

Zechariah's Second Oracle (Zech. 12-13)

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Text: Zechariah 12-13

Introduction: The focus of our study will be to consider the second oracle or “burden” revealed to Zechariah. Properly, it begins in 12:1 and continues to the end of book. Our assignment is to consider chapters 12 and 13. The final lecture in this series will focus on the final chapter. We will begin by looking at the broader context of the book to demonstrate how it sets the stage for the final chapters. We will examine a few points from the final chapter as they relate to the second oracle as a whole (reserving the bulk of the chapter for our final speaker).

Body:

I. The Context of Zechariah

A. The book of Zechariah dates itself in three passages. The first two fall in the “second year of Darius” (1:1; 1:7) and the third in the “fourth year of king Darius” (7:1).

1. While Darius was a common name among Medo-Persian royalty, this reference is to the fourth Persian king, Darius Hystaspes who reigned from 522-486 BC.
 - a. We must distinguish this from “Darius the Mede” (Dan. 5:1; 6:1, 6, 9, 25, 28; 11:1) also identified as “Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes” (Dan. 9:1) of the book of Daniel.
 - b. Daniel’s Darius reigned with Cyrus—or as some understand Daniel 6:28, was Cyrus. In my judgement, a better case can be made that Darius the Mede was the figure whom Xenophon (and other Greeks) knew as Cyaxeres II, the son of Astyages, the grandfather of Cyrus. This was a common understanding until the nineteenth century, and I believe is worthy of reconsideration.¹
2. Zechariah’s Darius is synonymous with the Darius to which Ezra refers at a time when the exiles were allowed to resume the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:24).

B. The book of Zechariah is an interesting blend of encouragement, promise, and warning.

1. It begins with a reminder of why they had faced exile—“The Lord has been very angry with your fathers” (1:2), but moves quickly to hold out the Lord’s promise of mercy—“I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house shall be built in it,” says the LORD of hosts” (1:16b).
 - a. It calls for a renewed relationship with God in the midst of the continued return from exile—“Up, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon” (2:7).
 - b. At the time Zechariah writes, those who act against God’s people are warned, “I will shake My hand against them, and they shall become spoil for their servants” (2:9b).
2. But Zechariah is also a book of future promise. The Lord declares:

Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,” says the LORD. “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” (2:10-11, NKJV).

- a. Certainly, this describes the blessings of a renewed relationship with God, but it also foretells a future in which not only the Jews, but “many nations” shall be God’s people, “joined to the LORD.”
- b. What a beautiful backdrop this provides! At a time when temple worship was being restored, the Lord reveals to Zechariah the coming of One He calls, “My servant the BRANCH” (3:8), whom He says “shall build the temple of the LORD” (6:13a).
 - 1) This would not be an ordinary temple. This One called the “BRANCH” will act as priest and king, who—“shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a priest on His throne” (6:13b).
 - 2) This was something not permitted under Mosaic Law. Under the Old Law, priests came from Levi, and the Davidic throne came from Judah.
 - 3) This temple would involve “Even those from afar” who “shall come and build the temple of the LORD” (6:15a).
3. Almost as if to balance such wonderful promises, the Lord then offers warnings.
 - a. He reminds them, “Should you not have obeyed the words which the LORD proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous” (7:7a).
 - b. Because of their past failures the Lord had, “scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known” and “the land became desolate after them” (7:14a).
4. This repetition of encouragement, promise, and warning runs throughout the book.
 - a. The Lord proclaims, “I am zealous for Zion with great zeal” (8:2b, ENCOURAGEMENT).
 - b. “Thus says the LORD: ‘I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain’” (8:3; cf. 10:6, PROMISE).
 - c. “They shall be My people And I will be their God, In truth and righteousness” (8:8b; 10:9-10, PROMISE).
 - d. “Let your hands be strong, you who have been hearing in these days” (8:9b; cf. 10:12)—“now I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days,” says the LORD of hosts” (8:11, ENCOURAGEMENT).
 - e. And yet, He admonishes them, “Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; and do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate,” Says the LORD” (8:17; cf. 10:3, WARNING).
 - f. He even warns pagan nations of His judgment (9:1-8; cf. 11:1-3, WARNING).
5. This promise of a different kind of temple, and future involving unification of the Jew with Gentile nations is so clear in Zechariah one wonders how the Jews of the first century could miss it! The Lord promises:

“Yes, many peoples and strong nations Shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD.” Thus says the LORD of hosts: “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’” (Zech. 8:22-23, NKJV).

 - a. Whatever conclusions one draws about the final chapters of this book we must not forget this emphasis and this promise.

C. Zechariah is a highly messianic book, especially focusing on events surrounding the death of Jesus and the atonement it would provide.

1. Barnabas Lindars calls this the “Zechariah Passion Commentary” (Lindars, Barnabas. *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations*. London: SCM, 1961, 111).
2. We can see this in specific fulfillments referenced in Matthew and John.

<i>Riding on a colt</i>	Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 21:4-5
<i>Sheep scattered</i>	Zechariah 13:7	Matthew 26:31
<i>Gazing on the one pierced</i>	Zechariah 12:10	(John 19:37)
<i>Thirty pieces of silver</i>	Zechariah 11:12	Matthew 27:9
<i>The potter's field</i>	Zechariah 11:13	Matthew 27:10

(Pope, Kyle. *Truth Commentaries: Matthew*. Athens, AL: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 2013, 698).

3. After this promise of fellowship with the nations (8:22-23) yet a warning to the sinful nations (9:1-8) we see a messianic prophecy which is specifically cited in the New Testament: “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, a colt, the foal of a donkey” (9:9).
 - a. Matthew quotes this passage directly and describes it as being fulfilled in Jesus’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem at the start of the final week before His death (Matt. 21:1-10).
 - b. Zechariah promises a messianic reign that will span from “sea to sea” and “to the ends of the earth” (9:10)—something accomplished in the proclamation of the gospel (Matt. 28:18; Rev. 1:5).
4. Another messianic allusion comes in a warning to Israel’s shepherds.
 - a. In Matthew 27:9-10, the apostle quotes Zechariah 11:12-13 describing the thirty pieces of silver paid as a betrayal price for Jesus and then the purchase of the potter’s field.
 - b. Matthew says this fulfilled what Jeremiah wrote, which is either including elements from Jeremiah that also relate to this (cf. Jer. 19:4, 6; 32:6-9) or reference to the ancient arrangement of scrolls that placed Jeremiah before Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Minor Prophets (Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Batra* 14b).
 - 1) While this is an unusual application of the text of Zechariah, the Holy Spirit makes it clear the context of Jesus’s death is the focus.

II. **The Last Chapters of Zechariah.** This sets the stage for the last chapters of the book, which continue this messianic theme and address how it will come and blessings it will bring.

A. Full-preterists have argued that the last three chapters of Zechariah describe a single act of judgment, introduced by the words “The burden of the word of the LORD against Israel” (12:1a).

1. They argue that this points directly to the fall of Jerusalem at the hand of Rome in AD 70, appealing to Zechariah 14:2b: “The city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished” as imagined proof of this identification.
2. They argue that Zechariah 13:1-2 promises an imagined forty-year period in which spiritual gifts operate but are brought to an end at the fall of Jerusalem, which they believe is the fulfillment of all eschatological prophecies.²
 - a. While certainly this wording often precedes a coming punishment (cf. Isa. 21:13; Jer. 23:34; etc.), it literally refers to a weight to be borne — as seen in the

“burden of the beasts of the south” (Isa. 30:6) who would carry the riches of the wicked.

B. The opening words of this “burden” in Zechariah do not foretell punishment, but protection.

1. Like the warning of 2:9b, that the Lord would fight against those who assault His people, the Lord declares to any who would “lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem” their efforts will be like taking a “cup of drunkenness” (12:2).
2. They will be “cut in pieces,” even “though all nations of the earth are gathered against it” (12:3). That is certainly not a description of the conditions in AD 70.
 - a. In fact, the Lord promised, “In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (12:8a)—“It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem” (12:9). That does not fit conditions in AD 70.
 - b. This challenges us to consider whether the Lord is talking about the physical city of Jerusalem or the identification of God’s people in a spiritual sense.
 - 1) We have already seen promises of a future that includes “many nations” who would be “joined to the Lord” worshipping Him (2:10-11), and men from “every languages of the nations” (8:22-23) under the Messiah’s reign from “sea to sea” and “to the ends of the earth” (9:10).
 - 2) Under Christ, there would come a redefinition of what it meant to be God’s people (Rom. 9:6; 2:28-29) and the names of places associated with these people applied in a spiritual sense rather than to a physical location (Heb. 12:22-24; Rev. 21:1-2).
 - 3) We will return to this later in our study.
3. How does the Lord indicate that He will offer this protection? He promises:

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 (Zech. 12:10, NKJV).

C. This is another messianic prophecy.

1. John says it was fulfilled in Jesus’s side being pierced at His crucifixion (John 19:37).
 - a. Zechariah speaks of mourning, but not over Jerusalem’s destruction in AD 70, but mourning over this “pierced” One (12:10-14), through whom the “Spirit of grace and supplication” was poured out.
 - b. It is compared to mourning “at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo” (12:11).
 - 1) This is the name of a place near Megiddo and the name of two Syrian deities.
 - 2) Zechariah associates it with mourning which has led to a number of interpretations of this as a reference to ritual mourning in this place:
 - a) Sisera’s mother crying for her son who died near there (Judg. 5:26-28).
 - b) Ahaziah, king of Judah, died here after Jehu ordered an arrow to be shot at him (2 Kings 9:27).
 - c) Following the Targum of Zechariah 12:11 (and most commonly) the place where Josiah, the last faithful king of Judah, died pursuing Pharaoh Necho (2 Kings 23:29).³

- D. This is the context of the “day” in which “a fountain” is said to “be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness” (13:1). This was accomplished in the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross.
1. Instead of referring to a literal fountain, Zechariah points to the “pierced” One who is the source of this “fountain” for “sin and uncleanness.”
 - a. Jeremiah used a similar figure of Deity, speaking of “The LORD, the fountain of living waters” (Jer. 17:13).
 2. In Revelation, John saw this “pierced” One (Rev. 1:7) who was said to have “loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Rev. 1:5).
- E. In connection with this fountain flowing, three things are said to “be cut off” or “depart from the land”—(1) “names of the idols,” (2) “prophets,” and (3) “the unclean spirit” (13:2).
1. “*Names of the Idols.*” Certainly, the spread of the gospel would lead souls to turn “to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9) and to “flee from idolatry” (1 Cor. 10:14). What of the other two?
 2. “*Prophets.*”
 - a. I actually agree with the preterists that Zechariah 13:2-6 foresees a time when spiritual gifts would end.
 - b. While Joel 2:28-32 foretells the outpouring of these gifts, Zechariah 13:2-6 (like 1 Cor. 13:8-13) looks to a time of its termination.
 - 1) This does not specify a forty-year “transition period” as full-preterists argue. Zechariah doesn’t jump from Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross to AD 70. He is generally dealing with the cross and its impact and consequences.
 - 2) With the outpouring of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit on the apostles in Acts 2, we see a limitation of its scope. Not all Christians received this. The laying on of the hands of the apostles was necessary (Acts 8:14-17) and when it occurred there is no Scripture that indicates that it could be passed on.
 - c. So, with the death of the apostles and those upon whom the apostles had laid their hands, the “prophet” passed from the land.
 - d. Some might argue that this is only talking about false prophecy associated with idolatry because it says, “they will not wear a robe of coarse hair to deceive” (13:4).
 - 1) I would argue that the language is broad enough to be inclusive of false prophecy, but also of true gifts of prophecy.
 - 2) The first time I ever heard this argument applied to spiritual gifts and demons was actually from a denominational preacher who was arguing that this points to the coming of a millennial kingdom, during which time he said there would be no spiritual gifts or demons.
 - e. If we agree that this is talking about a time when the kingdom is in operation, since that began in the New Testament (Col. 1:13-14) it points to a time that now exists—and thus to a time when miraculous gifts no longer operate as well as the restriction of...
 3. “*Unclean Spirit.*” The departure of the “unclean spirit” from the land may look to the same rationale for its interpretation.

- a. Certainly, a miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit was the ability to cast out demons (Mark 16:17) but what would happen as this gift passed away? Would demonic possession continue with no ability to address it?
 - b. In John's vision, in connection with the thousand-year period in which the Messiah reigns, Satan is bound (Rev. 20:1-4). If Jesus now reigns, it follows that Satan is now bound.
 - 1) Does that mean he has no influence? No (1 Pet. 5:8-9) — but his power is now restricted. This likely parallels the promise of Zechariah 13:1-6.
- F. This focus on the impact of Christ's death is also clear from yet another messianic prophecy that follows the foretelling of the termination of these things.
1. The Lord proclaims, "'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'" (13:7a).
 - a. Jesus Himself quotes this passage of what will begin on the "night" of His betrayal (Matt. 26:31; Mark 14:27) — His disciples would flee in fear.
 2. Yet Zechariah's application suggests that the Lord meant this not merely of the disciples' fear on that night, but the cycle of persecution and opposition to God's faithful remnant that would come to those who serve the Lord's "Shepherd."
 - a. Jesus warned, "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20b).
 - b. The inevitability of this persecution is likely what is meant by the call "awake O sword"—which is not a call to judgment but to the reality of coming persecutions (cf. Matt. 10:34).
 3. What would happen as a result of the striking of the "Shepherd"? "Two-thirds in IT shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in IT" (13:8b, emphasis mine).
 - a. The Lord promises, "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).
 - b. Let's ask what "IT" is being described here?
- G. My assignment is not to cover Zechariah 14, but allow me to consider a few points within that chapter.
1. Zechariah 14:2a speaks of nations that come "against Jerusalem." The second part of the verse is what full-preterists try to apply to AD 70: "The city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished."
 - a. They often fail to read the rest of the verse: "Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city" (Zech. 14:2c).
 - b. If this is referring to physical Jerusalem, as noted above it couldn't apply to AD 70 — there was no "one-third" of the city preserved and refined (cf. Matt. 24:21).
 - 1) Jesus forewarned and commanded His disciples concerning the events of AD 70: "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are 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" (Luke 21:20-21).

- 2) According to Jesus, unlike Zechariah 14:2c, in AD 70 there would be no faithful “remnant” preserved within the city. Jesus commands the faithful to flee from it and not to “enter her.”
2. Is this referring to spiritual Jerusalem (cf. Heb. 12:22)?
 - a. We have already seen Zechariah describe a new type of spiritual temple (6:13, 15a).
 - b. We have seen the promise of a spiritual fountain of forgiveness (13:1).
 - c. The verses that follow seem to describe spiritual rather than physical things. “The LORD will go forth and fight against those nations” (14:3; cf. Rev. 2:16 — “fight against them with the sword of My mouth”).
 - 1) The Mount of Olives will split in two as the Lord stands on it (14:4). Is that literal?
 - 2) “Living waters” will flow “from Jerusalem” to the Dead Sea and to the Mediterranean Sea (14:8). Is that literal?
 - d. Ironically, while most would likely understand all of these things as spiritual or figurative, why would they then assume that 14:2b — “The city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished” is not?⁴
 - 1) Jesus declared, “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38).
 - 2) Zechariah says “living waters” would flow “from Jerusalem” (14:8) — not the physical city but the spiritual dominion of those faithful to God.
 3. As God has offered encouragement, promise, and warning throughout Zechariah’s prophecy, in the last chapters He tells the faithful Jews rebuilding the temple of a future time with a spiritual temple, spiritual city, and spiritual fountain of forgiveness.
 - a. Although they will face persecution, and some may even turn from the Lord — which is likely the spiritual sense in which 14:2b must be understood: “The city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished” — the Lord still promises deliverance to the spiritual Jerusalem of His faithful remnant who will one day be cleansed by His “pierced” One.
 - b. “The people shall dwell in it; and no longer shall there be utter destruction, but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited” (14:11). This can only be understood in a spiritual sense.

III. What Should We Take Away from This?

- A. God offers encouragement, promise, and warning to His people.
- B. God knew what would happen to Jesus and to His church.
- C. Jesus is our BRANCH, the pierced One, the fountain of forgiveness, our Shepherd, and our King.

Conclusion: While Zechariah is a book revealed to a people under a different covenant, it points to the time in which we now live and the benefits we enjoy in Christ. It is talking about God’s people serving Him in faithfulness to the BRANCH, God’s Shepherd, and the “pierced” One who is the fountain for “sin and uncleanness.” Thanks be to God for the “living waters” He provides!

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¹ For a full survey of this issue see my study, “Belshazzar and Darius the Mede: Was Daniel Wrong?” *Focus Magazine Online*, December 4, 2018. <https://focusmagazine.org/belshazzar-and-darius-the-mede-was-daniel-wrong.php>.

² To see how advocates of the AD 70 Doctrine approach these texts see my study, “Zechariah and the AD 70 Doctrine.” *Truth Magazine* 64.10 (Oct. 2020): 6-7, 34, from which some of the material in this lecture is drawn.

³ The connection of these names with pagan deities has led some modern scholars to argue that this could refer to ritual mourning in connection with pagan worship, as attested in Ezekiel—“weeping for Tammuz” (Ezek. 8:14). Yet, in Zechariah this is mourning for the “pierced” One through whom grace and forgiveness would come. It seems unlikely that the Holy Spirit would use pagan worship as a simile for mourning for the Messiah.

⁴ To avoid this dilemma, some full-preterists have tried to identify two cities in these last chapters: a spiritual and a physical. This forces an interpretation onto the text in order to fit their preconceived conclusion. If we allow the text itself to lead us to a sound interpretation of its meaning it is clear that Zechariah is speaking of Jerusalem in a spiritual sense throughout the final chapters of the book.