

Zechariah

Part 5

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[00:00:00] It's at this stage, I trust, that the hard work put in by those of you who've been able to come on the other occasions will begin to bear fruit. With the limited number of times available, it was necessary to crowd a little the earlier sessions with a few chapters at a time to get the framework as guidelines to leave as much time as possible for the detail of these last three chapters. And so, if the Lord will, we look at chapter 12 tonight.

In chapter 12, all the prophetic matter is future, remains to be fulfilled.

[00:01:05] We've looked at previous chapters where some of the matter has already been fulfilled, at least in part, some perhaps in total.

But here, we are thinking of matters which have yet to occur, and perhaps that simplifies things to some extent.

The parameters are set by a phrase which recurs throughout the chapter, and indeed throughout Scripture in Old and New Testament, the words, In that day, verse 3, In that day, verse 4, verse 6, verse 8, verse 9, verse 11, maybe others, In that day.

Now, we'll be returning to that as to the significance of the phrase later this evening, [00:02:07] but if we can just use that as a guideline that things are relative to a certain day, whatever we are to understand by that phrase, and we'll come back to that. But I would like to commence, first of all, by commenting on the opening three verses, which tell us about a confrontation which is a climax of God's ways upon earth.

Now, I say a climax rather than the climax, because if there's one thing we've learned over the last few evenings, it is that what perhaps we first read in Scripture as one event, the coming of the Lord, we hadn't been reading Scripture and listening to Orthodox [00:03:01] ministry for long before we realized it wasn't quite as simple as that, and at the very least we could split things up into the rapture and the appearing. And as time went on, we would come to the conclusion it wasn't even as easy as that.

And again, we'll come to something of the distinction in the terms that are used. And I think we'll find tonight and in Zechariah that even when it says, In that day, it may not necessarily or always be referring to one 24-hour period or necessarily the same part of a period, whether it's 24 hours or longer.

So I think before we start thinking of timescales, we would do well to think of the character of the confrontation which is detailed in the opening three verses. [00:04:06] Now, the first thing, now tonight, we should have the time to look at some of the phrases and the words that are used in more detail than we've been able to in the past, and I intend to start straight away with this word burden, the burden of the word of the Lord.

A burden in simple terms, something which is a weighty matter, something which presses you down, something which takes great stamina to endure, and something you feel the increasing weight of the longer that you have to bear it. Now that's a burden as we understand it, and the term often comes in to the major prophets. Now I would merely ask myself and you this question as a gauge of our spiritual discernment [00:05:06] and our spiritual state.

This is the burden of the word of the Lord for Israel.

Now the question is this, do I feel, do I feel for Israel at the present time?

Does it bear upon my spirit that God's anointed nation is kicked around from pillar to post and is at the tail of the nations instead of the top? Do I feel the weight of that, or am I rather secretly pleased that this clever, crafty nation are having a difficult time of it? Now before we answer that question, let us bear this in mind. Scripture tells us most expressly that when the Lord Jesus Christ was here in the days [00:06:07] of his flesh, he felt their position very keenly indeed.

He bore their iniquities and he carried their sicknesses.

It was a burden, a sorrow, a matter of great weight to him that his own anointed nation on earth was plagued individually and nationally because of the effects of sin, their own sin and disobedience.

I think we have scriptural warrant for saying the Lord Jesus still feels keenly the burden of Israel, that they are not where they should be, and it is in order that they might be given their right place, as the text will tell us later on, that the prophet is given [00:07:02] this particular burden.

I'm getting a bit weary of those who come to me from time to time, and it's rare indeed that I venture into the realm of prophecy, but time and time again, not excluding time aside, time and again we are told that prophecy is academic, prophecy is intellectual, prophecy is for the mind. Tell me, they say, not of doctrine but of Christ. Don't tell me about prophecy, tell me about the love of Jesus. It sounds good, it sounds plausible, it sounds right, but I need to ask myself the question, if it's for the glory of Christ, if it's for the outworking of his plans on heaven and on earth, it must of necessity be of interest to me. It must affect my heart that God's earthly nation are where they are and how they are [00:08:07] at the present time. Let the burden of the nation of Israel press upon my spirit. You remember that good phrase expounding what the Lord Jesus did in that comment on Isaiah 53 verse 4, first he bore in his spirit what he then dismissed in his power.

He did that in the days of his flesh, in the miracles that he performed. He will do it as the grand deliverer, the battle bow that we read about in chapter 10 last night, the burden then of the word of the Lord for Israel. Now who is it that has this burden, not only for Judah, not only for Jerusalem, but as verse 1 says, for the whole of the nation, the nation of Israel. [00:09:04] We are going to have to go through a terrible time, the time of Jacob's trouble, Jeremiah 30, and in view of that, which still lies in the future, there is this burden upon the spirit of those who are true to God.

Well, what sort of deliverer can they be led to expect? What kind of deliverer will be able to see them through such difficulties? And we are immediately directed that the only one who will have the power and the mind to do it is he who stretches forth the heavens, lays the foundations of the earth, forms the spirit of man within him. Now we are hoping to get some detailed exposition here, but we must keep our eye on the clock at the same time.

He's the creator.

In the beginning, he created the heavens and the earth. [00:10:02] The highest point of that creation was the creation of man, and the highest point of man is his spirit.

But sad to say, implicit in this, it is in his spirit, the highest part of his tripartite being, that man has set himself most deliberately against the God who brought him into being. It is the spirit of man in particular which has been set in disobedience and willfulness against the God who created him. Well, that's man as a whole.

And we turn now, and again, another regular phrase that's introduced, not always discernible in the authorized version, but necessary to take account of in the plural. Verse two, all the peoples.

Verse three, all peoples. Again, all the peoples of the earth. [00:11:04] And verse four, peoples.

Verse six, they shall devour all the peoples.

Verse nine, all the nations, and so on. Coming to this great confrontation in and around Jerusalem, you have the nation of Israel represented, certainly you have Judah, the remnant in particular, you have the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you have round about them, on every hand, all the nations of the earth available at that time.

Now, here perhaps we have to put our thinking cap on. I'm very pleased that in matters like prophecy and in the specification of the tabernacle and the temple, I'm delighted that there's sufficient given for our spiritual and moral [00:12:08] guidance, but it always seems to me there's not quite enough for us to make an exact catalogue and timetable of events, and there's not sufficient detail given for us to make a detailed working specification.

I think it's good in the wisdom of God that there's always something left beyond the comprehension of our finite minds.

We are finite minds, we have limited understanding. That's no excuse to me, I have to work hard at it to learn all that's available with the understanding that I will never plumb the depths of all the detail. That's why I think it's so difficult to reach agreement with each other on where the pillars of the tabernacle there are, how many posts round about the gates, how many pillars there [00:13:01] are at the corners, and that kind of thing. It varies, that's not a bad thing, but we are brought to a full stop and say, so far and no farther. Well, likewise, in trying to prepare a catalogue of events between the rapture and the appearing, apart from the fact with our limited minds and finite understanding, we find it difficult to remember all the detail, all the verses of all the prophets, all at the same time. I'm sure, even if we had clever minds, we wouldn't be able to get an exact catalogue of events.

But certainly it seems to me that there are verses, like Revelation 19, about verse 20, where we

seem to get telescoped together, groups of events which may not necessarily take place on the same day.

Now, my suggestion, and pardon me if I differ from your Schofield reference Bible for once, [00:14:08] it certainly seems to me that when we look at the things that are said at the beginning of chapter 12 of Zechariah, we may well find ourselves at a time when the Western nations under the beast, associated with Antichrist, have already been summarily dealt with by the Lord Jesus Christ, destroying them by the brightness of his coming. And when we get references to all the peoples being against the inhabitants of Jerusalem, you have the sea to the west, you have the king of the south, you have the kings of the east, you have the king of the north. Things all round about, but perhaps, I only suggest, maybe, because the beast and the false prophet and the Western group of nations have had a special part in persecuting God's [00:15:07] earthly people, perhaps they are distinguished by having a separate, individual judgment unleashed upon them, and then we find all the rest get to this point where they can say this, we've had enough.

There's this difficult, obstinate, infuriating nation of Israel, protected first of all under the umbrella of the Western nations, and they've had this despot for the last few years, who first of all was in league with them, then he turned against them, and now he's gone, and now they're at our mercy, we can all move in. Now it seems to me that that's the point we've arrived at, at the beginning of chapter 12, when all the nations are round about, gathering ready to pounce, and they think we've got [00:16:09] them where we want them. Now verse 2 says, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling, verse 3, I will make them a burdensome stone.

Now you fit in to your scheme of prophecy as to whether what happens here happens after the 1260 days, the 1290 days, or the 1335 days, I don't think that's of vital importance in this stage. What is important is this, that when the nations think that the city, what is going to be the city of the great king, when they think it's at their mercy, the tables are turned. [00:17:06] They think that they are going to be burdensome to the nation, to the city, they're going to put it down, deal with it once and for all. There are many nations now, aren't there, who say, if only we could get rid of the trouble spot of the earth, Jerusalem, Palestine, if only we could swamp them once and for all, how pleased everybody would be. But we get to the point here where we find that the roles of the nations and Israel are completely reversed. We've been looking throughout the book of Zechariah at the fact that the nation of Israel must needs be disciplined because of their disobedience, and the Gentile nations are used as God's disciplinary tools, an order that due governmental discipline might be [00:18:04] applied to the nation of Israel.

And now, God having said previously, when the moment comes, I'll take them to task for the way they've dealt so severely with my beloved people. And when they gather around Jerusalem ready to pounce, God says, this is the moment, they're in for a fright.

Now I say that advisedly.

Isaiah 52 verse 15 says, the nations will be absolutely astonished, startled, petrified, and we get the same thought here.

Cup of trembling, cup of fright, they'll be absolutely petrified at the moment that they think victory is within their grasp.

[00:19:05] The siege, as verse two says, is against Judah in particular, and Jerusalem specifically.

And in that day, see what I mean now, that day I used to think, well that's the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ushering in the day of the Lord. Which is another point of course. We talk about things like the day of Christ, the day of the Lord. We talk of the parousia. I used to think each of them was a specific event. I've begun to learn that they may well be periods marked by a special character or way of approach. And here, that day, again, we are beginning to learn that there are different aspects of it.

Well, this particular aspect of this particular period is this, that the nation of Israel [00:20:05] will be used under the hand of their mighty deliverer, Jehovah, in the person of Messiah, to bring the crushing blow to all the nations that have opposed God.

The day, that day, when God's disciplinary judgment will have run its course and will have expired, will be the very day when those who are used as disciplinary tools will themselves be disciplined. And this is how it will occur. When all the peoples of the earth be gathered together against this.

Now I say, under the direct intervention of Jehovah in the person of Messiah, if we look at verse 4, we get the word astonishment, petrification, absolutely shriveled up with [00:21:01] fear in the moment of their supposed victory.

Smitten with blindness, you see how the roles are reversed, at the present time, Israel is smitten with national blindness in part.

Blindness in part has happened to Israel, as we learn in Romans. But then, the very nations, heaping their arms against them, they will be smitten with judicial blindness in the same way that Israel as a nation has been for these thousands of years.

But we begin to get the mark of grace coming in, but notice as to the judicial element referenced to the wood and the sheaf.

The nations will be rife for judgment.

It reminds me very much of the parable of the tares in Matthew 13, where they are bound [00:22:08] into bundles, ready for burning.

The devil does God's work in gathering the opposers of God into bundles, ready to be thrown into the fire of judgment.

Here the nations, gathered together, making it all so easy for the reaping angels to discern, and here we have it, that they're ready to be cast into the burning as wood and a sheaf in the fire.

Fire, wood thrown into a hearth with a raging fire, a torch thrown into a sheaf, how quickly the fire will spread with the effect that all the peoples round about will be devoured. [00:23:05] But notice the beginning of the marks of grace.

Verse 5, the governors of Judah shall say in their heart. Verse 6, in that day will I make the governors of Judah.

Certainly seems to me that after what we speak of as the epiphany, the brightness of the coming of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ in power and great glory, certainly seems that after that shattering event, the Lord in his grace is pleased to associate with himself on earth certain responsible people in Judah, subordinate to him, but in his grace [00:24:01] he allows them to be used in the work that has to be done. There seems to be no other way in which these governors of Judah should be referred to. And again, we have these overall impressions that Christ personally is going to do it all. Certainly it couldn't be done without him. But it's certainly true, it's true now, it will be true then, that the Lord gives his own the capacity to be involved with him in what he's decided to do.

And then doing it in his strength, he gives the credit for having done it in all his wonderful grace.

And it seems to me that these governors of Judah seem to be involved in the same way. And because of that, at the end of verse 6 we read, Jerusalem shall be inhabited again [00:25:01] in her own place.

Her own place is the focal point of all the prosperity of the nations, centre of God's administration on earth.

That's her own place.

She only gets her own place when Christ gets his place, his ordered place, king of kings, lord of lords. And then when he's in the right place, his appointed place, she will then be dovetailed into her own place, everything in its own proper order.

But notice too, it's implied here rather than stated, the deliverance is referred to, but other prophets tell us that before that moments have arrived, Israel as a nation, the remnant in particular, must have plumbed the depths of heartfelt sorrow.

[00:26:02] First in physical, material, temporal persecution, and then, as we shall see now, in utter sorrow of heart.

Well, Judah is delivered first, verse 7, the remnant of Judah were the first to be touched in their hearts in repentance and restoration, they'll be first to enjoy the blessing or the compensation that God gives to his own when they suffer for him, and so it will be in that day.

But again, it is a reminder in passing that they who are first to enjoy the blessing will have been the first to receive the touch of judgment.

What does the scripture say?

Judgment must begin at the house of God.

[00:27:02] They've received the first touch of judgment in the time of Jacob's trouble, but they will be the first to be brought into the blessing, adequate compensation. But again, it's the way of God towards blessing, again, bringing us into this cyclical succession of events. We've noticed in all the chapters, blessing, disobedience, falling away, call to repentance, restoration in measure, ushered into further blessing. And again, the remnant first to be repentant and then first to enjoy the blessing.

Then, Messiah, and those subordinate to him, but in the event it must be recognized, verse eight, in that day shall the Lord defend.

I will destroy, verse nine, all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

[00:28:07] The audacity of it, with all that scripture has said, with all that history has recorded, in this last fling, at this period of history, that all the nations that are left and powerful at that time, they heap upon heap themselves against God's center on earth, against Jerusalem. It's a challenge that God cannot ignore, and he deals with it. Now, we come to the sweet side of the chapter, and this must necessarily be the climax of our study tonight, verse 10.

I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplication.

The order in scripture is always exact.

[00:29:07] Grace first, then supplications.

Grace, pure divine favor.

By the time their deliverance comes, the nation will have been brought to their knees. They know that without the intervention of Jehovah, they are in for utter defeat, utter destruction, utter extermination as a nation. They know that there's nothing they can do about it. It's the intervention of God in grace, not because they deserve it, but because he's committed himself to it.

In the realization of what grace has wrought, and in the recognition that all that they have can only be gained in utter dependence upon him, they are filled not only with the spirit of grace, they are filled with the spirit of supplication. [00:30:05] None other but he can supply their need, individually, as a family, as a nation. How strong the lesson for us.

But they have to come to it as a nation. And in his grace, having delivered them from the foes, he then shows them the character of their deliverer. They shall look upon me whom they have pierced. Oh, in the turmoil, in the climax of the confrontation, enemies all round about them, the hearts disturbed, all perplexed, they couldn't possibly have entered into the sweetness or the necessity of such a deliverer.

But now that the enemies have been dealt with, now that their deliverance has come, now that [00:31:05] the deliverer has smoothed the way, they are able, they are free, they have the time, they have the serenity to have their hearts conducted away from their circumstances to look at him who has brought about their deliverance. Now it's this which marks the beloved in any dispensation.

First of all, the deliverance. As the scripture says, the goodness of God bringeth to repentance. It's not repentance that brings you into the blessing. The blessing and the sense of it, and what's available to it, and realizing the inadequacy to enter into it, brings this repentance, the goodness of God. Here, grace provided the remedy.

And in the realization that God could do for them what they could never do for themselves, [00:32:04] we read, they shall mourn.

Wonderful thing.

They had been echoing a cry of distress for themselves.

They are delivered, they are granted the spirit of grace and supplication, the cry of distress for themselves becomes a cry of repentance for their sins. What a contrast. They shall mourn.

How sweet the scripture puts it. Having been delivered from the peril of their circumstances, they are able to ponder quietly, as in the presence of their God, the reason, the cause, why they'd been in the situation from which they have just been delivered. All their enemies dealt with, no fear of being subjugated to Gentile foes, no fear of discipline, [00:33:05] no fear of judgment, no fear of punishment, but they can think about the character of the one who has delivered them, him whom they shall pierce. Now there are two similes used which give the character of their mourning. They shall mourn.

First of all, as one mourns for his only son, his firstborn, we can put those together, we can think of Genesis 22 and Abraham, his only one, his firstborn, Isaac, the special object of his love, the apple of his eye, his darling, his only begotten.

What a contrast.

Read Isaiah 53, the first six verses in particular.

The remnant, after they've been delivered by the arm of the Lord, looking back from [00:34:07] their present serenity, filled with repentance, they look back and they say, was it really him? If that's what he did for us, he deserves all our love, all our devotion.

And by now, the repentant remnant can say, he's just like our only one, the object of all our love and devotion, we mourn, we afflict our souls as we think that it was him that was abused in such a terrible way for us.

So in their repentance, in their deliverance, in the time of their national distress, they are then made to realize that their deliverance is not only based, as we had last night, on [00:35:01] a mighty act of deliverance, it depends and is based and founded upon the redemption by blood that took place at the cross.

Wonderful thing that these details are implied here, as one in bitterness for his firstborn. It's the character of the mourning that is depicted here in this simile, as one mourns for an only one, an only begotten. Verse 11 gives us another simile to tell us about the mourning, as the mourning of Hadad Rimmon in the valley of Megiddon.

If we check in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, we will find that Judah were holding their heads high. They'd had a king the like of which they hadn't enjoyed for centuries. [00:36:01] He dealt with the idols, he dealt with the groves, he dealt with all those who were disobedient, he established certain feasts which hadn't been celebrated in that way for long years, Josiah by name, and the thought, he's riding on the crest of the wave, all the former glory of the kingdom, it's going to come again. It's going to be like the days of Solomon. And then we get a point where the beloved of the people, Josiah, he was stricken down. Oh, how they mourned for him.

A present-day counterpart might be something like how the Americans felt when John F. Kennedy was assassinated. They thought, here's the man that's going to be the leader of the free world, and just when he was getting on the crest of the wave, dealing with Khrushchev and everybody else, he was stricken down. Well, that's perhaps a pale, modern-day example of how the people of Judah felt when they [00:37:06] lost their beloved king, Josiah.

And out of their relatively recent history, Zechariah pulls this little bit, 150 years previously or thereabout, and he says, when the nation mourns, it's going to be just like when the nation has been mourning all these years for the loss of Josiah, one who's specially beloved because of the way he'd acted on behalf of his people. Well, we then get this outline. This, you would notice when I read, how delightful it is that all these people are mentioned.

Before we pass to that, I suppose I'd better notice this Valley of Magidon, a large plain, central Palestine, at a crossroads of all the main trade routes. [00:38:06] If you get on any hills roundabout, you can see a vast plain, which could well contain the hundreds of millions of people that scripture says will be in the last great battle on earth, the traditional site of Armageddon. That may be, but certainly roundabout Jerusalem at this time, it's going to be the scene of the judgment of the nations who oppose God and his people, but more significant, this mourning.

We can take these people, or these classes of people, either as categories to compare, or we can take them by way of contrast. Personally, I think there's scope for considering them in three different ways, at least. [00:39:02] The mourning of the nation, the mourning that they exhibit, is complete, it's thorough, it's comprehensive. They mourn as individuals, a part.

They mourn as families, a part.

They mourn as a nation, a part.

None are missed out. If you look at the text, the house of David, well, we can look at it this way. The royal family, the highest in the land. Nathan, the prophet, the prophetic line, a part.

Levi, the priestly line, a part.

Shimei, we have a choice.

We're taking it literally, as in the authorized. We not only have these people of honor and respect, the royal family, the prophetic family, [00:40:02] the priestly family, we have Shimei, who cursed David, had the audacity to curse God's anointed, and ultimately had to be executed by Solomon. Well, the highest in the land, the wickedest in the land, the remainder, the rest, the families that remain, all those unworthy of special mention, unworthy of note, the nondescript, the others also, all have to be marked by this spirit of mourning. But there's another way to look at it. David and Nathan were together in at least one event.

Nathan, the prophet, the accuser.

David, in his gross sin, the accused.

No one has right of place or thinks more of himself than another in repentance, in mourning. [00:41:04]

All have to take the same low place, whether in the things of this life, we are the accuser or the accused in the eyes of men.

Levi and Simeon, not now on the opposite sides of the confrontation fence, like David and Nathan, Levi and Simeon, as it might be translated, a team together, instruments of cruelty, doing terrible deeds together, alike in mourning for sin.

I like the last one best, husbands and wives in every case.

If I can add a personal comment here, and we're almost at the end of our meeting. It was of note then, and it's of note now.

It's a good thing when a husband or a wife is prepared to go along with their partner [00:42:08] in an exercise, in a decision, in an activity, even if they don't feel as strongly about it as their partner. I think it's good to be prepared to go along with the partner, although not feeling a matter so strongly, but better by far, if as a result of individual exercise, the two can walk together because they are fully agreed apart as individuals. No couple, no team can walk together better than when they've come to the same conclusions as individuals, and that binds them together more closely than they've ever been. Or however we look at this, as individuals, as husband and wife partnerships, as friends, as colleagues, as opposing members of difficulties like David and Nathan, Limeon, Levi and Simeon, [00:43:09] all these nondescripts that are perhaps less worthy of notice than anyone, each personally involved in this spirit of mourning.

And it's when that spirit of mourning is entered into, in the appreciation of the grace and the favor that has brought deliverance about, that there's the spirit in which God can move for the accomplishment of his ways upon earth. We'll see something more of this, if the Lord will, in chapter 13, and then in the last grand statement in chapter 14, if the Lord will.

Now let us look at our last hymn, 152.

With the moments rich in blessing, music of the cross we stand.