

XIX. Scattered and Gathered

April 12, 2020 Zechariah 10:6-12

Theme: From the scattered nations, God will gather a people to Himself, redeeming and restoring them in strength to walk in His name.

Aim: To see our salvation as a new exodus, being delivered from sin and restored to covenant relationship with God.

Key Verses: ⁸“I will whistle for them and gather them in, for I have redeemed them, and they shall be as many as they were before. ⁹Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me, and with their children they shall live and return (Zechariah 10:8-9).

Review

Last week, we looked at Zechariah 10:1-5. This passage started with an exhortation for the post-exilic generation to ask God for the latter rain, a reminder that they were dependent upon Him for their daily provision. In the past, their ancestors had forgotten this and had abandoned the Lord in favor of foolish idols and false prophets. Indeed, it seems the current nation was tempted to do so as well; therefore, Zechariah warns against it. A lack of godly leadership had led Israel down the path of idolatry and destruction in the past as well as the present. Therefore, God’s anger burns against unfaithful shepherds, who lead the flock of His people astray. However, our LORD has not left us without hope; indeed, He has provided the Hope of the World to be our Good Shepherd.

Jesus Christ *the Messiah is the Good Shepherd of His people; He provides for their needs and keeps them safe from false religion and poor leaders.* As our cornerstone, the Messiah is our sure foundation, a stable base on which to build up the faithful church in truth and righteousness. As our tent peg, we can lay all our burdens on Him and hang on Him our hope of glory. As our battle bow, we have confidence that He can defeat our enemies, allowing us rest secure in His eternal victory. And as our ruler, we have a King who rules over us and keeps us in perfect righteousness, joy, and peace forever. Through the use of these messianic images, Zechariah gives us all the encouragement we need to turn to our Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, for all our needs, cares, and wants in this life and the next.

Introduction

The exodus under Moses occurred in about 1446 BC. After 40 years of wilderness wandering, the children of Israel, under the leadership of Joshua, crossed the Jordan river and entered the promised land in about 1406 BC. Following the conquest and allotment of the land to the twelve tribes of Israel, the nation existed as a loose tribal confederation for about 350 years; this was the period of the judges. Samuel, the last judge of Israel, anointed Saul to be the first king of Israel and David to be the second king. After Saul’s death, David reigned from about 1010 to 970 BC. David, the shepherd, the poet, the man after God’s heart, was also a warrior king who subdued his enemies, captured Jerusalem and made it his capital, and extended the national borders of Israel. God established the Davidic covenant with him, promising that one of his heirs would always sit on the throne, but David was not permitted to build God’s house, since he was a man

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of war. David's son, Solomon, the man of peace, succeeded his father in 970 BC and completed construction of the first temple in 966 BC. Solomon enjoyed stability and prosperity during his reign, but his falling away from the LORD in his later years sowed the seeds of division that would follow.

When Solomon died in 931 BC, the nation of Israel was soon divided into two kingdoms. Ten tribes in the north rebelled against Solomon's son Rehoboam, and broke away under the leadership of Jeroboam I to form the northern kingdom of Israel. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained faithful to Rehoboam, the Davidic king of Judah, the southern kingdom. Over the next two centuries, these sister realms had periods of both war and peace between them.

In the Scriptures, the national entity of the northern Jewish kingdom is called by several different terms. One such designation is "Samaria," which was the capital established by King Omri, father of Ahab (e.g. Ez. 16:46; Hos. 10:5, 7; Amos 4:1; Ob. 19; Mic. 1:1, 5-6). The name "Joseph" is also occasionally used to refer to either the entirety of the Jewish people or more specifically the northern kingdom (e.g., Ps. 78:67; 80:1; Ez. 37:16, 19; Amos 5:6, 15; Ob. 18). Joseph received a double blessing from his father Jacob (Gen. 49:22-26), and his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, both became full tribes of Israel. Ephraim and Manasseh were the largest tribes in the north, and so "Joseph" became representative of the entire northern kingdom. In the same way, the tribe of Ephraim also became synonymous with the kingdom of Israel in the north (e.g., Ps. 78:67; Is. 7:2-9; 9:9; 17:23; Ez. 37:16, 19; Hos. 5:3-14; 9:3-16).

The ten tribes in the north were cut off from the true worship of God at the temple in Jerusalem, which was the capital of Judah. To prevent his people from pilgrimages to the southern kingdom, Jeroboam I set up idolatrous centers of worship in Bethel and Dan, leading the northern kingdom astray on religious matters. Due to God's displeasure with the religious syncretism of the northern kingdom, Israel suffered dynastic instability. Every king in a series of different dynasties either followed in the religious practices of Jeroboam I, or even worse, introduced pagan, idolatrous practices, such as the worship of Baal under Ahab and Jezebel. Because of their religious infidelity, God raised up the Assyrian empire to destroy apostate Israel in 722 BC. Following their standard practice, the Assyrians deported much of the surviving population to other parts of their empire, relocating other people groups into the region of Samaria. In this manner, the ten northern tribes ceased to exist from all practical points of view.

Meanwhile, the southern kingdom of Judah continued to be ruled by the line of Davidic kings. Because some of the kings of Judah remained relatively faithful to the covenant (e.g., Jehoshaphat, Joash, Uzziah, Hezekiah, Josiah), God's covenant mercy extended the existence of the southern kingdom beyond that of her northern sister. However, eventually the sinfulness of the kings of Judah and the people as a whole doomed the nation. The LORD raised up Babylon to swallow up the Assyrian empire and to bring judgment upon Jerusalem and Judah. After a series of deportations, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon finally destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC, exiling many Jews to Babylon and ending the nation of Judah.

Despite God's chastisement of Judah, His covenant love remained with them, and He preserved a faithful remnant during the exile, giving them prophets such as Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel to encourage and strengthen the people in their diaspora. Jeremiah predicted an exile of 70 years (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10), promising the expatriated Jews that they would return to their homeland after that time. Indeed, when Babylon fell in 539 to Cyrus, the new Persian ruler allowed the Jews in 538 BC to return to Judah under Zerubbabel, their prince from the line of David.

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The number of those who returned to Jerusalem was small, and their primary task of erecting a new temple soon overwhelmed them. Therefore, God raised up Haggai and Zechariah in 520 BC to encourage the Jews to rebuild the temple for God's glory. Under the prophets' exhortation, the people returned to work and completed the construction of the second temple in 516 BC, exactly 70 years following the destruction of Solomon's temple. It is to this post-exilic generation, struggling to survive in their devastated homeland, that the prophet Zechariah first prophesied in chapters 1-8 regarding reconstruction of the temple. The latter half of Zechariah's prophecy (chapters 9-14), although undated, was likely given much later to encourage the returned remnant concerning their future.

Thus far in our study of Zechariah 7-10, the prophet has referred to the people of God by several different names associated with the southern kingdom, such as Zion (the temple mount), Jerusalem, or Judah (cp. Zech. 8:3, 4, 8, 13, 15, 19; 9:9, 10, 13; 10:3). These terms are expected, since he was writing to the heirs of the southern kingdom who had returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. However, he has also used the antiquated name of "Ephraim" in combination with either "Jerusalem" or "Judah" in 9:10, 13. In today's passage, Zechariah speaks in 10:6 of both "the house of Judah" and "the house of Joseph." Thus, in these verses, the prophet envisions a complete people of God recombined from both the southern and northern kingdoms. And in verse 7 with another mention of "Ephraim" by itself, the emphasis in the following verses shifts exclusively to the obsolete northern kingdom instead of Judah.

Based on this refocus toward Ephraim rather than Judah, Zechariah 10:6-12 ostensibly seems to be about the regathering, return, and restoration of the lost exiles from the northern kingdom. They had been thoroughly scattered and dispersed throughout the ancient near east, having lost all national and cultural identity more than 200 years prior to Zechariah's prophecy. How then, should we understand this prophecy?

From a *historical* viewpoint, only a limited fulfillment can be seen in the years up to the first advent of Christ. Mackay writes:

During the period of the Maccabees many from the northern tribes forgot their former animosity toward the South, and returned to settle in Galilee, becoming to all intents Jews. There is no scriptural support for the idea that the ten tribes remain in some way still hidden. But though these prophecies were fulfilled in the events of the inter-testamental period, it is obvious that the description of verses 10-12 moves beyond that to a much greater return, when the Messiah finally releases all who are His from spiritual bondage, and brings them into the freedom of His final kingdom (Mackay, pp. 201-202).

Attributing the fulfillment of the prophecy in Zechariah 10:6-12 to this resettlement of Galilee in the Maccabean period results in a rather unsatisfactory resolution of the prophetic message. It feels too small and insignificant relative to the other grand messianic promises contained in chapters 9 and 10. Therefore, many interpreters hold a *futurist* interpretation, wherein Zechariah's prophecy points to a literal return of Jews in a future messianic kingdom. Baron is a strong advocate of this position:

Even evangelical writers and commentators deny that there ever will be a literal fulfillment of these plain and solemn predictions, and see in them at the most only forecasts of the gradual spread of Christianity and of the absorption of a certain number of Jews into the Church.... But, as I have had occasion to remark more than once, such method of interpretation turns the great prophetic utterances in the Bible into mere

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hyperbole, and substitutes an unnatural and shadowy meaning for what is plain and obvious, thereby throwing a vagueness and uncertainty over all Scripture. No, no; just as the scattering of Israel was literal, so the gathering also will be *literal*; and it is not in the absorption of a remnant of the Jewish people into the Church, and in the gradual spread of “Christianity” that “these prophecies find a most glorious and real fulfillment,” but in a yet future nationally restored and converted Israel, which shall yet be the center of the Kingdom of God and of His Christ, and the channel of blessing to all the nations of the earth (Baron, pp. 371-372).

Baron is quite adamant in his expectation of a restored and converted Jewish state. He will not tolerate any spiritual interpretation, wherein the promises made to Old Testament Israel (or Ephraim) are applied primarily to the New Testament church. However, other commentators who still hold to the futurist view of a future, literal fulfillment, also acknowledge a secondary spiritual understanding:

I argue here, as elsewhere, that verses like these refer to a literal future blessing upon a regathering and believing Israel. This is their meaning. Nevertheless, it is true that we who have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior can see ourselves in the points of this prophecy. Has the Lord not done each of these great things for us? He has saved us by His death. He has provided for us and encourages us to come to Him in prayer, asking for anything we lack. He is purifying us. He is also gathering us—both Jew and Gentile—from the farthest reaches of this world (Boice, p. 198).

However, I stand in the line of Reformers with John Calvin and others (e.g., Phillips, Mackay) who see Zechariah 10:6-12 primarily in *spiritual* terms as being fulfilled in the ingathering of the church, along with a secondary *eschatological* understanding of its ultimate realization in glory. Indeed, within the text of this passage, Phillips sees an outline of salvation that is applicable, not only to Ephraim, or to a recombined Jewish people of both northern and southern kingdoms, but even more broadly, to believers of every age and nation, that is, the church of Jesus Christ. With this understanding, the theme of this passage is: *From the scattered nations, God will gather a people to Himself, redeeming and restoring them in strength to walk in His name.*

A. Means of Salvation (Zechariah 10:6-7)

Although verses 6-12 of chapter 10 appear to be set apart by an inclusio—the passage starts with God saying *I will strengthen the house of Judah* in verse 6 and closes with essentially the same promise in verse 12, *I will make them strong in the LORD*—there is no real break in the flow of the chapter. Therefore, as we approach verses 6 and following, we must keep in mind the great promises of the Shepherd-Messiah in verse 4 and the victory promised to the house of Judah in verse 5. The assurance of military strength is repeated in verses 6 and 7 and is transferred from the house of Judah to the house of Joseph and to Ephraim, reminding us that God’s blessings extend to the entirety of His redeemed people, not just a portion of them. Thus, we have a clear literary indicator that the prophet, although using Old Testament symbols and terminology, really has in mind the whole church of Jesus Christ, our Shepherd-Messiah.

The subject of verses 6 and 7, and indeed the rest of this passage, is the salvation of God’s people, personified in the house of Ephraim. However, since there is only one mode of salvation whereby anyone can be made right with God, which is faith in the Messiah Jesus, this passage declares to us how and why God saves sinners and brings them into covenant relationship with

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Himself. There are at four important concepts regarding biblical salvation contained in verses 6 and 7 that we should understand.

1. Deliverance (10:6a)

⁶“I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back because I have compassion on them, and they shall be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them.

The first key idea is that salvation involves *deliverance from bondage*. That is the situation behind the first phrase of verse 6: *I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I save the house of Joseph*. Both the northern and southern kingdoms had been destroyed by invading empires due to their wickedness, rebellion, and sin. They had been scattered throughout the near east and had lost their national strength and identity. They had both suffered under “the oppression of foreign domination.... Therefore, this statement of salvation has to do with the deliverance of people from the bonds of captivity” (Phillips, pp. 232-233).

The deliverance of the people of Israel from their political and geographical captivity is an apt depiction of our own spiritual need. All men are born in original sin, separated from God and justly deserving His wrath and displeasure. We are slaves of sin, and we need to be delivered from that spiritual bondage in order to become slaves of righteousness (cp. Rom. 6:15-18). Phillips explains:

God sent Israel into captivity for her iniquities and in the same way the New Testament sees us held captive and oppressed by the reign of sin into which we have fallen.... Salvation then, is deliverance from the bondage of sin’s guilt and power by the saving work of Christ, just as verse 6 sees the houses of Judah and Joseph restored from their captivity. This is our good news: Christ died to save us from our sins, through faith in His blood (Phillips, p. 233).

Praise be to God that He has indeed delivered us from sin and death into light and life:

¹³He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13-14).

2. Restoration (10:6b)

⁶“I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back because I have compassion on them, and they shall be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them.

The second critical aspect of salvation described in verse 6 is *restoration from rejection*. Zechariah says: *I will bring them back ... and they shall be as though I had not rejected them*. The Hebrew word rendered *I will bring them back* actually contains two separate, but related ideas: “to bring back” and “to make dwell.” Thus, the meaning is closer to “I will restore them back in the land to dwell safely” (cp. Jer. 32:27).

The LORD used the family of the prophet Hosea to demonstrate His rejection of the northern kingdom for their sins of idolatry and apostasy. God told Hosea to marry the prostitute Gomer. Over the course of time, Gomer bore three children of uncertain patrimony, to whom Hosea gave highly symbolic names. The first child, a boy, was named Jezreel, which means “God scatters.”

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This scattering could happen in one of two ways: a dispersion leading to destruction, or a sowing or planting intended for growth and stability. In the context of the birth of Gomer's son, this name was a warning that Israel would be soon be scattered in judgment for the blood King Jehu spilt at Jezreel in massacring the house of Ahab. The second child was a girl named Lo-Ruhamah, which means "No Mercy." God promised to have no mercy on Israel, although He would continue for a time to have mercy on Judah. The third child was also a son, named Lo-Ammi, or "Not My People":

⁸When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. ⁹And the Lord said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God" (Hosea 1:8-9).

Because Israel had rejected the LORD as their covenant God, He announced through the birth of Hosea's children that He was rejecting them. Shortly after the end of Hosea's ministry, the enacted parable of his children's names came to pass: God rejected Israel as His people, had no mercy on them, and scattered them throughout the Assyrian empire.

Later, God exiled the people of Judah to Babylon. They had been banished from the promised land and cut off from true worship in God's house in Jerusalem. Although God's covenant presence was still with the remnant of Judah in Babylon during their exile, they keenly felt the loss of their homeland, their way of life, and most of all, their access to God's holy temple:

¹By the waters of Babylon,
there we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion....
⁴How shall we sing the Lord's song
in a foreign land?
⁵If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand forget its skill!
⁶Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy! (Psalm 137:1, 4-6).

What a tragic story! Both the house of Israel and the house of Judah were judged, cut off, and scattered. But God was not done with His people. Indeed, the prophet Hosea had a further word for Israel, this time of hope for those dispersed in judgment:

²¹"And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD,
I will answer the heavens,
and they shall answer the earth,
²²and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer Jezreel,
²³and I will sow her for myself in the land.
And I will have mercy on No Mercy,
and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people';
and he shall say, 'You are my God'" (Hosea 2:21-23).

God promised to change the meaning of Jezreel from "scattering for destruction" to "sowing in stability." Further, He reversed the curse He placed on Israel, so that they once again would

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receive mercy and be His people. “The people were restored not merely to the land, not merely to freedom, but restored to God, to His presence, and His wonderful blessing” (Phillips, p. 234). Zechariah’s prophecy of restoration and reversal of rejection echoes the earlier story of Hosea. It is a beautiful portrait of what happens to sinners alienated from God; they are restored or reconciled by the blood of Christ:

²¹And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²²he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him (Colossians 1:21-22).

In fact, the apostle Peter appropriates the restoration theme of Hosea (and Zechariah) in his first epistle addressed to Christians dispersed throughout the nations of the world:

⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10).

3. Sovereign Grace (10:6c)

⁶*“I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back because I have compassion on them, and they shall be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them.*

The first two concepts of salvation, *deliverance from bondage* and *restoration from rejection*, are made possible by the third: *God’s sovereign grace*. Zechariah explains the reason for salvation: *because I have compassion on them ... for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them*. Ultimately, salvation is rooted in the nature, character, and decree of God. It is by His compassion and sovereign grace that elects a people to Himself. It is not our merit, our potential, our response to His overtures, or any other feature inherent in us that is the cause of our salvation. “The reason or cause for our salvation cannot be found in us, so it will have to come from God. This is what Zechariah proclaims, that salvation is based not on something in the sinner, not on something meritorious or lovely in the ones held captive, but on something in God” (Phillips, p. 235). The LORD made His sovereign grace perfectly clear to Israel in the wilderness:

⁶For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:6-8).

The same principle of salvation through God’s sovereign grace is expounded in the New Testament, perhaps most clearly by the apostle Paul:

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

4. Lasting Joy (10:7)

⁷Then Ephraim shall become like a mighty warrior, and their hearts shall be glad as with wine. Their children shall see it and be glad; their hearts shall rejoice in the LORD.

The final feature of salvation described by Zechariah is in verse 7: *lasting joy in the LORD*. The salvation that Ephraim enjoys leads to their strengthening and joy. Indeed, the joy of salvation in and of itself is a source of strength: “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). “Just as Judah will become *like mighty men* (v. 5), so will Ephraim be *like a mighty warrior* and find conscious delight in such strength” (Baldwin, p. 175). Again, this close connection between the two disparate, former Jewish kingdoms is a reminder that the promises of God are not limited to only a portion of His people, but that the entire household of faith, composed of the church of Jesus Christ, is the recipient of the LORD’s grace.

The second half of verse 7 characterizes the joy that comes with the assurance of salvation. *Their hearts shall be glad as wine* echoes a similar phrase in 9:14: *and they shall drink and roar as if drunk with wine*. The last phrase, *their hearts shall rejoice in the LORD*, recalls the rejoicing of the daughter of Zion and daughter of Jerusalem at the advent of her Messiah (9:9). The joy of salvation is not restricted to individuals; entire families will rejoice: *their children shall see it and be glad*. Phillips summarizes:

Conventional wisdom has it that Christianity is a drag on any joy in life. But our passage assures us that the opposite is true.... What joyous horizons await the man or woman who is reconciled to God, who knows the reality of His favor and His peace within, who sees the smile on His face and His protective hands guiding His beloved child! The truth is that sin results in misery, but salvation brings us out of misery into true joy, delivering us *from* sin’s reign and delivering us *to* the God of all grace, whose light shines in our hearts (Phillips, p. 235).

Because our salvation is deliverance from bondage to sin, restoration from rejection and reconciliation with God, and is guaranteed by God’s sovereign grace, we can and should celebrate with lasting joy according to the apostle Paul’s exhortation: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice” (Phil. 4:4; cp. Phil. 3:1; Ps. 97:12).

B. Method of Salvation (10:8-9)

If verses 6&7 describe the means of salvation, then verses 8&9 contain the method of salvation. The best way to see this is to take verse 9 first, then consider verse 8.

1. Scattered (10:9)

⁹Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me, and with their children they shall live and return.

Verse 9 acknowledges that God had scattered Ephraim among the nations, which historically occurred in their deportation from Samaria by their Assyrian conquerors in 722 BC. The same was true of the house of Judah, when they were taken captive by Babylon in 586 BC. Although this occurred as judgment for their past sins, there is a hint of a deeper, hidden divine purpose in the diaspora of the Jews. The Hebrew word translated here as “scattered” literally means “planted” or “sown,” as seed that is strewn on the ground. “And like seed long buried in the

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dust, they are awaiting the time of germination” (Moore, p. 246). The prophet Jeremiah spoke in similar terms:

²⁷Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. ²⁸And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring harm, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the Lord (Jeremiah 31:27-28; cp. Hosea 2:23).

Phillips explains the significance of this double meaning of scattered/sown:

This is a marvelous example of God redeeming the sin of His people. Though He scattered them in judgment, because of His grace He makes this dispersal a thing of blessing, a planting of His own among the peoples for a far greater salvation. Calvin explains, “For the Jews would dwell everywhere, and be God’s seed, and thus be made to produce abundant fruit.... Thus the punishment of exile...was the means of opening the door for the gospel; and God thus scattered His seed here and there, that it might in due time produce fruit beyond the expectation of all” (Phillips, p. 237).

The promise of verse 9 came to fruition in the advent of Jesus Christ and the rapid spread of the gospel during the first century. Jews were scattered throughout the Roman empire, having dwelt away from their homeland for centuries. The apostle Paul is a good example; he was born in the city of Tarsus, in the Roman province of Cilicia (Acts 21:30), which is located in modern day Turkey. Further, he was both a Roman citizen and citizen of Tarsus, indicating that his family likely had live in Cilicia for generations. However, these scattered Jews never forgot their roots, and thus we see apostles sharing the gospel in Jerusalem to Jewish pilgrims from all over the world on the Day of Pentecost,:

⁸“And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:8-11).

Many of those visiting Jews heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and were converted to Christianity (Acts 2:41). When they went back to their homes, they spread the gospel to communities throughout the world. Jews of the diaspora were critical to the missionary strategy of Paul, who would first visit Jewish synagogues in every city he visited before going to the wider Gentile population. In the perfect providence of God, those whom He scattered/planted *in far countries* remained faithful, remembered the LORD and their spiritual roots, and were the fertile soil in which the gospel grew and spread.

Entire families were converted, and while they may not have physically relocated to Palestine, they found new life and restoration in Christ, fulfilling the promise: *and with their children they shall live and return*. One such New Testament example of generational conversion is Timothy, who along with his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois were Christians from Lystra in Galatia (2 Tim. 1:5; Acts 16:1).

From this verse, we can perceive the general principle that God has planted His elect throughout the nations. As we have previously seen in our studies of Zechariah, His church is not confined to one ethnic group or geographical location; it is composed of people from every tribe, people,

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language, and nation (Rev. 5:9; 7:9). In the course of time, He will cause them to remember Him, and to live and be restored in true righteousness and holiness through Jesus Christ.

2. Gathered (10:8)

a) Called (10:8a)

⁸“I will whistle for them and gather them in...

Having scattered His people through the nations, God will inevitably *gather them in*. The mission of the church is to ingather the elect throughout the whole world:

¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

The prophet uses an unusual image to picture this ingathering: *I will whistle for them*. The KJV translates this phrase as “I will hiss for them.” The Hebrew word is used both of the apiarist who hisses at his bees to attract the swarm, or of the shepherd who calls his sheep by whistling a familiar signal to them (cp. Jdg. 5:16). Given the previous imagery of shepherds in 9:16 and 10:2-3, Zechariah likely wants us to envision Messiah as the Good Shepherd, calling His flock. “This is just how Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd. The sheep listen to His voice. In this way, He calls His own sheep out of both the fold of Israel and out of all the folds of the world” (Phillips, pp. 238-239):

¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd (John 10:14-16).

The whistling of God to gather in His flock is an illustration of the doctrine of *effectual calling*. WCF Q&A 31 says that “effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.” Those whom the LORD has predestined and elected to salvation, He will effectually call to Himself. Our calling and coming is entirely God’s work; it is not of our volition, but of His effective will.

b) Redeemed (10:8b)

...for I have redeemed them...

Those whom God has effectually called will also inevitably be *redeemed* through the blood of Jesus Christ. The word “redeem” means “to ransom” or “to buy back with a price.” In verse 6, the concept of restoration from rejection was described as a facet of salvation. But the one who is saved needs more than just simple restoration; he needs to be redeemed, the guilt of sin must be expiated before reconciliation can be made. Every single human being is a sinner, in rebellion against God and justly deserving His wrath and displeasure. The LORD cannot ignore the righteous demands of the law and simply waive sin’s penalty. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), and that price must be paid to satisfy God’s justice.

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However, in God’s infinite wisdom, He did not leave us to pay that price. Instead, He sent the Redeemer, His only begotten Son, to satisfy sin’s debt on our behalf. Jesus Christ could die in the place of sinners because He Himself lived a perfect life—since He never sinned, His righteousness could be imputed to us. The apostle Paul describes how Jesus redeems us by taking upon Himself the penalty of sin, and how His righteousness is then credited to our account:

¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— ¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:13-14).

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

c) *Multiplied (10:8c)*

...and they shall be as many as they were before.

Those of His scattered elect who come into the kingdom via effectual calling and redemption will represent a great and numerous host. *They shall be as many as they were before* is more literally translated in the KJV as “they shall increase as they have increased.” This phrase “is meant to remind us of God’s wonderful and gracious dealings with them during the last days of their sojourn in Egypt, where ‘the children of Israel were fruitful’ because of the blessings of Jehovah upon them” (Baron, p. 364) (cp. Ex. 1:7, 12; Dt. 26:5).

God is not stingy in the outpouring of His saving grace. He “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:4). Although we know that salvation is not universal, we all too often think that it is infrequent and restricted in scope. The truth is that God is able to save to the uttermost all those whom He chooses, and He is generous with bestowing His free gift of salvation to many. “It does seem that during the period of the Maccabees, Galilee again became populous. But that foreshadowed the blessing given to the church in New Testament times when there is a vast influx from all nations into the people of God (Is. 49:19-21; 54:1-3; Rev. 7:9)” (Mackay, p. 204).

The method of God’s salvation described by Zechariah therefore includes the scattering of His predestined elect throughout the nations followed by a gathering in of those saints at the right time through effectual calling and redemption, in order to bring a great multitude of believers into the kingdom of heaven. This has been happening throughout the history of the church, and will reach its fullest extent at the culmination of this age, when Christ returns to usher in the eternal state of glory.

C. Model of Salvation (10:10-12)

1. A New Exodus (10:10-11)

¹⁰*I will bring them home from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria, and I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon, till there is no room for them. ¹¹He shall pass through the sea of troubles and strike down the waves of the sea, and all the depths of the Nile shall be dried up. The pride of Assyria shall be laid low, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart.*

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In the final verses of this chapter, Zechariah uses figurative language to describe our salvation by the LORD in terms of a second or new exodus. Indeed, the exodus of Israel from Egypt is the great Old Testament pattern or model of salvation and is a type of the spiritual deliverance that all experience in Christ. “Verses 10 and 11 belong together, as the chiasmic arrangement of Egypt, Assyria, at the beginning and Assyria, Egypt at the end, shows” (Baldwin, p. 176).

It seems clear from the context that Zechariah intends his statements of return from Egypt and Assyria to be metaphorical, rather than historical. Egypt, of course, was the ancient enemy of Israel located to their south, from whom God redeemed them “with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment” (Ex. 6:6). But their exodus from Egypt was a historical fact of the past, not a present need or future possibility. Assyria, the northern empire that had scattered Ephraim, the northern kingdom of Israel, was in turn conquered by Babylon and Medo-Persia before the days of Zechariah and no longer existed as a nation. Thus, the combination of Egypt and Assyria symbolizes the domination of God’s people by foreign nations, wherever and whenever that may occur. “The LORD assures the people of Zechariah’s day that He will bring them out of every situation in which they are oppressed and enslaved by worldly powers. Ultimately this leads to that gathering of the church of all ages which joins in singing the song of Moses which is also the song of the Lamb (Rev. 15:3)” (Mackay, pp. 204-205).

In the same fashion, the use of “Gilead” and “Lebanon” as the lands receiving those restored from captivity is meant to be symbolic of the great number of those saved by Jesus Christ. Gilead was across the Jordan River and part of the land allotted to tribes in the northern kingdom of Israel. Lebanon was part of the original inheritance of Israel (cp. Dt. 1:7-8), although the Jews never actually possessed it. These areas greatly expanded the land of Palestine settled by the Israelites, and yet Zechariah says that God will fill up these territories with His redeemed *till there is no room for them*. This hyperbolic language builds on and extends what Zechariah previously said in verse 8, *they shall be as many as they were before*.

The figurative language of verse 11 builds on the exodus imagery of passing through the Red Sea. God demonstrated His power in striking down the waves of the Red Sea and allowing the Israelites to cross on dry land. Forty years later, He did the same thing, drying up the Jordan River so that the children of Israel could enter into the promised land without getting their feet wet. The God who delivered His people with such glorious manifestations of power can likewise remove all obstacles to save them to the uttermost.

Although most translations say *all the depths of the Nile shall be dried up*, the Hebrew literally is “river”; the identification of that river as “the Nile” is a translator’s choice, usually driven by its close identification with the nation of Egypt. However, it could also be the Tigris (associated with Assyria), or the Jordan, which was the historical river that God dried up to initiate the conquest of Canaan. In the final analysis, the identification of the “river” is not the important point. Rather, it the focus is on the Lord who goes before His people (like the pillar of cloud/fire; Ex. 13:21-22) to guide them safely to their heavenly destination.

Verse 11 ends with a pronouncement of judgment upon the symbolic enemies of God’s people: *the pride of Assyria shall be laid low, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart*. Bentley summarizes well: “This speaks of those haughty nations who put great store by their own power and counted God’s people as nothing. The failure of Egypt’s power is described as the loss of her scepter. Two outstanding mighty nations sink into nothing when they seek to oppose the delivery of God’s people – an everlasting truth concerning all who oppose the Almighty” (Bentley, p. 186).

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Phillips summarizes the application of verses 10 and 11 well:

The New Testament frequently employs the exodus as a model for salvation in Jesus Christ. It is for this reason, for instance, that Jesus was sacrificed as the Passover Lamb [cp. 1 Cor. 5:7], connecting His salvation to the exodus of old. Like the ancient Israelites, we are saved and sent forth on our journey to freedom. We are delivered from the house of bondage that is sin, just as Israel was delivered from slavery in Egypt, and like them, we are headed for a promised land, to which we journey as pilgrims in this world. Like Israel then, we now sojourn through the wilderness in a present time of testing. This being the case, this passage points us to what we most need to know, that once we have begun this difficult journey of faith in Christ, God will preserve us through every danger. This is the point: though we pass through the sea of trouble, God will subdue the waves and make level paths before our feet (Phillips, p. 241).

2. Strength in the LORD (10:12)

¹²*I will make them strong in the LORD, and they shall walk in his name,*” declares the LORD.

In the final verse of the chapter are the results of our salvation through Jesus Christ. First, the LORD declares, *I will make them strong in the LORD*, echoing the promise of strength that opened this section in verse 6. Salvation strengthens us and enables us to engage in spiritual warfare:

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:10-12).

Secondly, salvation empowers us to *walk in His name*. This walk is the entirety of the Christian lifestyle, and embraces our sanctification. He has placed His name, the name of “Christ” upon us, and we are to live and act according to His revealed Word.

Conclusion and Application

To summarize, the theme of Zechariah 10:6-12 can be stated as follows: *from the scattered nations, God will gather a people to Himself, redeeming and restoring them in strength to walk in His name*. Indeed, as the prophet Zechariah portrays, our salvation in Christ is a new exodus; we have been delivered from sin and restored to covenant relationship with God, through His sovereign grace alone.

Perhaps the most succinct summary of God’s salvific work in the exodus is provided in the message that God gives to Israel through Moses at their darkest hour. Moses had stood before Pharaoh and demanded that he let the children of Israel go to serve the LORD in the wilderness. Pharaoh rejected this demand, and in retaliation, he required the Israelite slaves to produce their existing quota of bricks, only without any supplied straw. This extra burden of gathering the straw increased the affliction of the Israelites to their breaking point. It was in this context of the sever oppression of His people that God said:

⁶Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. ⁷I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God,

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who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD” (Exodus 6:6-8).

This passage is a grand picture of salvation, including deliverance from oppression, redemption from slavery, adoption as His people, and restoration to their own land. The seven promises of God’s pronouncement all begin with “I will.” It is God who takes the initiative, it is God who provides the deliverance, it is God who pays the ransom, it is God who choose and adopts His people, and it is God who restores them to the promised land. Salvation from first to last is from God alone. All the children of Israel needed to do was “fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD” (Ex. 14:13).

The same emphasis on the sovereignty of God in our salvation is present in Zechariah 10:6-12. Notice how many times God says, “I will”:

- *I will strengthen the house of Judah (10:6);*
- *I will save the house of Joseph (10:6);*
- *I will bring them back because I have compassion on them (10:6);*
- *I will answer them (10:6);*
- *I will whistle for them and gather them in (10:8);*
- *I will bring them home from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria (10:10);*
- *I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon (10:11);*
- *I will make them strong in the LORD (10:12).*

In conclusion, Phillips notes:

The passage begins with “I will,” but it ends with “they will”: “they shall walk in His name, declares the LORD” (10:12). This is the way salvation works: those who are called will walk in the name and strength of the Lord because He wills it that we should. What a glorious salvation this is! Because of the promise of a mighty God, those who trust in Christ may know the power and joy of a new life, a new hope, and a new strength, all to the glory of His name (Phillips, p. 242).

For next time: Read Zechariah 11:1-17.