

The Beginning of Zechariah's First Prophetic Burden

Zechariah 9:1-10

Zechariah 9:1-8 – *“Also against Hamath, which borders on it, and against Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise.*

³ For Tyre built herself a tower, heaped up silver like the dust, and gold like the mire of the streets. ⁴ Behold, the Lord will cast her out; He will destroy her power in the sea, and she will be devoured by fire.

⁵ Ashkelon shall see it and fear; Gaza also shall be very sorrowful; and Ekron, for He dried up her expectation. The king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. ⁶ “A mixed race shall settle in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines. ⁷ I will take away the blood from his mouth, and the abominations from between his teeth. But he who remains, even he shall be for our God, and shall be like a leader in Judah, and Ekron like a Jebusite.

⁸ I will camp around My house because of the army, because of him who passes by and him who returns. No more shall an oppressor pass through them, for now I have seen with My eyes.”

Background Notes

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the last three books of the Old Testament, are all called *post-exilic minor prophets*. They are called *minor* prophets because their books are shorter than the writings of the so-called *major* prophets. They are called *post-exilic* prophets, because their books were written after Israel's 70-year captivity and exile in Babylon.

When the Jews returned from their exile in Babylon in 538 BC, led by Zerubbabel, they began to rebuild Solomon's Temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonian armies under Nebuchadnezzar. At first the rebuilding of the house of the Lord proceeded as planned, but then the people became discouraged and stopped building. So, God raised up Haggai and Zechariah as prophets of the Lord, to minister to the people and motivate them to finish the job of rebuilding the Temple.

And it worked! The people returned to the work of rebuilding the house of the Lord, and the rebuilt Temple was completed in 516 BC.

In a series of visions, prophetic messages, and “burdens” or oracles, Zechariah encouraged the people by speaking about the great future that was ahead for the nation of Israel. In chapter 9, Israel was encouraged because of the prediction that God's House would be protected from the conquest of Alexander the Great, and Israel would be blessed with the coming of her Messiah and His universal kingdom.

Doctrinal Points

1. Alexander the Great would come as a conquering hero.

Verses 1-8 traced the march of Alexander the Great of Greece in 332 BC, as he conquered Syria (v1-2), Phoenicia (v2-4), and Philistia (v5-7).

Regarding Alexander the Great's conquest of Tyre, verses 3-4 say: *"For Tyre built herself a tower, heaped up silver like the dust, and gold like the mire of the streets. ⁴Behold, the Lord will cast her out; He will destroy her power in the sea, and she will be devoured by fire.*

Just as predicted, this prophecy was fulfilled when Alexander besieged the island fortress of Tyre for six months. He eventually conquered it by building a causeway out from the mainland, using the debris from the ruins of the destroyed mainland city of Tyre. The prophet Ezekiel also predicted these details of Tyre's demise, more than 200 years before the event (Ezekiel 26:12-14). After the destruction of Tyre, Alexander moved on to conquer the cities of Philistines – Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod (v5-7).

God used Alexander the Great to judge the idolatrous practices of the Philistines: *"I will take away the blood from his mouth, and the abominations from between his teeth" (v7).*

This refers to the idolatry of the Philistines. However, there is a note of grace at the end of verse 7. It is predicted here that a remnant of the Philistines will turn to the Lord and be blessed in Israel: *"But he who remains, even he shall be for our God, and shall be like a leader in Judah, and Ekron like a Jebusite."* Remember, a number of Jebusites lived in the midst of Israel. The complete fulfillment of this promise awaits the return of Christ.

In verse 8, a promise was made to the small group of Jews who were rebuilding of the Temple: the Lord Himself will protect this house of the Lord. *"I will camp around My house because of the army, because of him who passes by and him who returns" (v8).*

Indeed, Alexander the Great did not conquer Jerusalem and did not destroy the Temple, even though he had the chance to do so - more than once. Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote that when Alexander the Great saw the high priest of Israel in his white priestly garments standing at the gates of Jerusalem, he was reminded of a vision that he said had been given to him by God, and he realized that it was the God of the Jews who had sent the vision. Thus, in fulfillment of this prophecy, he passed by Jerusalem and did not destroy the Temple on his way to and from his conquest of Egypt.

It is not known whether or not Josephus' account of Alexander's dream or vision was accurate, but in any case, the prophecy of the beginning of verse 8 was fulfilled. The last part of the verse awaits complete fulfillment when the Lord returns. Then indeed, enemy forces will never again invade Jerusalem!

A number of precise prophecies in Zechariah 9:1-8 were fulfilled by the conquest of Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great came as a conquering hero.

2. "Jesus the Greater" would come as a humble Servant.

Zechariah 9:9-10 - *"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.*

¹⁰ I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem. The battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations. His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.'

There is no doubt that the Spirit of God placed this Messianic passage in direct contrast with what was said about Alexander the Great in verses 1-8. And what a contrast! Alexander "the Great" came as a conquering hero, but Jesus "the Greater" came as a humble Servant.

Alexander "the Great" came riding a mighty stallion. Jesus "the Greater" came riding a lowly donkey. Alexander "the Great" came as rich and powerful king. Jesus "the Greater" came as poor and meek. Alexander "the Great" came with fear and dread. Jesus "the Greater" came with joy and peace. Alexander "the Great" came as a slayer of his foes. Jesus "the Greater" came as a savior of His foes. Alexander "the Great" came as a foreign king. Jesus "the Greater" came as the rightful King - Israel's Messiah.

Both Alexander and Jesus died at the age of 33. Alexander the Great was a burned-out dissolute warrior - but "Jesus the Greater" was the Savior of the world! What a contrast! And no wonder - Alexander was only a frail human, but the Lord Jesus Christ is God Himself!

Both advents of the Lord Jesus were prophesied in verses 9-10. In verse 9 we see His first coming: *"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.* This prophecy was fulfilled at the time of our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-5).

In Zechariah 9:10, the Lord's second coming was in view. When the Lord Jesus returns to this earth to set up His universal kingdom of peace, all instruments of war will be removed, in a just disarmament. This is the time predicted by the prophets Isaiah and Micah: *"They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks"* (Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3).

It is sometimes (improperly) taught that this prophecy of the Lord's Messianic Kingdom is a reference to the present-day Church. However, when properly interpreted, it is a prophecy of the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ that will come in the future. At that time, we will reign with Christ in that His Millennial Kingdom. Revelation 20:4 says that believers will live and reign with Christ for 1000 years.

What a contrast to Alexander the Great and his empire! Alexander "the Great" came as a conquering hero - but Jesus "the Greater" came as a humble Servant.

Practical Application

Don't practice the "open-and-point" method of biblical guidance!

I won't ask for a show of hands, but have you ever done that? You were looking for a word from the Lord, or you had a decision to make, so you just opened the Bible at random and pointed to a verse.

That can be dangerous! Verses of Scripture can be pulled way out of their context and badly misinterpreted by doing something like that. I'm not saying that God has never worked through this method, but that is ***not the proper way to use the Bible!***

Let me tell you a true story. A young woman in her late thirties desired to be married, but thus far no Christian men were available or interested. She was discouraged, so she decided to go to her Bible and use the "open-and-point" method. She closed her eyes, opened her Bible at random, and pointed - and her finger landed on Zechariah 9:9. She was very happy when she read: *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you..."*.

The woman believed that God had given her a biblical promise that her Prince Charming was right on the horizon, and soon she would meet the man of God's choice for her life. More mature Christians had to inform her that this was really "bad hermeneutics"! You can't rip Messianic prophecies out of their proper context in the Bible - and apply them to yourself! The young woman had pulled this Scripture way out of its context.

God certainly does use the Bible to guide us in making decisions. As we read His Word on a regular basis, He can give us guidance for the decisions we should make and the path He wants us to take. However - don't practice the "open-and-point" method of biblical guidance!