

# Israel's Physical Deliverance (The Campaign of Armageddon)

📖 Zechariah 12:1-9

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We are studying major prophetic passages from Daniel through Revelation. We began with Daniel because he is the key to prophetic revelation. Daniel gives the outline of prophetic history from the departure of the kingdom of God and the throne of David until the restoration of the kingdom of God and the throne of David. During that time Daniel saw four successive Gentile kingdoms who would rule over Israel during her period of divine discipline; Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and then Rome in two phases, one ancient and one future. We now live close to the future phase. As Daniel saw it, future Rome had ten kings coming to rule in the European theater, then an eleventh king, the anti-Christ, would arise. Deceitful and skilled in intrigue he would enter a treaty with Israel for seven years. In the middle of those seven years he would break the treaty, commit the abomination of desolation and attempt to destroy the Jewish people. This distress on the Jewish people would lead to their faith in the Messiah and their calling on Him to rescue them. At that time the Messiah will return, defeat the anti-Christ and establish His everlasting kingdom on the earth. Daniel saw these major pieces of the prophetic picture and because of that he is the key to prophetic revelation. Everything else must fit in that frame.

Then we went to Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a contemporary of Daniel. He prophesied that the whole house of Israel would be restored physically and spiritually. The physical restoration was fulfilled in the events leading up to the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948 and Jerusalem as the capital in 1967. The reality of these events shows that the stage is being set for other prophecies to be fulfilled in the future phase of Rome. The main one Ezekiel prophesied was the spiritual restoration of Israel. Several factors will be involved in bringing about the spiritual restoration of Israel. One that Ezekiel prophesied was the battle of Gog. This battle is an Islamic invasion of Israel led by Russia. In it God will miraculously defeat Islam. The timing of this battle is difficult and you may not agree with all the details as I portrayed them but the main point to see is that the stage is already being set for this battle through Russian-Arab alliances. So Daniel and Ezekiel have given us much to think about in terms of putting together the total prophetic picture and understanding the times in which we live.

Today we come to another prophet; Zechariah. He came on the scene just after Daniel and Ezekiel in about 520BC. He is therefore, a post-exilic prophet. He lived and prophesied in Persia under Cyrus. Cyrus was the king

who defeated Babylon in 539BC and shortly thereafter permitted the Jews to return to the land and start rebuilding the Temple.<sup>1</sup> The faithful Jewish remnant returned under Zerubbabel who led them in restoring the foundations, rebuilding the altar and re-instituting sacrifice. However, enemies arose in the land and discouraged them from completing the work. As days turned into weeks, weeks into months and months into years, the people of Israel became discouraged, lost hope and were falling into despair. To restore their hope and sketch their glorious future God sent two prophets; Haggai and Zechariah. "People experiencing adversity frequently see only things that are near. Zechariah provided hope from visions that he saw and from voices that he heard that encouraged his audience to lift their eyes to behold the larger plans and purposes of their God."<sup>2</sup> Zech 12-14 is a sketch of the larger plans and purposes of God for Israel. In it there is a time of great trouble coming for Israel but the result will be a great deliverance of Israel by the Messiah who will return to fight on their behalf. Then the kingdom will come. This should give them hope in the same way that we as Christians get hope by considering our future rapture and return with Christ to reign in the kingdom. Therefore, the events we will study beginning in Zech 12 are meant to give Israel hope. The prophesied events will occur during the last half of the future Tribulation just before the establishment of the kingdom. Zech 12:1-9 describes Israel's Physical Deliverance and Zech 12:10-13:9 describes Israel's Spiritual Deliverance. In the end their enemies will be destroyed, they will be restored and the kingdom will have come. This is the basic pattern of prophecy to learn.

Today let's look at Israel's Physical Deliverance in Zech 12:1-9. In verse 1, **The burden of the word of the LORD concerning Israel.** The Hebrew word **burden** is *massa* and is sometimes translated "oracle." An "oracle" could simply refer to Scripture but it is a word that means "a thing lifted up." As such it refers to a prophetic utterance that is a physical burden to lift up. It might even be a foreshadowing of the substance of this prophecy described in verse 3 as Jerusalem being "a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured." In other words, the prophetic utterance concerns the difficulty the nations of the world will face when they attempt to besiege Jerusalem. This heavy burden will be brought about by **the word of the LORD.** On occasion **the word of the LORD** is the second person of the Trinity. The **word of the LORD** seems to go forth from the LORD and on other occasions it seems to be the LORD. As such we are not surprised when John's gospel begins with the words, "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God." Perhaps **the word of the LORD** here is a reference to the second person of the Trinity and He is the One who will bring about this heavy burden upon the nations who take up arms against Jerusalem. And finally, all these things are **concerning Israel.** Therefore, it is important to understand that **Israel** means **Israel** and not the Church because many commentators do not believe that **Israel** means **Israel.** And yet every usage of Israel in Scripture refers either to the racial nation of Israel or to the believing remnant of Israel. So there is no idea of the Church here and generalizations about difficulties the Church will face. And when we finish today I'll share with you the interpretation of a scholar who believes this is the Church so you can see the unbelief of this kind of thinking.

In the middle of verse 1, **Thus declares the LORD who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him.** Three present demonstrations of the sovereignty of **the LORD**

are stated to preface the certainty of this prophetic deliverance. All three are present participles in the Hebrew and thereby communicate the Lord's ongoing work throughout all creation. One author said His sovereignty extends from the celestial to the terrestrial to the human. In the celestial, **the LORD stretches out the heavens**. In the terrestrial, **the LORD lays the foundation of the earth**. In the human, **the LORD forms the spirit of man within him**. The point is to preface the prophecy with the sovereign works of **the LORD** so that we know with certainty He will do it. Lindsey said, "This almighty power of the Lord is mentioned to confirm His ability to fulfill the deliverance predicted in the following verses."<sup>3</sup> There is nothing outside of the continuous sovereign operation of God and therefore He will accomplish the future physical deliverance of Israel.

In 12:2, **Behold, I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that causes reeling to all the peoples around; and when the siege is against Jerusalem, it will also be against Judah**. The sense of **I am going to make** is that it is a sovereign operation of God as the former things in verse 1. This, then, is a continuation of His sovereign work. His sovereign work will be **to make Jerusalem a cup that causes reeling to all the peoples around**. By **Jerusalem** is meant the capital city of Jerusalem and the only city where God chose to put His name. It is used ten times in this chapter alone. This makes **Jerusalem** the focal point of the prophecy. **Jerusalem** is likened here to **a cup that causes reeling**. It would be better to translate **cup** as glass of wine in our day. Jerusalem will be a glass of wine that causes the nations to reel or stagger because of its intoxicating influence. Unger says, "Their attacking Jerusalem will be like men greedily draining a wine goblet in pleasure but in the end finding themselves helplessly drunk and unable to take the coveted prize."<sup>4</sup> So just as a glass of wine is highly desirable to consume so the nations will highly desire to consume Jerusalem. And yet as they try to consume it they will become so drunk they will stagger and fall by the wayside.

In the middle of verse 2 the conflict is said to extend beyond the city of Jerusalem, **and when the siege is against Jerusalem, it will also be against Judah**. **Judah** is the tribal allotment of land in the hill country surrounding **Jerusalem**. J. Vernon McGee says, "Although He says it ten times, somehow or another it doesn't get through to us. Some of the commentators don't quite get the message. Jerusalem means Jerusalem, and when He puts Judah with Jerusalem, He is talking about Jerusalem which is in Judah."<sup>5</sup> When he says "some of the commentators don't quite get the message" he is referring to theologians who replace Judah with the Church and think of Jerusalem only as a city where some of the Church has found a home. But the idea that the Church has replaced Israel is one of the great heresies in our day, and yet fully embraced by most denominations. The orthodox view is that Jerusalem means Jerusalem and Judah is the land around Jerusalem. In the time when all the nations of the earth will take up **siege against Jerusalem** the **siege** will extend beyond the city of Jerusalem into all of **Judah**.

In 12:3, **It will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it**. Notice the phrase **in that day** and underline it. Also, underline it in verse 4, in verse 6, in verse 8, in verse 9, in verse 11 and on into

chapter 13. Obviously, a phrase used that often must be important. What day does it refer to? Ryrie says, "In that day occurs 16 times in these last three chapters and refers to the future campaign of Armageddon."<sup>6</sup> So what we are reading about here is what is popularly known as Armageddon even though the biblical name is not the battle of Armageddon but "the war of the great day of God almighty." The word Armageddon is from Har-Megiddo and refers to the hill of Meggido that you see here overlooking the valley of Megiddo. It is not the site of the battle but of the assembling of all the armies of the world for the battle, which will chiefly occur in and around **Jerusalem**. And since we've been studying the battle of Gog in Ezek 38-39 it is important to notice that this war is distinct from Gog in that in Gog only five nations are coming against Israel but in this war **all the nations of the earth** gathering **against Jerusalem**. So I take it that the battle of Gog will occur during the first half of the Tribulation with the aftermath dovetailing with Armageddon which will occur in the second half of the Tribulation. So when all the armies of the world come against **Jerusalem** we are told here that the Lord **will make Jerusalem a heavy stone** for them. The idea of **Jerusalem as a heavy stone** is that it's so heavy that as they try to pick it up they find it's too heavy for them to lift resulting in severe injury. By **severely injured** God means that the nations will be injured beyond repair for trying to destroy God's people, Israel, and God's city, Jerusalem.

In 12:4, "In that day," referring again to the campaign of Armageddon, **declares the LORD, "I will strike every horse with bewilderment and his rider with madness. But I will watch over the house of Judah, while I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness.** Since **the LORD** is sovereign over man and nature He will **strike every horse with bewilderment and his rider with madness.** This is how the LORD will attack the nations cavalry. Their horses will be bewildered. The word **bewilderment** means "confusion" and for a horse this means panic. Every horse of the cavalry will panic. Every horse has a rider and the riders will be struck with **madness.** The word **madness** means "struck with godly terror." The cavalry riders will be struck with terror knowing that God has done this. So both horse and rider will be out of sorts. **But** by strong contrast **the LORD...will watch over the house of Judah.** He keeps watch over the house of Judah. The short story is that the LORD begins working in the same ways that He worked during the Exodus and Wilderness Wanderings generation. He goes before them as a mighty warrior and He does the fighting. Just as horse and rider were cast into the Red Sea at the Exodus so horse and rider will be utterly bewildered and in terror as the Lord goes forth to fight for Israel as on a day of battle. The note that He will **watch over the house of Judah** is literally have His eye on the house of Judah. He will make a perfect discrimination between Judah and His enemies so that the judgment only falls on His enemies and not Judah, very much the same way that the judgments fell on Egypt only and not Goshen.

In 12:5 **Then the clans of Judah will say in their hearts, 'A strong support for us are the inhabitants of Jerusalem through the LORD of hosts, their God.'** Because the end of this verse is the clans of Judah saying **their God**, referring to the God of **the inhabitants of Jerusalem**, many think that until this time **the clans of Judah** are in unbelief while **the inhabitants of Jerusalem** are already in belief (cf Rev 11:13 possibly). The word

translated **clans** is really "chiefs." These are the leaders of the tribe of **Judah** and when they observe the fierce fighting of **the inhabitants of Jerusalem** they will recognize that it is **the LORD of hosts** who is fighting on their behalf and **they will** turn to faith in Him in order to gain His support. The fact that they **say this in their hearts** shows genuine conviction and faith. So it is at this time that the leadership of the tribe of Judah will believe and hope for the same kind of deliverance that **the LORD of hosts** is accomplishing through **the inhabitants of Jerusalem**. The word **hosts** is *saba* and should be translated "armies." Since the LORD is sovereign over all of creation then He has at His disposal all men, animals, angels, et. al., to use as His armies in the campaign of Armageddon. We have already seen that He is striking bewilderment into the nation's horses. He will be utilizing all of His forces as He now strengthens the leaders **of Judah** who are now in faith as they fight against all the nations of the earth with victories similar to the days of Joshua.

In 12:6 **In that day**, again, the day of the campaign of Armageddon, **I will make the chiefs of Judah like a firepot among pieces of wood and a flaming torch among sheaves, so they will consume on the right and on the left all the surrounding peoples, while the inhabitants of Jerusalem again dwell on their own sites in Jerusalem**. The word **clans** again is properly "chiefs" or "chieftains." The leadership **of Judah** will be energized to accomplish superhuman feats. Unger says, "Because of their faith in the Lord, the Lord will do exploits through the chieftains of Judah." Two similes are used to describe these feats. First, **like a firepot among pieces of wood**. A **firepot** was a vessel used to carry hot coals to start a fire. A firepot among pieces of wood sets it aflame quickly and consumes it. So, the chiefs of Judah will consume all their enemies. Second, **like a flaming torch among sheaves**. The meaning is obvious. The Lord will strengthen the chieftains of Judah to **consume on the right and on the left all the surrounding** Gentile armies.

All this will take place **while the inhabitants of Jerusalem again dwell on their own sites in Jerusalem**. In other words, Jerusalem will go unaffected even though every nation on earth is attacking. They will remain in security against impossible odds because God is fighting on their behalf.

In 12:7 **The LORD also will save the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not be magnified above Judah**. The **house of David** and the **inhabitants of Jerusalem** hold a very special place according to the plan of God. The **house of David** is the house from which the Messiah comes. The **inhabitants of Jerusalem** live in the only city God ever chose to put His name. Because of this they have a tremendous **glory** or reputation. The problem is that reputation can go to your head. If God rescued them first it would only give them more cause to look down on everybody else. Therefore, God will not rescue them first. Vernon McGee says, "In other words, Jerusalem would be looking down, as it were, on the rest of the country. People today in one section of our country have a tendency to look down upon people from other sections of the country...." Usually this is the city folk looking down on the country folk. "...this is a tendency we all have. We folk who have been born in Texas have been given the impression that there is nothing beyond the borders of Texas, that the chosen people are in Texas. There are

some of my fellow Texans who still believe that, and such is human nature." But that kind of thinking leads to division and the Lord wants unity among His people Israel. His purpose is to bring about unity. If He saved the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem first, then they would look down on the rest **of Judah** causing division but in salvaging **Judah** first there will be unity. "God makes it clear here in Zechariah, "I am going to manifest Myself to Judah first," and that will give Jerusalem and the house of David something to think about."<sup>7</sup> Therefore, to bring about a unified nation of Israel He will rescue **the tents of Judah** first. That will give everyone something to think about and the focus will be on what the LORD has done and not what they have done. That way He gets all the glory, not them.

In 12:8, **In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the one who is feeble among them in that day will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the LORD before them.** This is a description of the strength the Lord will give them in that day. Lindsey says, "This empowerment will be so great that the most feeble weakling **will be** a great warrior **like David**, and the leaders of the city (**the house of David**) **will be** granted superhuman strength."<sup>8</sup> Everyone knows the strength of little David up against the giant Goliath. Of course, it was not David that fought against Goliath but the battle belongs to the Lord. All David did was fight by faith. That is what the inhabitants of Jerusalem will do in that day; they will fight by faith. As such no matter how **feeble** the person is **in that day** they **will be like David** and they will strike down giants. **And the house of David will be like God.** The strength of David's house will be greater than anything ever accomplished on the field of battle. Exploits unrivaled as one tiny nation is invaded by every army on earth. And they will need it for there must be millions and millions in this army against only a few. The house of David will be **like the angel of the LORD before them.** There will be nothing but destruction in their path. No warrior, no weapon will be able to penetrate them as **the LORD** will go **before them.**

12:9 is the key, **And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.** The subject of the sentence is **I, I** the LORD. The nations set out to destroy Jerusalem but the great **I will set** out to **destroy all the nations that come against** her. He will go forth as on a day of battle to totally annihilate the nations that venture to touch the apple of His eye. The LORD loves Israel and will never allow them to be wiped off the planet but will wipe off the planet every one of the nations who comes up against her. He will defend her with everything that He is in accordance with the covenants He has made with this people. Israel has a future because of the gracious Abrahamic covenant. That is the teaching.

And yet here is an interpretation by an amillennialist, Leupold. This is what a commentator who believes in replacement theology would say about this passage. And today this would represent what all orthodox Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians and most Lutheran and Baptists would say. ". . . it covers all time from that in which the prophet spoke to the end of days." So it is not about the second half of the Tribulation but about what has been going on for the last 2500 years. "What is said concerning Judah applies to the people of God of all times." What he means is there is one people of God and there is no distinction between Israel and the

Church. "The claims made for Jerusalem's future find their ultimate fulfillment in the true Zion of God—His church; in fact, they can be applied to Jerusalem only insofar as she for a time harbored the church of God. The whole passage speaks of God's sovereign care and protection of the church of the Old and the New Testaments through the ages and more particularly of the church's victory rather than the victory of Judah after the flesh."<sup>9</sup> So they see no distinction between Israel and the Church, no future for the nation Israel. They run roughshod over this most basic distinction in Scripture. We understand that not all Israel believe, that there is an Israel after the flesh and an Israel of the Spirit, there has always been a remnant and non-remnant of Israel. It's the remnant of Israel that makes up the Jewish wing of the Church and with the Gentile wing the Church is complete. And after Christ has completed building His Church composed of Jew and Gentile He will complete His covenant plan with the nation Israel by bringing them to faith by the Campaign of Armageddon as this fantastic passage describes. To reject that God has a plan for the nation Israel after the Church is complete and taken from this earth is a rejection of the biblical God who made covenants with Israel. My question is are you going to continue to put up with churches that believe this garbage and allow your family members to continue to go to these churches without challenging them with Scripture? This needs to be answered for and people in these churches need to be defecting because they are being kept from the truth by people who claim to be ministers of the truth of God.

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<sup>1</sup> There's a great story about why Cyrus sent the Jews back to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. He was a polytheist. He believed in many gods and goddesses. He believed the people groups he conquered worshipped these gods in their allotted territories. He wanted to secure his kingdom by the protection of these gods so he sent the peoples back to their homelands to rebuild temples in honor of these gods and goddess. That way he hoped to procure the protection of these gods and goddesses. Of course, he sent the Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild a temple in Jerusalem to honor YHWH. Jerusalem was strategically located since it bordered the Mediterranean Sea. If a temple of YHWH was built that brought honor to YHWH then he believed YHWH would protect his western flank. That is what this man was thinking when he sent the Jews back to rebuild. And because he sent them back even today the Jews have high regard for Cyrus.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Hag 2:23.

<sup>3</sup> 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), 1566.

<sup>4</sup> Merrill F Unger, *Zechariah: Prophet of Messiah's Glory*, 209.

<sup>5</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Prophets (Zechariah)*, electronic ed., vol. 32 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 168.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, Expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 1473.

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<sup>7</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Prophets (Zechariah)*, electronic ed., vol. 32 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 171.

<sup>8</sup> 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), 1567.

<sup>9</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Zec 12:9.