

The Cleansing of Israel

📖 Zechariah 13:2-9

👤 Pastor Jeremy Thomas

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🌐 fbgbible.org

📍 Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin Street

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

(830) 997-8834

In our study of Major Prophetic Passages, we are looking at Zechariah 12-14. These chapters are often neglected, despite their major impact on NT prophetic passages like Matthew 24 and the Book of Revelation. Because of that we are taking a closer look at them. By way of review, Zechariah lived after the partial restoration of Judah when Cyrus permitted the Jews to return and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. They completed the foundations and the altar but local enemies resisted their attempts to complete the temple. This caused distress and loss of hope. To restore their hope God sent the prophet Zechariah. In vision God showed him the glorious future of Israel when they would at the last be delivered by their Messiah into the kingdom of God. The time period of their deliverance is what Jeremiah called "the time of Jacob's trouble" and Daniel described as "a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time" and Jesus would later describe as "a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world." At that time Zech 12:1-9 describes all the nations of the world organizing themselves under the anti-Christ in order to destroy Israel in what the Revelation refers to as "the war of the great day of God almighty" and is popularly known today as the Campaign of Armageddon. In 12:9 we learn that the Lord will set out to destroy all the nations of the earth in order to deliver Israel and He will do so by causing confusion among the enemy armies and strengthening the Jews to fight with incomparable valor.

Last time we saw that Zech 12:10 describes the work of God that will cause a change in the nation Israel causing the Lord to go forth in battle against these nations. This work is the pouring out of the Spirit of grace and supplication. In the Hebrew this is a massive spillage of the Spirit upon all Israel that will convict the Jewish people all over the earth of their sin of crucifying Jesus, the Messiah, and they will look to Him with a repentant faith accompanied by bitter mourning, as of the mourning over the loss of a firstborn son. In 12:11 a mourning comparable to the death of King Josiah, their last hope before the exile, in the plain of Megiddo. In 12:12 the entire land of Israel will mourn, every family by themselves and the women by themselves, whether descended from David, representing the kings, Nathan, representing the prophets, Levi, representing the priests or Shimei, representing the families of Israel in general. As they mourn they will confess Isa 53:1-9, that the One they despised bore their sorrows...the One they esteemed stricken and smitten of God...was pierced through for

their transgressions and crushed for their iniquities. And having a repentant faith in Jesus the atonement will be applied to them as a nation. 13:1 says a fountain will be opened, a perpetual fountain bringing continual cleansing of sin and impurity so that they are fit to dwell in the presence of God forever. This is the fulfillment of the New Covenant. As Lindsey says, "On the day of Christ's crucifixion the fountain was opened *potentially* for all Israel and the whole world. At the Second Advent of Christ, the **fountain will be opened experientially** for the Jewish nation. This spiritual cleansing of the nation is associated in other passages of Scripture with Israel's spiritual regeneration and the inauguration of the New Covenant (e.g., Jer. 31:31–37; Ezek. 36:25–32; Rom. 11:26–27)."¹

13:2 continues this line of thought by describing the results of Israel's spiritual regeneration. **It will come about in that day, declares the LORD of hosts, "that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land.** The first person singular **I** as a reference to **the LORD of hosts** indicates that the Messiah is the ultimate source of this extermination. Unger describes it this way, "Messiah is the speaker...He will exterminate Israel's ancient besetting sins, *idolatry* and *false prophecy* together with their *demonic dynamic* ("the spirit of uncleanness")." The location of the extermination will be **the land** of Israel but other prophetic passages indicate this extermination will cover the whole earth. Three things to be exterminated are idolatry, false prophets and demonism. First, idolatry. The Messiah says, **I will cut off the names of the idols from the land.** The major reason Israel has never enjoyed all of the Promised Land is because idolatry has never been exterminated from the land. When Joshua and his generation entered the land they were commanded to exterminate all the people in the land because they were idolaters and permitting them to remain would pose a serious threat to the faithfulness of Israel to the one true God. When they failed to exterminate them the idolatry of these people did infiltrate Israel and the defilement they brought on the land caused God to exile them from the land. It's not true that pagan worship doesn't hurt anyone. It has defiling effects on the environment that bring God to cause its inhabitants to be kicked out of the land. In the future, one greater than Joshua, Jesus will exterminate all the idols from the land so that Israel can dwell within it. Lindsey said, "Idolatry near the time of the Second Advent of Christ will include worship of the image of the beast in the temple in Jerusalem (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; Matt. 24:15; 2 Thes. 2:4; Rev. 13:4), though other types of idolatry will also be present (Rev. 9:20)."² The addition of the words **and they will no longer be remembered** signals the permanency of the extermination. The second thing to be exterminated are false prophets who propagate idolatry. The Messiah says, **And I will also remove the prophets.** The prophet is, in the Hebrew, the *nabi*, the one who in his true office is the voice of God. But here the reference is to false **prophets** as can be seen easily from vv 3ff. Clearly there will be Jewish false prophets during this time. Jesus confirms this later in the Olivet Discourse, Matt 24:11, where He says, "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many." The Jewish context points to Jewish false prophets. These will be in addition to the false prophet described in the Book of Revelation as the sidekick of the anti-Christ. The Messiah will remove them all. The third thing to be exterminated are the demons. **I will remove...the unclean spirit from the land.** The **unclean spirit**

is a collective singular referring to all the demons that are the true animators of the false prophets who propagate idolatry with all of its attendant unclean practices such as sexual deviation, cutting of the flesh and drug use. Constable says, "The reference to the banishment of the unclean spirits out of the land . . . is the only passage in Scripture which explicitly refers to the imprisonment of demons during the kingdom age. But since Satan is remanded to the abyss (the prison house of evil spirits) during this era, as is clearly declared in Revelation 20:1–3, it is a necessary corollary that his demon aids shall also share the same fate."³ The land must be cleansed from these things for the kingdom of God to come. In conclusion, all three of these are connected. Unger said, "The term is here employed of the demonic dynamic which energizes idolatry (I Cor. 10:20, 21) and of the prophets of diviners associated with idolatry (I Kings 22:21-23). Idolatry with the variegated occult phenomena connected with it (Deut. 18:9-14), including paganistic prognostication or divination (Deut. 13:1-5), is energized by demons or evil spirits (I John 4:1-5; I Tim. 4:1-3; II Thess. 2:8-10)."⁴ These elements will be removed from the land and the planet at Messiah's return. Then He will be the Only One.

In 13:3 if any false prophets remain in Israel they will be executed by their parents in keeping with the Mosaic Law. **And if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who gave birth to him will say to him, 'You shall not live, for you have spoken falsely in the name of the LORD'; and his father and mother who gave birth to him will pierce him through when he prophesies.** Since **prophesying** is speaking a word as if it is from God then to do this falsely is considered a capital crime by the OT. The OT gave two tests for determining whether a prophet was true or false. One test was whether all that the prophet predicted came true. The test was not whether something the prophet predicted came true but whether all the prophet spoke came true. If one thing he spoke was not true then he was not a prophet of God and was to be executed. He has to prophesy correctly 100%. The second test was whether what the prophet spoke was in harmony with prior divine revelation. If anything was not in harmony with prior divine revelation then the Lord had not spoken it and the prophet was to be executed. So the second test was teaching orthodoxy. At this time all the prophets who fail either of these tests will have been removed from the land. **if anyone still prophecies, then** that person's own **father and mother** will be the ones to cast the verdict **You shall not live**. False prophecy is a capital crime. The reason is because **you have spoken falsely in the name of the LORD**. It is a serious thing to claim that you are a prophet of God because a prophet is the mouthpiece of God. Therefore, to disobey a prophet is to disobey God. But false prophets aren't the mouthpiece of God but the mouthpiece of demons. Therefore, the punishment is death. And not only will the person's own **father and mother** pronounce the verdict of death but they will also execute the verdict by killing their own son. **And his father and mother who gave birth to him will pierce him through when he prophesies.** Significantly, the word **pierce** is the same word used in 12:10 of crucifixion of the Messiah. Here it is a reference to killing their own son in keeping with divine justice.

Therefore, this verse is expressing that the spiritually regenerate state of the nation will be evidenced by their strong desire to not allow the land to be defiled by false prophets. So strong will their desire be to please God that even the strength of a father-son or mother-son relationship will not get in the way of the administration of

true justice. Constable said, "If anyone would try to play the part of a false prophet, his own parents, those closest to him, would put him to death. This was what God had commanded the Israelites to do to false prophets (Deut. 13:6–9)."⁵ Though never done before, they will at this time. Sin is sin and evil is evil and the thing that runs thicker than blood connection is the justice of God.

In 13:4 **Also, it will come about in that day that the prophets will each be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies, and they will not put on a hairy robe in order to deceive; but he will say, 'I am not a prophet; I am a tiller of the ground, for a man sold me as a slave in my youth.'** In short, the dangers of being capitally punished for being a false prophet will be so strictly enforced that it will be a true deterrent. One of the arguments against capital punishment is that it is not a deterrent to crime. However, when those closest to the criminal are executing it despite the close association it will be a deterrent. Apparently how capital punishment is carried out is relevant in the discussion of its effectiveness. In that day it will be very effective. Lindsey said, "This prevalence of justice will cause false prophets to disavow all associations with their prophetic trade."⁶ Two responses will be common in that day. First, we are told **that prophets will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies.** The Hebrew says excessively ashamed. The reason is they will realize that the vision given them is demonically inspired. They had been caught in the deception of the great deceiver and their visions were lies. Thus, they will be excessively ashamed. Second, we are told that **they will not put on a hairy robe in order to deceive.** Prophets of old like Elijah often wore a **hairy robe** as a sign that they were a true prophet. False prophets would try to deceive others into thinking they were true prophets by wearing a **hairy robe.** But the danger of being a false prophet in this time will be so dangerous that **they will not put on a hairy robe in order to deceive.** Instead they will want to hide their identity.

In 13:5 these false prophets will deny they are prophets by claiming to be involved in life-long occupations like farming. **But he will say, 'I am not a prophet; I am a tiller of the ground, for a man sold me as a slave in my youth.'** Those alleged to be prophets will lie about their occupation. The reason, again, is to hide their identity and the fact they had been caught up in the Satanic deception of the anti-Christ's system.

13:6 is a dispute among scholars. The dispute is whether it continues to refer to the false prophets as the previous verses or to the Messiah as the following verses. If it refers to the false prophets then in their attempts to hide their identity **one will say to him, 'What are these wounds between your arms.** The **wounds between the arms** would be occultic cuttings so common in pagan ritual. Constable said, "Sometimes false prophets cut themselves to arouse prophetic ecstasy, to increase ritual potency, or to identify themselves with a particular god (cf. Lev. 19:28; 21:5; Deut. 14:1; 1 Kings 18:28; Jer. 16:6; 41:5; 48:37)."⁷ As such the Israelites were commanded not to cut or tattoo their bodies. Such cuttings were connected to pagan religion and demonic influence. To deny the association they **will say, "Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends."** In the **house of my friends** might better be rendered, "those who love me." In other words, they will say that the scars from the cuttings were the results of discipline they received as children; they will try to escape being identified

as prophets and given the death sentence. For one of the first times in history justice will begin to prevail over pagan occultism. However, if this refers to the Messiah, as some excellent commentators hold, even though this verse is never quoted in the NT as fulfilled by the Messiah, whereas verse 7 is quoted as being fulfilled by Messiah, and so this is speculative. But if this is a description of Messiah then the **one who will say to him, 'What are these wounds between your arms?'** Is a Jew who is looking upon the crucified Christ in 12:10 and realizing that He pierced Him by taking on the same attitude toward Him as those who crucified Him. The rest of the words are seen as coming from the Messiah, **'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.'** The Messiah's **friends** would be the house of Israel and they led the way in crucifying Him. That is the Messianic interpretation. But again, this verse is never quoted in the NT as being fulfilled in the Messiah and so it is probably best to see this as a continuation of the discussion of false prophets and their attempt to hide their identities by lying about their occult cuttings in order to save their skin.

In any case 13:7 is Messianic. It seems distinct from the former in that it is poetic as signified by the distinct typesetting of the publishers of our English Bible. Constable said, "Zechariah now returned in a poem to the subject of the Shepherd that he had mentioned in chapter 11."⁸ Lindsey added, "This passage (vv. 7–9) speaks of the smitten Shepherd (v. 7a), the scattered sheep (vv. 7b–8), and the saved remnant (v. 9)."⁹ In verse 7, **"Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, And against the man, My Associate," Declares the Lord of hosts. "Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; And I will turn My hand against the little ones. ⁸"It will come about in all the land," Declares the Lord, "That two parts in it will be cut off and perish; But the third will be left in it. ⁹"And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' And they will say, 'The Lord is my God.'"** In 13:7 the words **Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd** are undoubtedly the words of the Father directed against His Son in the crucifixion. There is a divine and human side to the crucifixion. Neither is to be excluded though they differ in their responsibility. Acts 2:23 "this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." Acts 4:27, "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur." The expression **Awake, O sword** employs two figures of speech. First, apostrophe, where an impersonal object is addressed as if it were a person. Second, personification, where the inanimate object is ascribed the ability to hear and respond. Here the impersonal object is the **sword** and it is told to **awake**. The **sword** is being used figuratively as synecdoche, the instrument causing death, which in this case stands for the crucifixion. Unger says, "The **sword** is here the figure of the *death* (of Christ), since this weapon is commonly used figuratively for any means of taking away human life (as in Exod. 5:21; II Sam. 12:9; Ps. 17:13)." The phrase then shows that the Father would be in direct control of the death of His **Shepherd**, the Messiah. The OT then clearly predicts the death of the Messiah.

But there is more than that. A further significant description then follows; **And against the man, My Associate.** This is a remarkable statement of the deity of the Son and co-equality with the Father. The expression **the man, My Associate**, is a translation of the Hebrew *gever amithi*. The word *gever* is not the usual word for man but the word for a strong man who protects others. The word *amithi* is the word for one who stands in the closest relation. Together, DeWette translates, "the man, my equal" and Leo Juda "a man coequal with me." The deity of the Son could not be stated in stronger terms. So then in just the first two phrases of this verse both the death and deity of the Messiah are asserted. So powerful is this attestation that Unger said, "The divine witness to the death and deity of the prophesied Messiah makes this verse one of the most significant in the entire Old Testament."

The verse continues with the Father as the speaker, **Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; and I will turn against the little ones.** The expression **Strike the Shepherd** inevitably refers to the crucifixion once more but here the result of the crucifixion is put forth as the reason, **that the sheep may be scattered.** This part of the verse is quoted by Jesus in Matt 26:31 to refer to the scattering of His disciples in light of His crucifixion. They would all fall away from Him, deny Him and scatter. As Constable said, "The striking (death) of the Shepherd would result in the scattering of the Shepherd's sheep (i.e., Israel, 11:4–14). The Lord Jesus quoted this part of the verse, claiming the role of the Shepherd, when he anticipated the scattering of His disciples following His death (cf. Matt. 26:31, 56; Mark 14:27, 50)."¹⁰ Yet in the original context it seems to refer to the entire house of Israel being scattered, and therefore a prediction of the events of AD70. Lindsey agreed, "The scattering of the sheep also seems to refer to the scattering of the Jewish nation when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in a.d. 70."¹¹ Not only would the disciples be scattered by His pungent crucifixion but the entire nation would be scattered as divine judgment for crucifying Him. The expression **and I will turn against the little ones** is a difficult one but probably means that even the young ones of Israel would be caught up in this terrible scattering brought about temporarily by the Romans in AD70 under the relentless Titus.

Now in dispersion 13:8 speaks of the final proportion of those of the land of Israel who will withstand the fiery judgment and enter the kingdom. **It will come about in all the land, Declares the LORD, That two parts in it will be cut off and perish; But the third will be left in it.** The reference to **the land** is to **the land** of Israel. In the land, during the great tribulation, when the anti-Christ will have turned his destructive purposes and agencies against the Jewish people. **Two parts in it will be cut off and perish.** The word **cut off** means to be empty, to hunger and **perish** means to die. They will suffer hardship and die of hunger, the sword or other causes in that most horrific time. **But**, by contrast, **the third will be left in it**, in the land. **The third** are undoubtedly the remnant in 12:10 who look in repentant faith upon Him whom they pierced. "The surviving remnant will have been purged and purified by the persecutions in the Tribulation, as well as by God's judgment on living Israel at the Second Advent (cf. Ezek. 20:33–38; Matt. 25:1–30)."¹² In other words, the NT clarifies the picture by indicating in Matt 24-25 that there will still be unbelieving Jews on earth when Christ returns but they will be removed by judgment. The one-third then refers to the proportion of Jews who will believe and enter the

kingdom whereas the two-thirds refers to the proportion of Jews who will not believe and will not enter the kingdom but will be killed either during the Tribulation under the persecution of the anti-Christ or by Christ at His coming. Constable said, "This remnant must be the same group of Israelites, described in 12:10–13:1, who would turn to God in repentance. Evidently two-thirds of the Jews will perish during the Tribulation and one-third will live through it and enter the Millennium."¹³

In 13:9, the Lord said, **And I will bring the third part through the fire**, that is the fiery judgments of the Tribulation, **Refine them as silver is refined**, separating the impurities by smelting, **And test them as gold is tested**. Testing to approve them, not testing to disapprove of them. Testing to give them opportunities for reward when He comes in His kingdom. **They will call on My name**. They will call on Jesus, the name which is above all names to rescue Him and to welcome Him to His kingdom. **And I will answer them**. The words He will answer them with are the words of Hosea 2:23, **They are My people**, which is the Hebrew ammi. Hosea was told to marry a prostitute named Gomer. God told Hosea to name one of their children lo-ammi. The addition of lo- means "not," so lo-ammi means not My people. In other words, Hosea's marriage to the prostitute Gomer was to depict how God's was married to an idolatrous nation. Hosea and Gomer's child lo-ammi represented the fact that as an idolatrous nation they were not His people. But in the end they would be renamed ammi, My people. And they will say to Him, **The LORD is my God**. Lindsey said, "Their renewed covenant relationship with the Lord (Hosea 1–2; Jer. 32:38–41; Ezek. 37:23–28) will be reflected in God's words, **They are My people** (cf. Zech. 8:8), and the people's response, **The Lord is our** (lit., "my") **God** (cf. Hosea 2:21–23)."¹⁴ From that day forward this relationship will continue throughout the kingdom which is the subject of Zech 14.

In conclusion, so far we have seen in Zech 12-13 that the order of events at the end of the 70th week of Daniel will be that all the nations of the earth will gather against Israel and Jerusalem. At that time God will spill out a massive work of the Spirit upon the nation. They will look to Jesus with a repentant faith. They will mourn excessively over Him. The Lord will set out to exterminate all the nations of the earth giving the armies of Israel miraculous strength. They will exterminate all false prophets who aligned themselves with the anti-Christ and the false prophet. Fathers and mothers will exterminate their own children for speaking falsely in the name of the Lord. The false prophets will realize they are in trouble and will begin trying to hide their identity. They will stop wearing the hairy robe garments of the prophets in order to deceive and will claim to be life-long workers in other vocations. The cuttings they performed on their flesh in connection with their occult practices they will blame on scars from physical discipline as children. But to no avail, and the Lord will remove demonism and idolatry throughout the land. An important look at the event which leads to Israel's time of trouble and deliverance is in view when the Father is shown to have as part of His plan the crucifixion of His Shepherd, the one who is co-equal with Him. One purpose of the crucifixion is to scatter the disciples and the whole nation Israel including the youngest among them. And it will come about in the latter days of Israel that two parts of Israel in the land will die and one part will be left. This one third will be refined as silver and tested as gold such

that they will call on the name of Jesus and He will answer and say, "They are My people, And they will say, "The LORD is my God." Next week Zech 14.

What can we learn? First, that God is a covenant making and covenant keeping God. He made four unconditional covenants with Israel and He intends to keep those covenants. So, though Israel has been under divine discipline for thousands of years, a corollary truth to divine discipline is that those under discipline belong to Him in some sense. The sense is that they are His covenant people. Yet in the end only those Jews who believe will enjoy the blessings of the covenant in the kingdom to come. Second, that replacement theology is incorrect. It is dangerous to interpret these passages as referring in some way to the Church. Many details have to be ignored or glossed over in order to make this about the Church. It has to do with Israel and if God is a God of His word then God will keep His word to Israel. And because he will keep His word to Israel we know that He will keep His word to us, the Church.

¹ F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1568.

² F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1568.

³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Zec 13:2.

⁴ Merrill F Unger, *Zechariah*, 224.

⁵ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Zec 13:3.

⁶ F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1568.

⁷ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Zec 13:6.

⁸ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Zec 13:7.

⁹ F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1568.

¹⁰ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Zec 13:7.

¹¹ F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1569.

¹² F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1569.

¹³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Zec 13:8.

¹⁴ F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1569.