

NOTES ON THE BURDENS OF ZECHARIAH (9-14)

\* \* \* PROPHECIES OF THE TWO COMINGS OF MESSIAH \* \* \*

S.L.H.  
Soli Deo Gloria!

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee ... and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth."  
**Zechariah 9:9-10**

AUTHOR: Zechariah (c. 470 BC)

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE. Zechariah means *the LORD remembers* (Berechiah means *Jehovah blesses*, Iddo means *appointed time*). Zechariah's grandfather (Iddo; Zech1:1) was a priest who returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel and Joshua (Neh12:1,4,16; Cp., Zech3-4). Zechariah began his ministry "in the second year of Darius" during the period of the Persian empire. Zechariah 1-8 can be dated precisely to 520-518 BC by chronological references provided in the book (cf. Zech1:1; 7:1). Allusion to the ascendancy of Greece in Zechariah 9 (Zech9:13) suggests Zechariah 9-14 was written later (c. 480-470 BC). According to Jesus, Zechariah was murdered in the Temple; he is noted as the last prophet to be martyred in the O.T. (Matt23:35).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT. Zechariah was a post-exilic prophet whose ministry was contemporary with that of Haggai (Cp., Hag1:1; Zech1:1). Both prophets wrote during the time of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem by the small remnant of Jews who returned from the Babylonian captivity (cf. Ezra5:1; 6:14); the historical background for this period of time is given in Ezra 4-6.

The Jews living as captives in Babylon were freed to return to Jerusalem by the decree of Cyrus, the king of Persia, in 538 BC (2Chron36:22-23; Ezra1:1-4). The first group of 42,360 Jews returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra2:2; 2:64) and began the task of rebuilding the Temple in 536 BC (Ezra3:8-10). However, the personal hardships associated with rebuilding their own homes and reestablishing their fields, combined with active opposition to construction of the Temple from the Samaritans, resulted in the abandonment of the rebuilding project in 534 BC (Ezra4:24). The LORD raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah in 520 BC (Hag1:1; Zech1:1) to exhort/encourage the Jews to resume rebuilding the Temple, and its construction was finally completed in 516 BC (Ezra6:15).

MESSAGE OF ZECHARIAH. Zechariah 1-8 revolves around a series of eight prophetic night visions given to Zechariah, all of which relate to fulfillment of the ultimate Jewish hope (i.e., restoration of the Kingdom to Israel; cf. Act1:6); none of these prophecies were fulfilled during Zechariah's lifetime, all look forward to the eschatological future. The prophet refers to the Temple throughout this section. He encourages the people to complete its construction (Zech4:9); since Messiah will use the Temple, the rebuilding of it is a necessary prerequisite to His coming (Zech6:12-13).

Zechariah 9-14 presents two prophetic "burdens": 1) the **first coming** and rejection of Messiah (Zech9-11), and 2) the **second coming** and acceptance of Messiah (Zech12-14). The scope and prophetic perspective of Zechariah 9-14 is identical to that of Zechariah 1-8; both sections of Zechariah look to the coming of Messiah and the establishment of His Kingdom on earth as the consummation of all prophetic hope.

OUTLINE OF THE BURDENS OF ZECHARIAH (9-14).

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|-----------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| I. 1ST BURDEN:  | The Coming and Rejection of Messiah | <b>Zechariah 9-11</b>  |
| II. 2ND BURDEN: | The Return and Reign of Messiah     | <b>Zechariah 12-14</b> |

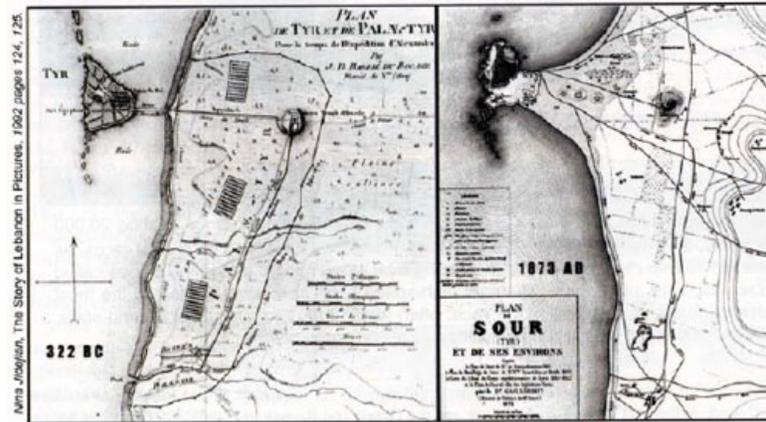
NOTE ON THE APOCALYPTIC GENRE. Zechariah is an example of the apocalyptic genre as used in the Bible (also Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation). It is a special type of divine revelation that focuses entirely on the very (eschatological) end of God's prophetic program. In the Bible, apocalyptic revelation is given to the people of God during times of extreme corporate suffering in which there is no prospect for their immediate or even near-term deliverance. During such times, even the people of God can be tempted to despair, believing that God has apparently forsaken them. The purpose of apocalyptic prophecy is to encourage/ensure the people of God that He is in sovereign control of history, and that He will providentially bring it to His appointed end (Isa46:9-11). The believer's hope should not be in temporal deliverance from present tribulations (cf. Jn16:33), but an unwavering confidence in the surety of the coming of Messiah/Christ (Tit2:13), which provides comfort (1Thess4:13-18) in any circumstance.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE RISE OF THE GREEK EMPIRE

The prophet Zechariah lived during the period of the Persian Empire (i.e., King Darius; cf. Zech1:1; 7:1), the second of the four Gentile kingdoms prophesied by Daniel (Dan8:20) that will be persecutors of Israel during "the times of the Gentiles" (Luk21:24). Zechariah 9 looks into the prophetic future (from Zechariah's perspective) and anticipates the rise of the third Gentile kingdom, the Greek Empire (Dan8:21; cf. Zech9:13). Though the military conquest of the Levant during the meteoric rise of Alexander the Great would include the destruction of the peoples and cities surrounding Judah (Zech9:1-7), the LORD would providentially preserve Jerusalem (Zech9:8) in preparation for the (first) coming of Messiah (Zech9:9ff).

- [1] A "burden" is a prophetic oracle that includes a message of divine judgment. The "land of Hadrach" is an ancient designation for the land of the Arameans (i.e., modern Syria), of which "Damascus" was its most prominent city. The language used is idiomatic and suggests that the judgment in view will "rest" (i.e., abide) upon the land of Syria. The armies of Alexander the Great overran Syria in 332 BC. In watching the rapid conquests of Alexander, "the eyes of man" (i.e., all mankind), including "the tribes of Israel", would actually be "toward the LORD" (i.e., observing the LORD). That is, Alexander would be Jehovah's instrument of judgment upon the peoples surrounding the land of Israel.
- [2] Verses 2-4 concern Alexander's conquest of Phoenicia. "Tyre and Sidon", the most prominent cities of the Phoenicians, would also be included in judgment. "Tyre" was reputed to be "very wise"; the people of Tyre took great pride in their own wisdom, so much so that the prophet Ezekiel compared the pride of Lucifer to that of the king of Tyre (cf. Ezek28:11-17). Though most of the cities of Phoenicia quickly surrendered to Alexander and his Greek armies, including Sidon, Tyre refused to do so.
- [3] Tyre originally existed as an extremely well-fortified city on the coast of Phoenicia. Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians besieged Tyre for 13 years (585-572 BC), which eventually fell and was destroyed. The surviving remnant migrated to an island approximately a half mile off shore, rebuilding the city of Tyre as a formidable island "stronghold" that came to be considered unconquerable. The wealth of Tyre, gained by facilitating international commerce as a result of its sea-faring prowess (v4), continued to increase.
- [4] Although Tyre was nominally willing to surrender to the Greek armies, they denied Alexander entrance into the city. The city was destroyed by Alexander in 332 BC following a siege of only 7 months. During the siege, Alexander's armies constructed a causeway from the mainland to the island, using in part the debris of the old city of Tyre that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar over 250 years before (literally fulfilling a prophecy of Ezekiel; Ezek26:1-5); over time, Alexander's causeway has been greatly enlarged by tidal silting, turning what was originally an island into a peninsula (as shown in the 19th century map below). That Zechariah attributes the destruction of Tyre to "the Lord" indicates that Alexander the Great was used as Jehovah's instrument of judgment upon the prideful city.



Map of Tyre from 1873.

- [5] Verses 5-7 concern Alexander's conquest of Philistia. Four of the five prominent cities of the Philistines are mentioned: "Ashkelon", "Gaza", "Ekron", and "Ashdod" (v6; Gath is not mentioned, probably because it had been incorporated into Judah by this time). Ashkelon quickly surrendered to Alexander out of "fear". Gaza refused to surrender, but fell after a 5 month siege; Alexander had its "king", Batis, dragged through the city behind a chariot until he "perish[ed]".
- [6] The "Philistines" would never again be a people of significance (i.e., "pride") after their conquest by Alexander. Those who "dwel[t]" in their lands would be "bastard[s]" (i.e., illegitimate descendants).

**Modern Palestinians.** *Palestine* was the Roman (i.e., Latin) name for Philistia. Following the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-135 AD), a failed attempt of the Jews of Judea to win independence from the Roman Empire under the leadership of a messianic figure named Simon Bar Kokhba, Roman armies decimated many cities of Judea and implemented extreme Jewish persecution on those that remained, including forbiddance of Torah study, sabbath observance, synagogue attendance, and circumcision. As a final affront to the Jews, the Roman Emperor Hadrian renamed their land the province of Palestine, the name of the ancient enemies of Israel. The people calling themselves modern Palestinians are a mongrel group of Arab peoples who are not legitimate descendants of the Philistines; the prophecy of Zechariah 9:6 that "a bastard shall dwell in Ashdod" has been fulfilled.

- [7] Following the Greek conquest of Philistia, the abominable practices of the pagan Philistines (which included the eating of bloody sacrifices offered to idols) would be put to an end. This was a necessary prerequisite for the land of the Philistines and its remaining inhabitants to be incorporated into the Land of Israel (i.e., in preparation for the Messianic Kingdom). The essence of the concluding thought is "he [of Philistia] that remaineth ... shall be like ... a Jebusite", expressing the idea that those continuing to dwell in this land would become loyal, albeit non-Jewish, citizens of

"Judah" akin to the "Jebusite[s]", the original inhabitants of Jerusalem whom David subjugated<sup>1</sup>.

- [8] During Alexander's conquest of the Levant, all its prominent cities were either subjugated or destroyed—with one exception. "I will encamp about mine house because of the army" prophesied that the LORD (Jehovah; v1) would sovereignly protect Jerusalem from the "army" of "him" (i.e., "Alexander") who would "passeth by" and "returneth", preserving it intact and undefiled for the coming of Messiah (v9). Alexander and his "army" passed Jerusalem twice, first on his march toward, and again when returning from, Egypt; on neither occasion did Alexander disturb the city.

The Testimony of Josephus. According to Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews* 11.8.5), when Alexander approached Jerusalem he was met by a delegation led by the Jewish High Priest Jaddua. When shown in the Book of Daniel the prophecy that the Persian empire would fall to the Greeks<sup>2</sup>, Alexander recognized himself as the "rough goat"<sup>3</sup> and "first king" of "Grecia" (Dan8:21). As a result, he spared the city, consented to their request to continue observance of the Law of Moses, and waived their tribute payment (formerly to the Persians, subsequently to the Greeks) every seventh year.

#### THE COMING OF MESSIAH

Jews who understood the prophecy of Daniel should have known that the arrival of Messiah would not occur at the time of Alexander the Great (c. 330 BC; e.g., Dan9:25), but during the (Roman) empire that would follow that of the Greeks (cf. Dan7:8-13). Thus, their deliverance from the armies of Alexander would come by other (albeit equally providential) means. Nonetheless, the LORD's almost singular preservation of Jerusalem during the Greek conquest of the Levant was essential in preparation for the future coming of Messiah.

- [9] In contrast to Alexander who came as an exalted and conquering king, Messiah would come to "Jerusalem" as one who was both "just" and "lowly" (Cp., Matt11:29; Phil2:3-7). Messiah's humility was exemplified by his entrance into the city "riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass", a prophecy fulfilled at Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Matt21:1-9; Mk11:1-10; Luk19:28-38; Jn12:12-15); fulfillment of this prophecy was the *terminus ad quem* of Daniel's 69 Weeks (Dan9:25), fulfilled to the very day (Luk19:41-44). Since an "ass" is a beast of burden not fit for use in battle, the symbolism is that of a King who comes in

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<sup>1</sup> Araunah/Ornan the Jebusite sold King David the land upon which the Temple would be constructed (cf. 2Sam24:18-25; 1Chron21:18-30).

<sup>2</sup> That Alexander and the Greeks would conquer the mighty Persian empire was an extraordinary accomplishment and by no means expected. The Persians were famed for their supposed one-million-man army. While this number may have been somewhat exaggerated, the Persians generally outnumbered the Greeks on the field of battle by 20-to-1.

<sup>3</sup> The "goat" was used as a national emblem by the Greeks. *Ægae*, the capital of ancient Macedonia, means goat and is the basis of the name for the *Ægean* sea on the east coast of Greece; Alexander the Great named his only son *Ægus*, which means *the son of a goat*.

peace<sup>4</sup>; in a similar way Solomon, who reigned over Judah during an extended period of peace, presented himself as king by entering "Jerusalem" riding on David's mule (1Kgs1:32-37). Messiah's entrance into "Jerusalem" in this prophesied manner was His formal presentation of Himself to the nation of Israel as "thy king", and the nation's ultimate obligation under the Mosaic Covenant was to "set him as king over thee whom the LORD thy God shall choose" (Deut17:15).

The "salvation" Messiah would bring at His first coming would not be physical deliverance of Israel from their enemies, but a genuine propitiation for sins (Jn1:29; 1Jn2:2) that "the blood of bulls and of goats" could never accomplish (Heb10:4). For this reason, the people of God are exhorted to "rejoice greatly" and "shout".

[10] Between vv9-10 is a vast chronological gap, into which the entire Church Age will be unexpectedly inserted; it is unnoted here since its very existence was a "mystery" unrevealed until the Apostle Paul (Eph3:1-6). This verse looks ahead to the return (i.e., second coming) of Messiah, at which time He will bring "peace unto the nations" in the kingdom He establishes, one in which He will exercise "dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth" (fulfilling God's original purpose in His creation of Man; Gen1:26-27). In the coming Kingdom, Messiah will "cut off the chariot of Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off", signifying it will be a time of peace utterly free from war (Cp., Isa2:1-4).

#### PROPHECY OF JEWISH VICTORY OVER GREEK PAGANISM

Persian rule over the Jews did not interfere with their worship of the LORD. Cyrus allowed the Jews who had been dispersed by the Babylonians to return to Judah and rebuild both Jerusalem and the Temple (Ezr1:1-4). However, under Greek rule the freedom of the Jews to worship the LORD as required by the Mosaic Covenant was increasingly curtailed. The religious conflict between the Jews and the Greeks reached its zenith under Antiochus Epiphanes. Antiochus ruled the (Greek) Seleucid empire, which included Israel, from 175-164 BC. He purposed to enforce Hellenism (which included religious paganism) throughout his empire, but encountered extreme resistance in Israel. He was one of history's infamous persecutors of the Jews. He forbid circumcision, Sabbath observance, Torah possession/reading, and all forms of Jewish worship under penalty of death. Most offensive was his sacrifice of a pig on the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem, and his subsequent erection of an idol of Zeus in the Holy of Holies; this historical event, designated "the abomination that maketh desolate" (Dan11:31), foreshadows an analogous offense to be performed by the future Antichrist (Cp., Dan9:27; Matt24:15; 2Thess2:4; Rev13:7,14-15). The persecution of the Jews under Antiochus ended in a revolt led by the Maccabees (a family of Jewish priests), which temporarily threw off the Seleucid oppression of Israel.

[11] "As for thee" returns the focus to the regathered Jews of Zechariah's generation who are struggling to rebuild the Temple (a prerequisite

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<sup>4</sup> In contrast, at His second coming Christ returns as a conquering king riding on a white horse and leading the armies of heaven to deliver Israel from her enemies at the Battle of Armageddon (Rev19:11-16).

to the coming of Messiah; Dan9:26). The "pit in which there is no water" seems to be an allusion to Joseph's confinement by his brothers in such a pit<sup>5</sup> (Gen37:24), typologically signifying the death of Messiah (of whom Joseph is the greatest of all the O.T. types); this expression becomes a Hebrew idiom for *Sheol*/Hell. Thus, by "the blood of thy covenant", by which is meant Christ's blood which inaugurates the New Covenant (Matt26:28; Luk22:20), Messiah will release the "prisoners" (i.e., O.T. believers who died before Christ) from *Sheol*/Hell (Cp., Ps68:18; Eph4:8-10).

- [12] This verse is likely a "double" entendre. If the Jews will "turn to the stronghold" (i.e., rely on the LORD; v14), these "prisoners of hope" will be both physically delivered from Greek oppression as well as resurrected from *Sheol*/Hell in order to participate in the future Messianic kingdom (cf. Dan12:1-3).
- [13] Speaking metaphorically, the LORD views Himself as a warrior having "Judah" as His "bow" and "Ephraim" as His arrows, thus identifying intimately with His people Israel and their coming struggle against "Greece". As there was no armed conflict between the Jews and the Greeks at the time of Alexander, this verse looks ahead to the Maccabean revolt during the reign of Antiochus IV (c. 167-164 BC).
- [14] The LORD is viewed as a storm "over" the land of Israel, with "lightning" as His "arrow[s]" and thunder as His "trumpet". Storms (i.e., "whirlwinds") that came from the desert region "south" of Israel were the most violent.
- [15] In the armed conflict between the Jews and their Greek oppressors at the time of Antiochus, "the LORD of hosts shall defend them".
- [16] Under the leadership of Judas Maccabee and his brothers, the Jews will be victorious (cf. Dan11:32-35). Believing Jews are referred to as God's "flock" (Cp., Jn10:11-16); "like the stones of a crown", the converted nation of Israel will be an item of adornment treasured by the LORD (Cp. Isa62:3; Mal3:17).
- [17] This verse alludes to the testimony of "the flock of [God's] people" (v16) during the Messianic Kingdom. Both the "goodness" and "beauty" of the LORD are recognized to be "great" (Ps27:4; Isa11:1-10; 33:17). The Kingdom will be a time when the nation of Israel is abundantly blessed with material prosperity (e.g., "grain", "new wine"; cf. Isa62:8-9; 65:21-23; Amos9:13-14) as promised under the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Lev26:3-13; Deut28:1-14).

## CHAPTER 10

### KINGDOM BLESSINGS

As Zechariah 10 opens, the allusion to the conditions and blessings during the Millennial Kingdom introduced at the end of Zechariah 9 are continued with elaboration.

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<sup>5</sup> Such pits in ancient Israel were generally man-made cisterns, so the fact that it had "no water" was unusual.

- [1] Agricultural productivity in ancient Israel depended upon the former and "latter rain"<sup>6</sup> (Cp., Hos6:3; Joel2:23; Jas5:7), which came from "the LORD" as a blessing promised under the Mosaic Covenant (Deut11:14), and for which Israel was to "ask of the LORD" (i.e., pray). The obedience of Israel under the reign of King Messiah during the Millennial Kingdom will bring timely rains that result in the promised blessing of agricultural abundance (both literally true as well as being a general figure of material prosperity).
- [2] In contrast to faithful dependence upon "the LORD" (i.e., Jehovah, the God of Israel; Exod5:1), Israel has throughout its history worshiped vain "idols", sought lying "diviners", and desired "false dreams" (all pagan/occult practices forbidden by God; Deut18:9-14), none of which provided "comfort". As a "flock" with "no shepherd" is destined for disaster, so goes Israel apart from the LORD (cf. Jer50:17). Practically, the circumstance of having "no shepherd" refers to the fact that there has been no king in Israel since Zedekiah (1Kgs24:17; Jer37:1; Matt1:11), and there will not be another until Messiah/Christ (cf. Luk1:31-33).

The LORD is the Shepherd of Israel (Ps23:1), and Jesus Christ declared Himself to be "the good shepherd" (Jn10:11,14); note that all the major O.T. types of Jesus Christ are *shepherds*<sup>7</sup> (e.g., Abel, Joseph, Moses, David).

- [3] Here, the LORD's "flock" refers to "the house of Judah". While it is not the case that every Jewish member of "the house of Judah" in Zechariah's generation was faithful to the LORD, nonetheless "the house of Judah" is being used here as a type of the believing remnant of the nation of Israel. The previous verse asserted that Judah had "no shepherd", meaning no legitimate or *good* shepherd (i.e., a king). They had had many false "shepherds" (i.e., apostate Jewish leaders; cf. Ezek34:2-4,8-10). They had also had many "goats", a Hebrew word actually meaning *he-goats*, which were male goats used to lead the "flock" (Cp., Jer50:8), a reference to Gentile rulers who have oppressed Judah (Cp., Matt25:32-33). The poetic language of the verse speaks of a future day in which the LORD will rescue His "flock" from wicked leaders/oppressors and restore it to a place of prominence and dignity (Rev19:11-21).
- [4] The prepositional phrase, "out of him", refers back to "Judah" (v3). Genealogically, Messiah comes "out of [Judah]" (Gen49:10; Matt1:3,16). Messiah is characterized as the "corner[stone]" (i.e., the rejected One who ultimately rebuilds the nation; cf. Ps118:22; 1Pet2:6) and the "nail" (i.e., the sure and immovable anchor point; cf. Isa22:22-24), who at His return will come as the conquering King who forcefully puts down "every oppressor" of His people (Rev19:11-21).

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<sup>6</sup> The former and latter rains in Israel become types of the 1st and 2nd Comings of Messiah/Christ (cf. Hos5:15-6:3).

<sup>7</sup> In the Dispensation of Grace (Eph3:2), during which the nation of Israel is temporarily set aside (Rom11:11; Act15:16) and God is "visit[ing] the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name" (Act15:14), the people of God are organized into local churches, each of which is to have a shepherd (i.e., pastor; cf. 1Pet5:1-4).

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**CHAPTER 11**

ISRAEL'S REJECTION OF MESSIAH

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THE COMING OF ANTICHRIST

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**CHAPTER 12**

ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE

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ISRAEL'S CONVERSION

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**CHAPTER 13**

ISRAEL'S NATIONAL CLEANSING

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**CHAPTER 14**

THE RETURN OF MESSIAH

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MESSIAH'S KINGDOM ESTABLISHED ON EARTH

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WORSHIP IN MESSIAH'S KINGDOM

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