

## XVI. God's Pawn: Alexander the Great

March 22, 2020      Zechariah 9:1-8

**Theme:** God defends His people from all harm and defeats all His enemies, either by righteous condemnation or gracious conversion.

**Aim:** To understand how God works in providence to protect His people and defeat His enemies.

**Key Verses:** <sup>1</sup>The oracle of the word of the LORD is against the land of Hadrach and Damascus is its resting place. For the LORD has an eye on mankind and on all the tribes of Israel” (Zechariah 9:1).

### *Review*

Last week, the LORD finally answered the question on fasting asked by the delegation from Bethel. Instead of merely cancelling the fast of the fifth month, which commemorated the destruction of the First Temple, God graciously transformed all four fasts that mourned the past into cheerful feasts of joy and gladness. Zechariah chapter 8 closes with a picture of Gentiles streaming into Jerusalem to entreat the favor of the LORD, a picture of the worldwide expansion of the gospel during the church age. The Great Commission is the church's mandate to ingather the nations. Zechariah promises that the nations will come, but the church must lead with a faithful, winsome witness of the gospel. The prophet's picture of evangelism also points to the heart of the gospel: Jesus Christ. He is the one Jew, the one man, to whom we must cling to have any hope of life in this world or the next. As we hold on to Him, He holds on to us and brings us ultimately into His glorious presence forever. *The New Covenant in Jesus Christ turns fasting into feasting and mourning into gladness, as He gathers the elect from all nations to be part of His holy people.*

### *Introduction*

Alexander of Macedon was born in 356 BC. He was the son and heir of Phillip II of Macedon, a minor Greek kingdom. He received the best possible education available in the ancient world, being tutored the philosopher Aristotle up until the age of 16. Alexander became king of Macedonia at age 20 when his father was assassinated. Not content to rule over a relatively small territory, Alexander undertook a grand campaign of military conquest that led him to victories in Asia, northwest Africa, Medo-Persia, and across to India. By the time he was 30 years old, he had created the largest empire in the history of the world. He was never defeated in battle, and he is still recognized as one of the greatest military geniuses in history. For that reason alone, he is known to us today as “Alexander the Great.” Unfortunately, at least for him, before he could complete his grand ambitions of conquest, Alexander became ill and died in Babylon in 323 BC, just shy of his 33<sup>rd</sup> birthday. After his death, his empire split apart into four kingdoms, ruled by four of his generals: Ptolemy in Egypt, Seleucus in Mesopotamia, Lysimachus in Asia Minor, and Antigonus in Macedon.

Although Alexander's reign was brief, his legacy is felt even to this day. He was the founder of cities, builder of temples, and leader of men. Alexander's primary lasting achievement, however, was in spreading the Greek language and culture throughout much of the known world.

## Zechariah II – Lesson 16

This process of “Hellenization,” as it came to be called, would have a profound impact on the near east and later on the Roman Empire. As a result of his conquests, Greek became the *lingua franca* of the known world, uniting many different nations and cultures by a common tongue. Even within the later Roman Empire, Greek was the universal language, especially in the east. Before the birth of Christ, the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek in the city of Alexandria, Egypt, which was founded by and named after the conqueror. This translation, called the Septuagint, was the basis for most of the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament, which was also written in Greek. The apostle Paul preached the gospel in Greek to Gentiles from Arabia to Europe. Although conversion, of course, is the work of the Holy Spirit, in human terms it is not an understatement to say that the rapid growth of the early church was due in large measure to a common language across the nations. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus Christ came into the world “when the fullness of time had come” (Gal. 6:4). Along with relative ease of travel enabled by Roman roads, government, and stability, the Hellenization of Alexander the Great was part of that perfect *kairos*, or moment in time, which God prepared in order to facilitate the spread of the gospel.

When we look at the career and impact of Alexander the Great from a biblical perspective, it is clear that God raised him up, as He has other great kings and military leaders in history, by His providence to accomplish the purposes of heaven on earth. Although he is not mentioned by name like another conqueror, Cyrus the Persian (Is. 44:28; 45:1), nonetheless, Alexander and his impact is clearly prophesied in the Scriptures. The book of Daniel, written 200 years before Alexander’s birth, has four clear references to him and his sovereignly appointed role as an empire builder. In Daniel chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon dreamt of a large statue made of various materials, which represented successive empires. The golden head was Nebuchadnezzar himself; the chest and arms of silver signified the Medo-Persian empire; the thighs of bronze anticipated Alexander and Greece; and the legs of iron and feet of iron and clay represented Rome (Dan. 2:31-45).

In Daniel chapter 7, the same four empires are symbolized by fearsome beasts: Babylon is the lion with eagle wings; Medo-Persia is the bear with three ribs in its teeth; Greece under Alexander is the four-headed, four-winged leopard, and Rome is the dreadful beast (Dan. 7:2-8). In this vision Alexander’s swiftness in conquering is suggested by the leopard with wings, and the four heads symbolize the division of his empire into four parts following his untimely death.

Daniel chapter 8 is even more explicit about the reign of Alexander and his successors. In this vision, Daniel saw a powerful two-horned ram, representing the kings of the Medes and the Persians, which grew great and ruled over the other beasts. This, in fact, was the status quo at the time of the prophet’s vision. Then a swift goat with a large horn came speeding from the west and crashed into the ram. The ram’s two horns were broken and it was trampled under by the goat with the mighty horn. The power of the goat’s horn continued to grow until it was very great, and then it was broken off suddenly and replaced by four smaller horns arrayed in the four cardinal directions (Dan. 8:3-8). The angel Gabriel explained the vision to the prophet, clearly alluding to Alexander the Great and his four successors:

<sup>20</sup>As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia.

<sup>21</sup>And the goat is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king. <sup>22</sup>As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power (Daniel 8:20-22).

## Zechariah II – Lesson 16

The final description in Daniel of Alexander and the history of his Greek empire is contained in chapter 11:

<sup>2</sup>And now I will show you the truth. Behold, three more kings shall arise in Persia, and a fourth shall be far richer than all of them. And when he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece. <sup>3</sup>Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion and do as he wills. <sup>4</sup>And as soon as he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not to his posterity, nor according to the authority with which he ruled, for his kingdom shall be plucked up and go to others besides these (Daniel 11:2-4).

However, Daniel is not the only Old Testament prophet who is given a vision of Alexander the Great. Our passage today, Zechariah 9:1-8, is a unique look at Alexander's military campaign of in the Levant (eastern Mediterranean), from God's point of view. This is not man-centered history, written after the fact to exalt a human king. This is God-inspired prophecy, foretold more than 150 years before the events occurred, to glorify God and His wonderful providence. Alexander's name is not mentioned in this passage, although it correlates very well with his historical actions. Instead, it is the LORD who is the primary subject of Zechariah's prophecy. Alexander may be "Great" in the annals of human history, but He is just a pawn on God's chessboard. Zechariah rightly draws our eyes not to Alexander, but to the LORD, as He accomplishes His purposes in redemptive history. This leads to the theme of today's lesson: *God defends His people from all harm and defeats all His enemies, either by righteous condemnation or gracious conversion.*

### A. Introduction to Zechariah 9-14

#### 1. Structure and Character

Before we get to the text of Zechariah 9:1-8, we need to take care of a couple of important housekeeping issues. First, we need to look at the structure of the book of Zechariah. As previously discussed, the structure of Zechariah's prophecy falls into two main halves – chapters 1 to 6 and 9 to 14 – with a hinge or smaller section in the middle, which we have just completed (chapters 7 and 8).

Chapters 1-6 were written early in the prophet's life, precisely dated to the second year of King Darius (520 BC), and composed with the purpose of exhorting the remnant to restart the temple building project. Chapters 7-8 were written two years later in the fourth year of King Darius (518 BC); the question about fasting is clearly related to the ongoing temple construction.

The character of chapters 9-14 is very different than the earlier chapters of the book. These chapters are not dated, nor are they concerned with the temple project. Rather, the prophet's focus expands to consider future events in the wider world, including the advent of Messiah and the consummation of God's eternal kingdom.

This third section of Zechariah is commonly divided into two smaller sections, both introduced by the word "oracle" or burden. Chapters 9-11 is the oracle against the land of Hadrach and other Gentile nations, while chapters 12-14 contain the oracle concerning Israel. Baron gives a further description of the contents of these two sections of Zechariah 9-14:

## Zechariah II – Lesson 16

In the first (chapters 9-11), the judgment *through which Gentile world-power over Israel is finally destroyed*, and Israel is endowed with strength to *overcome all their enemies*, forms the fundamental thought and center of gravity of the prophetic description. In the second (chapters 12-14), the judgment *through which Israel itself is sifted and purged* in the final great conflict with the nations and transformed into the holy nation of Jehovah forms the leading topic (Baron, p. 285).

### 2. Authorship

The other housekeeping issue we need to address is the matter of authorship of Zechariah 9-14. While the obvious answer is “Zechariah!”, that doesn’t stop Biblical commentators from proposing other answers. The question of the authorship of Zechariah 9-14 was first raised in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by a conservative English Christian named Joseph Mede, who had great respect for the integrity and inspiration of the Scriptures. However, he was confused about what he read in the book of Matthew about the fate of the traitor Judas Iscariot:

<sup>9</sup>Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, <sup>10</sup>and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me” (Matthew 27:9-10).

The prophecy of the thirty pieces of silver as the price of betrayal is found in Zechariah 11:12-13, not in the book of Jeremiah. To maintain the integrity of Matthew’s attribution, Mede therefore believed that the last section of Zechariah was not penned by the author whose name it bears. “Mede ascribes them to Jeremiah, and supposed that his prophecies were in a fragmentary and confused state during the captivity, and were arranged by Zechariah” (Moore, p. 210). Many other commentators followed him in this interpretation, attributing chapters 9-14 to Jeremiah or other prophets.

Later in the history of biblical interpretation, a less conservative class of commentators known as “higher critics” also began to cast doubts on the authorship of Zechariah 9-14 as well. Unlike Mede, who had a high view of plenary inspiration, their objections were based on: 1) a disbelief of the supernatural that rejected the possibility of predictive prophecy; and 2) a literary analysis that discounted the textual meaning and looked instead at more mechanical or human tendencies of writing.

Thus, many liberal commentators have rejected Zechariah’s authorship of chapters 9-14 because it is full of predictive prophecy that accurately foretells future events. We can observe this clearly in the text of 9:1-8, which foresees the conquest of Alexander the Great more than 150 years beforehand! The skeptical, unconverted scholar who rejects the spiritual and supernatural cannot conceive of an almighty God who controls all of history and can, when He chooses, relate future events to His prophets before they occur. Instead, they either try to attribute the predicted results to an earlier time period, or post-date the authorship to a period of time after the occurrence of the events recorded in the prophecy. Since Zechariah 9-14 is full of such predictive prophecies, in the minds of liberal theologians it could not have been written in the late 6<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Of course, simply taking God at His Word immediately resolves this discrepancy; the LORD of hosts, who exists outside of time and is the Master of time, can clearly “predict” future events and make them known to us, if He deigns to do so.

## **Zechariah II – Lesson 16**

The second objection of liberal scholars to the authorship of chapters 9-14 has to do with textual criticism. Due to the significant differences between the two halves of Zechariah, many commentators have felt that the prophecy was the work of two (or even more) writers.

First, the prophecies of chapters 1-8 are all precisely dated to the second or fourth year of the reign of King Darius I of Persia, i.e., 520 and 518 BC (cp. Zech. 1:1, 7; 7:1). The prophecies of chapters 9-14 are undated. Second, chapters 1-6 and 7-8 are highly structured. Chapters 1-6 contain a preamble, the eight Night Visions in sequence, and then a closely related appendix. Chapters 7-8 are a single unit that contains the answer to the question from the delegation of Bethel. However, the prophecies of chapters 9-14 are less structured and are only loosely connected. Beyond the division into two sections (9-11 & 12-14) introduced by the formula “The oracle of the word of the LORD” the subjects of these prophecies vary considerably.

The scope of each half is different as well. While the Night Visions do foresee the Messiah and the church age, their primary purpose is to encourage the post-exilic generation to complete the work they were called to do, to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Thus, the primary scope of Zechariah 1-6 is focused on the original audience, and then secondarily to a broader audience. Even chapters 7-8 were prompted by a question related to the construction of the Jerusalem temple. On the other hand, chapters 9-14 have no relationship to the temple reconstruction whatsoever. They are full of grand and mysterious predictions about future events, with a wider focus on the nations, the Messiah, the New Covenant age, and the eternal state.

A final distinction between the halves of Zechariah concerns the frequency of the phrase “LORD of hosts.” This title of God finds its highest concentration of use anywhere in the Old Testament in Zechariah chapters 1-8, where it is used some 44 times in just 8 chapters. In the last five chapters of Zechariah (9-14), this distinctive description of God is used only 9 times. This is a fairly obvious discrepancy in usage.

So how do we answer the critics who want to split up the authorship of Zechariah according to its various sections? It must be noted that while the above differences are real, they are not necessarily significant nor do they necessitate a change in writer to explain. “The specific time references suit the earlier material, while the later material is more like the undated prophecies in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets. Differences just as great occur in prophecies whose authenticity has never been questioned” (Boice, p. 192). For example, “The break at Zechariah 9 is not unlike that occurring at Isaiah 40, and similar reasons may be advanced for the changed style and approach” (Mackay, p. 171).

The most common explanation for the distinctions between chapters 1-8 and 9-14 is that these portions of the prophecy were written by Zechariah at very different points in his life. Chapters 1-8 were written early in the prophet’s career, when the purpose for his messages was to encourage the people of Israel to rebuild the temple. Chapters 9-14 were given many years, likely decades, later, when the prophet was a much older, mature man, when the temple worship had long been re-established, when Israel was settled in the land once more, and when new issues and concerns regarding living in the wider world were confronting the people of God. While the differences in the text are substantial, there are also many similarities as well. Therefore, this arbitrary attribution of chapters 9-14 to an otherwise unknown author designated as “Zechariah II” is an unnecessary and unwarranted attack on the integrity of the Scriptures.

That still leaves the apparent discrepancy in the citation of Zechariah 11:12-13 in Matthew 27:9-10. How can that be reconciled? The best explanation is that Matthew is not only citing

## Zechariah II – Lesson 16

Zechariah's prophecy, but he is also alluding to Jeremiah. Zechariah does not describe purchasing a potter's field; that found in Jeremiah:

<sup>6</sup>Jeremiah said, "The word of the Lord came to me: <sup>7</sup>Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle will come to you and say, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.' <sup>8</sup>Then Hanamel my cousin came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the Lord, and said to me, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.' Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord. <sup>9</sup>And I bought the field at Anathoth from Hanamel my cousin, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver" (Jeremiah 32:6-9).

Matthew combined Zechariah and Jeremiah together and then attributed the whole to the more widely known prophet. This same sort of combination of major and minor prophet with a single citation to the more familiar writer is also seen in Mark 1:2-3, where Mark combines prophecies from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3.

Alternately, "It may be that Matthew attributed these words to Jeremiah because the prophets were all bound together in one scroll, and Jeremiah, as one of the major prophets, was the first book in the scroll" (Bentley, p. 195). After all, the Jews regarded the twelve minor prophets as one book and rarely referred to them individually by name. Regardless of the explanation, with confidence in the inspired and infallible word of God, we can be confident that the prophet Zechariah who wrote the first 8 chapters of this book is also the author of the last 6 chapters as well.

### B. God Defeats His Enemies (Zechariah 9:1-7)

#### 1. The Drama of Providence (9:1-2a)

Alexander began his invasion of the Persian empire in 334 BC. After an initial victory against the Persians at Granicus in northwest Asia Minor (modern Turkey), he proceeded east, winning another major battle in 333 BC against the Persians at Issus, near the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea. This triumph opened the way east for Alexander to approach the heart of the Persian empire, located in modern day Iraq and Iran. Instead, likely to protect his lengthy supply lines, Alexander surprised his opponents by heading south, through the Persian-controlled territories of Syria, Phoenicia, Philistia, and Judea all the way to Egypt. Although he met some resistance along the way, he overcame all his enemies, and by 331 BC Alexander was the master of the Levant, from Syria to Egypt. Zechariah 9:1-7 is the heavenly perspective on this military campaign of Alexander the Great.

##### a) Oracle (9:1a)

<sup>1</sup>The oracle of the word of the LORD is against...

The opening of chapters 9-11 (as chapters 12-14) begins with a pronouncement of an *oracle* or "burden" of the LORD. "The word means 'an utterance from God, usually concerning judgment'" (Bentley, p. 167). It is an ominous word, portending prophecies of judgment. "At first glance it is a strange word for a book that is largely a collection of encouragements for the Jewish people in the days leading up to the coming of Christ.... But there *is* a judgment in these chapters.... The first section contains a judgment against the Gentile world powers for the

## Zechariah II – Lesson 16

benefit of Israel, while the second contains a purifying judgment against Israel herself” (Boice, p. 193).

### *b) Orientation (9:1b, 2a)*

*...the land of Hadrach and Damascus is its resting place. ...<sup>2</sup>and on Hamath also, which borders on it,*

In verses 1 and 2, three places are listed as the locations upon which this burden or oracle rests: *Hadrach*, *Damascus*, and *Hamath*. Hadrach is the most obscure place-name of the three. In fact, this is the only mention of “Hadrach” in the entire Scriptures. For centuries, biblical scholars puzzled about the location or identity of Hadrach. However, in the nineteenth century, archeologists discovered evidence in the form of Assyrian cuneiform inscriptions that linked the name Hadrach to Hatarikka, an Aramean city-state north of Damascus and Hamath. Most modern scholars today general accept this identification.

Next in sequence is the city of Damascus, that ancient capital of Aram or Syria. Damascus is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. Damascus and the Syrians had long been enemies of God’s people (cp. 1 Kgs. 20:1; 2 Kgs. 10:32-33), and the prophets often had a word of judgment against Judea’s northern neighbors (e.g., Is. 17:1-3; Jer. 49:23-27; Amos 1:3-5). “At this time Damascus was the seat of the Persian governor of the province of Trans-Euphrates. This is judgment to come upon the occupying power. No indication is given here of what is to happen to Damascus, or why. But it is clear that she will be unable to resist what the LORD has determined. Alexander in fact devastated the city on his way north from Egypt” (Mackay, p. 177).

The third location mentioned in verse 2 is Hamath, which is a Syrian city-state located between Hadrach and Damascus. Lebo-Hamath, which means “the entrance of Hamath,” was apparently the original boundary of the Promised Land and also the greatest northern extent of Israel’s rule (Num. 13:21; 34:8; 1 Kgs. 8:65; 2 Kgs. 14:25, 28; 1 Chr. 13:5; 2 Chr. 7:8; Ez. 47:15-20). The city of Riblah in Hamath is recorded as the site where Nebuchadnezzar slaughtered the officials of Judah following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, including killing King Zedekiah’s sons and blinding the Jewish king (2 Kgs. 25:6-7, 18-22; Jer. 39:5-6; 52:9-11, 24-27).

Thus, the burden of the LORD is placed upon these three places in Syria, in the northern Levant, which were all under Persian hegemony at the time. “God has an oracle of judgment against Persia, the very power then lording over His people. The judgment proceeds to work its way south along the invasion route toward one Persian possession after another, from Damascus to Hamath, then to Tyre along the Phoenician coast, and then down to the cities of Philistia,” (Phillips, p. 199), following the direction of Alexander’s invasion route from Syria to Egypt.

### *c) Oculus (9:1c)*

*For the LORD has an eye on mankind and on all the tribes of Israel...*

The translation of this phrase is very difficult. It can be rendered in one of two ways. First, it can be translated, as does the ESV, with God as the subject: “*For the LORD has an eye on mankind and on all the tribes of Israel.*” However, as in the NASB, NIV, or NKJV, it can also be interpreted as: “*For the eye of man and of all the tribes of Israel is toward the LORD.*” Commentators are mixed on their opinions, but both translations make valid points.

## Zechariah II – Lesson 16

The majority of Bible translations render this phrase with God being the object rather than the subject. In this rendering, the eyes of mankind and Israel are on the LORD. Why would men be looking to God as Alexander's army approached? Phillips suggests that men have no option but to look upon Him as the Sovereign of history: "As God openly enters the scene, He is the One to whom men will have to pay attention. People ignore God then just as they do now, but since He is sovereign we must ultimately reckon with Him. God is the One to whom we must give account and the One on whom we must rely" (Phillips, p. 203).

Baron offers another explanation: "It primarily describes the consternation into which men would be thrown at the approach of the conqueror, who would be the executor of God's judgment" (Baron, p. 289). As Alexander executes divine judgment upon the nations, the victims vainly look to Him for deliverance. The nation of Israel also looked to the LORD for salvation, something which this passage promises in verse 8.

Mackay has a slightly different viewpoint, seeing the vindication of God's judgment in the eyes of men. The LORD has promised judgment upon the nations. Will He make good on His word? "People everywhere expect Him to be true to His word that He will punish those who are His enemies. The world as well as His own people are watching to see His justice executed. The Lord sends this message that He will act in accordance with His word to reinforce that experience" (Mackay, p. 177).

However, if God is the subject, then this phrase is a statement of His universal sovereignty. He has His eye, *i.e.*, His concern, on both the nations of men and on His chosen people of Israel. No realm can escape His scrutiny. He is alert and active in the affairs of men. Israel is "apple of His eye" (Zech. 2:8), and God is eager to protect His people and punish those who afflict the children of God. This interpretation of the text underscores God's providence in raising up Alexander and directing him every step of the way in his conquest of the eastern Mediterranean and the Persian empire.

### 2. The Destruction of Phoenicia (9:2b-4)

#### a) *Their Wisdom (9:2b)*

*Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise.*

Zechariah now turns his attention to the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon. Sidon was located about 25 miles south of modern Beirut, Lebanon, with Tyre an additional 25 miles further south along the Mediterranean coast. These cities flourished during the Old Testament period as sea powers and due to their commercial trading prowess. David and Solomon were on good terms with King Hiram of Tyre, even purchasing supplies and labor for the construction of the temple:

<sup>1</sup>Now Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon when he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father, for Hiram always loved David. <sup>2</sup>And Solomon sent word to Hiram, <sup>3</sup>"You know that David my father could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet. <sup>4</sup>But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side. There is neither adversary nor misfortune. <sup>5</sup>And so I intend to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord said to David my father, 'Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name.' <sup>6</sup>Now therefore command that cedars of Lebanon be cut for me. And my servants will join your servants, and I will pay you for your servants such wages as you

## Zechariah II – Lesson 16

set, for you know that there is no one among us who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians” (1 Kings 5:1-6).

Later relations with the Phoenicians were not as beneficial to God’s people. A century after Solomon built the temple, King Ahab of the northern kingdom of Israel married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of Sidon (1 Kgs. 16:31). Jezebel introduced Baal worship into Israel, which caused much grief and religious apostasy. God raised up the prophet Elijah to combat this daughter of Sidon and the idolatrous practices she supported (cp. 1 Kgs. 18:19).

Because of their shrewd business acumen and commercial success, they were accounted as wise, particularly Tyre, which rose to greater prominence than Sidon:

<sup>2</sup>Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord God:

“Because your heart is proud,  
and you have said, ‘I am a god,  
I sit in the seat of the gods,  
in the heart of the seas,’  
yet you are but a man, and no god,  
though you make your heart like the heart of a god—

<sup>3</sup>you are indeed wiser than Daniel;  
no secret is hidden from you;

<sup>4</sup>by your wisdom and your understanding  
you have made wealth for yourself,  
and have gathered gold and silver  
into your treasuries;

<sup>5</sup>by your great wisdom in your trade  
you have increased your wealth,  
and your heart has become proud in your wealth” (Ezekiel 28:2-5; cp. 28:12, 17).

b) *Their Wealth (9:3)*

<sup>3</sup>*Tyre has built herself a rampart and heaped up silver like dust, and fine gold like the mud of the streets.*

As seen from the quote above, Tyre’s pride was based not only on her wisdom but also on her wealth. Sidon and Tyre “were two of the oldest and richest cities in the world, the one famed for her arts and manufactures, especially in glass and pottery, the other for her commerce. The fine harbor of Tyre had made her the depot for the rich stream of Asiatic trade whose current has always enriched the channels through which it flowed, and her merchant princes were among the rulers of the world. Having almost a monopoly of the carrying trade of the Mediterranean, her wealth became enormous, and her inhabitants lived in a style of luxury that has but few parallels in history” (Moore, p. 220). While the picture of silver and gold lying around the streets of Tyre like dust or mud on the streets is obvious hyperbole, there is no doubt that the wealth of Tyre, gained through commerce (Ez. 27:12-24; cp. Ez. 28:4-5) was legendary.

The original city of Tyre was built along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. However, to protect themselves and their riches from other nations, the people of Tyre relocated to an island about one kilometer away from the coast where they formerly dwelt. The old city was abandoned in favor of the offshore location, which was fortified by a double wall of stone 150 feet high around the entire island, with a width of 25 feet of earth filled in between the walls.

## Zechariah II – Lesson 16

In saying that *Tyre has built herself a rampart*, Zechariah appears to be engaging in a bit of word play here. The name “Tyre” (*tsor*) means “rock,” and the word translated as *rampart* is *matsor*, which can connote a stronghold or rocky fortress (Baron, p. 291), referring to the situation of the new city on its walled island.

“New Tyre” was considered impregnable and impossible to capture. Their fleet of merchant ships could keep the city continuously supplied with goods during any siege, and their naval ships protected the city from any attack from land or sea. Shalmanezzer of Assyria besieged the city of Tyre for five years from 724 to 719 BC without capturing it. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged the city of Tyre for 13 years, from 575 to 562 BC. Although he was able to destroy the old city on the mainland (cp. Ez. 26:7-12), he was unable to breach the walls of the island fortress (cp. Ez. 29:18). Truly, Tyre had built a *rampart* that was a monument to their wealth and to their arrogance. Behind their walls and separated from the mainland by the sea, they felt invulnerable and invincible.

*c) Their Woe (9:4)*

*<sup>4</sup>But behold, the LORD will strip her of her possessions and strike down her power on the sea, and she shall be devoured by fire.*

That is, until the advent of Alexander in 332 BC. Alexander accomplished what the Assyrians and Babylonians before him could not – he captured and completely destroyed the island city of Tyre. Zechariah makes it clear, however, that Alexander’s success was enabled by the LORD’s providence. It was God who stripped Tyre of her wealth, her power, and her pride. The woe of Tyre was due to the Word of God, who used Alexander as His pawn to deliver the scourge of judgment upon a wicked people.

How did Alexander succeed where all others before him failed? As Alexander approached from the north, news of his exploits preceded him. Sidon surrendered to the Greek army without a struggle. But the city of Tyre, safe behind the walls of their island fortress, refused to submit to Alexander. The Greek general had requested to sacrifice at the temple of their god Melqart, but the Tyrians refused his entrance into New Tyre, suggesting instead that he sacrifice at the old temple on the mainland. Furious at this rejection, Alexander sent envoys demanding immediate surrender. In response, the Tyrians murdered the Greek messengers and threw them over the wall into the sea. The siege of Tyre was officially underway.

Alexander did not have a navy, so to reach the fortress he used the debris of Old Tyre, as well as timber, stone, and other materials to build a “mole” or a causeway from the mainland to the island. After an incredible amount of effort on the part of the Greek army, they were able to bridge the half-mile span across the sea to Tyre. Alexander was then able to use his siege engines to create a breach in the city walls and conquer the proud Tyrians. Alexander sacked the city, killed eight thousand soldiers and leading citizens, and sold thirty thousand civilians into slavery. And then he completely burned the city down with fire, just as Zechariah had prophesied. Nothing was left of Tyre; it was nothing but bare rock (cp. Ez. 26:12-14). Altogether, Alexander was able to accomplish this amazing military feat in only seven months!

Tyre never recovered a semblance of her former glory. Alexander had shattered the pride and arrogance of that city forever; it was never rebuilt. So impressive was the feat of engineering in building the mole, that it still exists to this day, linking the former island of Tyre to the mainland.

## Zechariah II – Lesson 16

As we have seen already from the references in Ezekiel chapters 26-28, the destruction of Tyre had been prophesied even before Zechariah's day. The Lord had just cause to condemn the city of Tyre because of their arrogance, idolatry, and the harm they had caused to Israel, the "apple of His eye." In God's impeccable timing, He fashioned the perfect instrument for His retribution: the military genius of Alexander the Great. Alexander played his part exactly as God had ordained it: he was the minister of wrath to a people who had been judged and condemned by a righteous God. This is the first major point from our study of this passage, that *God defeats His enemies by righteous condemnation*, and He appoints and ordains the times and the means of that judgment.

### 3. The Destiny of Philistia (9:5-7)

#### a) Condemnation (9:5-6)

<sup>5</sup>*Ashkelon shall see it, and be afraid; Gaza too, and shall writhe in anguish; Ekron also, because its hopes are confounded. The king shall perish from Gaza; Ashkelon shall be uninhabited; <sup>6</sup>a mixed people shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of Philistia.*

The next obstacle in Alexander's southward march were the city-states of Philistia. The Philistines originally occupied the coastal plain to the southwest of Israel in five city states: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron (Jos. 13:3). They were a thorn in the sides of the Israelites for centuries, particularly during the time of the judges, the prophet Samuel, and king Saul (cp. Jdg. 13:1; 1 Sam. 4:1-3; 1 Sam. 17:1-4). David slew Goliath, the giant Philistine champion, and was generally successful in his wars against the Philistines (1 Sam. 17:51; 2 Sam. 5:19-25; 8:1). Solomon ruled over the land of the Philistines (1 Kgs. 4:21; 2 Chr. 9:26). Two hundred years later, king Uzziah defeated the Philistines and destroyed the city of Gath (2 Chr. 26:6; cp. Amos 6:2), explaining why it is absent from the list of Philistine cities mentioned here by Zechariah (cp. Jer. 25:20). The prophets also denounced Philistia and predicted her destruction (Jer. 47:1-7; Ez. 25:15-17; Amos 1:6-8; Zeph. 2:4-7).

The word of Alexander's victories against the Persians and his destruction of Tyre preceded his southward march into Philistia. In a series of brief, choppy statements, Zechariah portrays the panic, confusion, terror, and anguish experienced by the Philistines as the Greeks approached. There was no help from their Persian overlords; they were on their own against the invaders. Notice that verse 5 lists three of the Philistine cities in a chiastic order a-b-c-b-a: Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, Gaza, and Ashkelon (Baldwin, p. 160). The remaining Philistine city, Ashdod, is mentioned in verse 6.

Following the lead of Sidon, three of these four Philistine cities quickly surrendered to Alexander without opposition. Only Gaza, situated on top of a large mound or tell with a high wall, offered military resistance to the Greek army. The siege of Gaza lasted five months, while Alexander built up an artificial mound next to the city to bring his siege engines into play. Alexander was seriously wounded during the siege, and it took four separate assaults before the Greek army successfully scaled the walls, opened the gates and captured Gaza. All the males of Gaza were put to the sword, and the women and children were sold into slavery. Alexander killed Batis, the king of Gaza, by forcing a rope through his ankles and dragging him alive behind his chariot around the city walls. Thus was fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy, *the king shall perish from Gaza*.

## Zechariah II – Lesson 16

The phrases *Ashkelon shall be uninhabited* and *a mixed people shall dwell in Ashdod* indicate the general fate of cities conquered in this way. Current inhabitants would be deported or sold into slavery, leaving their ancestral homes abandoned. Meanwhile, similarly conquered people from other nations would be brought in to repopulate the area.

Once again notice, that although Alexander was the human agent that enacted this judgment against Gaza and her sister cities, it was God who was in control: The LORD says, *I will cut off the pride of Philistia*. The Philistines had a long history of cruelty and hatred toward the children of Israel. Apparently, the cup of God's wrath against them had filled up, and so He unleashed his unwitting pawn, Alexander, on the cities of Philistia. As with Tyre, the destruction of Gaza and conquest of the Philistines reminds us that it is *God who defeats His enemies by righteous condemnation*.

### b) Conversion (9:7)

*<sup>7</sup>I will take away its blood from its mouth, and its abominations from between its teeth; it too shall be a remnant for our God; it shall be like a clan in Judah, and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites.*

When we come to verse 7, we encounter what seems to be another reason for the doom of Philistia beyond their ill-treatment of Israel. The first half of verse 7 speaks about removing their idolatry: *I will take away its blood from its mouth, and its abominations from between its teeth*. The practice of consuming blood was strictly banned in Israel (Lev. 17:10). "This shows God putting an end to false and debauched worship. The Philistines practiced the grossest paganism, drinking animal blood and eating the flesh of banned animals" (Phillips, pp. 204-205). Indeed, the abominable idolatrous practices would more than justify the sentence of destruction pronounced by God and delivered by Alexander.

However, this statement regarding the removal of idolatry is not paired with a statement of condemnation, but rather with a statement of conversion. The second half of verse 7 speaks about the incorporation of a remnant of Philistia into the people of God. This is unexpected!

Verse 7 reminds us that although God defeats His enemies by righteous condemnation, there is a second way in which the LORD defeats His enemies: by making them His friends through *gracious conversion*. Once again in Zechariah, we have a reminder that God is in the business of converting the nations and bringing them into His kingdom (cp. Zech. 2:11; 8:20-23).

The Philistines would not be entirely wiped out by the conquest of Alexander. Some would remain, and in time become identified with the people of God:

*Remnant* was virtually a technical term for the restored people of God, but His mercy is extended beyond the Jews. The Philistines are to be brought into positions of prominence, as they will *become leaders in Judah*. *Leaders* [or *clans*] is used of princes of tribes of Edom and the Horites (Gen. 36:15-16; Ex. 15:15; 1 Chr. 1:51), and refers to one with status as a head of a family. This would not apply to all the Philistines but is part of the picture here that the favor extended to them will not make them subordinate in status to the remnant of Israel" (Mackay, p. 181).

This remnant of converted Philistines is also compared to the Jebusites. The Jebusites were the original inhabitants of Jerusalem (originally called Jebus). They remained in the land of Israel after the conquest of Joshua (Jdg. 1:21) and even held the city of Jerusalem until David conquered it (2 Sam. 5:6-7). The Jebusites were incorporated into the children of Israel and thus

## Zechariah II – Lesson 16

became part of the covenant nation (1 Kgs. 9:20-21; 2 Chr. 8:7). An example of one of these Jebusites was Araunah (2 Sam. 24:18), who sold his threshing floor to David, which later became the site where the temple was erected. By comparing the Philistines to the Jebusites, Zechariah is saying that this former enemy of Israel would one day become part of the covenant people. “God, therefore, is able to overthrow idolatry and establish true worship on earth” (Phillips, p. 205).

This prophecy, therefore, is another outworking of the redemptive purposes of God, who promised to bless all nations through the Seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). If God can save the despised Philistines, then we are reminded that He can save anyone, from any nation, from any background. The scope of God’s salvation is truly universal. “But it is not an indiscriminating universalism. Though it goes beyond boundaries of race, there is no thought of acceptance of, or compromise with, paganism. The Lord incorporates them within His people *after* He has purged them of their pagan ways” (Mackay, p. 182).

In what way was the promised conversion of a remnant of the Philistines fulfilled? The Philistines that remained after Alexander’s conquest did not convert *en masse* to Judaism. “The conquests of Alexander [was] the *commencement* of the fulfillment, which was then continued through the calamities caused by the wars of succession—the conflicts between the Egyptians, Syrians, and Romans—until it was completed by the fact that the heathen tribes within the boundaries of Israel gradually disappeared as separate tribes, and their remnants were received into the community of those who confessed Israel’s God” (Baron, p. 297).

In the New Testament, we see the gospel of Jesus Christ coming into former Philistine territory in Acts 8:26-40 when Philip the Evangelist converted the Ethiopian eunuch on the way to Gaza and then preached the gospel in Azotus (the Roman name for Ashdod). Peter also ministered the gospel to Gentiles in the towns of Lydda and Joppa (Acts 9:32-43), which were located on the edge of ancient Philistia. And of course, every time a sinner forsakes their pagan ways and bows the knee to Jesus Christ as Savior, the church grows in fulfillment of this beautiful prophecy in Zechariah. Although God does indeed defeat all His enemies, it is not simply by righteous condemnation; it is also by *gracious conversion*.

### C. God Defends His People (Zechariah 9:8)

<sup>8</sup>*Then I will encamp at my house as a guard, so that none shall march to and fro; no oppressor shall again march over them, for now I see with my own eyes.*

From Gaza, history records that Alexander traveled south to Egypt, where he was welcomed and installed as their king in place of the hated Persians. But what about God’s people, the nation of Israel? Did Alexander interact with Jerusalem? Most of secular history omits any reference to Alexander’s dealings with Jerusalem. However, the Jewish historian, Josephus, in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, chronicles at length what passed between Alexander and Jerusalem in 332 BC. Although Josephus’ record has no other historical corroboration, what he wrote is entirely consistent with the inspired prophecy of Zechariah in verse 8: “The passage ends with God assuring us that He camps before the gate of His people” (Phillips, p. 205) (cp. Heb. 13:5-6; Ps. 121:5, 7).

Zechariah predicted that God would encamp around Israel (see Zech. 2:5; cp. Ps. 34:7), that He would guard His house and His people in Jerusalem, that the Greek army would not approach,

## Zechariah II – Lesson 16

and that Alexander would do no harm to the apple of His eye, for the LORD's eyes were on His people to protect them. In verses 1-7, we've seen that God defeats all His enemies, either by righteous condemnation or gracious conversion. Here in verse 8 is the third lesson from this passage: *God defends His people from all harm.*

The story of Jerusalem's miraculous salvation from Alexander the Great is best told by Josephus himself:

So Alexander came into Syria, and took Damascus: and when he had obtained Sidon, he besieged Tyre. When he sent an epistle to the Jewish High Priest, "To send him some auxiliaries; and to supply his army with provisions: and that what presents he formerly sent to Darius, he would now send to him; and choose the friendship of the Macedonians: and that he should never repent of so doing." But the High Priest answered the messengers, that "He had given his oath to Darius, not to bear arms against him: and he said that he would not transgress them, while Darius was in the land of the living." Upon hearing this answer, Alexander was very angry: and though he determined not to leave Tyre, which was just ready to be taken; yet as soon as he had taken it, he threatened that he would make an expedition against the Jewish High Priest, and through him teach all men to whom they must keep their oaths. So when he had, with a good deal of pains, during the siege, taken Tyre, and had settled its affairs, he came to the city of Gaza, and besieged both the city, and him that was governor of the garrison.

...Now Alexander, when he had taken Gaza, made haste to go up to Jerusalem. And Jaddua the High Priest, when he heard that, was in an agony, and under terror; as not knowing how he should meet the Macedonians: since the King was displeased at his foregoing disobedience. He therefore ordained that the people should make supplications, and should join with him in offering sacrifice to God: whom he besought to protect that nation, and to deliver them from the perils that were coming upon them. Whereupon God warned him in a dream, which came upon him after he had offered sacrifice, that "He should take courage, and adorn the city, and open the gates; that the rest should appear in white garments; but that he and the priests should meet the King in the habits proper to their order; without the dread of any ill consequences; which the providence of God would prevent." Upon which, when he rose from his sleep, he greatly rejoiced; and declared to all the warning he had received from God. According to which dream he acted entirely; and so waited for the coming of the King.

And when he understood that he was not far from the city, he went out in procession, with the priests, and the multitude of the citizens. The procession was venerable, and the manner of it different from that of other nations. It reached to a place called Sapha: which name translated into Greek signifies a prospect, for you have thence a prospect both of Jerusalem and of the temple: and when the Phoenicians, and the Chaldeans that followed him thought they should have liberty to plunder the city, and torment the High Priest to death: which the King's displeasure fairly promised them: the very reverse of it happened. For Alexander, when he saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priests stood clothed with fine linen, and the High Priest in purple and scarlet clothing; with his miter on his head; having the golden plate whereon the name of God was engraved, he approached by himself, and adored that name, and first saluted the High Priest. The Jews also did all together, with one voice, salute Alexander; and encompass

## Zechariah II – Lesson 16

him about. Whereupon the Kings of Syria, and the rest were surprised at what Alexander had done; and supposed him disordered in his mind. However, Parmenio alone went up to him, and asked him, “How it came to pass, that when all others adored him, he should adore the High Priest of the Jews?” To whom he replied, “I did not adore him, but that God who hath honored him with his High Priesthood. For I saw this very person, in a dream, in this very habit, when I was at Dios in Macedonia. Who, when I was considering with myself how I might obtain the dominion of Asia, exhorted me to make no delay; but boldly to pass over the sea thither: for that he would conduct my army, and would give me the dominion over the Persians. Whence it is that having seen no other in that habit, and now seeing this person in it, and remembering that vision, and the exhortation which I had in my dream, I believe that I bring this army under the divine conduct, and shall therewith conquer Darius, and destroy the power of the Persians; and that all things will succeed according to what is in my own mind.” And when he had said this to Parmenio, and had given the High Priest his right hand, the priests ran along by him; and he came into the city. And when he went up into the temple, he offered sacrifice to God, according to the High Priest’s direction: and magnificently treated both the High Priest, and the priests. And when the book of Daniel was shown him, wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended. And as he was then glad, he dismissed the multitude for the present: but the next day he called them to him, and bid them ask what favors they pleased of him. Whereupon the High Priest desired, that they might enjoy the laws of their forefathers: and might pay no tribute on the seventh year. He granted all they desired. And when they intreated him that he would permit the Jews in Babylon and Media to enjoy their own laws also, he willingly promised to do hereafter what they desired (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XI.viii.3-5).

### ***Conclusion and Application***

It is no wonder that liberal theologians who scoff at the supernatural feel the need to relegate Zechariah chapter 9 to an anonymous writer designated as “Zechariah II” who lived hundreds of years after “Zechariah I.” For, if you do not acknowledge the sovereign power of God to control history and foretell it as He chooses, there is no other viable alternative to explain the accuracy and completeness of Zechariah’s portrayal of Alexander’s conquest of the Levant. But for true Christian who trusts in the plenary inspiration of the Word of God and the power of the LORD of hosts to accomplish His holy will in history, there is no conflict at all.

Alexander the Great was a remarkable military genius, whose conquests literally changed the course of human history. But nonetheless, he was but a pawn in God’s hands, accomplishing only what God permitted. When it served His purposes, the LORD allowed Alexander to win great victories and conquer powerful cities and nations, but Alexander was powerless to inflict the slightest harm upon the people whom God protected. In the destruction of Tyre and Gaza by the Greek army, in the sparing of a remnant of the Philistines for later incorporation into the people of God, and in the miraculous protection of Jerusalem from the wrath of Alexander, God’s sovereignty is on display for all the world to see (cp. 9:1c, alternate translation). Let the watching eye of man learn from this passage the lesson that *God defends His people from all harm and defeats all His enemies, either by righteous condemnation or gracious conversion.*

For next time: Read Zechariah 9:9-17.