

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY T3265

ZECHARIAH 7-9

5/10/17

A firefly is not a fly - it's a beetle.

A prairie dog is not a dog - it's a rodent.

A horned toad is not a toad - it's a lizard.

A lead pencil doesn't contain lead - it's graphite.

A Douglas fir is not a fir tree - it's a pine.

A silkworm is not a worm - it's a caterpillar.

A shooting star is not a star - it's a meteorite.

And being religious isn't the same as living right with God.

Just because a person *acts spiritual* and *observes rituals* doesn't mean he or she truly walks with God. *What you see is **not** always what you get.*

Appearances can be deceiving That was true of the Jews in Zechariah's day - and the theme of Chapter 7.

Verse 1, “**Now in the fourth year of King Darius it came to pass that the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, on the fourth day of the ninth month, Chislev...**” The Hebrew month of Chislev or Kislev corresponds to our late November, early December.

We can date Chapters 7-8, December 4, 518 BC.

This was two years after Zechariah's eight night visions, and about two years after the beginning of the construction on the Temple. At this point, Zerubbabel has the Temple in Jerusalem about half-way finished.

Verse 2, “When the people sent Sherezzer, with Regem-Melech and his men, to the house of God, to pray before the Lord, and to ask the priests who were in the house of the Lord of hosts, and the prophets, saying, “Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?” A delegation of Jews had come to the Temple to pray and to seek clarification from the priests involving a certain matter.

The word translated “*pray*” in verse 2 is provocative. It means, “to stroke the face of the Lord.” Apparently, these Jews came humbly, passionately, unashamedly seeking God's favor. They made no bones about it, they wanted God's blessing and were not afraid to ask!

And they also had a question, “*Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?*”

Understand, the seventy years the Jews spent in Babylon had been a distressing and depressing time.

Psalms 137 describes their mood, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yes, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows.” They stopped singing and celebrating - their hearts were heavy - they hung up their instruments.

They mourned for the home God had given them.

It was during their stay in Babylon that four holy days were added to the calendar. In the Law of Moses, God established **seven feast days** - or times of rejoicing. But in Babylon the Jews added **four fast days** to the calendar - days of weeping, and mourning, and fasting.

In Babylon they had little to be happy about and thought it was important to remember their plight.

Here the delegation specifically mentions the fast of the fifth month. This fast occurred on **the ninth of Ab**.

It commemorated the events that took place on **Ab 9th**, or **August 6, 586 BC** - the infamous day when the Babylonian army burned God's Temple to the ground.

"Tisha B'Av" or "**Ninth of Ab**" is commemorated by Jews to this day. It's a time of weeping and mourning.

For not only was the Temple burned by Babylon on **Ab the 9th** - but 656 years later when the Romans repeated the notorious deed, again the destruction of the Temple occurred on the exact same day, **Ab 9th**.

It's interesting, the Jewish Talmud also taught that on that day, much earlier, God decreed that Israel wouldn't enter the Promise Land because of their unbelief, and instead wander in the wilderness for forty years.

In the second century AD, *on the ninth of Ab*, a Jewish rebel, Bar Kochba, revolted against Rome. It ended in his devastating defeat, the death of half-a-million Jews, and the banishment of the remaining Jews from Jerusalem. During that time, again on the very same day, **Ab 9**, a Roman named, Turnus Rufus, plowed up the Temple Mount, fulfilling the prophecy of Micah 3:12, "**Zion shall be plowed like a field.**"

In antiquity and in modern times Tisha B'Av, has been a day that's live on in infamy for the Hebrews. Some people have referred to it as "**The Jewish 911.**"

The first crusade began on the ninth of Av... As did the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290, from France in 1306, from Spain in 1492 - all on Tisha B'Av.

In 1941 the Nazi Party in Germany gave formal approval for extermination of the Jews on this same day. In essence, **the holocaust began on Tisha B'Av.**

This is why even today the Jews mourn and fast on this day. On the 9th of Ab there's no eating or drinking, no bathing or washing, no applications of creams or oils, no wearing of leather shoes, and no sexual relations. Even today, the ninth of Ab is observed.

But in Zechariah's day, in 518 BC, with the return of the Jews and the rebuilding of the Temple, this was the question, *"Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?"* I'm sure they expected a "yes" or "no" response, but that's not what they got!

"Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, 'Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me - for Me?'" It's interesting, God doesn't fixate on the fast. He doesn't care about the fast per se, but the attitude of the folks performing the fasting.

Why were they fasting? To make themselves look good, or appear religious, or ease a guilty conscience... or were they fasting to focus on God, and learn from their mistakes, and really seek His will.

Understand, a sincere fast is of great spiritual value. It's been said, "Fasting is a way to fatten our soul."

G Campbell Morgan called fasting, "A means of discovering the stronger, the truer, the nobler; in order to create larger room in my soul for the coming and going and sweep of the Spirit." Fasting helps separate what's spiritual from what's physical. It carves out of our hearts more room for the work of God's Spirit.

It exercises the soul, promotes discipline, allows us to focus on spiritual things. Used properly, **fasting is a fast track to spiritual growth.** It's a healthy practice.

But used improperly *fasting is a farce*. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their *Hollywood holiness* - they were fasting for show. AW Tozer once said, "Rituals can be a front or a fount."

It's interesting, nowhere in this passage does God either encourage or discourage the fast. It can serve a purpose if done with the right attitude, but what God hates is hypocrisy - service done from impure motives.

Verse 6, "When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves?" The issue is not fasting or feasting, but the attitude behind what you do.

This was Paul's advice in Romans 14, "He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks." Whether you eat (and live it up), or fast (and give it up) - your goal should be to bless the Lord.

But the Jews of Zechariah's day were acting selfish.

“Should you not have obeyed the words which the Lord proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?” Prophets of old also spoke to this issue.

In 1 Samuel 15:22, Samuel told Saul, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.”

God wants heartfelt obedience not hollow rituals.

Verse 8, “Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.’” God is far more impressed with compassion than with self-denial.

He says in Isaiah, 58:5-7, “Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul?... Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free... is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring to your house the poor who are cast out...” God desires love more than religious performance. Love is the litmus test for pleasing God.

Again, what you see is **not** always what you get.

People can feign devotion to God with all sorts of religious deeds, but what matters is in the heart.

Verse 11, “But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear.” Sadly, this was the Jews response to Zechariah’s warnings. They shrugged him off. They responded to the voice of God by purchasing earplugs.

I heard of a ranger in Yellowstone National Park leading a tour of hikers to a lookout deep within the forest. He was busy describing the beauties of nature, and considered the buzz of his two-way radio a distraction, so he turned it off. Suddenly, he was met by another ranger who had been stationed at the lookout.

The man was nearly breathless. He wanted to know why the tour guide had not been listening to his radio. The lookout had spotted a grizzly bear stalking the group, and had been trying to warn them of danger.

Be careful lest we tune out the voice of God. We’ll miss out on blessings, **and** become subject to danger.

Verse 12, “Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the Lord of hosts. Therefore it happened, that just as He proclaimed and they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen,” says the Lord of hosts.” Here’s a sobering thought, **God also owns a set of earplugs.**

If every time God tries to get through to you - you tune Him out... when you finally see the error of your ways, and cry to Him, God might not be willing to listen to you any more. Don’t take God’s mercy for granted.

“But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known. Thus the land became desolate after them, so that no one passed through or returned; for they made the pleasant land desolate.” There came a time when God turned a deaf ear to the cries of His people, and brought judgment.

Chronologically speaking, the last chapter in the OT is 2 Chronicles 36. It's a sad passage. It conveys the same story as verse 14. It reads, “(The Jews) mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy.”

Woe, to the man who stops listening to God.

Chapter 8, “Again the word of the Lord of hosts came, saying, “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her.’” Commentator Walter Kaiser writes, “Zeal is an aspect of God's internal intensity and the passion that He brings to everything that He does and says.” God is not some old geezer who doesn't get excited - who has to control his blood pressure, since He's living on the edge of a stroke. God isn't a retiree who relishes peaceful days and restful nights.

To the contrary, the Bible tells us, “God is a consuming fire.” That means He's passionate about stuff. He never tires about caring. He has unlimited emotional energy to invest in issues that matter to Him.

And here He tells us, “*I am zealous for Zion with great zeal...*” He's passionate about His people, Israel.

Realize, Zechariah is still answering the question put to the priests in Chapter 7 - *should they keep the fast?*

And the answer is *sure, if you'd like*. There's value in remembering the past and the lessons you've learned.

But don't let *the failures of the past* be a *cloud over the future*. God is zealous to do a new work in Zion. He'll lavish them with His blessings. In Chapter 8 He shows them how He'll transform their *fasts* into *feasts*.

Verse 3, **“Thus says the Lord: ‘I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the Lord of hosts, the Holy Mountain.’”** While Zechariah's colleagues were chiseling stone and building a Temple, the Prophet was getting a glimpse of the future. The builders were *sweating*, but Zechariah was *seeing...*

The book of Zechariah is sometimes referred to as **"The Apocalypse of the Old Testament."** Its quoted or alluded to 71 times in the NT, and of those 71 references 31 are found in the book of Revelation.

Zechariah is quoted more in Revelation than any other OT book - except for the much longer, Ezekiel.

Zechariah sees into the future and Zion's last day's glory. *And realize, how incredible these visions were...*

The Temple Zerubbabel was building was a pathetic comparison to the beauty and glory of Solomon's previous Temple. In contrast to Solomon's, it was a hut.

The Jews at the time were haunted by the nation's glorious past. Zerubbabel's workers knew nothing they did would match the achievements of their forefathers.

Like the soldier son of five star general, they realized they'd never measure up to their father's greatness.

Without Zechariah's visions Zerubbabel's job site would've been a depressing place. Yet the Prophet assured the Jews that rather than a dim replica of their former glory, their new Temple would be a stepping stone to a glorious future. God's visions to Zechariah proved to the Jews Zion's greatest glory still lay ahead.

The Lord will come to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem.

“Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the Lord of hosts, the Holy Mountain.”

Jerusalem will sing, *“Happy days are here again.”*

Of course, today this is not the case in Jerusalem. The muslims call the Temple Mount, *“Al-Quds,”* which is Arabic for *“Holy One”* - but they've made it anything but holy. Two mosques desecrate the Temple Mount.

The facade encircling the top of the Dome of the Rock is a direct affront to Christianity. It reads, *“God does not beget, nor is He begotten”* - its a denial of the virgin birth and deity of Jesus. It's a blasphemous lie.

Yet one day, Jesus will return, and destroy the muslim presence in the holy city. The mountain will again become the *“City of Truth,”* not *the home of lies.*

“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age.’”

Here are some sites you see in modern Jerusalem.

“The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.” Today, in Jerusalem’s Jewish Quarter old men gather, while boys and girls play in the streets. I love to read this passage in the Old City. It’s a fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy, and it looks forward to a greater fulfillment, and to Jerusalem’s future glory.

In the Kingdom Age when Jesus returns and reigns in Jerusalem, its streets will also be safe for the elderly and the children. One author writes, "God's Kingdom will not have come on this earth until its streets are fit for its children. But by the same token, it will not have come until its children are fit for its streets."

A glorious era awaits Jerusalem. Verse 6, “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘If it is marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, will it also be marvelous in My eyes?’ says the Lord of hosts.”

The post-exilic period of Zechariah and Zerubbabel must’ve been a marvelous time. The Jews had returned to their land after seventy years in captivity.

They were rebuilding their Temple and re-cultivating their land. It was an exciting time to be alive. But if you think 500 BC was exciting just wait until the end of the age - when Jesus returns and does a marvelous work!

Messiah will do the impossible, the miraculous, the marvelous. Remember, God is zealous toward Zion.

“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; I will bring them back, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness.’

Again, this is happening today. Jews are returning to Jerusalem. But the greatest return will occur in the last days after Antichrist is defeated and Messiah reigns.

“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Let your hands be strong, you who have been hearing in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, who spoke in the day the foundation was laid for the house of the Lord of hosts, that the temple might be built.’” But before the age of glory comes, Zerubbabel needs to finish his Temple. Thus, these promises for the future were the impetus needed for the builders in that day.

And it’s our glorious promise of heaven that also motivates us to *let our hands be strong* and be faithful.

Verse 10, “For before these days there were no wages for man nor any hire for beast; there was no peace from the enemy for whoever went out or came in; for I set all men, everyone, against his neighbor.

But now I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘For the seed shall be prosperous, the vine shall give its fruit, the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew - I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these.’” God

would bless the pioneers who had returned to their land with prosperity.

God will give them fertile fields, ripe grapes, dew and rain. This was the case in Zechariah's day, and it's also the case today. Modern Israel is a prosperous land!

“And it shall come to pass that just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you, and you shall be a blessing. Do not fear, let your hands be strong.’ For thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Just as I determined to punish you when your fathers provoked Me to wrath,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘And I would not relent, so again in these days I am determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear.’”

Remember the zeal God has toward Zion. Here He says He'll bless them to the same degree He punished them. God does nothing half-hearted. *There is a divine zeal (or intensity) in both God's blessings and curses.*

“These are the things you shall do: speak each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace; let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; and do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate,’ says the Lord.” Notice, what God hates... lies, injustice, evil thoughts. He loves truth, fairness, and good intentions.

“Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the

tenth, shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah.

Therefore love truth and peace.”

Tisha B'Av was the fast of the 5th month, but it was just one of four fasts instituted by the Jews in Babylon.

The fast of the tenth month marked the beginning of Babylon's siege of Jerusalem... The fast of the seventh month mourned the death of Governor Gedaliah, we read about in Jeremiah 41... And the fast of the fourth month commemorated the day the walls of Jerusalem were breached and the Babylonians invaded the city...

Traditionally, the Jews observe an extended period of mourning from this fast of the fourth month to the ninth of Ab. During those three weeks no weddings are schedule. The book of Lamentations is read in the synagogue. It's an annual grieving over their past sins.

But Zechariah is saying the day will come when God will change *their fasting into feasting - their mourning into rejoicing*. Joy will come again to the holy city.

It's interesting in the Law, God gave his people **six feasts** and only **one fast**. Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, was the only fast the people were required to keep. The four added in Babylon were man-made.

And this reveals God's heart... Though repentance is important, God would rather see us rejoicing in His forgiveness, than wallowing in our guilt and failure. God wants us to embrace His mercies and move on.

There is another provocative Jewish tradition associated with Tisha B'Av, the fast of the fifth month.

In the Jerusalem Talmud there is a prophecy that predicts Messiah would be born on the ninth of Av.

History doesn't tell us when Jesus was born. That the shepherds had their flocks in the fields at night may be an indication it was earlier than December 25.

It seems the Catholic Church chose a winter date to correspond with a pagan festival. They hoped more people would celebrate Jesus birth if it was observed on what was already a holiday on the Roman calendar.

But I put more stock in the Jewish prophecy. How cool would it be if the God who according to John 1 **“tabernacled in human flesh”** - was actually born on the anniversary of the Jewish Temple's destruction?

In John 2:19 Jesus told the Jews, **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”** John makes a point of adding that Jesus was referring to His body.

What poetic justice, that on the anniversary of the destruction of Solomon's Temple, God raised up a new Temple. Jesus became the dwelling of God on earth.

And if that's the case, Christmas should come in August. *Imagine, a summertime Christmas! **“Chestnuts roasting on the BBQ. Sunburn nipping at your nose.”***

Verse 20, **“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities; the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, “Let us continue to go and pray before the Lord, and seek the Lord of hosts. I myself will go**

also.” Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord.” These verses look to the distant future when all the earth visits the Lord Jesus reigning in Jerusalem.

The day will come when people will no longer look to Washington or Beijing, New York or London. Jerusalem will be where the action is - from the holy city Messiah will reign - and all the earth will come to seek the Lord.

“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”’ What a promise. Historically, Jews have been a hated race.

They were labeled “Christ-killers” and drawn as little devils. They’ve been falsely accused of everything from black plague, to the stock market crash, to AIDS.

Yet one day Gentiles will flock to Jerusalem - see a Jew, grab him by the shirtsleeve, and ask for a tour, “Take us around, show us the holy sites, teach us God’s ways, *we have heard that God is with you.*”

The day will come when every Jew will be a tour guide. From the beginning, God intended for the Jews to be a light to the Gentiles. That day will finally come!

Zechariah 9, “The burden of the word of the Lord against the land of Hadrach, and Damascus its resting place (For the eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel are on the Lord); also against Hamath, which borders on it, and against Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise.” This is the only place in

the Bible that mentions *“the land of Hadrach.”* It must’ve been a region of Syria linked to Damascus. *This is a heavy word against it.*

The Hebrew word *“burden”* means *“heavy.”* When applied to a prophecy it denotes an ominous warning.

Understand, at the time all these cities: *Damascus, Hamath, Tyre, and Sidon* were well known places.

Damascus is perhaps the oldest city on earth. Tyre and Sidon were commercial capitols that navigated the seven seas. As a result they were known around the world. Yet all these cities sinned and practiced wickedness. And this meant the world was watching. Out of the corner of their eye, nations were watching to see how long a holy God would put up with their evil...

I have four kids and when one disobeyed, the others watched. If a sibling got away with it, they could too.

Here, Zechariah knows every eye is on God to see if He’ll punish these cities. Thus, in the next verses he goes into detail as he prophecies God's punishment.

God makes an example of these four wicked cities.

Verse 3, *“For Tyre built herself a tower, heaped up silver like the dust, and gold like the mire of the streets. Behold, the Lord will cast her out; He will destroy her power in the sea, and she will be devoured by fire.”*

In verse 2 Zechariah says that Tyre was wise - *and she was.* In 586 BC after sacking Jerusalem the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar attacked the coastal city of Tyre. And for 13 years Tyre held off the invaders.

When the walls finally collapsed and the Babylonians streamed into the city they were surprised to discover the streets and houses empty. The citizens of Tyre had moved via ship to an island a half mile off the coast.

Nebuchadnezzar's efforts won a hollow victory.

Yet Zechariah predicts that God will destroy *"her power in the sea."* This happened 241 years after Nebuchadnezzar, and about 180 years after Zechariah.

This is an amazing proof of the Bible's reliability.

The Lord raised up a young Greek general named Alexander. *"Alexander the Great"* attacked Tyre in 332 BC. A stroke of genius caused Alexander to take the rubble from the mainland-city and build a 200 foot-wide causeway out to the island-city. It took seven months to build but it was a successful strategy. The Greek army marched across the causeway and conquered Tyre.

Ezekiel 26 also prophesies these events in detail.

Verse 5, *"Ashkelon shall see it and fear; Gaza also shall be very sorrowful; and Ekron, for He dried up her expectation. The king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. A mixed race shall settle in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines."* After his dramatic victory over Tyre Alexander turned south, and marched along the Mediterranean coast to attack the five Philistine cities.

"I will take away the blood from his mouth, and the abominations from between his teeth. But he who remains, even he shall be for our God, and shall be like a leader in Judah, and Ekron like a Jebusite." When the Philistines are

judged, God will cleanse them of drinking blood and eating of abominations - idolatrous practices - and they'll become devoted to the true God.

This was the plight of Jerusalem's original residents. After David conquered the Jebusites they converted to Judaism and assimilated into Israel. This will also be the destiny of the Philistines and their chief city, Ekron.

And this has provocative modern day implications. The word "Palestine" means "land of the Philistines."

Today's Philistines are the Palestinian Arabs, and it could be in the future, as in the past, the Philistines will be converted to the God of Israel and incorporated into Israel. The Jews' hated enemy will be their brothers.

Look for this to happen **only** when Jesus returns.

Verse 8, "I will camp around My house because of the army, because of him who passes by and him who returns. No more shall an oppressor pass through them, for now I have seen with My eyes." History tells us after Alexander conquered Philistia he marched on Jerusalem. Jewish historian Josephus says that earlier during the siege of Tyre, Alexander had called on the Jewish High Priest, Jaddus, to mobilize Jews to help the Greeks. Jaddus refused and it made Alexander angry. The General's intent was to destroy Jerusalem.

When Alexander turned his army toward Jerusalem, Jaddus knew this was trouble, so he called for the city to offer sacrifice to God and pray for deliverance.

God told Jaddus to take courage. He would deliver Jerusalem. Jaddus was to adorn the city with wreaths and open its gates to the invaders. The Jews were to welcome Alexander in white robes, and the priests were to dress in the garments prescribed by the Law.

Josephus writes, "When Alexander while still far off saw the multitude in white garments, the priests at their head clothed in linen, and the high priest in a robe of hyacinth-blue and gold, wearing on his head the mitre with the golden plate on which was inscribed the name of God, he approached alone and prostrated himself before the Name and greeted the high priest."

Of course, Alexander's men were shocked that their general would bow to a Jewish priest. When they asked him why, he told them, "It was not before him that I prostrated myself but the God of whom he has the honor to be high priest, for it was he whom I saw in my sleep dressed as he is now, when I was in Macedonia. As I was considering how I might become master of Asia, he urged me not to hesitate but to cross over confidently, for he himself would lead my army and give over to me the empire of the Persians."

According to Josephus, Alexander spared the city of Jerusalem because he believed it was the God of the Jews who had guided him to victory over the Persians.

Secular historians have doubted Josephus' story, but in 2013 a mosaic was discovered in an ancient Hebrew synagogue in the Galilee. Some scholars believe it depicts Alexander's meeting with Jaddus. It is a fact that Alexander refused to destroy the city of Jerusalem as he did the other

cities in the region. Zechariah had promised that God would *“camp around His house!”*

Verse 9, *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

Recently I read a Jewish Joke. A new flood was predicted on the earth. In three days the world would be wiped out with water. A Buddhist leader went on TV, and pleaded for everyone to become a Buddhist... Billy Graham called for the world to turn to Jesus before it was too late... While the chief rabbi of Israel went on television, and said, *“Okay, we only have three days to learn how to swim.”* The point being most Israelis no longer look for a personal Messiah. They're humanists at heart. They believe in the indomitable spirit of man.

Yet here, Zechariah focuses on an approaching Savior. *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!”* God will give them something to shout about. *“Behold, Your King is coming to you.”*

And if the Jews of the first century had taken heed to Zechariah 9:9 they wouldn't have missed their Messiah when He came to them the first time. As predicted, He came *“lowly and riding on a donkey.”*

This was this script Jesus followed on the Sunday before His crucifixion when He presented Himself to the nation. On the exact day foretold in Daniel 9, Jesus arranged a donkey

as His transportation. And just as Zechariah predicted 500 years earlier he came riding...

Roman emperors or generals would've ridden on a black stallion, but the first time Jesus came was not *to reign and rule*, but *to serve and save*. Jesus boarded *a beast of burden, a pack animal, a donkey*. Yet the Jews missed him because they thought as secular Romans, rather than Hebrews immersed in the Scriptures.

God says in verse 10, **“I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be ‘from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.’”** Verse 9 speaks of Jesus' arrival. Verse 10 speaks of Messiah's authority.

His agenda will be disarmament. The chariot, horse, and battle bow - all instruments of war - will be cut off.

He'll bring about peace to the ends of the earth.

Verse 9 speaks of the Messiah's first coming. Verse 10 speaks of His second. *And this is common in OT prophecy*. A prophet sees future events, but not necessarily the timing in between them. There can be *an immediate and future fulfillment* in the same verse.

Verse 11, **“As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.”** A waterless pit refers to a cistern that doubled as a prison cell. Cisterns are all over Israel.

They are caves that capture and store rain water. At times after a cistern dried up it was used as a prison.

Here God is referring to the Jews still in Babylon as prisoners in a waterless pit. He'll eventually free them.

“Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope. Even today I declare that I will restore double to you.”

A double-portion was the inheritance of the firstborn.

When God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt He referred to them as His firstborn among the nations. The Jews were special to God, and as His firstborn son they are entitled to a double-portion of His blessings.

Verse 13, **“For I have bent Judah, My bow, fitted the bow with Ephraim, and raised up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and made you like the sword of a mighty man.”** Here, 180 years beforehand God shows Zechariah what'll happen after Alexander.

Of course, Alexander the Great died without naming a successor. This set off a war between his rival generals. His empire was split into four sections.

And Israel was sandwiched between the Seleucid dynasty of Syria and the Ptolemies of Egypt. For the next 200 years Israel was the battleground between the Hatfields and McCoys - or the Syrians and Egypt.

This Greek period of Jewish history contained colorful characters like Cleopatra of Egypt, but the most notorious was Antiochus IV. This Syrian king referred to himself as **“Epiphanes”** or **“God Manifest.”**

And Antiochus hated the Jews. He suspended their sacrifices, abolished the Sabbath, destroyed copies of the

Scriptures, outlawed circumcision, and erected pagan altars. The icing on his evil cake occurred in December of 167 BC when he set up an image of Zeus in the Temple's Holy of Holies and slaughtered a pig on its altar. This was the ultimate act of blasphemy.

And this stirred up Jewish zeal. Shortly thereafter a priest named Mattathias, and his five sons, John, Simon, Judas, Eleazar, and Jonathan began a revolt in the city of Modein. The story goes that a Syrian officer was forcing the Jews to sacrifice to pagan gods. One of the Jews capitulated, and went to offer his sacrifice.

In a courageous act of defiance, Mattathias stepped up to kill the compromising Jew and the Syrian officer.

Even though Mattathias died shortly thereafter, his son launched a guerrilla war. Judas Maccabeas, or "[Judas the hammer](#)," led the Jews to several stunning upsets that drove out the Greeks and their idolatry. The "[sons of Zion](#)" overwhelmed the "[sons of Greece](#)."

["Then the Lord will be seen over them, and His arrow will go forth like lightning. The Lord God will blow the trumpet, and go with whirlwinds from the south.](#)

[The Lord of hosts will defend them; they shall devour and subdue with sling stones. They shall drink and roar as if with wine; they shall be filled with blood like basins, like the corners of the altar. The Lord their God will save them in that day, as the flock of His people.](#)

[For they shall be like the jewels of a crown, lifted like a banner over His land - for how great is its goodness and how great its beauty! Grain shall make the young men thrive, and](#)

new wine the young women.” These last verses may be describing the brave exploits of the Maccabees, and God's defense of these warriors.

The Maccabean priests ruled over the Jews for nearly 100 years until the Romans invaded in 63 BC.