

## XXIV. Strike the Shepherd

May 17, 2020 Zechariah 13:7-9

**Theme:** By taking upon Himself the penalty of our sin, Jesus Christ, the God-man, redeems and refines His covenant people according to the foreordained will of God.

**Aim:** To endure the refining fire of God as He sanctifies us into His holy people.

**Key Verses:** <sup>7</sup>“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,” <sup>8</sup>declares the LORD of hosts. “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones” (Zechariah 13:8).

### *Review*

Last week, we looked at the fountain of cleansing described in Zechariah 13:1-6. Zechariah’s fountain provides us a wonderful metaphor for the atonement accomplished by Jesus Christ, which can be summarized as follows: *The blood of Jesus expiates our sins, removing our guilt, cleansing us from sin, and granting us forgiveness; His sacrifice also propitiates or turns away the wrath of God against our sins, reconciling us to Himself.*

First, it accomplishes *expiation*, because it removes both the defilement of sin and the impurity that it causes. It is exactly what the guilty conscience needs. The one who truly mourns their sin and is grieved by the Messiah dying on the cross for sin’s penalty is also acutely aware of their own guilt and shame that nailed the Savior to that tree. What they need is true forgiveness and a pardon from sin that cleanses the conscience and removes all guilt.

The atonement of Jesus also provides *propitiation*, satisfying or turning away the wrath of God from us and making Him favorably inclined toward us. The end result of propitiation is reconciliation with God, being brought near to His presence and living at peace with Him.

Having described our justification in terms of the fountain of cleansing, Zechariah goes on to describe its sanctifying effect in our lives in a series of pictures concerning the removal of idolatry and false prophecy from the covenant community. Justification leads to sanctification, which ultimately results in glorification, the complete removal of sin and impurity forever.

### *Introduction*

Zechariah is a thoroughly messianic book. I have identified the overall theme of the book of Zechariah as, “Behold the Branch,” in reference the distinct messianic overtones that flow through the entire prophecy. Our study in the second half of Zechariah’s message has been overflowing with images of Jesus Christ, although the wording of this theme actually comes from two passages in the first portion of the prophet’s writing. Zechariah calls the promised Messiah “the Branch” twice in chapters 3 and 6:

<sup>8</sup>“Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch. <sup>9</sup>For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. <sup>10</sup>In that day, declares the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree” (Zechariah 3:8-10) .

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<sup>11</sup>“Take from them silver and gold, and make a crown, and set it on the head of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. <sup>12</sup>And say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. <sup>13</sup>It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both”’ (Zechariah 6:11-13).

Zechariah is not the first prophet to use the metaphor of “the Branch” to describe the Messiah. This title shows up four other times outside of Zechariah: it is used twice by Isaiah (Is. 4:2; 11:1-4) and twice by Jeremiah (Jer. 23:5-6; 33:14-18). Both Isaiah and Jeremiah describe “the Branch” as a Davidic king who will come and rule in righteousness and execute judgment upon the earth.

A full exposition of these verses is beyond the scope of this lesson; I refer you to my earlier treatment on Zechariah chapters 1-6 for a fuller discussion. However, even in summary fashion, these two “Branch” passages from Zechariah are exploding with richness in describing the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is the main subject of all the Holy Scriptures. In brief, the Messiah, the Branch:

- is a king, who wears a royal crown and sits on a throne of peace.
- is a priest, who removes iniquity in a single day.
- is a man who is a servant, and yet He is entirely self-sufficient and clothed in divine majesty and glory.
- builds the holy temple of God, which is the church, the people of the LORD.
- established peace in eternity past with God and secures it in history and for all eternity future.

Jesus Christ is the everlasting and infinite God, who from eternity past counseled with the Father to establish peace between God and man. He accomplished this reconciliation through His work as priest, offering Himself up once and for all as the perfect sacrifice, paying for the sins of all the elect upon the cross. Through His life, death, and resurrection, He has secured salvation for all who trust in Him, thus building up His eternal temple, the universal church composed of individual Christians. He has ascended back to heaven, where He now reigns both as king and “a priest on His throne,” ruling the Creation and interceding for His people. “Behold the Branch!”

In our studies in the latter half of Zechariah, we have thus far encountered five additional messianic prophecies about the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, Zechariah’s version of *Pictures at an Exhibition*. The first was in chapter 9, when we beheld our coming King:

<sup>9</sup>Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold, your king is coming to you;  
righteous and having salvation is he,  
humble and mounted on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.  
<sup>10</sup>I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim

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and the war horse from Jerusalem;  
and the battle bow shall be cut off,  
and he shall speak peace to the nations;  
his rule shall be from sea to sea,  
and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9-10).

This prophecy comes immediately after the passage which describes the progress through the lands of the eastern Mediterranean of the Greek king, Alexander (9:1-8). As Alexander the Great passed through the land, he was greeted with fear and anguish, since death and destruction followed in his wake. God encamped around the holy city of Jerusalem and protected His people miraculously from the onslaught of the conqueror. The contrasting picture of the messianic king that follows in 9:9-10 is a counterpoint to the proud Gentile monarch, whose attempts at world conquest were cut short by his untimely death. The Messiah is gentle and lowly; his steed is the humble donkey's colt, not the war stallion. He conquers hearts, not kingdoms; and His timely death doesn't end His kingdom, but ensures its eternal dominion.

The second messianic portrayal is in chapter 10, where Zechariah introduces the metaphor of the shepherd leader and condemns those wicked shepherds of Israel who consistently led the flock of God's people astray. Because the LORD of hosts cares for His flock, He will give them a Shepherd-King who will truly care for them. This announcement comes in the form of a series of messianic metaphors:

From him shall come the cornerstone,  
from him the tent peg,  
from him the battle bow,  
from him every ruler—all of them together (Zechariah 10:4).

Jesus Christ is the cornerstone, the foundation upon which the strength and security of the church rests. He is also the tent peg, the one who bears all our burdens and shares with us all His glory. Third, He is the battle bow, the warrior who protects His people from all harm. And finally, He is the ultimate ruler, the Lord of lords and King of kings.

In chapter 11 of Zechariah's prophecy, we have the third depiction, which is an extended enacted parable of the Good Shepherd. Zechariah plays the part of the shepherd who cares for the flock, but he was despised and rejected by men (cp. Is. 53:3a). Although Jesus is the Messiah, the Branch, the coming King, the cornerstone, and the Good Shepherd anticipated by Zechariah and the other Old Testament prophets, His own did not receive Him (cp. Jn. 1:11). The betrayal of Jesus Christ by Judas Iscariot is graphically predicted in these words spoken by Zechariah:

<sup>12</sup>Then I said to them, "If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them." And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. <sup>13</sup>Then the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter (Zechariah 11:12-13).

Fourth, in Zechariah 12:10, we have a beautiful illustration of the salvation that God brings His people through the work of Messiah. In this verse, the people of God realize what their rejection and sin has led to—the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross for the sins of His people:

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“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn” (Zechariah 12:10).

Jesus was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities; He bore the chastisement for our sin upon His body, and by His stripes we have been healed from our sinful state (cp. Is. 53:5). What a different picture we get of the Branch in this latter portion of Zechariah’s prophecy!

Finally, in the previous lesson we saw the fountain of cleansing opened up for those who have faith in Jesus, whose sins are washed away and have their guilt removed by the blood of Christ:

On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness (Zechariah 13:1).

Putting these five messianic prophecies together from the latter part of Zechariah’s book gives us the following portrait. Our Messiah is a righteous and holy king who brings salvation to His people. He will build them up in safety and security and rule over them with gentleness as a shepherd cares for his flock. However, in an ironic twist that would be totally incomprehensible without God’s revelation and His Holy Spirit to guide us, His kingdom comes, not through acclamation or strength or arms, but through betrayal and rejection by the very people He came to save. He is pierced and murdered unjustly, but in that moment of seeming defeat, the true victory of Messiah is revealed. He saves us, not through military might, but by sacrificial atonement. He expiates the guilt of our sins and propitiates the wrath of God through the fountain of His shed blood, and those that truly see Him will mourn for their sins and experience repentance and salvation. He can accomplish the deliverance of His people because He is not simply man, but is also God Almighty, the One whom we have pierced.

But Zechariah has not yet exhausted his messianic treatment of the atonement. In the passage before us today, we have another likeness of the Messiah to display in the gallery, another insight into the mystery of salvation designed by our Lord. In chapter 11, the rejection of the Good Shepherd was by the sheep, and in chapter 12, they looked upon him whom *they* pierced. In those passages, Zechariah quite clearly lays the responsibility for the death of Jesus at the hands of mankind.

However, in Zechariah 13:7, we see the full truth of the matter: God is the one who raised the sword against His own Son, striking the Shepherd on behalf of the sheep. Furthermore, Zechariah extends our understanding of the unique dual nature of the Savior. Jesus is 100% man, but He is also 100% God. It is in His incarnation as the God-man that the Messiah comes into history to save a people for Himself and sanctify them in the truth of His word. Thus, the theme of Zechariah 13:7-9 can be summarized as follows: *By taking upon Himself the penalty of our sin, Jesus Christ, the God-man, redeems and refines His covenant people according to the foreordained will of God.*

### A. Stricken Shepherd (Zechariah 13:7a)

<sup>7</sup>“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd,  
against the man who stands next to me,”  
declares the LORD of hosts.

### 1. Awake, O Sword

At first glance, the location of the poem in verses 7-9 of Zechariah 13 seems to be out of place. Not only is the prophet returning to the metaphor of the Shepherd, which was the main motif of chapter 11, but the predicted event of striking the Messiah also occurs chronologically before His execution and death on the cross, which have already been prophesied in the previous messianic passages. Indeed, the position of this passage has vexed many translators and commentators in the past, who have attempted to remediate the perceived problem by relocating it back in chapter 11, in conjunction with the enacted parable of the Good Shepherd. However, there is no valid reason to assume that this poem is misplaced at all.

While the treatment of the Messiah in verse 7 may be out of historical order with the other messianic prophecies, theologically, its location makes perfect sense. Just as the prophecy of the coming Messiah-King in 9:9-10 followed as a counterpoint to the description of Alexander the Great, so the prediction of the true Messiah-Shepherd in 13:7 being struck by the sword provides a stark contrast to the picture of the false prophet who lied by saying he received his scars in the house of his friends (13:6). “He was the true prophet, and much more than a prophet, but He also was ‘wounded,’ yea, ‘smitten’ even unto death, in the house of His friends (i.e., ‘His own’ nation), who in their blind and ungodly zeal even thought that they rendered God a service in slaying the Prince of Life” (Baron, p. 474).

The poem begins with an evocative call: *Awake, O sword*. The inanimate object is addressed directly, as if to arouse it from hibernation. The sword is an instrument of war and of death (cp. Gen. 3:24; Ex 5:3; Ps. 17:13; Est. 9:5; Hos. 13:16; etc.). But more importantly, the sword is also the symbol of judicial authority. The apostle Paul teaches that governments derive their power of the sword (i.e., capital punishment) to mete out justice to evil doers from God:

<sup>1</sup>Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup>Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup>For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, <sup>4</sup>for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer (Romans 13:1-4).

The sword of justice, which had been quiescent in its scabbard, is suddenly called forth into action. Notice who calls the sword out of its slumber: *declares the LORD of hosts*. It is the LORD of hosts who calls for the sleeping sword to awaken. It is God Himself who is stirring up the instrument of His justice.

### 2. Against My Shepherd

But against whom has the LORD raised His judicial arm to strike down with the sword? “Not, in this instance, upon the wicked and the ungodly, but, mystery of mysteries! Upon Him who is not only absolutely innocent and holy, but who stands in the nearest and closest relationship to Jehovah” (Baron, p. 475). Unexpectedly, out of left field, we learn that God awakens the sword of His justice *against my shepherd*, the one whom He appoints over His people:

<sup>23</sup>And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd (Ezekiel 34:23).

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Following the prophet Ezekiel's lead, Zechariah has employed this shepherd metaphor on several occasions already to describe the attention with which Messiah takes care of the flock of His people, despite their rejection of Him. Indeed, Jesus identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd who "lays down His life for the sheep" (Jn. 10:11).

As we have previously seen in our studies in Zechariah, the death of the Savior provided a fountain of cleansing for defiled sinners (12:10). It was our sins which pierced Him upon the tree. But Zechariah here shows us an even deeper truth. God is not calling for the sword to fall on rebellious sinners, but rather on the One who was despised by them. Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd of Israel, is the object of the stroke of God's judicial wrath; it is God's arm that wielded the sword that nailed Him to the cross. Yes, He worked providentially through the Jews who delivered Him up to the Romans, but it was the foreordained will of God from all eternity past which led to the Savior's sacrifice, as the Scriptures teach:

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him;  
he has put him to grief (Isaiah 53:10a).

<sup>10</sup>So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" <sup>11</sup>Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin" (John 19:10-11).

<sup>22</sup>"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—<sup>23</sup>this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:22-23; cp. 4:28).

Thomas Kelly beautifully captures the paradox of Jesus being killed by men under the divine providence of God the Father in the second verse of the great hymn *Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted*, based upon Isaiah 53:

Tell me, ye who hear him groaning,  
was there ever grief like his?  
Friends thro' fear his cause disowning,  
foes insulting his distress;  
many hands were raised to wound him,  
none would interpose to save;  
but the deepest stroke that pierced him  
was the stroke that Justice gave.

In theology, this arrangement of God's providence is sometimes called "the covenant of redemption," where God the Son voluntarily and perfectly submitted to the will of God the Father. In the eternal council of the Godhead, Jesus became the Mediator between God and man in order to secure salvation for the elect through the blood of a sinless substitute. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* in chapter 8, of *Christ the Mediator*, explains this doctrine more fully:

1. *It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Savior of his church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world: unto*

whom he did from all eternity give a people, to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified....

4. *This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake; which that he might discharge, he was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfill it; endured most grievous torments immediately in his soul, and most painful sufferings in his body; was crucified, and died, was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. On the third day he arose from the dead, with the same body in which he suffered, with which also he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of his Father, making intercession, and shall return, to judge men and angels, at the end of the world.*
5. *The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.*

Before proceeding any further, there are at three reflections from the first part of 13:7 that should be stressed. First, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross in place of our sins was a *judicial* matter. God, in His love for sinners, cannot simply set aside His justice. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23); the debt must be paid. “He endured the penalty of that law whose penal power was symbolized by this sword of divine wrath. The sheep had deserved the blow, but the shepherd bares His own bosom to the sword, and is wounded for the sins of His people, and bears those sins in His own body on the tree” (Moore, p. 294). The atonement which satisfies God’s wrath and secures our justification is a matter of divine justice.

In the second place, the atonement of Christ demonstrated how *merciful* God is to His elect. Having determined that death was the penalty for sin, He freely chose to take that penalty upon Himself so that we would be spared and granted eternal life. The prayers of our Lord Jesus demonstrate both His willing obedience and the cost of such a course of action:

<sup>5</sup>Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,  
but a body have you prepared for me;

<sup>6</sup>in burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you have taken no pleasure.

<sup>7</sup>Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,  
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book’” (Hebrews 10:5-7; cp. Psalm 40:5-7).

“I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do” (John 17:4).

And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).

Thirdly, in light of both the justice and the mercy of Messiah’s vicarious atonement, we should have *confidence* in the sufficiency and efficacy of our salvation. The sacrifice of Christ was most certainly not in vain. “Jesus’ death is sure of achieving its promised end, and that God will certainly accept His sacrifice for our reconciliation. It was to this end that the Father sent the Son with a work to be done. God is not reluctant to our salvation; the holy Judge of all the

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universe is not forced to accept us against His wishes. Rather, in the way most costly to Himself, He removed the barrier between us and Him” (Phillips, p. 294).

### 3. Against the Man Who Stands Next to Me

The next phrase in verse 7 is also fraught with significance: *against the man who stands next to me*. Hebrew poetry is often characterized by parallel couplets where the thought of the first line is repeated, albeit in different words, in the second. We see that feature here, as the phrase *against my shepherd* is matched by the corresponding line, *against the man who stands next to me*.

The first point to notice here is that “my shepherd,” is also a “man,” that is, a human being. The Messiah is a man of flesh and blood. While that might seem obvious, it is also important, especially in relation to what follows. This is not just any “man,” but the man *who stands next to me*, i.e., a close colleague of the LORD of hosts. The Hebrew phrase used here has been variously translated as: “who is close to me” (NIV); “that is my fellow” (KJV); “who is My Companion” (NKJV); “My Associate” (NASB).

The only other place in the Old Testament where this same Hebrew word is found is in the book of Leviticus, where it is used some eleven times, for example:

If anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against the Lord by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor (Leviticus 6:2).

You shall pay your neighbor according to the number of years after the jubilee, and he shall sell to you according to the number of years for crops (Leviticus 25:15).

The ESV translates this Hebrew word in Leviticus as “neighbor,” but it carries a deeper connotation of one in closest relationship to another, and can be used as a synonym for a blood relation such as a brother. “The...description of the Shepherd in this passage as ‘the man who is my Fellow’ or ‘my nearest one’—implies much more than mere *appointment* to this office by Jehovah. More also than mere ‘unity or community of vocation,’ or that he is so styled because he had to feed the flock *like* Jehovah, and as His representative” (Baron, p. 476).

The Messiah-Shepherd is not only a man, but He is also God’s neighbor, His kin, His closest associate. Of what man can this be true? Indeed, no mere human being, created in God’s image, but fallen into a state of sin and misery, could ever hope to be elevated to such lofty status on his own merit. Abraham reached the lofty status of God’s “friend,” (Is. 41:8; James 2:23), and beloved king David was a “man after God’s own heart” (cp. 1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22), but both of these descriptions are a far cry from standing next to the LORD. “The idea of nearest one (or fellow) involves not only similarity in vocation, but community of physical or spiritual descent, according to which he whom God calls His neighbor cannot be a mere man, but can only be one who participates in the Divine nature, or is essentially Divine. The Shepherd of Jehovah, whom the sword is to smite, is therefore no other than the Messiah, who is also identified with Jehovah in 12:10; or the Good Shepherd, who says of Himself, ‘I and My Father are one’ (Jn. 10:30)” (Baron, p. 477). Here in Zechariah 13:7 we thus have one of the clearest statements of the divinity of the Messiah that is found in the Old Testament.

Indeed, this statement in Zechariah’s prophecy, *the man who stands close to me*, speaks to both the human and divine natures of the Good Shepherd-King. Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son

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of God (cp. Jn. 3:16), united His divine essence with a human body in His first advent. HE is the God-Man, 100% God and yet 100% human, two natures in one person. This mystery is hinted at in other passages in the Old Testament, for example:

For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to be ruler in Israel,  
whose coming forth is from of old,  
from ancient days (Micah 5:2).

The Lord says to my Lord:  
“Sit at my right hand,  
until I make your enemies your footstool” (Psalm 110:1).

According to Isaiah, the Messiah is both a son who is born and is at the same time “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Micah also foresees the birth of the Messiah; yet the one who is born in Bethlehem springs “from of old, from of ancient days,” i.e., from eternity. Jesus quotes the first verse of Psalm 110 and then asks his interlocutors, “If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” (Mt. 27:45; cp. Mk. 12:37; Lk 20:44).

While the mystery of the dual nature of Messiah is veiled in prophetic passages like these in the Old Testament, this doctrine comes to the clear light of day in the pages of the New Testament. For example, the apostle Paul described this in his beautiful passage on the incarnation in Philippians chapter 2:

<sup>5</sup>Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-7).

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* in chapter 8, of *Christ the Mediator*, explains this doctrine of the two-fold nature of Jesus more fully:

2. *The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.*

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3. *The Lord Jesus, in his human nature thus united to the divine*, was sanctified, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure, having in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell; to the end that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a mediator, and surety. Which office he took not unto himself, but was thereunto called by his Father, who put all power and judgment into his hand, and gave him commandment to execute the same.

Why was the incarnation necessary? Why did God the Son have to be born into the human race? The answer, of course, has to do with God's great plan of redemption. Although He had instituted the vicarious sacrificial system in the Old Testament to teach Israel that blood was required for atonement, the system was clearly inadequate, since, as the writer of Hebrews puts it: "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4).

While animal blood served as a temporary cover for sins until the time of Messiah would come, it was never meant to be the ultimate solution to our sin problem. Only the infinitely valuable life of a human being could ever hope to pay for the eternally heinous sin of one's soul. An angel would not qualify as a representative for man, since they of a wholly different created order, and although powerful, will one day be subservient to the redeemed (cp. 1 Cor. 6:3). But what human could pay for another person's sin with their life, since they were also sinners and were unacceptable before God? The presumptive redeemer would have to die to pay for his own sins in eternity first, leaving no possibility to rescue another.

Only a perfect man, one who is "holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners" (Heb. 7:25), could hope to stand as an acceptable substitute for another man in his state of misery and sin. But all those descended from Adam inherited our first father's original sin, and thus are disqualified from consideration. But Jesus Christ, being born of the mystical union between Mary and the Holy Spirit, does not descend from Adam by ordinary generation. Jesus did not inherit Adam's sin nature; instead, he lived a perfect life of obedience under the Law of God:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

In order to save men, the Messiah had to be a man, to share in the common life of mankind, and to demonstrate through His perfect, sinless life, that He was worthy to be our Substitute:

<sup>14</sup>Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup>and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. <sup>16</sup>For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. <sup>17</sup>Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup>For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:14-18).

However, in order to live a perfect life, He also needed to be perfectly holy and righteous, i.e., divine. Furthermore, it is through the power of His divine nature that His blood is acceptable to the Father as a propitiation for the sins of all the elect. Only a man could pay the debt owned by men; only God had the power and the ability to pay that debt. Therefore, the Messiah had to be both man and God, two natures in one person. Baron explains it well:

We are brought also *to understand* that the doctrine of the twofold nature of the Messiah—the fact that He is Man according to His human nature and, according to His Divine nature “God blessed forever,” is a necessary part of the Divine philosophy of Redemption unfolded in the Scriptures, for it is only a Divine Savior who could redeem man from sin and death; only one in whose person the human and the Divine meet who can be the true Mediator between God and man, in and through whom the broken fellowship between heaven and earth, between the Holy God and fallen man, can be fully restored. Only as man, and one who in all points was tempted even as we are, could He become the compassionate High Priest touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and able with a perfect human sympathy to enter into all our griefs and sorrows; but only as the Holy One, who Himself was pure from sin—the everlasting Son of the Father in whom dwelt “the fullness of the Godhead bodily,” could He effectually succor and deliver us, and *lift us out* of our own innate wretchedness and sin. Therefore, this doctrine of the twofold nature of the Messiah, which to the unbelieving is such an occasion of stumbling, is to the child of God a source of unspeakable comfort, and an occasion for unceasing praise (Baron, p. 478).

### B. Scattered Sheep (Zechariah 13:7b)

*“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered;  
I will turn my hand against the little ones.*

In the first half of verse 7, the Lord of hosts awakens His sword of justice against His shepherd. The sword is now alert, on guard, vigilant, and ready to execute judgment when called upon. That call comes in the second half of verse 7, as the Father continues, *strike the shepherd*, which is reminiscent of Isaiah’s song of the suffering Servant:

<sup>4</sup>Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup>But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities (Isaiah 53:4-5a).

Notice that the sword’s strike against the shepherd incurs collateral damage: *and the sheep will be scattered*. Who does this refer to? Who are the sheep that are scattered when the shepherd is struck? We find a clear answer in the gospels, where Jesus quotes Zechariah to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, shortly before His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane:

<sup>31</sup>Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ <sup>32</sup>But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee” (Matthew 26:31-32; cp. Mk. 14:27-28).

On the night Jesus was betrayed, “all the disciples left him and fled” (Mt. 26:56; cp. Mk. 14:50). This clearly fulfills Zechariah’s prophecy of the scattered sheep, but it probably does not exhaust its meaning. Many commentators see the dispersion of the Jews in the generation that followed 70 AD as a further fulfillment of this prophecy, especially in the light of verse 8. However, Mackay, who consistently applies the Old Testament prophecies of Zechariah to the New

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Testament church, sees in the scattering of the disciples a general principle, in which they are representatives of the latter dispersion of the church. “In the persecution after Stephen’s martyrdom the church was scattered (Acts 8:1, 4), and both James and Peter refer to the church as ‘scattered’ (James 1:1; 1 Pe. 1:1), a condition that continues until the Lord Himself returns (Mackay, p. 250).

Understanding the last line in verse 7 is challenging: *I will turn my hand against the little ones.* From the parallelism in the Hebrew poetry, it seems as if “the sheep” are equated with “the little ones.” Thus, “the little ones” are likely not lambs (i.e., children), but rather members of the covenant community. In fact, Jesus called His disciples much the same thing when He said to them, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Lk. 12:32).

The difficulty lies in understanding what is meant by the phrase *I will turn my hand against* “the little ones.” The most obvious meaning is that God will bring punishment upon them, like a parent spanking a wayward child. That is the clear meaning of this phrase in some other Old Testament passages, e.g.:

I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod,  
and him who holds the scepter from Ashkelon;  
I will turn my hand against Ekron,  
and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish,”  
says the Lord GOD (Amos 1:8; cp. Ps. 81:14; Ez. 38:12).

On the other hand, it is also used in a more positive manner, in terms of loving discipline and care:

I will turn my hand against you  
and will smelt away your dross as with lye  
and remove all your alloy (Isaiah 1:25).

Given the immediate context of this phrase in Zechariah, i.e., the purification of His remnant in verse 9, which is similar in context to the above reference in Isaiah, the most likely meaning of this expression is one of God’s salvation of His people, albeit via testing and chastisement. Certainly that was the experience of all the apostles, and it was also their message. For example, as Paul and Barnabas traveled through Galatia, they were “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). This should be no surprise to the Christian, who, like the apostles, is walking in the footsteps of the suffering Savior.

We should take cheer, however, from Zechariah here, because there is hope hidden behind these words. Although the hand of the Lord may at times seem to be against us, it is always and ever only raised up for our good, however painful it might be. By being struck with the sword of the Father’s justice, Christ has reaped for us the mercy of God’s grace. We already have the victory in Jesus, and thus we should heed His words on this subject:

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

### C. Perishing People (Zechariah 13:8)

*<sup>8</sup>In the whole land, declares the LORD,  
two thirds shall be cut off and perish,  
and one third shall be left alive.*

Moving forward into verse 8, we are confronted with a troubling image: two-thirds of the land's inhabitants are cut off and killed, leaving a remnant of only one-third of the population. In the Hebrew, 'two thirds' is literally a "double portion," which was the share of the inheritance given to the first born (Dt. 21:7; cp. 2 Kgs. 2:9). To what does this verse refer?

As mentioned above, many commentators see in this verse a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the immense suffering and death of 1.5 million Jews as a consequence of their rebellion against Rome. Several of them have tried to equate this figure as two-thirds of the actual Jewish population of that day, while others have seen the number less literally and more figuratively as representative of a large number. This national calamity is then also linked back into verse 7 as a further fulfillment of the prophecy of the scattered sheep, where the hand of the Lord of hosts against the "little ones" is seen as the refining and ingathering of the remnant of Israel at a future time of mass conversion of ethnic Jews.

While it may be attractive to interpret the text in this manner, I am not convinced that Zechariah all of a sudden switches from describing the salvation of God's elect from all nations, as we have been interpreting his prophecy, to a discussion on the future fate of a literal national Israel, especially when the heirs of the prophet's prophecies are the members of the church of Jesus Christ.

Mackay is the only commentator amongst those referenced who remains constant in his approach of seeing the Old Testament types fulfilled in the New Testament realities. While his explanation of this verse is not wholly satisfactory, it at least attempts to interpret the text consistently:

Old Testament references to "the land" point to Palestine as the place inhabited by the people of God and where God Himself was pleased to be present. In terms of its New Testament realization this does not refer to any particular geographical location, but is an expression for the church wherever it is to be found. *Two-thirds will be struck down and perish* portrays a time of great suffering for the people of God, and may refer to the persecutions of the early centuries. *Yet one-third will be left in it.* The picture is not totally bleak. There will be survivors, but even then there will be further testing to be undergone. A similar process of multi-stage testing had been the experience of the Old Testament church (Is. 6:13a) (Mackay, pp. 251).

The most important feature of verse 8 is the one-third that survives. Regardless of the stage of redemptive history, God always preserves a *remnant* of faithful people for Himself. In Noah's day, the remnant was only 8 souls (Gen. 7:13; cp. 2 Pe. 2:5). In Elijah's day, the remnant numbered 7000 (1 Kgs. 19:18). The exact number or percentage is not important; rather, the fact that although seemingly small and irrelevant, God will build His mighty kingdom with those that the world discards and rejects, but who have been redeemed and cleansed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

## D. Purified People (Zechariah 13:9)

### 1. Refined (13:9a)

<sup>9</sup>And I will put this third into the fire,  
and refine them as one refines silver,  
and test them as gold is tested.

It is this remnant of verse 8 that undergoes the “trial by fire” in verse 9. The metaphor of the refiner’s fire to purge sin and purify God’s people is common in Scripture (cp. also Is. 1:22, 25; Jer. 6:29-30; Ez. 22:20-22):

The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold,  
and the Lord tests hearts (Proverbs 17:3).

<sup>2</sup>But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. <sup>3</sup>He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD (Malachi 3:2-3).

Since precious metals melt at far lower temperatures than the other metallic impurities contained in their raw ore, metalsmiths can refine silver and gold easily by heating them up and removing the dross from the molten mass to obtain the desired purity. The refining process of heating up the metal, removing the impurities, and then quenching in water to harden it may be repeated a number of times in order to reach the end goal. This practice, well understood in the ancient world, is an apt picture of the progression of our sanctification, the removal of the dross of sin from our lives in order to make us holy, like Jesus Christ. Indeed, the goal of our sanctification is that Jesus Christ “might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27).

How does the goldsmith know when he has finished the purification process? How many times must he heat the metal, remove the dross, and quench it? Pure gold and pure silver are like a mirror; the smith knows he has his finished product when he can see his clear image in the surface of the metal. And so it is with us. We are to be reflections of God’s holy character; that is what our sanctification is all about. “This is God’s process for making us His true people; His goal in all our trials is to test and purify our faith, separating us from sins and the world, until finally He gazes on us and sees His own image and we have attained the spiritual excellence He has ordained, the beauty for which our salvation was designed” (Phillips, p. 300).

While refining ultimately results in pure silver or gold, the process itself is arduous, time consuming, and stressful, particularly on the metal! Again, this is an appropriate metaphor for the Christian experience, since sanctification is not immediate or instantaneous. We are not translated directly to heaven upon our justification. Rather, sanctification is a lifelong process. The deliverance accomplished when the Shepherd was struck on Calvary for our sins results in clear blessing and victory for all the saints, and yet, the road to heaven is filled with trials and adversity, as the allegory of *Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan so ably attests. Indeed, the process of sanctification can be quite painful, as we learn to leave behind our “favorite sins” and put on the righteousness of Christ.

But the end result, reaching the “Celestial City” and living in the presence of our Savior forever, is worth the pain of the refining process, as the apostle Paul declares:

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For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Corinthians 4:17).

In the end, God will make you fit for heaven, and we can rejoice in that, along with the apostle Peter:

<sup>6</sup>In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup>so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6-7).

### 2. Redeemed (13:9b)

*They will call upon my name,  
and I will answer them.  
I will say, 'They are my people';  
and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"*

The remnant who are being refined in the crucible of God's sanctifying power have already experienced the power of His redemption through the fountain of Christ's blood on the cross. In the last four lines of Zechariah's poem, we have a powerful reminder of this. Here we find a poetic description of God's people in communion with their covenant LORD, presented in a chiasmic pattern: *they...I...I...they*. It is a dialogue between creature and Creator.

First, we *call* upon the name of the LORD, and He will *answer* us. Calling upon the name of the LORD in the Old Testament is a reference to true prayer (e.g., Gen. 4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 26:25; 1 Kgs. 18:24; 2 Kgs. 5:11; Ps. 116:4; Zeph. 3:9). In particular, it is the prayer of faith and repentance that follows the mourning for sin (cp. Zech. 12:10):

For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13; cp. Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21).

This is the prayer of the redeemed remnant of God. It is a cry to their Savior and Lord for mercy and deliverance. And God is quick to hear and answer this sort of prayer. He is gracious and loving and longsuffering toward His elect. Amazingly enough, He delights to shower every spiritual blessing in Christ upon unworthy sinners like us (cp. Eph. 1:3). Phillips puts it this way:

These verses present to us a love of God that is worth of our most devoted love in return. "*They will call upon my name, and I will answer them,*" He says, as the final object of His own heart's desire. The whole of this great prophecy of Zechariah proclaims to us a great God of love who is the most fitting of all objects and persons and things for our highest devotion and love. Here is a love worth seeking! Isn't this what verse 7 shows us, that when God calls forth the sword He is striking with a lover's fervor to rescue His own from the house of their destruction, willing to assume the most costly of all imaginable sacrifices—God the Father striking God the Son—to spare the sword from us! (Phillips, p. 300).

Then He will *say* that we are our covenant people, and we will respond and *say* that He is our covenant God. We lift up our hearts to Him in prayer, and He hears us. His reply is full of covenant love and mercy, and so we answer back with words of thanksgiving and joy.

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These words—“I will be their God, and they will be my people”—are the heart of the covenant that God has cut with His people. This promise is threaded throughout the entirety of the Scriptures to bind us to Him through covenant (e.g., Ex. 6:7; 19:5; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23; 30:22; 31:33; Ez. 11:20; 37:23; Hos. 2:23; Zech. 8:8; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10; 1 Pe. 2:10; Rev. 21:3). Because the name *Immanuel* means “God with us” (Mt. 1:23; cp. Is. 7:14), I call this aspect of the covenant the “Immanuel Principle,” that is, God dwelling in the midst of His people.

In space and time, the first advent of Jesus Christ was the pinnacle of this covenant promise. God the Son took on flesh and united His divine nature to a human nature. The apostle John is a witness of God the Messiah dwelling or “tabernacling” in the midst of His people—the very Incarnation of the Immanuel Principle:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

It is in the second coming of our Lord in the flesh that the ultimate fulfillment of the Immanuel Principle will be made manifest, when He gathers all of His elect throughout the ages to dwell in heaven with Himself forever. This is the grand endgame and purpose of redemptive history—God dwelling directly in the midst of His redeemed and refined people:

<sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:2-4).

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

Although only three verses long, Zechariah 13:7-9 is packed with theology that, like the Snickers candy bar (which is packed with peanuts), “really satisfies.”

In the first place, we have here an insight into the covenant of redemption, whereby in the eternal council of the Godhead, God the Son freely subordinated Himself to the will of God the Father, in order to accomplish redemption as a vicarious sacrifice for all the elect. What a shock it is to fully understand that God raises His sword of justice, not against sinners and evil-doers, but upon His beloved and only-begotten Son! It is only the infinite wisdom of our merciful and holy God who could devise such a means of atonement that at one time both His holy justice and His righteous mercy could be simultaneously satisfied. As the apostle Paul says, in the atonement, we see that God is both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26).

Secondly, the mystery of God’s plan of redemption involves the interposition of a go-between: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5; cp. Heb. 9:5; 12:24). In his mediatorial role, Jesus, who is fully God, takes upon Himself mortal flesh, thus uniting both His divine and human natures in one person. Although the dual nature of Messiah is hinted at in this and other Old Testament passages, the full extent of its truth was not revealed until the first advent of Jesus Christ. It was a stumbling block for the Jews, who rejected His claims of divinity, and it continues to be foolishness to all who remain in the darkness of their sins. But for those of us who have been saved by the blood of the Mediator, we can add our “Amen” to Paul’s characterization of the gospel of Jesus Christ:

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<sup>22</sup>For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:22-24).

Third, we have a reminder of how God is always at work to preserve His true people, the “remnant” or the elect. Having redeemed them out of the world and justified them by the blood of Christ, He then purifies them through times of testing and trials. The purpose of this refining process is to remove the “remnant” of indwelling sin, polishing their characters into the image of their Savior, Jesus Christ:

<sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup>so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. <sup>15</sup>Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ (Ephesians 4:13-15).

We have encountered this process of sanctification several times now in our studies of Zechariah. In 9:13-15, sanctification was pictured as holy war, in which the saints are equipped for spiritual service, engage in holy warfare, and enjoy spiritual victory through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In 10:12, sanctification is likened to being strengthened to walk in the name of the LORD, which stands for the Christian lifestyle in obedience to the revealed Word of God. And in 13:2-6, our sanctification is described as a cleansing of sin, represented by the removal of idolatry and false prophecy from the land. But here in Zechariah 13:7-9, we see another side of sanctification. Yes, sanctification is fighting a holy war, and walking in step with God, and cleansing remaining sin. But the refining process, can and will at times be painful. Fighting and walking and cleansing, while necessary, are also difficult. The journey to heaven is not easy, but in God’s strength we will prevail. We can and must and will endure the refining fire of God as He sanctifies us into His holy people.

Finally, we have another reminder of the Immanuel Principle of the covenant of grace: *I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The LORD is my God’*. God redeems us and refines us, not so that we can do whatever we want, but rather that we would become His beloved and treasured people, justified through redemption, sanctified through refining, and glorified to dwell with Him forever in eternity:

<sup>9</sup>But 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. <sup>10</sup>Once 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).

That is some serious theology in only three verses! And it can all be summed up in the theme of this passage: *By taking upon Himself the penalty of our sin, Jesus Christ, the God-man, redeems and refines His covenant people according to the foreordained will of God.*

For next time: Read Zechariah 14:1-11.