

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE TRIUMPH OF ZION
THROUGH HER MESSIAH

JUDGEMENT AGAINST ISRAEL'S ENEMIES . . . Zechariah 9:1-8

RV . . . The burden of the word of Jehovah upon the land of Hadrach, and Damascus shall be its resting place (for the eye of man and of all the tribes of Israel is toward Jehovah); and Hamath, also, which bordereth thereon; Tyre and Sidon, because they are very wise. And Tyre did build herself a stronghold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets. Behold, the Lord will dispossess her, and he will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire. Ashkelon shall see it, and fear; Gaza also, and shall be sore pained; and Ekron, for her expectation shall be put to shame; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. And a bastard shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines. And I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth; and he also shall be a remnant for our God; and he shall be as a chieftain in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite. And I will encamp about my house against the army, that none pass through or return; and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes.

LXX . . . The burden of the word of the Lord in the land of Sedrach, and his sacrifice shall be in Damascus; for the Lord looks upon men, and upon all the tribes of Israel. And in Emath, even in her coasts, are Tyre and Sidon, because they were very wise. And Tyrus built strongholds for herself, and heaped up silver as dust, and gathered gold as the mire of the ways. And therefore the Lord will take them for a possession, and will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be consumed with fire. Ascalon shall see, and fear; Gaza also, and shall be greatly pained, and Accaron; for she is ashamed at her trespass; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ascalon shall not be inhabited. And aliens shall dwell in Azotus, and I will bring down the pride of the Philistines. And I will take their blood out of their mouth, and their abominations from between their teeth; and these also shall be left to our God, and they shall be as a captain of a thousand in Juda, and Accaron as a Jebusite. And I will set up a defence for my house, that they may not pass through, nor turn back, neither shall there any

more come upon them one to drive them away; for now have I seen with mine eyes.

COMMENTS

The theme of chapter nine is struck in verse nine. It is the coming of the Messianic King (*vs.* 9-17). The judgement of God against Israel's traditional enemies set forth in these opening verses are to be seen as preparation for that event. Not only God's dealing with these nations as the enemies of His people, but all his dealings in history prior to Messiah's coming were in preparation for it.

(Verse 1) The term "*burden* (more accurately "oracle") of *the word of Jehovah*" is reminiscent of Malachi. It is calculated to place the stamp of divine origin on the second section of the book. The method of inspiration seems to differ from that of the first section in that the prophet does not claim here to have seen a vision. Nevertheless, what he is about to say is not a matter of his own subjective understanding of historic events. He is speaking from God as one moved by the Holy Spirit. (cp. *II Peter 1:19-21, Hebrews 1:1*)

The first part of this oracle is concerned with the land of Hadrach, and its focal point is Damascus. (cp. *Isaiah 21:13*) Hadrach is a symbolic name for Syria. The name itself was a little used one applying to a region of Syria also called Bikathanen. It is the western interior part of the country surrounded by hills. Hadrach takes its name from this surrounding. The word means literally "enclosed."

The burden of Jehovah would focus on Damascus until that ancient enemy of Israel was utterly brought to its knees. History records the fulfillment of this prediction when Alexander the Great took the city, c. 344 B.C. It subsequently became Hellenized and is listed as the first of ten such cities which formed the Decapolis.

The parenthetical statement by which Zechariah explains this must not be overlooked if one would begin to understand the hand of Providence in the ebb and flow of history. The English text is misleading when it states, "*the eye of man and of all the tribes of Israel is toward Jehovah.*" The marginal rendering in the Standard Edition is more to the point, "*Jehovah hath an eye upon men and upon the tribes of Israel.*" The point being that God's covenant purpose to bless all the nations of the earth in Israel's Seed is the all determining factor in every historic development, even the defeat of one pagan nation by another.

(Verses 2-4) In rapid succession Zechariah deals with the future of the other enemies of Israel immediately adjacent to her. Tyre and Sidon were next in Alexander's plan to conquest. Sidon, as Damascus, surrendered peaceably, but Tyre was subdued only after a siege.

The city harbored a large squadron of mercenaries in the pay of the Persians. The resistance was so bitter that, when Tyre finally fell, Alexander departed from his usual policy of benevolence toward conquered cities and allowed his Macedonians to slaughter eight thousand Tyrians and sell thirty thousand into slavery.

(Verse 5) Ashkelon, seeing the fate of Tyre, surrendered without resistance. Thus the ancient seaport of the Philistines became, in turn, a Greek city to plague Israel no more.

Gaza, on the other hand, chose to resist the Macedonian conqueror. Durant records, "Gaza fought till every man in the city was dead and every woman raped."

Ekron, the southernmost of the Philistine cities, had hoped in vain that Alexander would be stopped by Tyre in his march through Palestine to Egypt. The hope was turned to disappointment as the Macedonian phalanx swept down the Mediterranean coast engulfing by either peaceful surrender or siege all who stood in its path.

The king of Gaza comes in for special attention by the prophet, as well he might, considering what lay in store for him. When Gaza fell, following a two month siege, and ten thousand of its inhabitants were killed while the rest were sold to the slave merchants who followed in the wake of Alexander's armies, special treatment was waiting Betis, the Persian satrap. This puppet "king" found himself tied to Alexander's chariot by two thongs through the soles of his feet and dragged through the city in one of the young conqueror's characteristic fits of revenge against one who resisted his forward march.

(Verses 6-7) Ashdod shall be ruled by an alien race. (The rendering "bastard" here is misleading.) (The Septuagint is more accurate.) It is a clear prediction of the reign of the Greeks and Romans, beginning with Alexander.

The pride of the Philistines has to do with the peculiar form of idolatry practiced in Philistia which included the drinking of the blood of sacrificed animals. Hence, when the Philistines are conquered by Alexander, Hellenized by the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt, and subsequently converted to Jehovah, the blood was taken "out of his mouth."

The law made the drinking of blood an abomination (cf. *Genesis* 9:4, *Leviticus* 7:26). When in Philistia "the son of the stranger joined himself to the Lord" (*Isaiah* 56:3) the abomination would be taken

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"from between his teeth," and the Philistine also became part of Jehovah's faithful remnant! Just as the Jebusites, the original inhabitants of Jerusalem had been incorporated into the people of Judah (*II Samuel 24:16*, etc.) in a subordinate position (*I Kings 9:20,21*), so the Philistines, traditional enemies of Israel are to ultimately be assimilated as proselytes. Again history vindicates prophecy.

(Verse 8) The prophet reassures his readers, who have worked to rebuild the temple, that when all this is taking place around them, they, and their work will be protected by the Lord. History records that Alexander's conquest of Jerusalem was by invitation. He did not oppress them, but rather afforded them privileges. No Jew was injured.

THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH KING . . . Zechariah 9:9-17

RV . . . Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy king cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off; and he shall speak peace unto the nations; and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. As for thee also, because of the blood of thy covenant I have set free thy prisoners from the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee. For I have bent Judah for me, I have filled the bow with Ephraim; and I will stir up thy sons, O Zion, against the sons of Greece, and will make thee as the sword of a mighty man. And Jehovah shall be seen over them; and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning; and the Lord Jehovah will blow the trumpet, and will go with whirlwinds of the south. Jehovah of hosts will defend them; and they shall devour, and shall tread down the sling-stones; and they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, like the corners of the altar. And Jehovah their God will save them in that day as the flock of his people; for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted on high over his land. For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the virgins.

LXX . . . Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; proclaim it aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, the King is coming to thee, just, and a Saviour; he is meek and riding on an ass, and a young foal. And

he shall destroy the chariots out of Ephraim, and the horse out of Jerusalem, and the bow of war shall be utterly destroyed; and there shall be abundance and peace out of the nations; and he shall rule over the waters as far as the sea, and the rivers to the ends of the earth. And thou by the blood of thy covenant hast sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit that has no water. Ye shall dwell in strongholds, ye prisoners of the congregation: and for one day of thy captivity I will recompense thee double. For I have bent thee, O Juda, for myself as a bow, I have filled Ephraim; and I will raise up thy children, O Sion, against the children of the Greeks, and I will handle thee as the sword of a warrior. And the Lord shall be over them, and his arrow shall go forth as lightning: and the Lord Almighty shall blow with the trumpet; and shall proceed with the tumult of his threatening. The Lord Almighty shall protect them, and overwhelm them with sling-stones; and they shall swallow them down as wine, and fill the bowls as the altar. And the Lord their God shall save them in that day, even his people as a flock; for holy stones are rolled upon his land. For if he has anything good, and if he has anything fair, the young men shall have corn, and there shall be fragrant wine to the virgins.

COMMENTS

The predictions of this section find their immediate meaning in the Maccabean revolt and their ultimate fulfillment in the coming of Jesus. The victory of Judas Maccabee over Antiochus Epiphanes led the prophet quite naturally to exultation over God's final victory through the Messiah.

For the sake of clarity we shall deal with the two aspects of this section separately, first as it applies to the Maccabean revolt, and afterward as it applies to the coming of Jesus Christ.

In order to understand the prophecies concerning the Maccabean war with the Seleucid Emperor Antiochus IV, it is helpful to review the history of Hellenism in the near east immediately following the death of Alexander the Great.

After nine years in Asia, Alexander began to doubt the wisdom of Aristotle's instruction to him to treat the "barbarians" as slaves. He found in the aristocratic elements of Persia a refinement seldom seen among the temperamental and warring Greeks. He doubted that his uncouth Macedonians could replace these Persian nobles in successful administration of the conquered peoples of the orient.

He began to think of himself not as a Macedonian emperor ruling a conquered Persian empire but as a Graeco-Persian emperor ruling over Greeks and Persians as equals.

Pursuant to this policy Alexander married a Bactrian princess and encouraged his officers to follow his example. He opened the Persian land to Greek colonists and gave large doweries to his soldiers who would marry middle eastern women.

All this marked the beginning of the Hellenization of that part of the world which included the holy land and which was vital to the development of events in the Seleucid empire following the death of Alexander.

Another factor in Alexander's reign was to greatly influence the subsequent history of the holy land. He did not choose a successor. When he was dying in Babylon following a drinking bout at the age of thirty three (323 B.C.) he was asked to whom he would leave his empire. He answered simply, "To the strongest."

Alexander's empire had no solid root. He was a Macedonian attempting to be Greek and he became almost a Persian. His attempt to Hellenize the orient resulted in no strong bond designed to hold the empire together. It was consequently no strange thing that it came apart, so to speak, shortly after his death.

The division came in five parts. Antipater took Macedonia and Greece; Lysimachus ruled Thrace; Antigonos, Asia Minor; Ptolemy, Egypt; and most significant for our purposes, Seleucus took Babylon, including Palestine as far south as the southern border of Samaria.

A struggle ensued between Seleucid Asia and Ptolemaic Egypt for control of what the Romans would later call Palestine. The original division gave Palestine south of Samaria to Ptolemy and it became part of Egypt. The Seleucids never agreed to this division, desiring full control of the trade route which passed through Damascus and Jerusalem.

From 312-198 B.C. the Ptolemies were able to resist the Seleucid attempts to wrest Judea from them by force. The Jews were allowed a large measure of local self-government. The ruling elements were the hereditary high priest and the gerousia or Council of Elders which had been established by Ezra and Nehemiah. The pattern of Orthodox Judaism from that time to now was set by the regulations passed by this body of seventy and called Dibre Soferim.

In effect this regulation simply attempted to prevent the Jews from succumbing to the Hellenistic pressures with which they were surrounded. Art, music, dress, customs, and most of all religion were

over-shadowed by the synagogue chant of the rabbis, "Shammai Israel, Adonai eleenu, Adonai echod," "Hear O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is One."

A concerted effort was made by the Hellenists to break down this resistance. Judea was ringed with a series of Greek settlements in league with the trans-Jordanian Decapolis. Each of these tantalized the Judeans with temples to Greek gods and goddesses, Academies, schools, gymnasiums and nude games.

The extent to which the Hellenizing efforts succeeded is seen in the fact that several young Jews submitted to surgery to remove the sign of the covenant so they would not be ridiculed when participating in the games.

Historians believe three factors prevented the complete overwhelming of the Jews by Hellenism. The persecution of Antiochus IV which drove the Orthodox underground and polarized public sympathy in their favor, the protection of the Romans which came at the request of the Maccabees, and the power and prestige of the Law of Moses which even the most Hellenistic Jews agreed came from God.

The persecution began in 198 B.C. when Antiochus III finally defeated the Ptolemys and Judea became part of the Seleucid Empire. Antiochus III was received by the Jews as a liberator, but their joy was short-lived. His successor Antiochus IV proved to be a veritable despot. He appointed as high priest one Jason who was a leader of Hellenistic sympathizers in Jerusalem. An order came from Antiochus at Jason's request for the establishing of Greek institutions like those of the Decapolis in Jerusalem itself.

Unhappy with Jason for the slowness with which the Hellenizing of Judea was proceeding, Antiochus replaced him with Menelous. Menelous proceeded to get to the core of the matter. Jehovah was made one with the Greek Zeus and sacrifices were offered to them according to the Greek practice rather than the Jewish law.

Such shocking practice brought predictable consequences. The majority of the Jews swung to the Chasidim, or anti-Hellenist party. Antiochus IV declared himself Epiphanes or "God made manifest."

In 168 B.C. Antiochus was defeated by the Ptolemaic Pharaoh Popilius, and Jerusalem received the mistaken report that he had been killed. Their celebration was cut short by Antiochus himself appearing on the scene.

Convinced that the Jews had been responsible for his failure in Egypt, he slaughtered thousands of them, robbed the temple, restored Menelaus whom the Jews had deposed and rededicated the temple to

Zeus. He ordered the destruction of the altar, replaced it with a Greek altar and then committed the ultimate blasphemy by sacrificing a pig on it! Jews were forced on pain of death to eat pork so sacrificed. Jerusalem was razed by flames and the Jewish population was sold into slavery.

The entire reign of Antiochus Epiphanes was, and still is, known as "the abomination of desolation," in Jewish historical writings.

During all this, the Chasidim preached guerilla resistance. Among those who went underground was one Mattathias of the house of Hasonai of the tribe of Aaron, and his five sons Judas, Simon, Eleazor, Jonathan and Johannan Caddis.

Mattathias began the active revolt by killing a Jew who was approaching the altar to offer a swine, and shouting, "Whoever is zealous for the Law, and wishes to support the covenant, let him follow me." He had set the stage for every Jewish Zealot from then until now.

Upon Mattathias' death, leadership of the revolt passed to Judas who was called Maccabee, "the hammer." Judas was a saint in prayer and a terror in battle. Against great odds he defeated the Greek mercenaries at Emmaus. The victory was complete, yet Antiochus was not convinced. He sent an even larger force to wipe out the rebels.

These were in turn wiped out at Mizpah. In 164 B.C. Judas cleansed and rededicated the temple and restored the priestly services.

Upon the death of Antiochus Epiphanes in 163 B.C., his successor, Lysias, offered the Jews full religious freedom if they would disarm. The Chasidim consented. Judas refused, asserting that to be really religiously free the Jews must be politically free. This difference was the beginning of civil strife which produced the party of the Pharisees, who agreed with the Chasidim and the Sadducees whose political ambitions matched those of Judas.

Civil war ensued with the Maccabeans now persecuting those of the Hellenistic faction. Israel was engulfed in civil strife.

Judas was slain in 161 B.C. His successor, brother Jonathan, was killed in 143. The only surviving brother carried the favor of Rome and with the help of that growing power established Jewish independence in 142 B.C. Thus establishing the Hasmonian dynasty.

This period of independence prevailed, although torn by internal strife, until the coming of the Roman Legions seventy nine years later.

In *Zechariah 9:9-10* the prophet begins to rejoice. Now that the temple is built and the land has returned to Jehovah, the appearance of the Messianic King seems imminent. We will have more to say shortly about this King and His appearance.

In 9:11-f the joyous coming of the Messiah is postponed by the stark reality of the present grim situation. The struggle with Greece must first be won. The disbursed are encouraged to return to their home land and join in the struggle. They have the promise that they will prevail (v. 13). Jehovah Himself will fight for them (v. 14-15). He will save them as His people (v. 16). The sling-stones of the Maccabees will eat the flesh of the Seleucids. The victorious rebels would be drenched with blood like the horns of the altar (v. 15) and in their victories they would shine like the glittering jewels of a crown (v. 16).

The fierce description of the struggle for independence from the Hellenizing Seleucid Greek empire ends on a note of praise to God for His goodness.

THE MESSIANIC ASPECT OF ZECHARIAH . . . 9:9-17

It is indeed not strange that Zechariah should mingle his prophecy of Maccabean independence with that of the coming of Christ. The defeat of the Seleucids marked the last foreign presence in the holy land prior to that historic period in which Christ finally came. The excited rejoicing of the prophet is indeed understandable.

On the other hand, it is equally easy to see how the Jews of later times reading such intermingled predictions could cast their longed for Messiah in the mold of Judas Maccabee. The desire for political independence as a base for religious freedom would be as strong under Caesar as under Antiochus Epiphanes.

Nevertheless, when the Messiah did come, He scorned such a militarily attained and supported political kingdom to fulfill God's ultimate purpose in blessing all the nations of the earth. It required His own resurrection from the dead to establish His Messianic identity in view of His renunciation of this worldly power and ambition.

(Verse 9) Zechariah calls upon the theocratic people, "Daughter of Zion . . . Daughter of Jerusalem" to rejoice at the coming of her king. (cp. *Psalm 2:11*) He is not at all what she expected, but He is Messiah.

He is just, a characteristic attributed by the prophets to the Messiah in connection with salvation (cp. *Isaiah 45:21, 53:11, Jeremiah 23:5,6*).

In contrast with Antiochus, whom the Jews mistakenly welcomed as a savior from Egyptian oppression but who came to destroy, the Messiah King will come to save.

He is lowly and He comes riding on an ass; not the symbol of humiliation as some have supposed but the symbol of peace, as the

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horse was a symbol of war. Messiah will lead no armed revolt. He will not receive His kingly dominion from Satan (cp. *Luke 4:6-7*) but by going the way of the suffering servant.

This verse finds its literal fulfillment in Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem. (cp. *Matthew 21:4-5*)

(Verse 10) Ephraim, symbolic of the northern tribes, and Jerusalem, symbolic of the southern are to be restored at Messiah's coming. The people will be restored to their full promised dominion (*Genesis 15:18*) from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean.

And beyond, He shall speak peace to all nations, His dominion shall be to the ends of the earth.

The Jews understood such passages to indicate that the Messiah would conquer the world, as had Alexander. Jesus showed the true sense when He commissioned His apostles to preach the gospel to the uttermost part of the earth.

(Verses 11-17) With the words, "as for thee also," Zechariah turns to the coming deliverance from Greek oppression. It will be because of the covenant that the people will be rescued from the threat of complete extinction by Hellenization.

Chapter XXXVIII—Questions

The Triumph of Zion Through Her Messiah

1. The theme of chapter nine is struck in verse _____.
2. This theme is the coming of the _____.
3. The term "burden of the word of Jehovah" is calculated to _____.
4. The first part of the oracle is concerned with the land of _____.
5. Hadrach is the symbolic name for _____.
6. This prediction was fulfilled c. 344 B.C. by the invasion of _____ by _____.
7. God's purpose to _____ is the all-determining factor in every historic development.
8. List the traditional enemies of Israel mentioned in chapter nine, and give the symbolic name of each as given by Zechariah.
9. _____ was the southern-most of the Philistine cities mentioned here.
10. What world conqueror fulfilled this predictive passage? (9:1-8)
11. The predictions of this section find their immediate fulfillment in what historic event?

12. The ultimate fulfillment of this passage is found in the coming of _____.
13. Describe the events leading to the Maccabean revolt.
14. To what three factors do historians attribute the failure of the Greeks to completely Hellenize the Jews?
15. Following the death of Alexander, the land of Palestine became at first part of what empire?
16. Antiochus IV was called Epiphanes meaning _____.
17. Who were the Chasidim?
18. Whom did Antiochus Epiphanes blame for his defeat at the hand of the Egyptian Ptolemies?
19. What, in Jewish history, is referred to as "the abomination of desolation?"
20. Who was Mattathias?
21. Who was called "the hammer?"
22. Upon the death of Antiochus IV, Lysias offered the Jews complete religious freedom if they would lay down their arms. Why did they refuse?
23. What caused the Jewish civil war following their victory under Judas Maccabee?
24. What was the origin of the party of the Pharisees?
25. What was the origin of the Sadducees?
26. What finally ended the internal strife which followed the Maccabean revolt?
27. In 9:11-f the joyous coming of the Messiah is postponed by_____.
28. Why does Zechariah mingle the prediction of the coming of Christ with that of the Maccabean revolt?
29. Show how the Jews in later times confused these two predictions.
30. What was Jesus' attitude toward the desire of the Jews for a military independence and a political kingdom?
31. Contrast Antiochus IV with the Messiah King.
32. What is the symbolism of the ass upon which the Messiah would ride?
33. What New Testament event fulfills this prediction?
34. Beyond the traditional boundaries of Israel, the Messiah will speak peace to _____.
35. The Jews understood such passages to indicate that _____.