

- d. Zechariah's first burden was introduced as having the land of Hadrach and Damascus as its primary referent (9:1), and yet there is no mention of these places in the subsequent pronouncements. (This is another reason some believe the "land of Hadrach" is a symbolic name which encompasses all of the entities named in the context.) Instead, Yahweh's word was first directed toward Tyre (and Sidon by implication) and then various cities of Philistia (9:3-8). The burden's initial focus on Damascus and the land of Hadrach with no subsequent mention of them is certainly curious and without explanation in the text itself. But the fact that the burden was connected with the Lord's interest in the Gentile world (here designated "man") and the tribes of Israel suggests two things:
- 1) First, it suggests that the peoples named in this passage (vv. 1-8) should be regarded as representative of the Gentile world, and particularly as it stands in contradiction and opposition to God and His righteousness and kingdom. Certainly the original Israelite audience regarded the Arameans, Phoenicians and Philistines that way.
 - 2) And this being the case, it follows that Damascus and Hamath (and Sidon) should be included as implied referents in the Lord's word to Tyre and the cities of Philistia. This wider reference is especially important in light of Yahweh's promise of purging and restoration in verses 7-8. Failing to regard the named peoples as representative could result in the reader concluding that this promise pertained only to the Philistines.

The stated provocation for the burden in verse 1 suggests a larger concern than those groups that are named, but that suggestion is made explicit by the subsequent introduction of the coming King. His paradoxical triumph would see Zion's recovery (cf. 9:9, 11-12; also again 1:13-17, 2:1-10, 8:1-8), which was to involve the reconciliation and ingathering of the remnant of Israel and Judah (9:13-17; cf. 8:11-15; also Jeremiah 30-33; Hosea 1-3), but also the nations of the earth (9:10; also 2:10-11, 8:11-13; cf. Isaiah 11:1-12, 49:1-6; Amos 9:11-15; etc.).

In the language of the burden, Yahweh has ownership of all human existence in a purposeful way; unto Him is the eye (issues of life) of mankind and all the tribes of Israel. *Thus His pledge to purge and gather (9:7-8) is His oath to the world of men as well as the household of Israel.*

It is with this in view that the burden turned first to the city of Tyre (9:3-4). Again, Sidon was probably not mentioned because of its close, subordinate relationship with Tyre. Sidon was actually the older of the two cities, but Tyre eventually eclipsed it in power, wealth and significance. At the same time, the two were virtually twin cities, so that the fate of the one implied the same (or similar) fate for the other. And what was here pronounced upon Tyre was its complete destruction. Though the city had become bloated with wealth (in the burden's language, silver and gold as common as dust and dirt) and was seemingly invincible as an island fortress, her doomed was assured.

What the Assyrians and Babylonians had been unable to accomplish, Alexander would. He was the one through whom the Lord would fulfill His word against Tyre and Sidon, but not these Phoenician cities only; Alexander would also execute Yahweh's judgment against Syria and Philistia. So it was that, after conquering the lands of Asia Minor (then under Persian control), Alexander turned his army south along the Mediterranean coast into Phoenicia and then through Palestine with Egypt as his goal. (He conquered Damascus a year later on his return from Egypt as he made his way into Mesopotamia.) When he came to Tyre (332 B.C.), Alexander laid siege to it, using the rubble of the mainland city to build a causeway to the island fortress. For the first time, an invading army had prevailed against invincible Tyre and the Lord's word was fulfilled: Though Tyre had built a fortress for herself and her vast wealth, her riches were plundered, her splendor was cast into the sea and she was burned with fire (ref. again 9:3-4).

- e. The rulers and people of Philistia surely learned of Alexander's extraordinary triumph in Phoenicia and they knew he and his forces were headed toward Egypt. That put their cities squarely in his path and they had every reason to expect the same horrific fate Tyre had sustained. If that island fortress couldn't withstand Alexander's army, how could they? Thus the burden recorded that, at the news of Tyre's destruction, Ashkelon would see and be afraid and Gaza would writhe in agony along with Ekron. And their terror was not unfounded; the king of Gaza was going to perish, Ashkelon would be stripped of its inhabitants and Ashdod would be settled with foreigners. Alexander – as the armies of Assyria and Babylon before Him (Isaiah 10:5-19; Jeremiah 51:15-26) – was the instrument of Yahweh's indignation and he would crush the pride of the Philistines who'd opposed Him and His kingdom and people since the days of Moses (9:5-6; cf. Exodus 13:17; Judges 3:1-4, 16:1-31; also 1 Samuel 9:1-16, 14:52, 17:1-52).

The burden highlighted that Tyre's fall was going to strike fear in the hearts of the Philistines and this prophecy proved true. Convinced they could not resist him, most of the Philistine cities and lords quickly capitulated to Alexander; Gaza's ruler, however, was confident in his city's fortification and attempted to withstand the Greek king. It took Alexander's army several assaults, but Gaza did fall to him. And when it did, he slaughtered its men, took its women and children as slaves and dragged Gaza's king through the streets until he was dead (ref. 9:5b).

The cities named in the burden – Ashkelon, Gaza, Ashdod and Ekron – were four of the five chief cities of Philistia during the period of the Israelite kingdom (ref. 1 Samuel 6:16-18). The fifth was Gath, and together these five cities under their five lords formed the Philistine pentapolis. (Compare Joshua 13:1-3 where Gath is referred to in terms of its residents, the Gittites.) Scholars propose different explanations for Gath being omitted from the burden, but it's noteworthy that this pattern is followed elsewhere in the prophets (cf. Jeremiah 25:20; Amos 1:6-8; Zephaniah 2:4-6). Clearly Gath's status as a chief Philistine city had dissolved by the time of King Uzziah and Amos' prophetic ministry; indeed, his prophecy seems to indicate that Gath had been overthrown (ref. Amos 1:1, 6:1-2).

- f. Yahweh had appointed the cities of Philistia, along with Syria and Phoenicia, for judgment and desolation. He was sending an invincible army against them, not only because of the detrimental influence they'd had on His covenant people, but also because they themselves had devised and worshiped imaginary gods in denial of the truth that they were men made in His image and likeness. They had embraced the most basic of all lies and would suffer the just recompense of their unbelief (Romans 1:18-25). But their destruction wasn't to be absolute or final; once again Yahweh affirmed that restoration was His goal for the world (9:7-8).

The Lord made this point in a poignant and arresting way, employing idolatry imagery in a manner intended to highlight its gross perverseness (9:7a). Specifically, these images drew on the ritual practice of the worshipper partaking in the sacrificial offering. This practice was part of Israel's worship and so wasn't offensive in itself (cf. Leviticus 7:11-18, 8:1-33 with Exodus 34:12-15). What made this imagery shocking and repulsive was the depiction of eating blood and the meat of unclean, defiling sacrifices: *Blood was in the mouth of these worshippers and that which stuck between their teeth was defiled and detestable.* For the Jewish recipients of the burden, there could be no more powerful depiction of the perverse and abominable worship of the nations in their alienation from the true and living God (cf. Leviticus 7:15-21, 11:1-47, 17:1-16).

There were a myriad of ways the Lord could have described the rebellion, degradation and guilt of the peoples named in the burden, but focusing on their idolatry was precisely and perfectly appropriate for at least two reasons:

- 1) The first is that idolatry is the most basic expression of man's fallenness. The fall introduced an intrinsic and determinative separation between man and God, so that every human exercise (whether thought, word or deed) is simply a manifestation of the person's fundamental alienation from God (cf. Genesis 3:24 with Isaiah 59:1-2; Romans 1:18-23, 14:22-23). Idolatry speaks to what a man *is* and only then to what he *does*. And because idolatry is intrinsic to man in his fallen condition, it determines and defines everything he does including his worship and devotion – even when his devotion is directed to the true God. Thus Paul could affirm that he was a blasphemer of God even while he was blameless under the prescription God had given (cf. 1 Timothy 1:12-13; Philippians 3:1-6).
- 2) The second reason springs from the first. By treating the nations' offense and guilt in terms of idolatry, the Lord was able to illumine in the clearest and most glorious fashion the nature and extent of His restorative work. In declaring that work, Yahweh notably didn't say that He was going to satisfy His justice against the violators or, beyond that, remove their guilt and forgive their offense (though He would certainly accomplish these). *No, He was going to deal absolutely and conclusively with their idolatry:* He was going to remove the blood from their mouths and the defiled and detestable sacrificial food from between their teeth.

- g. The Lord was pledging to put an end to idolatrous practices and, by implication, eliminate idolatry itself. But His elimination of idolatry implies – indeed, necessitates – the authentic and full restoration of the idolater to Himself. There is no other way to eradicate human idolatry since fallen man is inherently idolatrous: Alienated from the true God, people cannot worship Him in truth for the simple reason that they don't *know* Him in truth. Men will continue to be idolaters until such time as they are restored to a true and living knowledge of their Creator.

Reconciliation and restoration are implied in Yahweh's pledge to eradicate idolatrous practice, but this is made explicit by His subsequent pronouncement: Cleansing and ingathering, not destruction, were to be the outcome of His dealing with the nations' idolatry. These Gentile idolaters were going to endure as a remnant ("remain"), but now as a part of His people: "*He, even he, will remain unto our God and become as a clan in Judah and like the Jebusite.*"

The first thing to note about this pronouncement is the use of the masculine singular pronoun (*he, his*). Some English versions obscure this by adopting a plural rendering (NAS, NIV). Other versions employ the singular pronoun, but leave the impression that it has Philistia, or the Philistine people, as its referent (ESV, NAB). But "Philistines" is a plural noun in the text and so not the natural grammatical antecedent for the singular pronoun. In reality, this is an instance of the Hebrew *collective singular*: a grammatical device whereby a group of entities is identified with a singular pronoun in order to convey that that group is being treated collectively as a singular whole. And here that collective doesn't consist solely of the cities of Philistia, but all of the people groups named in the context.

The Lord pronounced His judgment upon Damascus, Hamath, Tyre, Sidon and Philistia, and all of those entities were to enjoy the same outcome from His hand being upon them. He introduced and addressed the entities separately, but He regarded them as a collective from the standpoint of His ultimate purpose; all were to be delivered and cleansed from their idolatry. And inasmuch as these named people groups symbolized the nations of the earth – i.e., mankind in distinction from Israel (ref. again 9:1), the outcome they were to experience at the Lord's hand implies the same outcome for the entire world of men.

And what Yahweh was here promising the Gentile world was authentic and full restoration to Him: *He* (the nations considered as a singular whole) was going to remain after Yahweh's judgment, but now as unto *our* God (the God of Israel). This transformation and incorporation are explicit in the subsequent descriptions:

The idolatrous nations were going to be reconciled to Israel's God, but not as a separate appendage or second-class community. They were to be joined to Yahweh – and therefore to His people – so as to become like a clan chieftain (that is, a distinguished head) in Judah ("Judah" designating both the regal tribe of David and, more importantly to this context, the covenant house over which David presided as Yahweh's king). (cf. Jeremiah 33:14-22)

This dynamic of ingathering and incorporation is further illustrated by the statement that *Ekron was to become like a Jebusite* (9:7c). The Jebusites were the Canaanite tribe that inhabited the region of Judea at the time of Joshua's conquest. Jerusalem (Jebus) was their stronghold and it remained so until David finally conquered the city and made it the new capital of his kingdom (ref. Joshua 3:1-10, 15:63; 2 Samuel 5:6-9). From this it might appear that the Lord was saying that Ekron was going to become an enemy of His people and kingdom as the Jebusites had been, but this is not the case. First of all, this interpretation contradicts the point being made in this verse. In fact, the issue here is not the Jebusites' opposition to Israel, but their *incorporation* as a result of David's conquest of Jerusalem. A Jebusite remnant continued to live in and around Jerusalem and many of them came to faith in Israel's God. Araunah the Jebusite appears to be a notable example; he sought to honor both David and Yahweh by donating the land and animals for the sacrifices prescribed to stay His hand (2 Samuel 24:10ff).

- h. This part of the burden closes with the Lord's reaffirmation of His watchful vigilance over His dwelling place (9:8; cf. again 1:13-2:9). Not surprisingly, this verse has been variously interpreted and an important consideration in determining its meaning is its relation to that which precedes and follows it.

Many see it as concluding the preceding context (vv. 1-6). In that case, it suggests the Lord's protection of His dwelling place (Zion and its temple) against Alexander's onslaught. Indeed, Alexander left Jerusalem and its temple intact when he passed through inland Palestine on his way to Mesopotamia. Josephus provided a sensational account of this in his writings, but his version is unsubstantiated. The reason may simply have been that the people of Jerusalem surrendered to Alexander without resistance (as did many other cities). In any case, it remained true that the Lord "encamped around His house" and preserved it against the army that "passed by and returned again." There are, however, two significant problems with this view, and they are the promises of verses 7 and 8b: Neither one of those promises was fulfilled during the time of Alexander's reign.

Thus others connect this verse more closely with the subsequent announcement of the coming King (v. 9) so that its promise pertains to the messianic age. At that time and henceforth, Yahweh would secure the well-being of His dwelling place. This interpretation certainly accords with Zechariah's larger prophecy and those of the other prophets (cf. Isaiah 54:1-17, 60:1-22; Ezekiel 40-48; Joel 3:18-21; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-5; Zephaniah 3:14-20; Haggai 2:1-9; etc.).

Indeed, in a certain sense both views have their place. Through whatever means, Yahweh *did* secure His house in the midst of Alexander's devastation. This historical deliverance demonstrated His commitment to Zion's restoration and preservation, *but with a view to the future* (9:8c): The Lord was zealous for His sanctuary and would see it restored *in truth* through the purging and ingathering of Adam's race in connection with the coming of David's Branch. *In that day and forevermore, He would be a wall of fire around Zion and the glory in her midst.*