

Zech. 13:2-9 "The Sword Cuts Both Ways"

For the Children: Some things can be seen as good or bad, depending on your attitude. For example, school holidays have come to an end. If you think only of how much you enjoy a break from school, that might be a disappointment. But if you think of it as an opportunity to learn more about God's world, and prepare for later life, it is a good thing. You could say it was very sad that God had to punish His people for their wickedness; but it was good that He removed much of the bad influence in Israel. You could say it was a bad thing that wicked men killed the Lord Jesus; but it is a great thing that God brought salvation through it. You could say that it is bad when God's people are persecuted; but it is good that God uses this to strengthen His people and spread the Gospel. **Questions:** What are the 2 main sins God warns Judah about in ch. 13? Why did the Lord want His sheep scattered? How should we react if we suffer persecution?

Introduction:

First Point: The Cutting of False Religion

- 1) The Idols of the Land: Judah had still not removed all the idols from the Land. Even when they threw away the pagan idols, they replaced them in Jesus' time with the idol of self-righteousness. Hence their reaction to the Messiah. The deeper removal of idols required the finished work of the Lord Jesus and His poured-out Spirit. The total removal of all idolatry must wait for His return.
- 2) The False Prophets: False prophets also plagued Judah, even after Exile (Neh. 6:12-14). But Zechariah tells of a Day when all false prophecy would end. The strength of its rejection is put in terms of parents condemning their own sons for being false prophets (Dt. 21:18-22), and the prophets themselves trying to cover up with lies, their shame at their former false prophecy. This rejection of all deviation from God's Word is also effected by the work of Christ and His Spirit, but completed when He returns.

Second Point: The Cutting of the Shepherd and the Sheep

- 1) Against the Shepherd: God Himself calls upon the sword (= violent death) to fall upon His Son, His Shepherd and close Associate. 12:10 puts this in terms of Him being "pierced." The cutting of the Shepherd is "2-edged," since it brings judgement upon those who reject Him, but salvation to the elect.
- 2) Against the Sheep: Similarly, His sheep/little ones are scattered, because of their close connection to Him (Jn. 10:4; Mt. 26:31; Acts 8:1-8). This scattering is also "2-edged," since it involves the evil of persecution against Christ and His sheep; but also results in great good for the church and the believer. The sheep see from their persecution that they have this close connection to their Shepherd. It also results in the spread of the Gospel (Acts 8:4). That is why Zech. 13:7b states that it was God's purpose to strike the Shepherd *so that* the sheep would be scattered. Persecution is part of God's good plan.

Third Point: The Cutting of the Sin of the Remnant

- 1) A Third Brought Through: Because God's people had hardened their hearts against Him, the Lord would destroy 2/3 of Judah. Temporal judgement fell in AD 70, and eternal judgement awaited those who had finally rejected the Messiah. But 1/3 would be brought through the fire – even though they would be scattered (see also Ezk. 5:12).
- 2) A Third Refined: The other side of the sword's edge, however, is that by this very judgement many would be refined/purified and tested by the fire. The Church and its members would be thus strengthened, especially by the removal of hypocrites, and by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. That purging will be completed when the Lord returns (Mal. 3:2-3).
- 3) The Covenant Confirmed: This purifying is in line with the promises about the new covenant in Jer. 31:31f and Ezk. 36:24f. Zech. 13:9 uses the language of covenant-renewal to make this point: God would truly be their God, and they would be close to Him, able to call upon Him and receive His answer. See Is. 65:24. The "sword" that cuts in judgement also cuts a new covenant through Christ's death and the pouring-out of His Spirit. We should therefore view persecution as a sign of our connection to Christ, our part in the new covenant, and as a way God uses to strengthen and sanctify us.

Conclusion: