

On that Day ... **Zechariah 12:1-13:9**

It seems everyone knows the story of David and Goliath. It's passed into folklore – even in our Biblically-illiterate nation. People may not know all the details as we have it in the Bible, but they know enough for it to be used as an analogy.

- Australia plays a one-day game against Zimbabwe – it's billed as a David and Goliath battle.
- Some individual takes on a multi-national corporation – it too is billed as a David and Goliath battle.

People know it's all about the little guy taking on the big guy.

People come up against an insurmountable obstacle in their lives – maybe it's cancer, maybe it's a government department, maybe it's another interest rate rise – and they feel small and insignificant and helpless. They feel an inevitability about the situation. It all looks so hopeless. In due course, they'll just go under. But someone mentions David and Goliath – sometimes the little guy wins – and so they have renewed hope. Maybe they too can overcome the odds.

Which of course misses the whole point of the story! The story has nothing to do with the little guy overcoming the odds. The story's about God and about God keeping His word – especially His word to David. David doesn't win because he's little. He doesn't win because he's somehow got lucky and overcome the odds. He wins because God steps in to keep His promises. He wins because God's with him and God always wins.

Jerusalem Rescued

The opening part of this second oracle – the oracle that covers the last three chapters of Zechariah – is like a David and Goliath story: both the way it's used in our culture and the way it's used in the Bible. Verse 1:

This is the word of the Lord concerning Israel. The Lord, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares:

Let me pause there to emphasise that – because I think the text emphasises it. Remember who's speaking here. This is God – Yahweh.

- He made the universe that stretches out in the night sky – all those planets and stars and galaxies.
- He made this planet and all it contains – all the rocks and plants and animals.
- He made us and gives us life.

This is the One who made everything. Think of His greatness. Think of His power. Think of how He put it all together and keeps it going. Think of how He directs it for His purposes. Think of how He owns it all. Think of the fact that we're accountable to Him. Many humans don't like to hear that. They don't like the idea of being accountable to their Maker.

What is it that Yahweh says? Verse 2:

"I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves. On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with

madness," declares the Lord. "I will keep a watchful eye over the house of Judah, but I will blind all the horses of the nations. Then the leaders of Judah will say in their hearts, 'The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the Lord Almighty is their God.'

"On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves. They will consume right and left all the surrounding peoples, but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place.

"The Lord will save the dwellings of Judah first, so that the honour of the house of David and of Jerusalem's inhabitants may not be greater than that of Judah. On that day the Lord will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the Lord going before them. On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem."

It looks like a David and Goliath situation. In one corner you've got all the nations of the world. In the other corner you've got Jerusalem. Somewhere in between you've got Judah. There's a bit of a translation difficulty. It looks like Judah starts off in the corner with all the other nations – maybe by choice, maybe by force simply because she's outside Jerusalem. Then in verse 5 it looks like they realise their mistake – that God's obviously on Jerusalem's side and so they swap sides. In relation to the overall situation, it doesn't matter much – Judah's not all that big.

- If you start off with all the nations verses Jerusalem and Judah, or
- If you start off with all the nations and Judah verses

Jerusalem

It's not really going to make that much difference to the equation. The ones on Jerusalem's side face overwhelming odds. This is a no contest. Jerusalem has no chance. All the nations are there. They all want to destroy her.

How would the people of Zechariah's time have felt? They were living in Jerusalem – but Jerusalem didn't look like much of a city – more like a village. There's still a lot of rubble lying around. The walls are still in ruins. It all looks pretty weak and defenceless. They hadn't been back from the exile that long. The threat of the nations coming against them must have felt a bit overwhelming.

But I think they'd also be perplexed. Wasn't God going to do great things when they returned? Weren't they going to be top nation? Wasn't Jerusalem going to be capital of the world? Wouldn't they rule over the nations? Wasn't blessing going to flow out from Jerusalem? So why are all the nations gathering to fight Jerusalem and destroy her? How does that fit in with the promises?

It's good that God promises to protect Jerusalem. At least that part of what God says is quite positive. Look at the images God uses.

- Verse 2: a cup that sends people reeling. They've come to Jerusalem to take. So they do – they drink the cup. But they find it's too strong for them. They can't handle the strength of this liquor – and so they stagger away empty-handed
- Verse 3: an immovable rock. The nations try to lift Jerusalem – to move her out of their way – but they can't. All they succeed in doing is injuring themselves – maybe a few hernias or slipped discs or

torn muscles.

- Verse 6: a firepot in a woodpile. They come to destroy Judah but find themselves set on fire instead. They're like dry tinder ready to burn.

The odds look insurmountable against Jerusalem. The whole world's against her. How can she survive? Yet, God fights for her – and so of course she survives. God will be a shield to her. Jerusalem will experience great victory. God will defeat His enemies.

Jerusalem Mourns

And so, you'd expect great rejoicing. But there's a twist in verse 10:

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, and all the rest of the clans and their wives.

On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.

It's strange, isn't it?

- The Egyptians are wiped out in the Red Sea and the

Israelites sing and dance.

- God destroys the Canaanite army in the time of the judges and Deborah and Barak compose a song of celebration.
- After Saul and David defeat the Philistines, the women come out of the towns dancing and singing.

Yet, after this great victory, they mourn. And it's bitter mourning.

- It's like mourning the death of an only child.
- It's like mourning the death of the heir – like happened to the Egyptians when God rescued Israel from slavery.
- It's like weeping in the plain of Megiddo.

We're not sure of the exact meaning of that last one. Some think it's to do with an annual ceremony by Israel to mourn the death of good king Josiah. Some think it's to do with an annual ceremony by pagans to mourn the death of the fertility gods. It doesn't really matter. Even though we can't work out this detail, the sense of the text remains the same. The first two examples are sufficient to give the general gist of the third. It's all to do with bitter mourning.

And this mourning comes because, the God who's given them the victory over their enemies, also gives them a spirit of grace and supplication. The mourning itself is God's gift to them. This mourning's a good thing. It still seems a strange way to celebrate a victory – but God's the one who induces this mourning.

What's the mourning about? Half way through verse 10:

They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him ...

That's a hard sentence to get your mind around. Who's speaking? God – Yahweh. How do you pierce God? Isn't God invulnerable? Isn't God indestructible? Impenetrable? I mean, isn't God Spirit? How do you stick a spear into a spirit? It's like trying to kill the wind with bows and arrows. How do you make sense of this?

And what's this bit about looking on *Me* (first person) and mourning for *Him* (third person). Who's this other person who's introduced? How does He relate to Yahweh? How does He fit into the picture? Why are they mourning for Him if it's God they've pierced?

What was Israel to make of a picture like this? It looks like they've just won this unbelievable victory – or that God's won it for them – and they're just about to start the celebrations when they turn around and discover they've killed their Commander-in-Chief. It's hard to work out. They've somehow killed God – and the only reason they realise it is that the God they've killed pours out a spirit of grace on them to enable them to realise it.

And somehow this is all connected to the cleansing of the land in 13:1. It opens a fountain that washes away sin and impurity. Back in chapter 3, the high priest Joshua was purified. His filthy garments were removed and he was given clean garments instead. He stood as representative of the people. Again, Zechariah has this emphasis on the purification of God's people.

Jerusalem Purified

Even more than that. Verse 2

"On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more,"

declares the Lord Almighty. "I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. And if anyone still prophesies, his father and mother, to whom he was born, will say to him, 'You must die, because you have told lies in the Lord's name.' When he prophesies, his own parents will stab him. "On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his prophetic vision. He will not put on a prophet's garment of hair in order to deceive. He will say, 'I am not a prophet. I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth.' If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body?' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends'."

This is a real change that's taken place. This is not simply turning over a new leaf or trying a little harder. We didn't do too well before the exile; let's see if we can do a whole lot better now we're back home. Again, this is God's doing.

- God will take the idols from the land.
- God will remove the prophets – presumably false prophets, although it may be even wider than that.
- God will remove the spirit of impurity.

There are a couple of stories there to show how deep the change is. In previous times, plenty were happy to put their hand up and claim to speak for God. Ahab had plenty of false prophets in his court. Amos and Jeremiah had to contend against false prophets. That won't be a problem anymore.

- If someone stands up to prophesy and claim to speak God's words, his own parents will kill him for making such outrageously false claims.
- The prophet's garment of hair – which had provided

some status for its wearer in previous generations – will be hidden. There's no status in that garment anymore.

- The person previously involved in the ecstatic prophetic schools – where they had practices involving the cutting of their own bodies – will come up with ridiculous stories to try to hide the physical evidence of their previous involvement.

God's people have a deep desire to serve God rightly. They want God. They want God's ways. They don't want to be led astray again. They don't want to risk the possibility that someone will come to them with a false message from God. It's a huge change of heart. Before the exile, they looked for any excuse not to truly serve the one true God.

- Idolatry.
- False religion.
- False prophets.

They found all sorts of ways to justify to themselves their own sinful behaviour. Not any more. God's given them a change of heart. They've been cleansed. They've been given a new spirit. They now truly want what God wants.

Jerusalem Scattered

It sounds great. It sounds like a very promising and very desirable future. But there's yet another strange twist – another surprise for us. Verse 7:

*"Awake, O sword, against My shepherd,
against the man who is close to Me!"
declares the Lord Almighty.
"Strike the shepherd, ...*

As we've seen throughout Zechariah, the term *shepherd*

refers to the leaders of God's people. To talk about God's shepherd – as here – is to speak of God's leader or God's Messiah. As we've seen, the Messiah was thought to be a glorious figure – kingly, triumphant, victorious, invincible. The Messiah's God's solution to all His people's problems. So why's God call for a sword to strike down His Messiah. It just doesn't seem to make sense.

- Has the Messiah messed it up? Has he too failed to achieve God's purposes in the world?
- Has the Messiah done something drastically wrong? Has he fallen into idolatry? Has he led God's people up the proverbial garden path?
- Is the Messiah not strong enough? Is he overwhelmed by the enemies arrayed against him? Are they too strong for him after all?

This is just so unexpected. The hopes of the nation rested on this coming Messiah – and He's to be struck down? What would happen to the nation then?

Zechariah tells them what will happen in what follows. Pick it up again in the second half of verse 7:

*"Strike the shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered,
and I will turn My hand against the little ones.
In the whole land," declares the Lord,
"two-thirds will be struck down and perish;
yet one-third will be left in it.
This third I will bring into the fire;
I will refine them like silver
and test them like gold.
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 our God'."*

If they didn't like what would happen to the Messiah, I suspect they liked this even less. Hasn't Zechariah just finished telling them about a great victory? Won't Jerusalem remain intact? God was going to shield them from their enemies, wasn't He? And they were going to get forgiveness and a new spirit and all that. So, why is it that two-thirds of them are now going to be destroyed? And why are the remaining third going to be put through the furnace?

Jesus and Jerusalem

So what's it all about? Can we make sense of these two chapters? What was God teaching Israel? What's God teaching us? I think we can find a couple of fixed points. The first, although not first in terms of the order they appear in Zechariah, has to do with Zechariah 13:7

*"Strike the shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered,*

Turn to Matthew 26:30. Jesus has just finished having His last Passover meal with His disciples – the one where He reinterpreted the Passover to speak of His coming death. Judas has already left to betray Him. Verse 30:

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of Me, for it is written:

*'I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'*

But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of You, I never will."

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night,

before the rooster crows, you will disown Me three times."

But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with You, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

Jesus announces that He is God's shepherd of Zechariah 13. He is the One close to God. He is the One to be struck down. And when He's struck down, the sheep will be scattered.

What's the result of that according to Zechariah? God saves a people for Himself. Two-thirds (that is, the majority) are destroyed, but one-third is left – and that one-third is refined in the fire like silver and gold. Look at 1 Peter 1:3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

A people who are saved and are purified through the fire.

The second fixed point has to do with Zechariah 12:10 – the one they have pierced. Turn to John 19:33

But when they came to Jesus and found that He was

already dead, they did not break His legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken", and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

The apostle John clearly identifies Jesus as the one spoken about by Zechariah.

The New Testament tells us that God's great victory over His enemies is tied up with Jesus – the Messiah. Yet, that victory doesn't come about by military conquest or force of arms or displays of supernatural power. The victory comes about by Jesus' death.

- When Jesus dies, God's Messiah is struck down.
- When Jesus dies, He makes a public spectacle of the powers and authorities – triumphing over them by the cross.
- When Jesus dies, He opens a fountain of cleansing from sin and impurity so that forgiveness is freely available for any who desire it.
- When Jesus dies, He begins to gather to Himself a people of God from all the nations and tribes and tongues of the earth.
- When Jesus dies, He makes available His Spirit to His people so they're given new hearts that want to put away the old idols and truly worship God.

Zechariah tells us this was God's plan all along. The promised Messiah's a great and glorious figure. He's the one who rules on David's throne over God's kingdom. He deals with God's enemies. He establishes true justice and

true righteousness. But the way the Messiah enters His glory is by being struck down – by being pierced. You don't get the glory without the suffering.

As Jesus faces the cross, He looks small compared to the forces arrayed against Him – like a David facing Goliath. The Jewish Sanhedrin and the Roman authorities proceed to do their will. They string Him up for execution. They kill Him on a cross. It looks like Goliath's won. But they reckoned without God. This was all part of God's plan. It was God's will to strike His shepherd – and thus to rescue a people for Himself.

- A people who'd mourn their sin.
- A people who'd be cleansed.
- A people who'd be changed to godliness.
- A people who'd be refined by fire.

This is what God's doing now in the history. This is God's purpose – and thus it's the only purpose that really matters.

So what's important to you?

- Is it important to you to be part of God's people – people who've been cleansed by the death of Jesus?
- Is it important to you to be refined – to get rid of that in your life that displeases Jesus?
- Is that so important that you're willing to be refined by fire – to suffer for the sake of the purity to follow?

There are all sorts of circumstances in life that threaten to overwhelm us from time to time – and I don't want to trivialise those things – but what are they compared with this? What's whatever it is compared with the kingdom of God? And would you allow whatever it is to so overwhelm you that you forgot about the kingdom of God?