

# Triennial Torah Study – 4<sup>th</sup> Year 15/06/2013

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We continue this weekend with our regular Triennial Torah reading which can be found at [https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon\\_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf](https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf)

Deut 22	Zechariah 6-9		2 Tim 3-4
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## Justice, Caring and Holiness Precepts (Deuteronomy 21:22-22:30)

This section begins with instructions on hanging someone. Notice that the criminal was put to death and then hanged (verse 22). “The guilty person was not hanged by the neck; this form of execution was not practiced in ancient Israel. The hanging was actually the impaling [or tying up] of the corpse for public viewing after death by stoning. Everyone would know that individual had brought guilt on the community. The exposure of the corpse was limited to one day. For that day, it reminded people of God’s judgment on the sinner” (Nelson Study Bible, note on 21:22-23). Thus, a criminal so hanged had to be buried before sunset (verses 22-23; compare Joshua 8:29). The hanging on a tree of the condemned person’s corpse was considered a “curse” (Deuteronomy 21:23). That is part of why Joseph of Arimathea was anxious to take Jesus from the cross and bury Him before the new day, a Holy Day, began (Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:38-42). Jesus, when being nailed on the cross, became “accursed” for us—He, being innocent of any crime or sin, took away the curse for the violation of the law (that is, the death penalty) that we, through our sinful conduct, had brought upon ourselves (compare Galatians 3:13; Romans 6:23).

Deuteronomy 22:1-4 gives practical examples on how to love our neighbor: If we find something that belongs to our neighbor, we are to return it to him. We are to take care of the found item until it can be returned (verses 1-3). We are also to assist our neighbor when he needs help (verse 4). And we are not to hide ourselves from helping (compare Isaiah 58:6-7). Rather we are to bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2).

Deuteronomy 22:5 prohibits cross-dressing. A man is not to wear women’s clothes and vice versa, according to the cultural norms of the day. This deals with transvestitism or with conduct that could even give the appearance that one is engaged in such a practice. The command does not forbid unisex fashions—that is, attire that is culturally acceptable for both men and women to wear. It should also be noted here that “in the ancient Middle East, dressing in the clothing of the opposite sex was a magical practice intended to bring harm to people. For example, a transvestite male would predict that the soldiers of another army would be as weak as females” (Nelson, note on 22:5).

Verses 6-7 are concerned with the preservation of the environment and wildlife—one is not to take the mother bird and the young birds at the same time, but let the mother go free so that she can continue producing offspring, thus perpetuating the species. If the opposite were done, taking the mother and leaving the young, the young would, of course, die, leaving none of the birds alive.

Verse 8 is another law showing concern for neighbor. In ancient houses, roofs, which were flat, were often used like other rooms, especially during hot weather. Thus, there was a real danger of someone accidentally stepping or falling off the edge of the roof. Therefore, this law was to protect others by requiring that a house have a parapet or railing around the roof’s edge to prevent accidental injury. While we do not normally put railings

around our roofs today unless it is common for people to walk on them, we would certainly do so around a balcony or very high deck. Indeed, the principle here is simply that we try to anticipate dangers in anything we plan or build and do what we can to protect others from those dangers. This law was simply a practical way to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39)—to take reasonable steps to protect others from injury.

Verse 12 repeats the command from Numbers 15:37-41 that tassels be added to the four corners of one’s clothing. One source comments: “To understand the significance of the tassel, we must first understand the significance of the hem. The hem of an ancient Near-Eastern garment was not simply a fold sewed to prevent the threads of the cloth from unraveling. The hem of the outer garment or robe made an important social statement. It was usually the most ornate part of the garment. And the more important the individual, the more elaborate and the more ornate was the embroidery on the hem of his or her outer robe. The tassel must be understood as an extension of such a hem.... Thus, the significance of the tassel (as well as the elaborate hem) is this: It was worn by those who counted; it was the ‘I.D.’ of nobility. The requirement of a blue cord in the tassels [see Numbers 15:38] lends further support to the notion that the tassels signified nobility because the blue dye used to color the threads was extraordinarily expensive” (Jacob Milgrom, “Of Hems and Tassels,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, May-June 1983, pp. 61-62).

This supports the common Jewish understanding: “In ancient times non-Jewish royalty wore fringes on the hems of their clothes to indicate their high position. The Torah instructs all Jews to remember that they are a nation of priests with God as their ruler” (Malka Drucker, *Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*, 1982, p. 48). However, the explicitly stated scriptural reason for tassels is found in Numbers 15:39-40: “that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord to do them...and so be holy to the Lord.” Perhaps, in reminding the Israelites that they were a royal priesthood, the tassels also reminded them that this responsibility required them to obey Him and remain holy. It may even be that the tassels reminded them that God had taken them from slavery and made them a wealthy, blessed people—and that He would continue to bless them as long as they remained faithful to Him.

Today it is the Holy Spirit that reminds us of God’s law (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit was not given, or even promised, to ancient Israel at large, so they needed such physical reminders (compare Deuteronomy 5:29). Under the terms of the New Covenant, those physical reminders should not be necessary, as the law of God is being written on our hearts and minds (Jeremiah 31:33). It is true that Christ wore tassels (see Matthew 9:20, the word translated “hem” here and “borders” in 23:5 referring to an ancient hem with tassels as described above), but He lived His human life under Old Testament rules, including its sacrifices and offerings and its physical reminders.

Deuteronomy 22:13-30 discusses laws of sexual morality. If it was discovered that a newly married bride had engaged in sexual immorality or fornication prior to marriage, she was to be stoned (verses 20-21). If the husband’s accusation of fornication prior to marriage was proved wrong, the husband had to pay a fine to his wife’s family and was not allowed to ever divorce her (verse 19). This was done to protect the wife, as the husband had to continue to provide for her.

When two unmarried people engaged in fornication and were discovered, the perpetrators had to marry each other (verse 28) unless the father of the girl refused to consent to the marriage. In that case, the man who had enticed the virgin still had to pay “money according to the bride-price of virgins” (Exodus 22:16-17). If two people engaged in adultery, that is, where at least one of them was married to someone else, then both perpetrators were to be stoned (verse 23). The concept of adultery even included a “betrothed,” though not yet married, woman, as she was already considered to be the “wife” of the new husband (verses 23-24). Then there was the matter of rape. If a sexual relationship involving a betrothed woman occurred in the city where other people were nearby, but the woman did not cry out for help, this was considered adultery and not rape, since the woman could have been heard if she had cried out, thereby demonstrating her disagreement with the sexual encounter. On the other hand, if a rape of a betrothed woman occurred in the isolation of the countryside, where her cries for help would have been to no avail, then the matter was declared a rape and only the rapist had to die (verses 25-27).

**Don’t Get Mixed Up (Deuteronomy 21:22-22:30)**

Deuteronomy 22:9 forbids sowing a vineyard with different kinds of seed. Verse 10 prohibits plowing with an ox and a donkey together. And verse 11 prohibits wearing garments of different material. Let's examine these three prohibitions in more detail.

The prohibition against wearing certain clothes is actually quite specific. Note that the words "such as" have been added to verse 11. It should actually read, "You shall not wear a garment of different sorts, wool and linen mixed together." That the mixing of wool and linen is really the issue here may also be seen in Leviticus 19:19, which clearly states, "Nor shall a garment of mixed wool and linen come upon you." Wool is an animal product, while linen is a plant product. Such should not be combined, as they produce clothes of lesser quality. Further, the Jamieson, Fausset & Brown Commentary (JFB) notes that research has determined that wool blended with linen may sometimes increase static electricity to the point of causing heat rashes in hot climates (note on Lev. 19:19). Thus, with the prohibition being so specific, synthetic fabric does not even appear to be an issue here, or fabric that is part synthetic and part wool or that is part synthetic and part linen. It should also be noted that the prohibition is against a particular fabric being an improper blend. It apparently does not prohibit wearing wool and linen at the same time or even as different parts of the same garment.

The purpose of the prohibition against sowing different kinds of seed may have been twofold. First, it may have been "directed against an idolatrous practice, viz., that of the ancient Zabians, or fire-worshippers, who sowed different seeds, accompanying the act with magical rites and invocations" (JFB, note on Leviticus 19:19). But this law was evidently also given to prevent the intentional or unintentional cross-pollinating of different kinds of plants, as this would produce substandard hybrids. The same commentary notes that "those who have studied the diseases of land and vegetables tell us that the practice of mingling seeds is injurious both to flowers and to grains. 'If the various genera of the natural order Gramineae, which includes the grains and the grasses, should be sown in the same field, and flower at the same time, so that the pollen of the two flowers mix, a spurious seed will be the consequence, called by the farmers chess. It is always inferior and unlike either of the two grains that produced it, in size, flavor, and nutritious principles. Independent of contributing to disease the soil, they never fail to produce the same [result] in animals and men that feed on them'" (note on Leviticus 19:19). For other examples, cucumbers should not be planted near watermelons because they will cross and produce a perversion. Likewise, the various members of the muskmelon and cantaloupe family should not be planted near pumpkins or certain types of squash, as they will mix. On the other hand, there is nothing wrong with planting peas or beans among corn, or planting two pasture grasses together. In that case, there is no problem as each seed continues to reproduce only after its own kind.

With today's scientific knowledge, there is much planned hybridization. However, much of it is controversial because, generally speaking, with most "improvements" or advantages come corresponding disadvantages or weaknesses. Hybrid plants grown for human food have often proven less healthful.

Several reasons have been offered for the prohibition against yoking an ox and a donkey together for plowing. One explanation is that an ox is a clean animal, while a donkey is unclean. Also, it has been shown that the ox cannot tolerate the smell of a donkey, so that both animals don't really work together harmoniously. They pull unequally and, sometimes, even against each other. The Soncino Commentary suggests that the "underlying principle is prevention of cruelty, since the ass which is weaker than the ox would suffer in such a combination." The JFB Commentary expresses all of these thoughts, stating: "An ox and ass, being of different species and of very different characters, cannot associate comfortably, nor unite cheerfully in drawing a plow or wagon. The ass being much smaller and his step shorter, there would be an unequal and irregular draft. Besides, the ass, from feeding on coarse and poisonous weeds, has a fetid breath, which its yoke-fellow seeks to avoid, not only as poisonous and offensive, but producing leanness, or, if long continued, death; and hence, it has been observed always to hold away its head from the ass and to pull only with one shoulder" (note on 22:10). All of this certainly serves to illustrate a spiritual principle the apostle Paul brought out in the New Testament. In light of everything that was just pointed out, we can perhaps better understand Paul's point in 2 Corinthians 6:14, where he says, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Indeed, this lesson may be found not only in the rule about plowing, but also the ones concerning seeds and fabrics. For while these precepts have value in the physical realm, they illustrate a spiritual reality: Don't get mixed up with this world.

#### **Four Chariots From Between Two Mountains of Bronze (Zechariah 6)**

The final vision of the night, often reckoned as the eighth but most likely the seventh (see comments on previous reading), is that of four chariots coming from between two bronze mountains (verse 1). Each drawn by horses of a different color, they thunder forth throughout the earth, evidently to deliver judgment on the nations (verses 2-8). This follows right on from the previous vision of the end-time captivity of Israel and Judah by a final revival of Babylon (see Zechariah 5).

The picture of two bronze mountains is rather mysterious. In the Hebrew, the first occurrence of the word for mountains, after the word for two, is *ha-hari*, containing the definite article *ha* and therefore meaning “the mountains.” And yet there does not appear to be any immediately preceding explanation for them—or a following one for that matter. So is the image here literal or figurative?

Well, there are no bronze mountains in the world. Bronze is not a naturally occurring metal. It is an alloy of copper and tin. The King James Version has “brass” here (6:1), which is an alloy of copper and zinc, and there is some dispute over which is intended, as the bronze of ancient Israel “varied a great deal in composition, and some contained an admixture of zinc, approaching brass. Such may have been the ‘fine shiny bronze, precious as gold’ (Ezra 8:27, NASB...)” (The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary, “Mineral Kingdom”). In any case, there are no mountains of bronze or brass, yet mountains do provide the ingredients. God described the Promised Land as a land “out of whose hills you can dig copper” (Deuteronomy 8:9).

Yet bronze could also denote appearance rather than actual material composition. As explained in the Bible Reading Program comments on Isaiah 6, the Hebrew word for bronze, *nechoshet*, is related to the word for serpent, *nachash*, evidently because of the “shiny” quality they both share. Recall Daniel’s vision of the glorious being with “arms and feet like burnished bronze in color” (Daniel 10:6). When the apostle John described the present appearance of Jesus Christ, he said, “His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace” (Revelation 1:15). The metal, then, would seem to denote a flashing, fiery appearance, as Ezekiel describes His legs and feet as “the appearance of fire with brightness all around” (Ezekiel 1:27).

There is also the figurative usage. One of the curses on the Israelites for disobedience was that God would make their “earth like bronze” (Leviticus 26:19), meaning hard and dry and unable to produce crops. Bronze could also signify firmness and invincibility. God set Jeremiah as “bronze walls against the whole land” so that no one would prevail against him (Jeremiah 1:18). Others point to the two massive bronze pillars that stood before the vestibule of Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 7:15-22)—one named *Jachin* (meaning “He Will Establish”) and the other named *Boaz* (meaning “In Him Is Strength” or possibly “He Is Quick.”) Some, pointing to the bronze serpent Moses made and the bronze altar of sacrifice of the tabernacle and temple, see the metal as signifying judgment.

How, then, are we to understand the bronze mountains? As the chariots that come from between them (Zechariah 6:1) are also described as going out “from their station before the Lord of all the earth” (verse 5), this would seem to locate God in this picture either where the two mountains are or between them. Various explanations have been proposed. Here are seven such possibilities:

1. Given that Zechariah prophesied in Jerusalem and that the work of the nation at that time was rebuilding the temple there, many would identify one of the mountains as Jerusalem or its Temple Mount (see also 8:3). And some would identify the other mountain as the one across the Kidron Valley from the temple—the Mount of Olives. The picture here would be of God in the Kidron Valley unleashing His forces of devastation against the nations, the mountains to either side of Him—Jerusalem and the Temple Mount—ablaze or illuminated like bronze. Indeed, as other prophecies show, even those at the end of the book of Zechariah, the returning Jesus Christ will fight the nations who oppose Him at Jerusalem. And as explained in the Bible Reading Program comments on Joel, many equate the Valley of Jehoshaphat (meaning “Judgment of the Eternal”) with the Kidron.

2. Another possibility relates to Zechariah 14:4, which says that the returning Christ will stand on the Mount of Olives, which will then split in two, leaving a northern half and a southern half. God refers to the resultant rift between the two halves in the literal Hebrew as “the valley of My mountains” (verse 5, Green’s Literal Translation). The image is that the chariots of destruction then go out from this location.

3. Others take the two mountains as meaning the heavenly Mount Zion (seat of God's spiritual temple) and the earthly Mount Zion (seat of God's physical temple)—with Christ descending in the air between them and sending out His forces of judgment from this location. Bronze here would seem to have the figurative sense of firmness or strength.

4. Still others, given that "mountain" often represents a kingdom in prophecy, see "between the two mountains" as signifying the transition from God's earthly kingdom of national Israel to the millennial Kingdom of God—and that "between" them denotes the time of coming judgment.

5. There are some who would take the two mountains as signifying God's Kingdom and Satan's kingdom, though it does not seem that both of these would be characterized by the same metal in the same prophecy.

6. Yet another theory is that "the two mountains" must refer to something previously mentioned in the relating of Zechariah's visions. The flying scroll of the previous chapter represented the curses for disobedience in God's covenant with Israel pursuing the people to visit judgment upon them. Interestingly, God through Moses had told the Israelites to publicly post the covenant between two mountains at Shechem—and for half the people to proclaim the blessings from Mount Gerizim and half to proclaim the curses from Mount Ebal (see Deuteronomy 27). And this they did (Joshua 8:30-35). Yet how could this possibly relate to the punishment on the gentile nations indicated in Zechariah 6? Notice that just after telling the Israelites of the curses that would befall them for disobedience (see Deuteronomy 27:1-30:1), God said that they would repent and return from captivity (verses 2-6) and that this would then happen: "Also the Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you" (verse 7). So the curses that had pursued and stricken the Israelites would turn around and strike the gentile nations. Consider also that after proclaiming the blessings and curses between the two mountains at Shechem, Joshua and the Israelites went out from there and conquered the Promised Land. This was figurative of the end time, when another Joshua (Jesus Christ) will lead His hosts to victory over the nations, conquering the "promised land" of the Kingdom of God—the entire earth.

7. Another possibility that has been offered, and perhaps the simplest, is that the two bronze mountains refer directly to the two bronze pillars (literally "standing things") before the temple. Mountains are certainly symbols of strength, just as were the bronze pillars—given their names related to strength and God establishing. Indeed, mentioning the two bronze mountains as the place of God's presence to a people engaged in the work of rebuilding the temple would quite likely have made them immediately think of the two pillars. So the picture here would simply be of God's agents going out from the place of His throne (which the temple represented).

Let's next consider the horse-drawn chariots. The picture of red, black, white and dappled horses in Zechariah 6 recalls the red, white and brown horses of chapter 1. Though similar, the images are not the same. The different colors in chapter 1 may have represented the different areas of oversight of some of God's angels in their reconnaissance of the nations. The colors in chapter 6 seem to most closely resemble the colors of the horses in Revelation 6: white, red, black and pale. While the order is not the same, the meanings of the colors are probably similar. The red horse of Revelation 6 signifies war and bloodshed, the black horse signifies famine, and the pale horse symbolizes plagues of disease and other calamities. "Dappled" in Zechariah 6—or splotchy—could fit the image of a variety of plagues. The parallel between the white horses of Zechariah 6 and Revelation 6 is perhaps not immediately grasped, as the one in Revelation is often designated as false religion—which does not fit with the one sent out by God in Zechariah. In fact, the white horse simply signifies conquest—as Christ Himself arrives on a white horse (Revelation 19). In Revelation 6, it is false religion doing the conquering: "And he went out conquering and to conquer" (verse 2). In Zechariah 6, it is God's agents who claim victory.

Yet the agents of God in this chapter are evidently not angels as in chapter 1. Rather, the horses and chariots of chapter 6 evidently represent waves of judgment from God. In verse 5, "four spirits of heaven" could also be "four winds of heaven," symbolizing destructive power sent out over the earth by God (see Jeremiah 49:36). In fact, notice Revelation 7: "After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree... '...till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads'" (verses 1-3). The sealing is completed during the Great Tribulation (see verse 14) so that the four winds are released thereafter during the day of the Lord. (There might be some relation, at least

thematically, to the releasing of four angels bound at the Euphrates during the Day of the Lord in Revelation 9:13-21 to cause vast destruction.)

The red horses of Zechariah 6 are not designated as going to any particular place but evidently are first in going “throughout the earth” (see verse 7, which applies to all the horses)—that is, to the whole world, indicating a period of global war. In verse 6, the chariot of black horses charges into the “north country.” In Zechariah’s third vision earlier the same night, “the land of the north” was specifically equated with Babylon (Zechariah 2:6-7). And Babylon was mentioned again in the previous vision (5:11). So it appears that end-time Babylon will be hit with a period of devastation and famine—which it will experience in the Day of the Lord. This may parallel the imagery in Joel 2:2-11 (see also verse 20). The black horses are followed to Babylon by the white horses of conquest—to be ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Christ and His heavenly hosts.

The plagues of the dappled horses strike south toward Egypt and other areas that are today Muslim. Interestingly, “if the chariots in Zechariah’s seventh vision are understood as moving from Zion in just the two directions, north and south, the geo-political outlook of Zech 6:1-8 is comparable to that in Daniel 11 with its concentration on the Ptolemies to the south and the Seleucids to the north, threatening the covenant people in between” (Meredith Kline, *Glory in Our Midst: A Biblical-Theological Reading of Zechariah’s Night Visions*, p. 218 footnote)—with the conflict continuing to the end-time. Later in the book of Zechariah, we are told of plagues on Egypt following Christ’s return if they refuse to observe the Feast of Tabernacles (14:16-19), showing how God will work with all nations.

Yet the principal enemy of chapter 6 is Babylon. Recall that God had been “exceedingly angry with the nations at ease” (1:15)—the enemies of Israel. He had foretold their punishment (verses 18-21), particularly that of Babylon (2:6-9). Now, with the judgment on the Babylonians accomplished, God’s Spirit is at last able to rest from bringing punishment on them (6:8).

### **The Crowning of Joshua (Zechariah 6)**

Whether or not Zechariah was still experiencing his final vision when God gave Him the instructions of verses 9-15 is not clear. In any case, his carrying out of the instructions, including his relaying of God’s message, would not have been part of a vision. Evidently, the episode described here literally took place on the day following the night of visions. The date would still have been the 24th day of the 11th month, because days were reckoned as beginning at sunset and lasting until the following sunset.

A new group returns from Babylon (verse 9), represented by a certain Heldai (referred to in verse 14 as Helem), Tobijah and Jedaiah. Following the vision in chapter 5 of the future captivity of Israel and Judah by Babylon, and the vision earlier in chapter 6 of Babylon’s coming punishment, the newly returned group represents, in the context of the visions, the returning captives from end-time Babylon. The men of Zechariah’s day brought gold and silver for the temple. Even so, the captives of the end time will return and contribute to God and His work.

Regarding Josiah the son of Zephaniah, Dr. Meredith Kline identifies him as “a treasury steward. Confirming this identification of his role is the designation for him in v. 14. In place of the name Josiah is *lehen*. The *l-* is usually taken as the preposition ‘for,’ which is prefixed to each of the other three names. It should, however, be taken together with the *hn* and this *lhn* has been shown to be an Akkadian loanword, the Neo-Assyrian *lahhinu* (also attested in the Aramaic *lehen*), used as a title for a court or temple official, a steward of precious commodities. Josiah was then a temple official. Such an office was occupied in the days of Hezekiah by Kore ben Imnah, who was set over the storage and distribution of the offerings (2 Chr 31:14). Josiah’s ‘house’ does not refer to his residence but to the storage or treasury room(s) connected with the temple, over which he was in charge. It was naturally to this ‘house’ of Josiah that the returning exiles brought their treasures for the temple. And it would have been at that (treasury) house that Zechariah received through Josiah’s offices the exiles’ donation as requisitioned by the Lord” (*Glory in Our Midst*, pp. 228-229).

With their gift Zechariah was to see to the making of a royal crown to be placed on the head of Joshua the high priest, probably to encircle the base of his priestly miter or turban. This would signify combining the priesthood and monarchy in one office. Yet Joshua was certainly not being actually crowned as king. Judah was still under Persian rule and there was no provision for the line of Aaron to reign anyway. Some have speculated that this ceremony was to signify Joshua, the ecclesiastical leader, soon taking over civil rule as well given the

conspicuous absence of Zerubbabel after this point. The event is also seen as representative of the later rise of the Hasmonean priest-kings around four centuries later. But this episode symbolized neither of these things.

Joshua was in no way personally assuming the royal office. He would not wear the crown again beyond this symbolic coronation. Rather, it would be kept in the temple for a memorial (verse 14). The point is that “again, as in chapter 3, Joshua is typical of Messiah both by name and office. The crown was to be a composite one (the verb is singular in v. 14), one set above another” (Charles Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 300). As in chapter 3, the Messiah typified by Joshua is again referred to as the Branch. He is introduced with the words “Behold, the Man...” (verse 12), the very words by which Pontius Pilate introduced the brutalized Jesus to the crowd that cried out for His death (John 19:5). The prophecy states that the Branch would “branch out” (Zechariah 6:12). Jesus told His followers, “I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:5). His Church would grow out from Him—and eventually His Kingdom throughout the earth and then the whole universe. The Messiah, as the ultimate Zerubbabel figure, would be the one to build the temple (Zechariah 6:12-13; see 4:9). He would accomplish the building of the second temple in Zechariah’s day. He would build the spiritual temple of His followers, the Church of God. And He will also build a new temple in Jerusalem in the Millennium. Church and state will be united through His rule as both Priest and King.

Not only would the crown in the temple represent the hope of Christ’s future coming as both ruler and intercessor, but it would also serve as a memorial to those who had contributed to the crown and thus to the Kingdom by their gifts to the work of God—and this as a representation of those who would come from afar in the future (verse 15). This would include not only Israelites but also the gentiles. All would be allowed and encouraged to “build the temple” along with the Messiah Himself—though this remained, as always, contingent on faithful obedience (same verse). Some of this is fulfilled in the Church of God today, God’s spiritual temple, but the ultimate emphasis here, as throughout Zechariah’s visions, is on the incredible time of Christ’s return.

### **Fasts of Mourning Turned to Joy (Zechariah 7-8)**

Zechariah 7:1 is dated to the fourth day of the ninth month Kislev in the fourth year of Darius, corresponding to late November of 518 B.C. Almost two years have passed since Zechariah’s memorable night of visions and the symbolic coronation of the high priest Joshua (see 1:7). With the decree of Darius in the intervening time bringing about a sea change in the region—the Persian province of which Judea was part now helping to provide for the temple’s construction—the rebuilding of the temple was really on the move. The nation was now being blessed instead of cursed, so we would presume the people were seeing bigger harvests and greater wealth and prosperity in general. The nation’s spiritual renewal had progressed even further. This was a time of restoration and great joy. The 70 years since the former temple’s destruction were nearly over—only two more years to go! So this prompted a sensible question regarding certain national fast days that had been instituted as times of mourning over the calamities at the beginning of the exile.

A delegation is sent to the temple in Jerusalem to pray and inquire of the priests and the prophets (the latter referring to Zechariah and Haggai) about the matter (7:2-3). The New King James Version says the deputation was sent “to the house of God” (verse 2). Others, such as the NIV, translate this as “from Bethel,” the town 12 miles north of Jerusalem. The uncertainty stems from the fact that in Hebrew Beth-El means “house of God.” The town of Bethel seems more likely as the temple is nowhere else referred to in Scripture as Beth-El and verse 3 immediately afterward refers to the temple as “the house of the Lord of hosts.” “Over two hundred Jews from Bethel returned from Babylon in 538 B.C. (Ezra 2:28; Neh. 7:32), and the city was reoccupied during the restoration period (Neh. 11:31)” (Nelson Study Bible, note on Zechariah 7:3).

Zechariah then gives God’s response in chapters 7-8, each of four sections beginning with the same basic wording (see 7:4, 8; 8:1, 18). The fact that the last section returns to the matter of the fasts shows that these are really four parts of one prophecy.

As recorded, the question was particularly concerned with the fast of the fifth month, the 9th of Av (see 7:3), as this day commemorated the destruction of Solomon’s temple. But perhaps the other fasts were initially mentioned as well. God’s first response through Zechariah also mentions the fast of the seventh month (verse 5). This does not refer to the fast God commanded in the Law for the seventh month, the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16:29). Rather these (and the other two mentioned in Zechariah 8:18) were all instituted through tradition:

“Counting the beginning of the year from the month of Nisan, the Jewish sages identified these dates as follows (in the Talmudical tractate Rosh Hashanah 18b): the fast of the fourth month fell on the ninth of Tammuz, the day when the city walls were breached (2 Kings 25:3-4; Jer. 39:2); the fast of the fifth month was on the ninth of Ab, when the house of God was destroyed by fire (2 Kings 25:8-10); the fast of the seventh month was on the third of Tishri, the anniversary of the assassination of Gedaliah the son of Ahikam (ibid. 25; Jer. 41:2); and the fast of the tenth month fell on the tenth of Tebeth, which was the day when the king of Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1, Ezek. 24:2). In Zechariah’s day, sixty-eight years after the destruction, when the rebuilding of the Temple was almost complete, the question naturally arose whether the time had not come to annul these fasts, since Jeremiah’s prophecy about the duration of the exile might well be thought to have been fulfilled” (The Illustrated Family Encyclopedia of the Living Bible, Vol. 8, p. 93, quoted in Expositor’s Bible Commentary, note on Zechariah 7:2-3).

Rather than a simple yes or no, God points out that there’s a much larger question to look at here with regard to what is being asked. Just what are these fast days all about anyway? He does not condemn the idea of national fast days. Instead, the real issue is one of motive and making sure to properly prioritize what is truly important. The exiles who have returned have undergone a period of spiritual renewal. But they still have areas to grow in—just as Christians do many years after conversion. God wants the people of Judea—and those Jews who were still in Babylon for that matter (as word would no doubt get back to them)—to really examine their hearts and consider the reasons they did the things they did, including why they engaged in the particular religious practices they did.

God asks, “Did you really fast for Me—for Me?” (verse 5). The sad truth is that their fasting was selfishly motivated. In verse 6, God says the same was true in regard to their feasting—it was all for themselves. It may be hard, though, to understand how self-denial can be selfish. Yet consider that rather than using fasting as a tool to draw closer to God, to realize total dependence on Him and more readily discern His will—which is the true purpose of fasting—the people were using the fasts to both wallow in self-pity and make God feel sorry enough for them to do something for them. Moreover, some likely fasted to feel good about themselves—and some to prove their righteousness to others. Centuries later, Jesus Christ would condemn such impure motives for fasting (Matthew 6:16-18).

Realize, further, that these fasts were instituted to mourn the terrible calamities that God had brought, not to mourn over and consider the behavior that had brought the punishment—the nation’s sins. Whereas it would have been fitting to use these anniversaries as opportunities to reflect on just why they had gone into exile, they merely grieved over their circumstances. Where was the searching self-examination and the depth of heartfelt repentance that God desires? As we will see, the people continued in many of their wrong attitudes and practices. So when they persisted in violating what God commanded, He would of course not look very highly on their form of piety that He did not command. Again, however, traditional national fast days were not the problem. The problem was attitude and motive. The same wrong mindset of the people could of course attach to God’s commanded Holy Days too—and in fact did. It was just particularly incongruous that fasting over calamities would ignore the very reasons for the calamities!

In verses 8-10, God reminds the people to focus on what’s really important—the weightier matters of the law, such as justice, mercy, faith and love (compare Micah 6:8; Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42), the true religion of looking out for the widow and orphan (see James 1:27), and other matters of serving and helping one’s neighbor. It was the refusal of their forefathers to heed this message that brought about the exile (Zechariah 7:11-14). These are the kinds of contemplative thoughts the national fast days should have been stimulating. The fact is, the relationship of the people to God could not have been right or they would have been right with one another (compare Matthew 5:23-24). Faith without a right way of life is a mockery of everything God stands for. The same challenge exists for God’s people today. Fasting, prayer, Bible reading, church attendance and the like can all become shallow rituals if they are not accompanied by a genuine desire to serve God and a lifestyle of integrity and outgoing concern toward others.

Zechariah 8 “continues the thought of the previous chapter. The prophet emphasized in chapter 7 the need of obedience from the fate of their fathers [a warning]; now he exhorts them in chapter 8 to the same condition of heart by placing before them promises of God’s future blessing [a message of the good news of God’s Kingdom]. This section parallels that of 1:14-17, just as chapter 7 answered to 1:1-6” (Charles Feinberg, The



Minor Prophets, p. 308). The Church of God today is also to deliver a warning and call to repentance as well as the all-important message of the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

God in the person of Christ will come to literally dwell in Jerusalem (see 8:3). Chapter 8 gives us a beautiful picture of the security, peace and joy that will then permeate not only the Holy City but all the world. Considering the terror and violence of the Middle East today, the imagery in verses 4-5 of people growing to great age and children playing in Jerusalem's streets is an astounding contrast. Expositor's comments on verse 6: "Such things may have seemed too good to be true in the eyes of the Jewish remnant living 'at that time,' but the Lord Almighty did not so regard them. Nothing is too hard for him (see Gen 18:14...). [Merrill Unger]... explains the thought of the verse thus: 'If the remnant of the nation in that future day will scarcely be able to comprehend how such miraculous things just promised could become a reality, the divine reply is, "Because they seem difficult to you, must they also seem hard to me?"' The answer is obvious."

In verses 7-8, God promises the restoration of all His people. He will gather them from both east and west—that is, from wherever they have been scattered throughout the world.

In verses 9-10, God encourages His people to be strong in their work of building the temple—and there is likely a spiritual meaning for His spiritual people of the end time intended here too. With confidence in God's promises, we should be strong in participating in God's spiritual-temple-building work today.

Israel will be blessed tremendously. Notice that God says He will deliver both Judah and Israel at that time—that is, all 12 tribes (verses 11-13).

In verses 14-17 God again sets forth our moral responsibilities—as all people living by these precepts is the way that will bring about the wonderful world of peace God proclaims.

Finally, in verses 18-19, God returns to the matter of the Jewish fasts. During the millennial reign of Christ, they will be turned into times of joy and feasting. This would parallel Christ's point about His followers not fasting while He was with them (Matthew 9:15). In the future Kingdom of God, Christ will again dwell with His people.

"Therefore," God instructs at the end of Zechariah 8:19, "love truth and peace." God's point through all that we have read is that our integrity and manner of life—in thought, word and deed—is what is most important. We cannot substitute false piety for righteousness—for that will serve only to take us away from God. Instead, in drawing close to Him by striving to obey all His commands, paying special heed to areas of life He refers to as more important, God's people will ultimately live in a perfect world of peace where they will never again need to seek of Him the reason for their national punishment through fasting. For they will be perpetually delivered. That, Zechariah proclaims, is where the focus needs to be.

How, then, was this matter of the fasts resolved? We are not specifically told. "According to Jewish tradition, when the nation was in peace and prosperity the fasts were suspended; when they were in trouble the fasts were reinstated. Since AD 70 [when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and its temple] the Jews keep the principal fasts" (Feinberg, p. 312). This would seem to be acceptable, as long as the right focus is maintained when participating in the fasts. As Jesus said in the same verse cited above, Matthew 9:15, His own followers would fast when He was no longer with them. Of course, this refers more to personally chosen times. Yet national days of prayer and fasting on traditional days would be acceptable as well as long as they don't devolve into ritualism, legalism, self-pity or false piety.

While the negative aspect here sadly still often characterizes Jewish religious practice today, that will not be the case in the world to come. Indeed, the people of other nations in the Millennium will even seek out the Jews as those who are close to God—and who can therefore guide and teach them in the ways of true worship (Zechariah 8:20-23).

### **Prophecy Against Judah's Neighbors (Zechariah 9:1-10:1)**

Chapters 9-14 of Zechariah contain two undated oracles. They may have been written years after chapters 1-8. Some have suggested a time in the prophet's old age, perhaps later than the Persian conflict with Greece around 480 B.C. since Greece appears in this section as a dominant power—though this is not a requirement, as God well knew that Greece would emerge as such a power. The focus of this section of prophecy is

predominantly on the end time, with 18 occurrences of the phrase “in that day.” And it is a heavily messianic section, referring to both the first and second comings of the Messiah.

Verses 1-2 of chapter 9 label the first oracle as a message against the land of Hadrach, Damascus, Hamath, Tyre and Sidon (and verses 5-7 add the cities of Philistia). Hadrach was in Syria, “north of Hamath on the Orontes River, southwest of Aleppo” (The Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 1). Verses 3-4 describe destruction to come on Tyre, reminiscent of Ezekiel’s prophecies against Tyre in Ezekiel 26-28. As explained in the Bible Reading Program comments on those prophecies, destruction of both ancient Tyre and its end-time counterpart appears to be intended. The greatest ancient destruction of Tyre was accomplished by Alexander the Great—as the unwitting agent of God—when he rebuilt an ancient causeway out to the island fortress, breached its towering walls and set the city ablaze. And this was a forerunner of the destruction God will bring against end-time Tyre—that is, the global power bloc also referred to in prophecy as “Babylon the Great” (see Revelation 18).

Many see Zechariah 9:1-8 as descriptive of Alexander’s march down the eastern Mediterranean coastline, as he subdued the Persian territories there. “His successes,” commentator Charles Feinberg states, “are recounted in verses 1-7, and verse 8 notes the deliverance of Jerusalem. After the Battle of Issus, Alexander quickly conquered Damascus, Sidon, Tyre (after seven months it was burned), Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron. The course of his victories in 332 BC was from northern Syria south by the valley of the Orontes River to Damascus, then along the Phoenician and Philistine coast” (The Minor Prophets, 1990, p. 314). This was more than a century after Zechariah lived.

Verses 5-6 says, “The king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. A mixed race [‘bastard’ in the King James Version here is an inaccurate translation] shall settle in Ashdod.” In Alexander’s conquest, “Ashkelon lost its population, and Gaza was reduced after a siege of a few months.... Special mention is made by a contemporary of Alexander that the king of Gaza was brought alive to the conqueror after the city was taken; the satrap, or petty ‘king’ of the city, was bound to a chariot and dragged around the city to his death.... Ashdod was to lose its native population during this invasion, being replaced by a... mongrel people. It was Alexander’s policy to mingle different conquered peoples” (p. 316).

Notice that verse 1 mentioned the eyes of all people, especially “all the tribes of Israel” being on the Lord—that is, on Him carrying out His will against these nations. The scattered tribes of Israel, on the northern periphery of the Persian Empire, experienced a measure of liberation through the conquests of Alexander. Yet this could also signify all the Israelites of the end time witnessing the coming of the Lord to deliver them—as described later in the chapter (see verse 14).

Verse 7 describes the removal of unclean and idolatrous practices from the Philistines—and apparently their conversion, as their remnant will be for God. This will be fulfilled at the return of Jesus Christ, demonstrating that the earlier verses in this prophecy are likely dual—applying to both ancient and future times. Ekron, probably representative in verse 7 of all the Philistines who are left, “will be like the Jebusites [the former inhabitants of Jerusalem] in a good sense. When David conquered Jerusalem, he did not destroy the Jebusites; instead, they were absorbed into Judah (e.g., Araunah in 2 Sam 24:16; 1 Chronicles 21:18). So it will be with a remnant of the Philistines” (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, note on verses 5-7).

Verse 8 further shows the end-time element of this prophecy, as God promises to never again allow a foreign oppressor to tramp through His people’s land. Since the time of Alexander, other oppressors have clearly afflicted the people of God. So the prophecy must refer to the time beyond Christ’s return.

### **The Messiah’s First and Second Comings (Zechariah 9:1-10:1)**

Zechariah 9:9 contains the prophecy of the saving Messiah arriving on the colt of a donkey. This was fulfilled when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on such a donkey colt a few days before His crucifixion (Matthew 21:2-7; John 12:12-15). “The donkey was the mount of princes (Judg. 5:10; 10:4; 12:14) and kings (2 Sam.16:1, 2)” (Nelson Study Bible, note on Zechariah 9:9). God had forbidden Israel’s kings from multiplying horses to themselves (Deuteronomy 17:16). Horses would have been a symbol of exaltation and conquest. Notice that Zechariah 9:10 shows horses and chariots as war implements. The donkey was to symbolize humility and peace—and Israel’s anointed kings were to represent the future Messiah who would humble Himself in the cause of ultimate peace.

Yet Jesus' first coming is not the primary focus of the remainder of the chapter. Verse 10 will not be fulfilled until Christ's second coming. Note the reference to Ephraim, as representative of the northern tribes. The end of the verse describes the Messiah's global dominion. In the remaining verses, we see that God will deliver His people.

Yet though Christ speaks peace to the nations (verse 10)—and indeed has done so through Scripture for nearly 2,000 years—they hatefully reject Him. He must therefore subdue them through means of war (verses 13-15). God will even use the returned captives of Ephraim (representative of the northern tribes) and Judah to fight their enemies. This is not a contradiction of the peaceful donkey imagery. Rather, it exactly parallels an ancient prophecy given about the Messiah by the patriarch Jacob: "The scepter [symbol of kingship] shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh [i.e., the Messiah] comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people. Binding his donkey to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes" (Genesis 49:10-11). "The imagery in this verse describes the warfare that the Messiah will wage to establish His reign (Ps. 2; 110; Rev. 19:11-21). Wine recalls the color of blood" (Nelson, note on Genesis 49:11-12).

Notice in verse 13 that the Israelites fight against the sons of Greece. The first part of the chapter (verses 1-8) seemed to indicate the Greco-Macedonian ruler Alexander the Great as typical of the coming of the Messiah. Yet here we see Greece as the enemy. Some have attempted to link verse 13 with the Jewish fight in the days of the Maccabees against the Seleucid Greek overlords of Syria. Yet, while there may have been a forerunner in that divinely assisted struggle, the verse here clearly mentions the presence of not just Judah but also Ephraim, as representative of the northern tribes—and they were not present during the Maccabean period.

The actual Hebrew word for Greece is Yavan (written in English as Javan). And the sons of Javan could refer to the nationalities listed in the table of nations in Genesis 10. "The sons of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim" (verse 4). Javan is generally understood to represent the Greeks. Elishah is typically equated with Cyprus. Tarshish is often thought to denote southern Europeans of the western Mediterranean, such as Spain (site of ancient Tartessus). Kittim, denoting western lands, could refer to people of Cyprus, Crete, Sicily, Italy and perhaps other western Mediterranean areas. Dodanim (spelled "Rodanim" in 1 Chronicles 1:7) may correspond to the Rhodians and other Aegean peoples. So southern Europeans could be intended in Zechariah 9:13 by Javan and his sons. Interestingly, this is where the descendants of ancient Tyre and Sidon may be found today—as well as the descendants of ancient Babylon. So the end-time Babylon, centered at Rome, may well be in mind in Zechariah 9:13. Indeed, as this latter-day system descends from ancient Greece—as from ancient Persia and Babylon before it—those who are part of it can rightly be described as descendants of Greece.

Yet the reference here may also be to the Hellenization (spread of Greek culture) begun under Alexander. By the time of Jesus' first coming, the Jews regarded all non-Jews as "Greek"—a term frequently used in the New Testament for any and all gentiles. Foreseeing this divide, God in Zechariah 9:13 may simply be contrasting the Israelites with their gentile enemies. Even today, Greece is reckoned as the birthplace of Western civilization.

The returned exiles of Israel and Judah, though reduced to mainly slingstones for weapons, will fight together against their foes—and will miraculously gain victory as Christ returns in power and glory to save them (verses 13-16). In verse 15, "Zechariah describes the victory banquet of God's people in celebration of His victory over the nations and securing of Jerusalem. The people will be filled with drink like sacrificial basins were filled with blood, and they will be filled with meat like the corners of the sacrificial altar (see Ps. 110)" (Nelson, note on verse 15).

This mighty deliverance will come "in that day" (verse 16)—the Day of the Lord. And the people of God will experience great blessing and prosperity (verses 16-17). In 10:1, "the latter rain (Deut. 11:14) refers to the rain that comes in late spring and is essential for an abundant grain harvest" (note on Zechariah 10:1). The rains signify all blessings, both physical and spiritual. God's people will pray for these—and He will answer their prayers in abundance. Just as thunder and lightning precedes a shower of rain, so will the lightning, trumpet and whirlwind of Christ's coming (9:14) precede a shower of blessings—the greatest blessing being the pouring out of God's Spirit.

This oracle continues through the remainder of Zechariah 10 and chapter 11—our next two readings.

## **2 Timothy 3**

Shaul had just given Timothy advice concerning how to deal with those who will come in opposition to the message in the last chapter and now in chapter 3 he proceeds to more of a revelation in his words to Timothy but they seem to be for this purpose of those living in the last days. For this is the setting now in Shaul's letter. "In the last days hard times shall come."

Because:

Men shall be lovers of self

Lovers of money

Boasters, proud

Blasphemers

Disobedient to parents

Thankless, wrong-doers

Unloving, unforgiving

Slanderers, without self-control

Fierce, haters of good

Betrayers, reckless, puffed up

Lovers of pleasure rather than lover of Elohim

Having a form of reverence but denying its power

Shaul is speaking of persons in the assembly here mostly. Denying the power is in reference to the straight path of Torah and its power unto LIFE. Lawlessness. We are to "turn away from these" Put them away from the true assembly. In doing this, they will be exposed.

Persecutions will come as one stands for the Way of Life and for the true Path. But their end is Life and reward. Those who are evil and imposters, let them also go on their way... going astray and leading astray. We are to stay on the true path of Torah. All the God-breathed scriptures are those that are good for direction and pointing out the landmarks to life, for knowledge of the snares and traps along the way, for getting us back onto the true and straight path, and for lighting our way for making right decisions when we reach forks in the road.

## **2 Timothy 4**

With Yehovah as witness, Shaul charges Timothy to proclaim the word. To proclaim the word with urgency at every opportunity, for the time when others will listen is going to go away. People will become hard of heart, desires fables and myths, and will not bear the truth and sound instruction. Be prepared for this and remain sober and expect hardship.