

Prophecies about the Inter-Testamental Period and the End Times

Zechariah 9:11-17

Zechariah 9:11-17 - *“As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. ¹² Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope. Even today I declare that I will restore double to you. ¹³ For I have bent Judah, My bow, fitted the bow with Ephraim, and raised up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and made you like the sword of a mighty man.”*

¹⁴ Then the Lord will be seen over them, and His arrow will go forth like lightning. The Lord God will blow the trumpet, and go with whirlwinds from the south. ¹⁵ The Lord of hosts will defend them; they shall devour and subdue with sling stones. They shall drink and roar as if with wine; they shall be filled with blood like basins, like the corners of the altar.

¹⁶ The Lord their God will save them in that day, as the flock of His people. For they shall be like the jewels of a crown, lifted like a banner over His land— ¹⁷ For how great is its goodness and how great its beauty! Grain shall make the young men thrive, and new wine the young women.”

Background Notes

A nice concise outline of the book of Zechariah would be as follows:

- Chapters 1-6: Eight prophetic visions
- Chapters 7-8: Four prophetic messages
- Chapters 9-11: Prophetic burden #1
- Chapters 12-14: Prophetic burden #2

Zechariah 9:1 is the beginning of prophetic burden #1: *“The burden of the word of the Lord...”* Zechariah was given a prophetic burden from the Lord, and he was to lift up his voice and deliver it as an oracle to God’s people.

Have you ever had a burden from the Lord - an exercise of heart that God has given you about His Word? Well, He expects you to lift up your voice and speak out about that burden. He expects you to deliver it by sharing that word, or by doing that work that He has called you to do. (But first - make sure it’s a burden from the Lord and not a “burden” of your own imagination or creation!)

All of Zechariah’s prophetic visions, messages, and burdens were given to encourage the people. Remember, Zechariah was ministering to the Jews who had returned from their 70-year captivity in Babylon. They were given permission to return under the more lenient policies of the Persian government. When Cyrus, the Persian emperor, permitted the Jews

to return from Babylon, only a fraction of the Jews returned to Jerusalem - only about 50,000 people. So, verses 11-12 may be specifically addressed to the exiles who had not returned to Jerusalem, and were still living in Babylon. It may be an exhortation to those Jews to return home for blessing: *“As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. ¹² Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope. Even today I declare that I will restore double to you.*

Waterless pits were used as prisons in ancient days, as in the case of Joseph. Babylon had been like a waterless pit for Israel. The Jews were prisoners there but, like Joseph, they were preserved in that waterless pit and were now set free. Their freedom was on the basis of *“the blood of your covenant”* (v11). God’s covenant with His people was sealed with blood, and it was still valid.

In verses 13-17 there are further encouraging prophecies about Israel’s future – their immediate future, and their far future as well.

Doctrinal Points

1. God delivered Israel at the time of the Maccabees.

Verse 13: *“For I have bent Judah, My bow, fitted the bow with Ephraim, and raised up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and made you like the sword of a mighty man.”*

God did indeed deliver Israel from the Greek Empire at the time of the Maccabees, just as verse 13 predicted. After the death of Alexander the Great, the Greek Empire split up into several subdivisions or kingdoms. Two of these kingdoms became very significant for Israel – the Seleucid Kingdom, or Syria, to the north of Israel, and the Ptolemaic Kingdom, or Egypt, to the south. During the inter-Testamental period, there was conflict between these two kingdoms, and because Israel was in between, Israel was always under the domination of one of these kingdoms. (Read Daniel 11 for some of the details of the wars and political interactions that went on during this time.)

In the 2nd century BC, during a period of Seleucid domination, a ruthless and despicable king named Antiochus IV came to the throne. He killed thousands of Jews and desecrated the Temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar. He attempted to Hellenize (impose Greek culture on) all of Israel. Although he took for himself the name Antiochus Epiphanes, meaning “the illustrious one,” he was a vile person.

A number godly Jews rose up in opposition and resistance to his ungodly violence, led by a priestly family known as the Hasmoneans. One of the Hasmonean leaders was named Judas, and with his fearless fighting skills he won the name, the “Hammer,” or “Maccabee.” Thus, these godly inter-Testamental Jews became known as “The Maccabees.” The

Jewish people were able to regain a measure of independence, and in 165 BC the Temple that had been defiled was cleansed and sanctified. This significant event is still celebrated today as a special Jewish festival known as Hanukkah.

The prediction of the Maccabean victories in Zechariah 9 would have been very encouraging to the Jews of Zechariah's day. They would certainly have known of Daniel's prophecies, and thus they would have known that the Greek Empire would follow the Persian Empire. In fact, the coming of Antiochus IV was predicted in Daniel's prophecy - he is the "little horn" of Daniel 8. So, this prophecy of Israel's victories over the coming Greeks would be very encouraging.

God loves to encourage His people with His word, then and today. God did deliver Israel at the time of the Maccabees.

2. God will deliver Israel at the time of the Millennium.

The victories of the Maccabees over the Greeks may carry on beyond verse 13 in this text, but all these victories foreshadow and anticipate the final conflict and victory, and the restoration of Israel to come in the future. This future is certainly in view in these verses. *"In that day"* the Lord will defend His people and save them (v16) and bring them into the blessings of His millennial kingdom. When is *"that day"*? We don't know for sure, but it could be in the near future.

The next event on God's calendar is the Rapture of the Church, which could take place at any time. After the Rapture will come the Tribulation Period. Zechariah 12 says that during that period, all nations will be gathered together against Jerusalem. It's during this period of tribulation, also known as "the time of Jacob's trouble," that a good portion of the nation of Israel will turn to the Lord. They will receive Christ as their Messiah, the Messiah whom they once rejected.

Then the Lord will return to this earth and fight for His people. His arrow will go forth like lightning (v14). The enemies' weapons of war will be useless (v15). The blood of the ungodly enemy forces will flow like water (v15). Revelation 14:20 says that there will be blood up to the horses' bridles for a distance of 200 miles during this time. Some scholars would say that Revelation 14 is only symbolic, because it's part of an apocalyptic vision of the apostle John. Maybe so. But even if this description is not to be taken literally, it certainly is symbolic of a great defeat of Israel's enemies!

Then the Lord will set up His glorious kingdom on this earth. Only the godly, both Jews and Gentiles, will inherit this kingdom. Verse 16: *"For they shall be like the jewels of a crown, lifted like a banner over His land.* It will be a kingdom of great blessing for all (v17). This is called the millennial kingdom of Christ because, according to Revelation 20, it will last for a thousand years.

All believers will be part of this millennial kingdom, but the restored nation of Israel will have a special place in this earthly kingdom of Christ. That is predicted right here in Zechariah 9. After the millennium will come the Eternal State. God will deliver Israel at the time of the Millennium.

Practical Application

Will you sparkle like a jewel in the kingdom?

In verse 16, the godly believers received a promise that they will be like the jewels of a crown, lifted like a banner over His Land. Interpreted properly in its context, this is a promise that was given to the faithful godly Jews who will come out of the Tribulation Period and enter the millennial kingdom of Christ.

However, this promise can be applied to **faithful believers** today. Notice that I said **faithful** believers. All believers will be part of Christ's kingdom here on this earth, but that doesn't mean that all believers will sparkle as jewels in that kingdom.

2 Timothy 2:12 says, "*If we endure, we shall also reign with Him*" - reign with Him in His kingdom. But "*if we deny Him, He will also deny us.*" What does that mean? This is addressed to Christians, so it doesn't mean a loss of salvation. It is a loss of **reward**. Romans 8:17 says, "*If we suffer with Him, we will also be glorified together.*" Not all Christians are willing to stand up and suffer the reproach of Christ, whether in the classroom, or the college campus, or the secular workplace, or the neighborhood. In that way, and in that sense, they deny the Lord.

All believers will be in Heaven, and all believers will be part of Christ's kingdom here on this earth - but the question is: **will you sparkle like a jewel in that kingdom?**