

There was a song in the former Trinity Hymnal that had a line about how
“little children” were the jewels in Jesus’ crown.

1. When he cometh, when he cometh to make up his jewels, all his jewels, precious jewels, his loved and his own.
Chorus: Like the stars of the morning, his bright crown adorning, they shall shine in their beauty, bright gems for his crown.
2. He will gather, he will gather the gems for his kingdom, all the pure ones, all the bright ones, his loved and his own.
3. Little children, little children who love their Redeemer, are the jewels, precious jewels, his loved and his own.

There was once a young lady in this congregation who wondered about that song –
“where does the Bible say that little children are the jewels in Jesus’ crown?”
I thought about it – dug around through scripture a bit –
and said in reply – “Nowhere.”

The idea that little children are the jewels in Jesus’ crown is a bit problematic.

Those who defend the idea point to Zechariah 9:16.

*¹⁶ On that day the LORD their God will save them,
as the flock of his people;
for like the jewels of a crown
they shall shine on his land.*

Okay – but remember that the “them” of verse 16 are the same people in verse 15:

*¹⁵ The LORD of hosts will protect them,
and they shall devour, and tread down the sling stones,
and they shall drink and roar as if drunk with wine,
and be full like a bowl,
drenched like the corners of the altar.*

So if you like the picture of little children “devouring” their enemies in battle,
“roaring as if drunk with wine,”
and “drenched like the corners of the altar” with blood –
I suppose you are free to have your own opinions!!

So I went to a friend (a composer) and suggested that he add a stanza
to include the ideas of verse 15!

“They’ll devour, they’ll devour, and tread down the sling stones...”

He laughed at me – but the result was the song that we’ll sing at the end of the service tonight
(which was a much better outcome...).

Israel and the Nations: The Burden of the Word of the LORD (9:1-11:17)

These three chapters are all talking about how God will bring judgment on Israel's enemies, and how the king will return to Jerusalem (ch 9)–

but the problem is that destructive leaders continue to plague Israel (ch 10) – and so those leaders will receive the same judgment as the nations (ch 11).

1. The Oracles Against the Nations (v1-8)

a. The LORD Watches Mankind (v1-2)

The oracle of the word of the LORD is against the land of Hadrach and Damascus is its resting place.

For the LORD has an eye on mankind and on all the tribes of Israel,^[a]

²*and on Hamath also, which borders on it, Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise.*

Different versions of the ESV translate verse 1 either as “the burden of the word of the LORD” or as “the oracle of the word of the LORD.”

The Hebrew word means “burden” – but is a term often used by the prophets to refer to an oracle,

and so it is best to translate it as “oracle”

(except in Jeremiah 23 – where the prophet uses a play on words, that when people ask: what is the burden of the LORD? Jeremiah is to say, “You are the burden of the LORD”!)

But here Zechariah is using ‘burden’ in the sense of ‘oracle’ –

the weight of God's word is against the land of Hadrach – northern Syria – focused around the city of Damascus.

Hamath is southern Syria –

and then Tyre and Sidon move further south down the coast, before reaching the cities of the Philistines.

But the key phrase in verse 1 is the second sentence:

“For the LORD has an eye on mankind and on all the tribes of Israel.”

(even if you go with the footnote – and argue that the focus is on Syria – the point remains that the LORD has his eye fixed on the nations, as well as Israel.)

b. Tyre and Sidon: the LORD Will Cast Down the Proud (v3-4)

³ *Tyre has built herself a rampart
and heaped up silver like dust,
and fine gold like the mud of the streets.*
⁴ *But behold, the Lord will strip her of her possessions
and strike down her power on the sea,
and she shall be devoured by fire.*

Tyre will be struck down and devoured by fire.

Tyre was the major economic power in the region –
largely because of her maritime trade.
Her “power on the sea” meant that she controlled the Mediterranean trade.
And since the city of Tyre was largely built on an island,
it was virtually impossible to defeat Tyre –
because your army could stand there on the shore forever –
and the ships of Tyre would continue to supply the city!

Tyre had played an important part in the story of Israel.
Hiram, king of Tyre, had made a covenant with David
and then later helped Solomon build the temple.
But later generations did not do so well.

Jezebel was a Phoenician princess –
and she brought their worship of Baal into Israel.
And the prophets – from Isaiah to Ezekiel –
all spoke of God’s wrath and judgment against Tyre and Sidon.

But less than two hundred years after this prophecy
Alexander the Great captured the city of Tyre –
by building a causeway out to the city!

Never think that your city is invincible!

And when the cities of the Philistines see God’s judgment against Tyre –
they too will tremble!

c. Philistia: the LORD Will Subject Them to His People (v5-7)

⁵ *Ashkelon shall see it, and be afraid;
Gaza too, and shall writhe in anguish;
Ekron also, because its hopes are confounded.
The king shall perish from Gaza;
Ashkelon shall be uninhabited;*
⁶ *a mixed people^[b] shall dwell in Ashdod,
and I will cut off the pride of Philistia.*

Verses 5-6 all focus on the judgment against the cities of the Philistines –
but then there is a striking conclusion:

*⁷ I will take away its blood from its mouth,
and its abominations 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.*

God will purify the Philistines and make them “like a clan in Judah”!
Ekron will be like the Jebusites.

The Jebusites were the prior occupants of Jerusalem.
2 Chronicles 8 tells us that after David conquered Jerusalem,
he turned the Jebusites into forced laborers for Judah –
which means that the Jebusites were incorporated into Israel.

In the same way, the Philistines will also be incorporated into Israel.
They, too, will become part of the people of God!

The Philistines had been hostile to the LORD for hundreds of years.
But God promises to bring them into his people!

d. The LORD Himself Will Guard His House (v8)

*⁸ Then I will encamp at my house as a guard,
so that none shall march to and fro;
no oppressor shall again march over them,
for now I see with my own eyes.*

And the result will be that the LORD himself will encamp at his house as a guard.
After all – if even his enemies become part of his people,
then his people will surely have nothing to fear!

Verse 1 had said that God had an eye on mankind.

Verse 8 concludes the first section by saying that now God sees with his own eyes
because he is encamped as guard at his own house.

And when God *sees*, God *acts*.

And that is where the oracle goes in verses 9-13 –
where God acts in restoring the king to Jerusalem!

2. The King Is Coming (v9-13)

a. The King Will Come Like Solomon (v9)

*⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!*

*Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Verse 9 portrays the king coming to Jerusalem like Solomon –
riding a donkey.

Some people have thought that riding a donkey was an act of humility –
but in fact, it was common for kings (and others) to ride donkeys.

The key image here is not humility – but peace.

If your king is riding a horse – that is a sign that battle is at hand.

If your king is riding a donkey – that means that all is well in the land.

When Solomon was crowned king, he rode his father David’s donkey –
as a sign that he was the one chosen by his father to rule in his place.

But of course, in Zechariah’s day the Davidic throne had been vacant for 70 years.

It would have been easy for Zechariah’s hearers to think

“Aha! The king is coming – any day now?!”

(After all, Zerubbabel *was* the Son of David!!)

But it would be another 500 years before the day would come.

Our Lord Jesus knew the prophecies.

He knew what Zechariah had said about the Son of David
who would come to Jerusalem
riding on the foal of a donkey...

And so when he came to Jerusalem for his final Passover meal –
he made sure to enact what the prophet had foretold!

“Little did the onlookers at the ‘triumphal entry’ of Christ into Jerusalem
that first Palm Sunday understand the full import of what they were witnessing.” (1167)

b. The Will Speak Shalom [Peace] to the Nations (v10)

*¹⁰ I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall speak peace to the nations;
his rule shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River^[c] to the ends of the earth.*

And the LORD says that this Son of David will bring peace.

There will be no need for chariots or war horses –

because the Son of David will speak peace to the nations.

Notice at the beginning of verse 10
how Zechariah treats Ephraim and Jerusalem as one unit,
thus fulfilling the promise of Ezekiel 37 that Israel and Judah would be restored
as one people under “My servant David.”

Ezekiel 37 had said that “I will make a covenant of peace with them...”

Now Zechariah says that when this one is enthroned –
“he shall speak peace to the nations.”

This one like Solomon – shall bring Shalom (peace).
He will be the Prince of Peace –
and his Peace – the Peace Christi – the Peace of Christ
shall rule in our hearts

c. I Will Set Your Prisoners Free (v11-12)

¹¹ *As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.*

¹² *Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;
today I declare that I will restore to you double.*

Again, the language of Ezekiel 37 comes back again in verse 11 –
as God had said that he would “make a covenant of peace with them” –
because then he would set them in their land.

Those who had returned from Exile were well aware of how far their experience fell short
of the ‘glory’ of the old days.

They have only a dinky little temple that they have just started building.
There is no Son of David on the throne – they still submit to foreign rulers.

But God bases his promise on “the blood of my covenant with you.”
In the OT that was always the blood of a lamb or an ox –
but then came the night when our Savior said,
“This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood.”
This is the blood of the covenant that Zechariah had spoken of.
This is the return from Exile that Israel had longed for –
but not fully understood!

And verse 13 goes a step further:

d. Zion Will Conquer Greece (v13)

¹³ *For I have bent Judah as my bow;
I have made Ephraim its arrow.*

*I will stir up your sons, O Zion,
against your sons, O Greece,
and wield you like a warrior's sword.*

Notice again how Judah and Ephraim are working together as bow and arrow.
And Zion's sons wind up as a warrior's sword in the hand of the LORD
as he goes to battle against Greece!!

The Persian empire was at the beginning of its long conflict with the Greeks at this time,
so everyone would have known who the Greeks were.
The question is why the Greeks come into view for Zechariah?

The simple answer is that God said so!
But even as early as 519 B.C.,
most observers would have seen the Greek city-states
as some of the most influential players in the Mediterranean world.

So when did God wield Zion's sons as a sword against Greece?
Well, *sort of* in the days of the Maccabees – who stood against the Greeks of their day.
But even more powerfully in the first couple centuries of the church –
where much of the Greek-speaking world was converted to Christ.

3. The LORD Will Save Them (v14-17)

a. The LORD Will Go Before His People (v14-15)

¹⁴ *Then the LORD will appear over them,
and his arrow will go forth like lightning;
the Lord GOD will sound the trumpet
and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south.*

¹⁵ *The LORD of hosts will protect them,
and they shall devour, and tread down the sling stones,
and they shall drink and roar as if drunk with wine,
and be full like a bowl,
drenched like the corners of the altar.*

The final image in verses 14-17 is of the LORD as Divine Warrior
going up against his foes.

In verses 14-15 we see the LORD going forth before his people.

With divine protection, we can go forth with confidence into the battle.

b. When He Saves Them They Shall Shine Forth in His Beauty (v16-17)

¹⁶ *On that day the LORD their God will save them,*

*as the flock of his people;
for like the jewels of a crown
they shall shine on his land.*

Because “on that day the LORD their God will save them as the flock of his people.”

This is striking!

He has just been talking about the warlike nature of God’s people going into battle –
but here he speaks of us as sheep.

And he also speaks of us as a royal crown.

Why does God save his people –

Because we are ‘like the jewels of a crown’!

And behind the metaphor – behind the pictures –
there is the reality of God’s goodness and beauty.

*¹⁷ For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty!
Grain shall make the young men flourish,
and new wine the young women.*

It is a beautiful thing when God saves his people.

When God sets us free, you see beauty restored to its proper place!

Grain shall make the young men flourish –
and new wine the young women...

Grain and wine are the staples of the Israelite economy.

They also are the elements that our Lord Jesus used to make a new covenant meal.