came "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Lk. 1:17). In other words, they were claiming to be the messianic forerunner predicted in Scripture, not just another ordinary, everyday false prophet.

Q: What is remarkable about the end result of how God will deal with the false prophets?

A: They "will each be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies"—that is come to confess the deception of their own message, confess the deception of making themselves to look like a prophet, and publicly admit their true identity. "...but he will say, 'I am not a prophet'". (v.5)

[Continued on the next page.]

Zechariah 12-13:6 • The Battle for Israel, Page 6 of 7

Q: What is v.6 describing? Is this suddenly speaking of Jesus' crucifixion?

A: Something false prophets engage in, and still seen today, is “false charismata”—that is, making it look like there is bleeding coming from the hands or head or other physical signs, claiming this has happened supernaturally as a sign from god. What the false prophet is admitting is that his buddies did this to him at his request so he could make a false claim. Such will not only admit their false message, but their false signs as well.

Q: In addition to the removal of idolatry and false prophets, what is the third thing which God will remove on Israel's behalf?

A: “...the unclean spirit from the land”. (v.2)

Q: What is this referring to?

A: It is the primary cause and motivator of both idolatry and the false prophets. They are not simply an error or mistake, but the result of a concerted effort animated by a false spiritual influence.

Q: What is the greater working of God that is being described here?

A: It is what we would call “consecration”, the process by which someone is spiritually purified according to God's standard to be qualified to come into His presence to worship and serve Him.

Q: Has Israel ever been consecrated to this degree and in this manner?

A: No. While we might attribute a partial fulfillment to the work of John the Baptist in the First Coming in preparing some of them for the Messiah, we know that someone in that same character will spearhead this complete work in the same but more complete way in the course of the Second Coming. (Mt. 17:9-13)

Application: Before the final and last divine **signs** and **wonders** bringing all things to a close in the Last Days, there will be the precursor of the greatest spiritual **consecration** of God's people. False **spirituality** will be replaced with authentic **spirituality**.

Overall Application

While the re-establishment of Israel as a nation politically is without a doubt a prophetic precursor to all that is to further come in the Last Days, where Israel and the Jews themselves are concerned this is not actually either the most important nor the most powerful sign of the imminent return of the Jesus—the greater sign is an unprecedented spiritual change. What John the Baptist effected on a small scale in preparing Israel for the Messiah in the First Coming will be completed for the whole in the shadow of the Second Coming. The already unprecedented number of ethnic Jews who have accepted Yeshua as their Lord and Messiah is actually a much more powerful scriptural sign of the fulfillment of God's prophetic Word than the reconstitution of Israel as a nation-state, and an incontrovertible indication of how close we truly are to Christ's Return.