

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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A look at Zechariah: Zechariah 12:1-14 - "They shall look on Me whom they have pierced"

"It's because you are tired!" That was the stock answer to all of life's problems when my children were small.

"It's the economy, stupid!" That was the election slogan that drove one politician seeking election.

"It's all about Jesus!" That has to be the overriding thought as we consider prophecy. There was a time in the life of king Ahasuerus when he could not sleep (Esther 6:1). He realised that he had not rewarded someone for a good deed done. So the next morning, when his prime minister came into the court, he asked him the question, "What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honour?" (Esther 6:6). Well, that is the question that needs to be asked whenever we consider prophecy. Too often we worry about details of battle plans, or types of judgement. Now whilst we do need to understand the details, we need to keep the big picture before us. And the big picture is that God is doing everything so that His Son, Jesus Christ, will receive universal acclaim. He has determined a day when every knee will bow to Him, and every tongue will confess Him as Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). Because of the stubbornness of mankind's heart, it will take the dreadful events outlined in prophecy to bring man to the point when this becomes a reality. For over two thousand years God has "asked nicely", so to speak, and man has rejected Him, by and large. And yet His plans will not be thwarted. God will delight to honour His man, Jesus, for the wonderful work of Calvary.

This morning we continue our studies in the book of Zechariah by looking at Zechariah 12. Let us begin by reading it together:

"The burden of the word of the LORD against Israel. Thus says the LORD, who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him: '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,' says the LORD, 'I will strike every horse with confusion, and its rider with madness; I will open My eyes on the house of Judah, and will strike every horse of the peoples with blindness. And the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, "The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength in the LORD of hosts, their God." In that day I will make the governors of Judah like a firepan in the woodpile, and like a fiery torch in the sheaves; they shall devour all the surrounding peoples on the right hand and on the left, but Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place - Jerusalem.

'The LORD will save the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall not become greater than that of Judah. In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the one who is feeble among them in that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the Angel of the LORD before them. It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

'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 pierced. Yes, 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 Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. And the land shall 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; the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of Shimei by itself, and their wives by themselves; all the families that remain, every family by itself, and their wives by themselves'" (Zechariah 12:1-14).

We will consider this chapter under two headings:

- The gathering of the nations and
- The revelation of the Messiah.

The gathering of the nations

Zechariah 12:1-14:21 form Zechariah's final prophecy. He begins then by referring his listeners to the One who had sent him. This wasn't just Zechariah having a rant about the state of things in Israel at the time. What he had to say was a burden because of the responsibility in speaking on behalf of Someone who was so great, and because of the message he was having to deliver. But here we have the biggest view of God possible. He is the One who stretches out the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth, and forms the spirit of man. Not only did He make everything out of nothing, He also made the space, in which to create everything, out of nothing. Imagine that! It wasn't that before the stars and galaxies were made there was just a big emptiness. There wasn't. Out of nothing, God made that first and then chose to fill that space with all that we are still discovering today. But God didn't finish His creatorial work in Genesis 1, for it is an ongoing work, as He gives life to all day by day. Isaiah describes God in just the same way in Genesis 42:5: *"Thus says God the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it."*

As we begin to consider the dreadful events that burden Zechariah, we need to bear in mind that it is this great and awesome God who is going to perform all this. The moving of world armies is but a piffling trifle to the One who stretches out the heavens. God has been working to the end that is in view in this chapter since the beginning of human history, allowing one discovery after another, so that the events described in prophecy do not seem all that fanciful to us today. They certainly will not exert the God described in Zechariah 12:1-14.

In Zechariah 12:2-3 we begin to see what God will be doing during what we call the Tribulation. The books of Daniel and Revelation give us more detail about this time. *"I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples"* (Zechariah 12:2). Some would limit Jerusalem here to the city, and its people only and so the surrounding peoples would refer to the country dwelling Israelites. Others would take Jerusalem as speaking of Israel in general, much in the way we may speak of London representing all the UK, in which case the surrounding peoples would be the neighbouring nations in the Middle East. In a sense it matters little, for both are true in the plans of God. The cup of drunkenness speaks of the awful effects on the people of the events of the tribulation. We speak about being "punch-drunk", associated with the lack of coherent control. So severe will be the judgement of God, exercised through the hostility of the nations of the world against Israel during the Tribulation, that it will leave both Israel and the surrounding nations almost broken. The Hebrew word for 'cup' refers to a big cup, rather than an everyday drinking vessel. Because of Israel's rejection of Jesus, God will raise up the nations to exact judgement upon the nation, breaking their hard-heartedness. However, the nations, who will not realise that they are being used by God for His purposes, and therefore think that they are exercising their own military prowess, will go beyond their God given remit and so incur judgement upon themselves. The history of the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians, the Greeks will repeat itself.

Joel gives a similar picture in Joel 3:9-12: *"Proclaim this among the nations: 'Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, Let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; Let the weak say, "I am strong." Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O LORD. Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations."*

Interestingly Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin, on his travels, noted that in many towns in Palestine there was a large stone. The young men would test their manliness by trying to lift it. Similarly in Athens, he noted a large boulder by the city gates. Wrestlers had to move the stone before they could enter the city games. So Zechariah 12:3 gives us a picture showing how Israel will be the test upon which God will judge the nations. The general hostility of the nations against Israel, will be the cause for the judgement of God upon a nation, for *"he who touches you touches the apple of His eye"*, Zechariah 2:8.

"In that day", which translates the Hebrew 'Yom Hahu', meaning 'His day', occurs 15 times in Zechariah 12:1-14:21 and reveals to us what God is about. When all seems lost for Israel, as the nations gather together against her, and her destruction seems imminent, God will act. He has used the nations to bring judgement upon Israel for her disobedience and idolatry, but now He will act to bring judgement on the nations also. So in Zechariah 12:4-8, Israel will be miraculously helped, Jerusalem saved and preserved. After the broadcast read for yourself the song that Moses taught the people. You can find it in Deuteronomy 32:36-43. Isn't it wonderful the way in which the whole of the Bible fits together perfectly. God has His plans and they will be fulfilled perfectly in His time.

The revelation of the Messiah

So we come to the second section of the chapter: The revelation of the Messiah

"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" (Zechariah 12:10).

Apparently after the battle of Waterloo, many of the victorious soldiers just lay down and slept on the battlefield as they were so exhausted. Wellington wept as he saw the carnage that the day had inflicted. One could barely tell the dead from the sleeping!

In this chapter we have an even more climactic battle. The nations of the world will have gathered together, to make war against each other and against Israel. All will seem utterly hopeless for Israel as it faces total annihilation. But it is at that moment that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, will return, and with the word of His mouth, destroy all who would stand against Him. The carnage will be completely without comparison. Israel will be free and secure in her land again, but it will not lead to her unadulterated rejoicing. Instead here in Zechariah 12:10 we get one of the most remarkable statements to be found anywhere in the Bible. God will pour out His spirit of grace upon them which will lead to a real supplication from the heart. Joel 2:28-32 speaks about the same time: *"And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days ... that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said."*

God is going to effect a total transformation in the lives of the nation of Israel. Almost from the beginning they have been proud of the fact that they were God's chosen people. Too often they believed that this was as a result of their superiority, rather than God's unconditional election. But in His day, they will be given a gracious spirit, that makes them realise their total dependence upon Him. And they will look upon Him whom they have pierced! (Zechariah 12:10).

Today Zechariah 12:10 is a real stumbling block for those who cannot and will not recognise Jesus as the Messiah. All sorts of gymnastic, fanciful contortions are attempted to try to avoid the plain meaning of the text. Israel will look on the One whom Israel pierced and be cut to the heart, mourning with a sorrow that will be hard to bear. There will be no national rejoicing after the war. No 'Victory in Jerusalem' day, no bank holiday to celebrate the fallen heroes, or the freedom won. There will just be the sound of heartbreaking grief, uncontrolled and inconsolable.

The disciple John understood this verse. he writes in John 19:36-37: *"For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, 'Not one of His bones shall be broken.' And again another Scripture says, 'They shall look on Him whom they pierced.'"*

And again, now with the longing of a whole lifetime's anticipation, in Revelation 1:7: *"Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so. Amen."*

The man, Jesus Christ, is set to return to this earth in His day, to establish His kingdom. The One who shares His Father's throne in the heavenlies now will reign supreme upon earth! This is what will be done to the Man whom the King of all eternity delights to honour. This will be the ultimate triumph of the crucified One.

But Israel will look on Him and in God given revelation recognise their Messiah as the self-same One whom they rejected and crucified. In a moment of utter appal the penny will drop. The word "look" used in Zechariah 12:10 implies to stare at, or really focus on. The Israelites in the wilderness were told to look at the bronze serpent on a pole and live (see Numbers 21:4-9). So Israel will really look at Jesus and recognise Him as their Messiah. And it will lead to their mourning, a true and deep grief like that experienced after the defeat and death of Josiah at Hadad Rimmon that we read about in 2 Chronicles 35:22-25. Josiah had been such a good king but now he lay dead and how the nation mourned his passing.

Amos 8:10 speaks of this mourning; *"I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist, and baldness on every head; I will make it like mourning for an only son, and its end like a bitter day."*

You can picture the scene as the shouts of victory at the return of the Messiah melt away, as they recognise Him, and mourn. The Lord Jesus was that true only Son, and yet He was crucified and rejected. Still, God will have His way, and He will reign supreme.

This mourning will be genuine and total. I cannot help but think that sometimes these days we are afflicted by an almost communal grief culture. Particularly at deaths and tragedies that make the news, suddenly everyone feels that they have to make a gesture. It becomes a bit like a grieving frenzy. However, in His day, the grief will be utterly unlike any other. Note how Zechariah 12:12-14 speak of it being very much an individual grief. This will be no grief of the day competition, where one family's grief feeds that of another, each trying to grieve more than another. This is true heartrending grief. And it will affect the whole nation from top to bottom, and in every facet of the nation. So we read

of the great in the royal family - David, and the least in the royal family - Nathan was a younger son of David. And we read of the religious world as represented by Levi, and an obscure younger son Shimei (Numbers 3:18). From the greatest to the least in both the civil and the religious life of Israel there will be universal sorrow for the rejection of the Lord Jesus. Men and women alike shall mourn.

Do you feel sad for Israel upon reading this? You shouldn't, for she is now in just the state that God intends for her blessing! Let us read together Isaiah 66:9-13: *"Shall I bring to the time of birth, and not cause delivery?" says the LORD. 'Shall I who cause delivery shut up the womb?' says your God. 'Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her; rejoice for joy with her; all you who mourn for her; ... So I will comfort you; And you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.'"*

It is not until she is utterly repentant that God, in all the fullness of His love, can move out to comfort and bless the nation of Israel. And it will be through Israel on earth that all the nations will come into blessing. Imagine that! The nation that stands as such a thorn in the side of Middle East politics to the view of so many, will be the source of blessing to the entire earth, for it will be through Israel that He will reign.

As we close this morning, I cannot but think that we ought to learn the lessons of history, even though this particular history is still future! Wonderful though her future is, much better if they had not rejected their Messiah in the first place. How do you picture your arrival in heaven? Great rejoicing and joy? I wonder whether it will be accompanied by many tears and real grief, such that He will have to wipe away every tear. We have no right to sit in judgement on Israel for not recognising their Messiah. Yes, we may have recognised Him as our Saviour, though we have not seen Him, but have we really appreciated the greatness of His person as our Lord? I suspect not! Perhaps too then, one day I will mourn for the missed opportunities, the lack of faith, the half-heartedness that has been the main characteristic of my life. If we learn anything from Zechariah 12, let us learn to be faithful now, until He reigns supreme.

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