

# Zechariah 9:1-8

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*The Suzerain (ruler) God promises to judge the nations surrounding Judah. He will stop them from oppressing His people and find a remnant among them to worship Him.*

Zechariah 9 commences the second main section of the book. In this section the prophet reveals God's plan for Judah and the nations surrounding her. He also announces the advent of the Messiah, the future king, who would bring peace to the world. The prophet introduces the message with a title, letting his readers know that the message was *the burden of the word of the LORD* (v 1).

The term translated as *burden* is “massa” in the Hebrew text. In some passages, “massa” refers to a burden as when an animal carries a load (Exodus 23:5; 2 Kings 5:17). In the book of Proverbs, it denotes a revelation of some sort (Proverbs 31:1). In prophetic literature, the term “massa” usually refers to a proclamation of disaster directed against foreign nations, as seen here (Nahum 1:1; Isaiah 13:1, 15:1). That *burden is the word of the LORD*.

The Hebrew term for *word* is “dābhār.” It is the same word used for “thing, event, or matter” (Proverbs 11:13; 17:9; 1 Kings 14:19). In the Bible, the *word* often deals with a situation or an event, as the prophets Amos and Isaiah make clear (Amos 1:1; Isaiah 2:1). It can be a message of judgment or a *word* of hope and salvation. It is authoritative and requires actions from its recipient(s) because it came from *the LORD*.

The Hebrew term for *LORD* is “Yahweh,” the covenant name of God. That name speaks of God's character and His relationship with His covenant people (Exodus 3:14, 34:6). In our passage, the prophet told his audience that the *word* came from *the LORD*, thus giving credibility to the message. Zechariah wanted the Judeans to know he received a *word* from their covenant partner. Therefore, they were to obey it or find comfort in it.

The divine *word* was more than a mere speech. It was a medium of God's activity as promises, threats, exhortation, and creative power. Zechariah was responsible for proclaiming that *word* faithfully, regardless of how the people would respond. He could not add or withdraw from it. That *word* would go out as God planned it to accomplish His desire (Isaiah 55:11). That is why the prophet began the pronouncement of judgment and said, *The burden of the word of the LORD was against the land of Hadrach* (v 1).

The *land of Hadrach* was a city in northern Syria. Although the Bible mentions it only once, it is a familiar name in Neo-Assyrian sources beginning in the mid-eighth century BC. The Assyrian king named Tiglath-Pileser III conquered the city in 738 BC. But in 720 BC, *Hadrach* joined with Israel and unsuccessfully revolted against Sargon II of Assyria. The city is located along the upper Orontes River between Aleppo and Hamath.

That the *land of Hadrach* is connected with *Damascus* as its resting place would indicate that this oracle is intended against the nation that includes *Hadrach* and *Damascus*. The idea of *resting place* (Hebrew “mnuha”) seems to include a place for an abode—a home place.

- “Thus they set out from the mount of the LORD three days’ journey, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD journeying in front of them for the three days, to seek out a resting place [mnuha] for them” (Numbers 10:33).
- “May the LORD grant that you may find rest [mnuha], each in the house of her husband” (Ruth 1:9).

In this case “mnuha” could refer to an alliance or partnership between *Hadrach* and *Damascus*, seemingly that *the land of Hadrach* in some way rests upon its relationship with *Damascus*.

*Damascus* was the capital of the nation of Aram during the 10th through 8th centuries BC. It is still the capital of modern Syria. In ancient times, *Damascus* was often a rival to Israel until the Assyrian empire conquered it in 732 BC (Amos 1:3–5). It seems that *the land of Hadrach* and its connection with *Damascus* indicate that God’s judgement will fall upon their land.

Like *Hadrach*, *Damascus* would fall under God’s judgment. They would submit to His authority and power when His *word* marched like an army to conquer them. *For the eyes of men, especially of all the tribes of Israel, are toward the LORD* (v 1). That means all nations, including Israel, stand before *the LORD* and are under His submission (Psalm 2:8-11).

Zechariah continued with the theme of judgment begun in the first part of the previous verse. He told his audience that God would punish *Hadrach and Damascus*, along with *Hamath*, a fortress city about 130 miles north of *Damascus* along the Orontes River in Syria. Today, the city is called “Hama.”

The divine judgment would reach *Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise* (v 2). The city state of *Tyre* was on the Mediterranean coast north of Israel (modern-day Lebanon), while *Sidon* was about 25 miles north of *Tyre* (Genesis 10:15; Joshua 11:8; Joel 3:4). They were notable city-states of Phoenicia in the early eighth century BC. In those days, the Phoenicians were known as slave traders and were skillful in construction, sea-craft, and commerce (1 Kings 5:8-9; Nehemiah 13:16; Psalm 45:12). *Sidon* is noted as the son of Canaan in Genesis 10:15, and could be the namesake of these people and this city.

In the next verse, the prophet singled out *Tyre* to describe her wealth, thus giving his audience a glimpse of her wisdom. *For Tyre built herself a fortress* (v 3). The name *Tyre* is “tzor” in Hebrew. It means “a rock.” Similarly, the term *fortress* is “matzor” in Hebrew. It is a wordplay on the name of the city of *Tyre*. It denotes a high point set to provide refuge for people and consists of walls, towers, and gates. In biblical times, a *fortress* was often built on high mountains to be impenetrable and to prevent the enemy from attacking the city residents.

*Tyre* relied on her *fortress* and thought she was secure and invincible. Having built a *fortress* to protect her citizens, she *piled up silver like dust, and gold like the mire of the streets* (v 3). The

Bible often pairs *silver and gold* when speaking of wealth or something precious because they are valuable and durable metals.

For instance, we read in Genesis that the LORD blessed Abram with a great deal of “livestock, silver, and gold” (Genesis 13:2). Later, He rewarded Solomon with riches. During Solomon’s reign, “he made *silver and gold* as plentiful in Jerusalem as stones” (2 Chronicles 1:15; 1 Kings 10:27).

In Zechariah, we learn that *Tyre* used these precious metals extensively to build her fortunes. As a result, she became arrogant (Ezekiel 28:2–5). Therefore, the LORD would judge her. As Zechariah declared, *Behold, the Lord will dispossess her and cast her wealth into the sea* (v 4).

To *dispossess* someone means to deprive them of their land, property, or other possessions. The term *Lord* is “Adonai” in Hebrew. It means “master” or “ruler” and speaks of honor, majesty, and sovereignty. It is fitting here because it shows that *the LORD* is the master of the universe, the possessor of all things. As such, He has the right to strip *Tyre of her wealth*. Thus, *she will be consumed with fire* (v 4). The phrase *consumed with fire* likely pictures God’s judgement *fire* upon Tyre. God is pictured as a “consuming fire” (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29) and His judgment is often pictured as fire (Leviticus 9:24; Numbers 11:1; 1 Kings 8:38; Amos 7:4; Daniel 7:9; 1 Corinthians 3:13, 15; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Revelation 19:20, 20:10).

The Assyrians attacked *Tyre* several times and compelled them to pay tribute in the eighth century BC. The city later surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar in 573 BC and fell to Alexander the Great in 332 BC. Alexander massacred many of Tyre’s citizens and razed its walls to the ground. Tyre’s defeat fulfilled Ezekiel’s prophecy:

“They will destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; and I will scrape her debris from her and make her a bare rock. She will be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken,” declares the Lord God, and she will become spoil for the nations.” (Ezekiel 26:4–5)

Having pronounced judgment on Syria to the northeast and Phoenicia to the north of Israel, the prophet Zechariah turned his attention to a nation to the west, namely Philistia. He listed four of the five major cities of the Philistines: *Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod* (v 5). The only major Philistine city not listed here is Gath. Gath might have been omitted because it had already been weakened substantially. Hazael of Aram captured it in 815 BC (2 Kings 12:17). Later, Uzziah of Judah captured Gath in 760 BC (2 Chronicles 26:6; Amos 6:2).

In his indictment of Philistia, Zechariah told his listeners that the destruction of *Tyre* would be so bad that *Ashkelon* would *see it and be afraid* (v 5). The city of *Ashkelon* was a Philistine city, a large seaport on the Mediterranean coast 12 miles north of Gaza and 31 miles south of Tel Aviv (Judges 1:18). It was a prosperous port city. It would be in panic mode when observing the defeat of *Tyre* in anticipation of a similar fate: *Gaza too will writhe in great pain* (v 5).

The city of *Gaza* was the Philistine coastal capital within the tribal allotment of Judah (Joshua 15:47). It was about fifty miles southwest of Jerusalem. It controlled the routes by which

invading armies entered Israel and served as the base for Persian military operations against Egypt. According to the prophet, *Gaza* would *writhe in great pain* because of the fall of Tyre.

The Bible often uses the verb translated here as *writhe* to picture the agonies of a woman giving birth to a child (Isaiah 21:3). Here in Zechariah, however, the prophet used it to describe Gaza's fate. The point is that the inhabitants of *Gaza* would suffer like a woman undergoing labor pains (Isaiah 26:17, Proverbs 31:17). Also, *Ekron* would suffer, *for her expectation has been confounded* (v 5). In context, it would seem that the *expectation* of *Ekron* that has been *confounded* concerned the combined might of the military alliance that included Tyre. Apparently the fall of Tyre spelled their own doom.

The city of *Ekron* was the most northerly of the major cities of Philistia. During Israel's conquest, Joshua did not conquer it (Joshua 13:3). When Joshua and the Israelite leaders divided the land among the 12 tribes, they gave *Ekron* first to Judah and then to Dan (Joshua 15:11, 45, 46, 19:43). Eventually, Judah regained *Ekron* (Judges 1:18), but it subsequently fell back to the Philistines.

Zechariah told his audience that the people of *Ekron* would be in agony like *Gaza* because they had lost hope since *Tyre*, their ally, would fall. Moreover, *the king will perish from Gaza*, causing the city to lose its independence. The city of *Ashkelon* *will not be inhabited*, meaning that it will be empty (Zephaniah 2:4). And *a mongrel race will dwell in Ashdod* (v 5).

The Hebrew term translated as *mongrel* is "mamzer." It refers to someone born of a mixed race. Here in Zechariah, the term likely means that *Ashdod* would no longer be a strong Philistine city—it would be populated with peoples from other places, a result of its military demise. As a result, Philistia would lose her political and social identity. As *the LORD* stated, *I will cut off the pride of the Philistines* (v 6).

The term for *pride* is "gā'ôn" in Hebrew. It can be translated as arrogance and refers to an improper view of oneself. Arrogance or *pride* is portrayed in scripture as the opposite of faith (Habakkuk 2:4). *Faith* recognizes that God is God, and that we are creatures that He created. It is *faith* that what God tells us about reality is true. *Pride* on the other hand is living in defiance of the cause-effect of God's moral universe.

But for those who refuse to live humbly, denying reality, there are consequences. For "when pride comes, then comes dishonor" (Proverbs 11:2). Therefore, God would judge the inhabitants of Philistia severely to remove their pride and humiliate them.

The removal of Philistia's *pride* would lead to her purification and blessing. The LORD declared, *I will remove their blood from their mouth* (v 7).

The Jewish law forbade the Israelites from eating meat without draining the blood. In Leviticus, Moses made it crystal clear when he said, "No person among you may eat blood, nor may any alien who sojourns among you eat blood.' So when any man from the sons of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, in hunting catches a beast or a bird which may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth" (Leviticus 17:12–13).

However, the Philistines did not follow the Mosaic Law since they were not in a covenant relationship with the LORD. They ate animal meat without draining its blood. Therefore, the LORD promised to purify them. He would overturn their pagan ways. This infers that God would redeem them and reconcile them to Himself. He would also *remove their detestable things from between their teeth* (v 7).

The term translated as *detestable thing* is “šiqqûš” in Hebrew and means “abominable.” A form of this noun (“šeqeš”) occurs at least eight times in Leviticus 11, where it refers to forbidden animals (Leviticus 11:10–12, 13–19, 20–23, 41–43). Likewise, in Zechariah, “šiqqûš” refers to things ritually unclean, especially prohibited flesh. That means that the Philistines would no longer eat unclean foods per the Mosaic food laws (Leviticus 11:2–23).

At that time, *they also will be a remnant for our God* (v 7). In the midst of pronouncing judgment on the Philistines, suddenly God asserts their eventual redemption. The Philistine people would become His worshipers and *be like a clan in Judah* (v 7). This foreshadows that Gentiles would be grafted into Israel. The Apostle Paul states that Gentiles are like wild olive branches that are “grafted in” to the “olive tree” that is Israel (Romans 11:17-19). God is not willing that any should perish and desires all peoples to reconcile to Him (John 3:26, 2 Peter 3:9). All the sins of the world were nailed to the cross, and God calls all people to Himself through Jesus (Colossians 2:14).

In addition to the Philistines becoming a *remnant for our God*, also *Ekron will be like a Jebusite* (v 7).

The *Jebusites* were native to Jerusalem before and during the conquest of the land under Joshua. Before the conquest, the Bible describes them as inhabitants of the Promised Land, among others (Genesis 15:18–21; Exodus 3:8). During the conquest, the city of Jebus was an entrenched fortress from which the Jebusites attacked the Israelites. It was in the hill country of what would later be known as Judah (Numbers 13:29; Joshua 11:3).

The Jebusites continued to control Jerusalem during the time of the Judges until David conquered the city and absorbed them (2 Samuel 24:18). Likewise, the people of *Ekron*, representing the Philistine people, would one day become absorbed, and be part of the people of God. At that time, *the LORD will secure the borders of Israel and Judah. As He stated, I will camp around My house because of an army, because of him who passes by and returns* (v 8).

The term *My house* here likely refers to the land of Israel, as it does in Jeremiah 12:7, Hosea 8:1, and 9:15. It could specifically refer to the temple in Jerusalem, but in context it seems God is referring to His presence and protection of the entire land of Israel.

In Old Testament times, armies traveling from Syria to Egypt would pass through the land of Israel, especially the Philistine coastal plain. But the day will come when *the LORD* secures the borders of His *land* (Israel) to prevent the enemy soldiers from marching through it. And *no oppressor will pass over them anymore* (v 8).

All mistreatment or cruelty upon Israel at the hand of invading nations would be over because the LORD would take control of His territory. He reaffirmed this truth by saying, *For now I have seen with My eyes* (v 8).

The term *eyes* speaks of God's care and protection (Deuteronomy 11:12). One translation renders the phrase *For now I have seen with My eyes* as "For now I am keeping watch." The *LORD* cared much for the land of Canaan because that was the land He had promised to give to Abraham and His descendants (Genesis 13:15). Therefore, He would defend and secure its borders against all hostile attacks.

### **Biblical Text**

**1 The burden of the word of the LORD is against the land of Hadrach, with Damascus as its resting place (for the eyes of men, especially of all the tribes of Israel, are toward the LORD),**

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

**3 For Tyre built herself a fortress  
And piled up silver like dust,  
And gold like the mire of the streets.**

**4 Behold, the Lord will dispossess her  
And cast her wealth into the sea;  
And she will be consumed with fire.**

**5 Ashkelon will see *it* and be afraid.  
Gaza too will writhe in great pain;  
Also Ekron, for her expectation has been confounded.  
Moreover, the king will perish from Gaza,  
And Ashkelon will not be inhabited.**

**6 And a mongrel race will dwell in Ashdod,  
And I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.**

**7 And I will remove their blood from their mouth  
And their detestable things from between their teeth.  
Then they also will be a remnant for our God,  
And be like a clan in Judah,  
And Ekron like a Jebusite.**

**8 But I will camp around My house because of an army,  
Because of him who passes by and returns;  
And no oppressor will pass over them anymore,  
For now I have seen with My eyes.**