

**The Minor Prophets – volume 3**  
(Explanation on Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah, Malachi)



**Pastor Tânia Cristina Giachetti**  
**Ministério Seara ágape**

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*Estudo Bíblico Evangélico*

Pastor Tânia Cristina Giachetti  
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This book is dedicated to the true prophets of God.

Thanks to the Lord for His strength and fidelity to His promises, giving me perseverance, always showing me His truth and broadening my inner vision to see His greatness and sovereignty over all His Creation.

“The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, says the Lord Almighty. And in this place I will grant peace, declares the Lord Almighty” (Hag. 2: 9 – NIV).

“But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts” (Mal. 4: 2-3).

## Introduction

This book follows volume 2 (about Jonah, Micah, Nahum and Habakkuk). It arose in the sequence of the study of the book of Isaiah as a curiosity on my part concerning the prophets of the Old Testament, with the thirst to know more deeply what they meant in each verse. I sought to know how to situate prophecy in History, what characters they were referring to, the location of the cities there, and the figures of speech used at the time to give me more insight about the writings of the prophets.

All the prophets were used by God to prophesy about the coming of Jesus, in whom the prophecies were fulfilled. In fact, the coming of Christ was a plan of God the Father that astonished mankind in what it thought about His righteousness and His ability to restore His children. Although they were used by God to reveal His designs to men, the prophets of that time had their thoughts permeated with human opinion and limited vision of something they could not understand or imagine (1 Cor. 14: 32). In other words, they could not imagine that the Father would send Jesus the way He sent, emphasizing His spiritual reign and showing mankind that it needed to be restored from something far greater than it had lost in the material sense such as houses, lands and the power to govern subjects; man needed to understand that the most precious thing he had lost was his intimacy with God and the innocence that once was present in a being similar to him in Eden. He also needed to know his true enemy.

Jesus brought a new dispensation to mankind, which was like an ‘Apocalypse’ to the people of that time (Isaiah is an example of this), like a new Creation. Apocalypse means ‘revelation.’ Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, Joel and others have undoubtedly left something about eschatological events, but it is Jesus who gives us the certainty of present and future events through His prophecy set forth in the Gospels. What happens today and will happen at His second coming is a result of what He prophesied about the end times. His prophecy is being fulfilled. Under this point of view, little of the prophets of the OT remained to be fulfilled still as an apocalyptic (eschatological) event, especially for those who already have salvation in Christ. Most prophecies have already been fulfilled. Jesus left, so to speak, what is important for us to know about His second coming; and His apostles John and Paul left their complementation on the subject, using the words of the OT prophets to corroborate their writings and the revelations given by God to them. In relation to the Jews it is another story.

In the writings of the Minor Prophets we can see practically the same message being delivered in many different ways: to seek God, to leave idolatry and to believe in His righteousness ever present, obeying Him in all things not to provoke His wrath and His judgment, which infallibly come on those who commit perversity. We can see, above all, His mercy and patience, always giving man a chance to repent and be blessed. None of the prophets minced their words but exhorted the people as watchmen of the Lord, making them aware of their sin.

May the Holy Spirit be your guide and teacher in this reading!

Tânia Cristina

Notes:

- The version used here is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV – 1989 (1995). The New International Version (NIV) will be used in brackets in some verses to make it easier for readers to understand.
- Words or phrases enclosed in brackets [ ] or parenthesis ( ), in *italics*, were placed by me, in most cases, to explain the biblical text, although some verses already contain them [not in italics].
- In some texts we'll use 'Lexicon Strong's Concordance.' Strong's Concordance is a concordance of the King James Bible (KJV), created by the English theologian Dr. James Strong (1822-1894), along with a team of theologians, and first published in 1890. It is about a cross-reference between each word in the KJV and the original text in Hebrew or Greek. To each word in its original language is given an entry number for the biblical concordance of KJV. Lexicon means a dictionary of ancient classic languages. In order to interpret Lexicon Strong's Concordance properly it's necessary to take into account the cultural context of that time, because Strong's numbers do not consider figures of speech, metaphors, idioms, common phrases, cultural references, references to historical events, or alternate meanings used by the writers of that time period to express their thoughts in their own language (source: Wikipedia.org).

Source of research:

- J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1995.
- Wikipedia.org and crystalinks.com (for some images).
- Email: [relacionamentosearaagape@gmail.com](mailto:relacionamentosearaagape@gmail.com)

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Volumes 1 and 2 of this book:

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<https://www.searaagape.com.br/theminorprophets2.pdf>



## Zephaniah

Zephaniah ('God hid') prophesied in the period of 640-621 BC, during the reign of king Josiah of Judah (640-609 BC), but before the destruction of Nineveh in 612 BC. He was contemporary of Nahum and Jeremiah. After the death of Hezekiah the Jewish religion deteriorated, being revived the idolatrous worship by his son, Manasseh. Probably, Zephaniah was born during the period of the atrocities committed by this latter king, who, in accordance with the tradition, sawed the prophet Isaiah in half (Heb. 11: 37). Zephaniah was related to Josiah, the great-grandson of Hezekiah (Zeph. 1: 1 – son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah; this one was another son of Hezekiah and brother of Manasseh). Josiah ascended the throne at the age of eight years (640 BC) and was much influenced by Hilkiah the high priest of the time, who advised the king and leading him to piety. Josiah, at eighteen years old, ordered the renovation of the temple; during the religious reformation, the Book of the Law was found and changed the life of the nation.

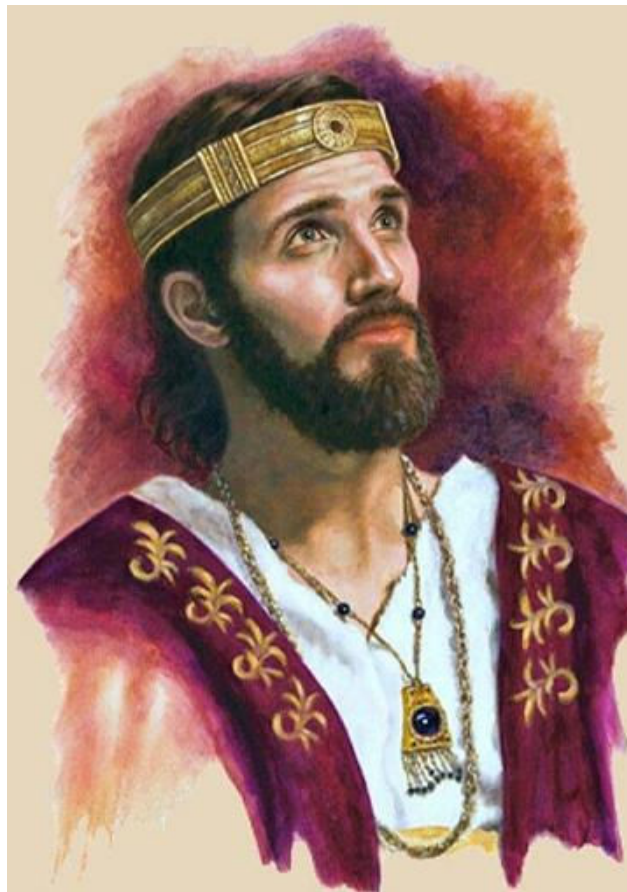


Zephaniah wrote to the people of Judah, warning them of God's judgment for their sins and ensuring that the divine trial would open the way for a new society, in which justice would prevail and all mankind would worship the Lord (Zeph. 3: 1-20). After the purification of the people, there would be only a humble remnant that would trust in the Lord, because the accusations against them would be removed by Him (Zeph. 3: 12). He talks about "the remnant of Baal" in Jerusalem (Zeph. 1: 4 cf. Hos. 2: 16-17), as well as other idolatrous customs that were abandoned (Zeph. 1: 5; 2 Kin. 23: 4-20; 24; 2 Chr. 34: 1-7) after the discovery of the Book of Law (2 Kin. 22: 8-10; 2 Kin. 23: 21; 2 Chr. 34: 14-18). Among these customs was that of to worship the stars or angelic beings ("the host of the heavens" – NRSV – or "starry host" – NIV) and the worship of Molech or Milcom, god of the Ammonites (Zeph. 1: 5). Zephaniah is concerned with the Day of

the Lord, through the judgment of all things; the judgment of foreign nations (Philistia, Moab and Ammon, Egypt and Assyria), as well as Judah and Jerusalem. With the judgment of God, Zephaniah wanted to illustrate that He had to make His people go through the flames of affliction in order to prepare them to be a blessing that would extend to all humanity.

## Chapter 1

• Zeph. 1: 1-6 (Warning against Judah and Jerusalem): “The word of the Lord that came to Zephaniah son of Cushi son of Gedaliah son of Amariah son of Hezekiah, in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah. I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth, says the Lord. I will sweep away humans and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. I will make the wicked stumble [NIV: The wicked will have only heaps of rubble]. I will cut off humanity from the face of the earth, says the Lord. I will stretch out my hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off from this place every remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priests [NIV: every remnant of Baal, the names of the pagan and the idolatrous priests]; those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens; those who bow down and swear to the Lord, but also swear by Milcom [NIV: those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the LORD and who also swear by Molech (in Hebrew, Molech, that is, Milcom)]; those who have turned back from following the Lord, who have not sought the Lord or inquired of him.”



King Josiah

First, the prophet says that the word he brings came from the Lord. Then he makes clear his royal lineage (from king of Hezekiah) and says who rules the nation at the moment: King Josiah. The word given by the prophet announces an imminent judgment

from God, and of great magnitude, when He mentions even birds and fish. And he says something more frightening: 'I will cut off humanity from the face of the earth', which shows the anger and violence with which this is going to be done, and makes us think that God's patience with the sins of His people was already running low. He speaks clearly about the punishment of idolatry, especially the worshipers and the idolatrous priests of Baal, as well as all those who went up on the terraces (roofs) at night to worship the stars ('the host of the heavens' or 'the starry host' – 2 Kin. 23: 11; Jer. 19: 13; Jer. 32: 29; Ezek. 8: 16), and those who did a divided worship, that is, they were Jews, but they made sacrifices to Molech or Malcam or Milcom, the Ammonite god, worshiped with the sacrifice of children in the same way as the Moabite god Chemosh. Even more extensive will be His punishment: not only over idolaters, but also over those who do not follow Him nor seek Him, nor consult Him in their difficulties.

For the time being, the Lord does not make it clear that He would use a foreign army to do this, although at that time the peoples who were in a great warlike activity were the Scythians (a group of nomadic tribes from northern of Siberia near the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea), who acted with considerable destruction in the invaded areas, and was already devastating the regions of Assyria, Western Asia and Egypt. But it seems that they did not enter Judah. At the end of the eighth century BC they moved to the north of Persia and to the northern region of Assyria (Urartu). Their initial advance to the southwest was faced by Sargon II (727-705 BC) and Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC). The latter one tried to detain them in 632 BC (during the reign of Josiah of Judah), but the Scythians dominated the western Persia for 28 years through various military incursions. They aided the Assyrians against the Medes, freeing Nineveh in 630 BC, but later attacked Haran. They ceased to invade Egypt only when Psamtik I (known by the Greeks as Psammetichus or Psammetichus – 664-610 BC) diverted them with payment of tribute. Around 110 BC with its capital in Neapolis, in Crimea, Russia, they controlled trade with this nation, especially in the traffic of wheat and slaves. The Scythians, in fact, were a 'headache' for many kings at this time and for still some centuries, because even Cyrus, Darius I and the Romans were at war with them.





Scythian warrior

- Zeph. 1: 7-18 (The Day of the Lord's wrath):

- Zeph. 1: 7-9: "Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand; the Lord has prepared a sacrifice, he has consecrated his guests. And on the day of the Lord's sacrifice I will punish the officials [NIV: princes] and the king's sons and all who dress themselves in foreign attire [NIV: all those clad in foreign clothes]. On that day I will punish all who leap over the threshold, who fill their master's house with violence and fraud [NIV: On that day I will punish all who avoid stepping on the threshold, who fill the temple of their gods with violence and deceit]."

The Lord seems to be speaking to those who still make their supplications heard on His altar, but they did not commit to give up the sin of idolatry and turn to Him. A divided worship was not pleasing to Him. In any case His judgment had already been decreed, and He would not turn back. The Day of the Lord was near and would be a bitter day for many people (Amos 5: 18). The sacrifice was Judah, and the guests were his enemies, who also would suffer under His wrath.

God leaves His targets in a more specified way, that is, the leaders (the king and his officials), the princes (the king's sons), and all those who enjoyed the ostentation of wealth and dressed themselves in clothing from other lands just to draw peoples' attention ('dress themselves in foreign attire' or 'all those clad in foreign clothes'). Everyone should now be silent before Him, for there was nothing more to say or to explain. Despite the religious reform tried by Josiah (2 Kin. 23: 1-25), the Lord did not give up punishing them (2 Kin. 23: 26-27), for his descendants [Jehoahaz (or Shallum – Jer. 22: 11-12), Eliakim (or Jehoiakim), Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) and Mattaniah (Zedekiah): 2 Kin. 23: 31-37 – 2 Kin. 24: 1-17; 1 Chr. 3: 15] have exercised a terrible government, pushing the people increasingly deeper into sin, which brought Nebuchadnezzar as an instrument of God's punishment on that land.

'On that day I will punish all who leap over the threshold, who fill their master's house with violence and fraud' or 'On that day I will punish all who avoid stepping on



the threshold, who fill the temple of their gods with violence and deceit' – this may mean servants who, at the command of their master, leapt the window sill or the threshold of the door of the house of some citizens to steal them, sometimes with violence, and to deliver the fruit of this robbery to their masters. Their houses, therefore, were filled with violence because of this dishonest gain.

- Zeph. 1: 10: "On that day, says the Lord, a cry will be heard from the Fish Gate, a wail from the Second Quarter [NIV: the New Quarter], a loud crash from the hills."

KJV translates as: "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD, that there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish gate, and an howling from the second (*gate*), and a great crashing from the hills." The Hebrew word for 'second' is Mishneh (Strong #4932), which corresponds to the 'Old Gate' or 'Mishneh Gate', also northwest of Jerusalem, just below the Fish Gate, leading to the lower city, which in the next verse is called Maktesh.

Following:

- Zeph. 1: 11: "The inhabitants of the Mortar wail, for all the traders have perished; all who weigh out silver are cut off [NIV: Wail, you who live in the market district [or 'the Mortar']; all your merchants will be wiped out, all who trade with silver will be ruined]."

KJV translates as: "Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off."

The literal translation of Hebrew by the Concordant Version of the Old Testament (CVOT) is: "Howl, you! Ones dwelling of the mortar-shaped hole that he is stilled all of people Canaan they are cut off all of transporters of silver [*meaning: for all the people of Canaan are silent, all that weigh silver are destroyed*]."

The meaning of the name Maktesh (Strong #4389), the lower city, according to the NIV and CVOT, is 'mortar', 'place where mortar is made' or 'mortar-shaped hole', and some contemporary scholars suggest that it was situated somewhere in the Tyropoeon valley (valley of cheese makers, on the west side of Jerusalem), within the city walls, and that was the area of the city separated to trade, where mercenary people used to stay. Thus the Mishneh Gate should be like a narrow and downhill passageway, plastered with mortar, toward the other part of the city. Because Maktesh has the meaning of 'pestle', 'trough', mortar (in the sense of: a cup-shaped receptacle made of hard material, in which ingredients are crushed or ground, used especially in cooking or pharmacy) and the CVOT translation write: 'the mortar-shaped hole', leads us to imagine if by chance the Mishneh Gate, as we have said above, was a passage that led to a lower level of the city and, because it was covered with mortar, the other part resembled a trough, a pot, a pestle, placed in the bottom, where the merchants stayed ('Ones dwelling of the mortar-shaped hole').

Returning to the reasoning of the biblical text:

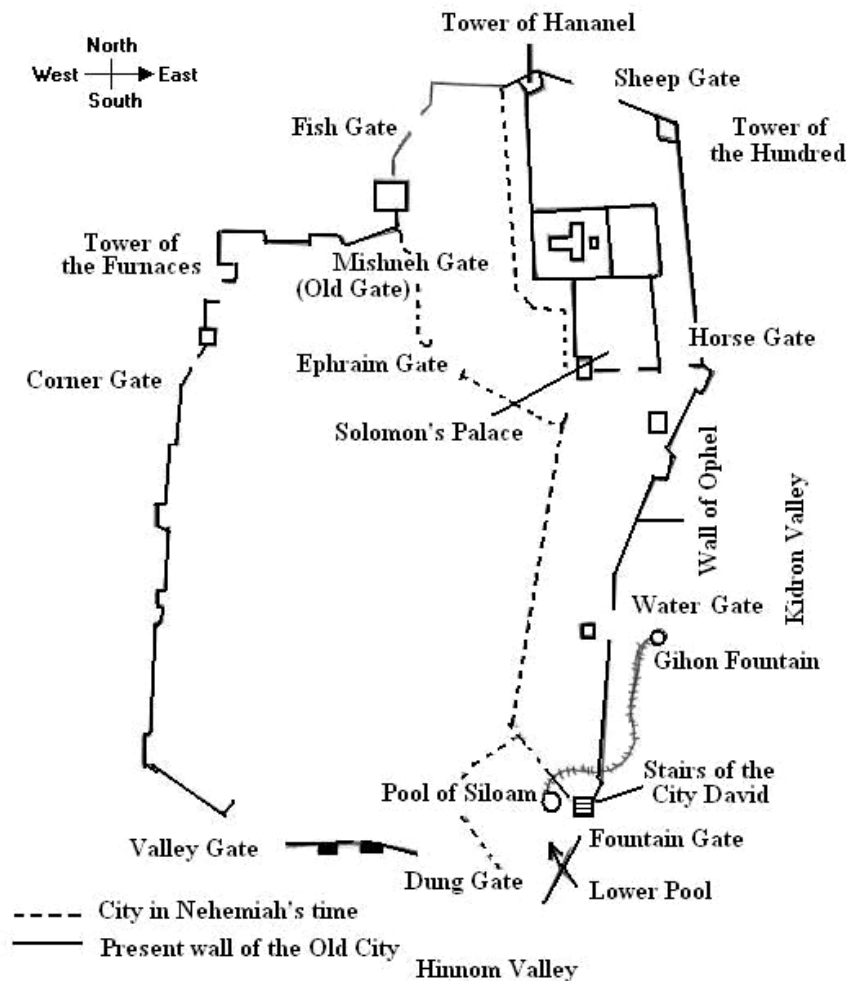
On the day of the visitation of the Lord's judgment a cry will be heard from the Fish Gate in the northwest of the city until the Lower City (in Hebrew, Maktesh).

'A cry will be heard from the Fish Gate' suggests the attack of an invading army from the north, most likely the Babylonian army. There will also be wails in the hills, or more possibly, loud crashes from the hills, corresponding to the noise of the approach of an army.

'All the people of Canaan' – in the times of the Old Testament, Phoenicia was called Canaan, and its inhabitants, Canaanites, meaning 'merchants', 'traders'. In Greek,

Phoenicia is called Phoinikē, Φοινίκη), ‘land of palm trees’. Therefore, the term ‘Canaan’ is used here in relation to the neighborhood of Maktesh.

‘All who trade with silver’ (NRSV / NIV) or ‘all they that bear silver’ (KJV) signify the merchants, for to buy and sell goods the money was weighed. There were scales for that. The Lord will deal with iniquity as accurately as the merchants weighed the money, or the goldsmiths traded gold and silver. All this would be in decline, and many of them would be destroyed.



• Zeph. 1: 12-13: “At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs [NIV: who are like wine left on its dregs], those who say in their hearts, ‘The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm’ [NIV: The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad]. Their wealth shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them.”

The moment the Lord decides to act, He will search, day and night and all the recesses, to the most hidden place (‘with lanterns’), making a total search so that no one escapes and no sin go unnoticed. That would be worse for careless people, who live on pleasures, and are oblivious to reality, like drunks.

‘I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs’ or ‘who are like wine left on its dregs’ – this means self-indulgent people who prefer to live with the

soul dirty of unwanted residues, conforming themselves to their deformed character and old concepts. During the aging of the wine it was kept in wineskins or bottles, which had a kind of vent to eliminate carbon dioxide (resulting from the unfolding of sugars in alcohol through fermentation) and prevent the entry of oxygen, lest they turned into vinegar. The longer the wines rested, the more the lees rushed to the bottom of the container and they were clarified, improving their bouquet and flavor. Then the wines were transported to other receptacles, and the process was done again until they had the ideal flavor. The bible refers to this in many ways: Job 32: 19 ('vent'); Isa. 25: 6 ('well-aged wines strained clear'); Jer. 13: 12 ('wine-jar'); Jer. 48: 11 ('like wine on its dregs' = lees); Zeph. 1: 12 ('dregs'); Lk 5: 39 ("And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, 'The old is good'" – because he was clear, free from the lees).

Such a person has already shown that he was not intimate with the Lord, so he said: 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm' [NIV: The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad]. To God this was an insult that would not go unanswered. Therefore, He says that their goods and wealth would be plundered and their houses desolate. Though they built houses, they would not inhabit them, neither would drink wine from the vineyards they planted.

- Zeph. 1: 14-16: "The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness [NIV: blackness], a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements [NIV: a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers]."

Zephaniah repeats that the day of the Lord's wrath is near, and describes in a rather emphatic way the horrors of destruction and the battle. This day will be very bitter for the wicked and they will seek a way to escape, a ray of light to light their ways and their bewildered minds and their anguished hearts, but they will not find. The fortified cities will be invaded and the towers of defense will be overthrown. There is an allusion to the smoke of a city that was burned by the invader. This may be a metaphor for the judgment in the end times, but here, in particular, it seems to refer to the invasion of an enemy army. If he speaks of fortified cities being invaded and destroyed ('a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements' or 'a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers') he does not seem to be referring to the defeat of Josiah in the Valley of Megiddo, even because in the previous verses he was talking about Jerusalem and its main doors (Fish Gate and Mishneh Gate or Old Gate) and about the lower city (Maktesh). Therefore, it is more likely that he is referring to the invasion of Jerusalem. It also does not seem to be an invasion of the Scythians, for the bible never implied that the Scythians invaded Israel or Judah, and there is not much of that in History. Since it is a day of indignation, distress and anguish, it is because the mercies of the Lord have run out to that people because the iniquity was great or because they rejected them. Although the name of the attacker is not clearly mentioned, most likely it's about a Babylonian invasion. I commented before that despite the religious reformation tried by Josiah (2 Kin. 23: 1-25), the Lord did not give up punishing them (2 Kin. 23: 26-27), for his descendants [Jehoahaz (or Shallum – Jer. 22: 11-12; 1 Chr. 3: 15; he was not the eldest son of Josiah), Eliakim (or Jehoiakim; another son of Josiah), Jehoiachin (Jeconiah, son of Jehoiakim) and Mattaniah (Zedekiah, brother of Jehoiakim): 2 Kin. 23: 31-37 – 2 Kin. 24: 1-17; 1 Chr. 3: 15] have exercised a terrible government, pushing



the people increasingly deeper into sin, which brought Nebuchadnezzar as an instrument of God's punishment on that land.

- Zeph. 1: 17-18: "I will bring such distress upon people that they shall walk like the blind; because they have sinned against the Lord, their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung [NIV: and their entrails like filth]. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath; in the fire of his passion [NIV: of his jealousy] the whole earth shall be consumed; for a full, a terrible end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth [NIV: for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth]."

The verses portray a severe suffering, much pain and distress. The men will be bewildered and look like blind, without hope and with nowhere to run, for the attack seems to be sudden. The corpses will be left in the streets, like garbage or dung.

'Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them' indicates that no one can use this resource to get rid of the Lord's sentence, even if it is to buy food, for Zephaniah writes soon after: 'in the fire of his passion the whole earth shall be consumed', which may indicate destruction of plantations and orchards by the fire provoked by the enemy army.

## Chapter 2

- Zeph. 2: 1-7 – Prophecy against the Philistines

- Zeph. 2: 1-3: “Gather together, gather, O shameless nation, before you are driven away like the drifting chaff [NIV: before the decree takes effect and that day passes like windblown chaff], before there comes upon you the fierce anger of the Lord, before there comes upon you the day of the Lord’s wrath. Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the Lord’s wrath.”

This seems to be an invitation to repentance, before the Lord makes the final decision to exercise His judgment. The prophet says that the days pass quickly and the Jewish nation does not have much time (‘before the decree takes effect and that day passes like windblown chaff’). He tells them to pay attention and to examine themselves, for it is necessary for them to see their lack of shame; then repentance may come. The lack of shame refers to the abandonment of their faith (in favor of idolatry) and other types of moral corruption. Then he summons the humble to seek the Lord, to seek righteousness and humility. Who knows, they may be protected and escape the punishment in the Day of the Lord’s wrath. The fact that Zephaniah hints that the punishment is very fast, we must understand that the counting of time for God is different from ours. So far, nothing seems to corroborate the idea that it is about the Scythians, but about the Babylonians who, in a few years, in the reign of the two sons of Josiah, Jehoahaz (or Shallum – Jer. 22: 11-12; 1 Chr. 3: 15; he was not the eldest son) and Eliakim (or Jehoiakim: 2 Kin. 23: 31-37 – 2 Kin. 24: 1-17), they began to bother Judah, until in the third invasion they succeeded in destroying the city.

- Zeph. 2: 4-7: “For Gaza shall be deserted, and Ashkelon shall become a desolation; Ashdod’s people shall be driven out at noon, and Ekron shall be uprooted. Ah [NIV: Woe], inhabitants of the seacoast, you nation of the Cherethites! [NIV: Kerethite people]. The word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines; and I will destroy you until no inhabitant is left. And you, O seacoast, shall be pastures, meadows for shepherds and folds for flocks [NIV: The land by the sea will become pastures having wells for shepherds and pens for flocks]. The seacoast shall become the possession of the remnant of the house of Judah, on which they shall pasture, and in the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down at evening. For the Lord their God will be mindful of them and restore their fortunes [Note NIV: or ‘will bring back their captives’].”

Cherethites or Kerethites are also mentioned in Ezek. 25: 16 and refers to a tribe living in the south of the land of the Philistines (1 Sam. 30: 14; 16). The island of Crete was a colony of the Philistines. The land of the Philistines was called Philistine (hence the term ‘Palestine’); Keritha, by the Arabs; Creth, by the Syrians; and by the Hebrews: the land of the Kerethites. They were a people originally from the island of Crete (Greek: Κρήτη, Kriti) and scattered among the Philistines and, according to some scholars, were part of David’s personal guard (J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1995). The Kerethites were mercenaries. The word kerethites comes from the Hebrew Cherethites or Cherethims. The singular is Krethiy (Strong #3774), originated from ‘karath’ (Strong #3772) and meaning: executioner, life-guardsmen; Kerethite or member of the royal guard, which in turn, derives from ‘tabbach’ (Strong #2876), which means: properly, a butcher; hence, a guardsman

(because he was acting as an executioner); also a cook (usually slaughtering the animal for food) – cook, guard.

The cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron are mentioned in Zech. 9: 5-7: “Ashkelon shall see it and be afraid; Gaza too, and shall writhe in anguish; Ekron also, because its hopes are withered. The king shall perish from Gaza; Ashkelon shall be uninhabited; a mongrel people [NIV: foreigners] shall settle in Ashdod, and I will make an end of the pride of Philistia. I will take away its blood from its mouth, and its abominations [NIV: the forbidden food] from between its teeth; it too shall be a remnant for our God; it shall be like a clan in Judah, and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites” – cf. Isa. 14: 20-31; Jer. 47: 1-7; Ezek. 25: 15-17; Jl. 3: 4-8; Am. 1: 6-8. Zechariah speaks here of the divine judgment on the Philistines, and this judgment would be made by Alexander the Great, and later finished by the descendants of the Maccabees.

Zephaniah quotes the same cities (Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron) and says that all will be destroyed. He also mentions the people of the Cherethites or Kerethites, and utters a ‘woe’ to them. He prophesies that the coast of the land of the Philistines shall be of pasture for flocks of sheep, and the remnant of Judah shall inherit that land, when the Lord shall bring back his captives.

Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) captured Gaza in 734 BC, and then his son Sargon II (722-705 BC) repeated the feat, for the city was for a time outside the control of Assyria; perhaps, by dispute with Egypt, which fell into the hands of Sargon in 716 BC. In 711 BC Ashdod was sacked by the same Assyrian king (Isa. 20: 1; Isa. 14: 29). In 604 BC Ashdod had refused to pay tribute to Nebuchadnezzar and was plundered by him as well. Pharaoh of Egypt would one day come to smite the Philistines and enter Gaza (Jer. 47: 1). Alexander the Great conquered Gaza in 332 BC, after a five-month siege; and was finally desolated by Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BC, who ruled Judea as the high priest in Jerusalem) – as prophesied by Am. 1: 6-7; Zeph. 2: 4 and Zech. 9: 5. In 57 BC, Aulus Gabinius (Roman Proconsul in Syria – 57-54 BC) rebuilt the city in a new location, south of the former location, closer to the sea, which remains occupied until today, but the archaeological sites discovered very little about it. Herod restored it and named it Azotus (Acts 8: 40).

Apparently, Zephaniah’s prophecy was fully fulfilled in Alexander Jannaeus, descendant of Judas Maccabeus (‘the remnant of the house of Judah’), and who completely destroyed the city in 93 BC.

#### Moab and Ammon

• Zeph. 2: 8-11: “I have heard the taunts [NIV: insults] of Moab (cf. Isa. 15: 1 – Isa. 16: 14; Isa. 25: 10-12; Jer. 48: 1-47; Ezek. 25: 8-11; Am. 2: 1-3) and the revilings [NIV: taunts] of the Ammonites (cf. Jer. 49: 1-6; Ezek. 21: 28-32; Ezek. 25: 1-7; Am. 1: 13-15), how they have taunted my people and made boasts against their territory [NIV: ‘who insulted my people and made threats against their land’]. Therefore, as I live, says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Moab shall become like Sodom and the Ammonites like Gomorrah, a land possessed by nettles [NIV: weeds] and salt pits, and a waste forever. The remnant of my people shall plunder them, and the survivors of my nation shall possess them. This shall be their lot in return for their pride, because they scoffed and boasted against the people of the Lord of hosts. The Lord will be terrible against them; he will shrivel all the gods of the earth, and to him shall bow down, each in its place, all the coasts and islands of the nations [NIV: The nations on every shore will worship him, every one in its own land].”

Moab and Ammon mocked the suffering of the people of God many times, and then because of their pride they received their judgment through the Babylonians, like the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, symbols of the Lord's violent judgment. Their territories would be like a field of weeds and as desolate as salt pits.

'He will shrivel all the gods of the earth' – The destruction of the gods of the land of Moab and Ammon would be like the destruction of the idolatry of the land of the Philistines, which Zechariah prophesied (Zech. 9: 5-7), and as the destruction of the worship of Baal and other gods in Jerusalem, prophesied by Jeremiah, after the destruction of the city by the Babylonians. During the exile, the worship of the Canaanite gods was interrupted by the Israelites.

'To him shall bow down, each in its place, all the coasts and islands of the nations' or 'The nations on every shore will worship him, every one in its own land' means that anyway, God was working to remove the idolatry of the Gentile nations, preparing a people who would come to know Him through the Messiah.

### Cush and Assyria

- Zeph. 2: 12: "You also, O Ethiopians [NIV: Cushites], shall be killed by my sword" cf. Isa. 18: 1-7; Jer. 46: 2; 9; Ezek. 30: 4; 5; 9. Nebuchadnezzar would also cause destruction in Ethiopia.

- Zeph. 2: 13-15: "And he [*God*] will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and he will make Nineveh a desolation, a dry waste like the desert. Herds shall lie down in it, every wild animal; the desert owl and the screech owl shall lodge on its capitals; the owl shall hoot at the window, the raven croak on the threshold; for its cedar work will be laid bare [NIV: locks and herds will lie down there, creatures of every kind. The desert owl and the screech owl will roost on her columns. Their calls will echo through the windows, rubble will fill the doorways, the beams of cedar will be exposed]. Is this the exultant city that lived secure, that said to itself, 'I am, and there is no one else?' What a desolation it has become, a lair for wild animals! Everyone who passes by it hisses and shakes the fist."

This prophecy was literally fulfilled, for today there are only sheep in the place. Archaeological excavations found the huge figures of winged bulls with human heads ('lamassu') standing on either side of the main gate symbolizing the power of the city.

Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, is quoted by the prophets as an arrogant city and very confident in itself, but also would be destroyed by the Babylonians (cf. Isa. 10: 5-34; Nah. 1: 1 – 3: 19).

Naum describes the city of Nineveh (Nah. 2: 1) as a fortified city, always watched by soldiers in red uniforms ('his soldiers are clothed in crimson' or 'the warriors are clad in scarlet'), in chariots of metal and armed with spears. The chariots raced swiftly, with rage through the streets and across the squares, and were as fast as lightning, especially on the day of their invasion. Like Babylon, the city of Nineveh had a great supply of water and great wealth (Nah. 2: 2-4; 7-9). It was a bloodthirsty city full of lies and theft (Nah. 3: 1) and of spiritual prostitution by the multitude of gods with whom it corrupted the other nations; 'Mistress of sorcery', who misled many peoples (Nah. 3: 4 – 'Mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft – NIV); a mercantile city (Na 3: 16), greedy and insatiable, which devoured what she saw ahead (Nah. 3: 17).

The first capital of Assyria was Assur (14<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC), a city existing since the third millennium BC. Assur (Aššur, in Akkadian; Syriac, 'Āšūr; Persian, Āšūr;

Hebrew, אַשּׁוּר Aššûr, Arabic, Āšūr, Kurdish, Asûr) is also known as Ashur and Qal'at Sherqat. It is in present-day Iraq, sixty-five kilometers (40 miles) south of the site of Nimrud and one hundred kilometers (62 miles) south of Nineveh. Ashurnasirpal II (884-859 BC) changed the capital from Assur to Kalhu (Calah / Nimrud). With the reign of Sargon II (722-705 BC) the capital passed to Dur-Sharrukin ('Fortress of Sargon'). However, he died in battle and his son and successor Sennacherib (705-682 BC) left the city, choosing to magnify Nineveh as his royal capital. However, the city of Assur remained the religious center of the empire, due to its temple of the national god Ashur. The city was sacked and destroyed during the conquest of Assyria by the Medes, Babylonians, Scythians and Persians in 612 BC.

The Hebrew word for Nineveh (nīnēweh or Nīnewē – נִינְוָה), in Greek, nineue (Νινευη), in Latin, Nineve; in Arabic: Naīnuwa, an 'exceedingly large city', is a translation of the Assyrian, ninua, in Old Babylonian, ninuwa, which in turn is transliteration of the even more ancient Sumerian name, Nina, the name of the goddess Ishtar, goddess of fertility, love and war, the protective deity of that city and whose name was written with a sign representing a fish in a womb. Nina was the ancient Assyrian name of the 'Queen of Heaven' (Jer. 7: 18; Jer. 44: 17; 18; 19; 25), therefore, place of great abomination and idolatry, witchcraft and prostitution.



Location of Nineveh (archaeological sites) – Wikipedia

Nineveh, on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, was a group of several villages along this river. Today is a large area of ruins by the new suburbs of the city of Mosul, in the state of Ninawa, Iraq. The ancient mounds Tell Kouyunjik or Kuyuncuk, Nimrud (name of the ancient Calah), Karamles (Karemlash or Karemlish) and Khorsabad (present name of the ancient Dur-Sharrukin) form the four corners of a parallelogram. They are located on the plain near the confluence of the Tigris and Khosr Rivers. Tell Kouyunjik or Kuyuncuk was the mound of the ancient citadel of Nineveh whose name means ‘mound of many sheep’, twenty meters high above the plain, and has another mound beside it (A kilometer to the south, the secondary mound of the ruins of Nineveh) which was given the name of Nabī Yūnus (‘Prophet Jonah’ in Arabic), and which was not properly explored because there was a Muslim Arab shrine dedicated to that prophet on the spot. Nimrud is the modern name of the archaeological site located around the Assyrian city of Kalhu, located south of the Tigris River in northern Mesopotamia. Archaeologists named the city Nimrud because of Nimrod (Gen. 10: 8-11). The city was called Calah in the bible. These were the four districts of old Nineveh, so Jonah must have taken three days to go through it. Dur-Sharrukin (the modern Khorsabad) means ‘Fortress of Sargon’ and was the capital of Assyria at the time of Sargon II, father of Sennacherib. Khorsabad today is a village in northern Iraq, fifteen kilometers northeast of Mosul. The great city was entirely built in the decade prior to 706 BC. After Sargon’s unexpected death in battle, the capital was displaced twenty kilometers south to Nineveh.

Nineveh was embellished in 700 BC by Sennacherib (705-681 BC), which made it a magnificent city. At that time the total area of Nineveh comprised seven square kilometers, an interior wall about twelve and a half kilometers long (circumference), and had fifteen great gates on its walls. The system of walls consisted of a wall of stone of about 6 meters high, surmounted by a mud brick wall with 10 meters high and 15 meters thick. The stone retaining wall had projecting stone towers spaced every 18 meters away from each other, and with great height. Like the city of Babylon, the walls of Nineveh were thick and allowed chariots to pass through them.

Five of the gates have been explored by archaeologists:

- Mashki Gate (‘Gate of the Watering Places’) perhaps was used to take the cattle to the Tigris River, which currently flows about 0.9 miles to the west. It was rebuilt with mud brick to the top of the vaulted passageway. The original Assyrian gate may have been plastered and ornamented.

- Nergal Gate

It received this name because of the god Nergal (‘lord of the great city’ – god of plague, war, flood and confusion), and perhaps was used for some ceremonial purpose, for it is the only known gate flanked by stone sculptures of winged bull (lamassu) in both sides of the walls. The reconstruction made in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a conjectural building of what could be before, as was excavated by Layard in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

- Adad Gate

It received this name because of the god Adad (‘the thunderer’ – the Amorite equivalent of Baal, the god of the storms). A reconstruction was begun in the 1960s by Iraqis but was not completed, leaving only a mixture of concrete and eroding mud brick, which nonetheless gives some idea of the original Assyrian structure.



Exterior entrance of Adad Gate (after its restoration) – Wikipedia

- Shamash Gate

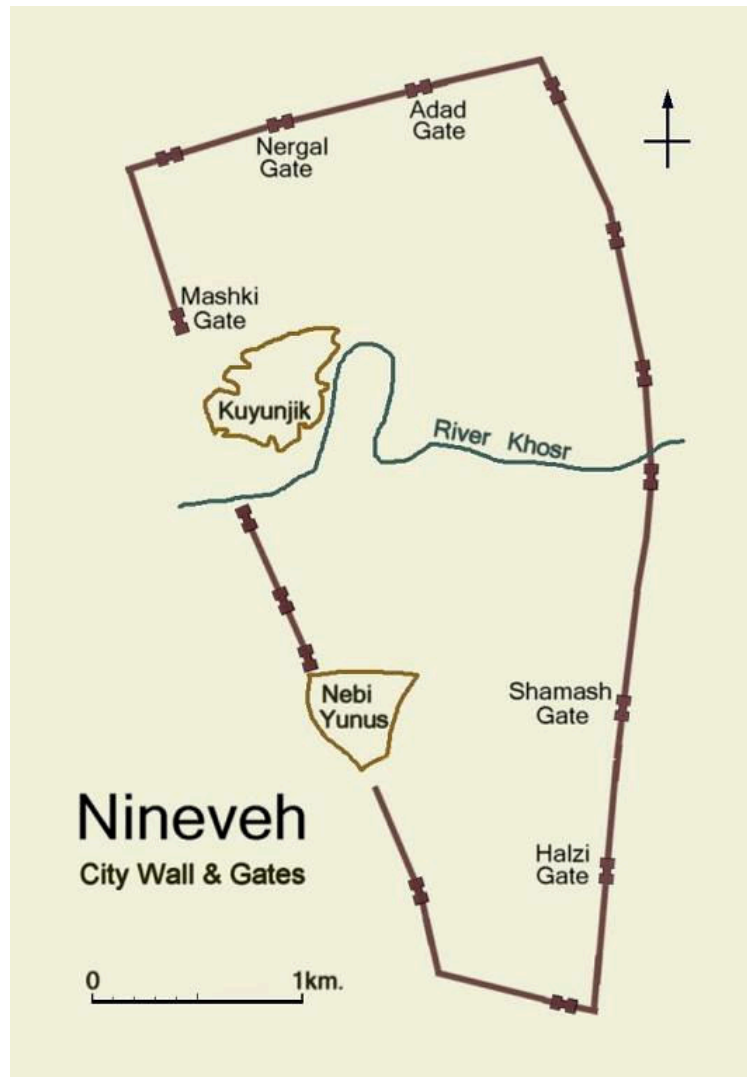
It received this name because of the sun god Shamash. It was excavated by Layard in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Part of the mud brick structure and the stone retaining wall were reconstructed in the 1960s. The mud brick reconstruction has deteriorated. The stone wall projects outward about twenty meters out of the main wall, and is seventy meters wide. Shamash Gate is the only one with such a significant projection. Its size and design suggest it was the most important gate in the times of Neo-Assyrian Empire.

- Halzi Gate – the meaning of this name is unknown. It was located near the south end of the eastern city wall. Archaeological excavations were undertaken here by the University of California (1989-1990). There is an outward projection of the city wall, though not as pronounced as at the Shamash Gate. The entry passage has been narrowed with mud brick to about two meters as at the Adad Gate. Human remains from the final battle of Nineveh were found in the passageway.

The population of the city at the time was 175,000 people (The enclosed area had more than 100,000 inhabitants). In the account of Jonah (Jon. 1: 2; Jon. 3: 2; Jon. 4: 11) about the existence of 120,000 people agrees with the city of Nimrud, which was less than half the size of Nineveh, and housed 69,574 people in 879 BC, almost one century before the preaching of Jonah (785-750 BC). The three days' walk required to cross the city of Nineveh (Jon. 3: 3) probably refers to the entire administrative district with all its neighborhoods. A day's walk (Jon. 3: 4) perhaps referred to the distance from the southern suburbs to the north of the city.

Sennacherib built a magnificent canal (aqueduct) carrying water from a dam on the Gomel River (forty-eight kilometers to the north), and controlled the inflow of water from the Khosr river (Khasr), which crossed the city, building another dam in Ajeila, a little further in the east (J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1995). Wikipedia.org writes: "An elaborate system of eighteen canals brought water from the hills to Nineveh, and several sections of a magnificently constructed aqueduct erected by Sennacherib were discovered at Jerwan, about 65 kilometers (40 mi) distant."

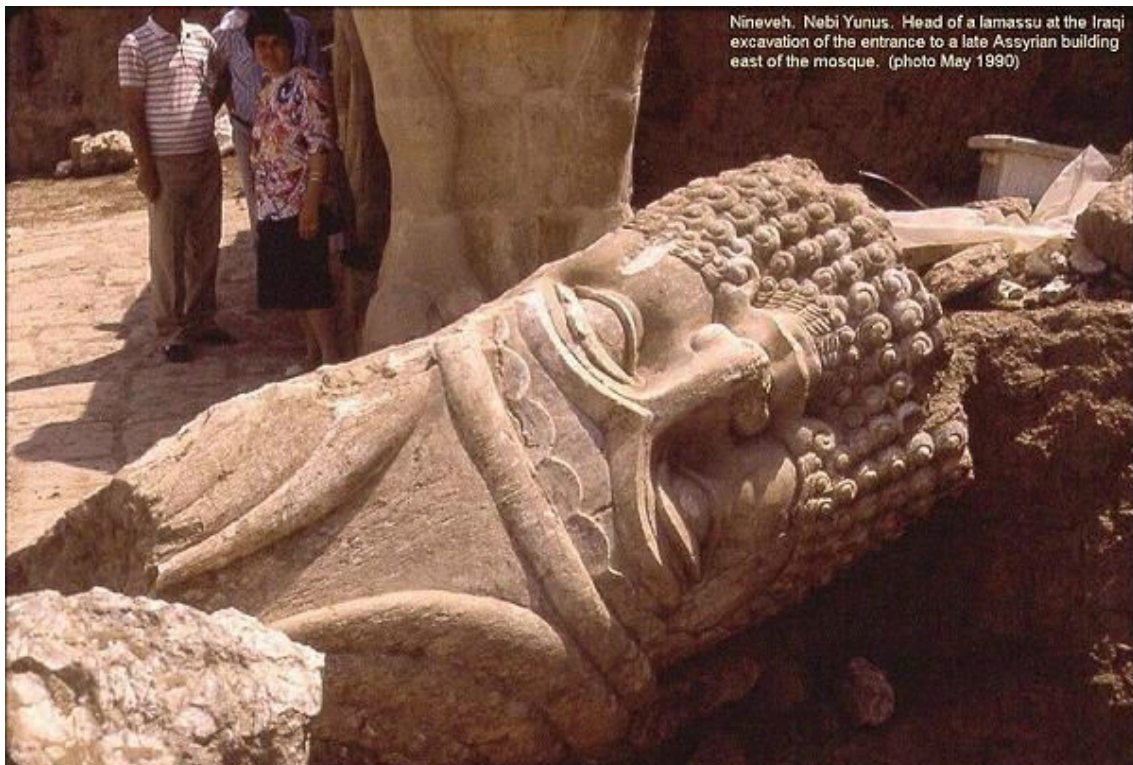




Simplified plan of ancient Nineveh showing city wall and the location of gateways (Wikipedia.org)

His palace had a total size of five hundred and three meters, and had at least eighty rooms, many of which were filled by sculptures. Countless tablets with cuneiform writing were found there. The main entrances had on each side of the gates huge figures of stones weighing about 30 tons, including winged lions or winged bulls with a man's head, which not only served as adornment on the walls and doors of the temples, but were found in pairs (of winged lions or bulls), also serving as guards posted at the entrance of the Mesopotamian temples. In some writings, these lions or bulls are portrayed to represent a female deity. A name less used is shedu (Sumerian: dalad; Acadian, šēdu) which refers to the male counterpart of a lamassu. Large lamassu figures up to six meters high can be seen in Assyrian sculpture. Artistically, lamassu were portrayed as hybrids, with bodies of winged bulls or lions and human male heads as symbol of power. They were initially household protecting spirits of the common people of Assyria and Babylon, later becoming protectors of kings; so they were placed as sentinels at the entrance of the palaces.





The head of a 'lamassu' found by Iraqi archaeologists on the tell Nabī Yūnus ('Prophet Jonah) in the ruins of Nineveh – Wikipedia

These lions or bulls, carved in the quarries, were transported to the royal palaces of Nineveh and raised to a height of twenty meters by a ramp. The walls of the new palace

of Sennacherib were decorated with reliefs describing his victories, including the siege of Lachish (2 Kin. 18: 13-14; 17; Mic. 1: 13; Isa. 10: 28-32 – describes the march of Sennacherib to Jerusalem). Lachish was situated in the most fertile agricultural area of Judah (Shephelah); therefore, it was vitally important to the kingdom's economy. It was completely destroyed. The siege against Hezekiah in Jerusalem is recorded in a prism of clay (Prism of Taylor), found in 1830. The tribute received from Hezekiah was sent to Nineveh: 300 talents of silver and 30 of gold, plus the silver found in the House of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house, and the gold that was removed from the doors and the doorposts of the temple (2 Kin. 18: 14-16).

The Taylor prism that is in the British Museum was discovered by Colonel Robert Taylor (1790–1852), an archaeologist, in 1830 at Nineveh, but there two more prisms with cuneiform inscriptions in Akkadian from the Annals of Sennacherib: one in the Oriental Institute of Chicago and another in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. They are clay prisms inscribed with the same text, hexagonal in shape, made of red baked clay, measuring 38.0 cm high and 14.0 cm wide. They were created during the reign of Sennacherib in 689 BC (that of Chicago) or 691 BC (those of London and Jerusalem). They are Sennacherib's accounts of his campaign against the Kingdom of Israel and Kingdom of Judah, and some passages are in agreement with the biblical text of 2 Kings 18–19: the attack on Samaria and forty-six of fortified cities, including Lachish, the deportation the inhabitants and the tribute paid by Hezekiah. He also reports the siege of Jerusalem, describing Hezekiah 'like a caged bird' but he but does not speak of any capture of Jerusalem. The prism speaks something that is not in the bible: that Hezekiah still gave to Sennacherib as a present: antimony, jewels, ivory-inlaid furniture, his own daughters, harem, and musicians and became a tributary of him. The Assyrian King mentions 200,150 captive people. The towns he captured he gave to the kings of Ashdod, Ekron, and Gaza.







Shfela or Shephelah, literally, 'lowlands' (Wikipedia)



Shephelah (another view)

Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC), the grandson of Sennacherib, made Nineveh his principal residence. In the excavations made by Layard and Rassam (1845-1854) the libraries of Ashurbanipal and of the temple of Nabu were found, with 25,000 tablets inscribed, one of them with the Babylonian account of the Flood in 1872.

In the reign of Ashurbanipal, Assyria acquired the greatest territorial extension, although in 663 BC it began to show signs of weakness, and was attacked by the Medes at this time. Nineveh was attacked again in 625 BC by the Medes, allied with the Chaldeans.



Fragment of a clay tablet from the library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh with an Assyrian report of the Flood ([crystalinks.com](http://crystalinks.com))



Lachish – main gate of the archaeological site in Israel (Wikipedia)

The descendant of Ashurbanipal was Sinsharishkun (Sin-shar-ishkun; Sîn-šarru-iškun – 628-612 BC), one of his sons, and at this time the city fell. This happened due to the alliance among the king of Media, Cyaxares (Uvaxštra – in old Persian;

transliterated as 'Uvarkhshattra' or 'Hovakhshatra', 625-584 BC, father of Astyages the grandfather of Cyrus II) and Nabopolassar (626-605 BC, father of Nebuchadnezzar II) king of Babylon, and the Scythians. Thus the city fell as a result of breaches of four and a half kilometers made in the walls by the waters of the flooded river (Nah. 2: 6-8), probably provoked by the occasion of the siege. There was a serious war, fires in almost every city in the Assyrian empire, and the inhabitants of Nineveh who could not escape to the last Assyrian fortresses in the west were massacred or deported. Many skeletons not buried were found by archaeologists at that site during excavations in the nineteenth century. Nineveh was completely destroyed. The Assyrian Empire was over; and the Medes and the Babylonians divided their provinces between themselves. Nahum gives a description of the time of war and its destruction (Nah. 2: 10; 13; Nah. 3: 2-3; 7; 12-13; 18-19). Sinsharishkun died in the fire, during the invasion by the Medes. But his family escaped. The last king of Assyria (Ashur-uballit II, 612-608 or 605 BC, who no one knows if he is the son or brother of Sinsharishkun) was practically a puppet king in the hands of the Babylonians. In 401 BC, Nineveh was already a ruin.

That's why Zephaniah wrote (Zeph. 2: 13-15): "Herds shall lie down in it, every wild animal... What a desolation it has become, a lair for wild animals!" This prophecy was literally fulfilled, for today there are only sheep in that place.



## Chapter 3

- Zeph. 3: 1-7 – prophecy against Jerusalem

- Zeph. 3: 1-4: “Ah, soiled, defiled, oppressing city! [NIV: Woe to the city of oppressors, rebellious and defiled!]. It has listened to no voice; it has accepted no correction. It has not trusted in the Lord; it has not drawn near to its God. The officials within it are roaring lions; its judges [NIV: rulers] are evening wolves that leave nothing until the morning. Its prophets are reckless, faithless persons; its priests have profaned what is sacred, they have done violence to the law [NIV: Her prophets are arrogant; they are treacherous men. Her priests profane the sanctuary and do violence to the law].”

The prophet is referring to Jerusalem, who had rebelled against the Lord, failing to listen to His prophets, and decided to follow the path of idolatry. Because of the worship of Baal and Molech (Zeph. 1: 4-5) the city was stained with blood of the sacrifices and therefore stained with sin before God. Besides rebellious and defiled, the prophet says that it is an oppressing city because its civil leaders extorted the people and the religious leaders profaned what was sacred, burning incense on the roofs and offering their own children as sacrifice to obtain the favor of the false gods (cf. Jer. 19: 4-5; Jer. 23: 13-14; Jer. 32: 29; 35). The civil and religious leaders followed idolatry and did not act as God’s spokesmen. He could not find anyone with a righteous heart to practice justice (cf. Jer. 5: 1).

‘It has listened to no voice; it has accepted no correction. It has not trusted in the Lord; it has not drawn near to its God’ – the city had already been warned by the prophets, but they had not been heard and therefore the people were increasingly far from God (cf. Jer. 22: 21).

‘The officials within it are roaring lions; its judges [NIV: rulers] are evening wolves that leave nothing until the morning’ – violence, greed, and power struggle seemed to have control over the officials, the judges and all other leaders. They had authority and power, but they did not use any of it with wisdom or justice. What was in their mouths was the lie. They roared fiercely like the lion with arrogance, living at the expense of bribes. The judges looked like wolves, which took advantage of the darkness of the night to act, without anyone seeing their corrupt and unjust acts, and shattered the hope of the innocent who trusted in their judgment. They were ravenous wolves, who acted with violence and oppressed the weakest (Ezek. 22: 27; Mic. 3: 9-11).

‘Its prophets are reckless, faithless persons; its priests have profaned what is sacred, they have done violence to the law [NIV: Her prophets are arrogant; they are treacherous men. Her priests profane the sanctuary and do violence to the law]’ – The prophets no longer behaved with integrity like the holy men. As it is written in Micah (Mic. 3: 11), they ‘gave oracles for money’, like the false prophets, so the Lord didn’t use them for His purposes anymore. They deceived people and said what they wanted to hear, not what they needed to hear (cf. Jer. 23: 11; 14; 16-17; 25; 27; 31-32). The priests offered defective animals on the altar, for they neglected their office and mocked the holy things; they had already lost interest in God’s law, as would happen even after the return from exile in the time of Malachi (Mal. 1: 6-14).

- Zeph. 3: 5-7: “The Lord within it is righteous; he does no wrong. Every morning he renders his judgment, each dawn without fail; but the unjust knows no shame. I have cut off nations; their battlements are in ruins [NIV: their strongholds are demolished]; I have laid waste their streets so that no one walks in them; their cities have been made

desolate, without people, without inhabitants. I said, 'Surely the city will fear me, it will accept correction; it will not lose sight of all that I have brought upon it'. But they were the more eager to make all their deeds corrupt [NIV: I said to the city, 'Surely you will fear me and accept correction!'] Then her dwelling would not be cut off, nor all my punishments come upon her. But they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did]."

The Lord goes on saying that He is righteous and day after day He has made his judgment to be noticed by all. But the sinner is not ashamed for his actions. God exterminated the wicked nations, like Syria, and even the northern tribe, Israel, so that Judah could understand His motives and accept His correction. This would avoid God's punishment of them and their city, but they did not listen. He expected regret, but this did not happen. They promptly turned to the practice of evil, and God called the Babylonians to correct His people.

- Zeph. 3: 8-20 (Restoration of Israel's remnant):

- Zeph. 3: 8-9: "Therefore wait for me, says the Lord, for the day when I arise as a witness. For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all the heat of my anger; for in the fire of my passion all the earth shall be consumed. At that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord [NIV: Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder]."

But the Lord has prepared the day of His vengeance against these nations too, for He watches over His people, for Judah and for Jerusalem. His mercy will be reserved for the repentant and for those who fear His name, but His mighty hand will continue over the arrogant and over those who forsake Him, for their own evil. Judgment by fire is associated with the punishment of nations through war and great trials. When He has performed His judgments and His holiness has acted upon the peoples, they will also call on His name and serve Him. Jews and Gentiles will abandon the blasphemy of idolatry and will give praise to the Lord ('I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech' or 'I will purify the lips of the peoples'). Probably, this is a prophecy for the times of the gospel.

- Zeph. 3: 10-11: "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, my scattered ones [NIV: my worshippers, my scattered people], shall bring my offering. On that day you shall not be put to shame because of all the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain."

'From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia' refers to the North of Abyssinia, where Jews settled with the Semitic peoples from southern Arabia, to flee from the Assyrians and Babylonians, building a Jewish colony in that nation. This prophecy is very similar to that of Isaiah (Isa. 18: 1; 7) where the Lord promises a restoration to those people, not only the Jewish refugees there ('my suppliants, my scattered ones' or 'my worshippers, my scattered people' – Zeph. 3: 10), as well as the Ethiopians converted to Him (Ps. 68: 31).

'On that day' – It means, on the day when the punishment comes to an end.

'You shall not be put to shame because of all the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain' – a remnant would be cleansed from idolatry; the wicked leaders and the haughty Jews ('your proudly exultant ones') would

also be separated from the righteous, just as chaff is separated from the wheat, so that they may worship Him in spirit and truth on His holy mountain.

- Zeph. 3: 12-13: “For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord [NIV: But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the LORD]—the remnant of Israel; they shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths. Then they will pasture and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid.”

After the captivity, the lowly in spirit would draw near to the Lord. The rich preferred to stay in the comfort of exile, for they had already rebuilt their lives in a foreign land. And the remnant will no longer commit sin of idolatry, nor will they lie, nor will they have a deceitful tongue, for they will be fed and will feel safe, without fear of oppression again (cf. Mic. 4: 7). This not only concerns the return of the Babylonian captivity, but extends to the time of the gospel, where the humble and meek of heart came to Jesus to hear Him and to touch Him because He healed them:

- “He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. Then he looked up at his disciples and said: ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God’” (Lk. 6: 17-20).

- “Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon” (Mk. 3: 7-8).

- “And the large crowd was listening to him with delight” (Mk. 12: 37b).

- Zeph. 3: 14-15: “Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more.”

The Lord promises Jerusalem restoration and forgiveness, where the accusations will no longer exist and the enemy will no longer be able to touch them. After the purification, the Lord will be in their midst, bringing safety. Perhaps it is referring to their return from the Babylonian captivity when the remnant would return to worship in the rebuilt temple, but it is more likely to be about the future gladness in the times of the gospel when Israel accepted their Messiah; Jesus would be in the midst of His people. We can read in the books of the post-exile prophets that there was not a full rejoicing of this people, nor a sense of security and strength, even with the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah, for example. The Jews who returned were very insecure because of the opposition of the nations around them, and they feared to rebuild the temple. After rebuilding, the joyful worship in the House of the Lord was short lived, and they soon fell into apathy and cooled down to the holy things (see Malachi’s prophecies). Thus the coming of Jesus was a new incentive for them, for a weary and weak people who no longer had any hope of freeing themselves from the oppression of nations or of resuming their relationship with God.

We can read in the song of Zechariah (Lk 1: 67-79), how much those people waited for light and for the visitation of God: “His father Zechariah [*referring to John the Baptist*] was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: ‘Praise be to the Lord, the God



of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace”.

Luke describes the birth of Jesus and the news given by the angel to the shepherds:

“In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’... The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them” (Lk. 2: 8-14; 20).

The song of Simeon, when Jesus was presented in the temple by Mary and Joseph, expresses the satisfaction of this desire: “Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, ‘Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel’” (Lk. 2: 25-32).

The prophetess Anna in the temple also rejoiced at the news of the birth of the Lord:

“There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Lk. 2: 36-38).

And it was Jesus Himself who said: “‘the kingdom of God is among you’ (NRSV) or ‘the kingdom of God is within you’ – NVI” (Lk. 17: 21). In some English versions it’s also written ‘the kingdom of God is in your midst.’ This means that Jesus identified Himself with the awaited Messiah, the One who would bring the kingdom of God to His people. The kingdom of God was Jesus, and He was there with them.

- Zeph. 3: 16-17: “On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he

will exult over you with loud singing [NIV: The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you; he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing...].”

The prophecy repeats itself.

‘On that day’ means ‘the day that Jesus is with them’, bringing salvation, the deliverance from the yoke of sin and from the captivities of the soul; the understanding of the freedom of Christ, even under a foreign ruler like Rome. Jesus’ love renewed them and brought them peace, and He rejoiced in those who accepted Him, for they were His reward on earth.

‘The Lord, your God’ – Is an expression that emphasizes His exclusiveness in the midst of Israel, excluding all other gods. When Zephaniah says ‘mighty to save’ or ‘a warrior who gives victory’ it is because he reminds them of His ability to perform miracles on their behalf. As He did in the past, He was doing in the present, though they did not realize; and He would do even more in the future, with the coming of the Deliverer, the Savior they waited for. The Mighty God was the God of Israel. That’s why Isaiah said: ‘Mighty God’ (Isa. 9: 6), like Jacob, by erecting the altar in Shechem (Gen. 33: 20): “There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel” (or ‘God, the God of Israel’ or ‘mighty is the God of Israel’ – El Elohe Israel, 'èl 'elohèy yisrà'èl).

- Zeph. 3: 18: “... as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it [NIV: ‘The sorrows for the appointed feasts I will remove from you; they are a burden and a reproach to you’, or ‘I will gather you who mourn for the appointed feasts; your reproach is a burden to you’].”

The Lord speaks here of a repentant remnant, and will gather them again in Jerusalem. Those who were taken into captivity in other nations were ashamed because of the mockery of the peoples of those lands, as it is written in Psalm 137: 3, but God promises to remove this shame from their lives, allowing them to return to celebrate their feasts in Jerusalem. They will no longer mourn because think they are far away and excluded, for they will return to their land.

- Zeph. 3: 19-20: “I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth [NIV: At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame and gather those who have been scattered. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they were put to shame]. At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord [NIV: At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes [or ‘I bring back your captives’] before your very eyes, says the LORD].”

‘At that time’ – At the time of the return from exile, when the Lord judged the nations that oppressed them. No Jew who wanted to return was prevented from doing so, for Cyrus’ order had been given, and the Lord helped them to return to their homeland, not only those who were lame physically, but those who were spiritually lame by their indecision and by their little faith. The Lord would save them from that too. They would be honored by all who imprisoned them and by all other nations when they saw the power of the God of Israel. They would find the favor of the Lord again.

‘When I restore your fortunes before your eyes’ or ‘I bring back your captives’ – This is a reference to the return of the captivity and the return of the Jews to Israel in the times of the gospel, by the proclamation of God’s favor there, through Jesus. Thus, all

nations of the earth would be blessed by the Jews through their Messianic King, Jesus Christ (Isa. 11: 12; Ezek. 28: 25; Ezek. 34: 13; Am. 9: 14).

### **Conclusion:**

By speaking of Zephaniah we are speaking of the zeal of the Lord for His people despite their sin, also punishing those who make fun of their suffering and of His zeal for His own holiness, for when His chosen commit atrocities and iniquities, His holy name is ashamed and blasphemed. What He asks of us is the humility and the true worship. This way, the prophet must be an instrument of zeal of the Lord where there is sin, irreverence, abomination, lack of fear and lack of knowledge of the true God. The prophet must not let the world influence him or the things of the flesh and evil seduce him and divert him from the truth, for all this leaves a stain in our spirit and hurts the Holy Spirit who is in us. We should know that the love and mercy of the Lord will always be available to all those who sincerely repent of their error, and that His restoration is complete, removing of us all charges of the enemy. It is He who justifies us before those who humiliated us and lifts us before those who wished to see us fall. When we are at the center of His will, His protection and His righteousness are upon us. We must intercede like Habakkuk for those who are in error, but not to carry the burden for their sins, their rebellion and their idolatry. When the sinner rejects the correction through the mouth of the intercessor and the prophet, it's time to stop praying and let God's sovereign purpose take action to discipline, to convince of error, of sin, of righteousness and judgment, and thus vindicate His own holiness.

## Haggai

Haggai prophesied in 520 BC (Hag. 1: 1 – Hag. 2: 10 in 112 days). His name means ‘joy, feast.’ Although the Jews had started the rebuilding of the temple sixteen years before this prophecy (around 536 BC), the opposition of the neighboring peoples managed to intimidate them and cause them to abandon the work of reconstruction (Ezr. 4: 1-5; 8-10; Ezr. 5: 6; Ezr. 6: 6-7; 13) and that was why Haggai was crying out. Haggai and Zechariah are the first prophets described after the return of the first exiles in 538 BC (Ezr. 5: 2). Haggai encourages the people to rebuild, in the second year of Darius I, that is, in 520 BC (Hag. 1: 1; Ezr. 4: 24; Ezr. 5: 1-2). The rebuilding of the temple finished in 516 BC (Ezr. 6: 15 cf. Hag. 2: 18 – its beginning). According to History, the second return of the exiles to Jerusalem (under the command of Ezra) was in 458 BC and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in 445 BC (3<sup>rd</sup> return: Nehemiah). There are four prophecies in Haggai (Hag. 1: 1-11; Hag. 2: 1-9; Hag. 2: 10-19; Hag. 2: 20-23).



## Chapter 1

- Hag. 1: 1-11 (A call to rebuild the House of the Lord): “In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest: Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord’s house. Then the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai, saying: Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? Now therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider how you have fared [NIV: Give careful thought to your ways]. You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes. Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider how you have fared [NIV: Give careful thought to your ways]. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored, says the Lord. You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the Lord of hosts. Because my house lies in ruins, while all of you hurry off to your own houses [NIV: Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house]. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce [NIV: and the earth its crops]. And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the soil produces, on human beings and animals, and on all their labors [NIV: on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands].”

- On the first day of the sixth month (Month of Elul – August-September). This prophecy is addressed to Zerubbabel and to Joshua, leaders of the people, speaking of the neglect of the past sixteen years, when the people ceased to rebuild the temple (Ezra 3 and 4), for they preferred to build houses for themselves, experiencing natural disasters that destroyed crops and kept the people in poverty. Thus, God reminded them to put Him first in their lives.

This text makes it clear what happens when we cease to supply the House of God: our prayers are not answered (‘the heavens above you have withheld the dew’) and God does not pour His anointing (‘oil’). God is not vindictive, but He is a just God and faithful to His own word. Without caring for His temple there is no blessing or prosperity. This concerns not only the financial offerings to meet the material needs of the temple such as taxes, expenses, salaries of servants, etc., but also concerns the ‘spiritual and physical cleansing’, that is, reverence and a respectful and dignified behavior within the House of God, keeping the temple physically clean and praying that it may be spiritually in holiness too, through the people who minister there, so that they may be blessed by God and always be in His presence. In this way, those who are under that mantle will be blessed as well. Jesus came to fulfill the law and the prophecies, but the word of God does not change. His House must be well cared for, just as His servants, who minister there, should receive their supply through tithes and offerings.

- Hag. 1: 12-15 (The people obey the Lord): “Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of the prophet Haggai, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people feared the Lord. Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord’s message, saying, I am with you, says the Lord. And

the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month [NIV: In the sixth month in the second year of King Darius].”

In twenty-four days the people reacted to the prophecy and went back to work.





## Chapter 2

• Hag. 2: 1-9 (The promised glory of the new House): “In the second year of King Darius, in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai, saying: Speak now to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, and say, Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? [NIV: Does it not seem to you like nothing] Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear. For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts. The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts [NIV: The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, says the Lord Almighty. And in this place I will grant peace, declares the Lord Almighty].”

On the twenty-first day of the seventh month (Month of Ethanim or Tishri – September-October) the prophet Haggai gave words of encouragement to those who felt that the new temple was poor compared to the former. The glory of the second house (of this second temple) would be greater than that of the first. ‘The treasure of all nations’ described in verse 7 refers to the contributions of the Gentiles, who would help to adorn the temple. This began with the Persians in the person of Darius I and Artaxerxes I after the decree of Cyrus was confirmed, for the enemies of the Jews had tried to prevent the reconstruction since the time of Cambyses II (Ezr. 4: 1-24) where in v. 6, the writer uses his Chaldean title – Ahasuerus (Strong #325) – and in v. 7, his Persian title Artaxerxes (Strong #783), but not the same Artaxerxes I from the time of Nehemiah, son of Xerxes, who authorized the return of Ezra (Ezr. 7: 1) and the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 2: 1). Darius I son of Hystaspes decreed that the Jews should be given the materials and money needed for the work (Ezr. 6: 1-15), money that would be taken from the royal treasures (Ezr. 6: 4). God’s total control over kingdoms and nations, as well as His political decisions, is figuratively described when the prophet writes (v. 6): ‘Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land’ (cf. Jer. 51: 29 – ‘The land trembles and writhes’). As it is written in v. 7: ‘and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come’, it may be understood that it was not just the Persian Empire that would be moved by the Lord. Later, Herod, for example, reformed the temple, even at the expense of taxes on Jews and Gentiles, subjects of Rome, embellishing it with beautiful stones, gold, and many other materials that called everyone’s attention because of its greatness (Lk. 21: 5). The Gentiles began to be drawn to Judaism and were allowed to occupy their outer courts, when they came to worship and to bring their offerings. The prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus (Eph. 2: 17-22). This statement from Haggai increased the hope of those who were rebuilding, and these improvements would be done by God’s will, so He said: ‘The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts’, symbolizing that, just

as He had the power to move nations to make decisions in favor of His people, He also dominated their riches (verse 8).

- Hag. 2: 10-19 (Blessings for a defiled people): “On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai, saying: Thus says the Lord of hosts: Ask the priests for a ruling [NIV: Ask the priests what the law says]: If one carries consecrated meat in the fold of one’s garment, and with the fold touches bread, or stew, or wine, or oil, or any kind of food, does it become holy? The priests answered, ‘No.’ Then Haggai said, ‘If one who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?’ The priests answered, ‘Yes, it becomes unclean’. Haggai then said, So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, says the Lord; and so with every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean. But now, consider what will come to pass from this day on [NIV: or ‘to the days past’]. Before a stone was placed upon a stone in the Lord’s temple [NIV: consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the Lord’s temple], how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty. I struck you and all the products of your toil [NIV: the work of your hands] with blight and mildew and hail; yet you did not return to me, says the Lord. Consider from this day on, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the Lord’s temple was laid, consider: Is there any seed left in the barn? Do the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree still yield nothing? From this day on I will bless you.”

- In 536 BC (in the second month of the second year of their arrival to Jerusalem in the reign of Cyrus – month of Ziv or Iyar, corresponding to April-May) the inauguration ceremony was held (Ezr. 3: 8; 10-11), but the work was interrupted. On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month in the second year of Darius (520 BC), which corresponds to the month of Kislev (November-December), Haggai made this prophecy.

The ruins of the temple were unclean and polluted the nation and the things they touched. Therefore, placing the new foundation would make all the difference, and from that moment on the work of the people would be blessed.

The word of God says (Lev. 6: 27; Num. 19: 11; 13; 22; Ezek. 44: 19) that the priestly garments were consecrated, and that the priest should change them after he had ministered in the sanctuary and should wear other garments to draw near to the people; and what was holy also sanctified all that it touched (Ex. 29: 37; Lev. 6: 27; Ezek. 44: 19). It also says that whatever was unclean by touching a corpse could not touch other things, especially in holy things lest they became impure (Num. 19: 11; 13: 22). The meat that was carried on the edge of the garment was consecrated, but if it touched other food, it would not be consecrated, sanctified, for it was not in direct contact with the priestly garments. So the priest and the temple were consecrated, therefore, they were holy to the Lord. God’s presence with them and with His people blessed them. This was planned by God to give them the idea of separation between the holy and the profane. For the Jews, holiness was in the temple, so it was important to rebuild it.

The second point was a matter of ceremonial impurity, that is, if holiness required special conditions, the transmission of impurity occurred with extreme ease from one to another. Many things made a person impure, especially touching a corpse (Num. 19: 11). As it was written above, the ruins of the temple, being unclean (like a corpse), they contaminated the nation. The nation had become impure by sin, by infidelity and by



disregard for God; consequently, the fruit of their insufficient crops and their poverty were also considered as unclean offerings by the Lord.

We can extrapolate our reasoning to the present days by saying that the impure things of the world should not be offered to God (Hag. 2: 14: ‘So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, says the Lord; and so with every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean’). Not even the priest can make them holy. God can sanctify the sinner through the blood of Jesus, but He does not sanctify the worldly filth (sin). In the same way, the priest cannot purify the people, nor can the consecrated food do it, but he can become unclean by the people. Impurity is more easily transmitted than sanctification.

- Then the Lord makes a connection between the conditions of impurity and disobedience to His word, which gave rise to drought and scarce crops, and the time this began, that is, before they begin the construction: “But now, consider what will come to pass from this day on [NIV: or ‘to the days past’]. Before a stone was placed upon a stone in the Lord’s temple [NIV: consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the Lord’s temple], how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty. I struck you and all the products of your toil [NIV: the work of your hands] with blight and mildew and hail; yet you did not return to me, says the Lord” (v. 15-17).

Even being disciplined by Him with blight and mildew and hail they remained stubborn, so the days were being difficult. And they did not turn to God.

- “Consider from this day on, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the Lord’s temple was laid, consider: Is there any seed left in the barn? Do the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree still yield nothing? From this day on I will bless you” (Hag. 2: 18) – God asks them again to look at their past, and assures them that from now on He will bless them. All this was an incentive to rebuild the temple (cf. Ezr. 6: 15 – Its conclusion).

- Hag. 2: 20-23 (The promise of God to Zerubbabel): “The word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month: Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations [NIV: and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms], and overthrow the chariots and their riders; and the horses and their riders shall fall, every one by the sword of a comrade [NIV: by the sword of his brother]. On that day, says the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, son of Shealtiel, says the Lord, and make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you, says the Lord of hosts.”

- Twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (Kislev – November-December). This was a special promise to Zerubbabel the governor of Judah that he would be kept safely, despite the disturbances that occurred in the Persian Empire.

- “I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations [NIV: and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms], and overthrow the chariots and their riders; and the horses and their riders shall fall, every one by the sword of a comrade [NIV: by the sword of his brother]” (v. 21b-22) – Here the Lord returns to speak of His power to move kingdoms and empires, including to cease wars (I will overthrow the chariots and their riders; and the horses and their riders shall fall, every one by the sword of his brother), what reminded the Jews of their past victories, when God intervened, bringing

supernatural deliverances to His people (Judg. 7: 7; 13-15; 21-22; 2 Chr. 20: 22-24). This is a figure of speech that means to change and renew all things in Christ.

- God calls Zerubbabel ‘my servant’ and says that He had chosen him. Isaiah used the word ‘servant’ many times, both for Israel and for Jesus (Isa. 42: 1; Isa. 49: 3; 6; 7; Isa. 52: 13; Isa. 53: 11) as a symbol of the instrument anointed and chosen by God to accomplish His purpose. Zerubbabel is the figure of Jesus. Although Zerubbabel has faced oppositions in the moment of his arrival in Judah, for the governor appointed by Cyrus was Sheshbazzar (Ezr. 1: 8; Ezr. 5: 14; 16), but he, Zerubbabel, was the active leader both in 536 BC and in 520 BC (Ezr. 3: 2; 8; Ezr. 5: 2), after Sheshbazzar died Darius I appointed him to the position of governor of Judah, for this land was part of a Persian satrapy in his reign (Ezr. 5: 14; 16; Hag. 1: 1; 14; Hag. 2: 2). Thus, this action of God over kingdoms and empires, even on wars, may indicate a future time, where prophecy is fulfilled in the person of Jesus (‘on that day’). Zerubbabel was a descendant of David and is also part of Jesus’ lineage (Matt. 1: 13; Lk. 3: 27). He was responsible for the return of the Jews from captivity and for the rebuilding of the nation. At His first coming, Jesus would rebuild the nation spiritually, showing Himself as the shepherd, the redeemer, the high priest, and the King of it, leading it to a new level of relationship with God and a place of honor among the nations.

‘Signet ring’ was the royal ring used to seal the decrees issued by the king, that is, the ring that authenticated them, as happened to Ahasuerus king of Persia described in the book of Esther (Est. 3: 10-11; 12; Est. 8: 2; 8; 10). Jeremiah (Jer. 22: 24) referred to an ancestor of Zerubbabel with the name ‘signet ring’ being taken from the Lord’s hands, referring to his rejection as king and his defeat at the hands of the king of Babylon. God had already sealed his destiny. This ancestor was Jehoiachin (Jeconiah), Zedekiah’s nephew. Zedekiah was the last king of Israel on the throne. After the return of the captivity only Jesus restored the honor to the house of David, so Zerubbabel was a figure of Jesus, who would come from his lineage. This prophecy encouraged the Jews to rebuild the temple, for God gave them the assurance that the nation would be rebuilt as well, and in the future the lineage of David would have honor again.

## Conclusion:

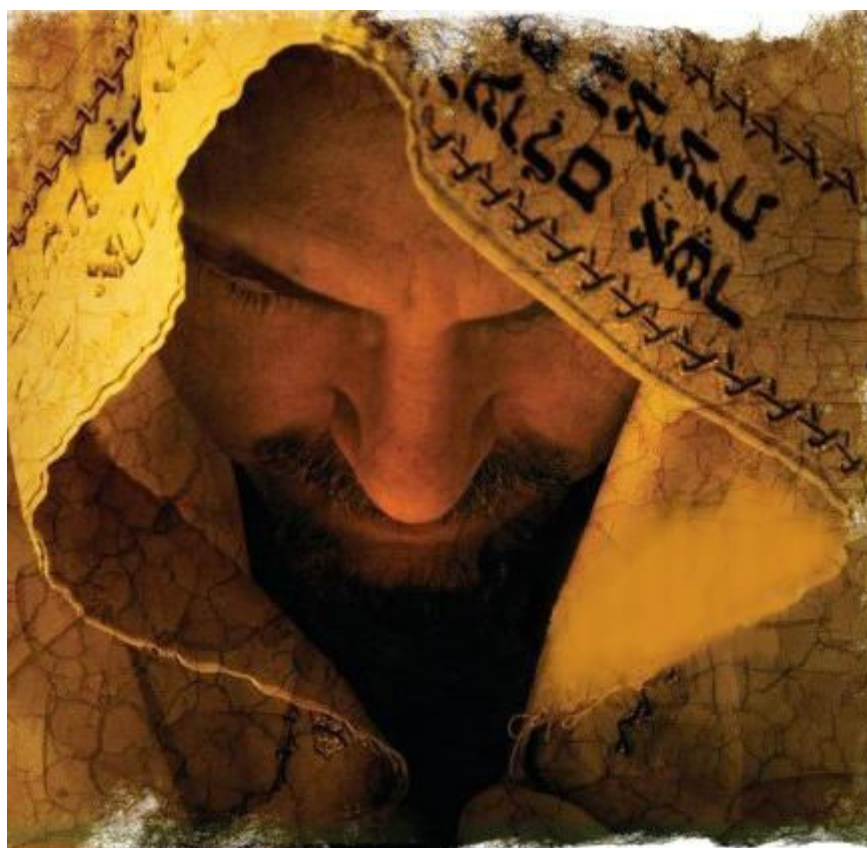
What we see in the life of Haggai is the strength of the prophetic word that helps us to rebuild what was destroyed in our lives, in addition to what He reminds us of what holy priesthood is, of what we need to do to please Him as our Lord. He doesn’t wish to see us apathetic in relation to our calling or to His work because it could discourage all His Church. Each of us has the responsibility to persevere in our own way and look after the spiritual gifts given to us so that we can be a channel of His blessings to other lives. Therefore, through our living testimony, we’ll be prophesying and bringing the salvation of the Messiah to all who are in darkness. In our mouth, His words are alive, and also bricks to help our neighbors rebuild their ‘temples.’ Therefore, as prophets, we must obey the voice of the Spirit of God in everything, both to exhort, to rebuke, to convince of error and to eliminate sin, and to bring comfort and encouragement to those to whom the Lord brings to us. Even condemning evil and bringing to light the errors of the flesh, we are contributing to the ‘edification of walls and the repair of breaches’ (cf. Isa. 58: 12).

## Zechariah

Zechariah means ‘God remembers’ or ‘Jah has remembered.’ He prophesied from 520 to 480 BC, during the reign of Darius I (522-486 BC) and was still young when he began to prophesy (Zech. 2: 4). He was a prophet and priest, born in exile. His father was Berechiah (or ‘Berechiah’, Zech. 1: 1); probably the same character mentioned by Jesus in Matt. 23: 35. His grandfather was Iddo (Zech. 1: 1; Ezr. 8: 17; Neh. 12: 16). When he was a young man he returned from Babylon to Jerusalem, along with Haggai, Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest (Ezr. 5: 2). From 536 to 520 AC the reconstruction of the temple was neglected. So, the Lord called him to motivate the people to restore it. Ezra came 62 years after (458 BC). Zechariah also made predictions about the Messiah (Zech. 3: 8-10; Zech. 9: 9; Zech. 10: 4).

The second part of the book of Zechariah refers to his prophecies in the period when he was already old (Zech. 9–14). In regard to the ancient Jews, we have here the impression that the first enthusiasm had given way to coldness, formality, to a weak leadership and the fear of the attack from Greece. In some of them there is also allusion to eschatological events.

There are several references to Zechariah in the New Testament: Matt. 21: 5 cf. Zech. 9: 9 – the triumphal entry of Jesus in Jerusalem; Matt. 27: 9-10 cf. Zech. 11: 13 – Judas returns the money of his treason; the potter’s field described by Zechariah, in Acts 1: 19 is called Akeldama (‘Field of Blood’); Rev. 1: 7 cf. Zech. 12: 10 – the Jews will see the One whom they have pierced; the moment of repentance.



## Chapter 1

In the first chapter of his book there is an exhortation to repentance for the sin of rebellion of his forefathers in face of the prophetic rebukes, which ended up by leading them to captivity. The Lord calls them back to His ways and asks for sincere conversion. In this chapter Zechariah makes clear the date on which this prophecy was made (Zech. 1: 1-6), in the eighth month of the second year of Darius I, namely, in the month of Bul (October-November) in the year 520 BC, two months after the first prophecy of Haggai (Hag. 1: 1) and one month after the second prophecy of Haggai (Hag. 2: 10). In verse 7 he reports the first vision he received from God on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the eleventh month of the second year of Darius I, that is, in the month of Shevat (January-February), 519 BC. The first vision refers to the angelic horsemen, who are told that God will restore Jerusalem. The eight visions of the prophet occurred in sequence.

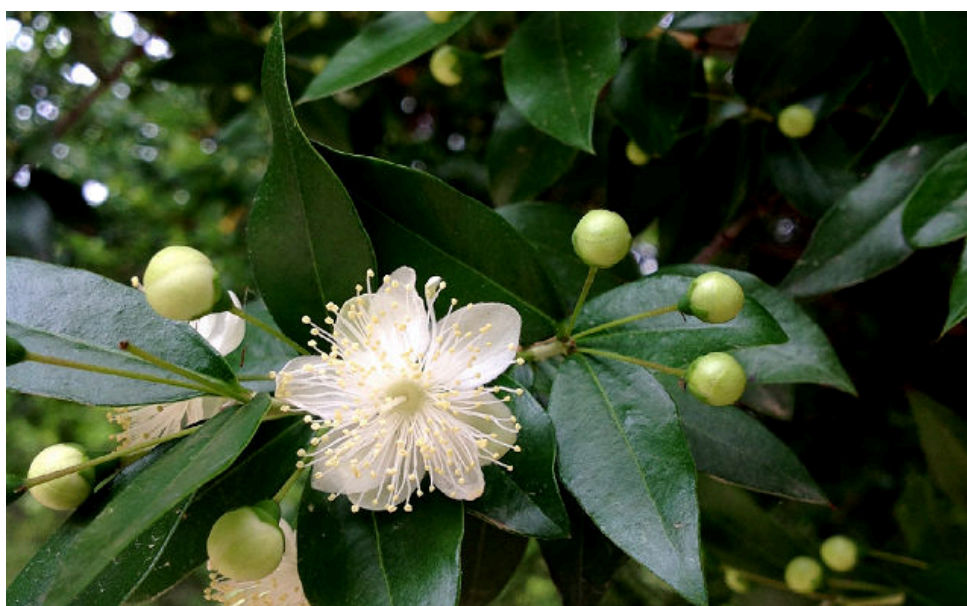
- Zech. 1: 1-6 (Exhortation to repentance): “In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah [NIV: Berekiah] son of Iddo, saying: The Lord was very angry with your ancestors. Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts: Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.’ But they did not hear or heed me, says the Lord. Your ancestors, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your ancestors? So they repented and said, ‘The Lord of hosts has dealt with us according to our ways and deeds, just as he planned to do.’”

- Zech. 1: 7-17 (The first vision: angelic horsemen): “On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat [or ‘Shevat’], in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo; and Zechariah said, In the night I saw a man riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen [NIV: in a ravine]; and behind him were red, sorrel [*i.e.*, *brown-yellowish*], and white horses [NIV: Behind him were red, brown and white horses]. Then I said, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The angel who talked with me said to me, ‘I will show you what they are.’ So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, ‘They are those whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth’ [NIV: to go throughout the earth]. Then they spoke to the angel of the Lord who was standing among the myrtle trees, ‘We have patrolled the earth, and lo, the whole earth remains at peace’ [NIV: at rest and in peace]. Then the angel of the Lord said, ‘O Lord of hosts, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which you have been angry these seventy years?’ Then the Lord replied with gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. So the angel who talked with me said to me, proclaim this message: Thus says the Lord of hosts; I am very jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. And I am extremely angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was only a little angry, they made the disaster worse [NIV: but they added to the calamity]. Therefore, thus says the Lord, I have returned to Jerusalem with compassion; my house shall be built in it, says the Lord of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. Proclaim further: Thus says the Lord of hosts: My cities

shall again overflow with prosperity; the Lord will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.”

- Measuring line (v. 16) is a line of measuring the city and building the wall, the streets and houses of Jerusalem with precision and symmetry. The measuring line (ruler) and the plumb line, much used in other prophetic writings, symbolize God’s judgment and sometimes His willingness to rebuild (Zech. 1: 16). In Isa. 34: 11-15, most likely, the measuring line would be to mark the destruction of Edom; to mark what would be overthrown: “The desert owl and the screech owl [NRSV: the hawk and the hedgehog] will possess it; the great owl and the raven will nest there. God will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos and the plumb line of desolation” (NIV).

- Myrtle (v. 8; 10; 11) – Zechariah, in a vision that symbolized peace, saw a grove of myrtle trees in the glen, while in Neh. 8: 15 the Jews carried boughs of myrtle trees from the Mount of Olives, in order to build their tents at the Feast of Tabernacles (445 BC). Isaiah foresaw the myrtle, replacing the thorn bush in the wilderness (Isa. 41: 19; Isa. 55: 13). The myrtle is a small shrub (*Myrtus communis* L.) of Mediterranean origin, cultivated to make hedges and is characterized by small leaves, compact and fragrant. The flowers are white and were used as perfume. Its name in Hebrew is h<sup>a</sup>das, and Hadassah (Hebrew name of Esther) derives from it. The shrub reaches thirty-three feet high (ten meters). The myrtle is an evergreen plant. The bible describes the myrtle as a symbol of divine generosity.



Myrtle (*Myrtus communis* L.)

- It is interesting to note that the horses described in chapter 1 of Zechariah have the same colors as the horses in chapter 6, but their behavior in the two chapters is different. Here is not described the black horse. Let us remember what is written in Zech. 1: 8-11: “In the night I saw a man [*probably, Jesus before His human incarnation, the Lord of hosts, and the Angel of the Lord – cf. v.11*] riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen [NIV: in a ravine]; and behind him were **red, sorrel** [*i.e., a light reddish-brown color*], **and white horses** [NIV: Behind him were **red, brown and white horses**]. Then I said, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The angel who talked with me said to me [*an angelic servant of the Lord, not the first angel who was*]



*standing among the myrtle trees*], ‘I will show you what they are.’ So the man [*Jesus*] who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, ‘They are those whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth’ [NIV: to go throughout the earth].<sup>11</sup> Then they spoke to the angel of the Lord [*Jesus*] who was standing among the myrtle trees, ‘We have patrolled the earth, and lo, the whole earth remains at peace’ [NIV: at rest and in peace].”

Here in chapter 1 they are on a mission of peace to give the prophet the consolation of a restoration of his city; symbolically, they came back from a bloody war (red) but victorious (white); and they defeated diseases, plague, and other kinds of calamities (brown or sorrel) sent by God as a way to execute His judgment against sin and all the enemies of His people. The land of Israel was now at rest and in peace.

The black horse is not here, for, besides signifying the scarcity of food and hunger, it means mourning, grief. And the first vision of Zechariah is a vision of hope in rebuilding, therefore, a vision of joy.

- Zech. 1: 18-21 (The second vision: the four horns and four blacksmiths): “And I looked up and saw four horns. I asked the angel who talked with me, ‘What are these?’ And he answered me, ‘These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem’. Then the Lord showed me four blacksmiths [NIV: craftsmen]. And I asked, ‘What are they coming to do?’ He answered, ‘These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no head could be raised [NIV: so that no one could raise their head]; but these [NIV: but the craftsmen] have come to terrify them, to strike down the horns of the nations that lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter its people.”

- Horns (v. 18; 19; 21) – Refers to the powerful nations and kingdoms of the four corners of the earth, which came against Israel and Judah. Horn symbolizes power, strength.

- Blacksmiths or craftsmen (v. 20; 21) – strong instruments of God to shatter the enemies of His people, the nations that scattered Israel and Judah.

As for the correct identity of the four nations or empires (‘horns’) that came against Israel and Judah to disperse them, any statement becomes uncertain. Many nations raised up their power against the land of Judah, to scatter its people, that is, to take them into captivity: Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Greece and Rome, for of them caused destruction and dispersion in the Lord’s people. This happened even with Persia under Cambyses II, who was an enemy of the Jewish nation, trying to prevent the rebuilding of the temple – Ezr. 4: 1-24, where in v. 6, the writer uses his Chaldean title – Ahasuerus – and in v. 7, his Persian title, Artaxerxes. It is not the same Ahasuerus or Xerxes I of Est. 1: 1, son of Darius I and who reigned in 486-465 BC, nor it is the same Artaxerxes I son of Xerxes, from the time of Nehemiah (Neh. 2: 1), who reigned in 465-424 BC and who authorized the return of Ezra (Ed 7: 1) and the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem. But as I wrote in the commentary on Joel 3: 13 where the prophet reports the divine judgments against enemy nations, God Himself used one against another to perform His vengeance for having destroyed His people: Tiglath-Pileser III destroyed Syria, which had oppressed Israel. Assyria, in turn, was defeated by the Medes and Babylonians; these ones, by the Persians. Nebuchadnezzar was an instrument of God’s vengeance upon the enemy nations of Israel: Ammon, Moab, Philistia, Egypt, Edom, Sidon and Tyre, among others. Alexander the Great defeated the Medes and Persians, and the Romans caused division within their own empire, leading it to downfall. Thus, God will use the mighty to annihilate His enemies until the Day of Judgment, when all of them will be destroyed forever. Perhaps we can say that the blacksmiths, as instruments of the Lord’s punishment, are the next ‘horns’ to be destroyed by other ‘blacksmiths.’



It is difficult to say with certainty whether the prophet was referring to the nations that had already appeared on the world stage or to those that would still arise, since all the prophets used the verb in the past for a future situation as if it had already occurred. After Rome, things did not improve for Israel, either physically or spiritually, for other empires arose to steal their peace and material possessions, as well as the seed of early Christianity.

## Chapter 2

- Zech. 2: 1-5 (The third vision: Jerusalem is measured): “I looked up and saw a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then I asked, ‘Where are you going?’ He answered me, ‘To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its width and what is its length’. Then the angel who talked with me came forward, and another angel came forward to meet him, and said to him, ‘Run, say to that young man: Jerusalem shall be inhabited like villages without walls, because of the multitude of people and animals [NIV: livestock] in it. For I will be a wall of fire all around it, says the Lord, and I will be the glory within it’” (cf. Isa. 60: 19; Rev. 21: 23).

The prophet again sees the angel with a measuring line to measure the city of Jerusalem, giving him the certainty that God will rebuild it. It will not only be rebuilt, but also inhabited by many people (Jews and Gentiles) and flocks, so it will be like villages without walls, so that there is room for all; and it shall fear no more, for the Lord will be a wall of fire all around it. He will stand within of it and be its glory, its brightness, its honor, its dignity, that is, God will restore the honor, the dignity and respect of Zion before the peoples. This is an allusion to the repopulation of the city during the post-exile period (Neh. 7: 4; 66-69), and more than that, the promise of the first coming of Jesus, where God Himself will protect it as a wall of fire, in the same way that His pillar of fire led them in the wilderness and separated His people from the chariots of Pharaoh at the time of Exodus (Ex. 14: 19-20). The fire here is the symbol of His protection and His presence (His glory) enlightening them in their ways, and also of His Spirit of holiness, separating His people from the ‘unclean’, and allowing them, within the city, to have peace to hear His Word and see the light of the Messiah.

- Zech. 2: 6-13 (Israel exhorted to come back to Zion): “Up, up! [NIV: Come! Come!] Flee from the land of the north, says the Lord; for I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven, says the Lord. Up! [NIV: Come, O Zion] Escape to Zion, you that live with the daughter of Babylon. For thus said the Lord of hosts (after his glory sent me) regarding the nations that plundered you: Truly, one who touches you touches the apple of my eye [NIV: For this is what the LORD Almighty says (*Jesus speaking*): ‘After he (*God the Father*) has honored me (*the Son*) and has sent me against the nations that have plundered you—for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye]. See now, I am going to raise my hand against them, and they shall become plunder for their own slaves. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me [NIV: I will surely raise my hand against them so that their slaves will plunder them. Then you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me]. Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For lo, I will come and dwell in your midst, says the Lord. Many nations shall join themselves to the Lord on that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in your midst. And you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. The Lord will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem. Be silent, all people, before the Lord; for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling [NIV: Be still before the LORD, all mankind, because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling].”

Explaining:

Zech 2: 6-7: “Up, up! [NIV: Come! Come!] Flee from the land of the north, says the Lord; for I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven, says the Lord. Up!

[NIV: Come, O Zion] Escape to Zion, you that live with the daughter (city) of Babylon” – the Lord exhorts His people to leave Babylon. The reason is that many of the children of Israel remained in the land of Babylon (now part of the Persian Empire), even after the destruction of the city of Babylon by Cyrus in 539 BC. He ordered the return of the Jews in 538 BC (1<sup>st</sup> return of the exiles). The temple began to be rebuilt in 536 BC, but its construction was interrupted until 520 BC, during the reign of Darius I, because under the government of his predecessor Cambyses II there were many impediments on the part of the other peoples, both of those who lived in Samaria from time of the Assyrians and the Persian salaried workers (Ezr. 4: 1-5; 8-10). Thus, after an interruption of sixteen years, the temple restarted to be built, and was finished in 516 BC, after four years. During this period Zechariah and Haggai acted as prophets, encouraging this restoration. The two came together with Zerubbabel and Joshua in the first stage of the return of the exiles (Ezr. 5: 2). There was a second return of the Jews to Jerusalem in the time of Ezra (458 BC), who was called to minister in the temple which had been built. There was still a third return of the exiles, along with Nehemiah (445 BC), when the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem began. We can notice that since the liberation of Cyrus until the coming of Nehemiah, 93 years have passed (here, it was already the prophetic period of Malachi – 450-400 BC).

So the prophecy of Zechariah was addressed to the Jews who had remained in Chaldea and Persia, for God’s promise to them was in their homeland, in Judah. There, He would pour His blessings upon them. Another reason to return to Judea was that there would be turbulence where they were, and God was warning them.

The fall of Babylon did not happen at once with Cyrus. Cyrus began the process, taking away its supremacy. Therefore, Jeremiah (Jer. 50: 39; 46) says that the complete extinction of Babylon would not be fulfilled immediately, but gradually (‘from generation to generation’ – NIV). Ancient Babylonian rulers raised insurrections, trying to regain the throne:

- Nebuchadnezzar III (Nidintu-Bel) against Darius I (522-486 BC) – in the year 522 BC. Darius I took a little more than 1 ½ year to take the city.
- Nebuchadnezzar IV against Darius I – 521 BC. Darius deprived the city of its fortifications; the walls were partially destroyed.
- Bel-shimanni and Shamash-eriba, in the reign of Xerxes I (486-465 BC), the son of Darius I – 482 BC.

Because of these insurrections Xerxes destroyed the city almost totally in 478 BC. The kings mentioned above were native Babylonian kings who briefly regained independence, but when these rebellions were repressed Babylon remained under Persian rule for two centuries until the entry of Alexander the Great in 331 BC.

Therefore the prophet urged them to return, for God would continue to judge the wicked in that place: “I am going to raise my hand against them, and they shall become plunder for their own slaves. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me” (v. 9).

The Jews who were slow to return had many reasons for remaining in Chaldea and Persia, for they still saw Persian indulgence with suspicion; besides, they feared the enemies who delayed the rebuilding of the temple and of the city. Its walls remained in ruins for 71 years after the completion of the temple and the coming of Nehemiah (445 BC). Many were born in a foreign land and never knew Jerusalem, so they had no memory of the land of their ancestors nor knew their original customs and traditions (Neh. 8: 8-9; 12; 17). Another reason to remain there is that the Babylonians allowed the Jewish exiles to form families, build their houses, plant gardens (Jer. 29: 5-7) and consult their own leaders and elders (Ezek. 20: 1-44); that way, they set a community in

that nation. In addition to agriculture, some Jews devoted themselves to trade in order to survive. So their quality of life was much better there than in Judea, where they would have to start all over again. Due to the conditions of Persian tolerance and even well-being in which the exiles began to live, many became accustomed in that land and did not want to return to Jerusalem, even with the permission of Cyrus.

- Zech. 2: 8: “For thus said the Lord of hosts (after his glory sent me) regarding the nations that plundered you: Truly, one who touches you touches the apple of my eye [NIV: For this is what the LORD Almighty says (*Jesus speaking*): ‘After he (*God the Father*) has honored me (*the Son*) and has sent me against the nations that have plundered you—for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye]” – this means that after God the Father had become the glory of Jerusalem (Zech. 2: 5) and restored His honor before the nations, the Son, the Angel of the Lord, was being sent to judge the nations that had risen against His people. The Father sent Jesus, the Son, the Messiah: Jn 4: 34; Jn 5: 37; Jn 6: 29; Jn 6: 44; Jn 6: 57; Jn 7: 16; Jn 7: 18; Jn 8: 29; Jn 9: 4. Jesus was sent as a light for revelation to the Gentiles and to the glory of the people of God, of the people of Israel (Lk 2: 32); ‘This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed’ (Lk. 2: 34 b). So it is the Lord who glorifies His church and punishes His enemies, the enemies of the gospel, as will definitely happen at the second coming of Jesus (2 The. 1: 7-10; Prov. 16: 4).

The Lord also shows His love to us by saying that whoever touches us touches the apple of His eye (Deut. 32: 10; Ps 17: 8), and this means that He is sensitive to our pains and suffering, and responds to those who affront us. Just as He destroyed the enemies of His people in the past, He continues to do today and will always do. Therefore, He says that revenge belongs to Him and one should not touch His anointed ones nor harm His prophets (Ps. 105: 15; 1 Chr. 16: 22).

- Zech 2: 9: “See now, I am going to raise my hand against them, and they shall become plunder for their own slaves. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me [NIV: I will surely raise my hand against them so that their slaves will plunder them. Then you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me]” – this verse confirms the protection of the Lord over His people and His judgment against the ungodly nations, as He was speaking to the prophet Zechariah concerning Babylon.

- Zech 2: 10-13: “Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For lo, I will come and dwell in your midst, says the Lord. Many nations shall join themselves to the Lord on that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in your midst. And you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. The Lord will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem. Be silent, all people, before the Lord; for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling [NIV: Be still before the LORD, all mankind, because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling]” – Here the restoration of Israel after the exile is confirmed and especially with the first coming of the Messiah (‘on that day’), where Jews and Gentiles (‘many nations’) will have the right to be called ‘the people of God.’

‘And you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you’ – here Jesus repeats again that He was sent by the Father.

## Chapter 3

• Zech. 3: 1-10 (The fourth vision: Joshua the high priest): “Then he [God] showed me the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, ‘The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man a brand plucked from the fire?’ [NIV: Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?]

Now Joshua was dressed with filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Take off his filthy clothes.’ And to him he said, ‘See, I have taken your guilt away from you, and I will clothe you with festal apparel’ [NIV: See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you]. And I said [He said], ‘Let them put a clean turban on his head’. So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with the apparel; and the angel of the Lord was standing by. Then the angel of the Lord assured Joshua, saying [NIV: The angel of the LORD gave this charge to Joshua], Thus says the Lord of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here [NIV: ‘and I will give you a place among these standing here’].

Now listen, Joshua, high priest, you and your colleagues who sit before you! For they are an omen of things to come [NIV: who are men symbolic of things to come]: I am going to bring my servant the Branch. For on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven facets, I will engrave its inscription [NIV: There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it], says the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the guilt [NIV: the sin] of this land in a single day. On that day, says the Lord of hosts, you shall invite each other to come under your vine and fig tree [NIV: In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree, declares the LORD Almighty].”



In this vision of Zechariah, the high priest Joshua is accused by Satan, but is vindicated by God (Jesus, the Angel of the Lord) receiving forgiveness of his sins and access to His presence, and appears as a symbol of the Messiah, the Branch (Zech. 3: 1-10). In verses 7-8 the Lord also addresses the priests who were with Joshua, confirming

to them the priesthood and exhorting them to remain in His ways, observing His precepts.

- ‘Now listen, Joshua, high priest, you and your colleagues who sit before you! For they are an omen of things to come [NIV: who are men symbolic of things to come]: I am going to bring my servant the Branch’ (v. 8) – He announces to them the coming of the Messiah, here called the Branch, and that he would perform the priestly work to remove the iniquity of that land in one day (verse 9: ‘I will remove the guilt [NIV: the sin] of this land in a single day’).

- ‘For they are an omen of things to come [NIV: who are men symbolic of things to come]’ – It means: just as Joshua was the symbol of the priestly office of Jesus, they were a ‘shadow’, a symbol of the followers of Christ, who would also be separated to a new type of priesthood under a new dispensation. This taught them that the true priesthood should be preserved.

- ‘For on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven facets, I will engrave its inscription [NIV: There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it], says the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the guilt [NIV: the sin] of this land in a single day’ (verse 9) – the stone is Jesus. The seven eyes or facets signify His perfect knowledge and wisdom in the presence of His Spirit (Rev. 5: 6).

- ‘I will engrave its inscription [NIV: I will engrave an inscription on it]’ (verse 9) – may be a reference to the stones on the breastplate of the high priest (Ex 28: 21; 29; Ex 39: 8; 10-14), since we are talking about priesthood, and Joshua was the high priest. On each stone were engraved the names of the twelve tribes, as a memorial before God, when Aaron offered a sacrifice for them, for the bible says that he should bear the iniquity of the children of Israel upon his breast, that is, to present before God their petitions and making the atonement for their sins, asking His forgiveness for their faults. As a human being, he could only carry their iniquity, but could not remove it. Perhaps because of that, by seeing his sin removed and the revival of his call by God Himself, Joshua was receiving one more revelation, that He (God) was engraving on this Stone (Jesus) the name of all His redeemed, for He would not only carry their sins but would remove them totally. This was a way of showing Joshua the superiority of His priesthood (Heb. 8: 6), above the priesthood of the old covenant. Jesus said, “Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (Jn. 17: 24); “... I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me” (Jn. 18: 9b). As the high priest, He carries us close to Him. Therefore, the Lord says soon after: ‘I will remove the guilt [NIV: the sin] of this land in a single day’ – this refers to the cross, where the atonement for the sin of mankind has been completed, accomplished. Jesus was bearing the sin of us all, for our names were engraved there.

Aaron also wore on his forehead the turban with a gold plate, on which was engraved the phrase: ‘Holy to the Lord’ (Ex. 28: 36; 38; Ex. 39: 30), symbolizing that he also bore the guilt of any sin of the children of Israel with the holy things, when they made their offerings, that they might be accepted before God. The gold plate was called ‘tzitz’, which means ‘to gaze’ because it was worn on the forehead in a place visible to everybody. This means that even if they did not make the offerings in the right way, whether in matter or intention, that is, offerings with an apparent defect or without completely fulfilling all the precepts, or even offers given without the integrity of heart or without devotion, they were sanctified by Aaron when he appeared before the presence of the Lord using the turban and the gold plate on it. For us, this can be summed up in one word: service, namely, what we consecrate to God, what we offer to



Him, the way we serve Him. There is no perfection in us, for we are human, therefore, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are our intercessors and our mediators in this connection with the Father. Likewise, Jesus bore our guilt toward holy things through the crown of thorns. If what we offer materially to the Lord is deficient or if we give ourselves incompletely to Him in our way of thinking (without so much devotion or willingness to do so), or if we do not have the right idea about His word and the His character, He sheds His blood upon it and accepts our offering, but we can be sure that He will continue to work with us to perfect us until ‘we become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ’ (Eph. 4: 13), as the bible says, giving ourselves to Him fully. It is written: “Now finish doing it [*he was referring to the work the Macedonians began to do for the poor of Judea*], so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have” (2 Cor. 8: 11-12); “Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might” (Ecc. 9: 10a).

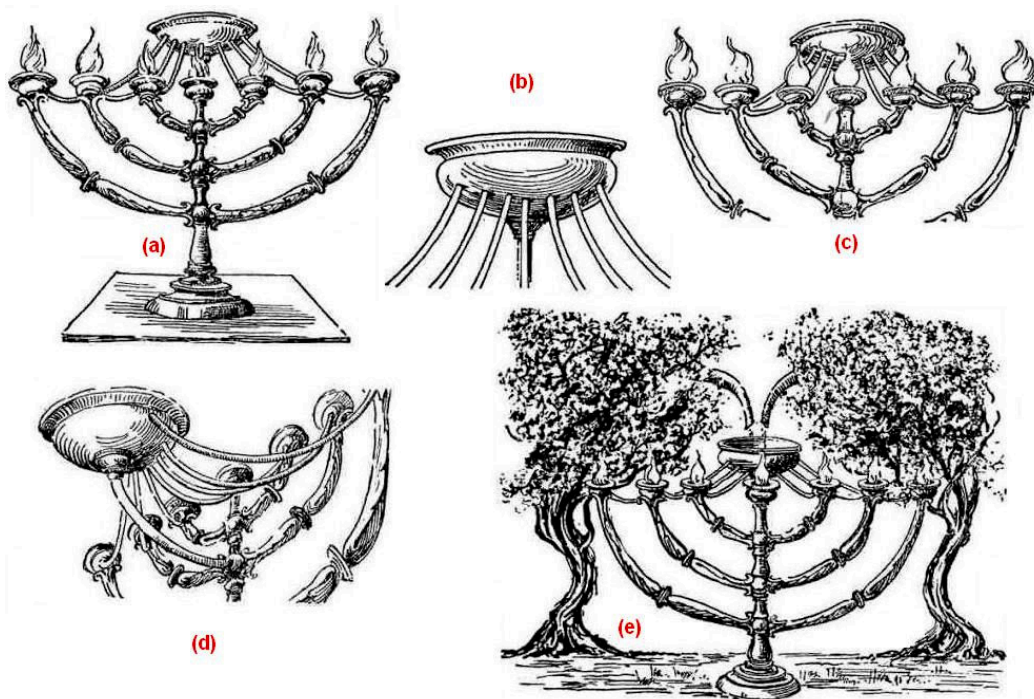
- ‘On that day, says the Lord of hosts, you shall invite each other to come under your vine and fig tree’ (verse 10) – ‘On that day’ is the day of Christ’s first coming, more exactly the day of His death, when He took away the iniquity of the earth in a single day. The vine is a symbol of prosperity and peace, symbol of divine favor. The fig is associated with God’s promises of prosperity and with prophetic warnings (Jer. 5: 17; Hos. 2: 12; Hab. 3: 17). Planted together with the vine (Lk 13: 6), it symbolizes perpetual prosperity and well-being. His productivity was a sign of peace and divine favor over the nation. Healthy fig trees produced fig ten months a year. In short, these plants represented well-being, peace, prosperity, and favor on God’s part. This means that after the forgiveness of our sins, we can rest in the Lord and reap the fruit of His righteousness, for we know that His blessings are the visible sign of His favor and His grace.

## Chapter 4

- Zech. 4: 1-14 – The fifth vision: the gold lampstand and the two olive trees

The fourth and fifth visions of Zechariah are related. In the fourth vision, God speaks to the prophet about Joshua, the high priest. On this fifth vision, he speaks with the prophet about the governor of Judah (Zerubbabel). The two visions of Zechariah concern the work of the Holy Spirit through two individuals: the king and the priest, who stand by the lampstand, that is, in the service of God. Joshua and Zerubbabel prefigured the office of Christ as King and priest in the service of the Father.

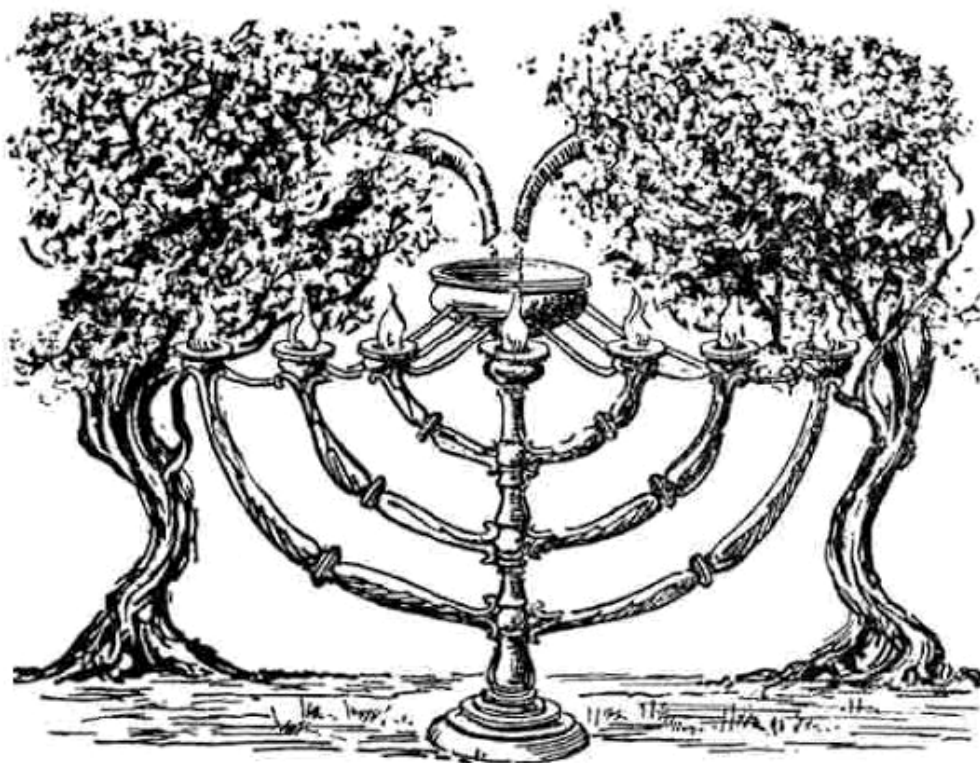
• Zech. 4: 1-6: “The angel who talked with me came again, and wakened me, as one is wakened from sleep. He said to me, ‘What do you see?’ And I said, ‘I see a lampstand all of gold (a), with a bowl on the top of it (b); there are seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps (c) that are on the top of it (d). And by it there are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left’ (e). I said to the angel who talked with me, ‘What are these, my lord?’ Then the angel who talked with me answered me, ‘Do you not know what these are?’ I said, ‘No, my lord.’ He said to me, ‘This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts.’”



• Verse 2 in the NIV is described more clearly: “He asked me, ‘What do you see?’ I answered, ‘I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights.’”

The angel explained to the prophet the meaning of his vision: the gold lampstand with seven lamps (in this prophecy of Zechariah) is a symbol of the people of Israel. The gold lampstand with seven lamps (Ex. 25: 31-32; Ex. 37: 17-18) placed in the Tabernacle of Moses and in the Temple of Solomon was the symbol of the Holy Spirit,

of the presence of God with His people. The seven lamps are also called ‘the seven spirits of God’ (Rev. 1: 4; Rev. 4: 5), with the same meaning as Zech. 4: 10 (‘the seven eyes of the Lord’) cf. Rev. 5: 6: ‘Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.’



- In verses 3 and 12, Zechariah says that the lampstand is fed by two golden pipes of olive oil from two olive trees, which pour oil on a vessel above the lampstand: “And by it there are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left... And a second time I said to him, ‘What are these two branches of the olive trees, which pour out the oil through the two golden pipes?’” Here the reference is made to Zerubbabel and Joshua, the two anointed ones (the ‘two olive trees’) who were separated by God to lead His people, that is, in the position of king and priest, according to the theocratic regime of Jewish government. God separated the civil and the ecclesiastical representative to rule together (the ‘bowl on the top of the lampstand’, meaning equal power and authority to rule), as it was with Moses (the lawgiver) and Aaron (the high priest). Zerubbabel and Joshua were the ‘two olive trees’ through whom the Holy Spirit (the oil) supplied the people with the light and courage necessary to rebuild the temple.

- v. 6: “He said to me, ‘This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts’” – The angel was saying to Zechariah that there was a word from the Lord to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah (Hag. 1: 1, 14; Hag. 2: 2). Zerubbabel and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, came with Haggai and Zechariah to rebuild the temple (Ezr. 5: 1-2). But in face of the oppositions (Ezr. 5: 3-5) of Tattenai (Ezr. 5: 6; Ezr. 6: 6; 13) the Persian governor

of the district of Samaria; and of Shethar-Bozenai (it's not known his real post as Persian official) and their companions (Ezr. 4: 7-10), they felt weakened and unable to proceed with the rebuilding of the House of God. Even if they had an army of Israelites to confront the oppositions, the Lord assured them that the work would not be by might or power, but by the Spirit of God.

- Zech. 4: 7-10: “What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring out the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’ [NIV: What (or ‘who’) are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘God bless it! God bless it!’]. Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘the hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house [NIV: temple]; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet [NIV: the plumb line] in the hand of Zerubbabel.’ These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth.”

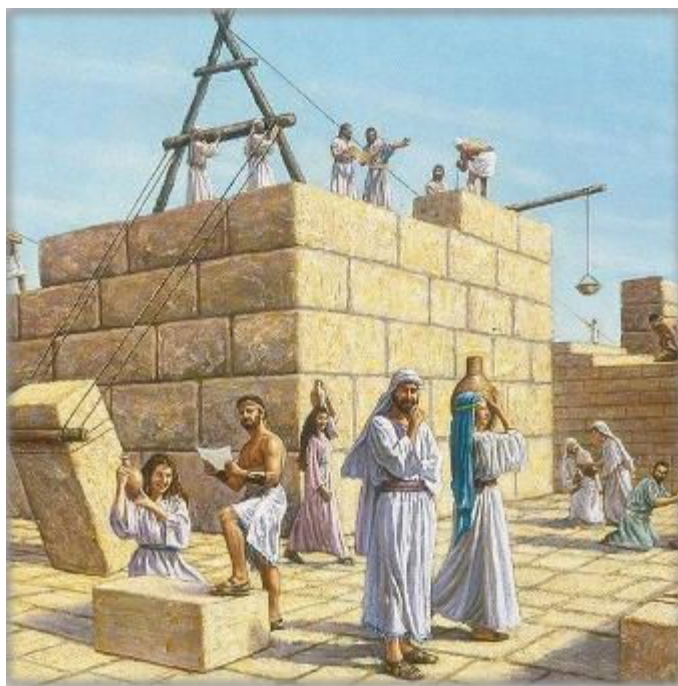
- v. 7: ‘What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring out the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’ [NIV: What (or ‘who’) are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘God bless it! God bless it!’]’ – The ‘great mountain’ may be a reference, in particular, to Tattenai (Ezr. 5: 6; Ezr. 6: 6; 13) the Persian governor of the Samaria district, or be applied in general, to all the opposition (Ezr. 5: 3-5) that Zerubbabel faced, that is, from Tattenai (Ezr. 5: 6; Ezr. 6: 6; 13), from Shethar-Bozenai (Ezr. 4: 7-10; Ezr. 6: 6) and all his companions: “Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, Rehum, Shimshai, the judges, the envoys, the officials, the Persians, the people of Erech, the Babylonians, the people of Susa, that is, the Elamites, and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnappar (the Aramaic word for Ashurbanipal) deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and in the rest of the province beyond the River wrote—and now [NIV: and the other people whom the great and honorable Ashurbanipal [Aramaic Osnappar, a variant of Ashurbanipal] deported and settled in the city of Samaria and elsewhere in Trans-Euphrates] – Ezr. 4: 7-10.” In 641 BC Ashurbanipal looted Susa, the capital of Elam, and brought men from Susa and Elam to dwell in Samaria.

- v. 7: ‘he [*Zerubbabel*] will bring out the capstone’ – putting the capstone or finishing stone means that he would finish the work he himself started. It is interesting to notice that in the book of Ezra it is written that Cyrus named Sheshbazzar (Ezr. 1: 8; Ezr. 5: 14; 16) as the governor of Judah and that he laid the foundations of the temple in 536 BC (Ezr. 5: 16). But it is also written that Zerubbabel and Joshua began the work of the House of the Lord (Ezr. 3: 2; 8; Ezr. 5: 2), referring respectively to the 1<sup>st</sup> (536 BC) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage (520 BC) of its reconstruction. This makes us think that Sheshbazzar was the official leader appointed by Cyrus; but Zerubbabel was the active leader both in 536 BC and 520 BC. It is known that Darius I appointed Zerubbabel as governor of Judah, which was part of a Persian satrapy in his reign (Initiated in 522 BC). Probably Sheshbazzar was already dead in 520 BC (Ezr. 5: 14; 16), and Zerubbabel took on the office of governor of Judah (Hag. 1: 1; 14; Hag. 2: 2).

- v. 8-9: ‘Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, the hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house [NIV: temple]; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent **me** to you’ – the pronoun ‘me’ refers to the Angel of God who was speaking to the prophet. This means

that the fulfillment of this prophetic word would be proof of what He had spoken, for them to know that He had been sent by God the Father. The Lord confirmed that despite all the opposition that Zerubbabel and Joshua were facing, He would give them strength to complete the work.

- v. 10: ‘For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet [NIV: the plumb line] in the hand of Zerubbabel. These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth’ – Again, it is confirmed that the seven lamps (seven eyes) are the seven spirits of God (Rev. 5: 6), symbolizing His perfect knowledge and wisdom.



- Zech. 4: 11-14: “Then I said to him, ‘What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?’ And a second time I said to him, ‘What are these two branches of the olive trees, which pour out the oil through the two golden pipes?’ He said to me, ‘Do you not know what these are?’ I said, ‘No, my lord.’ Then he said, ‘These are the two anointed ones [literal translation: ‘the sons of the oil’] who stand by the Lord of the whole earth’ [NIV: So he said, These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth (or ‘the ‘two who bring oil and serve’’)].”

Here, Zechariah comes back to say that the lampstand is fed by two pipes with oil that go out of two olive trees (or ‘two branches of the olive trees’ – v. 12), which pour oil in a bowl placed above the candlestick (verse 3). This was an encouragement to Zerubbabel and Joshua, for through them God would bring revival, strength and courage to His people.

Therefore, the **lampstand of Zechariah** means the people of Israel under the anointing of the Holy Spirit through the two anointed ones that He chose to govern them. When we speak of the **Menorah in the OT** (the gold lampstand of **the Tabernacle and the Temple**), it always symbolized the presence of God with His people, the light of the Spirit of the Lord with them.



For us, this prophecy of Zechariah chapter 4 was fulfilled in the person of Jesus in His office as King and Priest, pouring out the anointing of His Spirit on the Church so that it can carry out its mission of restoring the temples destroyed by sin, and in darkness for lack of knowledge of the word of God.



**Image:** Rev. 11: 3-4: “And I will grant my two witnesses authority to prophesy for one thousand two hundred sixty days, wearing sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.”



## Chapter 5

The sixth vision is a huge flying scroll that carries God's words condemning sin (Zech. 5: 1-4). The seventh vision is a woman in an ephah, symbolizing the sin. The woman is removed to the filthy land of Babylon, the place of exile (Zech. 5: 5-11).

- Zech. 5: 1-4 (The sixth vision: a flying scroll): "Again I looked up and saw a flying scroll. And he [*the angel*] said to me, What do you see? I answered, 'I see a flying scroll; its length is twenty cubits, and its width ten cubits' [NIV: I see a flying scroll, thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide]. Then he said to me, 'This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land; for everyone who steals shall be cut off [NIV: banished] according to the writing on one side, and everyone who swears falsely shall be cut off [NIV: banished] according to the writing on the other side. I have sent it out, says the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief, and the house of anyone who swears falsely by my name; and it shall abide in that house and consume it, both timber and stones' [NIV: It will remain in his house and destroy it, both its timbers and its stones]."



The scroll contained God's judgment on sin, especially theft and false oath. It was flying, which means how quickly His judgment would be done. Its size also indicates the size of iniquity, for it was great before God. The Lord would bring His curse upon all the earth (the land of Judea). The fact that it was written 'anyone who swears falsely by my name' most probably referred to the people of God who knew His law, for a wicked had no custom or reason to swear by the name of the Lord. In this chapter, in the vision of the scroll, it seems that He was dealing with His people, and in the vision of the woman and the ephah, with other nations; in particular, the land of Babylon.

As for the two sins mentioned (stealing and false oath) it seems that they were the most urgent ones to be treated (Mal. 3: 5), since they were the sins of sacrilege that were being committed, that is, the House of God was being neglected in favor of their own homes and that meant to steal God. Therefore, Haggai, Nehemiah and Malachi complained about this and denounced this attitude: Hag. 1: 3; 8-9; Neh. 13: 10-12; Mal. 3: 8-9.

The prophecy also says: "I have sent it out, says the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief, and the house of anyone who swears falsely by my name; and it shall abide in that house and consume it, both timber and stones' [NIV: It will remain in his house and destroy it, both its timbers and its stones]" (verse 4) – God's curse would

stay there ('shall abide in that house') and would act and destroy both timber and stones. This recalls the guidance on leprosy in the house (Lev. 14: 45), where the house with 'destructive mildew' [NRSV: 'a spreading leprous disease' – Lv 14: 44] was destroyed; both the wood and the stones were taken out of the city into a filthy place, and most probably burnt. Besides house, temple or sanctuary being symbols of our body (1 Cor. 6: 19-20; 2 Cor. 6: 16b-18), the word house is also used in the bible as a synonym for family, offspring (1 Chr. 17: 7-10; 1 Chr. 17: 16-17; 23). Thus, what the Lord wants to say is that when someone in the family committed a grave sin, either now or in the past, the evil tends to spread and to perpetuate itself throughout the progeny. This is what happens with the hereditary curses, in which one often repeats the same sins of one member for generations, causing death and destruction to all descendants of that 'leper.' And when someone is called by Jesus to the truth, he must make an effort to purify himself, lest to repeat the mistakes of the past, and then to start all over again of God's holy way. Then great struggles arise and great barriers to be faced appear because the old structures need to be plucked out of the way of acting of that whole house. Such work is necessary and urgent so that the offspring is not compromised and also lose its salvation. The stones are the spiritual and moral structures present in a generation, which are firm and motionless for years, as well as the outward appearance before the world (the 'plaster', the 'coating', or 'mortar', mentioned in the bible). It is like a 'trademark' present in the family, which both the natural and the spiritual world recognize. Everything needs to be changed in a new structure to save the rest. This means that when something truly evil is detected, one cannot 'feel sorry;' the whole structure must be knocked down to the dust so that it can be raised again. Sin must be plucked out by the root.

Both the returning exiles and their fathers who rejected justice and the word of God suffered, but if they repented He would send His judgment upon the Chaldeans and upon their former enemies. Perhaps this is why the Lord gave Zechariah the seventh vision about the woman and the ephah.

- Zech. 5: 5-11 (The seventh vision: the woman and the ephah): "Then the angel who talked with me came forward and said to me, 'Look up and see what this is that is coming out' [NIV: Look up and see what is appearing]. I said, 'What is it?' He said, 'This is a basket coming out' [NIV: It is a measuring basket; in Hebrew 'an ephah']. And he said, 'This is their iniquity in all the land' [NIV: This is the iniquity (or 'appearance', in original) of all the people throughout the land]. Then a leaden cover was lifted, and there was a woman sitting in the basket! [NIV: Then the cover of lead was raised, and there in the basket sat a woman!] And he said, 'This is Wickedness.' So he thrust her back into the basket, and pressed the leaden weight down on its mouth. Then I looked up and saw two women coming forward. The wind was in their wings; they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and sky [NIV: Then I looked up—and there before me were two women, with the wind in their wings! They had wings like those of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between heaven and earth]. Then I said to the angel who talked with me, 'Where are they taking the basket?' He said to me, 'To the land of Shinar (Shin`ar – Strong #8152, Babylonia), to build a house for it; and when this is prepared, they will set the basket down there on its base' [NIV: He replied, 'To the country of Babylonia to build a house for it. When the house is ready, the basket will be set there in its place']."

The seventh vision of Zechariah, therefore, is a woman in an ephah, symbolizing sin and wickedness, the perversity of the Jews. The woman is removed to the filthy land

of Babylon, the place of exile (Zech. 5: 5-11). Ephah was a unit of measurement for dry products and was equivalent to 17.62 liters, but here it's not about the ephah as a specific measurement, but rather in the sense of 'container'; that's why the bible used the word 'basket'. The weight of lead means the limit of the iniquity imposed by God, that is, there was a measure of iniquity endured by God, before beginning to do His judgment. The sin of the ancestors would no longer be present in the people who returned from exile, nor the sins they brought from Babylon because of their long coexistence with the culture of that place. Therefore it is written in verse 6: 'This is their iniquity in all the land (*of Judea*)' or 'This is the iniquity of all the people throughout the land (*of Judea*), or else, in the original: 'This is the appearance of all the people throughout the land (*of Judea*).'

In verse 9 it is written: "Then I looked up and saw two women coming forward. The wind was in their wings; they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and sky [NIV: Then I looked up—and there before me were two women, with the wind in their wings! They had wings like those of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between heaven and earth]." The wind and stork's wings symbolize the swiftness of God's judgment returning the wickedness to Babylon, from where affliction came upon Jerusalem. The stork is a bird capable of traveling long distances, so impiety would be taken out of the Promised Land to a symbolic place like Babylon (place of impiety). The land of Shinar was the land of Sîn (Mesopotamian god of the moon), whose highest temple was in Ur of the Chaldeans. Thus Babylon corrupted by mercantilism, wealth and luxury, falls under God's judgment to remove the affliction of captivity and the iniquity present in that land (mercantilism, wealth, luxury, wickedness, idolatry, etc.), which came along with the Jews. The severe judgment was also to leave iniquity there with those who had remained in Babylon, even though the Lord had commanded their return (Isa. 52: 11-12), but they preferred to remain in the sinful comfort of that land. The Lord would punish both the Chaldeans and the unrepentant Jews: v. 11 – "He said to me, To the land of Shinar (Shin`ar – Strong #8152, Babylonia), to build a house for it; and when this is prepared, they will set the basket down there on its base' [NIV: He replied, 'To the country of Babylonia to build a house for it. When the house is ready, the basket will be set there in its place']." This verse in the ASV is: "And he said unto me, 'To build her (*that is, 'the woman')*) a house in the land of Shinar: and when it is prepared, she shall be set there in her own place." The phrase 'When the house is ready' or 'when it is prepared' means: 'until the Lord finishes giving the payment to His adversaries.' Humanly speaking, Darius I was still acting in that land and in that city, suppressing the revolts from the descendants of the royal lineage of Nabonidus and Belshazzar.

At the moment (520 BC) he was ending with a rebellion of Nebuchadnezzar III (Nidintu-Bel) and that began in 522 BC, when he assumed the throne of Persia. At the beginning of his reign there were revolts in Assyria, Elam, Media, Parthia, and Egypt. Within one year he managed to suppress them with the aid of his army, led by his advisers and nobles. But only recently had he succeeded in taking Babylon. During this Babylonian revolt, the nomadic Scythians (a group of Iranian nomadic tribes from the north) took advantage of the disorder and the chaos and revolted as well, threatening to disrupt trade between Central Asia and the shores of the Black Sea. They had already invaded Persia before, in the time of Cyrus. Darius took a little more than 1 ½ year to take the city of Babylon.

In 521 BC, Babylon revolted again, under Nebuchadnezzar IV. Darius deprived the city of its fortifications; the walls were partially destroyed.

In turn, his son Xerxes I would have to stifle another insurrection on the part of Bel-shimani and Shamash-eriba in 482 BC, almost completely destroying it in 478 BC. When these rebellions were repressed Babylon remained under Persian rule for two centuries until the entry of Alexander the Great in 331 BC. His generals eventually moved the capital to Seleucia, taking along with them the Babylonian citizens and the wealth of that place. Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer. 50: 39; 46), about the total extinction of Babylon being gradual ('from generation to generation'). This prophecy of Zechariah most probably relates to this.

As for the fact of being two women, there is nothing symbolic about it; perhaps, by the weight they had to carry, so two. But in relation to the fact of being women and not men, it does not seem to have any biblical significance.

## Chapter 6

The eighth vision shows four chariots that go throughout the earth as executors of God (Zech. 6: 1-8). Joshua is crowned as a symbol of the Messiah, the Branch, who builds the temple and governs as king and priest (Zech. 6: 9-15).

- Zech 6: 1-8 (The eighth vision: the four chariots): “And again I looked up and saw four chariots coming out from between two mountains—mountains of bronze. The first chariot had red horses, the second chariot black horses, the third chariot white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled gray horses [NIV: ‘The first chariot had red horses, the second black, the third white, and the fourth dappled—all of them powerful’; in KJV and ASV the color of the fourth horse is ‘grizzled.’ The word used in Hebrew is *barod* (Strong #1261), meaning: spotted (as if with hail), grizzled. In Portuguese (ARA) the color remains the same than that of Zech. 1: 8, i.e., sorrel [*a light reddish-brown color*]. Then I said to the angel who talked with me, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The angel answered me, ‘These are the four winds of heaven going out, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth [NIV: These are the four spirits (or ‘winds’) of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world]. The chariot with the black horses goes toward the north country, the white ones go toward the west country, and the dappled ones go toward the south country.’ When the steeds came out, they were impatient to get off and patrol the earth. And he said, ‘Go, patrol the earth.’ So they patrolled the earth [NIV: When the powerful horses went out, they were straining to go throughout the earth. And he said, ‘Go throughout the earth!’ So they went throughout the earth]. Then he cried out to me, ‘Lo, those who go toward the north country have set my spirit at rest in the north country’ [NIV: Then he called to me, ‘Look, those going toward the north country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north’]” – NRSV.



The prophet has one more vision: that of horses and chariots that go throughout the earth to exercise the will of God, more precisely His judgment, for the prophet mentions bronze. Bronze is a symbol of God’s judgment over sin, which implies repentance from

the sinner and righteousness from God. 'Mountains' symbolize the decrees and purposes of God: solid, steadfast, and unshakable. Thus, the Lord had already given His judgment, His purpose was already determined. Chariots and horses symbolize the swift messengers of God to carry out His will; also symbolize war.

Then the bible says (v. 2-3 – NRSV): “The first chariot had red horses, the second chariot black horses, the third chariot white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled gray horses [NIV: ‘The first chariot had red horses, the second black, the third white, and the fourth dappled—all of them powerful’]. In KJV and ASV the color of the fourth horse is ‘grizzled’. The word used in Hebrew is *barod* (Strong #1261), meaning: spotted (as if with hail), grizzled. In Portuguese (ARA) the color remains the same of that of Zech. 1: 8, i.e., sorrel [*a light reddish-brown color*]. Red horses symbolize war (Rev. 6: 4); black horses symbolize mourning, grief and the scarcity of food and hunger, represented by barley and wheat weighed on the scales (Rev. 6: 5-6); the white horses symbolize victory (Rev. 6: 2), conquest and justice. The dappled gray horses (grizzled, spotted, or sorrel – cf. Zech. 1: 8) represent diseases, plague, or a mixture of calamities. The bible speaks in four judgments of God:

- Ezek. 14: 21 (cf. v.13; 15; 17; 19): “For thus says the Lord God: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four deadly acts of judgment (cf. Rev. 6: 8), sword, famine, wild animals, and pestilence, to cut off humans and animals from it!” Punishment is cumulative, when a nation sins against Him: first, famine (v. 13); second, the wild animals (verse 15); third, the sword (v. 17); finally, pestilence (v. 19).

- Ezek. 5: 12; 17: “One third of you shall die of pestilence or be consumed by famine among you; one third shall fall by the sword around you; and one third I will scatter to every wind (*to scatter through all nations*) and will unsheathe the sword after them... I will send famine and wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children; pestilence and bloodshed shall pass through you; and I will bring the sword upon you. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

- 1 Chr. 21: 12: “either three years of famine; or three months of devastation by your foes, while the sword of your enemies overtakes you; or three days of the sword of the Lord, pestilence on the land, and the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the territory of Israel. Now decide what answer I shall return to the one who sent me.”

- 2 Sam. 24: 13: “So Gad came to David and told him; he asked him, ‘Shall three years of famine come to you on your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days’ pestilence in your land? Now consider, and decide what answer I shall return to the one who sent me.’”

The sword (Deut. 28: 25), famine (Deut. 28: 23-24), the animals of the land (Ezek. 34: 28) and the pestilence (Deut. 28: 21; Ezek. 28: 23) are the four judgments described. The animals of the land (or wild animals) can be understood, literally, as lions, wolves, hyenas, jackals, etc. (Ex. 23: 29; Lev. 26: 22; Deut. 28: 26; Ezek. 34: 28), which were sometimes sent by the Lord (2 Kin. 17: 25; 1 Kin. 13: 26). Sometimes, beasts can be figuratively understood as ‘destructive conquerors’, as in Dan. 7: 4-7.

- Zech. 6: 4-5; 7: “Then I said to the angel who talked with me, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The angel answered me, ‘These are the four winds of heaven going out, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth [NIV: These are the four spirits (or ‘winds’) of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world] ... When the steeds came out, they were impatient to get off and patrol the earth. And he said, ‘Go, patrol the earth.’ So they patrolled the earth [NIV: When the powerful horses went out, they were straining to go throughout the earth. And he said, ‘Go throughout the earth!’ So they went throughout the earth].”



The word 'wind' in Hebrew is Ruwach (Strong #7307) which means, among other things: winds, spirits (destructive powers) and angels – Rev. 7: 1. In verse 7 the horses are impatient to get off and wait for a word of release from the Lord to begin to act.

- Zc 6: 6; 8: “The chariot with the black horses goes toward the north country, the white ones go toward the west country, and the dappled ones go toward the south country... Then he cried out to me, ‘Lo, those who go toward the north country have set my spirit at rest in the north country’ [NIV: Then he called to me, ‘Look, those going toward the north country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north’].”

The North Country referred to Babylon, now under Persian rule, but still manifesting insurrections.

At the moment (520 BC) Darius I was ending with a rebellion of Nebuchadnezzar III (Nidintu-Bel) and that began in 522 BC, when he assumed the throne of Persia. At the beginning of his reign there were revolts in Assyria, Elam, Media, Parthia, and Egypt. Within one year he managed to suppress them with the aid of his army, led by his advisers and nobles. But only recently had he succeeded in taking Babylon. During this Babylonian revolt, the nomadic Scythians (a group of Iranian nomadic tribes from the north) took advantage of the disorder and the chaos and revolted as well, threatening to disrupt trade between Central Asia and the shores of the Black Sea. They had already invaded Persia before, in the time of Cyrus. Darius took a little more than 1 ½ year to take the city of Babylon.

In 521 BC, Babylon revolted again, under Nebuchadnezzar IV. Darius deprived the city of its fortifications; the walls were partially destroyed.

In turn, his son Xerxes I would have to stifle another insurrection on the part of Bel-shimani and Shamash-eriba in 482 BC, almost completely destroying it in 478 BC. When these rebellions were repressed Babylon remained under Persian rule for two centuries until the entry of Alexander the Great in 331 BC. His generals eventually moved the capital to Seleucia, taking along with them the Babylonian citizens and the wealth of that place. Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer. 50: 39; 46), about the total extinction of Babylon being gradual ('from generation to generation'). This prophecy of Zechariah most probably relates to this.

It seems that Zechariah was talking about these first two revolutions of Babylon, faced by Darius I. Every prolonged war causes shortage of food and starvation. This was God's judgment against that land, as had been prophesied by Isaiah and Jeremiah. But the bible also says that the white horse followed the first, that is, the war that Darius was waging was a victorious war, for the revolt of these two Babylonian kings would be overthrown. However, the white horse may refer to the son of Darius I, Xerxes or Ahasuerus, who continued the policy of expansion of the kingdom initiated by his ancestors and, in 478 BC destroyed the city almost completely, giving a period of peace to Persia as for that satrapy for almost two centuries. So when the bible says: “Lo, those who go toward the north country have set my spirit at rest in the north country [NIV: Then he called to me, ‘Look, those going toward the north country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north’]” it may be referring to this situation, that is, the wrath of God against that land of iniquity was propitiated. Historically speaking, however, Babylon only became a complete ruin in the time of Roman Emperor Hadrian (117-138 AD).

The dappled gray horses (grizzled, spotted, or sorrel – cf. Zech. 1: 8) that go to the south probably goes to the land of Egypt, Arabia, perhaps Ethiopia, where the hand of the Lord also punished. Ethiopia was a Persian satrapy in the reign of Xerxes (Est. 1: 1; Est. 8: 9). It is not known whether there were plagues or diseases in those places, a few

years or decades after that prophecy. But surely there were other kinds of calamities as divine judgment (civil wars, rebellions against government, disagreements, interference in trade between nations, etc.). What is known is that before Darius I, in the reign of Cambyses II (530-522 BC), Egypt suffered greatly. He was quite cruel in his invasion and in his control of that nation, perhaps fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah (Isa. 19: 3-4), when the Lord spoke of delivering them into the hands of a hard master, and a fierce king. Cambyses took the city of Pelusium with a very cunning strategy: in front of his army he placed cats, dogs, sheep and the ibis bird, considered gods by the Egyptians. Not to injure the animals, the Egyptians did not shoot the Persians, thus facilitating the capture of the city. Other versions say that during the siege, knowing how the cats were sacred there, Cambyses ordered his soldiers to capture them and throw them with the catapults. When the Egyptians saw that the animals were in danger of life, their inhabitants surrendered. Capturing Pelusium, Cambyses II invaded Egypt. He dethroned Psamtik III (Ankhkaen-re – 526-525 BC) and humiliated the daughter of Pharaoh and other young women of the nobility, obliging them to bring water from the river. Then he killed the young son of Pharaoh and 2,000 young men in shameful manner for vengeance on the men of Memphis who had assassinated the ambassadors whom Cambyses had sent.

It is also not known if this prophecy of Zechariah is related to that of Isaiah (Isa. 19: 5-7: “The waters of the Nile will be dried up, and the river will be parched and dry; its canals will become foul, and the branches of Egypt’s Nile will diminish and dry up, reeds and rushes will rot away. There will be bare places by the Nile, on the brink of the Nile; and all that is sown by the Nile will dry up, be driven away, and be no more”).

Under Darius I (522-486 BC), the dominion was just and firm; but with the Egyptian rebellions that followed (like the one that happened at the beginning of his reign, along with that of Assyria, Babylon and other nations) and even influencing Greece, the Persian policy towards Egypt hardened.

Egypt remained the vassal of Persia (400-341 BC), until Alexander the Great entered Egypt as ‘deliverer’ in 332 BC. Henceforth, Egypt was a Hellenistic monarchy under the Ptolemies, and then fell under Roman and Byzantine rule.

It is interesting to notice that the horses described in chapter 1 of Zechariah have the same colors (at least in Portuguese bible, which writes ‘sorrel’ or ‘brown’ in the two chapters, instead of ‘sorrel’ or ‘brown’ in chapter 1 and ‘dappled gray’, ‘grizzled’ or ‘spotted’ in chapter 6), but the black horse is not described; and its behavior in the two chapters is different. Let us remember what is written in Zech. 1: 8-11: “In the night I saw a man [*probably, Jesus before His human incarnation, the Lord of hosts, and the Angel of the Lord – cf. v.11*] riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen [NIV: in a ravine]; and behind him were **red, sorrel** [*i.e., a light reddish-brown color*], and **white horses** [NIV: Behind him were **red, brown and white horses**]. Then I said, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The angel who talked with me said to me [*an angelic servant of the Lord, not the first angel who was standing among the myrtle trees*], ‘I will show you what they are.’ So the man [*Jesus*] who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, ‘They are those whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth’ [NIV: to go throughout the earth].<sup>11</sup> Then they spoke to the angel of the Lord [*Jesus*] who was standing among the myrtle trees, ‘We have patrolled the earth, and lo, the whole earth remains at peace’ [NIV: at rest and in peace].”

In chapter 1 they are on a mission of peace to give the prophet the consolation of a restoration of his city; symbolically, they came back from a bloody war (red) but victorious (white); and they defeated diseases, plague, and other kinds of calamities (brown or sorrel) sent by God as a way to execute His judgment against sin and all the

enemies of His people. The land of Israel was now at rest and in peace. We can extrapolate the same reasoning for the horses described here as ‘dappled gray’, ‘grizzled’ or ‘spotted’, as it was described in chapter 1 in relation to their meaning: diseases, plague, or a mixture of calamities.

The black horse is here in chapter 6, for besides signifying the scarcity of food and famine, it means mourning and grief. Therefore, chapter 6 is a different vision of the 1<sup>st</sup> vision of Zechariah.

- Zech. 6: 9-15 (The coronation of Joshua. The Branch): “The word of the Lord came to me: <sup>10</sup> Collect silver and gold from the exiles—from Heldai [in Syriac; in Hebrew: Helem], Tobijah, and Jedaiah—who have arrived from Babylon; and go the same day to the house of Josiah (NIV: called Hen – v. 14) son of Zephaniah. Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak; say to him: Thus says the Lord of hosts: Here is a man whose name is Branch: for he shall branch out in his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he that shall build the temple of the Lord; he shall bear royal honor [NIV: he will be clothed with majesty], and shall sit upon his throne and rule. There shall be a priest by his throne, with peaceful understanding between the two of them [NIV: And there will be harmony between the two]. <sup>14</sup> And the crown shall be in the care of Heldai [in Syriac; in Hebrew: Helem], Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Josiah son of Zephaniah, as a memorial in the temple of the Lord [NIV: The crown will be given to Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Hen [Note NIV: ‘the gracious one’, referring to Josiah, v. 10] son of Zephaniah as a memorial in the temple of the LORD]. Those who are far off shall come and help to build the temple of the Lord; and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God.”



- Heldai [or Helem], Tobijah, Jedaiah and Josiah (or Hen), son of Zephaniah, were men of authority who came from captivity, though not reported in the book of Ezra. The prophet Zechariah was instructed by God to go to the house of Josiah (or Hen) and receive the gold and silver from the hands of these men to make a crown for Joshua the

son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Joshua, once again, is called Branch and prefigures Jesus in His office as Priest [Zerubbabel was the figure of Jesus in His office as King]. It is written that 'there will be harmony between the two' offices (or 'peaceful understanding between the two of them'). Other crowns will be made for Helem [Heldai], Tobijah, Jedaiah and Josiah (or Hen), son of Zephaniah, and will be placed as a memorial in the temple of the Lord because of the generosity of these men who helped to build the temple.

- It is also written that 'those who are far off shall come and help to build the temple of the Lord', which seems to me to be related to the near future, to the construction of the second temple of the Lord, for many Persians came along with the Jews in this first stage to help them, unlike some Persians and peoples of Mesopotamia and Chaldea like Rehum and Shimshai, Bishlam, Mithredath (Ezr. 1: 8) and Tabeel (Ezr. 4: 7-10), which delayed the reconstruction.

## Chapter 7

• Zech. 7: 1-14 (Justice and mercy, not fasting): “In the fourth year of King Darius (518 BC), the word of the Lord came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, which is Chislev [NIV: Kislev, November-December]. Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-melech and their men, to entreat the favor of the Lord, and to ask the priests of the house of the Lord of hosts and the prophets, ‘Should I mourn and practice abstinence in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?’ [NIV: Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?]. Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me: Say to all the people of the land and the priests: When you fasted and lamented in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted? And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink only for yourselves? [NIV: And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves?]. Were not these the words that the Lord proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, along with the towns around it, and when the Negeb [NIV: Negev, meaning south] and the Shephelah were inhabited? [NIV: the western foothills were settled?]. The word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying: Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another [NIV: Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another]; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another [NIV: In your hearts do not think evil of each other]. But they refused to listen, and turned a stubborn shoulder, and stopped their ears in order not to hear. They made their hearts adamant in order not to hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent by his spirit through the former prophets (cf. Isa. 58: 3-7). Therefore great wrath came from the Lord of hosts [NIV: They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry]. Just as, when I called, they would not hear, so, when they called, I would not hear, says the Lord of hosts, and I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations that they had not known. Thus the land they left was desolate, so that no one went to and fro, and a pleasant land was made desolate [NIV: I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come and go. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate].”

This prophecy occurred two years after that of chapter 1, that is, in 518 BC. The ninth month, Kislev, corresponds to November-December.

Bethel, before the exile, belonged to the northern kingdom: Samaria.

Sharezer and Regem Melech were chiefs of the people.

The two months of fasting in this question were those of the fifth and seventh months, the fasts instituted post-exile, so the Lord said: “Say to all the people of the land and the priests: When you fasted and lamented in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted?”

The fast of the fifth month referred to the month that the temple was burned (2 Kin. 25: 8).

And that of the seventh month referred to the month that Gedaliah was slain (Jer. 41: 1). Gedaliah (Jer. 40: 5 – son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan) was whom the king of Babylon appointed governor of the cities of Judah. This fast is not to be confused with

the fast of the Atonement Day (Ex. 30: 10; Lev. 16: 29-34; Lev. 23: 26-32), ‘Yom Kippur.’

What the Lord was questioning with them were the true intentions of their fasting, as He did with the people in the time of Isaiah (Isa. 58: 3-7), who fasted by hypocrisy, but did not abandon their particular interests; they did not think of their fellow man. And here the Lord reminded them of the true motive of fasting for Him: to be impartial in the judgment, to show goodness and mercy to the fellow man; not to oppress the widow, nor the fatherless, nor the stranger, nor the poor, nor to plot evil against the neighbor.

Their ancestors refused to listen to the prophets (Isa. 58: 3-7) and to obey, so they were taken into captivity, and the land where they lived before became ruins.



## Chapter 8

- Zech. 8: 1-23 – The Lord promises to bless Jerusalem

- Zech. 8: 1-8: “The word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath [NIV: I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her]. Thus says the Lord: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city [NIV: The City of Truth], and the mountain of the Lord of hosts shall be called the holy mountain. Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff [NIV: cane] in hand because of their great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. Thus says the Lord of hosts: Even though it seems impossible to the remnant of this people in these days, should it also seem impossible to me, says the Lord of hosts? Thus says the Lord of hosts: I will save my people from the east country and from the west country; and I will bring them to live in Jerusalem. They shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.”

In verses 2-3, Lord says He is jealous for Jerusalem. He will again dwell in the midst of it, and it will not sin against Him again, worshiping idols and rebelling against His word. It will be faithful, and the mountain where the temple is will be called ‘the holy mountain’, because the holiness of the Lord will be seen there (cf. Obad. 17; Joel 3: 17). His priests will no longer deviate from His law, and will teach the truth to the people.

In verses 4-5 there is a promise to the elders and youths: the Lord had a time of peace and well-being for them, without illness, hunger or war, what prevented His people from reaching an old age. It was also a time of prosperity and fertility. He was promising new births and safety for the children who were already born; boys and girls would play in the streets of the city. These were the promises of God to the people who had returned from captivity, but still felt fragile and insecure in their relationship with Him, and threatened by the peoples of the land, who were trying to prevent the rebuilding of the temple and of the city.

Then He says: “Even though it seems impossible to the remnant of this people in these days, should it also seem impossible to me, says the Lord of hosts? Thus says the Lord of hosts: I will save my people from the east country and from the west country; and I will bring them to live in Jerusalem. They shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.”

This means that there would be nothing impossible for Him, and that He would save His people who were still in captivity in the East (Media and Persia, now lords of Babylon), and who would still come with the second and third group of exiles, led by Ezra and Nehemiah in 458 BC and 445 BC.

The Lord also promised to bring His people out of the West Country, which is probably reported in Joel 3: 6-7, where the prophet rebuked the Tyrians for selling Hebrew prisoners as slaves to the Greeks. God Himself would do vengeance against Tyre, freeing the slaves. According to the historian Flavius Josephus, Alexander and his successors rejected the Jewish slaves of Greece and allowed them to return to their country. It was the fulfillment of the prophecy, freeing the Jews that had been sold to the Greeks by the Philistines and Tyrians. In turn, the city of Tyre was invaded in 332 BC by Alexander the Great when he seized the Persian Empire and established his (‘I will turn your deeds back upon your own heads’ – Joel 3: 7). In verse 8 He confirms

that He will bring them back to Jerusalem, and they will be His people, and He will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness. ‘In faithfulness and in righteousness’ means that He is faithful to His own word, speaking the truth and doing justice to them; and they will respond to that righteousness by obeying His just law.

- Zech. 8: 9-23: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Let your hands be strong – you that have recently been hearing these words from the mouths of the prophets who were present when the foundation was laid for the rebuilding of the temple, the house of the Lord of hosts. For before those days there were no wages for people or for animals, nor was there any safety from the foe for those who went out or came in, and I set them all against one another [NIV: Before that time there were no wages for man or beast. No one could go about his business safely because of his enemy, for I had turned every man against his neighbor]. But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, says the Lord of hosts. For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things [NIV: The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people]. Just as you have been a cursing among the nations [NIV: an object of cursing among the nations], O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you and you shall be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong. For thus says the Lord of hosts: Just as I purposed to bring disaster upon you, when your ancestors provoked me to wrath [NIV: and showed no pity when your fathers angered me], and I did not relent, says the Lord of hosts, so again I have purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; do not be afraid. These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the Lord. The word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying: Thus says the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful festivals for the house of Judah: therefore love truth and peace. Thus says the Lord of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, the inhabitants of many cities; the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Come, let us go to entreat the favor of the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts; I myself am going.’ Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favor of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”

- v. 9: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Let your hands be strong—you that have **recently** been hearing these words from the mouths of the prophets who were present when the foundation was laid for the rebuilding of the temple, the house of the Lord of hosts” – once again the Lord encourages His people to rebuild, for they have heard the words of His prophets Haggai and Zechariah, now in 520 BC, when they re-started the edification of the temple, after 16 years of stagnation.

- v. 10: “**For before those days** there were no wages for people or for animals, nor was there any safety from the foe for those who went out or came in, and I set them all against one another [NIV: Before that time there were no wages for man or beast. No one could go about his business safely because of his enemy, for I had turned every man

against his neighbor]” – this means the 16 years of stagnation, where the temple could not be built because of the threat of the people around. There was no reward for the labor (Hag. 1: 5-6; 9-11), neither for man nor for animal, for there was neither security nor peace to work; besides they labored more for their particular things than for the temple of the Lord, and He withheld the rain and the product of their crops. Now they received from God the approval and the strength to rebuild, not only the temple, but their lives as well.

• v. 11-12: “But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, says the Lord of hosts. For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things [NIV: The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people].”

‘As in the former days [NIV: as I did in the past]’ – that is, with those returning from Babylon (Hag. 1: 5-6; 9-11). Now there will be peace and the earth will bear its fruit. There will be rain for the crops, and people will truly feel heirs of the land of Israel. His promise of blessing and grace is reaffirmed so that they begin to rebuild (verses 13-15). They will cease to be a curse among the nations, and will become a blessing because the Lord will work alongside them.

From v. 16, He gives them the guidelines to be blessed and successful in the work that lies before them and that their fasting and prayers may be accepted: speak the truth to one another, judge rightly in their courts, not to think evil in their hearts against their neighbor, nor swear falsely, to love truth and peace.

Then the Lord speaks again about the four fasts established post-exile, and now have His blessing. They shall be a feast day for Judah: the fast of the fourth and the fifth month, the seventh, and the fast of tenth month. In Zech. 8: 19 we can see four months of fasting observed by the Jews and instituted post-exile, which marked the disasters of Jewish history. The bible says: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful festivals for the house of Judah: therefore love truth and peace.”

Let’s explain what situation God was referring to:

Four month (2 Kin. 25: 3 – the city of Jerusalem was taken by the Babylonians)

Fifth month (2 Kin. 25: 8 – the temple was burned)

Seventh month (Jer. 41: 1 – Gedaliah was killed). Gedaliah (Jer. 40: 5 – son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan) was whom the king of Babylon appointed governor of the cities of Judah. This fast is not to be confused with the fast of the Atonement Day (Ex. 30: 10; Lev. 16: 29-34; Lev. 23: 26-32), ‘Yom Kippur.’

Tenth month (2 kin. 25: 1; Ezek. 24: 1 – when Babylonian army besieged the city of Jerusalem) – the 1<sup>st</sup> of the four fasts.

• v. 20-21: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, the inhabitants of many cities; the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Come, let us go to entreat the favor of the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts; I myself am going.’”

Here we already have a transition to the times of the gospel when people of many nations came to know Jesus and to be healed by Him.

- v. 22-23: “Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favor of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”

Here it is very clear that it is about the times of the gospel, during the ministry of Jesus and during Pentecost, when Jews who came from all nations to the Passover in Jerusalem were converted after the speech of Peter (Acts 2: 10-11; 37-41). Surely there were not only Jews there at the feast, but also Gentiles who came to worship the God of Israel at Jerusalem.

- v. 23 – ‘ten men’ or ‘many men’, in the original.

‘From nations of every language’ – this means that the Gentiles were already in God’s plan for salvation. No nation will be excluded anymore.

## Chapter 9

The second part of the book of Zechariah refers to his prophecies in the period when he was already old (Zc 9 – 14). Some of them talk about the coming of the Messiah with His salvation for the people truly repentant. In regard to the ancient Jews, we have here the impression that the first enthusiasm had given way to coldness, formality, to a weak leadership and the fear of the attack from Greece. In some of them there is also allusion to eschatological events. There are several references to Zechariah in the New Testament: Matt. 21: 5 cf. Zech. 9: 9 – the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem; Matt. 27: 9-10 cf. Zech. 11: 13 – Judas returns the money of his treason; the potter's field described by Zechariah, in Acts 1: 19 called Akeldama ('Field of Blood'); Rev. 1: 7 cf. Zech. 12: 10 – the Jews will see the One whom they have pierced; the moment of repentance.

- Zech. 9: 1-8 (Judgment of Israel's enemies): "The word of the Lord is against the land of Hadrach and will rest upon Damascus. For to the Lord belongs the capital of Aram, as do all the tribes of Israel [NIV: 'for the eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel are on the Lord' or 'For the eye of the Lord is on all mankind, as well as on the tribes of Israel']; Hamath also, which borders on it, Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise [NIV: through they are very skillful]. Tyre has built itself a rampart, and heaped up silver like dust, and gold like the dirt of the streets. But now, the Lord will strip it of its possessions and hurl its wealth into the sea [NIV: and destroy her power on the sea], and it shall be devoured by fire. Ashkelon shall see it and be afraid; Gaza too, and shall writhe in anguish; Ekron also, because its hopes are withered. The king shall perish from Gaza [NIV: Gaza will lose her king]; Ashkelon shall be uninhabited [NIV: will be deserted]; a mongrel people shall settle in Ashdod, and I will make an end of the pride of Philistia [NIV: Foreigners will occupy Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines]. I will take away its blood from its mouth, and its abominations from between its teeth [NIV: I will take the blood from their mouths, the forbidden food from between their teeth]; it too shall be a remnant for our God; it shall be like a clan in Judah, and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites [NIV: Those who are left will belong to our God and become leaders in Judah, and Ekron will be like the Jebusites]. Then I will encamp at my house as a guard, so that no one shall march to and fro; no oppressor shall again overrun them, for now I have seen with my own eyes [NIV: But I will defend my house against marauding forces. Never again will an oppressor overturn my people, for now I am keeping watch]."

- v. 1-2: "The word of the Lord is against the land of Hadrach and will rest upon Damascus. For to the Lord belongs the capital of Aram, as do all the tribes of Israel [NIV: 'for the eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel are on the Lord' or 'For the eye of the Lord is on all mankind, as well as on the tribes of Israel']; Hamath also, which borders on it, Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise [NIV: through they are very skillful]."

Here the Lord utters His sentence against Damascus and mentions the cities of Hadrach and Hamath (v. 2) along with this warning. Hadrach was a city to the north of Syria, called Hatarikka, in Assyrian, to the south of Aleppo. It was an important city in Celesyria. Celesyria or Coele-Syria is the region to the north of Syria, later taken by Romans and Parthians. Damascus, Hamath and Arpad were allies. Isaiah had prophesied about Damascus (Isa. 17: 1-3; Isa. 7: 8), just as Amos (Am. 1: 3-5), referring to Assyria between the reigns of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC), Shalmaneser V (727-

722 BC) and Sargon II (722-705 BC). Tiglath-Pileser III conquered Damascus in 732 BC and it was reduced to subsidiary town within the Assyrian province of Hamath. Shalmaneser V besieged Samaria for three years (2 Kin. 17: 5; 2 Kin. 18: 9-11) while Sargon II captured it in the year he ascended the throne (Exile of Israel to Assyria – 722 BC). Damascus remained under Assyrian yoke. The kingdom of Damascus was destroyed by Assyria, but the city remained, and it is to this city that Jeremiah prophesies (Jer. 49: 23-27). The fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy occurred, probably, in 581 BC, about five years after the destruction of Jerusalem (586 BC) by Nebuchadnezzar. Thenceforth it lost its political influence, remaining with only economic influence (Ezek. 27: 18). Therefore, Zechariah's prophecy here already referred to what had been left of the city of Damascus after the Babylonian's destruction, partially regaining its economic power during the Persian Period. But it would suffer afterwards under Alexander the Great and the establishment of the Seleucid Empire in that territory, trying to dispute power over the region of Coele-Syria. It was once again capital in 111 BC, during the Seleucid rule of Antiochus IX Cyzicenus (115-96 BC). Aretas (a Nabataean king) conquered the city in 85 BC, later handing it over to Tigranes II of Armenia (83-69 BC). From 64 BC until 30 AD it was Roman domain.

Hamath, 'Fortress' or 'sacred enclosure' was a city and kingdom of upper Syria, on the banks of the Orontes River. It was the boundary of that territory, given to the Israelites (Num. 13: 21), but they didn't take possession of that land. Hamath was of great importance and prosperity in the time of David (2 Sam. 8: 9-10) and Solomon, who built storehouses there (2 Chr. 8: 4; 2 Kin. 14: 28). After Solomon's death, Hamath became a free state again, and retained its independence until King Jeroboam II of Israel (782-753 BC) took it from Judah, destroying its fortifications (2 Kin. 14: 28). Later, Hamath became part of the Assyrian Empire (2 Kin. 18: 34; Isa. 10: 9), passing to the Chaldeans in the time of Zedekiah (Jer. 39: 5; Jer. 49: 23; Jer. 52: 9; 27). It was not only an important commercial center, but had also become remarkable due to its irrigation system by means of large wheels ('norias'), which brought up the water from the river Orontes to be taken to the upper city. It is now known by the name of Hama. It was also part of the Persian and Greek Empire.

Also in verses 1 and 2, the prophet mentions the cities of Phoenicia: Tyre and Sidon, and says that their wisdom (NIV, skill) is great. Sidon was a great city near Tyre, strongly linked to it by trade, and called by some the mother of Tyre, for it is supposed that this one was built and inhabited for the first time by a colony of Sidonians. 'The sea' (Isa. 23: 4) was that part of the sea where Tyre was, and from where ships and men were sent to all countries. Tyre was known as 'the fortress of the sea' not only because of its strength and commercial power, but because it defended that part of the sea of pirates and invaders who tried to dominate the continent. The commerce of the whole world was gathered in the warehouses of Tyre. Its merchants were the first to sail through the Mediterranean, founding colonies on the coast and neighboring islands of the Aegean Sea (Greece), on the North of Africa coast (in Carthage), Sicily, Corsica and the Iberian peninsula.

**Tyre** was the main seaport on the coast of Phoenicia. Tyre is called 'côr' (in Hebrew); in Greek, 'tyros', and means 'rock', 'fortress.' In the times of the Old Testament, Phoenicia was called Canaan, and its inhabitants, Canaanites, which means 'traders.' In Greek, Phoenicia is called Phoinikē, Φοινίκη, 'land of the palm trees.' Some historians give it the meaning of 'land of purple', for it produced purple paint extracted from the shell of a shellfish called Murex, to dye the robes of kings and nobles. Tyre was founded around 2750 BC according to Herodotus, and was originally



built as a walled city in the mainland. In Ancient times, Tyre was divided into two parts: one, called 'Old Tyre', which lay on the mainland (where the 'old' harbor was), and the city built on a small rocky island about seven hundred and seventy yards off shore (The 'New Tyre'). By 1485 BC, Tyre marketed luxury goods with Egypt as well as wheat. Around 1200 BC, the Philistines besieged Sidon, and its inhabitants fled to Tyre, which became known as 'daughter of Sidon' (Isa. 23: 12). With the decline of Egypt, the city became independent, and its rulers began to dominate most of the coastal cities of Phoenicia, including the interior of Lebanon. It was called the 'the marketplace of nations' or 'the merchant of the nations' because of its great trade with countless nations (Is 23: 2-3). In the time of David and Solomon, Israel kept good commercial relations with Tyre (2 Sam. 5: 11; 1 Kin. 5: 1-12; 1 Chr. 14: 1), whose people was ruled a long time by their native kings. It was Hiram I (979-945 AC) that built a land bridge (an artificial isthmus) connecting the island to the mainland, where the principal port was. The Assyrians destroyed this land bridge, probably in 719 BC, when the New Tyre of the island was looted. During two centuries the Assyrians subjugated Tyre.

The Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC) besieged the port of Tyre (841 BC), which began to pay him tribute. Then, the New Tyre was besieged by Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC), beginning in 724 BC, more or less by the same time of the fall of Samaria. And in 720 BC the city fell in the hands of Sargon II (722-705 BC). Sidon and the Old Tyre, in the mainland, were soon plundered in 720 BC; but the New Tyre, in the island, only fell in 719 BC. When Sennacherib (705-681 BC) came in 701 BC, its ruler ran away and died in exile. The years that followed with Esarhaddon (681-669 BC) were of great competition for the dominion of the city, which came to fall in 664 BC by the hand of Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC), taking many people into captivity. With the downfall of Assyria, Tyre regained its autonomy for some time but Jeremiah prophesied its fall before the Babylonians, just as Ezekiel. The Babylonians destroyed many of the coastal cities of Phoenicia, and Tyre weakened. Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Tyre for thirteen years (582-569 BC), and when the city surrendered he appointed judges to govern it; but was unable to capture the Island of Tyre (the New Tyre). For almost a decade, Tyre paid tribute to him. In 539 BC Cyrus conquered the city for the Persian Empire and it remained under its dominion. The inhabitants of Tyre supplied Israel with cedar wood for the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem (Ezr. 3: 7). At this point in History, Tyre was an arrogant and proud city that relied on itself, thinking it was unassailable because of its fortresses; also boasted in its riches and in the power of its commerce (Zech. 9: 3).

- v. 3-4: Zechariah says that the wisdom of Tyre consisted of the building of fortresses in the Old Tyre of the mainland and in the city of the island (the New Tyre), and in the ability to accumulate gold and silver ('Tyre has heaped up silver like dust, and gold like the dirt of the streets'); and Ezekiel confirms the wisdom of his king to acquire not only gold and silver, but to come to power. He also had the wisdom of trade and diplomacy to deal with nations. In Ezek. 28: 1-7 this can be seen, and according to ancient historians, Josephus and Philostratus (Lucius Flavius Philostratus, an Athenian philosopher, 150-250 AD), the king of Tyre in question was Ithobaal III (or Ethbaal III – 591-573 BC). In Isaiah 23: 8, the prophet says that Tyre was a bestower of crowns, whose merchants were princes and its traders were the most honored of the earth. It is said that Tyre was a bestower of crowns because there has been always a great succession of kings in this city; or, because, serving many nations, the city honored many kings of many nations. His merchants (traders) were as respectable as if they were princes and nobles. But the Lord planned its fall to destroy the pride and beauty of Tyre,

and to humiliate its 'princes', its merchants. There is also reference to Tyre in: Isa. 23: 1-18; Ezek. 26: 1 – 28: 26; Am. 1: 9-10; Matt. 11: 21-22; Lk. 10: 13-14.

Amos rebuked them for having given Hebrew prisoners to the Edomites (Am. 1: 9-10); and Joel, for selling Hebrew prisoners as slaves to the Greeks (Joel 3: 6-8). Ezekiel (Ezek. 27: 13) also speaks of the trade of Tyre with Javan (the ancestors of the Greeks), Meshech and Tubal involving slaves. Isaiah, like Ezekiel, prophesied its fall.

While the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel (Ezek. 27: 1-36) were directed against the Old city of Tyre on the mainland and were fulfilled by the Assyrians and Nebuchadnezzar, the prophecy of Zechariah seems to be against New Tyre on the island, and which was apparently impregnable, for it was protected by a double wall and a considerable height, and was surrounded by the sea in all its extension. Tyre was on the route of Alexander the Great, from the Mediterranean to Egypt.

It closed the gates to the Greeks, but after the seven-month siege and the construction of a new bridge (a causeway on a natural land bridge) to the island's fortress (New Tyre), Alexander conquered it in 332 BC. Thus the prophecy of Ezekiel (Ezek. 26 – 28) was fulfilled fully. The great and arrogant Tyre has finally become a place for fishermen to dry their nets. The prophecy of Zech. 9: 4 can also fit here: "But now, the Lord will strip it of its possessions and hurl its wealth into the sea [NIV: and destroy her power on the sea], and it shall be devoured by fire."

Antigonus I Monophthalmus, one of Alexander's successors came back to besiege it in 315-314 BC. The Seleucids rebuilt the city and then the area became a Roman province (64 BC). Herod the Great rebuilt its main temple. Acts 21: 3-6 shows that there were Christians there in the first century AD, for in Tyre a Christian church was founded after the death of Stephen; and the apostle Paul stayed there for seven days when he returned from his third missionary journey to spend Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 21: 3-6).

In the Middle Ages the city also suffered other sieges:

- Fatimid Caliphate – 996-998 AD
- The Crusaders (Baldwin I of Jerusalem) – 1111-1112 AD
- Venetian Crusaders – 1124 AD
- Ayyubid dynasty (1171-1246 DC), under Saladin – 1187 AD

• v. 5-7: "Ashkelon shall see it and be afraid; **Gaza** too, and shall writhe in anguish; **Ekron** also, because its hopes are withered. The king shall perish from Gaza [NIV: Gaza will lose her king]; **Ashkelon** shall be uninhabited [NIV: will be deserted]; a mongrel people shall settle in **Ashdod**, and I will make an end of the pride of Philistia [NIV: Foreigners will occupy Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines]. I will take away its blood from its mouth, and its abominations from between its teeth [NIV: I will take the blood from their mouths, the forbidden food from between their teeth]; it too shall be a remnant for our God; it shall be like a clan in Judah, and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites [NIV: Those who are left will belong to our God and become leaders in Judah, and Ekron will be like the Jebusites]" – cf. Isa. 14: 20-31; Jer. 47: 1-7; Ezek. 25: 15-17; Joel 3: 4-8; Am. 1: 6-8; Zeph. 2: 4-7.

Zechariah speaks here of the divine judgment over the Philistines, and this judgment would be made by Alexander the Great, and later finished by the descendants of the Maccabees.

**Gath** is omitted here, perhaps because it is somewhat far away from the route of Alexander the Great to Egypt. In Joel (Jl 3: 8) it is written: "I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a nation far away; for the Lord has spoken" – that is, to sell the children of

the Tyrians and of the Philistines to the Sabeans. Darius II and Artaxerxes II (404-358 BC), his son, and especially Alexander the Great, reduced the power of the Phoenicians and the Philistines. After the capture of Tyre and Gaza by the latter conqueror, multitudes of Philistines and thirty thousand Tyrians were sold as slaves. Thus, God tells the Jews, in the same way, to sell these foreign slaves to the Sabeans. The Sabeans (Shba'iy or Shba') were the first progenitors of a district of Ethiopia. Shba'iy is a variation of the Hebrew word Cba'iy, or Cba' (Isa. 45: 14), referring to the descendants of Cush, the son of Ham, who established his nation (Seba or Sheba; in Hebrew, s<sup>e</sup>bha' or sh<sup>e</sup>bha'), which later came to be Ethiopia. Seba is related to Sheba, also son of Cush, that settled down to the south of Arabia. Seba (s<sup>e</sup>bha') and Sheba (sh<sup>e</sup>bha') are the forms (ancient Arabic and Hebrew) of the people of the kingdom of Sheba.

Likewise, Zechariah foretells the defeat of Ashkelon, Ekron and Gaza, whose king will perish. Alexander the Great took Gaza after five months of siege. Ten thousand of its inhabitants died and the rest were sold as slaves. Gaza occupied an important position in some trade routes between Egypt and western Asia. The city was finally desolated in 93 BC by Alexander Jannaeus, as had been prophesied by Am. 1: 6-7; Zeph. 2: 4 and Zech. 9: 5. That's why God said through the prophet Zechariah: 'it too shall be a remnant for our God; it shall be like a clan in Judah' because it was taken by Alexander Jannaeus, of Hasmonean lineage and who ruled as high priest in Judah in the period of 103-76 BC. In 57 BC, Aulus Gabinus (Roman Proconsul in Syria – 57-55 BC) rebuilt the city in a new location, south of the former location, closer to the sea, which remains occupied until today, but the archaeological sites discovered very little about it.

- 'A mongrel people shall settle in Ashdod [NIV: Foreigners will occupy Ashdod]' – In 604 BC Ashdod refused to pay tribute to Nebuchadnezzar and was plundered by him. The city had already been sacked in 711 BC by Sargon II (Isa. 20: 1; Isa. 14: 29). In the case of Zechariah's prophecy, the term 'mongrel people' [NIV: foreigners] may refer to the Greeks or the Maccabees, who undertook various attacks to this city by its continued idolatry. Herod restored it and named it Azotus (Acts 8: 40).

- 'I will take away its blood from its mouth, and its abominations from between its teeth [NIV: I will take the blood from their mouths, the forbidden food from between their teeth]; it too shall be a remnant for our God; it shall be like a clan in Judah, and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites [NIV: Those who are left will belong to our God and become leaders in Judah, and Ekron will be like the Jebusites]' (v. 7) – as for the abominations, the prophet is referring to the food consecrated to the idols, and says that God would remove that idolatry. But a remnant of the Philistines will be converted and receive honor and dignity from the Lord as if they were leaders in Judah, even because these five Philistine cities were in the territory of Judah in the division of land made by Joshua.

- '... and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites' – when the land of Canaan was distributed by Joshua, the Jebusites were not conquered by the Israelites (Josh. 15: 63; Judg. 1: 21). It was David who invaded their fortress in Zion and subdued them (Jerusalem was called Jebus), and incorporated them into the Jewish nation, placing them as servants (2 Sam. 5: 10; 2 Sam. 24: 16; 1 Chr. 11: 4-9; 1 Chr. 21: 18; 20-25), that is, in a lower civil position. Solomon imposed to them forced labor in building the temple: 1 Kin. 9: 20-21. So the Philistines, though they were strangers, would be accepted by the Lord, just as all the Gentiles, but they would be servants of the Israelites, just as the Jebusites were in the past. Ekron is the symbol of their cities, as well as of all the remnant Philistine people, placed as a tributary of the Israelites.

• v. 8: “Then I will encamp at my house as a guard, so that no one shall march to and fro; no oppressor shall again overrun them, for now I have seen with my own eyes [NIV: But I will defend my house against marauding forces. Never again will an oppressor overturn my people, for now I am keeping watch].”

• ‘My house’ here is more than the temple; it is the city of Jerusalem. This prophecy would be to reassure the Jews involved in the construction of the temple, who feared a new attack by the surrounding peoples and even by the Persians at the time. If we think of the emotional part of those who have returned from captivity, we may suppose that they were unmotivated, demoralized, and in fear, so God raised up His prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage them (Ezr. 5: 1-2; Ezr. 3: 3; Neh. 2: 17-18; Zech. 1: 1-3; Hag. 1: 1-4; 8; 12-15; Hag. 2: 6-9). With the power of the Holy Spirit they were able to rebuild the altar, the temple and the city of Jerusalem. The faith of Ezra and Nehemiah was a great point of support for them.

• ‘Marauding forces’ – It seems to be related to the future advance of Alexander the Great from Turkey (where the battle of Issus took place on 5<sup>th</sup> November, 333 BC when he defeated Darius III for the first time) to Egypt, passing through Phoenicia, Philistia and Judea.

It does not seem to concern the Persians, since Cyrus was used by God to help in the repatriation of the Jews, and with the exception of Cambyses II (who was more interested in conquering Egypt), the Persian rulers who followed (Darius I and Artaxerxes I) supplied the exiles, the cities of Judah and Jerusalem with goods, livestock and voluntary gifts not only for rebuilding the temple (Ezra 1: 6-11) but also with basic things to rebuild their homes and their lives.

• Xerxes I (Ahasuerus – אחשורוש), son of Darius I, is mentioned in the book of Esther as someone who bestowed favor on the Jews. Xerxes is a Greek transliteration of his Persian name after his ascension, Jshāyār Shah, meaning ‘ruler of heroes.’ In the bible his name is mentioned as Ahasuerus (in Hebrew), being written as Ahashuerus, in Chaldean. Axashverosh is the Greek transliteration of this last name. He repressed revolts in Egypt and Babylon immediately after ascending the throne.

• His son, Artaxerxes I, favored the coming of Ezra and Nehemiah with the second and third groups of exiles, and therefore did not invade Jerusalem.

The Persian kings in sequence had no interest in Judea:

• Darius II was occupied with palatial intrigues and revolts in Media.

• Artaxerxes II was involved in the wars against Greece. His biggest problem was Egypt, which revolted against him from the beginning of his reign. He was unsuccessful in his first attempt of conquest in this nation.

• Artaxerxes III or Ochus began two great campaigns against Egypt. The 1<sup>st</sup> failed and rebellions appeared in the western part of the empire, because Philip II of Macedonia (father of Alexander the Great) began to strengthen in Greece. He won the 2<sup>nd</sup> campaign against Egypt, exercising strict control there and plundering temples.

• Artaxerxes IV or Arses (younger son of Artaxerxes III) ascended the throne after the murder of his father and most of his family by Bagoas, the principal prince of Persia. Arses was a puppet in his hands, until with the help of the nobles he killed Bagoas. Hostilities with Macedonia resumed under Philip II of Macedonia and Alexander the Great.

• Darius III, the cousin and successor of Arses, spent his reign in battles against Alexander, who eventually took over the Persian Empire.

• ‘So that no one shall march to and fro; no oppressor shall again overrun them [NIV: Never again will an oppressor overturn my people]’ – like all these prophecies,

this type of promise will be actually fulfilled in the end times, as Jesus said, and in relation to His first coming, because He brought us the revelation about the spiritual things, and put us above them to exercise the authority that He also bestowed on us. Spiritually speaking, the enemy can no longer destroy a child of God who is sealed with His blood and who walks on His ways. We are the Israel of God, our spirit is the temple where He dwells; and Jerusalem corresponds to our soul, which needs to be rebuilt and protected by His blood.

If we look from the human point of view, temporal, the prophet Zechariah could not be speaking of an eternal peace thenceforth, for many oppressors passed through Jerusalem, before and after the captivity in Babylon, but this prophecy is placed in a moment of History where God was giving His people a chance to be restored and prepared for the coming of the Messiah. The lack of motivation after the return, aggravated by the opposition of the surrounding peoples prevented them not only to rebuild the temple of the Lord but to see their honor before the nations. Therefore, at this time (520-518 BC), the prophet was logically speaking of things closer in time. We saw that the Persians (especially Darius I), that very moment, were more concerned with repressing the revolutions of the powerful nations that rose up against them to take away their might than to worry about Jews again, hurting them, when by the order of God they themselves had been raised up to restore His people.

We may also think that soon after the days of Alexander, when the Ptolemies and Seleucids began to reign and dispute many lands in the Levant, Jerusalem saw no peace, for Antiochus IV, for example, invaded the city, killed a pig on the altar and provoked the revolt of the Maccabees. When Rome manifested itself as the next empire to rule the world, Pompey entered the holy city and defiled the temple with its pagan presence in there, though not exerting the violence of Titus. Therefore, the verse above may relate to some events in the time of Alexander the Great, since it follows those who speak of the destruction of the cities of Philistia by this conqueror.

Let's take a look at the main events during the reign of Alexander the Great (Alexander III of Macedonia) at that moment in History:

In 332 BC, Alexander besieged the city of Tyre, killed all men of military age, and sold the women and children as slaves. He remained in Phoenicia and Syria for about three months. The crops were stored and the supplies were taken to the Euphrates. The satrap of Syria stopped collecting the necessary supplies and Alexander replaced him. Then the Jews of Samaria rebelled and killed the satrap, suffering retaliation from Alexander because of their attitude. He removed most of the population and made Samaria a mixed city, like Gerasa (in Decapolis). After crushing the Persian resistance in Tyre, Alexander followed by the coast line until Egypt taking the cities of Philistia. Historian Flavius Josephus reported that when the Macedonians entered Jerusalem the Jews showed Alexander a prophecy of the book of Daniel (Dan. 8: 21; Dan. 11: 3), which described a mighty Greek king who would conquer the Persian Empire. He then spared Jerusalem from destruction and advanced to Egypt.

When passing through Gaza, he found resistance. The city was fortified and built near mountains, and the Macedonians besieged it. Alexander was wounded during the battle, but his army destroyed the city, killing civilians and selling thousands of others as slaves. Alexander followed along the Mediterranean coast, and in 332 BC he entered Egypt, hailed as the deliverer of the people. Even after his death he was treated as a deity. There he founded the city of Alexandria in 332 BC, which was one of the most prosperous urban centers of Ancient times and capital of Ptolemaic Egypt. With Egypt under his control, Alexander did not return by the way of Jerusalem, but followed

towards Babylon, in Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq), the center of the Persian Empire. For the second time, he confronted Darius III, now at the Battle of Gaugamela, also called the Battle of Arbela (Gaugamela corresponds to the current town of Tel Gomel near Erbil or Arbil, in Iraq – 331 BC), and defeated him, subjecting the Persian Empire to his control. Darius III fled as he had done in the first defeat at Issus (in the eastern part of Cilicia in Asia Minor). This time he fled to Ecbatana (former capital of Media, and modern city of Hamedan). The city of Babylon let the Macedonian army enter freely through its gates so that it would not be destroyed. After conquering Babylon, Alexander went to Susa in Persia, which was one of the principal capitals of the Achaemenid Dynasty (the first capital of Elam), and plundered its treasures.

Most of his army was sent across the Persian royal road to Persepolis, another important city of Persia (along with Pasargadae), while Alexander led the vanguard with a group of soldiers, crossing the ‘Persian Gates’ in the Zagros Mountains (a high and extensive mountain range in Iran and Iraq, from northwestern Iran to the Strait of Hormuz). The ‘Persian Gates’ was a narrow gorge on the mountain, now called Tang-e Meyran, linking the coast to the central part of Persia, and was controlled by the Achaemenid troops of the satrap Ariobarzan (Ariobarzanes). It was a dangerous route in early winter, and they were heavily defended, but they were defeated by the Macedonians (330 BC), and the city of Persepolis had its great treasures looted. There, Alexander stayed for five months. Darius III was killed (330 BC) by one of his own commanders, a satrap who claimed to be his successor on the throne, but was also killed by the Greek conqueror. Alexander himself buried Darius’ body and gave him a worthy funeral. The death of Darius is considered as the final event of the Achaemenid Empire. In 323 BC Alexander died in the old palace of Nebuchadnezzar II at the age of 32. Historians, Diodorus and Plutarch, differ as to the cause of his death, and one of the hypotheses is poisoning. His wine could be poisoned with a plant well known to the Greeks, the hellebore, which produced symptoms similar to those described: fever and severe pain. Also his death was attributed to many natural causes, like malaria and typhoid fever, since his general state had declined due to years of heavy drinking and severe wounds in his body due to the battles. India was the limit of conquest of Alexander the Great, who sought to conquer a little more of East Asia and Western Greece.

- ‘For now I have seen with my own eyes’ [NIV: for now I am keeping watch] (v. 8) – God has always looked to His people since their captivity in Egypt (Ex. 2: 25; Ex. 3: 7). He saw how Jerusalem was oppressed by many peoples, especially the Assyrians and the Babylonians. He was aware of their mistakes. But now He saw the building of His city and His temple; He saw His people free, protected by Himself, and at the same time contemplating the judgment of their enemies and manifesting to the world His justice and His strength.

- Zech. 9: 9-17 (The coming of Zion’s king): “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth [NIV: I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extent from sea to sea, and from the River (*that is, the Euphrates*) to the ends of the earth (or ‘to the end of the land’, meaning the nation of Israel)]. As for you also (*He talks to Zion*), because of the



blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double. For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will arouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword [NIV: and make you like a warrior's sword]. Then the Lord will appear over them, and his arrow go forth like lightning; the Lord God will sound the trumpet and march forth in the whirlwinds of the south [NIV: in the storms of the south]. The Lord of hosts will protect them [NIV: and the Lord Almighty will shield them], and they shall devour and tread down the slingers [NIV: They will destroy and overcome with slingstones]; they shall drink their blood like wine, and be full like a bowl, drenched like the corners of the altar [NIV: They will drink and roar as with wine; they will full like a bowl used for sprinkling the corners of the altar]. On that day the Lord their God will save them for they are the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land. For what goodness and beauty are his! [NIV: How attractive and beautiful they will be!] Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women."

- v. 9: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" – the prophet makes a sudden transition to the times of the first coming of Jesus, the Messiah, the King, who enters Jerusalem in a very different way from the conquerors of the past. This is an allusion to the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, mounted on a donkey, reported in Matt. 21: 5; Jn. 12: 15:

- "When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately.' This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, **5** 'Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!'" (Matt. 21: 1-9)

- "The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel!' Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: **15** 'Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!' His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him" (Jn. 12: 12-16).

The prophet says in the name of the Lord that Jerusalem must rejoice over this, for its true King and Lord comes, bringing a greater victory than His people expected: His righteousness and His salvation. And this conqueror would come humbly, riding on a donkey, not on a warhorse. Jesus would come as a meek and humble king, contrary to what the Jews always expected in regard to their Messiah. This verse of Zechariah can also be applied to the Jews, who will see the Lord coming to save them at His second coming (Rom. 11: 26).

The ancient patriarchs (Gen. 22: 3; Gen. 42: 27; Gen. 44: 3), prophets (1 Kin. 13: 23) and judges (Judg. 5: 10 – ‘white donkeys’; Judg. 10: 4 – ‘donkeys’; Judg. 12: 14 – ‘donkeys’), used to ride donkeys before the introduction and multiplication of horses in the time of Solomon and forbidden by the law of God (Deut. 17: 16). It is obvious that a country needed horses as a necessary equipment for its defense in the event of war or for use of government, but what God said in Deut 17: 16 was not to multiply horses, leading the king to make certain mistakes like, for example: the increase in interchange with foreign nations (especially Egypt), the establishment of military despotism, the ostentatious power of the king and his army before the subjects (military parades) and even a dependence on Egypt in time of war, leaving aside the trust in God. David could not win in his military campaigns with mules alone. Jesus, like the ancient patriarchs, kings and prophets, entered Jerusalem this way, on a donkey.

A parenthesis here – the text of Deut. 17: 17 also gives other guidelines to a king: “And he must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; also silver and gold he must not acquire in great quantity for himself.” This was to avoid the practice of polygamy of neighboring countries, whose kings had numerous harems. A king should restrain his passions, unlike an ordinary man of the people. The bible writes “or else his heart will turn away”, this is because women has a great power of influence over men; many women would negatively influence a king in the performance of his duties. And the guideline not to acquire silver and gold in great quantity means that the kings were forbidden to accumulate money for private purposes. This would demonstrate that he also behaved differently than a wicked man, who was greedy; if he misused his money, he could be a bad example for his subjects.

Returning to the case of donkeys and mules: David gave orders to prepare a mule for Solomon and to lead him to Gihon, where he would be anointed king of Israel (1 Kin. 1: 33; 38; 44). The mule is a word applied to the crossbreed of the horse and the donkey, and this began at the end of David’s reign (2 Sam. 13: 29; 1 Kin. 10: 25; 2 Chr. 9: 24: ‘mules’), because it was not customary among the Jews before this time (Lev. 19: 19). The mule (female or male animal) is always barren. The mules combine the strength of the horse with the resistance and the firm step of the donkey and have enough vigor; but are symbol of stubbornness or something difficult to move, stuck and without understanding (Ps. 32: 9). Like the donkey, the mule is also a beast of burden and transport (Isa. 66: 20).

On the other hand, the donkey is the symbol of **docility, humility, bondage, or service** (Gen. 22: 3; 5; Gen. 42: 26-27; Gen. 44: 13; Gen. 49: 14; Ex. 23: 5; Num. 22: 27; 32; Deut. 22: 10; Josh. 9: 4; 1 Sam. 16: 20; 1 Sam. 25: 18; 2 Sam. 16: 1-2; 1 Kin. 13: 29; 1 Chr. 12: 40; 2 Chr. 28: 15; Prov. 26: 3; Isa. 1: 3; Isa. 30: 6; Isa. 30: 24; Isa. 32: 20; Zech. 9: 9), and was the most common **means of transport** (Ex. 4: 20; Num. 22: 21-23; 25; Josh. 15: 18; Judg. 1: 14; Judg. 19: 3; Judg. 19: 10; 19; 21; 28; 1 Sam. 25: 20; 23; 42; 2 Sam. 17: 23; 2 Sam. 19: 26; 1 Kin. 2: 40; 1 Kin. 13: 13; 23; 24; 27; 28; 2 Kin. 4: 22; 24; Zech. 9: 9); it was also an animal **used for housework** (Gen. 22: 3; 5; Gen. 36: 24; Ex. 23: 12; Deut. 5: 14; 1 Sam. 10: 2; 14; 16; Job 1: 14) and **taken into account in the evaluation of the wealth of a man**, as his property, or as a **spoil of war** (Gen. 12: 16; Gen. 24: 35; Gen. 30: 43; Gen. 32: 5; Gen. 32: 15; Gen. 34: 28; Gen. 43: 18; 24; Gen. 44: 3; Gen. 45: 23; Gen. 47: 17; Gen. 49: 11; Ex. 9: 3; Ex. 20: 17; Ex. 21: 33; Ex. 22: 4; 9; 10; Ex. 23: 4; Num. 16: 15; Num. 31: 28; Num. 31: 30; 34; 39; 45; Deut. 5: 14; 21; Deut. 22: 3; 4; Deut. 28: 31; Josh. 6: 21; Josh. 7: 24; Judg. 6: 4; Judg. 10: 4; Judg. 12: 14; 1 Sam. 8: 16; 1 Sam. 9: 3; 5; 20; 1 Sam. 12: 3; 1 Sam. 15: 3; 1 Sam. 22: 19; 1 Sam. 27: 9; 2 Kin. 7: 7; 10; 1 Chr. 5: 21; 1 Chr. 27: 30; Ezr. 2: 67; Neh. 7: 69; Job 1: 3; Job 24: 3; Job 42: 12; Isa. 1: 3; Isa. 21: 7; Zech. 14: 15).

In the bible there are other unusual verses and other meanings for the donkey:

Gen. 16: 12 (Ishmael – wild donkey)  
 Gen. 49: 14 (Issachar – rawboned donkey, or strong donkey)  
 Ex. 13: 13 (Redeemed and exchanged for a lamb)  
 Ex 34: 20 (Redeemed and exchanged for a lamb)  
 Num. 22: 28-30 (the Lord made Balaam's donkey speak)  
 Num. 22: 33 (the Angel speaks to Balaam that the donkey saw him)  
 Judg. 15: 15-16 (Samson and the donkey's jawbone)  
 2 Kin. 6: 25 (Sell the head of a donkey to eat in times of famine)  
 Job 6: 5 (wild donkey)  
 Job 39: 5 (wild donkey)  
 Ps. 104: 11 (wild donkey)  
 Isa. 32: 14 (donkeys)  
 Jer. 2: 24 (wild donkey)  
 Jer. 14: 6 (wild donkeys)  
 Jer. 22: 19 (donkey – something that worth nothing) – humiliation  
 Ezek. 23: 20 (donkeys – sexual potency, strength)  
 Dan. 5: 21 (wild donkeys)  
 Hos. 8: 9 (wild donkey)

- v. 10-12: “He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea (cf. Ps. 72: 8), and from the River to the ends of the earth [NIV: I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extent from sea to sea, and from the River (*that is, the Euphrates*) to the ends of the earth (or ‘to the end of the land’, meaning the nation of Israel)]. As for you also (*He talks to Zion*), because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.”

The Messiah will come in peace and will bring this peace to His people, ceasing the war between nations and between people, beginning with Israel, where Ephraim, the kingdom of the North, will no longer raise his hand against Judah (the southern kingdom), nor this one against Ephraim, as they always did in the days of kings, when the two kingdoms were divided. He will declare peace to the nations, to the Gentile peoples.

- ‘His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth [NIV: His rule will extent from sea to sea, and from the River (*that is, the Euphrates*) to the ends of the earth (or ‘to the end of the land’, meaning the nation of Israel)]’ – from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea (‘sea to sea’). The Messiah will also extend His dominion from the river Euphrates to the ends of the earth, that is, from the Euphrates, the boundary of the land promised to Abraham to the west, to the remotest parts of the earth (Gen. 15: 18; Deut. 1: 7; Deut. 11: 24; Josh. 1: 4). The Reubenites occupied the country until the entry of the desert that separated them from the Euphrates (1 Chr. 5: 9: ‘He [*the descendants of Joel, a descendant of Reuben*] also lived to the east as far as the beginning of the desert this side of the Euphrates, because their cattle had multiplied in the land of Gilead’; the phrase ‘to the east as far as the beginning of the desert this side of the Euphrates’ suggests that they extended to the western side of Mesopotamia, where the region leading to the Euphrates River begins, in the East). The Euphrates was visited by Jeremiah (Jer. 13: 4-7). It was also possessed by David (2 Sam. 8: 3, implying

here the northern part of the Euphrates, in the region of Syria), the Euphrates having the name 'the River.' The word Euphrates, in Hebrew, in all of these texts (Gen. 15: 18; Deut. 1: 7; Deut. 11: 24; Josh. 1: 4; 1 Chr. 5: 9; Jer. 13: 4-7) is Prath (Strong #6578), which means: open, run, Perath (that is, Euphrates), a river in the East: Euphrates. It was also the boundary of the territory in the time of Solomon: 1 Kin. 4: 21; 2 Chr. 9: 26 – here in these verses the word used is: 'nahar' – Strong #5104, a common noun for 'river', but there is a note in KJV: the Euphrates.

In Zech. 9: 10, the word used is also 'nahar', a common noun for 'river', but it is supposed to refer indeed to the Euphrates, since it was there that the exiles went, and many had not yet returned from that heathen land, but left there the seed of Jewish culture. Thus, verse 10 of Zechariah makes it clear that the Messiah would come to both Jews and Gentiles and His doctrine would reach all nations and peoples of the earth: 'erets – Strong #776 – to be firm; the earth (the planet); in common sense: a portion of land, country, earth, field, ground, land, nations, wilderness, world. Even the remotest places in the world would be enlightened by His doctrine, and would know redemption, typified by the deliverance of the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon.

- 'As for you also (*He talks to Zion*), because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit' (v. 11) – the Lord now addresses His people, reminding them that it was because of the blood of His covenant with them that they were redeemed from captivity. The captivity in Babylon is the captivity of sin, from which the Messiah will come to rescue them also. It is interesting to remember not only the covenant of circumcision given to Abraham (Gen. 17: 7-14) but also that of Moses. When he was called by God to ascend Sinai to receive the tablets with the law (he and Aaron and the seventy elders), he erected an altar at the foot of the hill and twelve pillars, one for each tribe of Israel; and the blood of the bulls' sacrifices was sprinkled on the altar and on the people, as a sign that they were accepting that covenant made with the Lord (Ex. 24: 1-11). It was part of the covenant that, if in the land of their captivity, they sought the Lord, He would be found by them: Lev. 26: 41-42; 44-45; Deut. 30: 4. God remembered this covenant, and because of it He was delivering His children from bondage, from a pit of affliction where they felt as if there was no water. In the same way, the Messiah would come to make the ultimate sacrifice, removing them from the bondage of sin, from the pit where there wasn't the 'water' of His Spirit.

- 'Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double' (v. 12) – the Lord referred to the stronghold of Zion, to the city of Jerusalem, to which the captives who were still in Babylon should return, because maybe they had no hope of seeing it again. But He assured them that there was still this hope, through Ezra and Nehemiah, who would return in a few years to minister in the rebuilt temple and to rebuild the city walls. Even those who returned with Nehemiah still felt hopeless to have what they once had (Neh. 9: 36; Ezr. 9: 8-9), and they felt insecure as for the Persians, just as the powerful kingdoms that surrounded them, like Syria, Egypt and Greece; but the Lord gave them a promise of deliverance (verses 12-17). This promise had its greatest achievement in the times of the Maccabees, when the Jews rose up against their enemies, retained their strength, and after many struggles and difficulties, came to dominate them.

Transposing to the times of the Messiah (the first coming of Jesus), He was the stronghold for those who had no hope of salvation, no hope of knowing the light and resuming their communion with God.

- 'Today I declare that I will restore to you double' or 'I will restore twice as much to you' (v. 12) – a promise very similar to that of Isa. 61: 7, where the Hebrew word is mishneh (Strong #4932), which means properly, a repetition, that is, a duplicate (copy

of a document) or a double portion (in amount); by implication, a secondary position, the next, second (in order, rank, age, quality or location), twice as much.

In Isa. 61: 7 it is written: 'Because their shame was double, and dishonor was proclaimed as their lot, therefore they shall possess a double portion; everlasting joy shall be theirs' [NIV: Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs] – in the place of the shame which they had spent in captivity (and even before, because of God's judgments against the idolatry of His people), they would have double honor, as well as the rejoicing of owning again the land of Canaan. The 'everlasting joy' became a spiritual thing for those who understood God's plan through Jesus. In spite of external circumstances, believers would know what the joy of salvation is and the eternal companionship of the Holy Spirit. What had been stolen from them would be restored twice as much by the Lord.

'Double' would correspond to a repetition, a copy of what they had with God at the beginning, before they began to sin and worship images (as the tablets of the Law were written a second time to remake the covenant). It would be a covenant that was being redone between them and God; or a double portion (like the anointing of Elisha compared to Elijah) as a way to compensate for a loss, a need or a desire for something that was won with much dedication and effort.

In the Law of Moses it is written: Ex 22: 1; 4; 9: "When someone steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, the thief shall pay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep... When the animal, whether ox or donkey or sheep, is found alive in the thief's possession, the thief shall pay double... In any case of disputed ownership involving ox, donkey, sheep, clothing, or any other loss, of which one party says, 'This is mine', the case of both parties shall come before God; the one whom God condemns shall pay double to the other."

Thus, this would be a double reward for them for all the theft and shame they suffered at the hands of the Babylonians, as a cause in justice, where is paid the indemnity for the moral damages suffered by the victim, that is, the litigant who first entered the legal request.

- Zech. 9: 12 says: 'Today I declare that I will restore to you double' or 'I will restore twice as much to you', which means restitution in the material and spiritual realm. The double wealth they would receive would be not only the position of children of God, but the blessing of the firstborn (Ex. 4: 22), who received the double portion of the inheritance of the father in relation to the other children.

- v. 13: "For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will arouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword [NIV: and make you like a warrior's sword]."

This means that the Lord would prepare the Jews for a war ('bow', 'sword', 'arrow', 'warrior'), and this happened in the time of the Seleucid rule over Palestine (198-167 BC) when Antiochus IV invaded Israel, committed sacrilege, killing a pig on the altar. God-fearing Jews, such as the Hasmon family, among them Judas Maccabee, rose up against the invaders and undertook a successful revolt (167-160 BC), driving out the wicked ruler of Israel. The temple and the altar were purified and consecrated. Victory came by sword, by war.

• v. 14: “Then the Lord will appear over them, and his arrow go forth like lightning; the Lord God will sound the trumpet and march forth in the whirlwinds of the south [NIV: in the storms of the south].”

The Lord will manifest Himself to them. The arrows are a symbol of His quick judgment. The trumpet is a symbol of convocation, as the Israelites were summoned to the holy wars of the Lord since the time of Moses (Num. 10: 2; 9), or to the solemn festivals (Num. 10: 10).

The expression ‘the whirlwinds of the south’ or ‘in the storms of the south’ [south = Negev] is similar to what is written in Isa. 21: 1 [‘As whirlwinds in the Negeb sweep on’ or ‘like whirlwinds sweeping through the southland’ (NIV)]. Fire, chariots, whirlwind and sword are symbols of God’s judgment over those who reject His correction and despise Him.

In Isa. 21: 1, the word ‘south’ or ‘south lands’ refers to the southern part of Judea, where there were many and great deserts, such as the Negeb (Negev). Negeb (in Hebrew, Negev, ‘dry’) is a desert to the south of Israel, near the Sinai Peninsula and the Mediterranean Sea and that only experiences life when the rains fill the beds of its dry rivers. The rivers are filled with the waters, and plants are watered and the animals quench their thirst. The whirlwinds of the south come suddenly, blow heavily, carry everything before them and there is nothing that can resist them. The bible says that in this way, that is, with irresistible strength and power as the whirlwinds of the south, ‘he’ (referring to Cyrus and his army) would come from the wilderness of Media and Persia to Babylon. There was a great desert between them and Chaldea.

In Zech. 9: 14, the prophet says: ‘The Lord God will sound the trumpet and march forth in the whirlwinds of the south [NIV: in the storms of the south].’ This means that, just as the whirlwinds of the south come suddenly, they blow heavily, carry everything before them and there is nothing that can stand against them, He, God, no more Cyrus, would come to help them against the Greeks, and would give them strength to fight.

• v. 15: “The Lord of hosts will protect them [NIV: and the Lord Almighty will shield them], and they shall devour and tread down the slingers [NIV: They will destroy and overcome with slingstones]; they shall drink their blood like wine, and be full like a bowl, drenched like the corners of the altar [NIV: They will drink and roar as with wine; they will full like a bowl used for sprinkling the corners of the altar].”

The prophet goes on saying that in those days of war, God will protect His children and they will destroy the slingers or, in NIV, ‘they will destroy and overcome their enemies with sling stones.’ They shall be filled with the blood of the wicked, like the bowls of the altar were filled with the blood of the animals of the sacrifices, or like the bowls were filled with water to wash the altar after the sacrifices were made. God’s judgment over the enemies of His people will be like atonement for sin and His house will be cleansed again. His people will dwell safely and prepare for the coming of the Messiah. Therefore, the next verse seems to take them again to the times of the gospel, to the first coming of Jesus:

• v. 16-17: “On that day the Lord their God will save them for they are the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land. For what goodness and beauty are his! [NIV: How attractive and beautiful they will be! KJV: For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! – his = God’s] Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women [KJV: Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids].”



These verses give continuity to those who speak of the victory of the Maccabees over the Greeks. Therefore, for the people of the Old Covenant, ‘on that day’ refers to the day that Israel had got rid of the Greeks (Seleucids) and established the priesthood in His land (Jews of the Hasmonean lineage led the nation until the arrival of Rome). The faithful remnants were pearls of a crown to the Lord, for they had overcome the temptations and did not deny His name.

Then comes the phrase: ‘For what goodness and beauty are his!’ (NRSV), or ‘For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!’ (KJV), where ‘his’ refers to Him, God, whereas in the NIV we have the impression that it is the winners who are beautiful, for the bible doesn’t include the first sentence about ‘his goodness’: ‘How attractive and beautiful they will be!’ (NIV). In any case, the goodness of God is infinite, and great is His beauty, just as are the children who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb. If we think of these verses as a reference to the first coming of Christ (‘on that day’ – v. 16), we can understand that, just as He gave a deliverance to His people (OT), even if by war and sword, now He would come bringing the greater victory, that of salvation, becoming the faithful shepherd who would care for his flock, and would make him beautiful, with the white wool of holiness, for He justifies them.

“Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women [NIV: ‘Grain will make the young men thrive’; KJV: Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids]” – thinking of the victory of the Maccabees, this meant a promise of prosperity and joy, grace and divine blessing upon His children, who wouldn’t need to fear scarcity or oppression anymore. And this extends to the times of the NT, where we are certain of His provision and His joy in our lives through the Holy Spirit.

## Chapter 10

• Zech. 10: 1-12 (The Lord will care for Judah): “Ask rain from the Lord in the season of the spring rain, from the Lord who makes the storm clouds, who gives showers of rain to you, the vegetation in the field to everyone. For the teraphim utter nonsense, and the diviners see lies; the dreamers tell false dreams, and give empty consolation. Therefore the people wander like sheep; they suffer for lack of a shepherd [NIV: The idols speak deceit, diviners see visions that lie; they tell dreams that are false, they give comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd]. My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the Lord of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah, and will make them like his proud war-horse [NIV: My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the LORD Almighty will care for his flock, the house of Judah, and make them like a proud horse in battle; KJV: Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds, and I punished the goats: for the LORD of hosts hath visited his flock the house of Judah, and hath made them as his goodly horse in the battle]. Out of them shall come the cornerstone, out of them the tent peg, out of them the battle bow, out of them every commander [NIV: from him every ruler]. Together they shall be like warriors in battle, trampling the foe in the mud of the streets; they shall fight, for the Lord is with them, and they shall put to shame the riders on horses [NIV: Together [or ‘all of them together’] they will be like mighty men trampling their enemy the muddy streets in battle. Because the LORD is with them, they will fight overthrow the horsemen]. I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph [*Ephraim*]. I will bring them back because I have compassion on them, and they shall be as though I had not rejected them; for I am the Lord their God and I will answer them. Then the people of Ephraim shall become like warriors [NIV: mighty men], and their hearts shall be glad as with wine. Their children shall see it and rejoice, their hearts shall exult in the Lord. I will signal for them and gather them in, for I have redeemed them, and they shall be as numerous as they were before. Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me, and they shall rear their children and return [NIV: Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive, and they will return]. I will bring them home from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria; I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon, until there is no room for them. They shall pass through the sea of distress, and the waves of the sea shall be struck down, and all the depths of the Nile dried up. The pride of Assyria shall be laid low, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart. I will make them strong in the Lord, and they shall walk in his name, says the Lord.”

• v. 1: ‘Ask rain from the Lord in the season of the spring rain, from the Lord who makes the storm clouds, who gives showers of rain to you, the vegetation in the field to everyone’ – The prophet prays to the Lord and exhorts the people to pray also, asking for the latter rain [the spring rain], which is the rain that falls before the harvest, to ripen the grains. This can be understood in a physical sense, for by their sin hunger and drought came, both before and after the return of captivity (Hag. 1: 10-11; Neh. 5: 3), but it can be a metaphor, for verse 2 speaks about idolatry and about the state of spiritual darkness in which the people find themselves, for lack of a faithful leadership. In regard to the ancient Jews, we have here the impression that the first enthusiasm had given way to coldness, formality, to a weak leadership and the fear of the attack from Greece. Thus, without the word of God as light to illuminate the ways of His people,

they were afflicted and wandering like sheep without a shepherd. Therefore, the prophet is crying out for revival so that they do not perish, beyond what he reminds them of their past.



- v. 2: ‘For the teraphim utter nonsense, and the diviners see lies; the dreamers tell false dreams, and give empty consolation. Therefore the people wander like sheep; they suffer for lack of a shepherd [NIV: The idols speak deceit, diviners see visions that lie; they tell dreams that are false, they give comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd]’– in the past, the idolatry of Israel and Judah drew the judgment of God upon them. They trusted in their idols, sorcerers and false prophets, so they were taken into captivity.

‘Household idols’ or ‘household gods’ (Hebrew: Teraphim or Traphiym – Strong’s #8655: family idol; image (of an idol); idols ; idolatry). They were like those of Gen. 31: 19, 30, 32, 35 (Laban’s idols stolen by Rachel); 2 Kin. 23: 24 (destroyed by Josiah), used in the practice of divination. In Hosea 3: 4, the prophet mentions the idols along with the ephod: “For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim [NIV: For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods].”

The ephod was the garment worn by the high priest (Ex. 28: 4-30) and contained two stones (the Urim and Thummim) by which the Lord was consulted [Ex. 28: 30 (Aaron); 1 Sam. 23: 6; 9-14 (David and Abiathar)], but it was not mixed with pagan worship or used for ‘divination.’ In the case of Hosea it is mentioned to show the type of idolatry in the northern kingdom when this prophecy was made. In Judg. 17: 1; 4-6; 7; 9-12; Judg. 18: 14, 17, 18, 19, 20; 30, the ephod is mentioned along with a young Levite from Bethlehem in Judah and the images of Micah, an Ephraimite man who hired him to be a priest in his household.

- v. 3: ‘My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish **the leaders**; for the Lord of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah, and will make them like his proud war-horse [NIV: My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish **the leaders**; for the LORD Almighty will care for his flock, the house of Judah, and make them like a proud horse in battle; KJV: Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds, and I punished **the goats**: for the LORD of hosts hath visited his flock the house of Judah,

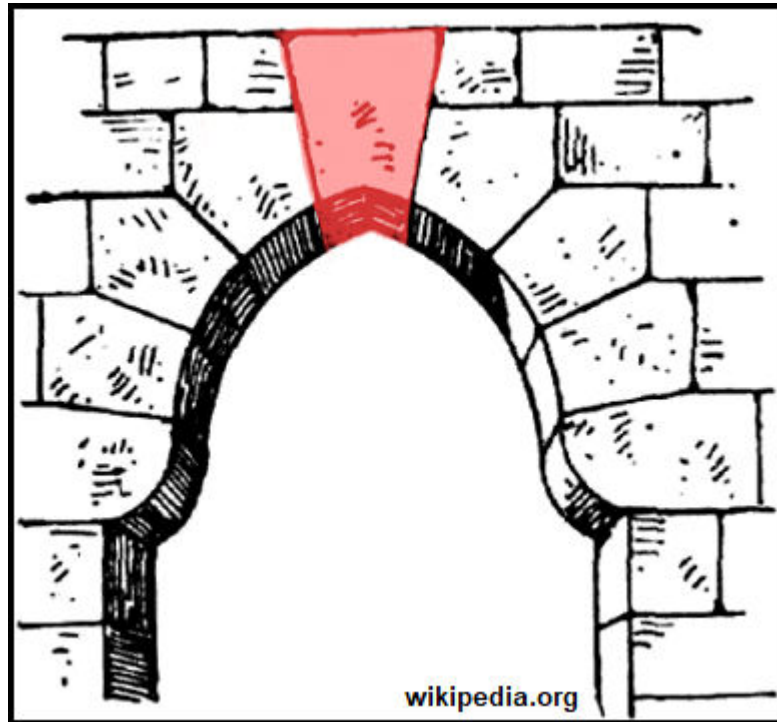
and hath made them as his goodly horse in the battle]’ – the Lord answers the prayer of his prophet saying that His wrath was kindled against the leaders. A herd of she-goats, although small (at most twenty animals), has a male goat as chief and is metaphorically employed in this verse for ‘guide’ or ‘leader.’ Both Zechariah and Jeremiah use this metaphor for the religious and civil leaders of Israel, who were neglecting their office. In Jer. 50: 8 it is written: “Flee from Babylon, and go out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be like male goats leading the flock”, and in Zech. 10: 3, the Lord says: “My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish **the leaders**; for the Lord of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah, and will make them like his proud war-horse.” But He promises to take the flock under His care, and presents Himself here as ‘the Lord of Hosts’, that is, the defender of His people and the warrior who defeats His enemies. He will use the strength of the house of Judah for this, like a warhorse.

- v. 4-5: “Out of them shall come the cornerstone, out of them the tent peg, out of them the battle bow, out of them every commander [NIV: from him every ruler]. Together they shall be like warriors in battle, trampling the foe in the mud of the streets; they shall fight, for the Lord is with them, and they shall put to shame the riders on horses [NIV: Together [or ‘all of them together’] they will be like mighty men trampling their enemy the muddy streets in battle. Because the LORD is with them, they will fight overthrow the horsemen]” – the tribe of Judah was chosen by God for the government leadership, while the birthright was given to Joseph (1 Chr. 5: 2), and the bible says that this remained after David, to honor God’s promise that one of his descendant would never fail on the throne, even because the Messiah as King of His people would be born of the tribe of Judah.

If we interpret this prophecy from the physical point of view, human, it happened in the near future for the Jews, referring to the Maccabees, for their village was Modiin, in the land of Judah, thirty-two kilometers west of Jerusalem. The cornerstone, referring to a ruler, may be symbolized by Judas Maccabee and his family, who firmed the people of that time in the law of God, even though they were already divided into factions, and fought physically to maintain the freedom of Israel and the holiness of the temple. They fought fiercely against enemy horsemen, for cavalry was the main force, not only of the Egyptians (the Ptolemies), but of the Syrians (Seleucids) – Dan. 11: 40.

But this prophecy has a spiritual meaning, where ‘the cornerstone’ (Isa. 28: 16 – in Hebrew: פִּנָּה – pinnah, Strong #6438: corner; an angle; by implication, a pinnacle; figuratively, a chieftain; bulwark, chief, corner, stay, tower) concerns Jesus, and ‘the tent peg’ is what holds the tent to the ground, symbolizing stability; it may also refer to the prophecy of Isa. 22: 23, where the peg was firmly attached to the wall of the house (Judg. 4: 21), and that was where one hung the household utensils in the same way as a ruler firmly placed in his throne sustains his subjects; or, in other words, his subjects hang to him, for he is their strength and safety. Thus, the hope of the people was in the Messiah. Another prophecy that may be linked to the same term is in Am. 9: 11 about raise up ‘David’s fallen tent’ or ‘the booth of David that is fallen’ (cf. Acts 15: 16-18). ‘Cornerstone’ (Mk 12: 10-11; Matt. 21: 42; Lk. 20: 17-18), in KJV, ‘the head of the corner’, is explained by the Greek words κεφαλῇ, kephalé (head), Strong #2776: (a) head, the head, (b) a corner stone, uniting two walls; head, ruler, lord. From the primary kapto (in the sense of seizing); the head (as the part most readily taken hold of), literally or figuratively; and γωνία, gónia (corner), Strong #1137: a corner; a secret place. Probably akin to gonu; an angle; corner, quarter. ‘Cornerstone’ (or foundation stone or setting stone) is the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation. All other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire

structure. It is also called 'capstone' or 'keystone' – a central stone at the summit of an arch, locking the whole together. Thus, cornerstone or capstone is that stone, small, cut in triangle and placed even at the highest point of an arch, and which holds and joins the two parts of a door or an arched ceiling. It is a stone that does not make force, does not have to be great, but if someone takes it away everything drops. There are people like this: they seem to do nothing, and yet nothing works without them. Or it can be that stone placed to unite two walls.



In the images above, we have the example of a cornerstone at the highest point of an arch ('pinnah or kephalé' – photo: Karniesbogen) or in order to join two walls. This second photo was taken by Norbert Schnitzler and is a stone with letters in bronze relief in Aachen (in northern Germany), in the church of St. Boniface (Bonifatiuskirche).

In the prophetic texts the cornerstone may be a reference to rulers (Isa. 19: 13) but the greatest ruler that Judah would need to rise again would be the Messiah, Jesus, no longer as it was in the past. At the time of His coming the House of David was demoralized; the current ruler (Herod Antipas) was descended from an Idumean, Herod the Great, appointed by Rome. Jesus was the cornerstone that would bind His church (Jews and Gentiles), raising David's fallen tent, which means His spiritual kingdom, where Israel and Judah would be together and could live free before the Lord, worshipping Him without unnecessary and empty rituals, and a reign in which the Gentiles could also have the right to participate, for Jesus would be the shepherd of all.

'The battle bow' in the spiritual sense of prophecy may symbolize that the Messiah is the defense of His people; He is their defender.

'Out of them (*the people of the house of Judah*) every commander [NIV: from him (*Judah*) every ruler]. Together they shall be like warriors in battle [NIV: Together (or 'all of them together') they will be like mighty men]' – it may symbolize the first ministers of the gospel in the church which began in Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost, for if we think in the human way most of the apostles came from Galilee, not from Judea. Spiritually speaking, they were the 'leaders', the 'rulers' of the Lord's flock. And the bible goes on saying that 'Together they shall be like warriors in battle, trampling the foe in the mud of the streets; they shall fight, for the Lord is with them, and they shall put to shame the riders on horses' – Jesus' followers had a different war to fight, but they were victorious because He was with them and they put to shame the riders on horses, that is, those who fought in the strength of their own arm, making war as the world does. They walked contrary to the world (in the opposite direction), but showed the power of God by surpassing the traditions and rules of that time, in the religious and secular ambit.

• v. 6-7: "I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph [*Ephraim*]. I will bring them back because I have compassion on them, and they shall be as though I had not rejected them; for I am the Lord their God and I will answer them. Then the people of Ephraim shall become like warriors [NIV: mighty men], and their hearts shall be glad as with wine. Their children shall see it and rejoice, their hearts shall exult in the Lord."

Here the prophet speaks distinctly about the house of Joseph, or Ephraim, namely, the ten tribes, and the house of Judah, showing that there is still a separation between them, even after the return from exile in Babylon. God says that He will have compassion on them and will no longer reject them. Those of Ephraim will be like a victorious warrior in battle [NIV: mighty men] and will rejoice in the blessing of the Lord, which will also be to their descendants. God will put them back into their own land, where they will dwell safely.

During the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III and his descendants, especially of Sargon II (722-705 BC), who invaded Samaria and led the northern kingdom in captivity to Assyria (722 BC), the Israelites fled, mainly to the Egypt, which also fell into the hands of this last conqueror in 716 BC. During the invasion of Sennacherib king of Assyria, many inhabitants of Judea and Jerusalem fled to Egypt with everything they had, long before Babylonian dominion (Jer. 24: 8b); they had fled with their riches on donkeys



and on camels, seeking shelter; in fact, they sought refuge in an impotent people who would not help them at all, for they themselves were subjects of Assyria at that time (Isa. 30: 6 – ‘The envoys carry their riches on donkey’s backs, their treasures on the humps of camels, to that unprofitable nation’).

The Jewish community settled in Egypt after the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, and taking the prophet Jeremiah along with them (Jer. 43: 6-7; Jer. 43: 8; Jer. 44: 1). Much probably, some of them also went south to Ethiopia (Jer. 44: 1 – Pathros is the Hebrew name for Upper Egypt and Cush or Ethiopia). In Isa. 18: 1 it is written the expression ‘from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia’ (Zeph. 3: 10), perhaps referring to the north of Abyssinia (as it was known the Ethiopian Empire of the Upper Nile that occupied the present territories of Ethiopia and Eritrea), where Jewish settlers had apparently settled along with other Semitic peoples from southern Arabia.

- v. 8-10: ‘I will signal for them and gather them in, for I have redeemed them, and they shall be as numerous as they were before. Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me, and they shall rear their children and return [NIV: Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive, and they will return]. I will bring them home from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria; I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon, until there is no room for them’ – here the Lord confirms the places of the dispersion of His people, and says He will gather them again, and will bring them to the land of Gilead (in the Transjordan – northeastern boundary of Israel) and to Lebanon (the northern boundary of the Holy Land), for there will be many who will be gathered and they’ll need space to dwell (cf. Isa. 49: 20; Isa. 54: 3).

It is interesting that all the prophets write the words of the Lord, especially the verbs, referring to a future time, but putting them in the past as if events had already occurred (‘for I have redeemed them’). This shows us that the vision of God is different from ours and when He determines something, it is as if it had already happened, for what He says is fulfilled.

‘Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me, and they shall rear their children and return [NIV: Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive, and they will return]’ – cf. Deut. 30: 1-5; 2 Chr. 6: 37-39; Ps. 22: 27; Lk. 15: 17-18.

Isa. 11: 10-16 also speaks of a return to those who have been scattered. As it follows a text that refers to the Messiah’s kingdom, that is, to the first coming of Jesus, in my view it can be fit in this prophecy of Zechariah, although many find that it agrees only with the vision of the future restoration. The text says: “On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious. On that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Ethiopia [in Hebrew, Cush], from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea [NIV: the islands of the sea]. He will raise a signal for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, the hostility of Judah [NIV: Judah’s enemies] shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not be hostile towards Ephraim. But they shall swoop down on the backs of the Philistines in the west [NIV: they will swoop down on the slopes of Philistia to the west], together they shall plunder the people of the east. They shall put forth their hand against Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites shall obey them. And the Lord will utterly



destroy the tongue of the sea of Egypt [NIV: The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea]; and will wave his hand over the River [NIV: over the Euphrates River] with his scorching wind; and will split it into seven channels, and make a way to cross on foot [NIV: He will break it up into seven streams so that men can cross over in sandals]; so there shall be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that is left of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt.”

Isaiah says that the Messiah shall stand as a signal to the peoples, and all nations shall inquire of Him. The day He comes, there will be a ransom for all those of His people that were scattered throughout the nations because of the exile. Judah and Ephraim, that is, the kingdom of the south and the kingdom of the north, will no longer be two divided nations; on the contrary, as it was in the reign of David they will again be one nation under the Messiah. The nations that have oppressed them shall be subject to the Israelites, like Moab, Edom and Ammon. The Philistines will also submit to Israel.

In Isaiah 11: 11, the prophet mentions some nations like Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Ethiopia, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and the islands of the sea. The term ‘islands of the sea’ refers to countries far from Judea, inhabited by idolatrous Gentiles; the most remote parts of the world, as well as in Arabia, which was near them; or all regions beyond the sea (Jer. 25: 22), sea regions or coastal regions, not merely islands in the strict sense. Pathros is the Hebrew name for Upper Egypt and Cush or Ethiopia; Elam is the ancient name for the plain of Khuzestan, in lower Mesopotamia, in present-day Iran, watered by the rivers Karkheh (or Karkhen) and Karun (Kārūn), which empty into the Tigris just north of the Persian Gulf. The Karkheh or Karkhen is perhaps the river known in the bible as the Gihon one of the four rivers of Eden. Some scientists think that Gihon is the river Karun itself. Khuzestan (transliterated Arabic, Khūzestān) is now one of the provinces in southwest Iran, bordering southern Iraq. Its capital is Ahvaz. Khuzestan, meaning ‘the Land of the Khuz’ or ‘Kuzi’, refers to the original inhabitants of this province, the ‘Susian’ people (in Old Persian ‘Huza’ or ‘Huja’; Shushan, in Hebrew). Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal subdued the Elamites and deported some of them to Samaria, transferring some Israelites to the Elam (Isa. 11: 11; Ezra 4: 9). Elam was annexed by an ancestor of Cyrus, and Susa eventually became one of the three main cities of Persian Empire. Shinar is the Hebrew name of the land of Babylon; Hamath is a city of Syria (now known by the name of Hama). In Isa. 11: 15 it is written: “And the Lord will utterly destroy the tongue of the sea of Egypt; and will wave his hand over the River with his scorching wind; and will split it into seven channels, and make a way to cross on foot [NIV: He will break it up into seven streams so that men can cross over in sandals]” – Just as the Red Sea was an impediment in the way of the Israelites in the Exodus, the Euphrates was an obstruction in the way of Israel for his return from Assyria. However, the Lord, by the force of His wind, would equally divide the Euphrates where the exiles could cross on foot. He would do the impossible to deliver His people. This can also be seen as a vision of the future restoration of Israel at the end of time.

Returning to Zechariah, these prophecies all converge to the first coming of Jesus, when His people were brought to the land of Israel because of His preaching. Thus, the ten tribes would be united to Judah under the reign of Christ. Their dispersion occurred for a special purpose (Hos. 2: 23; Mic. 5: 7-8); therefore, it was not a factor totally bad, for Jewish colonies in several nations would ease the preaching of the gospel in the synagogues throughout the world and consequently the flourishing of the Church. It does not mean that everybody would return to Palestine, but would be united in a single

faith by the doctrine of the Gospel. Assyria and Egypt are presented as symbolic names of all oppressors of God's people.

- v. 11-12: 'They shall pass through the sea of distress, and the waves of the sea shall be struck down, and all the depths of the Nile dried up. The pride of Assyria shall be laid low, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart. I will make them strong in the Lord, and they shall walk in his name, says the Lord.'

This passage seems to give continuity to verses 8-10, and may refer to the years that follow with Darius I and the other Persian kings, overcoming the revolts in Assyria and favoring the return of the exiles with Ezra and Nehemiah, or may refer to the Greece, in the person of Alexander the Great, taking Egypt, and, consequently, to the events of the Intertestamental Period, when the Lord would perform miracles of liberation as He had done in the past with the Red Sea. The mention to Egypt here may refer to the dominion of Alexander the Great over that land or to the years following the division of his empire when the Ptolemies ruled over Israel. The Ptolemies dominated them, but were defeated by the Syrians (Seleucids), who would break the power of Egypt once again. God told them that there would be a time of affliction ('sea'), but in His strength, the Jews would overcome that too and return to Palestine.

'I [*God the Father*] will make them strong in the Lord [*i.e. His manifestation in the Lord, the Messiah, Jesus, the Son*], and they shall walk in his name, says the Lord' – When he says, 'they shall walk in his name', He means that they will live continually under His protection and according to with His will (Gen. 5: 22; Mic. 4: 5).

## Chapter 11

• Zech. 11: 1-3: “Open your doors, O Lebanon, so that fire may devour your cedars! Wail, O cypress [NIV: pine tree], for the cedar has fallen, for the glorious trees are ruined! Wail, oaks of Bashan, for the thick forest has been felled! Listen, the wail of the shepherds, for their glory is despoiled! [NIV: their rich pastures are destroyed!] Listen, the roar of the lions, for the thickets of the Jordan are destroyed! Listen to the roar of the lions; the lush thicket of the Jordan is ruined!”

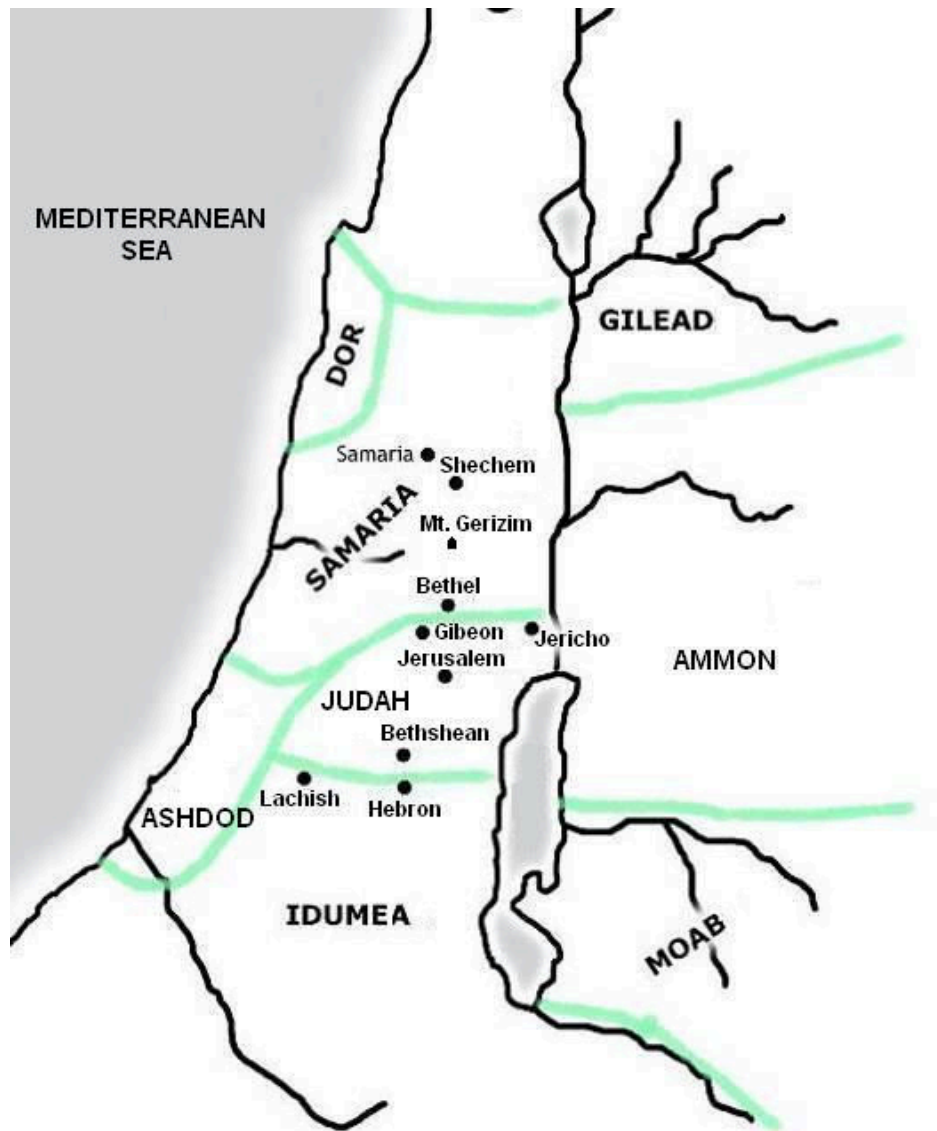
This shows the power of God overthrowing the pride, the haughtiness, and the power of men. Here God may be referring to the wicked nations of the Intertestamental Period as His instruments to punish the enemies of His people and to place Israel in a situation of preparation for the coming of the Messiah. The great mountain range of Lebanon seemed impregnable, but God could bring the enemy right there. Lebanon is famous because of its dense forest. Ample rainfall from November to March and the mountains of limestone give rise to many wellsprings and streams. To the south of the mountains there are cultivation of gardens, olive groves, vineyards and orchards of fruit (mulberries, figs, apples, apricots, walnuts) and small fields of wheat. The forest vegetation is of myrtle, conifers and huge cedars; therefore, Lebanon, in the bible, is a symbol of fertility and of taking benefit and enjoyment of life and of a plantation. Cedar and cypress symbolize majesty and royalty. Cedar of Lebanon is a majestic conifer of durable wood; so David built his house with cedar, and Solomon, the temple, as well as the second temple of Ezra was also reconstructed with this wood. The cedar can reach one hundred and thirty-one feet high (forty meters high) and the ancient writers used it as a symbol of the stature of a man (Ezek. 31: 3; Am. 2: 9), also of strength, majesty and power (Song 3: 9), pride, hardness, inflexibility (Ps. 29: 5).

The prophet describes the three borders of Israel post-exile; Lebanon (north), Bashan (or Gilead – to the northeast) and Ammon (to the east, in Transjordan).

In this prophecy of Zechariah Lebanon is commanded to open its doors and its fortifications to the Greeks, probably, because it was by Tyre that Alexander began his action in Phoenicia, Palestine and Philistia, on the way to his conquest of Egypt.

The fire of wars against the enemy would burn the houses of the great and small ones, even palaces. The bible says (Zech. 11: 2): “Wail, O cypress [NIV: pine tree], for the cedar has fallen, for the glorious trees are ruined! Wail, oaks of Bashan, for the thick forest has been felled!”

This means that all are called to weep and wail, for the miseries will come upon all. The flocks of sheep and herds of cattle were dispersed, their beautiful pastures were devastated, that is, their glory and their honor. The pride of the Jordan (‘the lush thicket of the Jordan’) speaks of the great forests on the banks of this river, where the lions imposed their authority and their dread. The word ‘lions’ here may refer to kings, and ‘lion cubs’ are the princes of that region to the east of the river, for example: Tobiah the Ammonite, in the time that Nehemiah came (Neh. 2: 19; Neh. 5: 17-18; Neh. 6: 1), or the kings of that nation during the Hellenistic Period, and who favored the Seleucids (Dan. 11: 41).



Israel in the post-exile period

- Zech. 11: 4-14 (The parable of the Good Shepherd): “Thus said the Lord my God: Be a shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. Those who buy them kill them and go unpunished; and those who sell them say, ‘Blessed be the Lord, for I have become rich’; and their own shepherds have no pity on them. For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the earth, says the Lord. I will cause them, every one, to fall each into the hand of a neighbor, and each into the hand of the king [NIV: their king]; and they shall devastate the earth, and I will deliver no one from their hand. So, on behalf of the sheep merchants, I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. I took two staffs; one I named Favor, the other I named Unity, and I tended the sheep [NIV: So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs and called one Favor and the other Union, and I pastured the flock; KJV: the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands]. In one month I disposed of the three shepherds, for I had become impatient with them, and they also detested me [NIV: In one month I got rid of the three shepherds. The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them]. So I said, ‘I will not be your shepherd. What is to die, let it die; what is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed; and let those that are left devour the flesh of one another!’

I took my staff Favor and broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples. So it was annulled on that day, and the sheep merchants, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the Lord [‘and the sheep merchants’, in NRSV; NIV says: It was revoked on that day, and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew it was the word of the LORD]. I then said to them, ‘If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.’ So they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver [NIV: I told them, ‘If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.’ So they paid me thirty pieces of silver]. Then the Lord said to me, ‘Throw it into the treasury’ – this lordly price at which I was valued by them. So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them into the treasury in the house of the Lord [NIV: And the LORD said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter]. Then I broke my second staff Unity, annulling the family ties between Judah and Israel [NIV: Then I broke my second staff called Union, breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel].”

- v. 4: ‘Thus said the Lord my God: Be a shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter.’

Here, probably, the prophet receives guidance from God concerning His sheep, for they were being neglected and would probably receive cruel treatment from their leaders in the near future. We can see a reference to the role of Jesus as the Good Shepherd who would come to feed His sheep so they would not be killed at the hands of Satan (Jn. 10: 10-11). After the reconstruction of the temple, rather, after the prophecy of the two anointed ones, Joshua and Zerubbabel (Zech. 4: 1-14; Zech. 6: 9-15), the prophet no longer mentions anything about the civil government and the priesthood in Judah, but from what we read in Nehemiah and Malachi, the initial enthusiasm turned into apathy; there was a coldness in spiritual things, and what came to occupy people’s minds was the fear of Greece. So what seems here is that the prophet is being called to warn people about what was happening so that the worst could be avoided. It seems that this verse and the following ones lead to the events of the Hellenistic Period, at the same time that it makes us wonder what Zechariah could be trying to convey to his people in the present.

- v. 5: ‘Those who buy them kill them and go unpunished; and those who sell them say, ‘Blessed be the Lord, for I have become rich’; and their own shepherds have no pity on them.’

This situation does not seem to be something present, for in the time of Zechariah the governor of Judah was theoretically Zerubbabel, and he was not prone to such practices. If this situation is related to the time of Nehemiah (more or less, 445-430 BC – cf. Neh. 5: 1-12; 15), it seems to have been effectively circumvented by him as a civil leader of Judah, and by Ezra, as a religious leader. A little further on, in the time of Malachi (450-400 BC) and the period in which Nehemiah seems to have returned to Persia (12 years after his coming – Neh. 13: 6 – around 433 BC), what seemed to happen was a disrespect for holy things and a neglect of priests in relation to their office (Mal. 1: 6-14; Mal. 2: 8-9, Mal. 2: 10-16; Mal. 3: 14), causing their people to deviate for lack of the true word of God. There was theft in tithes and offerings, but it seemed there was no cruelty in dealing with the Jews by their leaders. Therefore, we can think that this began to happen after 333 BC, with the rise of Alexander and the Greek Empire, specifically during the Seleucid Period over Israel (198-167 BC – after the reign of

Antiochus III, also called Antiochus III the Great – 223-187 BC), because in the Ptolemaic period (323-198 BC) Israel was treated with tolerance by the Egyptians.

We know that Antiochus III guaranteed the Jews the freedom of worship and allowed them to collect taxes for the temple in Jerusalem. His son Seleucus IV Philopator reigned in his place in the period of 187-175 BC. Antiochus IV Epiphanes was the youngest son of Antiochus III the Great and brother of Seleucus IV Philopator. He ruled Syria between 175-164 BC. At that time, Judea was ruled by high priests (the ‘shepherds’ described by Zechariah), who, corrupted and thirsting for power, no longer cared for the people; they were useless shepherds. This leads us to the next verse, where we will understand what God was saying about punishing them.

• v. 6: ‘For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the earth, says the Lord. I will cause them, every one, to fall each into the hand of a neighbor, and each into the hand of the king [NIV: their king]; and they shall devastate the earth, and I will deliver no one from their hand.’

When we say ‘I will cause them, every one, to fall each into the hand of a neighbor’ we think of a civil war. And ‘their king’ refers to the Seleucid king, especially to Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC). In the Hellenistic period there was the rise of a pro-Hellenic Jewish party that first developed in the Jewish Diaspora of Alexandria and Antioch (Syria), and then spread to Judea, for example, in the family of the Tobiads, of which Menelaus or Menahem the high priest, was probably part, being one of those sympathizers. The Tobiads were from the land of Ammon. Willreich (a German bishop of Bremen, Germany, ninth century) associates them with Tobiah, the Ammonite servant mentioned by Nehemiah, and who consequently came from the Eastern Jordanian district.

When Antiochus IV Epiphanes became ruler of the Seleucid Empire in 175 BC, he replaced the high priest Onias III (185-175 BC) by Jason (175-172 BC), and Menelaus was placed as second man in the priesthood. For Antiochus IV the high priest was only a local governor within his kingdom, but for the Orthodox Jews the high priest was someone appointed by God. In 172 BC, Menelaus was sent by Jason to Antioch to pay the annual tribute to Antiochus IV, and seized the opportunity to bribe the king and gain the office of high priest. He got what he wanted, with the support of the Tobiads; the people revolted, supporting Jason, but could only submit before the troops of Cyprian soldiers sent by Antiochus to subdue any opposition from the followers of the former high priest. In addition, the troops were sent to collect the tribute that Menelaus had promised. With the help of his brother Lysimachus, Menelaus stole sacred vessels from the temple and gave them to the Seleucid king, while Jason fled Jerusalem and found refuge in the land of the Ammonites. The high priest Onias III publicly accused Menelaus of stealing the temple, but this one killed him. Menelaus was arrested for the murder of Onias and accused before Antiochus, but with bribes he got rid of the trial. He continued to plunder the treasures of the temple until his brother Lysimachus died in another turmoil in Jerusalem in 170 BC.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes got involved in the Sixth War of Syria against Egypt (170-168 BC) and its kings, the brothers Ptolemy VI Philometor and Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II, conquering the strategic city of Pelusium (an ancient city of Lower Egypt, located in the northeast of the Nile delta). Daniel (Dan. 11: 21-28) refers to this episode of war between Antiochus and Ptolemy VI Philometor (Dn 11: 28: ‘He shall return to his land’ or ‘The king of the north will return to his own country’), for Antiochus was forced to leave Egypt because of difficulties in his homeland (betrayal by his own people against him). On the way back (taking many spoils) he plundered Jerusalem and the treasure of

the temple. Antiochus IV, who had already taken Cyprus and Memphis, returned to Alexandria, trying to take Egypt on a second expedition in 168 BC, but met with the Roman consul Gaius Popillius Laenas in the city of Eleusis (Egypt). There, Gaius Popillius Laenas gave him an ultimatum on behalf of the Roman senate for him to leave Cyprus and Egypt immediately. After this episode, Antiochus focused his attention in Judea, also trying to take Hellenism there and attach it to Rome; not only Judea, but also Phoenicia. During the reign of his father Antiochus III the Great, it was granted broad religious autonomy to the Jews who were already divided into two parties, one 'pious' (traditional) and another that favored Hellenization and Romanization, the latter being richer and composed of the most important people before society, such as Menelaus. Antiochus supported the latter party. At this time, Jason made a failed attempt to regain control of Jerusalem. He fled again to Ammon, then to Egypt and died in Lacedaemonia (or Laconia, Greece, in the region of the Peloponnese, whose capital was Sparta).

Then, in the return of the second war against Egypt (168-167 BC), Antiochus IV Epiphanes conquered Jerusalem, which became permanently controlled by soldiers. He sent a great army against the city and took it in a sudden attack; killed 40,000 people and sold many Jews as slaves. In that place, Antiochus IV committed sacrilege, having a pig sacrificed on the altar and sprinkling the blood in the temple; he invaded the Holy of Holies and plundered the vessels of gold and other sacred utensils worth a thousand talents. He sought to establish Hellenism by force, introducing as law the destruction of copies of the Scriptures and forbidding the Jewish worship: the observance of the Sabbath, dietary prohibitions and even the circumcision. Some historians report that in addition to looting the temple and killing the 40,000 people mentioned above, the mothers who were circumcising their babies were killed along with their families. Daniel refers to this (Dan. 11: 31: 'Forces sent by him shall occupy and profane the temple and fortress. They shall abolish the regular burnt offering and set up the abomination that makes desolate' – NRSV – or 'His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation' – in NIV). In the Temple of Jerusalem it was installed a statue of the Greek god Zeus (Jupiter to the Romans). Antiochus IV left Menelaus ruling the Jews as high priest.

The prophet Daniel also comments on this. Among the Jews and the high priests there were unbelievers, such as Menelaus (probably from the Tobiads' family) and Jason (another Ammonite), who facilitated the infiltration of Antiochus Epiphanes into the Holy City. The prophet Daniel, in his prophecy, calls them 'those who violate the covenant' (Daniel 11: 32: 'He shall seduce with intrigue those who violate the covenant; but the people who are loyal to their God shall stand firm and take action'). 'The people who are loyal to their God shall stand firm and take action' refers to the Maccabees and the Jews who resisted the attempt of Hellenization. This situation (Romanization and Hellenization of Judea) generated displeasure among the faithful Jews as Mattathias and his sons, John, Simon, Judas Maccabee, Eleazar, and Jonathan (the Hasmonean family, known as Maccabees). Macabee means 'hammer.' They lived in a village called Modi'in (in Hebrew: מודיעין), about twenty miles west of Jerusalem and twenty-two miles southeast of Tel Aviv, at the site known today as Modi'in-Maccabim-Reut.

The revolt broke out when a group of Greeks gathered the inhabitants of the village in the square where an altar with idols had been erected. The Greek general demanded that John made offerings there. He, however, refused vehemently and his attitude provoked the revolt, for his father, Matthias, killed a Hellenistic Jew who took a step forward to offer sacrifice to an idol. Modern scholars say that it all started in a civil war between traditionalist Jews and Hellenized Jews in Jerusalem. For this reason Zechariah



writes: 'I will cause them, every one, to fall each into the hand of a neighbor, and each into the hand of the king [NIV: their king]; and they shall devastate the earth, and I will deliver no one from their hand' (Zech. 11: 6).

What began as a civil war and as a religious rebellion was gradually transformed into a national liberation war, when the kingdom of Syria joined the Hellenistic Jews in their conflict with the traditionalists. Mattathias and his five sons fled to the wilderness of Judah. Mattathias died, quite old, and his son, Judas Maccabee was appointed general. He adopted the strategy of guerrilla, taking the enemy in surprise attacks. Finally, the Macabees expelled the troops of Antiochus IV from Jerusalem. In 162 BC Menelaus was executed, and Antiochus V Eupator (the son and successor of Antiochus IV) placed Alcimus (162-160 BC) in his place. His commander, Lysias, agreed to a political compromise that restored the religious freedom of the Jews. The Revolt of the Maccabees lasted from 167 BC to 160 BC. Judas wanted to retake Jerusalem to cleanse the temple. By getting there, he found only desolation, ruins, statues and idols everywhere. But he and his army purified the temple ritually, restoring the traditional Jewish worship. Judas Maccabee died and was succeeded by his brother Jonathan Maccabee, who became high priest in Jerusalem (153-143 BC).

- v. 7: 'So, on behalf of the sheep merchants, I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. I took two staffs; one I named Favor, the other I named Unity, and I tended the sheep' [NRSV].

NIV: 'So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs and called one Favor and the other Union, and I pastured the flock.'

KJV: 'And I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock.'

ASV: 'So I fed the flock of slaughter, verily the poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock.'

In all versions in English, the verb it is written in the first person, that is, he (*the prophet*) made the decision ['I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter', the poor of the flock], meaning the prophet representing the role of God to his people.

We can say that, just as with Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Zechariah was staging the word he received from the Lord, and he took a staff, which he called 'Favor' [KJV / ASV: Beauty; or in ARA: Grace], and another, to which he gave the name of 'Union' ['Unity' or 'Bands'], in the same way that God was dealing with His people: with favor (grace, mercy, beauty) and bringing to them the union ('unity', 'bands'). There is also a relationship with the shepherding of Jesus.

The Hebrew word translated as 'Beauty' (KJV, ASV) or 'Favor' (NRSV, NIV) is: nô'am or no'am (Strong #5278), meaning delight, pleasure, pleasant, pleasantness, satisfaction, splendor; grace, beauty, pleasant feeling. It is derived from a primitive root (na'em – Strong #5276), meaning: to be pleasant or agreeable, to walk with beauty, be a pleasure, be sweet, be delight.

The Hebrew word translated as 'Union or Unity' (NRSV, NIV) or 'Bands' (KJV, ASV) is Chabal or Chêbel (Strong #2254), meaning: to wind tightly, with force (like a rope), that is, to bind, specifically, by a promise; a pledge, oath; figuratively, pervert, destroy, twist or writhe in pain (especially in childbirth); band, produce, a corrupt thing, corruptly, offend, put on pledge, take on pledge, take a pledge, spoil, ruin, travail, painful work or labor, withhold.

When it comes to the prophet and the people of the old covenant, God says that He was pouring on them His favor and His mercy and grace, His beautiful order of government and His satisfaction. This would be pleasant to them. It was also a promise of union between His children in the post-exile period, Judah and Ephraim, by the divine mercy poured out in response to the obedience of their hearts to the word from the mouths of His prophets; more precisely, the divine mercy poured out upon civil and ecclesiastical rulers who were submissive to Him. With their hearts softened by the love of God, union would become easier among the brethren. The people are still described as ‘The flock doomed to slaughter’ or ‘the flock marked for slaughter’ or else ‘the flock of slaughter’ (cf. v.4), but the sheep are also called ‘the oppressed of the flock’ or ‘the poor of the flock’ (the expression is repeated in v. 11: ‘the afflicted of the flock’ – NIV; or ‘the poor of the flock’ – KJV, ASV), which probably means the faithful remnant within Israel.

Jesus, as a figure of the Good Shepherd, would unite Jews and Gentiles under grace, under the undeserved favor of God, in only one family: His Church (Jn. 10: 16). The sheep destined for slaughter at the hands of Satan, the oppressed, the poor in spirit who were thirsting for His word, these ones would find the rest and comfort of a true shepherd, for He was both their King and priest. The humble, the poor, the oppressed sheep may refer to the disciples and followers of Christ, those chosen to be His and to hear His voice (Jn. 10: 4; 11; 27-28; Jn. 1: 12-13).

The same way the prophet was saying that he took the two staffs and began to feed the sheep, Jesus began His ministry on earth by feeding His sheep, the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10: 6).

- v. 8 (NRSV): ‘In one month **I disposed** of the three shepherds, for I had become impatient with them, and they also detested me.’

NIV: ‘In one month **I got rid of** the three shepherds. The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them.’

KJV: ‘Three shepherds also **I cut off** in one month; and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me.’

ASV: ‘And **I cut off** the three shepherds in one month; for my soul was weary of them, and their soul also loathed me.’

- ‘I disposed of’, ‘I got rid of’, ‘I cut off’ – this means to be free from something, someone or an annoyance, i.e., this ceased to bother. It does not necessarily mean that the problem was eliminated by killing people, but that somehow these shepherds were no longer a problem for the Good Shepherd.

- The second question comes to be: what is the identity of these three shepherds?

If we think of the OT in the person of God the Father as the author of this decision, it is not possible to know who they were, in the same way in relation to the prophet who probably clashed with the leaders of his people by obeying God and deciding to shepherd the sheep, as it was commanded to him; after all, Zechariah was a priest. It is common the interpretation of these biblical characters as being the king, the prophet and the priest. But in the case of Zechariah there was no king ruling over his people, except a wicked emperor, like the Persians (in the present) and the Greeks (in the future). If Zerubbabel was still alive and in the post of governor of Judah, he did not seem to be opposition to the prophet; nor Joshua, the high priest, the figure of the Messiah, the Branch. In the case of Zechariah, it could be other Levites priests, separated to teach, but at the moment were far from God’s ways.

What matters to us here is Jesus, once this prophecy concerns His ministry and His role as a Good Shepherd of His sheep. Then the three shepherds may relate to the

teachers of the law: Sadducees, Pharisees and scribes, for it was with them that Jesus argued most. The high priest and the Levitical priests who performed their office in the temple were not His major opponents present in His preaching and His miracles; they didn't make open opposition to Him. They were informed by the teachers of the law, and only saw Him closely in the Sanhedrin, and talked to Him personally by the time of His judgment. We can say that they were behind the scenes, while the teachers of the law instigated the people openly against Him and against His doctrine.

- The third important expression is: 'in a month.' Just as in the preceding comment, nothing can be said about the prophet or any attitude of God in the Old Testament concerning this period of time. We can think that in regard to Jesus, the month of Passover was the month when all the prophecies were fulfilled concerning His mission as Messiah and Redeemer of Israel, especially the day of His death, when it became clear for all what God was doing to His people: a new beginning, a new creation, the end of a dispensation, the finish of a covenant that by itself had already proven obsolete (Heb. 8: 13). Then, when He died on the cross, Jesus manifested clearly what He had preached for three years as the true doctrine of the Father, putting an end to the poisonous and corrupt doctrine of the teachers of the law and to their 'shepherding' over Israel. He died, rose from the dead, entered His glory again, and became free from the three shepherds definitely. They would no longer annoy Him or His sheep, which were now set apart for a new life and a new mission. They now had a new owner, a new master, and would no longer submit to the slaughter of Satan, but they had eternal life.

- The bible also says: 'for I had become impatient with them, and they also detested me' [NIV: 'The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them'].

If we think of Zechariah saying this, we are again without explanation of this statement; therefore, we can understand that it was God the Father speaking, that His patience with His people had been exhausted, after thousands years of attempts of reconciliation. His people refused to submit to Him, despite what they had already suffered, implying a new judgment for the correction of His ways; in fact, a 'last chance' or a 'preparation' for the coming of the Messiah (cf. v. 9-10).

Hence, the verse leads us to think again of Jesus, against whom the contempt and opposition from Israel were very clear and declared (see v. 12, when He is valued in thirty pieces of silver). The NT speaks about this in some passages of His ministry:

- 'for I had become impatient with them' – **Matt. 23: 1-36** (He rebukes the scribes and Pharisees); **Matt. 21: 43** ("Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom"); **Lk. 13: 34-35** ("Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord'").

- 'and they also detested me' – **Matt. 26: 3-5** ("Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, 'Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people'"); **Matt. 27: 23; 25** ("Then he asked, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!'... Then the people as a whole answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'"); **Jn. 1: 11** ("He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him"); **Jn. 8: 43-44; 47** ("Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He

was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies... Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God”); **Jn. 10: 25-26** (“Jesus answered, ‘I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep’”).

• v. 9: ‘So I said, ‘I will not be your shepherd. What is to die, let it die; what is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed; and let those that are left devour the flesh of one another!’” – In relation to the people of the Old Testament, God speaks through the prophet that His judgment is already determined. His people will be handed over again to the sword, to famine, to divisions, and to the sieges of their cities by their enemies. The Greek Empire under Alexander and his successors were God’s instruments to discipline His people. As was commented in verse 6 about Antiochus IV and the Seleucids, what happened to the Jews was part of the Lord’s judgment, increased by the civil wars that became more evident in Maccabean and Hasmonean times (these leaders also quarreled among themselves).

In 65–64 BC, the Seleucid Empire was annexed to the Roman Republic. Thus, the Hasmonean Period was ended, and the Roman Period began, when Pompey invaded Jerusalem (63 BC) and Herod the Great rose to power as king (37-4 BC). Antigonus (40-37 BC) was the last king of the Hasmonean Dynasty, and some say he was executed by Herod the Great in 37 BC. During the Herodian dynasty things did not get any better for Israel. Herod was the son of Antipater, an Idumean (or Edomite), placed by the Roman general Pompey as procurator of Palestine in 67 BC. Antipater prospered in the court of the last Hasmonean kings and came to rule Judea after Roman occupation. Herod the Great married Mariamne I (his 2<sup>nd</sup> wife, grand daughter of John Hyrcanus II, and the niece of Antigonus, the last High Priest of the Hasmonean dynasty) and appointed Ananelus as high priest (37-36 BC), succeeded by Aristobulus III of Judea (36 BC), at the age of 17. Aristobulus III was Herod’s brother-in-law and brother of Mariamne I; he was assassinated by Herod, who had already murdered John Hyrcanus II of Judea (36 BC). Ananelus returned to be high priest (36-30 BC), and after him, Joshua ben Fabus (30-23 BC). The priestly line follows with Simon ben Boethus (Father of Mariamne II, who married Herod the Great; she was his 3<sup>rd</sup> wife) → Joazar ben Boethus (4 BC) → Eleazar ben Boethus (4-3 BC) → Annas (6-15 AD – Ananus ben Seth or Annas ben Seth, the father, who is mentioned in the Gospel) → Caiaphas (18-36 AD, Annas’ son-in-law: Lk. 3: 2; Jn. 18: 13). He was appointed high priest by the Romans. The five sons of Annas also served as high priests: Eleazar ben Ananus (16-17 AD), Jonathan ben Ananus 36-37 AD, after the death of Caiaphas), Theophilus ben Ananus (37-41 AD), Matthias ben Ananus (43 AD), Ananus ben Ananus (63 AD).

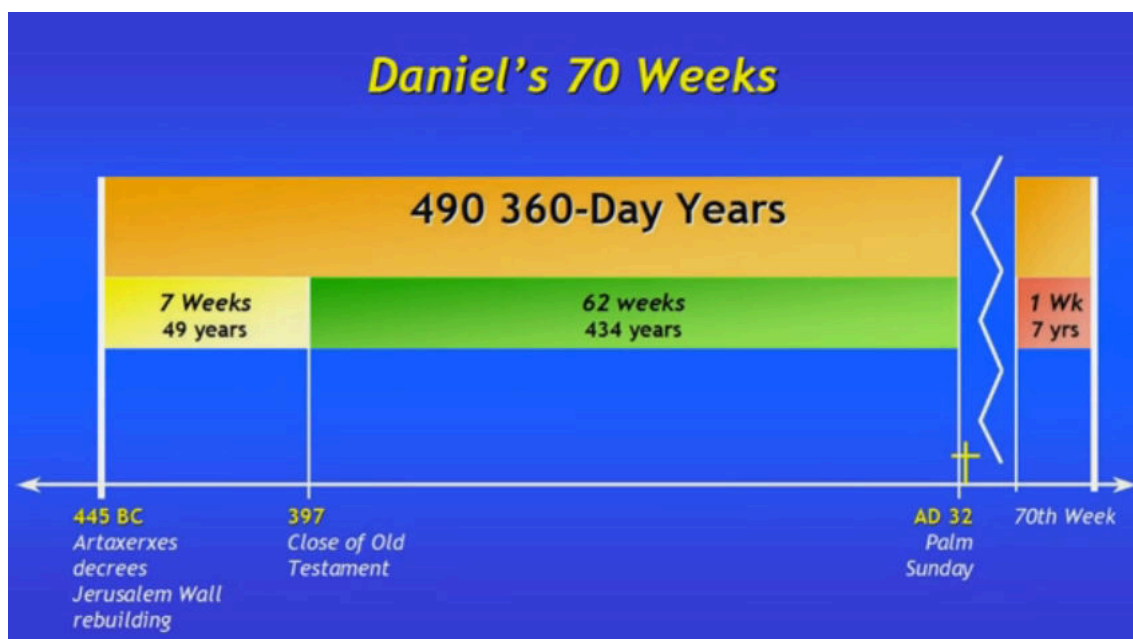
Herod the Great not only interfered in a bad way in the choice of the high priests, as he was a very bad civilian ruler, transmitting this bad behavior to his descendants.

As for the prophecy of Zechariah (Zech. 11: 9), it seems that the divine judgment resulting from it continued after the coming of Jesus and His rejection by the Jewish people (cf. v.12), for He Himself confirmed the word of the Father when referring to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus (“Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down” – Mk. 13: 2 – cf. Matt. 24: 2; Lk. 21: 6).

The prophecy of Zechariah (Zech. 11: 9) can also be confirmed by Daniel’s (Dan. 9: 24-26) about the seventy weeks: “Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity,

to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place [*The Holy of Holies*]. Know therefore and understand: from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince [NIV: until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes], there shall be seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat, but in a troubled time [It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble]. After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one [NIV 'The Anointed One' = *the first coming of Jesus and His death*] shall be cut off and shall have nothing, and the troops of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary [*It refers to Titus, who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple*]. Its end [*the end of Jerusalem*] shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed [*Bloodshed like a flood because of one war after another. Until the end times, Israel and Jerusalem will go through wars, that's what it means*].

The seventy weeks represent a time (according to some theologians, the years after the rebuilding of Jerusalem walls in 445 BC, plus God's period of silence, after the prophet Malachi – 400 years) that would end with the ascension of Christ (after His resurrection – 30 AD), having the “six divine targets” fulfilled (Dan. 9: 24) with His death on the cross: to make the transgression cease, to put an end to sins, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring the everlasting justice, to seal the vision and the prophecy (in Jesus the prophecies about the messianic restoration over Israel were finished) and to anoint the Holy of Holies.



In the image above (cf. Dan 9: 25) the angel separates the seven weeks (forty-nine years, which goes from the construction of Jerusalem to the beginning of the Intertestamental Period, and the other four hundred and thirty-four years, that is, sixty-two weeks, until the death and ascension of Jesus). The space with the zigzag line, in white, corresponds to the period between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ, the church period, where there was the destruction of the temple by Titus in 70 AD. And the last week (seven years) at the end of the figure corresponds to the Great Tribulation and will complete the seventy weeks (four hundred and ninety years) described by the prophet in

Dan. 9: 24. Therefore, this vision not only concerns the first coming of Christ, but also to His second coming.

The first Jewish-Roman war (66-70 AD), sometimes called the great Jewish revolt, which was the first of three great rebellions of the Jews of Judea against the Roman Empire. It began in the year 66 AD, initially due to religious tensions between Greeks and Jews with protests anti-taxation and attacks on Roman citizens. It ended when the Roman legions under the command of Titus (Titus Flavius Vespasianus Augustus, son of Titus Flavius Sabinus Vespasianus, or Vespasian) besieged and destroyed the center of rebel resistance in Jerusalem on 1<sup>st</sup> August 67 AD, culminating in the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, and defeated the Jewish remaining forces [three years and a half]. This fact was not only a landmark on the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies (Matt. 24: 1-2; Mk. 13: 1-2; Lk. 21: 5-6), as it was also depicted in the form of reliefs on the Arch of Titus in Rome. The Arch of Titus, all made of marble, was erected as a triumph, commemorating the conquest of Jerusalem, and built in 81 AD after the death of the emperor because of a fever. On the Arch are carved: the table with the bread of Presence, the silver trumpets and the Menorah. The following inscription can be read on it:

“SENATVS·POPVLVSQVE·ROMANVS·DIVO·TITO·DIVI·VESPASIANI·(FILIO) VESPASIANO·AVGVSTO”, meaning: “The Senate and the Roman people [dedicate] to the divine Titus Vespasian Augustus, son of the divine Vespasian”.

There was a difference between Pompey's attitude when he entered Jerusalem in 63 BC, annexing the province of Judea to the Roman Republic, and Titus' attitude, in 70 AD. Pompey entered the Holy of Holies with his officers, which was a serious insult to the Jews. However, in respect for the sanctity of the temple, he ordered that nothing should be removed or damaged. Perhaps, Pompey considered necessary to demonstrate his power by entering the temple, but showed his willingness to respect the Jewish faith and let their holy place inviolate, unless the Jews forced him to destroy it.

Titus, on the contrary, besieged the city with three legions on the west side and one legion on the Mount of Olives to the east. Titus cut off the food and the water to the city; he allowed the entry of some Jews to celebrate Passover, and then, denying their exit. After unsuccessful attempts of negotiation between Jews and Romans, Titus entered with his legions, destroying the outer part of the walls and crucifying the Jews who deserted around the walls. The Jews were surrendering because of hunger. Flavius Josephus reports that the famine in Jerusalem because of the siege of Titus was so intense, to the point of practicing cannibalism. The Romans took advantage of this weakness, breaking the inner parts of the walls, and entering the city. They took the Fortress of Antonia, which was not only a strong watchtower, but also the residence of the Roman procurator when he was in Jerusalem. More than one million people were killed during the siege, most of them Jews. Thousands of people were captured and enslaved. Many escaped to places near the Mediterranean. Under the command of Titus, the soldiers also invaded the temple after being in fire by a torch thrown against it. The city was plundered and the sacred objects taken to Rome. In the south wall of the temple, the Roman soldiers sacrificed eagles to their gods. His campaign in Judea ended with the invasion of the fortress of Masada south-west of the Dead Sea, where some Zealots (one of the radical Judean parties along with the Sicarii) took refuge and resisted, but everything ended in mass suicide, for the Jews preferred suicide to surrender.

In the time of the Romans, unlike the post-exile era, Israel was composed of the land of Judah, Samaria, Idumea, and Galilee, all of these regions under the name of Province of Judaea (or Palestine) under the rule of Rome.

Judea (Palestine) was divided by many parties in constant disagreement, which allowed the entry of Titus there.

The **Zealots** had their origin in the revolutionary Judas the Galilean who, in 6 AD, led a revolt against the payment of taxes to Rome. The rebels in Jerusalem at the time of the Roman invasion belonged to the group of Zealots, the Sicarii and other extremist groups not mentioned by name by the historians.

The **Sicarii** seem to have been a more extremist group within the radical separatist party of the Zealots (a splinter group of the Zealots), who tried to expel the Romans and their sympathizers from Judea. The Sicarii (in Latin: sicarius, 'man of the dagger'; pl. sicarii) used the sicae, a type of small dagger, hidden in their cloaks, and with these daggers they acted in public gatherings, attacking the Romans or the Jewish Roman sympathizers. The Sicarii, the Zealots and other kinds of revolutionaries invaded Jerusalem in 66 AD, and for some time managed to free it from the Romans, regaining the control of the temple. But the population itself expelled them and the city returned to be at the mercy of Rome. The historian Flavius Josephus blames the Zealots for inciting the revolt that led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

In addition to these extremist groups there were other political-religious parties that were also in constant opposition: **the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes**, who emerged during the Ptolemaic period, especially during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (250-198 BC).

**Pharisees** (in Hebrew, פרושים) were a group of devotees to the Torah, who emerged almost concomitantly with the other two in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (they arose around 150 BC, during the period of Jonathan Maccabeus as High Priest of Israel – 153 to 143 BC). They were the creators of the institution of the synagogue. After the destruction of the temple by Titus and the fall of the power of the Sadducees, the Pharisees had a greater influence within the Jewish community and became the forerunners of rabbinical Judaism. Pharisee means 'separated', 'holy.' The name, in Latin, is Pharisaeus; which comes from ancient Greek, Φαρισαίος (Pharisaios), and from the Hebrew, prushim or perushim, which comes from the root parash, meaning 'to separate', 'to move away', for it was a Jewish religious party characterized by opposition to other religious of its time, fleeing from the contact with them, and by the rigorous observance of legal prescriptions of the Torah and the traditions they had established. Probably the Pharisees had their origin in the 'Hassidim' (the pious), who supported the revolt of the Maccabees (167-160 BC). Between 160-63 BC, the Maccabees led the nation as kings and priests, but this led to divisions in the Israelite society because the Maccabees were not from the lineage of David or Zadok (a descendant of Aaron) and therefore they could occupy neither the civil nor the priestly office. That's why they found opposition by the Sadducees, who were said to belong to Zadok's lineage, therefore, with the right to the high priesthood. Later the Pharisees no longer disputed the position of civil ruler of the nation, but they did not depart completely from politics, for by finding themselves experts in religion they ended up controlling the religion of the Jewish state, and made use of political means to attain spiritual ends. But they never stopped thinking about the public interest, for they thought it important the teaching of the scriptures and traditions of the ancestors to the Jewish population. They believed that the oral law existed and was so authorized and inspired by God as the Torah (the written law). They were part of the Sanhedrin, which was a tribunal established by priests, elders and scribes who judged the ceremonial and administrative issues relating to a tribe or a city, as well as important political crimes. It corresponded to the Jewish Supreme Court or Court of Justice. They also participated in the leadership of the synagogue and its worship, as well as of the schools. Most of the Pharisees were not of the priestly class



and therefore did not depend exclusively on the Temple for their living. They were generally middle-class people who worked in various professions, such as merchants, artisans, and farmers. Some Pharisees were wealthy, but most were middle class and lived off their work. Some Pharisees had the function of scribes.

The **Scribes**, from the Hebrew word, *Sōpherim*, also called doctors or teachers of the law, were technicians in the study of the Law of Moses (Torah). Their main activity was to study it. They emerged after the Babylonian exile, and exerted influence especially in Judea, but could also be found in Galilee and among the Jewish dispersion. **Along with the Pharisees**, they were the creators of the worship in the synagogue. Some of them were members of the Sanhedrin. The scribes had their importance increased after 70 AD. They transmitted faithfully the Hebrew Scriptures. They had a triple function: a) they preserved the law; therefore, they were responsible for the written transmission of the manuscripts and their interpretation. b) They had disciples and made conferences in the temple. c) They were called the doctors (lawyers) and teachers of the law because they were judges of the Sanhedrin. They were not paid for the service they did in the Sanhedrin, so had to make a living by other means.

The **Sadducees** were a sect or a group of Jews present in Judea from the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple, and that flourished from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Some scholars claim that the Sadducees were descendants of Zadok (Hebrew: Tsadoq, צדוק, which means 'righteous'), a priest descendant from Eleazar son of Aaron (1 Chr. 6: 4-8). He officiated as a priest in the time of David and Solomon. From the time of the Maccabees the Sadducees disagreed with the Pharisees. The Sadducees were initially partisans of Hellenism, while the Pharisees were of the orthodox faction. Its members were regarded as the religious, social and economic elite in Judea; therefore, they held the political power in the Sanhedrin. Most of the Sadducees were wealthy and did not need to depend on ordinary secular work to survive. They fulfilled several political, social and religious functions, among which were the sacrifices and the administration of the Temple funds. They disagreed with the Pharisees about the question of the oral law, which they did not accept, denied the resurrection, angels and spirits (Acts 23: 8). They remained some time after 70 AD, when the temple and city of Jerusalem were destroyed by the Romans, but they left their mark on all anti-rabbinical tendencies of the early centuries (AD) and in medieval times.

The conflict between these two parties (Sadducees and Pharisees) was the disaster of the last years of the city of Jerusalem.

The **Essenes** were a mystical-religious movement (without political orientation) that rejected the high priests appointed by the Seleucids or the Hasmoneans, considering them illegitimate. The name 'Essene' (in Greek: *essaioi*; in Syriac: *essaya* or *essenoi*; in Aramaic: *chasajja*; and in Latin: *esseni*) means 'pious.' Their doctrine was based on the renunciation of pleasures of the flesh in order to achieve spiritual holiness. They lived in Qumran (or Khirbet Qumran, current name of the archeological site, which in Hebrew means 'ruin of the gray stain'), which was a place located in the region of Transjordan (West Bank), northwest of the Dead Sea, twelve kilometers from Jericho and twenty-two kilometers from Jerusalem. The colony of Qumran was known as 'stronghold of the pious', and held 200 to 300 people. It was abandoned in 31 BC, after a fire and an earthquake, but it was reconstructed and remained till the first century AD, when in 68 AD the Romans destroyed it. The name 'Qumran' is modern; it is derived from the Arabic 'qamar', meaning 'moon.' The name of the site in the period of the Second Temple was probably, *Secacah*, meaning 'city of salt.' Today, Qumran is summed up only in ruins. The Essenes were too concerned about the cleanliness of the body (they washed themselves constantly) as a symbol of purification of the soul. They made vow

of Naziriteship (consecration to God, not cutting the hair, not drinking wine or any product derived from grape and not touching a corpse), so they were called Nazirites (a word that is often mistakenly translated as 'Nazarenes'). The Essenes kept the name of God (the sacred tetragrammaton – YHWH) given to Moses at Sinai, unlike other Jews (mostly Pharisees and Sadducees) who were forbidden pronounce it.

They believed that man was the tabernacle of God on earth, not built by human hands, and also waited for the Messiah. Some of the early Christians were Essenes. This understanding ('the human being was the tabernacle of God on earth') was also shared by the Pharisees, members of the community of scribes and sages.

The power struggle between the leaders of these three factions (Sadducees, Pharisees and Zealots) was bloody and deadly. And this facilitated Titus entry into Judea and into the city.



Pharisees



Sadducee



Essene



Zealot

- v. 10: ‘I took my staff Favor [or ‘Beauty’] and broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples [NIV: all the nations].’

God speaks through the mouth and the attitude of the prophet that He is breaking His covenant with Israel. The Lord took His staff called ‘Favor’ and broke it, removing His favor over the Jews, even over those who were scattered among the several nations (the Jewish Diaspora), and this would affect all peoples as well. How? God had said to Abraham: “I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12: 3). And in Galatians, Paul repeats: “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you’” (Gal. 3: 8). Thus, the Jews were initially chosen and blessed by God so that they could be light to other peoples, that is, so that they could know the light of truth through the God of Abraham. By breaking this staff (‘Favor’), the covenant was being broken with the Jews and, consequently, with all peoples, so the prophet wrote: ‘annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples [NIV: all the nations].’

But due to rejection by the Jews, the Lord was already confirming here in Zechariah that the Messiah would come to truly break this ancient covenant and make a new one, where both Jews and Gentiles (gowy = peoples, nations, Gentiles) could be justified from sin and remake their friendship with Him. Therefore, Paul wrote, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3: 13-14).

For the people to understand, the prophet broke the staff before them, showing through this act what would happen to Jesus, that is, on the cross He canceled the first covenant of God made with His people since Abraham (Heb. 8: 13). Thus, they would no longer be governed by His beautiful order of government, nor would they continue in fraternal union (cf. v. 14, the staff called ‘Union’ was also broken). Jesus came bringing a new doctrine, breaking the civil form of government the Jews knew, nullifying the Mosaic law and the carnal ordinances that they created for themselves (especially in the exilic and post-exilic period).

- v. 11: ‘It was revoked on that day, and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew it was the word of the LORD (NIV).’

‘On that day’, therefore, refers to the day of Jesus’ death, for His followers and all who accepted Him as Savior, Messiah and Son of God, that is, the ‘poor sheep of the flock’ (or ‘the afflicted of the flock’, the remnants of Israel) understood that this had already been announced (Lk. 24: 25-27; 31-32; 44-48).

- v. 12-13: “I then said to them, ‘If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.’ So they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver [NIV: I told them, ‘If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.’ So they paid me thirty pieces of silver]. Then the Lord said to me, ‘Throw it into the treasury’—this lordly price at which I was valued by them. So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them into the treasury in the house of the Lord [NIV: And the LORD said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter’—the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter]” – The prophet seems to be experiencing this situation, for it is written: “**I then said to them**, ‘If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.’ So they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver.” Then he writes: “**Then the Lord said to me**, ‘Throw it into the treasury’—this lordly price at which I was valued by them. So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them into the treasury in the house of the Lord.”

- Thirty pieces of silver were the value of a slave’s life (Ex. 21: 32). It was the price agreed between Judas and the chief priests to betray Jesus, handing him over to them: “Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What will you give me if I betray him to you?’ They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him” (Matt. 26: 14-16).

- The Lord asked Zechariah to be evaluated by the people as to the worthiness of His actions before them. How could men evaluate God? But they valued His work through the prophet in only thirty pieces of silver.

- ‘So they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver’ – this was the manner of making a payment in money at that time, weighing it on the scales.

- In verse 13 God tells the prophet to throw the thirty pieces of silver to the potter in the House of the Lord, for He rejected this ignoble price by which they valued His true

shepherd. Ironically He used the word *lordly* (or handsome) to describe this value. This was the price of Israel's ingratitude and rebellion, as well as the rejection of the real shepherd. Therefore the flock would suffer, for had despised the 'grace' and 'favor' of the Lord poured upon His people and the 'union' (or 'unity') He had brought to the nation, gathering them from the peoples to whom they were exiled and giving conditions to Israel and Judah to remake their brotherhood.

Judas also threw back to the priests the thirty silver coins acquired by his act of betrayal: "Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, 'It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money'. After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, 'And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me'" (Matt. 27: 5-10).

- v. 14: 'Then I broke my second staff Unity, annulling the family ties between Judah and Israel [NIV: Then I broke my second staff called Union, breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel]' – by breaking the second staff 'union', the prophet was showing that God broke the unity between Israel and Judah in the same way. He tried to unite them after the return from exile, but it was not possible. Thus, they would once again be a divided nation, in the face of an enemy invasion (Greek and Roman Empire).

With Jesus' death on the cross, in front of a nation politically separated (Judea and Samaria; Galilee and Perea; Ituraea and Trachonitis), He broke the first covenant based on the Mosaic Law that governed them and held them together beneath it. He came to unite Israel in one church under His spiritual government. The traditional Jews who rejected His doctrine and tried to keep the traditions and the sacrifices in the temple, were forced to accept the dissolution of all this with its destruction by Titus in 70 AD. The struggle of three rival factions (Sadducees, Pharisees and Zealots) within Jerusalem under the Roman siege was one of the factors that led to the destruction of the city and temple and to a new dispersion of the Israelites throughout the world.

- Zech. 11: 15-17 (The parable of the foolish shepherd): "**15** Then the Lord said to me: Take once more the implements of a worthless shepherd [NIV: Take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd]. **16** For I am now raising up in the land a shepherd who does not care for the perishing [NIV: who will not care for the lost], or seek the wandering [NIV: or seek the young], or heal the maimed [NIV: or heal the injured], or nourish the healthy [NIV: or feed the healthy], but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs. **17** Oh, my worthless shepherd [NIV: Woe to the worthless shepherd], who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! Let his arm be completely withered, his right eye utterly blinded!"

Here the Lord tells the prophet to take the equipment of a foolish shepherd, as a way of showing His people what would still happen to Israel and with a ruler other than the Good Shepherd (Ezek. 34: 11-31). This ruler would not watch over His flock; he would not bring the lost sheep back, nor would heal their wounds, but would destroy them. Ezekiel spoke this way about the kings of Judah before exile (Ezek. 34: 1-10). Zechariah now spoke of leaders who would come after Zerubbabel, both Jews and

Gentiles of foreign nations. Or we can take this to the time after Christ, when His countrymen rejected Him and the Jews were scattered throughout the world.

In any case, we may think that the foolish shepherd is the figure of all the wicked men who have ravaged Jerusalem over the centuries since the Old Testament, especially after the return from exile. Because they have rejected the true Shepherd, they will have the guidance of the foolish shepherd, whose apex will be in the end times with the appearance of the Antichrist and the false prophet (Dan. 11: 36-39; 2 The. 2: 1-12; Rev. 13: 1-10; 11-18).

‘For I am now raising up in the land a shepherd’ – this means that by divine permission this wicked man will commit his atrocities in Israel.

- v. 17: ‘Oh, my worthless shepherd [NIV: Woe to the worthless shepherd], who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! Let his arm be completely withered, his right eye utterly blinded!’ – This chapter of Zechariah ends with a terrible woe to the foolish (worthless) shepherd who forsakes the flock. And the curse of God upon him is that the sword strikes his arm and his right eye. Let his arm be completely withered, his right eye utterly blinded! He did not work as he should; therefore, his arm will be stricken. This means the loss of secular power. He did not watch; he slept, and let the kingdom of darkness take hold; therefore, his right eye will be totally blind. This means the loss of the knowledge and spiritual discernment needed for leadership. The arm is the symbol of power, while the eye symbolizes intelligence.

## Chapter 12

### Introduction:

From this chapter on, the interpretation becomes a bit more difficult, for it refers to the period of the Great Tribulation and the way God will deal especially with the Jews at the end of time. The explanations I give are Evangelical Christian explanations, not Jewish explanations.

It is as if the Holy Spirit used Zechariah (Zech. 12: 1-2; Zech. 14: 1-15) to write with more detail the battle of Armageddon, the final war described in three different manners (Rev. 16: 12-16 – 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> bowls of God's wrath; Rev. 19: 17-21; Rev. 20: 7-10) between Jesus and the Dragon (Satan – Rev. 20: 7-10), the Beast coming out of the Sea (the Antichrist – Rev. 13: 1-10; Rev. 19: 20) and the false prophet (the beast coming out of the earth – Rev. 13: 11; Rev. 16: 13; Rev. 19: 20). We can notice from now on, in the next chapters of Zechariah, the clear Jewish content in the figures of speech, and the 'necessity' almost imperative of showing something quite physical, material, palpable, to a people who were not aware of the spiritual realities.

Zechariah brings a message filled with figures of speech to the Jews of that time and, very possibly, with his understanding of a 'millennium' from the Jewish standpoint (Zech. 14: 9-11; Zech. 14: 16-21): the fulfillment of the promises of God made to them, that is, the prophecies concerning the restoration of Israel as a nation, in its own land, endowed with a literal throne, a literal Davidic king, a literal temple, and a literal system of sacrifices, which will be fulfilled to the letter, overly emphasizing the materialistic side of all this. This theory is called: Dispensationalism. The Christian church interprets this as a thousand-year time when the righteous will reign on earth with Christ.

Many scholars feel that the idea of a Millennium or Messianic Kingdom can not be embedded within the biblical eschatological view [Rev. 20: 1-6 concerns the victory of the martyred saints (Rev. 20: 4 – 'the souls of the beheaded'), which are in heaven, those martyred by the Beast]. According to this theory, the second coming will immediately inaugurate the consummation, the final judgment, and the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21: 1; Isa. 65: 17; Isa. 66: 22; 2 Pet. 3: 13; 1 Cor. 15: 23-28). This point of view is called 'amillennialism' [Source: J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1995 / Note the commentary to this paragraph: cf. G.E. Ladd, Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God, 1952, pg. 141 et seq.]. The Gospels, Paul's letters and the general letters do not speak of a millennium.

'Millennium' was a conception created by Jewish scholars in the post-exilic and Intertestamental Period to endorse a belief and hope for redemption and regeneration of Israel in a physical and overly material way, for they misinterpreted the words of the prophets, and they did not expect that their Messiah would come differently, so they did not believe in Him; even because the prophets of God never used the word Messiah (Mashiach – mâshiyach – משיח) to refer to the spiritual Savior of Israel. This word is only clearly written in reference to Jesus in the book of Daniel (Dan. 9: 25-26 – 'The Anointed One'), when an angel announces to the prophet that the Messiah would arise and would be killed 62 prophetic weeks after the rebuilding of Jerusalem, before the city and temple be destroyed again (what happened in 70 AD by the Romans).

In these verses of Daniel, 'The Anointed One', in NIV is written with a capital letter:

<sup>25</sup> Know therefore and understand: from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince [mâshiyach – NIV: until de



Anointed One, the ruler, comes], there shall be seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat, but in a troubled time [It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble].

<sup>26</sup> After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one [NIV ‘The Anointed One’ (māshiyach)] shall be cut off and shall have nothing, and the troops of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.

What needs to be clear is that ‘millennium’ or ‘Messianic Kingdom’ was a word and expression created by the ancient Jews, to meet their need for an explanation of the fulfillment of God’s promises made to them, including based on apocryphal books, such as ‘The First Book of Enoch’, and wrongly interpreted by the church of Christ on the verse of Revelation (Rev. 20: 1-6). The chapters 91–108 of this book are called ‘The Epistle of Enoch’ and give a prophetic exposition of the thousand-year reign of the Messiah. In this epistle, the history of the world uses a structure of ten periods (called ‘weeks’), of which seven regard the past and three regard future events (the final judgment). The climax occurs in the seventh part of the tenth week where “new heaven shall appear” and “there will be many weeks without number for ever, and all shall be in goodness and righteousness”. Those who have read parts of the book can perceive the high mystical content of it, without any biblical basis.

In fact, ‘Messianic Kingdom’ concerns the coming of the Messiah, which already occurred 2,000 years ago; and ‘eschatological’ or ‘apocalyptic’ refers to His second coming, bringing His righteousness and the end of the world (‘the end of the age’, in biblical terms). ‘Eschatology’ is a word that derives from two Greek roots: ‘eschatos’ (ἔσχατος), which means ‘last’; and ‘logy’ (λογία), which means ‘study’, therefore, the study of ‘things of the end’, the ‘end times’. In a broad sense, the word eschatology, or the expression ‘things of the end’ can be applied to the end of an individual life, the end of time, the end of the world or the nature of the Kingdom of God. Broadly speaking, Christian eschatology focuses on the ultimate destiny of individual souls and the entire created order, based primarily on the biblical texts of the Old and New Testaments.

So we can call Isaiah and other prophets ‘messianic’ prophets because they pointed to the coming of the Messiah. And we can call apocalyptic prophets those who contain a message from God for the end times (that is, the ultimate defeat of evil and eternal life with God).

There is no reason to think of a material millennium when we know that the coming of Christ was a plan of God the Father that astonished mankind in what it thought about His righteousness and His ability to restore His children. Although they were used by God to reveal His designs to men, the prophets of that time had their thoughts permeated with human opinion and limited vision of something they could not understand or imagine (“And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets” – 1 Cor. 14: 32).

At His first coming, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies concerning the Messiah (with the several names given to Him by God Himself through His true prophets), bringing victory over sin and death and, consequently, the eternal life. But through unbelief in His words and rejection of His doctrine, God the Father has written down what He is going to have to do in the last days (Dan. 12: 1-3; 10-12). Therefore, the prophet Zechariah alludes to the attack of Jerusalem by foreign forces and the victory given by the Lord (Zech. 12: 1-9), followed by the repentance of the Jews (Zech. 12: 10-14), for they will see Him whom they have pierced (Zech. 12: 10; Rev. 1: 7; Jn. 19: 37).

There is a reference to Jesus in chapter 13 when the Good Shepherd is wounded (Jesus is arrested and crucified), and the ‘sheep’ are scattered: Zech. 13: 7.

During the period of the Great Tribulation (Dan. 12: 1; Rev. 7: 14) the Antichrist (2 The. 2: 3; 2 The. 2: 7-12; Dan. 9: 27; Dan. 11: 31; Dan. 12: 11) and the false prophet (Dan. 9: 27; Dan. 12: 1-2; Matt. 24: 15-31; Mk. 13: 3-27; Lk. 21: 5-28; Rev. 7: 14) will appear, among other eschatological characters. But the false prophet will only deceive those who have not accepted and will not accept Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, for those who accept Him and acknowledge Him as the awaited Messiah will be the remnant saved (Zech. 13: 9; Rev. 7: 4-8).

During the second period of the Great Tribulation the two witnesses described in Rev. 11: 3-14 will appear. If we think from the Jewish standpoint (as the Dispensationalists do), they will bring revival to God's people of the old Covenant playing the role of king and priest (as Joshua and Zerubbabel – 'the two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand' – Zech. 4: 11-14 – cf. Rev. 11: 4), confronting the Antichrist (who will claim the role of civil ruler) and the false prophet who, in addition to deceiving the people with false prophecy, will also desire the role of priest among the Jews. And they will prophesy for 3 ½ years in the name of the Lord to convert the Jews to Jesus. When they have finished their testimony, they will be killed by the beast that rises from the bottomless pit (Rev. 11: 7) and many wicked will rejoice, but after 3 ½ days (Rev. 11: 11), the Spirit of God will raise them up and they will be caught up. The divine judgment will come upon the city. From the Jewish and the Dispensationalist standpoint, this city here is Jerusalem, the city where Jesus was crucified and killed.

However, the two witnesses represent the very Church of Christ (made up of Jews and Gentiles) witnessing during History, proclaiming the gospel; and only at the time of the end will the Lord allow the antichrist to rise up against them. The witnesses are the representation of the people of God who preach and prophesy the word during the period between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus. When they complete their testimony, the beast that comes out of the Abyss will overcome them (Rev. 11: 7). But they will be resurrected after 3 ½ days (Rev. 11: 11). The city mentioned in Revelation is the city of men, the world hostile to God and the Church, not Jerusalem or Rome.

The moment of the 'restoration of Israel' or 'renewal of all things' described in the bible (Acts 1: 6; Matt. 19: 28; Mk. 10: 40; Lk. 22: 28-29) will correspond to the moment of repentance (at the time of the second coming of Christ – Zech. 12: 10-14; Zech. 13: 1-6; 9 cf. Dan. 12: 11-12) and to the opening of their understanding to Jesus Christ as the true Messiah, before the final judgment, with the separation between those who inherit eternal life and those who go to hell (Matt. 25: 31-46; Matt. 16: 27; Matt. 19: 28). Thus, Israel will be entitled to live in the spiritual New Jerusalem (Zech. 14: 7-11; Rev 21: 1-8, Rev. 22: 1-5; Rev. 22: 12-17).

When Jesus came to earth He came bringing a spiritual kingdom, giving us consciousness of the supernatural things to overcome our true enemies, but He did not remove the material part from us. He knows we need material things on earth. What He did was a **prioritization of values** (To seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to us as well: Matt. 6: 33; Lk 12: 30-34). Jesus turned the table of the money changers in the temple because He saw a distortion there, doing trade in His Father's House. That is why Zechariah (Zech. 14: 20-21) writes that the renewal and future glory of the city of God include holiness. There will be no trade, no merchants in the Temple ('Canaanites', written in some bible translations, means 'merchants' – Zech. 14: 21c).

Therefore, in the New Jerusalem our new life will be spiritual (glorified, more precisely), for we will already be 'detached' from these material things. When the bible refers to gold and precious stones in the New Jerusalem, perhaps it is referring to the

glory, the abundance, the fullness and the splendor of God; difficult things to be described by human mind.

Christ is now enthroned at the right hand of God (Mk. 16: 19; Rom. 8: 34; 1 Peter 3: 22); but His kingdom is not evident to the world, therefore He will return in a visible way to those who do not believe, and to carry out His judgment. After His victory, when all things are subject to Him, His kingdom will be handed over to the Father (1 Cor. 15: 24-28).

The Lord will appear in heaven, will catch up His living saints (with their glorified bodies) and resurrect the saints who are asleep (dead). He will make His judgment upon those who have the mark of the beast (Rev. 13: 16-17; Rev. 15: 7, Rev 16: 1-2; 3; 4; 8; 10-11; 12; 18-21; Rev. 18: 9-10; 21) and will deal with darkness (1 Cor. 15: 24-26; 28; Rev. 19: 11-21; Rev. 20: 10). The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Cor. 15: 26; Rev. 20: 14). In other words, the second coming will immediately inaugurate the consummation, the final judgment, and the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21: 1; Isa. 65: 17; Isa. 66: 22; 2 Pet. 3: 13; 1 Cor. 15: 23-28).

## Explanation:

After this introduction, it is easier and simpler to explain the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Zechariah:

- Zech. 12: 1-9 – Salvation of Jerusalem

- Zech. 12: 1: “The word of the Lord concerning Israel: Thus says the Lord, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the human spirit within.”

After the Lord spoke about the two shepherds and made it clear that the foolish shepherd is the figure of all the wicked men who have ravaged Jerusalem over the centuries, He now gives a message of judgment over all the world powers that are against His holy city at the end of time. By the importance of revelation, He says that He is the God who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the human spirit within man. Thus, God reaffirms His sovereignty over the world, over men and over all creation, and makes it clear through the prophet that it was this God who was speaking.

- Zech. 12: 2: “See, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling for all the surrounding peoples; it will be against Judah also in the siege against Jerusalem.”

The Lord announces a future siege to the city of Jerusalem by many nations, but He will give an answer at the same level of this invasion, that is, He will make the city a cup of reeling for these peoples. The cup is the symbol of God’s wrath, something that has a limit and ability to bear the iniquities of men, and brings a complete state of physical and mental disorientation (confusion), as if it were a ‘strong drink’, as the bible says. Some prophets wrote about this cup: Isa. 51: 17; 22; Jer. 13: 13; Jer. 25: 15-28; Jer. 51: 7.

- Zc 12: 3: “On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it shall grievously hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth shall come together against it [NIV: 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].”

Jerusalem will not only be like a cup with a strong drink that sends people reeling, but it will be like a heavy stone, and whoever tries to lift it will be injured, that is, the people of Jerusalem will fall on those who have tried to oppress them with their dominion; will be an unexpected result in the war.

- Zech. 12: 4-5: “On that day, says the Lord, I will strike every horse with panic, and its rider with madness. But on the house of Judah I will keep a watchful eye, when I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness. Then the clans of Judah shall say to themselves, ‘The inhabitants of Jerusalem have strength through the Lord of hosts, their God.’”

In the same way that the Lord used this metaphor to express His action against enemy armies in the past (Gideon, Joshua, the Syrians in the time of Elisha, Jehoshaphat, Lot – the citizens of Sodom), He uses it again in this verse to a state of chaos and panic (madness and blindness) that will take care of the horses and the horsemen during the attack. The cavalry here serves to describe every vehicle used in war, as the horses were animals used by the Eastern armies for this purpose. God also talks about opening the eyes of His people to see that He cares for them and is defending them; it also concerns the opening of their understanding to the spiritual things, something they could not have before because of their rebelliousness. The inhabitants of Judah will recognize that Jerusalem has victory because the Lord of hosts is their God.

- Zech. 12: 6: “On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot on a pile of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves; and they shall devour to the right and to the left all the surrounding peoples, while Jerusalem shall again be inhabited in its place, in Jerusalem [NIV: 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].”

Completing the reasoning above, the Jews will not triumph just because God brings confusion and chaos to enemy armies, but because their commanders will receive His power, organization, and competence as if they were fire destroying straw or wood.

- Zech. 12: 7: “And the Lord will give victory to the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may not be exalted over that of Judah.”

The Lord will give victory in the most distant and less defended areas (‘the tents of Judah’ – Ezek. 38: 11-12), so that all realize that deliverance came from Him, not from human strength, and so that the great do not boast over the little ones. ‘The tents of Judah’ may refer not only to the technically weaker but also to the spiritually weaker.

- Zech. 12: 8-9: “On that day the Lord will shield the inhabitants of Jerusalem so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the Lord, at their head [NIV: like the Angel of the LORD going before them]. And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.”

Here the Lord no longer speaks of the tents of Judah but of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and says that even the weakest of them will feel strong and confident to fight, as David with a single sling destroyed the giant Goliath in the strength of his faith in God. The Lord will be their strength, though the enemy armies are more numerous and more prepared. ‘The feeblest among them’ concerns Jews of all classes.

‘The house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the Lord, at their head [NIV: like the Angel of the LORD going before them]’ – this shows a restoration in the royal line of the house of David as a civil ruler in Israel, who will regain his leadership force, will not falter, and will go with security ahead of the people, leading them to victory, like the pillar of cloud or fire, or the Angel of the Lord (the figure of Jesus, common to see in the Old Testament) went ahead of the Israelites in any battle to open the way for them.

In verse 9, He confirms that on that day He will destroy the nations that come against His people, showing the faithfulness to His promises, and His sovereignty over all things. He uses the verb ‘destroy’, meaning something definite, which will not rise up anymore.

- Zech. 12: 10-14 (Repentance of the inhabitants of Jerusalem):

- Zech. 12: 10-11: “And I will pour out a spirit [Note NIV: or ‘the Spirit’] of compassion [NIV: grace] and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced (cf. Jn. 19: 37; Rev. 1: 7), they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon [NIV: Hadad Rimmon] in the plain of Megiddo.”

After the material victory given to His people, the spiritual treatment through repentance is necessary. ‘The spirit of grace and supplication’ or ‘the spirit of compassion and supplication’ concerns the Holy Spirit, who will be poured out upon the nation, from the lowly to the most important, leading them to seek God in prayer (Jer. 29: 12-13; Ezek. 39: 29; Jl. 2: 28-29). Jesus said that it is the Holy Spirit who convicts of guilt in regard to sin, and righteousness and judgment (Jn. 16: 8). Through the Holy Spirit, their hearts will be propitious to supplication and repentance. Therefore, God’s response to this quest will lead them to the understanding of salvation and the reason for the death of Jesus on the cross as an atonement of the sins of mankind. Then, their eyes will see the one whom they have pierced. Jews of the past did it physically; those of the present generation, who refuse to accept Him, crucify Him again, that is, ‘undo’ the benefit of His sacrifice, denying His salvation and exposing His name to shame, excluding Him from their lives (Heb. 6: 6b: “and then have fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding him up to contempt”). Jews who can remember the prophetic writings will also remember what is written in Isa. 53: 5: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed [NIV: But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed]”, as the Jews of Zechariah’s time must have remembered, even if they could not attain to the deep understanding of what it meant. The national mourning will be compared to the death of King Josiah in the valley of Megiddo (2 Chr. 35: 24-25). Hadad-Rimmon means ‘the thunderer’ and was probably a locality in this valley. The hypothesis is related to the idolatry to Baal (J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1995), because of the title ‘the thunderer’, for Baal was the lord of storms and other natural manifestations connected to the atmosphere (lightning and thunder), besides being the great god of fertility for the Canaanites. Perhaps the modern Rummanah, in the plain of Jezreel, corresponds to the location of Hadad-Rimmon, cited by Zechariah. Thus, the mention of ‘the mourning for Hadad-Rimmon’ may be a reference to pagan

worship ceremonies or to the event of Josiah's death, mortally wounded in the Battle of Megiddo (609 BC).

- Zech 12: 12-14: "The land shall mourn, each family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimeites by itself [NIV: the clan of Shimei], and their wives by themselves; and all the families that are left, each by itself, and their wives by themselves."

The national mourning will cover all families of all social classes. Each one will weep for himself, will face his sadness alone ('each family by itself', 'their wives by themselves'). From the simplest Israelite to the noblest, all will turn repentant to the Lord.

'The land shall mourn' = the land of Israel will mourn

'The family of the house of David' = kings (the political leadership of Israel)

'The house of Nathan' = prophets

'The house of Levi' = priests

'The family of the Shimeites' = the family of Shimei, the son of Gershon, the son of Levi (Num. 3: 21). Shimei is placed separately even though he is a member of the Levites, meaning a different category within Israel in the service of God, that is, those who do not serve God directly in a priestly ministry, but take care of His house and have a call to serve Him, whatever it may be; they help the priests in their office. For example: Levi begat Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. Moses, Aaron and Miriam were born of the descendants of Kohath. The family of Kohath took care of the utensils of the Tabernacle, after Aaron and his sons covered them; then they carried them, including the ark of the covenant. Aaron and his sons took care of the priesthood itself, to serve in the Holy of Holies and in the Holy Place. Gershon's family took care of carrying the curtains, as well as the other utensils of the tent of Meeting, not the sacred objects; and the family of Merari was responsible for the objects, for the stakes, and for all that was in the outer court of the tabernacle, besides its wood frames.

'All the families that are left, each by itself' = lay people, the common people.

After the weep and God's forgiveness, Israel will experience the joy of salvation: Isa. 59: 20; Rom. 11: 25-26.

## Chapter 13

After the encounter with the Lord and His grace, there is a great restoration and purification of the faithful remnant (Zech. 13: 1-6; 9). Jewish prophecy (Zech. 13: 7-9) finishes when the Good Shepherd is wounded and this way the source that cleanses from all sin is opened.

- Zech. 13: 1-6 (The idols and the false prophets are eliminated):
- v. 1: “On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.”
- ‘On that day’ concerned the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ (conversion of the Jews). God was still giving a chance to the ancient Jews, as He continues to talk about the conversion of the Jews at the time of His second coming (after the national mourning for the Messiah’s death).
- ‘A fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity’ – Jesus’ blood removes those sins, and He did it on the cross for all who accepted Him as Savior at the moment of His first coming. In the spiritual world, which is timeless, this is a continuous source available to anyone, at any time, to Jews and Gentiles, to all who decide to give up sin and turn to God, desiring the true and total purification of their robes. Concerning the conversion of the Jews at the time of His second coming (after the national mourning for the Messiah’s death) described in the previous chapter, this is confirmed in Rom. 11: 25-27: “So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in (cf. Matt. 21: 43; Lk. 21: 24; Rom. 11: 25; Ezek. 30: 3; Rev. 11: 2). And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, ‘Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.’”

Ezekiel’s prophecy will have its fulfillment (Ezek. 36: 25: ‘I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you’).

- v. 2: “On that day, says the Lord of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more; and also I will remove from the land the prophets and the unclean spirit [NIV: I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land].”
- ‘I will cut off the names of the idols from the land’ – this was fulfilled for all who accepted Jesus at His first coming, and Christians came to have another type of attitude (both converted Jews and Gentiles). For the Jewish people who will still experience conversion at the end of time, this will also happen from the Lord: idolatry will be completely uprooted, and the remembrance of the idols will be lost.
- ‘The unclean spirit’ – the devil, with his unclean spirit behind all kind of idolatry.
- ‘... also I will remove from the land the prophets’ – the false prophets, well understood, whom the prophet Zechariah was referring to, and who have always appeared to divert the flock from the right way. For the future conversion of Israel this concerns the false prophet, who will deceive them in the first period of the Great Tribulation, manifesting his true character in the second period, at the end of which the Lord will intervene.



• v. 3: “And if any prophets appear again, their fathers and mothers who bore them will say to them, ‘You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the Lord’; and their fathers and their mothers who bore them shall pierce them through when they prophesy NIV: 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]” – the false prophecy accompanying idolatry will not be easily removed from the nation. This was always a stumbling block in the way of Israel, and God left well-established laws in this regard: Deut. 13: 1-5; Deut. 13: 6-10; 12-18; Deut. 17: 2-7. In many prophetic books, the displeasure of the Lord is evident, as well as His sentence: Isa. 9: 15-16; Jer. 14: 14-16; Jer. 23: 13-16; 28-32; Jer. 28: 15-17; Jer. 29: 21; 32; Ezek. 13: 1-16; 17-23; Mic. 3: 5-7; Mic. 3: 11. Here in the book of Zechariah (Zech. 13: 3) the Lord says that if anyone claims the position of a prophet, even his parents will condemn him to death for God’s sake. The faithfulness of the purified people to the Messiah will be greater than the blood ties.

In the NT there is an episode reported on Paul’s first missionary journey, when he passed through Salamis and came to Paphos, and encountered Elymas (or Bar-jesus), the sorcerer and false prophet. According to the word of power from the Holy Spirit through the apostle (Acts 13: 4-12), the hand of God was seen there, not killing him but blinding him. I wrote this just to show that this prophecy of Zechariah did not apply only to the end times for Israel, but it was fulfilled also from God in the NT. Paul was a zealous of the law and a zealous of Christ.

• v. 4: “On that day the prophets will be ashamed, every one, of their visions when they prophesy; they will not put on a hairy mantle [NIV: a prophet’s garment of hair] in order to deceive.”

The false prophets who once boasted in their position on the day of the cleansing of Israel will be ashamed of their deeds. False prophets will have no place in the midst of the converted Israel.

‘They will not put on a hairy mantle [NIV: a prophet’s garment of hair] in order to deceive’ – this means that they can no longer use any subterfuge; they will not be able to mask or hide their true intentions. In the OT the prophets used to wear clothes of animal hair and a leather belt, and put on a robe, as it was with Elijah: 2 Kin. 1: 8; 1 Kin. 19: 13; 19; 2 Kin. 2: 13-14; Isa. 20: 2. John the Baptist dressed the same way: Matt. 3: 4.

• v. 5: “... but each of them will say, ‘I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the soil; for the land has been my possession since my youth’ [NIV: He will say, ‘I am not a prophet. I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth’ [or ‘I am a farmer; a man sold me in my youth’]]” – no false prophet will be able to claim a prophetic gift that he does not have, so it is better to say that he is a humble person, and to put himself in his place, even if as a slave (‘a man sold me in my youth’). He will be content with work to live. So he will deny any connection to the prophecy. It is better to be a farmer (‘I am a tiller of the soil’) and dwell in heaven than to be a false prophet and dwell in hell.

• v. 6: “And if anyone asks them, ‘What are these wounds on your chest?’ the answer will be ‘The wounds I received in the house of my friends’ [NIV: If someone asks him, ‘What are these wounds on your body?’ (Or ‘What are these wounds between your hands?’) he will answer, ‘The wounds I was given at the house of my friends’]” –

The wounds can be a sign of punishment for being a false prophet, or refer to idolatrous marks (1 Kin. 18: 28). His parents or friends may have done the wounds because he's a false prophet. Not even the closest people will support him, nor accept his activity contrary to biblical teaching.

- Zech. 13: 7-9 (The shepherd struck, the sheep scattered):

- v. 7: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate [NIV: against the man who is close to me!], says the Lord of hosts. Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones."

- 'Awake, O sword' – this can mean afflictions, persecutions, even the cross. It is a symbol of God's judgment and His punishment over a nation.

- 'Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered' – before Jesus came (His first coming), the Jews would be dispersed because of the oppression of the empires that dominated over them after the return of the Babylonian captivity. However, there was a great dispersion after the destruction of the temple by Titus in 70 AD and that continued in the Middle Ages to the present day. Therefore, at His second coming, the Lord will draw the Jews back to their land.

If we think of the time that Zechariah was prophesying, and that the prophetic word was for a leadership in the near future, this may mean that Israel's unfaithful shepherds would be punished by God and consequently His flock would disperse (cf. Zech. 11: 6; 8; 9; 16).

When it comes to Jesus, the sword refers to the cross; sword = an instrument of punishment, judgment, death.

- 'Against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate [NIV: against the man who is close to me!]' – The Shepherd whom the bible refers to here is Jesus (He himself used this phrase during the Supper, before going to Gethsemane: Matt. 26: 31; Mk. 14: 27). The sword was the judgment of God being made against the Son in order to accomplish His plan of salvation. With His imprisonment and death, His disciples would be scattered.

- 'Against the man who is my associate [NIV: against the man who is close to me!]' – This reaffirms the identity of Jesus as standing beside the Father and being one with Him: 'I and the Father are one' (Jn. 10: 30).

- 'I will turn my hand against the little ones' (NRSV; NIV) can refer to abandonment or punishment too. Or, then, 'and I will turn my hand upon the little ones' (ASV) 'and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones' (KJV) can mean the hand of mercy to His apostles on that day that He was betrayed, and their faith was shaken. Likewise, at the renewal of all things, the renewal of Israel, He will gather the remnants with loving care and draw them to Him.

The Messianic connotation is evident here (the first coming of Jesus), but the eschatological connotation of the chapter as a whole is undeniable, dealing with the restoration and purification of the future Israel, and the faithfulness of the people before their redemption. But it will only be possible after the deadly wound of the Good Shepherd, the God incarnate in the person of Jesus. He is the true prophet, unlike the others described in the previous verses.

- v. 8: "In the whole land, says the Lord, two-thirds shall be cut off and perish [NIV: will be struck down and perish], and one-third shall be left alive."

The prophecy says that 2/3 of the inhabitants of the land of Israel will be destroyed, but a faithful remnant will remain.

- v. 9: “And I will put this third into the fire, refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. 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.’”

The remaining third part will be purified. The fire, used in the purification of metals like gold and silver, symbolizes trials and tribulations, besides the Great Tribulation. The purified remnant will recognize God, and He will recognize this remnant as His people. This shows that the relationship with Him will be renewed. ‘They will call on my name’ is the result of sincere conversion and the recognition that there is help only in Him; only in Him trust must be placed.

## Chapter 14

This last chapter of Zechariah shows the visible return of the Messiah (vs. 1-5) and His holy kingdom (verses 6-21). However, the prophet warns that before this happens, many pains and struggles will still come (in my view, it is his way of describing the Great Tribulation). In the previous chapter it was said that many will be exterminated during the days of the Great Tribulation. Now chapter 14 shows that the whole situation will be reversed by the presence and action of the Messiah in the midst of His people.

- Zech. 14: 1-15 (The judgment on Jerusalem and its oppressors):

- v. 1: “See, a day is coming for the Lord, when the plunder taken from you will be divided in your midst [NIV: A day of the LORD is coming when your plunder will be divided up among you].”

Zechariah is again referring to what he said in chapter 12 about the invasion of Jerusalem by the ungodly nations (Zech. 12: 2-3) before the return of the Messiah to the earth. ‘On that day’, ‘the Day of the Lord’, He will avenge His people, enforcing His righteousness. ‘On that day’, or ‘the Day of the Lord’ refers to the moment God will bring judgment to Israel and the nations of the Earth during the Great Tribulation. These years will precede the coming of the Messiah to reign definitively. Thus the prophet shows them that there will be many sufferings; their belongings will be divided, because their land will be dominated by strangers who will take their property and goods and will divide the spoil among themselves. This may have happened at the time of Titus or other invasions that the city has suffered in all ages.

Jerusalem suffered successive invasions and its walls were destroyed almost completely at least twice, by Nebuchadnezzar and Titus. Scholars say that in addition to these two destructions, Jerusalem was besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times and captured and recaptured 44 times.

- v. 2: “For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses looted and the women raped; half the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city [NIV: but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city].”

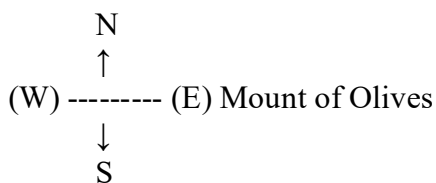
The Lord says once more that He will gather the nations that for centuries have hated Israel desiring to give a fatal blow to the city of Jerusalem. And this will be by His permission. The city will be taken and no one will escape the suffering of the plunder. Its population will be demoralized and half of the population will be dispersed and captive, but the other half will be left. The above text probably refers to a confederate group of nations, as described in the book of Revelation (Rev. 13: 1-2; 7-8; Rev. 16: 14-16; Rev. 19: 17-19). The ten horns (Rev. 13: 1) are an empire of ten Confederate kings covering the sphere of authority of Ancient Rome, perhaps the descendant nations of the ancient Roman Empire that was divided, representing the world’s opposition to God’s people and to Him (Rev. 19: 19). ‘Jerusalem’ represents the whole nation of Israel (in this context of Zechariah). In the past, Nebuchadnezzar and Titus did something similar. At the end of time, the enemies will be disposed to destroy it (Rev. 16: 14-16).

- v. 3: “Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle.”

When it happens, the Lord will come to defend their cause as a ‘man of war’ (Ex. 15: 3), just as He did in the past in many battles that Israel faced, such as the Exodus (Ex. 14: 15-31), in the days of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 20) and Joshua (Josh. 10: 11), Deborah (Judg. 5: 20-22), and many other historical events.

- v. 4: “On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward [NIV: and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south].”

- ‘His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives’ – the feet of Jesus, in a visible, corporeal way, in all His power. The Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, is an excellent barrier for someone seeking to flee the city. But with the supernatural action of the Lord, the mountain will be split so that the frightened people have this escape route (verse 5). The ascension of Jesus took place on the Mount of Olives, and His coming will also take place there (Acts 1: 9-12), in a visible way. In Ezekiel this place is also described (Ezek. 11: 23).



- v. 5: “And you shall flee by the valley of the Lord’s mountain, for the valley between the mountains shall reach to Azal [or Azel]; and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.”

- Azel or Azal (Atsel, אֶזֶל, Strong #682) – May be the name of an Israelite or an unknown location in Palestine that has existed in the past or will come into existence.

- ‘You shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah’ – this can be compared to Ezek. 38: 19-20: “In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth [*of Israel*] will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground” – He is speaking of the invasion of Gog and Magog.

In the reign of Uzziah (781-740 BC) there was an earthquake, which was probably great, for it was described by two prophets (Zech. 14: 5 and Am. 1: 1).

- ‘Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him’ – ‘the holy ones’, here, most probably refer to His heavenly hosts (cf. Deut. 33: 2; Job 5: 1; Ps. 89: 5; 7; Dan. 4: 13; Dan. 8: 13; Rev. 19: 14), who will help Him in the battle. In the NT it’s written: Matt. 24: 30-31 (his angels); Matt. 25: 31 (all the angels with him); Mk. 8: 32 (holy angels); Lk. 9: 26 (holy angels). However, it may refer to the glorified saints on the Day of then rapture of the Church.

- v. 6-7: “On that day there shall not be either cold or frost [NIV: ‘On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost’; KJV: ‘And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark’; ASV: ‘And it shall come to pass in that day, that there

shall not be light; the bright ones shall withdraw themselves’]. And there shall be continuous day (it is known to the Lord), not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light [NIV: It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime – a day known to the LORD. When evening comes, there will be light].”

Nature will show the coming of the Messiah, the sky, the sea, the climate and the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars) – Joel 2: 10; 30-31; Joel 3: 15; Matt. 24: 29; Mk. 13: 24-25; Lk. 21: 25-26; Rev. 6: 12-14; Rev. 8: 12. This shows us that the return of the Messiah will be preceded by cosmic events. Metaphorically speaking, this may relate to the dark days of judgment that will come before His coming. Cold and ice can metaphorically refer to the cooling of God’s love in hearts and therefore to the lack of His light (Mt 24:12).

- v. 8: “On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea [*the Dead Sea* – cf. Ez 47: 1; 8], and half of them to the western sea [*the Mediterranean Sea*]; it shall continue in summer as in winter.”

- ‘On that day’ – when Jesus physically materializes on the Mount of Olives for the Jews, that’s what it means; or just before the time of His second coming, when there is trouble and persecution because of the word, which is still being preached to give men a chance.

For us Christians, the prophecy of Ezekiel 47 was fulfilled in Christ, the true tabernacle among men: “On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water’” (Jn. 7: 38-39); and the Holy Spirit present in Him spread to the nations around Israel, which happened after Pentecost: “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear” (Acts 2: 33). ‘in summer as in winter’ = uninterruptedly, which for us Christians can also refer to the light of the gospel sprouting without interruption at the end of time, before the period of darkness that will occur during the Great Tribulation. The gospel will spring forth throughout the world for the conversion of Jews and Gentiles (verse 9).

Verses 9, 10, and 11 seem to make a leap to a later time when Israel is already cleansed and restored.

- v. 9: “And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one [NIV: The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name].”

The Lord shall be king over all the earth, over all peoples: “Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder peals [NIV: peals of thunder], crying out, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns’” (Rev. 19: 6). There will be only one faith, only one God, considering chapter 13, where all idolatry has been extirpated. “All the earth” may refer also to all the land of Judea, which will be filled by the knowledge of God. The nation of Israel will be recognized by God Himself as His people.

- v. 10: “The whole land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem shall remain aloft on its site from the Gate of Benjamin to the place of the former gate [NIV: the First Gate; that is, the Old Gate], to the Corner Gate,

and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's wine presses [NIV: from the Tower of Hannanel to the royal winepresses].”

Geba is the northern boundary (Josh. 21: 17; 2 Kin. 23: 8); and Rimmon, the Southern boundary of Judah (Josh. 15: 32; Josh. 19: 7), as in other biblical passages they referred to ‘Dan and Beersheba’ to define God’s great extent of action in Israel. From north to south the land will be turned into a plain, leaving only Jerusalem in a prominent place on the mountains. The gates indicate the sides of Jerusalem, which will be visible and accessible to all. Metaphorically speaking, this represents the great extent of Jesus’ rule over the entire Earth, when the forces of evil are defeated. He will be the only King.

- v. 11: “And it shall be inhabited, for never again shall it be doomed to destruction; Jerusalem shall abide in security.”

Verse 11 may have connection with the new heavens and with the new earth (Rev. 21: 1; 4; Rev. 22: 3) and with the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21: 2-3), where these figures of speech try to describe the new life, the everlasting life that we will have with God, where our union will be perfect and everything will be revealed as it really is (1 Cor. 13: 10; 12: “but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end... For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known”).

There will no longer be curse or sin (Rev. 22: 3); fights and wars will end. Security will come from Jesus’ presence with His church.

The NT refers to our heavenly dwelling (Heb. 13: 14: ‘the city that is to come’; Phil. 3: 20: ‘our citizenship is in heaven’); the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21: 2; 10; Rev. 3: 12), where we will live quietly and without fear of evil.

- v. 12: “This shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh shall rot while they are still on their feet; their eyes shall rot in their sockets, and their tongues shall rot in their mouths.”

Here the prophet again describes the events preceding the peace of Jerusalem in the reign of the Messiah (v. 8-11). The Lord will have victory over the armies of the enemy, smiting them with a supernatural plague. Enemies will be destroyed violently; their bodies will be corrupted quickly and irreversibly.

- v. 13: “On that day a great panic from the Lord shall fall on them, so that each will seize the hand of a neighbor, and the hand of the one will be raised against the hand of the other.”

The work of devastation will be completed with great confusion (cf. Zech. 12: 4), a real chaos in the invading armies, as in the days of Gideon (Josh. 7: 22) or Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 20: 23), and also by civil war: ‘each will seize the hand of a neighbor, and the hand of the one will be raised against the hand of the other’ – cf. Ezek. 38: 21.

- v. 14: “Even Judah will fight at Jerusalem. And the wealth of all the surrounding nations shall be collected—gold, silver, and garments in great abundance.”

- ‘The wealth of all the surrounding nations’ – the enemy will not only lose lives, but also wealth and material goods (‘garments’). This shows the reversal of the previous situation when the nations plundered Jerusalem, taking their spoils (Zech. 14: 1-2).



- v. 15: “And a plague like this plague shall fall on the horses, the mules, the camels, the donkeys, and whatever animals may be in those camps (*the enemies’ camps*).”

The plague will strike not only men but also animals. And this figure of speech seems to be more comprehensible to readers of the past, so the prophet made a point of describing the great dimension of God’s action.

- Zech. 14: 16-21 – The future glory of the city of God

From verse 16, Zechariah describes how the Messiah will reign and how this will influence other nations. Although many scholars interpret this passage and describe it as the Millennium from the Jewish point of view, perhaps this is Zacharias’ way of describing the eternal life in the New Jerusalem (for the title of this biblical passage is: ‘The future glory of the city of God’), where he is predicting reverence, holiness, and worship to the only one God and Lord of all things. Being a Jew, he saw things materially, not spiritually, as see today. In second place, as he was a priest, he used the religious feasts of the OT, the sacrificial rituals and utensils of the temple as symbols of that holiness and commitment to God.

However, this may be better understood from what the apostle John wrote in Revelation:

- “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals [NIV: Now the dwelling of God is with men]. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them” (Rev. 21: 1-3).

- “I saw no temple in the city (*the New Jerusalem*), for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day – and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations (Isa. 60: 11). But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21: 22-27).

- v. 16: “Then all who survive of the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the festival of booths [NIV: the Feast of Tabernacles].”

That is what happened at that time between the Jews and the Gentiles reverent to God, who went up to Jerusalem annually to the feast.

The Feast of Tabernacles, in Hebrew, *hagh hassukkoth* (or feast of Sukkot; Sukkot = tents, plural of *sukkah* = tent), or Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, in Hebrew, *hagh hā’āsiph* (Ex. 23: 16; Ex. 34: 22; Lev. 23: 34-43; Num. 29: 12-40; Deut. 16: 13-17) lasted seven days and on the first and on the last there was sacred assembly. The fruit were harvested and the people lived in huts made of branches and twigs of trees, starting on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month (Lev. 23: 39-43; Num. 29: 12-40). The fact of living in tents during the festival recalled the Jews of their wanderings in the wilderness after being freed from Pharaoh. As in all other feasts, the rest in this day was kept, there was much joy and the seven days were reserved exclusively for worship and meditation on the law.

The most important of all for us, who live under grace, instead of the law, is to be able to interpret through the light of divine wisdom the spiritual meaning of these feasts, because our spirit may rejoice not only with something that was the Lord's blessing in the past, but continues to be for everyone who believes in Him. Today, under the grace of Jesus, celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles means to remember everything that He has already done for us until today in our spiritual desert, in search of 'The Promise Land', and to rejoice by knowing that in our pilgrimage on earth He will be always guiding our steps, giving us victory and deliverance.

Jesus said that we are the temple of His Spirit on earth (Acts 7: 48-50; 1 Cor. 3: 16-17; 1 Cor. 6: 19), as His body was (Jn. 2: 19; 21). The tabernacle was the symbol of the incarnation of Christ, who became flesh and tabernacle among us.

When it comes to the New Jerusalem, nothing more is needed, for it is written:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals [NIV: Now the dwelling of God is with men]. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them'" (Rev. 21: 1-3). Jesus is the Tabernacle of God among men.

- v. 17-19: "If any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain upon them. And if the family of Egypt do not go up and present themselves, then on them shall come the plague that the Lord inflicts on the nations that do not go up to keep the festival of booths [NIV: If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The LORD will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles]. Such shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to keep the festival of booths [NIV: to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles]."

Here he tells what will happen to those who do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord at this feast: the Egyptians and the people who do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King will have no rain. The rain is a symbol of the blessings poured by the Holy Spirit, that is, revival. Egypt is the symbol of the world, just as 'the families of the earth' is the symbol of the Gentiles, of non-Israelites people. Transposing this to our Christian understanding, whoever did not come to worship the Lord would suffer with the plague the Lord would send. The prophet uses the word 'plague' as a way to threaten those who disobeyed, especially Egypt, who suffered under the ten plagues that God sent before taking His people out of captivity.

If the prophet released this word nowadays from a spiritual standpoint, we could say that those who do not worship the Lord and do not make their bodies a tabernacle for Him, being worldly people in the hands of Satan, wicked that do not give value to sacred things, or Gentiles who believe in Him but do not have intimacy with Him, these ones cannot receive the life of His Spirit. Besides not receiving the blessings that the faithful receive, they suffer with the curses of darkness.

In the case of the New Jerusalem, the apostle John writes this in another way:

- Rev 21: 8: "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

- Rev 22: 15: "Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."

• v. 20-21: “On that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, ‘Holy to the Lord’. And the cooking pots in the house of the Lord shall be as holy as the bowls in front of the altar; and every cooking pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be sacred to the Lord of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and use them to boil the flesh of the sacrifice. And there shall no longer be traders in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day [NIV: And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite (or ‘merchand’) in the house of the LORD Almighty].”

The prophet confirms that the city will be holy. ‘Holy to the Lord’ were the words that were on the turban of the high priest of Israel (Ex. 28: 36; Ex. 39: 30). They will be placed on the bells of the horses, meaning that what was used for war (‘horses’) and personal purposes will be totally dedicated to the Lord. The bells on the horses were part of the ornaments of the horses’ harness and had the name of their owner engraved on them. In addition, they were placed in their harness to keep them together during a journey.

Zechariah says that in the bells of the horses the words ‘Holy to the Lord’ will be engraved, which indicates a consecration of everything that belonged to his people, and henceforth would be consecrated to God and therefore the possession of all goods belonging to the Jews would be His. The high priest also had golden bells on the edge of the mantle that was upon the ephod (Ex. 28: 33) so that his sound could be heard when he ministered to the Lord, lest he died, that is, people would hear the sound of the bells outside the Tent of Meeting and would know that the priest had not died because of sin. Thus the bells speak not only of holiness, but of joy, for their sound was like a song to the Lord. Likewise, the pots of the house of the Lord and of all the land of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pure, indicating that all things are holy and suited to the Lord. The holiness of the ordinary pans would be equal to the utensils reserved for the sacrifices and the altar, showing that in any task in the service to God His people would be in holiness.

The apostle John also describes how much holiness is important for one to be in heaven in the presence of the Lord:

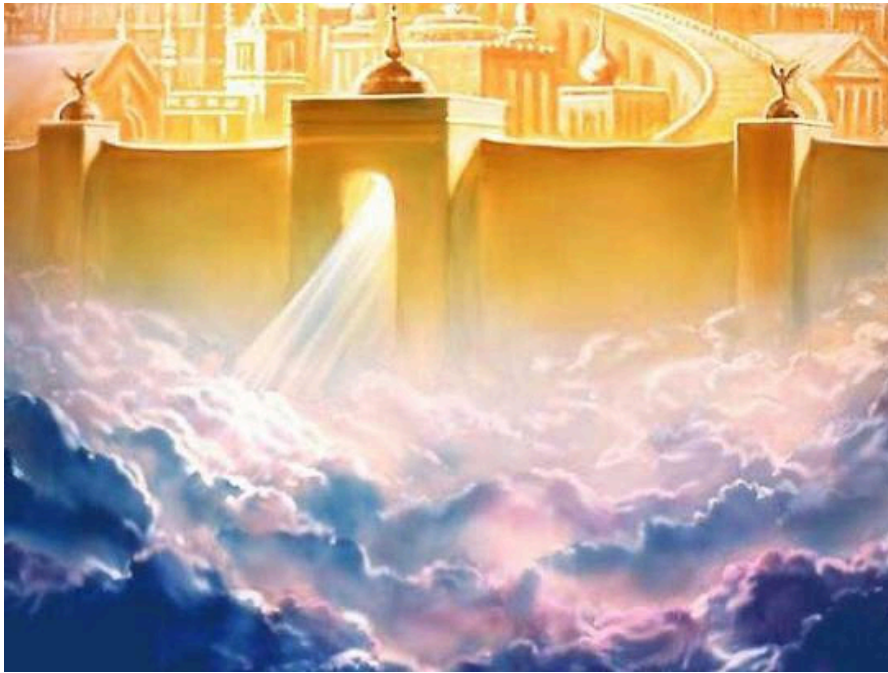
• Rev. 7: 9; 13-14: “After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands... Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, ‘Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?’ I said to him, ‘Sir, you are the one that knows.’ Then he said to me, ‘These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”

• Rev. 19: 7-8: “Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”

• Rev. 22: 14: “Blessed are those who wash their robes [*in the blood of the Lamb, that’s what it means*], so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.”

Zechariah ends by saying, “And there shall no longer be traders in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day [NIV: And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite (or ‘merchant’) in the house of the LORD Almighty].” This also speaks of holiness, that is, without trade with His word, for ‘Canaanites’ or ‘Phoenicians’ (both mean ‘merchants’) was a term usually associated with unscrupulous wicked practices, greedy (Hos. 12: 7). There would no longer be traders in the temple selling sheep, oxen and doves for sacrifices, for with the coming of Jesus the sacrifices would be abolished. In regard to

the apocalyptic aspect of prophecy, we can say that all the followers of the Lord will be pure and there will be neither hypocrites nor corrupt, distorting the true service of the priesthood and marketing His word.



### Conclusion:

What we see in the life of Zechariah is the strength of the prophetic word that helps us to rebuild what was destroyed in our lives, in addition to what He reminds us of what holy priesthood is, of what we need to do to please Him as our Lord. He doesn't wish to see us apathetic in relation to our calling or to His work because it could discourage all His Church. Each of us has the responsibility to persevere in our own way and look after the spiritual gifts given to us so that we can be a channel of His blessings to other lives. Therefore, through our living testimony, we'll be prophesying and bringing the salvation of the Messiah to all who are in darkness. In our mouth, His words are alive, and also bricks to help our neighbors rebuild their 'temples.' Therefore, as prophets, we must obey the voice of the Spirit of God in everything, both to exhort, to rebuke, to convince of error and to eliminate sin, and to bring comfort and encouragement to those to whom the Lord brings to us. Even condemning evil and bringing to light the errors of the flesh, we are contributing to the 'edification of walls and the repair of breaches' (cf. Isa. 58: 12).

## Malachi

Malachi means 'My messenger.' He prophesied around 450-400 BC, after Israel returned from Babylonian captivity, after the rebuilding of the temple of Jerusalem (516 BC). The second return of exiles occurred in 458 BC with the coming of Ezra. The third return occurred in 445 BC with Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. But the first enthusiasm had turned into apathy; there was coldness regarding the spiritual things, and what became to occupy people's minds was the fear of Greece.

In the times of Malachi and in the period that Nehemiah seems to have returned to Persia (twelve years after his coming, around 433 BC – Neh. 13: 6), what happened was a disregard to the holy things and the neglect from the priests concerning their office (Mal. 1: 6-14; Mal. 2: 8-9; Mal. 2: 10-16; Mal. 3: 14), making their people deviate for lack of the true word of God. The Law had been almost forgotten, both by the people and the priests, who offered defective animals and married women of foreign religion (Mal. 2: 11). There was no more zeal for the things of the Lord, neglecting the tithes and offerings. Malachi attacks this self-indulgence and indifference among the people and helps to reassess the relationship with God. Through him, the Lord makes clear the duty of the priest. His book can be divided into two parts: 1) the sin of Israel and the judgment that would come to the wicked; and 2) the beatitude that will come upon those who repent (here we can see also references concerning the Messiah and John the Baptist: Mal. 3: 1-5; Mal. 4: 2; Mal. 4: 5-6). In Mal. 3: 1 it is written: "See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts" (cf. Matt. 11: 14; Matt. 17: 10-13; Mk. 1: 2; Mk. 9: 11-13; Lk. 1: 17; Lk. 1: 76; Lk. 3: 4-6; Lk. 7: 27; Jn. 1: 21).



As of the death of the prophet, Israel entered “God’s period of silence,” predicted by Amos (Am. 8: 11-13), where the nation was handed over to pagan kings because of their negligence with the sacred things until they repented and were prepared to receive salvation through the Messiah. The coming of Jesus would be terrible for the wicked, but would bring comfort and joy to the pious (Mal. 4: 1).

## Chapter 1

• Mal. 1: 1-5 (God's love for Jacob): "An oracle. The word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, 'How have you loved us?' Is not Esau Jacob's brother? says the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau; I have made his hill country a desolation [NIV: I have turned his mountains into a wasteland] and his heritage a desert for jackals. If Edom says, 'We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins' [NIV: Edom may say, 'Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins'], the Lord of hosts says: They may build, but I will tear down, until they are called the wicked country, the people with whom the Lord is angry forever [NIV: They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD]. Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, 'Great is the Lord beyond the borders of Israel!' [NIV: You will see it with your own eyes and say, 'Great is the LORD—even beyond the borders of Israel!']."

The Lord begins by saying to the prophet that He loved them and continues to love them, but they feel rejected. Then He begins by speaking of Esau, who was rejected in the past because he had despised the blessing of the birthright which God in His omniscience had already separated for Jacob. Then the Lord tells them that though Edom rebuilt the ruins of his land, yet He would destroy it again, because he is a wicked people and God is angry with him. He still gives them the assurance that they will see it with their own eyes, and will magnify His name.

Edom was destroyed by Babylon in 581 BC, five years after the captivity of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Isa. 34: 1-17; Isa. 63: 1-6; Jer. 49: 7-22; Ezek. 25: 12-14; Ezek. 35: 1-15; Am. 1: 11-12; Obad. 1: 14). The prophets Amos and Jeremiah predicted the destruction of Bozrah (capital of Edom).

Assyrian inscriptions show that Edom became a vassal state of Assyria in 736 BC in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC). Babylon conquered it five years after the captivity of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, that is, in 581 BC. Afterwards, it fell into the hands of the Persians (539 BC), and in the third century BC was dominated by the Nabataeans (one of the Arab tribes), who ended up pushing the inhabitants of Edom to the south of Judea, later called Idumea. Judas Maccabeus subdued them (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC), and John Hyrcanus I (2<sup>nd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> century BC) forced them to be circumcised in order to be incorporated by the Jewish people. Herod the Great descended from the Edomites. The people of Edom were definitely destroyed by Titus in 70 AD.

Bozrah or Botsra or Botzrah (Hebrew: בֹּצְרָה, botsrâh) was the capital of the people of Edom, and whose king was Jobab (Gen. 36: 33; 1 Chr. 1: 44). Esau or Edom (Gen. 36: 19) was Jacob's brother, and lived in Seir, a mountain previously belonging to Seir the Horite (Gen. 36: 8-9; Gen. 36: 20); therefore, Edom is often called Seir. Ishmael son of Abraham and Hagar had twelve sons (who were the princes of the Arab nations) and a daughter named Mahalath (Gen. 28: 9), who married Esau (or Edom). Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael, was the ancestor of an Arab tribe who later gave birth to the Nabataeans. Nebaioth (Nbayowth or Nbayoth – Strong #5032) means fructification, fecundity. These peoples (descendants of Ishmael and Esau) were people related to the descendants of Isaac, son of Abraham, but later, opposing the people of Israel on several occasions. The descendants of the Edomites spread through the lands adjacent to the Red Sea, going north where they also entered into territorial clashes with the Philistines, finally settling down, later, in the valley of Aqaba where they founded two very important cities on the incense route: Bozrah and Petra. Bozrah means 'sheepfold', indicating that it was a city of shepherds in the southeast of the Dead Sea in the land of



Edom. Today it is a small city in Jordan in the state of Tafilah, called Buseirah (Bouseira or Busairah).

- Mal. 1: 6-14 – The Lord rebukes the priests

- Mal. 1: 6: “A son honors his father, and servants their master. If then I am a father, where is the honor due me? And if I am a master, where is the respect due me? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name [NIV: It is you priests who show contempt for my name]. You say, ‘How have we despised your name?’ [NIV: But you ask, ‘How have we shown contempt for your name?’].”

The Lord uses His prophet to rebuke the priests, for He is not being honored by them. And this leads us to think of the neglect of their office. Something, however, seems to be ‘oblivious’ to them, or, more likely, that there is an irony in their question to God, “How have we despised your name?” Then the Lord goes on:

- Mal. 1: 7-8: “By offering polluted food on my altar. And you say, ‘How have we polluted it?’ By thinking that the Lord’s table may be despised [NIV: You place a defiled food on my altar. But you ask, ‘How have we defiled you?’ By saying that the LORD’s table is contemptible]. When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not wrong? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not wrong? Try presenting that to your governor; will he be pleased with you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts.”

When the Lord says: ‘By offering polluted food on my altar’ [NIV: You place a defiled food on my altar], He was talking about the animals that were sacrificed on the altar of burnt offering. This profaned His name and the altar. Therefore, He says next: “By thinking that the Lord’s table may be despised [NIV: By saying that the LORD’s table is contemptible]. When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not wrong? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not wrong?” In Deuteronomy (Deut. 15: 19-21 – laws concerning the firstborn of cattle), the type of animals for sacrifice was established: “Every firstling male born of your herd and flock you shall consecrate to the Lord your God; you shall not do work with your firstling ox nor shear the firstling of your flock. You shall eat it, you together with your household, in the presence of the Lord your God year by year at the place that the Lord will choose. But if it has any defect—any serious defect, such as lameness or blindness—you shall not sacrifice it to the Lord your God.” And in Leviticus (Lev 22: 1-16 – the law about eating the sacred offerings), the bible says that every priest who was ceremonially unclean could not eat the sacred offerings that the people dedicated to God, nor sacrifice before the Lord, that is, if he was in a state of uncleanness: with leprous disease, or suffered a discharge or had an emission of semen, if he had touched a corpse or any swarming thing, or if he had eaten an animal which died by itself or was torn by wild animals. They would have to purify themselves before eating the sacred food (or ‘the sacred donations’ – NRSV).

In the following passage from Leviticus (Lev. 22: 17-33 – the sacrificed animals must be without blemish), verse 19 says: “to be acceptable in your behalf it shall be a male without blemish, of the cattle or the sheep or the goats.” The animal could not be blind, or injured, or maimed, or having a discharge or an itch or scabs. It could not have a limb too long or too short; nor it would be accepted any animal that had its testicles bruised or crushed or torn or cut (v. 24). These animals could not be offered also if they were from the hands of a foreigner, since they were mutilated (v. 25).

What we can conclude from all this is that the priests offered these defective animals on the altar, as if the offer were anyhow, without any kind of reverence, just because it had already become a tiresome routine. In the same way today, this means that our offering before the Lord must be without defect; it should be with the best we have, with the firstfruits, not with what's left, with the remains. The offering should be given liberally and with integrity of heart. We must not bring a defective offering to the Lord. He does not accept 'damaged offering'. For us, bringing 'damaged offering' before the altar of the Lord is to bring our offerings unwillingly, with contempt or some other feeling in the heart than humility, reverence and love. It is to neglect the spiritual food that flows from the altar, thinking only in our personal and material needs, before we put Jesus in the first place in our lives. It is to use our money to do anything and after this we separate the tithe. Another important revelation: the word 'honor' comes from the Hebrew, *kābhôdh* and means dignity, reputation, honor, renown, pride, prestige, wealth. A child who follows the ways of God and does His will is honoring Him. It means: 'to be decent, to have nothing to be ashamed of, to serve the Lord with all our heart, to be a motive of pride (in the sense of pleasure) for God, to show His dignity, to have zeal for His reputation.' When the Lord was saying, "A son honors his father and a servant, his master. If I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is the respect for me?"—says the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests who despise my name," He meant that our sincere offering honors Him, it is a motive of pride for Him, it shows that He is worthy of glory and praise.

Therefore, He challenges them: "Try presenting that to your governor; will he be pleased with you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts." If they offered it to the civil ruler, he would not accept it. Why would God have to do it?

- Mal. 1: 9-10: "And now implore the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. The fault is yours. Will he show favor to any of you? says the Lord of hosts [NIV: With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?"]. Oh, that someone among you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not kindle fire on my altar in vain! [NIV: so that you would not light useless fires on my altar!] I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hands."

The Lord had no pleasure in them or in their offerings; it would be better for them to shut the doors of the temple, lest the fire of the altar burn unnecessarily. Then God goes on, comparing the priests with the Gentile people.

- Mal. 1: 11: "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts [NIV: My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty]."

This may mean that at that time many Gentiles feared the God of Israel and revered Him more than the Jews themselves. But it is probably a prophecy concerning the times of the gospel when the Gentile converts would abandon their altars of idolatry and would magnify the name of the Lord and bring their offerings to the temple in Jerusalem. More than that, they would perform a spiritual worship to God through their holy actions. The bible says that incense is the prayer of the saints (Rev. 5: 8; Rev. 8: 4). It is interesting that in Isa. 17: 1-14, when the prophet writes about God's judgment on Ephraim and Damascus, a prophecy that was fulfilled by the kings of Assyria (Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmaneser and Sargon II), he also speaks of a remnant who will repent and

turn to God. In Isa. 17: 7-8 it is written: “On that day people will regard their Maker, and their eyes will look to the Holy One of Israel; they will not have regard for the altars, the work of their hands, and they will not look to what their own fingers have made, either the sacred poles or the altars of incense.” Despite the destruction of Samaria by the Assyrians, there will be a remnant of Ephraim who will forsake his idols and turn to the Lord. So it could be with the Gentiles that turned to God (abandoning their useless idols) both with those of that time and in the times of the gospel.

- Mal. 1: 12-14: “But you profane it [*the Lord’s name*] when you say that the Lord’s table is polluted, and the food for it may be despised [NIV: But you profane it by saying of the Lord’s table, ‘It is defiled,’ and of its food, ‘It is contemptible’]. ‘What a weariness this is’, you say, and you sniff at me, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the Lord [NIV: And you say, ‘What a burden!’ and you sniff at it contemptuously, says the LORD Almighty. ‘When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?’ says the LORD]. Cursed be the cheat who has a male in the flock and vows to give it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished; for I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name is revered among the nations [NIV: and my name is to be feared among the nations].”



The priests performed their office without love, with indifference and neglect, bored and tired of it; worse than that: they laughed before the Lord and offered Him defective animals. God did not accept that, and cursed them because of their lie. They thought to deceive God, but they could not, for He knew what was going on in their hearts. It was an offering of inferior quality. He ends up declaring His name, which is above all names and is feared among the nations: “for I am a great King, says the Lord

of hosts, and my name is revered among the nations.” The lie is an affront to the sovereignty of God.

## Chapter 2

- Mal. 2: 1-9 – Additional warning to the priests

• Mal. 2: 1-4: “And now, O priests, this command is for you. If you will not listen, if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse on you and I will curse your blessings; indeed I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart [NIV: because you have not set your heart to honor me]. I will rebuke [Septuagint, ‘cut off’] your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and I will put you out of my presence [NIV: I will spread on your faces the offal from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it]. Know, then, that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may hold [NIV: may continue], says the Lord of hosts.”

So far the Lord shows His displeasure and says that they would be cursed if they did not change their attitudes and did not listen to His commandment, and did not honor Him, as the priests should do, so that the whole Levitical lineage did not disappear. He had made a covenant with the tribe of Levi (Num. 3: 6-7; Num. 3: 11-13; Ex. 28: 43) and promised that they would never lack a descendant as His representative in the priestly class. But these priests could even be eliminated, so that the other generations would not be defiled or ashamed by their actions. God uses very carnal words to show what He could do to them to shame them and thus to give them back their filth: “I will spread on your faces the offal [NRSV: ‘dung’] from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it” (NIV).

• Mal. 2: 5-7: “My covenant with him was a covenant of life and well-being [NIV: of life and peace], which I gave him; this called for reverence, and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong [NIV: nothing false] was found on his lips. He walked with me in integrity and uprightness [NIV: peace and uprightness], and he turned many from iniquity [NIV: turned many from sin]. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.”

The Lord speaks that His covenant with Levi was a covenant of life and peace, more specifically here, referring to Phinehas (Num. 25: 12), grandson of Aaron, who showed his zeal for the Lord, when in Baal of Peor killed the Israelite and the Midianite woman with whom he sinned, to uproot the idolatry from the camp of Israel. For this reason, Malachi wrote that in awe of the Lord’s name ‘he (*Levi*) walked with me in integrity and uprightness [NIV: peace and uprightness], and he turned many from iniquity.’ He was the example of the priesthood that God wanted to see once again in the midst of His people. The true priesthood is reaffirmed: the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

• Mal. 2: 8-9: “But you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by your instruction [NIV: by your teaching]; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts, and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, in as much as you have not kept my ways but have shown partiality in your instruction [NIV: So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law].”

Malachi now returns to make a comparison between the priests God wants and those He sees there: they were instructing the people wrongly, leading them to sin and turning them away from God, violating the covenant of the priesthood made between Him and their ancestors. Therefore, they were already being despised and humiliated before the people, because they did not keep the right ways and have shown partiality in their judgments. The priest should judge of the causes of the people.

- Mal. 2: 10-16 – Breaking covenant through divorce

- Mal. 2: 10-12: “Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors? Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob anyone who does this—any to witness or answer, or to bring an offering to the Lord of hosts [NIV: ‘As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty’; in the Septuagint: ‘May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob anyone who gives testimony in behalf of the man who does this’].”

It seems to be the prophet himself who rebukes his fellow priests and the people of Judah who were profaning the covenant of their ancestors with God by marrying foreign women, for it was a disloyalty also among them, from one to the other. The Lord would eliminate the man who continued in this practice, both a man of the people and a priest, and also whoever supported the man who made that mistake.

In the time of Ezra (Ezra 10: 1-44) there was the case of many Jews who married foreign women (Ezra 10: 2a; ‘many’ – Ezra 10: 13), including priests (Ezra 10: 18-44), and had to dismissed them as well as their children, lest to provoke the Lord’s wrath. In the days of Nehemiah there was also a similar case, when it was discovered that the Israelites married the Ashdodite women (Philistines women from the city of Ashdod), the Ammonite women (from Ammon) and the Moabites (from Moab) – Neh. 13: 23. Nehemiah punished them, for this was happening among the priests: Ezra 10: 18-19. It is not known exactly if this was the same case that was happening now, for Nehemiah and Malachi are contemporaries, and this may have happened in the period when Nehemiah returned to Persia, twelve years after arriving in Judah (Neh. 13: 6 cf. Neh. 2: 1; Neh. 5: 14).

- Mal. 2: 13-16: “And this you do as well: You cover the Lord’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. You ask, ‘Why does he not?’ Because the Lord was a witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did not one God make her? Both flesh and spirit are his. And what does the one God desire? Godly offspring. So look to yourselves, and do not let anyone be faithless to the wife of his youth [NIV: Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring (or ‘But the one [who is your father] did not do this, not as long as life remained in him. And what was he seeking? An offspring from God’)]. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth]. For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel, and covering one’s garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless [NIV: I hate divorce, says the LORD God of Israel, and I hate a man’s covering himself (or ‘his wife’)]

with violence as well as his garments, says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith].”

The prophet goes on saying that there is no use groaning or supplication or the offerings before the Lord when they continue in the practice of adultery and divorce, repudiating the first wife, the rightful wife (‘the wife of your youth’) and marrying another.

‘Covering one’s garment with violence’ or ‘a man’s covering himself with violence as well as his garments’ or ‘a man’s covering his wife with violence’ – means to injure the legitimate wife by taking other women. The ‘garment’ would be the symbol of the first wife, and ‘violence’, the symbol of the other wives, since repudiation and polygamy would be like violence against the legitimate wife.

- Mal. 2: 17: “You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, ‘How have we wearied him?’ By saying, ‘All who do evil are good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them’. Or by asking, ‘Where is the God of justice?’”

The priests wearied the Lord with their words, especially when they distorted His righteousness. Therefore, God goes on saying about the coming of the Lord preceded by His messenger, or ‘The Day of Judgment’ (title NIV).



## Chapter 3

- Mal. 3: 1-5 – The coming of the Lord preceded by His messenger

• Mal. 3: 1: “See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.”

Here we can see references to the Messiah (‘the messenger of the covenant’) and to John the Baptist: Mal. 3: 1-5; Mal. 4: 2; Mal. 4: 5-6 – cf. Matt. 11: 14; Matt. 17: 10-13; Mk. 1: 2; Mk. 9: 11-13; Lk. 1: 17; Lk. 1: 76; Lk. 3: 4-6; Lk. 7: 27; Jn. 1: 21.

• Mal. 3: 2-4: “But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap [NIV: a launderer’s soap]; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.”

v. 2a: “But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?” – it is a phrase very similar to that of Zeph. 1: 14: “The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there.” This signifies a great strength and authority of God putting Himself in opposition to the inability and the weakness of men. He will bring fear to the wicked.

Verses 2b-3 express His holiness and His sanctifying power: “For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap [NIV: a launderer’s soap]; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness” – His process of sanctification with the life of a man resembles the refining of a noble metal like gold or silver. And this was what the prophet was saying to the priests, the sons of Levi: the dross of their souls would be removed in the melting pot of God, like the slag of a metal, and there they would bring their gifts with righteousness before Him, that is, with rightness, with integrity of heart and mind. Fire symbolizes the trials to which they would be subjected until they were as the Lord desired: with righteous thoughts and hearts clean of intentions.

v. 4: “Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years” – this reminds us of David’s offerings, especially those he did when he brought the ark on the shoulders of the Levites to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6: 13-15; 1 Chr. 15: 25-28) and the riches he kept so that Solomon could build the temple (1 Chr. 29: 2 -9). When the messenger of the covenant comes and purifies the hearts of His priests, ‘then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord’, no longer with the sacrifice of animals, but with true worship, acknowledging the Son of God, Jesus, as the author of life and salvation.

• Mal. 3: 5: “Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely [NIV: perjurers], against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien [NIV: who deprive aliens of justice], and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.”

The Lord warned that when He came, He would bring judgment to all the works that God abhorred and to all that committed wickedness; and the priests were conscious:

He would come to punish the sorcerers, the adulterers, those who swore falsely, those who exploited the workers in their wages, and oppressed the widow and the orphan, those who deprived aliens of justice and did not fear God. Purification included the priests and the people. This was a prophecy for their descendants, those who were alive at the coming of Jesus, just as it applies to all at His second coming.

• Mal. 3: 6-12 – Robbing God

• Mal. 3: 6-12: “For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished. Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ [NVI: How are we to return?] Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, ‘How are we robbing you?’ In your tithes and offerings (cf. Neh. 13: 10-12)! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test [NIV: test me in this], says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing [NIV: And see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not have room enough for it]. I will rebuke the locust for you, so that it will not destroy the produce of your soil; and your vine in the field shall not be barren, says the Lord of hosts [NIV: I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit, says the LORD Almighty]. Then all nations will count you happy, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts [NIV: Then all the nations will call you blessed, for your will be a delightful land, says the LORD Almighty].”

The first sentence that the Lord says here is that He does not change, and so they had not yet been destroyed, after thousands of years of rebellion. By being righteous, the Lord does not change His laws, for He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2: 13). And this immutability gives us the certainty of His grace.

He said that they had turned aside from His statutes and have not kept them, but they asked: How?

They could not think it was about tithes and offerings.

The law spoke of tithes: Lev. 27: 30; Num. 18: 21-24; Deut. 12: 5-7; Deut 14: 22-29, and the priests knew it. In the case of Malachi it seems that there were no tithes being given by the people to supply the House of God (cf. Neh. 13: 10-12), and this was partly the fault of the priests who, by neglecting their office, were demoralized. They were denying the tithes (including the tithe of tithes – Num 18: 26-29) and the offerings that were given in the temple, as the half shekel which was the temple tax (Ex. 30: 13-16), and the peace offerings, the grain offerings, the burnt offerings and firstfruits (Num. 15: 1-21).

Theft was punished by law, let alone when it comes to the things of God! God did not need animal sacrifice, wheat bread, or money, but this was a law created by Him to cause His servants to be sustained by the service they rendered to Him and that the people could be blessed in their work and in their financial life. But they turned aside from His statutes because they did not know the spiritual implications of all this.

Thus, Mal. 3: 6-12 is the basic text on tithes. We have lessons with this text:

a) Not to give the tithe is theft, because it is law established by God at the dawn of creation. Withholding the money that He Himself dedicated to His Work is robbery and robbery generates a consequence on earth, in our natural life, which the bible gives the name of curse, because it creates a gap, a breach, where there is legality for robbery as

well. Even though we live under the dispensation of grace, we are still under the authority of the word of God and it never dies. The value of 10% He asks of us is a means created by Him to bless us in our finances, and for us to show that He is first in our life, and what we have, we received from Him. It is He who gives us the ability to produce wealth (Deut. 8: 18). This practice is an experience that brings you to the true knowledge of who He is, and why He created laws to protect us from the ravage of the enemy. Jesus said: “Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (Lk. 20: 25). And He was speaking to a people who knew what “the things of God” meant, that is, the tithes and the offerings in the temple. Even abolishing the Levitical Mosaic priesthood, His law remained for the priesthood of the new covenant that He created (1 Tim. 5: 17-18; 1 Cor. 9: 13-14). When we love the Lord and His work on earth, all we do is for love, not by obligation subject to punishment or penalty. And that takes away the weight of the word, as it was interpreted in the OT. God’s money is different from the world’s money. The tithe is not an imposition of God subject to the death penalty, but a protection of God in our lives, in all areas, not only in finances.

b) Bringing the tithes first into the House of the Lord provides sustenance to the priest, the law established by God for the support of the Levites (today the Levites are those who exercise the function of shepherding and teaching the flock of the Lord and live on the money earned from the Work of God, without secular job – cf. 1 Tim. 5: 17-18).

c) Giving the tithe opens the floodgates of heaven upon us for us to receive the overflowing blessings.

d) Giving the tithe rebukes the Devourer in all areas of our lives, not only in financial life. When He speaks of the locusts (cf. Jl 1: 4; Jl 2: 25) that devoured the crops He means that it was as a form of punishment from the Lord upon a disobedient people. The vines also suffered from drought, frosts or pests. Although in the OT these natural catastrophes acted as a way for God to correct them, today we can not ignore the symbolism of all this, especially in the case of tithes. When the Lord speaks of the ‘locusts’ or ‘pests’ or ‘the devourer’ (KJV and ASV), it is not just of locusts He speaks. They are symbol of the ‘Devourer’ (in other translations, ‘Destroyer’). It is about the action of demons on people’s financial lives, where they find an open gap to destroy that area, for the fact that Jesus came and abolished the rituals of the Old Covenant, this does not mean that the word of God was abolished (Matt. 5: 17-20), nor that His laws were changed. God has always wanted to participate in the life of His people in the totality and the financial area is one of those. Tithe remains valid, even more today, when Rulers and Authorities (or Principalities and Powers, that is, demons of high hierarchy) are eager to steal the truth of God and the peace of His children, giving the world the honor of prosperity. Thus, the tithe closes the gaps and protects our heritage.

e) The Lord says to put Him to the test [NIV: ‘test me in this’], giving Him the tithes. For some, it may sound like a challenge from God so that the man believes in Him, especially in an area that is so palpable. However, the verb (‘to test’) may have the meaning of to search, to exam, to experience, to taste, as if savoring a meal that one never ate, to see if it’s good or not, whether we like it or not; it can also have the meaning of to gain experience, knowledge and skill in any area. With this, the Lord tells us that by giving Him our tithe, we can achieve a higher level of knowledge of Him, leading us to gain experience in this area of our lives, the same way as we experience Him in others. Giving Him our tithe, we begin to be aware of what He can do for who is faithful to Him.

f) God rewards those who are faithful to Him, showing the difference between those who serve Him and those who do not serve Him. God spares them from the curses

and confirms His fatherhood over them (Mal. 3: 17-18: “They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act, and I will spare them as parents spare their children who serve them. Then once more you shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him”).

In 2 Chr. 31: 5-6; 12; Neh. 10: 37-38; Neh. 12: 44; Neh. 13: 5; 12 we can see the people bringing the tithe to the Lord, thus obeying His law.

By obeying His voice they would be happy, and all nations would recognize this.

- Mal. 3: 13-18 – The difference between the righteous and the wicked

- Mal. 3: 13-15: “You have spoken harsh words against me, says the Lord. Yet you say, ‘How have we spoken against you?’ You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What do we profit by keeping his command or by going about as mourners before the Lord of hosts? Now we count the arrogant happy; evildoers not only prosper, but when they put God to the test they escape’ [NIV: But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape].”

Not all the people raised their voice against God to accuse Him of injustice, but some Jews complained, and this was hard to hear. In fact, they made a bargain with Him. As long as they were being blessed and there was prosperity, everything was fine. They would continue with hypocritical attitudes in their worship, and with an external mourning, but without inner repentance. And as if this was not enough they were envious of the proud, for they considered them more blessed; they referred to sinners, Jews and Gentiles, who had material prosperity. So it is written in Mal. 2: 17 that they wearied the Lord with this kind of talk.

- Mal. 3: 16-18: “Then those who revered the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord took note and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who revered the Lord and thought on his name. They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act [NIV: in the day when I make up my treasured possession], and I will spare them as parents spare their children who serve them. Then once more you shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.”

Here we can notice that not all the people raised their voice against God to accuse Him of injustice. The righteous and God-fearing people, on the Day of the Lord, would find deliverance and victory. The bible writes: “a book of remembrance [NIV: A scroll of remembrance] was written before him of those who revered the Lord and thought on his name.” This means that their attitude was like a ‘memorial.’ A ‘memorial’ is a ‘reminder’ or a ‘monument’ where a worthy deed is recorded. The kings kept a book of chronicles of their reign, where the important events were written (Est. 2: 23; Est. 6: 1). Moses asked God to forgive the people or to take his name from the book (Ex. 32: 32-33); David had his name written in the book of God (Ps. 56: 8). This means that in heaven, before God, in the Book of Life, are the names of those who fear Him, and who are a special treasure for Him: Ps. 69: 28; Lk. 10: 20; Rev. 13: 8; Rev. 17: 8; Rev. 20: 12; 15; Rev. 21: 27; Dan. 12: 1.

‘In the day when I make up my treasured possession’ or ‘on the day when I act’ makes us understand that it may refer to Mal. 3: 1-2; Mal. 4: 1 (the Day of the Lord) in relation to His first coming, or on the day He decides to do something important, or on the day of His second coming, when He takes to Himself those who are His.

‘They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, my special possession’ [NIV: my treasured possession] – the Hebrew word for ‘special treasure’ is Seghullâ (or Cgullah – Strong #5459), which means:

- A personal treasure, a special possession, a treasured possession (Mal. 3: 17; 1 Chr. 29: 3).
- Private property, possession of kings (Ex. 19: 5; Ecc. 2: 8, Ps. 135: 4).
- Personal property in regard to persons (Deut. 7: 6; Deut. 14: 2).
- The word Seghullâ (in Greek: periousios or peripoiesis) can also be understood as the people of God (Eph. 1: 14; Tit. 2: 14; 1 Pet. 2: 9).

In short, Seghullâ refers to a possession of kings and to a particular property, not only material but of persons.

‘I will spare them’ – the Day of the Lord will be a terrible day (Zeph. 1: 14-18), but the righteous are sure that there will be God’s comfort for them (Ps. 91: 7). God spares us from death and hell (Jn. 3: 16-18).

‘Then once more you shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him’ – ‘once more you shall see’ shows that History repeats itself in the journey of humanity with God. He always ended up to defend His children and make clear the difference between those who serve Him and obey Him and the unbelievers, the rebellious and the wicked, who infallibly experience His wrath and His judgment, for they fall into the judgment of God’s own word (Jn. 3: 18), and not only in the Last Day, but right here on earth, where the rule is the same for all: “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow” (Gal. 6: 7).

## Chapter 4

- Mal. 4: 1-6 – The sun of righteousness and its forerunner

- Mal 4: 1: “See, the day is coming, burning like an oven [NIV: it will burn like a furnace], when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch [NIV: the day that is coming will set them on fire, says the LORD Almighty. Not a root or a branch will be left to them].”

Malachi speaks again about the day of the Lord’s coming:

‘The day is coming’ – refers to the first coming of Christ, which we extend to His second coming. But it is interesting to comment that for those prophets of the OT, the coming of a long-awaited Messiah, a deliverer, was like the Apocalypse is to us, a new Creation, for they would never have imagined that God would bring to the human being of that time a dispensation of forgiveness and grace, as a new chance to be chosen by Him and destined for salvation. The bible says that the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets (1 Cor. 14: 32), which means that God respected the personality trait of each of them to convey His message. Therefore, taking into account the mental content of each one (Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah were priests, which is noted in the tone of their prophecies), it is understandable that they imagined the coming of Christ, the awaited Messiah of Israel, with a certain amount of ‘violence’, to leave no doubt as to His justice and His authority to correct the wrongs of the wicked and to avenge the afflicted. Thus Malachi implies that the coming of Jesus (the ‘Day of the Lord’) would be terrible for the wicked: ‘burning like an oven [NIV: it will burn like a furnace], when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch [NIV: the day that is coming will set them on fire, says the LORD Almighty. Not a root or a branch will be left to them].’ If we think in a more spiritual way, with our vision today, all of this was fulfilled as Jesus did a great work during His ministry and His death on the cross, defeating Satan and all kind of demon and weapons forged against us, every kind of chain over men, killing and consuming, yes, the perversity and arrogance, leaving no root or branch of the enemy’s plans as a legality to touch the true children of God. It is obvious that the realization of this promise was left for us to conquer, bringing the kingdom of God to light, here and now, and that is conquered by effort (‘violence’ in some biblical versions, Matt. 11: 12). The part it is up to Him to do, it will be completed at the time of His second coming. But by no means it is an excuse for any believer to accommodate with the limitations and suffering of the present without reacting, hoping that the Lord makes what it is for His children to make.

The presence of the Lord – anyway and wherever it may be – will always be a terror to those who are not His. But it brings comfort and joy to the pious; therefore Malachi says in the following verses:

- Mal. 4: 2-3: “But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act [NIV: on the day when I do these things], says the Lord of hosts.”

Malachi speaks again about the day of the coming of the Lord, who is called here ‘the sun of righteousness’, as to respond to the complaints of the people and priests who accused God of being unjust to them and partial in His judgment, favoring the sinners.

For those who fear the Lord, He is born always on their situations of anguish and pain, bringing justice, healing and salvation. And when He comes, there is deliverance and, consequently, the joy of freedom, like with calves being released from a stable where they were confined. It means to be set free, to grow in the joy of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3: 17), experiencing the liberation from the yoke of law and sin. His presence bestow on His loved ones the authority and power to tread down the wicked and to consume them in the fire of His Spirit, turning them to ashes, that is, to nothing, into something that no longer has power of action. This figure of speech (to consume with fire, to turn to ashes) expresses God's right and quick judgment destroying evil and removing the power of action from the adversary. When one stepped on the head of the vanquished enemy it was a sign of victory; this one was 'placed as the footstool' of the winner. Here is the same thing. 'On the day when I act' or 'on the day when I do these things' the Lord will bring the victory and will give freedom to His children, to those who fear Him.



The sun of righteousness is Jesus. His name (Yeshua – ישוע) means salvation (Hebrew, ישועה), a word transliterated as yeshu'ah, meaning: something saved, deliverance, help, victory, prosperity, health, salvation, well-being, peace, forgiveness, protection, security. The word 'salvation' appears 146 times in the bible – 103 times in the OT and 43 times in the NT. The Hebrew word yeshu'âh (salvation) is clearly seen in 3 verses of Isaiah: Isa. 26: 1; Isa. 49: 8; Isa. 60: 18. In other verses, it is written as: yeshu, yshu, yish, etc., but it keeps the same basic letters, and most important, the same meaning: salvation. In the NT, the word 'salvation' is written in Greek as: sôtêrias (σωτηρίας – Lk. 1: 69; 77), sôtêria (σωτηρία – Acts 4: 12), sôtêrion or sôtêrian (σωτηριον – Lk. 3: 6; Acts 28: 28), for example. The word 'Savior' is written as Sôtêr (Σωτήρ = a deliverer, i.e., God or Christ), and which can correspond to the Hebrew words: mattan and mattnay, meaning 'to give' or 'reward.' The Greek words, sôtêrias, sôtêria or sôtêrion, mean: 'ransom, safety, to liberate, health, salvation, saved, to save, defense and defender.' Yshuw'ah (or yeshu'âh) is derived from Yhowshuwa' (Jehoshua; Joshua), transliterated to the Greek as Iēsoûs (Ἰησοῦς), Jesus (Strong # g2424) – Matt. 1: 21.



In Mal. 4: 2, the word is ‘healing’ (marpe’ or mrpha – Strong #4832), meaning: a curative, i.e. literally (concretely) a medicine; deliverance, placidity: cure, curable, incurable, healing, health, remedy, sound, wholesome, yielding.

John the Baptist bore witness to Jesus, more or less, in a similar way of Malachi: Matt. 3: 10-12.

The interesting thing in the verse of Malachi is that the Lord puts a condition: to fear His name. His deliverance is a privilege for those who fear His name. And ‘to fear’, here, is not only the fear of His anger, but respect, reverence, recognition for who He is, to give priority. When He is the center, everything else is subordinate to Him.

- Mal. 4: 4: “Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel [NIV: Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel].”

The prophet exhorts his people again, especially the priests, to remember the law of Moses and follow it.

- Mal. 4: 5-6: “Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.”

The reference is clear to John the Baptist, who came as the forerunner of Jesus, preparing the hearts of His people to receive His doctrine. In the NT this identity is confirmed between Elijah and John the Baptist: Matt. 11: 14; Matt. 17: 10-13; Mk. 9: 11-13; Lk. 1: 17; Lk. 7: 27; Jn. 1: 21. John the Baptist is placed as Elijah because Elijah was a great member of the prophetic lineage in Israel and known as being the one whom God used most to perform miracles; John the Baptist was confirmed by Jesus as the last member of the prophetic lineage, for no one needed to prophesy about Him anymore (Lk. 16: 16). He also said that among those born of women no one appeared greater than John the Baptist; but the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than he (Matt. 11: 11). This meant that John the Baptist stood out from the prophets of the past because he came in the ‘dawn’ of the gospel. He had the privilege that others did not have, which was to see the Christ incarnate. But he was the least in the kingdom of heaven because he could not see His resurrection, nor did the miracles that the apostles did.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared alongside Jesus, and the apostles saw them; Moses representing the law, and Elijah the prophets. God allowed the disciples to see also the spirit of Moses and Elijah to understand that the Law and the previous prophecies were now being fulfilled in the person of Jesus (Lk. 24: 44). The bible also says that they talked about the departure of Jesus, which was to be fulfilled in Jerusalem. It shows that God was there revealing that, just as He had done miracles in the past through His servants, He was working miracles in those days through His Son, especially the salvation of mankind, and the spiritual world was already aware. The voice that said, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him” (Lk. 9: 35) confirmed Jesus, not only as the Messiah, the Son of God, but also as the Prophet of Deut. 18: 15 (“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet”) foretold by Moses (cf. Jn. 5: 46: “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me” and Jn. 1: 45: “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth’”). Therefore, the disciples once again had the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God, the awaited Messiah, and as the prophet announced centuries ago.



### Conclusion:

Malachi reminds us of what holy priesthood is, of what we need to do to please Him as our Lord. He doesn't wish to see us apathetic in relation to our calling or to His work because it could discourage all His Church. Each of us has the responsibility to persevere in our own way and look after the spiritual gifts given to us so that we can be a channel of His blessings to other lives. Therefore, through our living testimony, we'll be prophesying and bringing the salvation of the Messiah to all who are in darkness. In our mouth, His words are alive, and also bricks to help our neighbors rebuild their 'temples.' Therefore, as prophets, we must obey the voice of the Spirit of God in everything, both to exhort, to rebuke, to convince of error and to eliminate sin, and to bring comfort and encouragement to those to whom the Lord brings to us. Even condemning evil and bringing to light the errors of the flesh, we are contributing to the 'edification of walls and the repair of breaches' (cf. Isa. 58: 12).

Volumes 1 and 2 of this book:

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/theminorprophets1.pdf>

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/theminorprophets2.pdf>