
October 1 : Scriptures Nahum 1-3

SUMMARY

Nineveh didn't have a chance. Like Jonah, Nahum prophesied against Assyria and its capital city, Nineveh. The Ninevites and their king repented under Jonah's preaching and prophetic proclamation, but they returned to their old wicked ways, drawing God's wrath. My Bible commentary points out a great irony – Nahum's name means "comfort." Well, his words may be comforting to Judah, but they're no comfort to the Assyrians!

When did Nahum prophesy? It had to be before Nineveh's destruction in 612 B.C., 110 years after the Assyrians conquered Israel, and 26 years before Babylon conquered Judah. My commentary places Nahum sometime during evil King Manasseh's reign (686-642 B.C., 44-year reign) or his rotten son, Amon's reign (642-640 B.C., 2-year reign). Nahum addresses Assyria seemingly at the peak of its power (668-627 B.C.).

Nahum opens his prophetic screed with a dynamic description of Israel's God – jealous, avenging, and fierce wrath. With great power, Yehovah will destroy His enemies in furious anger for their guilt. With typical Hebrew imagery, Nahum depicts God as precisely Who He is – the mighty God of heaven and earth whose anger shakes the heavens, dries up rivers, and crushes mountains. Who can possibly withstand Him (1:1-6)? Certainly not the Assyrians!

What follows in verses 7-8 is classic Nahum. While the Lord is loving and compassionate with His people, protecting them like a refuge, He's an overwhelming flood that will destroy those who oppose Him. Even though their ruler plots against God, forget it! It'll be futile. There will be no second time for Assyria. The brutal empire may have Israel under their yoke due to God's discipline, but God will deliver His people (1:12-13) while He brings the Assyrian king down. When that happens, Judah will never have to fear Assyria again. On the other hand, Babylon is rising as a power, and the Babylonian empire will conquer Assyria for good.

Nahum declares Nineveh's destruction in chapter 2. The Assyrians were known for scattering (exiling) their enemies via long death marches. They were a brutal military known for piling enemy corpses at city gates and scooping up all the treasure they could after conquering a nation. But the empire that scatters will face its Scatterer – Yehovah (2:1). Even though the Assyrians plundered Israel and Judah, God will restore His people (2:2). But for Nineveh, the battle will commence, depicted in stunning imagery of intense scarlet shields and clothing with chariots flashing back and forth like fire. As I read, I get this intense feeling of chaos and pandemonium as the Assyrian army darts back and forth

to shore up its defenses under their enemy's onslaught (2:3-6). But to no avail. There's only defeat followed by plundering, leaving them desolated, decimated, and devastated (2:10). The Assyrian people will despair over their humiliating takedown.

So, where will the lion be after they are defeated? The Assyrian army was like a lion that shredded its prey to feed its lioness and cubs. But now, the lion's cubs (soldiers) will be killed, and the rest of its army silenced.

What brings such horrible judgment from Yehovah? Their staggering sin! Chapter 3 opens with a battle scene with short bursts of language to describe it to capture the frantic pace of warfare. But what city is this that's being attacked with the dead being stacked and racked (3:1-3)? It's Nineveh! Yehovah will do to them what they did so often to their enemies. It's payback time, measure for measure. This kind of retribution is a common theme in Nahum. Assyria will get what it gave. Their payback is what comes in 3:4-7 as Nineveh is depicted as a witch prostitute who "treats nations and clans like merchandise by her prostitution and sorcery." God will punish Nineveh by exposing her and humiliating her by pelting her with filth and contempt. The nations will recoil with horror at what mighty Nineveh has become. I bet Jonah would have loved to see this!

The Lord holds up Egypt's city, Thebes, as an example to Nineveh. "Do you think you're better than this mighty city? No! Even though Egypt had strong allies, Thebes was conquered, her children were dashed to pieces, her leaders sold off as slaves, and everyone exiled – the same thing you, Assyria, did to others. All this is coming upon you, even as you try to hide from it" (3:8-11). Nahum uses another vivid illustration in 3:12. When fig trees have ripe fruit, all a person needs to do is shake a branch, and the figs will let loose to fall into the person's open mouth. As Assyria did this to Samaria in Israel, so it will happen to Assyria. Their fortresses will drop like ripe figs into the hands of their attackers to be consumed.

The Assyrian army will "be like women" (my apologies to the women, but that's what the text says, implying the stereotypical weak and helpless-in-battle females), and their gates will be useless for defense. Their gates will be burned open. Despite Nineveh's siege preparations, the city will be cut down, and the leaders will disappear like a locust swarm.

And then comes a final word to the Assyrian King – your leaders will lie dead, and your people will be exiled across the region. Assyria will never rise again because of their incurable wound. The nations that Assyria afflicted will applaud their destruction. For

the nations that experienced Nineveh's utter cruelty and brutality, they will give a standing ovation over Assyria's downfall.

INSIGHT

No nation is invincible. Every nation has its "sell-by" date and the end of its "shelf life." Doubt me? Just study world history. Kingdoms, empires, nations, and countries rise and fall. The best they can do is serve God according to His word for as long as they can. Sadly, that's rarely the case for long because of fallen human nature. So rather than expecting a nation, etc., to be God's kingdom on earth, we should call every person to live God's way. At least with that, God's influence will make that people group a godly one for as long as possible. Sometimes I fear the United States is getting close to the end of its "shelf life." We may see God's judgment approaching and annihilating what the world knew as the "Christian" United States. But if we, as God's people, stay faithful to Him, our families and we will remain as a godly remnant for what God has in store next.

October 2 : Scriptures Habakkuk 1-3

SUMMARY

Habakkuk prophesied somewhere between 609-599 B.C. during Judah's King Jehoiakim's reign when Egypt ruled Judah and just before the Babylonians (Chaldeans) arrived to defeat Egypt and make Judah a vassal kingdom. His message is similar to Job's, "Why, Lord, do You allow these things to happen?" Throughout the book, Habakkuk talks with Yehovah, asking Him the "Why" questions about His dealing with Judah. I'm pretty sure that as we go *Cruisin' Through The Bible* with Habakkuk, we may have those same questions in our minds, given the world we live in today.

Habakkuk is a simple book. Chapters 1-2 are Habakkuk's conversation with God, and chapter 3 is Habakkuk's Song. The unique thing about his book is that Habakkuk doesn't speak to people, only God. As we listen to his conversation with the Almighty, we learn God's message to His people.

Habakkuk's first question to God is one we could ask today, "Why do You tolerate injustice and wrongdoing? Why do we have to sit here and look at it while You seemingly do nothing? The longer it goes on, the worse it gets!" Habakkuk points out, "This is why the law is ineffective, and justice never emerges. For the wicked restrict the righteous; therefore, justice comes out perverted" (1:4). I can't tell you how many times I've thought that same thing while watching the news. How long will our political leaders use their positions for insider stock trading? How long will the evil people get out of jail free, and their victims not get justice? How long will our leaders buy votes to keep themselves in power and then stomp on the citizens? Seriously, it makes me furious, probably like it did to Habakkuk.

What was God's answer? "Oh, don't worry, Habakkuk. Justice is on the way in the form of the Chaldeans (aka Babylonians). They don't follow Me as 'their views of justice and sovereignty stem from themselves.' They're fast and fierce and worship their strength" (1:5-11).

Habakkuk's next question is, "You, O Lord, are the eternal God. Why would you assign the wicked Chaldeans to punish the less-wicked Judahites? Why would You use evil to punish your people? 'Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, and you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. So why do you tolerate those who are treacherous'" (1:13)? Shouldn't You use a righteous nation to punish evil? These Chaldeans are idolaters, and they don't even follow You! Why do You let them continually scoop up nations like fish in a net, empty it, and go back for more?" I have to hand it to Habakkuk. These are essential questions,

and he's content to wait for God to answer even though he's more than a little stirred up (2:1).

God's answer to Habakkuk is first to write down the vision that the Chaldeans will arrive to punish Judah (2:2-3), and it will happen just when Yehovah wants it to happen. Yes, the Chaldeans are egomaniacs, "But the righteous one will live by his faith." In other words, righteous people live by trusting God, even when it doesn't seem God is doing what is right. "Trust me, Habakkuk. I know what I'm doing by choosing the Chaldeans/Babylonians to serve My purposes. They're like drunk and greedy people. They're on a tear and will eat nations like the grave eats dead bodies. But the nations will taunt the Chaldeans/Babylonians when their time comes."

Yehovah pronounces five prophetic woes (judgments) against the Chaldeans: 1) A curse on the Chaldeans for taking what they want from the other nations, loading themselves up with treasures. The empire that looted others will themselves be pillaged. This looting is the Chaldeans' judgment for all their violence and bloodshed (2:6-8). 2) A curse on the Chaldeans for taking dishonest gain to build themselves an unassailable city. Rather than conquering people and receiving tribute, a very acceptable practice, they killed populations and wiped many out. For that, they'll pay (2:9-11)! 3) A curse on the Chaldeans for using slave labor, bloodshed, and injustice to build their empire, specifically their cities. However, we know from history that those cities will burn when the Persians arrive. Despite all the injustice and unrighteousness, a time is coming when the whole world will know God's glory. When that happens, human activities will be accomplished righteously (2:12-14). 4) A curse on the Chaldeans for their "shameless perversity" (Bible commentary), by which they corrupted the nations to get what they wanted, especially wood from Lebanon for their building projects. For the violence the Chaldeans poured out on others through their perverse ways, they will experience violence themselves and be disgraced before all those nations to which they were violent. 5) A curse upon the Chaldeans for their idolatry! There's only one God Who lives. The idols are just dead, useless blocks of wood and stone (2:18-20)!

Habakkuk ends with his song of praise and confidence in chapter 3. After hearing "the report about You," i.e., what God is doing and why, Habakkuk accepts it and asks for Yehovah to remember His mercy on Judah in the face of judgment (3:2). However, for the Chaldeans, Habakkuk sees God marching toward Judah from Mount Sinai ("from Teman, from Mount Paran") to execute His judgment upon the one He used to judge Judah. His splendor accompanies Yehovah with brilliant light streaming from His hand, from where His power emanates. Plague and pestilence for His foes surround Him, and the earth shakes with His power. The atmosphere also shakes with thunder and torrential

rains. His oncoming presence even affects the sun and moon. As He walks, He tramples the nations that oppose Him (specifically, the Chaldeans), stripping their king and crushing him.

After this shattering vision of God's glory arriving to dish out a world of hurt on His enemies, we get the feeling Habakkuk is wiped out mentally and emotionally (3:16). Having had his questions answered, all Habakkuk can do is sit and wait. He is the righteous person who will live by trusting His God. Even though all circumstances look dire, "yet I will celebrate in the Lord; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation!" *That's the cry of faith and trust.* Why would Habakkuk do this? Because he knows his God, "The Lord my Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like those of a deer and enables me to walk on mountain heights!" (3:19). *Selah!*

INSIGHT

Given other End Times scriptures, Habakkuk may have received a prophetic vision of the Lord arriving for the last battle at the End. Isaiah describes the seemingly similar scenario this way:

"Who is this coming from Edom in crimson-stained garments from Bozrah (SSE of Jerusalem in modern-day Jordan)— this one who is splendid in his apparel, striding in his formidable might? It is I, proclaiming vindication, powerful to save. Why are your clothes red, and your garments like one who treads a winepress? I trampled the winepress alone, and no one from the nations was with me. I trampled them in my anger and ground them underfoot in my fury; their blood spattered my garments, and all my clothes were stained. For I planned the day of vengeance (against God's enemies), and the year of my redemption came (for His people, Israel)" (Isaiah 63:1-4).

According to Habakkuk and Isaiah, Yehovah starts His attack at Mount Sinai in Saudi Arabia and moves into Jordan on His way to save His people in Jerusalem and the rest of the land of Israel.

I find it fascinating that Habakkuk describes God's power as flashing in His hand. This can mean many things. However, we know that Jesus sits at His Father's right hand, meaning He *is* His Father's power. Revelation describes Jesus' return with the same language as Isaiah did above. "Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and with justice he judges and makes war. His eyes were like a fiery flame, and many crowns were on his head. He had a name written that no one knows except himself. *He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God*" (Revelation 19:11-13).

If we put the pictures together, it seems that when Jesus returns, He'll appear near Mount Sinai, deal with Saudi Arabia and Jordan first, and then arrive in Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives to begin His assault on the enemy nations (the Islamic army of a revived Caliphate). Jesus, the Right Hand of God, will triumph over His enemies and fulfill Habakkuk's prayer.

One more thing. During the Passover meal, a lamb shank bone (the foreleg) on the plate represents the Passover Lamb that saved Israel from the Death Angel. The word for this bone is *zeroah*, the "arm of the Lord," strong and mighty to save. At the Last Supper, Jesus implied that He is the "new" Passover Lamb who will save His people from death and bring them into the New Covenant. Therefore, Jesus is not only the Hand of God in judgment, but He's the arm of the Lord who will accomplish His Father's work.

Now, check out the rest of the scripture from Isaiah 63:1-5, "I (the Father) looked, but there was no one to help, and I was amazed that no one assisted; so *my arm* (Jesus, the Son) accomplished victory for me, and my wrath assisted me."

In due time, God will cause this all to come about. All righteous people must do is wait in quiet trust, "the righteous one will live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4).

October 3 : Scriptures Zephaniah 1-3

SUMMARY

The timeline for Zephaniah's prophecies is in the neighborhood of 640-612 B.C., between the Assyrian (722 B.C.) and Babylonian (586 B.C.) exiles. The prophet's general theme is the Great Day of the Lord, meaning the time when God intervenes in human history to exercise judgment, save His people, or both. In Zephaniah's case, the Lord spoke to him between Israel's deportation for idolatry and Judah's coming deportation for the same sin.

Many of us evangelicals look forward to Jesus' return which is the quintessential "Day of the Lord." We long to meet Jesus face to face. We all will eventually, even if not in the End Time Rapture way – getting changed and scooped up from the earth while we're still alive. When we die, that will be a Day of the Lord for us believers. That's when we will experience our salvation fully as we look forward to eternity with the Lord.

For the non-believer, the person who hasn't "pledged allegiance to the Lamb," their death will also be their Day of the Lord. However, rather than salvation, they will face judgment for eternity.

Which have you chosen? You can settle it right now. Talk to Jesus and ask Him to save you. Tell Him you want to be with Him on the Day of the Lord, whether it's your Day or that Great Day. Then walk with Him. Learn His word, get together with other Bible-believing believers, and do what He says about living life His way. There you go.

Zephaniah's word from the Lord begins chapter 1 with a short genealogy, possibly linking him to Judah's royalty (Hezekiah), but we're not sure. He prophesied in the days of King Josiah, whose father, King Amon, and grandfather, King Manasseh, were accomplished idolaters whose influence incurably infected Judah with sin. King Josiah helped bring about a remarkable revival, but it only hit the brakes momentarily until Judah hit the Babylonian wall.

Zephaniah's prophecy begins with a bang! "I will completely sweep away everything from the face of the earth—this is the LORD's declaration" (1:2), including all animals and people. Okay. Not much headroom left there. Why would the Lord declare that? Of course, for Judah's rampant sin of idolatry, as we've all read in the Hebrew scripture histories and prophets. Zephaniah notes that the Judahite priests who were worshipping the stars were joining along with the pagan priests (1:4). Yehovah doesn't tolerate

syncretism, mixing two or more religions, like Chrislam is today (Christianity and Islam – an abomination! Like Yehovah would share the spotlight with Allah. Right.).

So, the Lord has “prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated his guests.” The scary part is those guests *are* the sacrifice, His people who will be punished. He will judge them for their unholy political alliances (1:8) and their pagan worship practices similar to the Philistines (1:9; 1 Samuel 5:5). Business will cease on the day of war (1:10-11) to everyone’s grief. Some of Zephaniah’s hearers think the Lord will or can do nothing. Not so. God will be sure to hunt those people down and show them they were wrong (1:12-13).

As Zephaniah continues, he describes the Day of the Lord, which ain’t pretty. For Judah, it will be a day of destruction, famine, disease, and turmoil caused by the besieging Babylonian army. But Zephaniah sees that time as a template for a global Day of the Lord. Think of worldwide conflict breaking out, bringing death and destruction because of humanity’s profound and unrepentant sin (1:17-18). Not a light message, is it? We often fail to see how much God *hates* sin and the things that violate His holiness. Yehovah’s reaction to sin is its destruction. It doesn’t get worse than that, the total removal of any holiness-offending thing. Apostle Paul points out in Romans 6:23a, “For the wages of sin is death.” However, the Lord is merciful. He provides help where we cannot help ourselves, “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23b).

So, what should we do in the face of God’s intervention in humanity’s slide into hell? *Repent!* Zephaniah’s call to the Judahites, the “undesirable/shameless nation,” is “Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth, who carry out what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be concealed on the day of the Lord’s anger” (2:1-3). We can also see that it’s a call to all the nations and those who are the “humble of the earth, who carry out God’s commands.” Carrying out God’s commands demonstrates our allegiance to Him.

But some don’t embrace the God of Israel. Instead, they oppose Him and His people. In Zephaniah’s prophetic focus, they are the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Cushites (Eastern Africa, just south of Egypt and often allied with Egypt), and Assyria. Yehovah will ruin and remove the Philistines, the Moabites’ and Ammonites’ land will be laid waste while the remnant of Israel plunders them, and the Cushites will be killed through war. Assyria will also be devastated. The only inhabitants of the once prosperous and populated city of Nineveh will be birds and wild animals (2:13-15).

The nations will get their judgment on the Day of the Lord, but Jerusalem will also get what’s coming to them because they’ve turned their backs on their God, Yehovah.

They've rebelled and have become defiled through their pagan worship and sinful actions (3:1). If we turn v. 3:2 around, we see what the Lord expects from His people: To obey, accept discipline, trust the Lord, and draw near to Him. Take a moment to reflect on this. How do you measure up? Do you do this as a Jesus follower?

The leaders of Jerusalem certainly didn't repent. Yehovah indicts Jerusalem's princes, judges, prophets, and priests for the sins listed while comparing them to His righteousness (3:5). Yehovah has already cut off other nations (3:6). Perhaps Jerusalem should learn from that and mend her ways (3:7). But she didn't, "they became more corrupt in all their actions." And then comes the big "therefore." Because Jerusalem refused to return to God, Yehovah says, "Just you wait. On My Day, I'll deal with you as I deal with the other nations" (3:8).

However, God doesn't punish or discipline just to bring destruction and pain. Even His negative works are done for a reason to bring about a positive result. Yehovah wants His people to return to Him with "pure speech" and a "single purpose" (3:9), an apparent reference to His judgment on the nations at the Tower of Babel that created the nations in the first place. If that's a correct assumption, then the Day of the Lord is not only meant to punish the sinning nations but to create a single people on earth, a humanity that's completely devoted and loyal to Him. Cool!

On that Day, Israel will once again be restored as a "humble and meek people" who will "take refuge in the name of the Lord" (3:12). The restored people of Israel will be like safe and secure sheep lying down in the Lord's pastureland (3:13). It will be a time of great rejoicing with God in their midst (3:14-17)! Even those who had been driven away in the past (i.e., their descendants) will be recalled and come home to live in their land, with "fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes" (3:20).

INSIGHT

"The End is near!" Most Bible readers who believe God's word usually equate "the End" with the Day of the Lord and vice versa. But the Day of the Lord is more than just one day. As I've pointed out before, the Day of the Lord is when God interjects Himself into human affairs to accomplish His work. He's always at work; some involve judgments, corrections, and discipline. A Day of the Lord happened when He judged Israel's northern kingdom and later Judah's southern kingdom. There was a Day when the Lord overthrew Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Could we say the great wars of global history, epidemics, natural disasters, etc., are "days of the Lord?" Not all, but some,

perhaps. Some catastrophes are humanity's own making. We'll find out for sure when we see Jesus and ask Him about this.

However, there is only one End, one *final* Day of the Lord before the start of the messianic kingdom. There are solid indicators that let us know when it approaches. The major and minor prophets foretold signs of an approaching Day of the Lord, and the Bible has recorded them and others, even from Jesus' lips. Some of those indicators are so broad people think the Day of the Lord is just around the corner. This assumption was the case in the first century and throughout church history for 2,000 years. Just because the End didn't happen right away doesn't mean the prophets or the Bible are wrong. It just means we haven't reached the point of its immanence yet.

But a final Day of the Lord *is* coming.

We must learn the indicators of the approaching Day of the Lord. We must also avoid those things that brought on *a* Day of the Lord for God's rebellious people. When we see those things that seem tangible signs of the End, such as Israel's rebirth and Jerusalem's restoration to the Jewish people, we must still hold our conclusions loosely. We must remain actively working for the Lord's kingdom.

We might not be alive when the final Day of the Lord comes. But *our* Day of the Lord is coming, which we will experience when we meet the Lord after we leave our mortal bodies. Jesus' call to us is the same as Zephaniah's call to the Jerusalemites, "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth, who carry out what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility," and you *will* be concealed on the Day of the Lord's anger.

October 4 : Scriptures Haggai 1-2

SUMMARY

When Haggai received his prophecy from Yehovah, about 43,000 Jewish returnees had arrived in Judah in the first wave. Seven months later, Gov. Zerubbabel and High Priest Joshua led the people to begin rebuilding the Temple. The reconstruction began with a new Bronze Altar (Ezra 3:8-10). In the 2nd year of return, the 2nd Temple's foundation was laid. However, the work on the Temple was halted when the Samaritans (the imported and intermarried people in the north of Israel) threatened the Judahites (Jews) and tied up the process for 16 years by bringing accusations to the Persian king against the Jews. Jerusalem's walls and the Temple remained broken, and the Jews were greatly discouraged by the lack of progress.

My study Bible has a great synopsis. The Jews couldn't proceed because "Tattenai, the governor of the 'region west of the Euphrates River' and his officials (see Nehemiah and Ezra)." King Cyrus died and was succeeded by his son Cambyses (530-522 B.C.). He marched from Persian to Egypt, conquering along the way. Cambyses died during the campaign, and a "high army official named Darius took control of the Persian army, marched back to Babylon, defeated a rebel force... and became king in 522 B.C." In two years, the Persian empire finally had peace under King Darius. In King Dairus' 2nd year, the Lord inspired Haggai to encourage the people to resume rebuilding. "But when *the prophets Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak began to rebuild God's house in Jerusalem. The prophets of God were with them, helping them*" (Ezra 5:1-2, italics author). Keep these names in mind.

Tattenai tattled on the Jews to Darius to find out if the Persian empire had indeed approved of the Jerusalem and Temple rebuilding project. Tada! It had. So, Darius affirmed the project and told Tattenai to shut up and provide the Jews with funds and materials. If Tattenai and crew refused to comply, dire consequences would result (see Ezra 4-6 for background). Bada-bing! The Temple was completed in four years.

Haggai's work encouraged the people not to focus on their own needs and desires at the Temple's expense. Rebuilding God's house was necessary to bring Him glory. They were not to be discouraged but diligently set about the work, even though the 2nd Temple was no match for the majesty and beauty of Solomon's 1st Temple. (King Herod of Jesus' day later expanded the 2nd Temple into a magnificent structure!) Haggai encouraged the people to keep themselves ritually clean and holy and not feel like they could not complete the work. Haggai's prophetic call was to "put God first."

Haggai begins with God's command to rebuild the Temple despite what the people say. "Oh, so it's okay to rebuild your houses, but not the Lord's house? And you wonder why you're coming up short in the provision area? Gee, maybe the Lord is doing that to get your attention, so you'll put Him first and prod you into action" (1:6). Yehovah commands them to gather the materials to rebuild His Temple for His glory. Otherwise, He will continue to shorten their supply (1:10-11). The people respond, led by Gov. Zerubbabel and High Priest Joshua, the son of Jehozadak (Hebrew – *Yeshua ben Yehozadak*), and the work commences with the Lord's assurance that He's with them. Talk about an encouraging message!

Chapter 2 opens about a month later. The people have grown discouraged because they can already see the new Temple won't be nearly as super-duper as Solomon's Temple (2:3). Yet, God again reassures them of His presence to help them with the rebuilding project (2:4-5). Yehovah promised to be with them after the Israelites came out of Egypt, and He kept His promise. They should not worry about the rebuilding process because God owns the world's silver and gold and will "shake it out of the nations" (which He did) to enable them to rebuild. Even better, Yehovah promises that the final glory of His Temple will be greater than from the start, plus it will come with peace.

As a matter of fact, Jesus' presence in the 2nd Temple's latter days was God's greater glory, and His glory brought peace to Israel through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. And when Jesus returns, and the 3rd Temple is built (Ezekiel 40:1-44:8), the *final* glory of God's Temple will be seen – a gloriously built house for the Lord with the greatest manifestation of God's glory ever!

Two months after the last message, Haggai brings another about the peoples' need to maintain their holiness and ritual purity before the Lord. The question is, "If something holy touches something unholy, does the unholy thing become holy? No. However, can defilement (unholiness/uncleanness) be transferred to the holy by touch? Yes." Here's the Lord's point. The people can't become holy simply by being in contact with the Temple as its being rebuilt. The Jews will only be made holy when they live according to God's holiness. Yehovah is more concerned with rebuilding holy hearts and lives than sacred buildings. 2:10-17 is about the Jews' failure to repent. However, it seems the people eventually did respond correctly, and Yehovah promised to bless them for doing so.

Finally, Haggai receives a second word on the same day, recorded in 2:20-23. This word seems good but insignificant. In essence, Yehovah promises Gov. Zerubbabel success in warfare. But what's this signet ring thing? For that, we have to go to a previous event.

As Judah's exile approached, Jeremiah prophesied against King Jehoiachin, the second to last legitimate Davidic king. Jehoiachin was like a ring on God's finger, which the Lord would tear off and throw away. *"As I live' —this is the Lord's declaration—' though you, Coniah (Jehoiachin) son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, were a signet ring on my right hand, I would tear you from it. In fact, I will hand you over to those you dread, who intend to take your life, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the Chaldeans. I will hurl you and the mother who gave birth to you into another land, where neither of you were born, and there you will both die. They will never return to the land they long to return to"* (Jeremiah 22:24-26, italics author). In other words, Yehovah removes the right to be a Davidic king from Jehoiachin and his family line.

The following and last king, Zedekiah, was made king by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:10). This was the "end" of the royal Davidic line as kings over Judah. But was this the end forever? No! Gov. Zerubbabel was David's descendant and a rightful heir to the throne. Although Zerubbabel was never crowned king, God regarded him as the legitimate heir and thus the continuation of David's family line from which God promised to produce a king over Israel forever; either a forever line of Davidic kings or one Davidic king who would reign forever (Gee, I wonder Who that could be?).

Here we go. Check out Jesus' lineage from Matthew: David's descendant is Zerubbabel (Matthew 1:1-13). Zerubbabel's descendant is Jesus (Matthew 1:13-17). Therefore, through His father, Joseph's, family line, Jesus is David's descendant. "But wait, Dr. Jay! Joseph wasn't Jesus' real father. Joseph was Jesus' adoptive earthly father. For Jesus to be Israel's king, David's lineage must come down through His mother, Mary (Miriam). Right?"

Matthew records Jesus' *legal* ancestry from David by His mother's marriage to Joseph of David's line. For the Jews at that time, a person's family lineage came from the father's side, not as Jewish heritage is determined today from the mother's side. "Jesus, untainted by Jehoiachin's curse (Jeremiah 22:30), has a legal claim to the throne of David through His stepfather, Joseph. Such a thing was legally acceptable under Jewish law." (bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/4201/Davidic-Lineage-Jesus.htm)

As a second witness, Luke records Jesus' lineage backward from Joseph (by marriage) to David (Luke 3), emphasizing Jesus' humanity by tracing it back to Adam.

But this is even more fascinating:

In Matthew, David's line traces from *David* through his son *Solomon* to *Jehoiachin* (the cursed) to *Zerubbabel* (son of *Shealtiel*, restored from the curse) to *Joseph* – Jesus' legal royal line by *Joseph's marriage to Mary*.

Now, let's look down David's line in Luke. He traces Jesus' lineage from *David* through his son, *Nathan* (Luke 3:31), bypassing *Jehoiachin the Cursed* through a different branch of David's family, *only to reconnect with Zerubbabel (son of Shealtiel) the Restored* and then down to *Joseph* – Jesus' lineage by *Joseph's marriage to Mary*.

Therefore, Jesus has the legal right to claim David's throne from two family paths. But here's the most important lineage of all – Jesus is the Father's Son, the same Heavenly Father who conceived the people of Israel through Abraham. As a descendant of Abraham through Judah, Jesus is Israel's qualified king through physical *and* spiritual family lines, and he is the Firstborn Son of the Father who fathered Israel in the first place. Jesus holds kingship over Israel's line as Israel's eldest brother and kingship over Israel as David's legal human descendant. It blows your mind, doesn't it?

And all of this because God reaffirmed Zerubbabel as David's heir (the signet ring).

INSIGHT

The Lord's physical glory departed the Temple (Ezekiel 9-11), but the Lord is still with them through His Spirit on His prophets and because Yehovah is omnipresent (present everywhere). We often don't "feel" God's presence, but don't let that discourage you. Jesus' nickname is Immanuel, God With Us. He is always and forever with us if we're believers. His Spirit isn't *on us* as it was on the prophets. His Spirit is *in us* as the New Covenant says it is. For non-believers, God is present in this world through His omnipresence and near those who wish to call on Him. The person who doesn't know the Lord *can* say God is not with them because Jesus doesn't live within them. But they *can't* say God is not with them. He is, and He's calling every non-believer to call upon Him for salvation.

October 5 : Scriptures Zechariah 1-4

SUMMARY

Zechariah is a wonderful but cryptic book for me. There are a *ton* of gems under the surface of a prophecy meant to encourage God's people and foretell Israel's final redemption and restoration. Zechariah prophesied alongside Haggai to spur the people toward rebuilding God's Temple. But the restoration of God's house is nothing compared to the restoration of God's *house*, the people of Israel. Most of Zechariah's prophecies apply directly to the Jews following their exile in Babylon. But some of his prophecies apply to the End Times after the Jews have returned from their Roman exile (Summer 70 – May 1948 A.D). As we read through the book, we'll see similarities between the two eras. Both address the rebuilding of the land, the Temple, the Jewish population, and a re-Jew-vination of the nation, if you will.

Zechariah's message is not only encouraging but tests the people to see if they would be more faithful than their ancestors who broke their covenant with their God and King. The people faced an overwhelming task – rebuilding the Temple, their city, and their nation. How could they ever accomplish it? Only by His power, Yehovah told them. How will Israel be protected, saved, and restored? Only by His power! And His kingdom of Israel, overseeing the whole earth, will reign supreme when that happens.

Zechariah's prophecies are kind of a mishmash to us readers. There are visions, historical events, and poetic prophecies to wade through. So, let's wade into the prophetic waters.

Like Haggai, Zechariah starts his word in the Persian King Darius' 2nd year (1:1). He begins with the most crucial topic: "Did you learn your lesson, My people? I'll return to you if you return to me, and we can start over." The people respond well, "As you said, so it happened." In other words, Yehovah was right, and they were wrong. Repentance – good! Now that that's settled, on to the visions.

The Horsemen: Zechariah encounters Yehovah's horse patrol, who reports to the Lord's Angel (the messenger among the myrtle trees) that the earth was peaceful at the time. The Angel's question to Yehovah was about Jerusalem and Judah's cities that were still devastated by the nations that had come against them before the recent exile. He's wondering how long it will be until Yehovah again shows mercy and blessing to His people. The Lord's "kind and comforting words" show that the time is now. This affirmation would have been a very encouraging word to the Jews trying to rebuild everything. Yehovah's wrath had passed, the wrath that destroyed the city and Temple. As fiercely angry as He had been against His people for their sins, Yehovah was even

more furious about the nations who had wrecked such devastation as His tools against Jerusalem. The measuring line reference tells the people the Lord is in rebuilding mode with them. He will prosper them as they continue to work.

The Four Horns and Craftsman: Horns represent powerful leaders, such as the horns of Daniel's visions (Daniel 7, 10). Just who or what nations the horns represent, we don't know. Zechariah's prophetic point is that Israel's future is reversing, and the nations that their God once used to discipline and punish His people through defeat and exile will themselves be cut off and carved up. As my study Bible puts it, this is a vision of reversal that the first vision began.

Chapter 2 is the vision of the Surveyor: This is a word of encouragement to the Jews. The surveyor has a measuring line in his hand. Yet, he can't measure Jerusalem because it's too big, meaning God will prosper the people so much after their Babylonian restoration that it can't be contained within its walls. Walls are defensive measures, so the Jews' natural question would have been, "Then how will we be protected?" Yehovah answers that He will be their defense (2:5). His glory will guard them personally. Zechariah then calls out prophetically for the Jews to come home. "From the north" means Babylon, even though the city of Babylon lay to the east. People followed the arcing westward route from Babylon to Jerusalem and would naturally enter the land from its north side. There were three groups of Jews who left Babylonian captivity to return home (537, 458, 445 B.C.). Zechariah's call came to the people c. 537 B.C. The Lord reassures and comforts His people with the "apple of His eye" metaphor. Yes, this is where we get this common idiom. The apple of the eye is the pupil. Because it's so sensitive and vital for vision, we instinctively react when someone or something threatens to touch our pupil. If touched wrongly, we usually have an instinctive reaction – like hitting the person or at least grabbing their hand to stop them. In the plain sense, Israel and the Jewish people are the most precious thing to Yehovah. He guards them jealously, protects them powerfully, and values them highly, whether you like it or not. But go ahead and poke God in the eye. See what happens. God will raise a hand against you (2:9).

The glory and presence of the Lord that left Jerusalem in Ezekiel 9-11 will return to His people. Here's a new, exciting revelation. Because God's glory resides in Israel, "Many nations will join themselves to the Lord on that day and become my people" (2:11). To me, this speaks (in part) of the New Covenant. Apostle Paul writes, "that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ*" (Ephesians 2:12-

13 NKJV, italics author). Zechariah has more to say about the nations aligning themselves with Yehovah and drawing near Him in the messianic age.

Chapter 3 is the fourth vision of the High Priest and the Branch. This vision is an amazing two-part vision with a few different levels. The first part is for the High Priest Joshua, son of Jehozadak, in Zechariah's day. On the surface, this is God's encouragement through Zechariah that the Temple will be rebuilt and the priesthood will be restored. The Jews will again experience forgiveness and cleansing as the High Priest and priesthood are restored. This will happen once the Bronze Altar is rebuilt, although the entire Temple is not. High Priest Joshua has the Lord's approval to oversee His Temple, His house.

On a secondary level, High Priest Joshua also represents Israel, as High Priests do. Israel was soiled because of her idolatry. Satan accuses Israel before God of her sin. But the Lord chooses to forgive and cleanse her because she has borne her punishment, and her restoration time is at hand, "So, get lost, Satan!" The changing of the High Priest's garments would easily be recognized by a Jew of the day as referring to the Yom Kippur/Day of Atonement ritual, where the High Priest needs to be cleansed and purified before he changes garments to complete atonement for himself, his family, and the nations. Therefore, this scene speaks of forgiveness, cleansing, and atoning for sin. Israel will receive God's approval to oversee the world as His "High Priest" among the nations. What a tremendous responsibility that will be.

This assignment is surprising as firstborn sons function as "kings and priests" among their siblings and families. Jesus is the King and High Priest over His family and Israel as a nation. Israel will function similarly (ruling and spiritually serving the nations) because Israel is the "firstborn son" that Yehovah conceived and delivered from the womb of Egypt.

All of that relates to 3:1-7. However, starting in verse 8, a remarkable thing happens. "High Priest Joshua, you and your colleagues sitting before you; indeed, these men are a sign." What does that mean? The Hebrew word is *mopheth*, meaning "a sign, wonder, token, portent, miracle; a symbol or omen." In other words, it represents something that is to come. Joshua and the guys around him symbolize the Branch, a common reference to Israel's Messiah. Messiah means "anointed" with oil. Yehovah's High Priests and Kings were anointed with oil as a symbol of being empowered by God for service to Him. Therefore, the Branch = the anointed High Priest, Joshua. Even more stunning is that *Joshua* in Hebrew is *Yeshua* (*Y'shua*), Jesus' Hebrew name meaning *salvation*. Per the Bible's use of names, Jesus is salvation and will bring salvation.

The stone with seven eyes is curious. What could it be? I can't say for sure, but there is a lot of conjecture online. To me, though, if I take scripture to interpret scripture, the joining of the rock picture with God's messiah, who will bring about God's kingdom, then this echoes what Daniel saw in Daniel 2 – the rock, God's kingdom, that breaks the line of human dominions on earth leaving only God's kingdom as the reigning domain over the nations. Since High Priest Joshua represents Jesus, then the rock set before him is the Father's kingdom given to Jesus to rule. The seven eyes speak of seeing and being aware of everything that transpires.

Finally, this High Priest, Yeshua, will "take away the iniquity of this land in a single day" (3:9), a definite reference to Jesus' crucifixion or how Israel's sin will be atoned for in one day by their High Priest/Messiah King when Jesus returns.

The final vision of today's reading is the Gold Menorah (the Lampstand in the Temple). The Menorah is like the usual Temple Menorah except that it has a bowl at the top (likely for a supply of oil), and each of its seven cups has seven lips that each hold a wick. The traditional lamp had to be filled daily, and each cup had only one lip/wick. 1) This lamp has a continual source of oil, and 2) It burns much brighter than the original. So far, so good. But again, pictures in visions represent things.

Before the Lord reveals the meaning of the pictures, He gives Zechariah a word for Gov. Zerubbabel. "You can't rebuild the Temple, Jerusalem, and the nation by your human strength. It's only through My strength that you can do your job. With my power, you can move mountains. When the work is completed (signified by the capstone), the only credit you'll be able to give is to the Lord's grace (4:6-7). The sign that the Lord has given this word to Zechariah and the people is that Gov. Zerubbabel began the work, and He'll complete it despite all the opposition the discouraged Jews face. The ceremonial stone is the completion of the work which the Lord has been overseeing. The two figures standing by the lampstand are Gov. Zerubbabel and High Priest Joshua, whom the Lord has called to stand with Him and has anointed for the rebuilding project. The Lord's anointing flows through them to the nation to encourage the people and direct the work.

INSIGHT

Without the Lord's anointing, all we have is sanctified busyness.

October 6 : Scriptures Zechariah 5-9

SUMMARY

We have a rather large section to read today, so buckle up. Grab an extra cuppa coffee and get comfortable. Chapters 5-6 finish the visions Yehovah gave to Zechariah. Chapters 7-8 deal with fasting, disobedience, obedience, and Yehovah's promises to bless His people. Chapter 9 begins Zechariah's astonishing prophecies about God's coming kingdom on earth. See? I told you it's a big read. Let's go!

The sixth vision of the Flying Scroll. Yeah, I get it. This one is unusual and hard to understand. That is, of course, if you're a Gentile and have no frame of reference for a Torah scroll. If you're just joining *Cruisin' Through the Bible*, the Torah is the first five books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (the books of Moses). The Torah contains historical accounts and God's covenant with the Israelites. A covenant has terms that the covenant partners agree to follow. There are curses for disobedience and blessings for obedience. The phrase, "This is the curse that is going out over the whole land," gives us the key to unlocking this vision. God is looking at the remnant that has returned from Babylon and is calling on them to remain faithful to their Sinai/Moses covenant. The thief and the one who swears falsely have gone unpunished. That time is over. God will continue to enforce His covenant with His people as the foundation of their life with Him, and the punishments will be severe. Yehovah isn't kidding about His people staying true to the covenant.

The seventh vision is the Woman in the Basket (with the lead cover). Weird, huh? Not if we look at the parts of the picture and what the Lord says about them:

- The measuring basket = the Israelites' iniquity in all the land, and it has been measured.
- The woman in the basket = "Wickedness," i.e., idolatry. It could also represent the people of Israel, prone to idolatry.
- The basket that's taken to Shinar (an older name for Babylon). Idolatry began in the region of Babylon (the Tower of Babel). The root of idolatry is there. The idolatry that seduced Israel and Judah doesn't belong in God's land, so He's sending it back to its source. This vision could also be Yehovah's threat to send His people back to Babylon Should they succumb to idolatry again. God had promised Israel earlier that if they engaged in idolatry, Yehovah would be willing to send them back to Egypt (Deuteronomy 28:69, Study Bible commentary).

When we get to the book of Revelation, we'll see "Mystery Babylon," depicted by a wanton woman (Wickedness, a prostitute Queen) who deceives and seduces the nations.

God will ultimately destroy her as part of His program on the Day of the Lord. Yehovah will crush idolatry, especially after He reveals Himself as the single Almighty God of all "gods," spiritual beings that humanity worships in place of God. The woman, Mystery Babylon, is tied to Zechariah's vision = the source, ground-zero, of all anti-god idolatry.

Chapter 6 presents the eighth vision: Four Chariots. This vision is like the first and speaks of the same topic – God's sovereignty. In the first vision, the world is at peace. In this vision, God's Spirit is pacified regarding His judgments on Israel. The four horsemen and the directions cited may reinforce that Yehovah is the God of the whole earth (the four compass points) and keeps watch over His people and all the world.

The second part of chapter six has two levels. It became more apparent when I studied this prophecy and how it would have likely spoken to the returning Jews who were rebuilding the Temple. The priest/throne reference seems to address Gov. Zerubbabel/High Priest Joshua's cooperation needed to rebuild the Temple (6:13). The gifts from the Jews returning from Babylon are examples to the rest of the Jews that everyone needs to give what they can (resources, efforts) for the project (6:10, 14). Thirdly, the people need to obey the Lord (6:15). That fits the context. However, a friend pointed out a remarkable revelation embedded in 6:9-15 that we can see if we know the Hebrew text. You can find that in today's "Insight" part.

Chapter 7 starts two years later with a question about a religious observance, fasting, in the context of the Temple's renewed authority as Israel's center of worship. Some Israelites and Judahites worshiped at Bethel during the exile after the Temple was destroyed. Since Bethel had been a center for worship (albeit idol worship) that the Lord destroyed, it was the most likely place to seek the Lord. So, the people of Bethel sent a delegation to seek an "official" decision regarding proper worship practices, showing they recognized the Temple's superiority (7:2-3).

Zechariah's answer is typical of a prophet. Speaking for Yehovah, he says, "Were your fasting and feasting over the last 70 years genuine or just empty forms of worship, and have you learned your lesson not to engage in idolatry? If you really want to return to the Lord, follow the Torah as your guide. It's not only about proper worship but proper living. Do what's right, unlike your ancestors whom I had to exile for their refusal to obey. Their disobedience made this land desolate.

Chapter 8 continues Yehovah's reply in chapter 7. "I'm *zealous* for Jerusalem! I want to live there and see her be the Faithful City and the place of My Holy Mountain!" (8:2-3). The Lord will restore every day, prosperous, vibrant life in His city even though it may

not seem like it to the remnant returning to a busted-up place they're struggling to rebuild (8:6). They will be restored and be the Lord's people, and He will be their God.

Yehovah promises to restore His people, their land, and their city. Before, they had been a curse among the nations, and now they will be blessed. The Lord is as resolved to restore and bless them as He had been determined to punish and curse them. The implication is that if He harmed them previously, He would indeed bless them now. *But* they must be His obedient people (8:9-17).

As for the fasts (which commemorated Jerusalem's destruction), the Lord will turn them into feasts because of Jerusalem's restoration (8:19), a reply to the visitors' opening question. Furthermore, when Jerusalem is restored, people of many nations (Gentiles) will flock to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. Ten Gentiles (handfuls of them!) will take hold of one Jew by their robe (by the Torah-representing fringes?) and plead with the Jew to let them go with him to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. In case you're wondering, this kind of thing is happening today. Many Gentiles are flocking to Israel to visit and worship the Lord. When you go to Israel, it's a profound experience to pray at the Western Wall and quietly pray on the Temple Mount. If this is how it is today, with a partial fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, imagine how it will be when Jesus returns!

Chapter 9 begins a new part of Zechariah's book – the Coming of God's Kingdom (9:1-14:21). First, Zechariah preaches God's judgment against Damascus, Tyre/Sidon, and Gaza (Philistines). Why? Because Yehovah is Israel's Conquering King who will subdue His peoples' enemies (9:1-8). He will come to Jerusalem and establish peace in the region (from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates) and globally. He will release His people from captivity, fight against their attackers, and defend them. Yehovah will make His restored people and land glorious!

As we know from the Gospels and the rest of history, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matthew 21:5; John 12:15), as was customary for Israel's kings. By this act, Jesus openly proclaimed Himself as Israel's Messiah. His declaration was further underscored by the fact that during Passover, the Jews traditionally remembered Moses as their deliverer and looked forward to King David's descendant to restore God's kingdom on earth and fulfill all of the messianic prophecies. However, many missed God's plan. Jesus didn't come to rule as King, but to serve as High Priest and the Lamb of God who takes away sin (atonement, as in the Day of Atonement) and saves His people from the Angel of Death (Passover).” *Selah.*

INSIGHT

The focal point of the section is High Priest Joshua, the son of Jehozadak. Previously, I

shared that Joshua's name in Hebrew is *Yeshua (Yehoshua) ben Yehozadak*. Yehozadak means "Yehovah is Righteous." Jesus is the son of *Yehovah, the Righteous*. He is also our final High Priest (Hebrews 5:10). As I pointed out above, the text declares High Priest Joshua as representing "the Branch," a messianic term (6:12). Furthermore, if we look at the completed picture of High Priest Joshua crowned and sitting on a throne as if he were also Israel's king, we should understand that his enthronement would violate the Torah. Israel's kings were not to usurp the High Priest's duties and vice versa (see King Saul's usurpation: 1 Samuel 13:6-14, King Uzziah's usurpation: 2 Chronicles 26:19-20). High Priests don't sit on thrones, and Kings don't offer incense and sacrifices as the High Priest does. So, what gives?

If we combine all these elements, the section suddenly reveals what Jesus will do as our future Messiah. When Jesus came the first time, He became the nation's High Priest. Since the High Priesthood is inherited when the High Priest dies and Jesus can never die again after His resurrection, Jesus will forever be His Father's and Israel's High Priest. When Jesus returns, He will also arrive to become Israel's King. At that time, the Branch (the Messiah) "will branch out from his place (expand the nation) *and build the Lord's temple*. Yes, *he will build the Lord's temple*; he will bear royal splendor and *will sit on his throne and rule*. *There will be a priest on his throne*, and there will be peaceful counsel between the two of them." Once again, the firstborn son as king and priest of the family will be restored with THE King and Priest functions embodied in the Supreme Firstborn Son. This is how the High Priest can also sit on Israel's throne as Israel's King.

Finally, there is much debate among evangelicals about the need for Israel to build a 3rd Temple so the Antichrist can stand in it and proclaim himself God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). However, Ezekiel 43 says the 3rd Temple will house God's glory, not the Antichrist's presence. The Prince, Jesus' delegated ruler over Jerusalem, will worship in it. So, I contend that there will be no 3rd Temple built before Jesus returns, although the Bronze Altar likely will. According to Zechariah, it seems the 3rd Temple will be built by Jesus, the son of Yehovah the Righteous, after He returns to be Israel's Messiah King/High Priest. I'll let you know when we get there.

October 7 : Scriptures Zechariah 10-14

SUMMARY

Zechariah's remaining prophecies come thick and fast with lots of forth-telling and foretelling.

Chapter 10 continues Yehovah's declaration of His coming kingdom. First, He is the God who brings rain, not the false gods, represented by their idols (10:1-2). So why did the people turn to idols? Because they didn't have good leadership, they wandered about, straying away from the Lord. But when they were with Yehovah, they were strong (majestic steeds, 10:3). Having Yehovah with them once again will help every Israelite, from warrior to support staff to the leader, prevail in battle (10:4-5). God will restore His people as if He had never rejected them in the first place (10:6). Yehovah will regather them from distant lands and bring them home. They will find the land too small for their vast numbers (10:10) even though it includes Gilead, the farthest border of Israel before the exiles began. Israel will be strong in battle with their God!

I must admit, chapter 11 is a bit of a stumper. So, let's see what it meant in Zechariah's day, even though it has a handful of messianic prophecies (MP) within the verses. Simply put, chapter 11 is an indictment against Israel and Judah's leaders and how they failed to lead the people in God's way. It's set in a parable with Zechariah as the imaginary shepherd.

11:1-3 alludes to the destruction of the Temple. If you recall, Solomon's Temple used vast amounts of wood from Lebanon to panel the interior of the building. The wood paneling was carved and overlaid with gold plating. You can imagine what it was like for the Temple priests to serve God in an aromatic cedar box covered with a polished gold surface. It must have been stunning! Imagine how grief-stricken the leaders were when Babylon burned their Temple, and the "fire consumed your cedars" and "the cedar has fallen." The shepherds, the leaders who were supposed to care for their sheep, grieved more for a building than their people (11:1-3).

The "flock intended for slaughter" refers to the animals kept for the Temple's sacrificial service. Shepherds were designated to care for them before they were sacrificed. But the leaders failed to care for their people. Like terrible shepherds, the leaders had looked to the people as things from which to profit. The shepherds had no compassion for their God-dedicated sheep. Therefore, Israel's Shepherd decided to show no compassion for the leaders and their "sheep" (people). He turned them over to neighboring nations for slaughter instead.

Next, Zechariah takes on the role of “shepherd” to demonstrate that Yehovah stepped in to lead His people since the civic leaders failed. Zechariah creates two staves – Favor and Union – to illustrate God’s favor for His people and His intent to bring Israel and Judah back together as one kingdom (11:7). “In one month, I got rid of three shepherds” seems to describe how the Lord fired worthless kings or other leaders. Because the shepherds/leaders continued to reject and despise their Chief Shepherd, Yehovah had His fill of them. He rejected His people, removed His favor, and demanded what they owed Him, their covenant loyalty, represented by the silver in the parable. The price they pay the Lord in Zechariah’s living parable – thirty pieces of silver (a slave’s price, Exodus 21:32) reflects how the people had treated their God, like their slave who was supposed to work to provide for them (11:12), nothing more. But the Shepherd of Israel is offended by their “magnificent price” (insert sarcasm here) and tells Zechariah to throw the silver into the potter’s house (11:13), a way of prophetically showing the Lord’s contempt for His people and leaders. Finally, Zechariah breaks the Union staff, i.e., to illustrate how the Lord declared that He was going to suspend His plan for Israel’s unification for a time. Zechariah’s parable dramatizes Yehovah’s relationship and interaction with Israel before their exile.

Finally, in a highly sarcastic way, Yehovah declares through Zechariah if they refuse to follow Him as their Shepherd, then they can have a foolish leader who is weak and blind. And so it was as the nation approached their Judgment Day at the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar.

However, there’s something else that may be embedded here. This seems to be not just a description of the past (foretelling) but a prediction for the future (a messianic prophecy). We can assume that because there are elements that Jesus fulfilled. In Jesus’ day, the spiritual and national leaders were terrible shepherds, meaning many profited off the people they should have cared about. The Lord had turned Judea over to Roman rule, under whose authority the leaders neglected the people except for their enrichment. The Sadducean families controlled the High Priesthood. These few families became wealthy through the Temple service and bought their way into the High Priest’s office by paying the Romans to “install them” yearly rather than God’s requirement of transferring the High Priesthood from father to son.

Jesus came as the Good Shepherd to shepherd God’s people. Part of His job was to declare the Lord’s *favor* (11:7; Luke 4:19) and plan for reunification (*union*) under the Messiah, the future Davidic King (Luke 1:32). Jesus’ ministry lasted three years, during which He saw three High Priests come and go (11:8). Jesus became impatient with the leaders and the leadership detested Jesus (11:8). During His ministry, Jesus declared God’s *favor* over

Jerusalem nullified (Luke 13:34) for if you reject the Uniter, you reject the *reunification*. Judas received thirty pieces of silver to betray Jesus, designating Jesus as a slave (Matthew 26:15) rather than Israel's King. But Judas threw the silver back into the Temple and hanged himself. The leadership used Judas' silver to buy the potter's field (where potters dug clay for jars) to use as a cemetery. Zechariah's final words are a curse on Israel's bad leaders.

With chapter 12, we begin Zechariah's fourth and final section. It continues with the theme of God's Kingdom. Zechariah 9 announces the Coming King and His triumph over His enemies. Zechariah 10 proclaims the King's regathering of His people. Zechariah 11 declares the King's rejection by His people. Zechariah 12 is about the King's city.

Remember that Zechariah is prophesying to the people trying to rebuild Jerusalem after a world power destroyed it. Zechariah's message is one of hope that Israel's God will defend His people and His city in the future. While Jerusalem had been a tasty treat for the Babylonians, in the future, Jerusalem will become a cup of judgment that causes whoever attacks it to stagger around, helpless as a drunk (12:2). Now, while this was a prophecy to encourage the Jews who were rebuilding Jerusalem, the repeated use of the phrase, "on that day" appears also to point toward the final Day of the Lord, when Jesus returns. So that's the lens I usually use to interpret Zechariah's "on that day" prophecies.

Zechariah describes a future siege around Jerusalem that will include Judah. The nations who try to take Jerusalem will "gash themselves," i.e., become severely hurt by their futile effort (12:3). They'll be hurt because the Lord will be watching over Jerusalem while the "horses of the nations are blinded" (their armies hindered) (12:4). You can't make much progress with blind horses. Then the Lord will make the people of Jerusalem and their leaders a powerful force against their enemies. The image of a "firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves" speaks of rapid and consuming destruction (12:6) as Israel quickly overcomes her enemies. The Jews will go from being ordinary people to exceptional fighters with the Lord's help (12:8). It will be a day when the Lord will act against His enemies (12:9).

As a side note, "All the nations that come against Jerusalem" doesn't mean all the world's nations. If I'm correct, it sounds like a coalition of Islamic countries under the leadership of their Caliph (the Antichrist).

"On that day" (a verse that ties all of Zechariah 12 to Jesus' return), God will give a lot of grace to His people and move them to pray to Him during this tumultuous warfare. In response, God will show up ("they will look at me" 12:10). *Now comes the challenging part*

for many Jews who study this verse. The Jewish people, the warriors fighting for Jerusalem, will see God, but he will appear in a human form that has been wounded, "they will look at me whom they pierced." How can God be pierced if He's a spirit? He can't *unless the God appearing is the God-Man, Son of Man, as Daniel reveals* (Daniel 7; Matthew 24:30; Acts 1:9-11). Jesus is the God-Man who was pierced (Isaiah 53:5; Psalms 22:16; John 19:33-37). Zechariah's prophecy clearly describes Jesus returning to defend His family (the Jewish nation) as their Conquering King. He is His Father's only child and firstborn son, as Zechariah describes (12:10). The Jewish people will mourn for finally realizing what their leaders had done to their Good Shepherd and for rejecting Jesus as Messiah on a national level.

Reconciliation comes as God's Favor is released, and the Union of Israel and Judah happens. Chapter 13 highlights national forgiveness and cleansing like Paul describes in Romans 11:25-27 "don't want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you will not be conceited: *A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, The Deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.* And this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

Israel's two biggest sins were idolatry and false prophets who turned the Israelites away from God and toward idols. On the final Day of the Lord – all of that will be washed away. All idolatry and false prophets will be purged from the land. As the Lord acts to purify His people, as happened during the last two exiles where many were taken, and a remnant was left, so during the final Day, there will be a remnant that will be purified and rededicated to God through turbulent events.

Zechariah ends his prophecy with the Conquering King battling nations of the world on behalf of His covenant people. The climax is God's kingdom being established on earth, just like it was prophesied in Daniel 2:44-45, Micah 4:1-2, and others. At first, Israel's enemies will be on the winning side, attacking the city and doing terrible things (14:1-2). But then the King returns. He will stand on the Mount of Olives (14:4), and the mountain will split in two when He does. Let me help you visualize this. I recommend you find a topographical map of Jerusalem before you read on.

The Mount of Olives stretches north to south and east of Jerusalem, and the Kidron Valley lies between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. Going by Zechariah's description, there will be an earthquake-caused east-west valley separating the north and south parts of the mountain when Jesus returns. This ties in with Ezekiel 44, where we read about a river that starts in the 3rd Temple and runs east down to the Dead Sea. Currently, that wouldn't

happen because the Mount of Olives is in the way. The water would drain south down the Kidron Valley, or it would have to flow uphill to go east (and that won't happen). But when Jesus comes back, things are going to change!

This new valley will provide a way of escape for the Jews who are under attack. At the same time, their Defender, Jesus, will arrive with His resurrected forces and any other holy ones to help (14:5), during which there will be supernatural darkness and unnatural light. As Ezekiel reveals, water will flow east *and* west from the area (14:8) in summer and winter, meaning the typical lack of rainfall in summer will change and become constant. After Jerusalem's liberation from enemy attack, people will inhabit it, and the city will never again be destroyed.

A great plague-like event will also happen during the enemy attack, "Their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths" (14:12). Chaos will ensue with the enemy soldiers turning against each other. After the battle, the people of Israel will recover a tremendous amount of treasure.

We now move into the time of Jesus' Messianic Kingdom. There will be those who survive that epic battle for Jerusalem. To think about this: If Jesus' followers (dead and alive) are Raptured and given glorified, immortal bodies at Jesus' return for the Jerusalem battle, then there will also be people on earth who will have non-glorified, mortal bodies. As I've written before, this explains why Isaiah describes people dying during the Messianic Reign (Isaiah 65:20). Interesting, huh?

During the Messianic Reign, the nations of the earth will be required to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles which celebrates Israel's life with God during the Wilderness Wandering and acknowledges Yehovah as the God who supplies everything Israel needs for life, represented by the rain that brings forth food. Any nation that refuses the Lord's command will not receive rain, and thus, it will hinder its resources. It's a reminder to all the nations who the one true God is.

Finally, Jerusalem and the Temple will be established as entirely holy. No Canaanite (representing unholy people) will enter the Temple. This is Zechariah's final word to those laboring so hard to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple in his day. Zechariah was encouraging the people that they were doing holy work to establish God's holiness on earth. Yehovah will bless and protect what they build, which is a beautiful word for those who have returned from the days of the Lord's discipline.

INSIGHT

“Though I sow them among the nations, they will remember me in the distant lands; they and their children will live and return” (10:9). The nations of the world have been watching this prophecy come to pass since the late 1800s. Decade after decade, waves of Jewish immigrants have washed onto the land of Israel. We truly are living in prophetic times!