



ZECHARIAH, Being the People of God

Spiritual Cleansing Through Fire

Lesson 13 Zechariah 13:1-9

INTRODUCTION

Chapters 9 through 11 comprised a single “burden” Zechariah received from God, and chapters 12 through 14 comprise the final “burden” Zechariah received and was inspired to write. To summarize what Zechariah has said leading up to the present chapter, in chapter 9 Zechariah prophesied the coming of the King-Messiah who would fight for and free his people. Chapter 10 presented the conditions during the reign, what we would call the Millennial reign in view of New Testament revelation, of the King-Messiah. Chapter 11 presented the Messiah as God’s Good Shepherd, whom the people would reject and value at 30 pieces of silver, and thus be relegated to a bad shepherd who would devour them. Whereas the rejection of Messiah in Chapter 11 looks to the first advent of Jesus, chapter 12 looks to his second advent and a time of national revival for Israel. The present chapter looks to the time of the Second Advent, and the revival that is associated with Messiah’s return, and explains the spiritual cleansing that will be poured out on the Jewish nation.

13:1 In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.

The phrase “*in that day*” occurs twenty times in Zechariah and occurred six times in the prior chapter. This phrase appears abundantly in the prophets and is shorthand for “the day of the Lord,” that future time when Messiah comes in judgment on Israel’s enemies and with blessings for His people. We do well to see this verse as a continuation of the national revival experienced by Israel as explained in Zechariah 12:10-14. A fountain is opened, and its waters wash sin away. This idea is pictured elsewhere in the Old Testament. For instance, Ezekiel wrote: “*Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you*” (Ezekiel 36:25). In the New Testament, Paul wrote: “*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word*” (Ephesians 5:25-26). Other passages use the idea of water as cleansing and life-giving. (Numbers 31:23; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Isaiah 12:2-3). Jesus said to Nicodemus: “*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*” (John 3:5). And Jesus offered living waters to the woman at the well in John 4. To be saved, a person must be cleansed of their sin and regenerated by the Spirit. This passage in Zechariah is further confirmed, and applied to Jesus, by Paul in Romans 11:25-27. We do well to note that the term “*fountain*” (Hebrew *maqor*) describes a water source that flows unaided by human hands. This is a picture of salvation by grace.

13:2 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land.

The future revival in Israel will not only be a time of justification (a declaration of righteousness), but also of sanctification. God, the Lord of hosts, will remove sin from the land, from the daily experience of the people. The “*names*” of the idols will be removed, and they will be forgotten. The sin is typified by two of its most serious manifestations, idolatry and false prophecy. These issues are addressed in many other places in Scripture (e.g., Jeremiah 23:13-14, 30; 27:8-10; Ezekiel 13:1-14:11; Lamentations 2:14, 4:13). We know from Jesus’ preaching in His Olivet Discourse that the false

prophets will remain until His return (Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 23-24). And in the Revelation, during the Tribulation period, idolatry is prominent insofar as the false prophet leads and deceives the world in worshipping the beast (anti-Christ) and his animated image. Idolatry is connected with Satanic/demonic activity, and when Jesus returns He will remove the unclean spirit from the land. In Revelation 20:1-3, we read that after Jesus returns to institute His kingdom, Satan is bound in the bottomless pit.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the parallel between the cleansing in 13:1-2 and what should occur in the life of a believer?
 2. How thorough is the cleansing of the land? How thorough should the sanctification of the believer be?
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13:3 And it shall come to pass, *that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the LORD: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth.*

Many commentators hold that this passage pictures a hypothetical situation in order to make a point because land has been cleansed completely (13:2) and thus all the false prophets are gone. The weakness in this view is that the next several verses continue the theme and seem too detailed to be only hypothetical. Instead of a hypothetical, it may be that Zechariah is emphasizing the extent of the cleansing away of the false prophets from the land. To impress the point on his audience, Zechariah essentially says that even if a false prophet arose, his own parents would execute him. This would comport with the law outlined in Deuteronomy 13:6-10. Moreover, “*in that day*” people will revere their relationship with God more than all other relationships.

13:4 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive:*

There is a tremendous difference between regret and remorse. We routinely hear purported apologies from public figures caught in some criminal or immoral activity (usually after they have denied wrongdoing and then been shown the indisputable evidence of their guilt). Of course, they regret what they did only because they were caught, but that is not genuine remorse. In the same way, the false prophets are “*ashamed*” of their lies because of the severity of the punishment. To try to evade the punishment, they will remove their “*rough garment*,” the traditional clothing of a prophet (1 Kings 19:13, 19; 2 Kings 2:8, 13-14; Matthew 3:4), to try to deceive the people around them.

13:5 But he shall say, *I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth.*

Not only will the false prophets try to disguise themselves, they will openly deny having been false prophets. Instead, they will claim to have some other trade than that of the prophet, for example, a farmer or rancher. Zechariah’s words partially quote, and then paraphrase, Amos’ testimony of his own background: “*Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit*” (Amos 7:14). In contrast to Amos, who used his background to give validity to his calling, the false prophets will claim this background to argue that they cannot possibly be prophets. They will claim it “*from my youth*,” that is, that they have always had the same trade and never worked as a prophet.

13:6 And *one* shall say unto him, What *are* these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, *Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.*

Their testimony will not be believed, however, and the reason is that obvious evidence will give them away. In particular, their self-inflicted wounds (1 Kings 18:28) will give them away. The wounds are indicative of self-mutilation that was commonly practiced by idolatrous prophets and priests, but strictly forbidden among God's true prophets. Thus, the wounds provide irrefutable evidence that they are false prophets. This self-mutilation is expressly forbidden in Deuteronomy 14:1. They will try to lie about the source of the wounds but to no avail.

QUESTIONS

3. The people are seen here as quickly seeing through the false prophets by asking the right questions. What is the application to us today? What are the right questions?
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13:7 Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man *that is my fellow*, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

Zechariah now returns to the shepherd theme of chapter 11. In chapter 11, the Messiah (the Good Shepherd) was rejected. Here, He is not only rejected but killed. Zechariah goes back to this theme to further elaborate on Israel's condition and need for God's intervention. The reference to the "sword" does not necessarily mean death by a literal sword, but a violent death. The "sword" is used against "my shepherd," that is, God's good shepherd. The good shepherd is also called "my fellow," a term that carries the idea of a peer or equal and, in this case, suggests deity. Zechariah may well have had in mind the Suffering Servant passage, Isaiah 53:10. Jesus applied this passage to Himself: "Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad" (Matthew 26:31). Israel will be scattered as a result of its rejection of Messiah Jesus, but in a more immediate context, Jesus' own disciples would scatter or abandon Him (Mark 14:27). In 70 A.D., the Roman troops were victorious over the land and the nation was scattered.

13:8 And it shall come to pass, *that in all the land*, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off *and die*; but the third shall be left therein.

The reference to "the land" in this verse is not the real estate but the Jewish population there. God says that two-thirds will be killed and only one-third will survive. This passage is reminiscent of Ezekiel 5:1-12 where God commands the prophet to shave his head and divide the hair into three equal portions, burning and destroying two-thirds of the hair and throwing the rest to the wind so that it is scattered, thereby killing two-thirds of the "house of Israel" as judgment for their refusal to obey God's statutes and keep His judgments. While Ezekiel may only have been looking forward to Nebuchadnezzar's victory over Jerusalem, the parallel is obvious. With Ezekiel's prophecy, even the one-third that were not destroyed were relegated to further trials, and ultimately they were refined and a refined remnant were returned to the land. In the next verse, we will see God's purpose in the refining of His people.

13:9 And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.

The one-third of the nation that survives will be refined like silver or gold is refined by fire, that is, melting it down and removing the dross or impurities. Peter used similar imagery for how God uses circumstances to grow believers: *“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:”* (1 Peter 1:7). This refined group of Jewish people will call on God, and He will respond in confirmation that they are His people, and they will respond that He is their God. This brings a complete fulfillment of Hosea 1:10: *“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.”* Paul taught in Romans 9 that the Gentiles were made a part of God’s plan and brought fulfillment to this passage, but when the Jewish people also turn to God, both Jews and Gentiles together will be His people, and He will be their God.

QUESTIONS

4. How does God refine believers?
