

# Zechariah 12:1-5

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*There will be a siege against Jerusalem in the future. The world will attack Judah, but the Lord God will guard Judah. He will cause blindness and confusion upon those who attack His people. This likely looks to a siege in the End Times, where Jesus will save His people from their enemies.*

The previous chapter ended on a negative note as God instructed the prophet Zechariah to act as a foolish leader to illustrate how a future ruler would neglect and oppress the Judeans rather than serve them. God then pronounced judgment against that ruler for his worthlessness and wickedness (Zechariah 11:15-17).

The present chapter begins on a more positive note. In its first section, Zechariah reveals God's plan to defend and redeem the inhabitants of Judah when their enemies attack them. He introduces the message with a title verse to let his readers know that the revelation was *the burden of the word of the LORD concerning Israel* (v. 1).

The term translated as *burden* is “massa” in the Hebrew language. 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, “massa” usually refers to a weighty message, a great responsibility such as proclaiming disaster directed against foreign nations, as in here (Nahum 1:1; Isaiah 13:1, 15:1; Zechariah 9:1). The idea might be that it is a responsibility (*burden*) that God has given to the prophet to carry this message to the people. That *burden is the word of the LORD*.

The Hebrew term for *word* in the phrase *word of the Lord* is “dābhār.” It is the same word used for “thing, event, or matter” (Proverbs 11:13, 17:9; 1 Kings 14:19). In the prophetic corpus, “dābhār” is a typical and specific term for prophecy. It 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 covenant/treaty relationship with His chosen people (Exodus 3:14, 34:6). In our passage, the prophet told his audience that the information he imparted to them came from *the LORD*, thus giving credibility to the message.

He used the term “Yahweh” to inform the Judeans that he received a *word* from their covenant leader, their Suzerain (Ruler). God's covenant/treaty with Israel contained specific rewards for walking in the way of loving their neighbors (Leviticus 10:18; Deuteronomy 28:1-14; Matthew 22:37-39). It also contained cursings or negative consequences for living in the pagan ways of exploitation of others (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Accordingly, the Judeans were expected to listen to God and find hope and instruction in His *word*.

The divine *word* was more than a mere speech. God spoke creation into existence (“Then God said ‘let there be light’” Genesis 1:3). This indicates that God’s word contains creative power. Jesus, who is God, is also depicted as being “the Word” (John 1:1). This indicates that God’s word reflects His image.

God’s word is a medium of God’s activity, containing promises, warnings, exhortation, and creative power. Zechariah was responsible for proclaiming that *word* faithfully to the post-exilic Judeans, regardless of how they would respond. He could not add or take away from it. That *word* would go out as God planned, and it was certain to accomplish His desire (Isaiah 55:11).

In our passage, the message of Yahweh was a word *concerning Israel*. *Israel* is a term that stands for the entire nation.

The prophet emphasized the divine source of his message with the expression: *Thus declares the LORD* (v 1). This statement is a classic formula in prophetic literature. It carries much weight and affirms the truthfulness of the prophet’s message (Joel 2:12; Hosea 2:16, 21; Amos 9:13; Zephaniah 1:2). When the prophet said, *declares the LORD*, he added weight and emphasis to the message, indicating that it did not come from him. Instead, the revelation came from *the LORD*, the faithful and upright God (Deuteronomy 32:4).

Zechariah further reinforced the legitimacy of his prophetic word by adding a threefold statement about God’s power as demonstrated through His mighty acts in the creation. In his first expression, he told his audience that *the LORD* is the one *who stretches out the heavens* (v 1). To *stretch* something is to spread it or extend it, as when someone pitches a tent (Genesis 12:8, 26:25, 33:19).

The prophet drew on the image of a person stretching out the fabric of a tent to tell his audience that God similarly *stretched out the heavens* (v 1).

This illustrates God’s creative role in fashioning the universe. The image echoes Isaiah’s message, describing the incomparable *LORD* as “He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in” (Isaiah 40:22). This image illustrates that the universe is like a mere tent panel in the hands of *the LORD*, the all-powerful God who created the world.

In Zechariah’s second expression, he told his listeners that *the LORD lays the foundation of the earth* (v 1). The verb translated as *lays the foundation* is “*yāsād*” in Hebrew. It refers to the foundation of a permanent building. It focuses on the element of stability and permanence.

In Zechariah, the verb demonstrates that God is a Master Builder. Earlier, the prophet said that God *stretched out the heavens*. Now, he stated that God alone *laid the foundation of the earth*. The foundation is the necessary first step in constructing a building. God did not build upon anything done by another. He was the creator of all that is, from the beginning to the end.

He used *heaven* and *earth* as two contrasting parts to express the totality of God’s creation. God created not only the *heavens and earth*, but also everything in between.

The final expression, God *forms the spirit of man within him* (v 1), switches from the creation of the material universe to the creation of human beings. The verb translated as *forms* (“yāšar” in Hebrew) means “to shape” or “to fashion.” It occurs in the book of Genesis, where “the LORD God formed (“yasar”) man from dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). The verb can also designate various forms of craftsmanship (Isaiah 44:9-20; Habakkuk 2:18). God is the ultimate Master Craftsman.

In Zechariah, “yasar” refers to the divine activity as creating and shaping the *spirit* of human beings, like a potter shaping his clay. God alone sees and knows man’s inward parts (Psalm 139:13). The Hebrew word translated as *spirit* is “ruwach” which is also translated as “wind” or “breath.” God is spirit (John 4:24) and God is life. He is the source of the breath (“ruwach”) of life necessary for all living beings (Genesis 7:22). After Noah’s flood, God sent a wind (“ruwach”) to dry the land, bringing life back to the earth.

Jesus was the agent of the creation (Colossians 1:16-17). Through Him all things were made (John 1:3). In Him is life (John 1:4, 11:25, 14:1, 14:6). When we believe on Jesus, we are born anew in the Spirit (John 3:3, 3:5-8). In John 3, Jesus explained the Spirit by using the wind as an example. We know the wind is real because we can see its effect, but we cannot see it. The assertion that God *forms the spirit of man within him* indicates that God is the creator of all that is material, all that can be seen and experienced physically, and God is also the creator of all that is unseen, all things that are spiritual in nature.

Having depicted *the LORD* as the creator of the universe, including human beings and all that is within the spiritual realm, the prophet Zechariah began reporting the divine message. He used the first-person pronoun to allow God to speak directly to the people. In so doing, the prophet confirmed the divine source of his message. God is always faithful to His promises (Hebrews 10:23).

The *LORD* introduced the message with the particle *behold* (“hinneh” in Hebrew), a term often occurring in contexts where an unexpected event is about to transpire (v. 2). God used “hinneh” to call attention to the words He was about to speak to prepare His audience to focus and listen carefully because of the imminent nature of the events. As the listeners gave undivided attention to the message, He stated, *I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that causes reeling to all the peoples around* (v 2).

The city of *Jerusalem* was the capital of Judah. It is the site of God’s presence (Psalm 9:11; Zechariah 8:3). In Isaiah, it is called “the holy city” (Isaiah 52:1). The Babylonians had destroyed it in 586 BC and the people of Judah were exiled to Babylon (2 Kings 25:11). During the time of Zechariah, many had returned to Jerusalem from their exile. The initial wave came with Ezra (Ezra 1:5). Then another group came to rebuild Jerusalem’s wall under Nehemiah. Zechariah prophesied at the same time as Haggai and encouraged the people to finish building the temple which the Babylonians had destroyed (Zechariah 8:9).

Jesus called Jerusalem “the city of the Great King” in Matthew 5:35 quoting Psalm 48:2 . In and God miraculously delivered it (Isaiah 37:36-37). Centuries after the time of Zechariah, the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. However, Zechariah prophesies that one day *the*

*LORD* will elevate Jerusalem to a level of prominence that will do to other nations what Babylon did to it. He will *make Jerusalem into a cup of reeling* to all the neighboring nations.

The expression *cup of reeling* means a cup containing a beverage that can cause those who drink it to stagger or lose balance. It implies a strong drink like alcohol. The LORD used the *cup* metaphor to encourage the inhabitants of *Jerusalem*, letting them know that He would strengthen them to give them victory over their foes. And *when the siege is against Jerusalem, it will also be against Judah*. That means that when the nations fought against the city of *Jerusalem*, they would also fight *against* the entire region of *Judah*.

This prophecy of the *siege of Jerusalem* might look forward to the siege that will occur hundreds of years into the future, in 70 AD. However, in that siege, Jerusalem's enemies were completely victorious. It would follow then that the ultimate fulfillment of this passage will occur in the last days, when Jerusalem is again put under siege from the nations.

The story of Jerusalem's deliverance from the Assyrian king Sennacherib and his braggadocious mouthpiece, Rabshakeh, in Isaiah 36 & 37 likely foreshadow the beast and false prophet of Revelation. This, along with the prophecy in Micah 5:5 of Israel's deliverance from invasion might be a companion to this prophecy in Zechariah 12 referring to the end of the age, when the nations will descend upon Jerusalem (as described in Zechariah 14:2 and Revelation 16:16).

At the time of Zechariah, the Judeans had returned to Judah after Babylon had sieged and destroyed Jerusalem some seventy years earlier (2 Kings 25:1-4). This *siege* of Zechariah 12:2 that is *against Jerusalem* predicts a future siege, at the end of the current era, when the nations will gather in Israel to fight against Jesus and His army (Revelation 16:16, 19:16; Zechariah 14:1-4). It could additionally refer to the siege of Jerusalem that takes place at the end of the thousand-year-reign of Jesus in the Messianic Kingdom (Revelation 20:7-9).

As Zechariah continued the divine message, he introduced the phrase *It will come about in that day* (v. 3). In doing so, he reminded the post-exilic community of Judah that the time when God would intervene to elevate them and humiliate the other nations was still future. Although it was distant, it would surely come to pass because God's word is never void (Isaiah 55:11). At the right time, He *will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured* (v 3). The picture here is of someone trying to lift a heavy rock and wrenching their back. So it will be with those who attempt to subjugate Jerusalem.

In the ancient world, the Israelites used stones for many purposes. When Jacob "departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran, he came to a certain place, spent the night there" and used a *stone* as a pillow. At times, people rolled stones over the mouths of wells to protect them (Genesis 29:2). Other times, they used them as building material (1 Samuel 6:14; 14:33). Because *stones* are durable and firm, they symbolized permanence.

In Zechariah, the LORD informed the Judeans that Jerusalem would be strong like a large *stone*. The city will be so heavy that *all who lift it will be severely injured*. The picture illustrates that when the other nations attack Jerusalem, it will defend itself and defeat them. *All the nations of the earth will be gathered against it*. But *the LORD* will not allow them to conquer it because He loves it so much (Psalm 87:1-2).

This would predict that Jerusalem would rise again after its fall in 70 AD and become a seat of power for the Jewish people once more. This has begun to become a reality in the current era, as Israel became a Jewish state in 1948. Then, Jerusalem once again became its capital, although divided. Jerusalem became Israel's undivided capital in 1967.

As Zechariah continued reporting the divine message, he reintroduced the temporal phrase *in that day* to let the Judeans know that the promises were still future (v. 4). But, before he gave the message, he repeated the prophetic formula *declares the LORD* to emphasize the divine source of his revelation.

Afterward, he resumed his speech, saying of those who would invade Jerusalem, *I will strike every horse with bewilderment and his rider with madness* (v 4). God will fight for Jerusalem and Judah against invaders by striking its enemies with fear, and will drive them to confusion and disarray.

In the ancient world, people used *horses* to form cavalries for purposes of war (Exodus 14:9; 1 Kings 4:26). In the early periods of the world, only kings and warriors had the privilege of using them (Exodus 14:9, 23). Horses were instrumental in battle due to their strength and speed (Jeremiah 12:5; Joel 2:4).

In our passage, *the LORD* comforted His covenant people by telling them they would be victorious because He would smite the cavalry of the enemy, causing chaos and fear among them. But He would protect the Judeans because they belong to Him.

As He declared, *I will watch over the house of Judah* (v 4).

The expression *I will watch over* is “I will open my eyes” in Hebrew. In this context, God's open eyes symbolized His protection and provision for *the house of Judah* (2 Kings 19:16; Isaiah 37:17). The term *house* means tribe or clan, as the next verse shows. Thus, the *house of Judah* refers to the descendants of the people of the southern kingdom. (Israel split into two kingdoms after Solomon's death, a northern kingdom known as Israel, or Samaria, and the southern kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12:16-17).

The people of Judah will be beneficiaries of God's precious care. While *the LORD* would protect the Judeans, He would *strike every horse of the peoples with blindness* (v 4). His open eyes would be against the enemy cavalry to blind them, precluding them from seeing the battlefield. Therefore, they would suffer defeat at the hands of the Judeans.

The phrase *the peoples* refers to the nations. The siege against Jerusalem by Rome in 70 AD does not fit this prophecy, so it must refer to a time yet to come as of this writing (2023). The likely fulfillment is at the end of the age as predicted in Zechariah 14:1-4 and Revelation 16.

This portion in Zechariah echoes a curse in the Mosaic Law. In Deuteronomy 28, Moses warned the Israelites that they would suffer a curse for disobeying their covenant/treaty with their Suzerain/ruler God by following the pagan ways of exploitation rather than loving their neighbor, saying, “The LORD will smite you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart” (Deuteronomy 28:28). In this case, the curse is applied to Israel's enemies.

Instead of punishing Israel and Judah for violating their covenant with Him, He would apply the cursings to Israel's enemies. God will protect them and defeat the enemy nations, as He promised in His covenant with them, when they repent and turn to Him (Deuteronomy 32:36, 43).

Then, as *the clans of Judah* acknowledge God's protection and provision for them, they *will say in their hearts*, 'A strong support for us are the inhabitants of Jerusalem through the LORD of hosts' (v. 5). This indicates that Judah has returned to the Lord, for they are acknowledging God's provision for them. The *inhabitants of Jerusalem* are themselves a strong force. But there is an acknowledgment that this provision has come *through the LORD of hosts*. This indicates that the leaders of Israel will be courageous and formidable warriors, and will play a meaningful role in Israel's defense and deliverance.

The term translated as *hosts* is "Sabaoth" in the Hebrew text. It means "armies" and refers to the angelic armies of heaven (1 Samuel 1:3). The phrase *the LORD of hosts* often describes God as a warrior leading His angelic army to defeat His foes (Amos 5:16; 9:5; Habakkuk 2:17; Haggai 1:7). Here and elsewhere in Zechariah, the phrase demonstrates God's power as the supreme warrior who has complete control over all human affairs. Even though the people of Israel will play a meaningful role, the ultimate salvation of Israel/Judah will be through their Suzerain (Ruler) Yahweh.

Here and elsewhere in Zechariah, the phrase *LORD of hosts* demonstrates God's power as the supreme warrior who has complete control over all human affairs. The *clans of Judah* would recognize in faith the divine power and testify on behalf of *the LORD Almighty* because He is *their God*, their covenant partner. This implies that the rulers of Israel will become courageous and follow their Suzerain (Ruler) God and covenant partner, Yahweh, in faith. As a result they will be a *strong support* to the rest of the country.

Piecing this together with the picture painted in Zechariah 14:1-4, it seems that Jesus will set down on the Mount of Olives and deliver Israel from the surrounding nations who are ravaging Jerusalem, but the people within Jerusalem will also play a meaningful role in fighting and defeating the nations.

This suggests that the rulers of Israel will become courageous and follow their Suzerain (Ruler) God and covenant partner, Yahweh, in faith. As a result they will be a *strong support* to the rest of the country.

Although the *inhabitants of Jerusalem* will become a strong fighting force, the *clans of Judah* would recognize that their provision for security is in the Lord. This infers that they will return to *their God*, their covenant partner.

This prophecy of the *siege of Jerusalem* likely looks forward to the siege that will occur hundreds of years into the future. In the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the enemies of Israel were completely victorious. It would follow then that the ultimate fulfillment of this passage will occur in the last days, when Jerusalem is again put under siege from the nations.

The story of the Assyrian king Sennacherib and his boastful mouthpiece Rabshakeh in Isaiah 36 & 37 possibly foreshadow the beast and false prophet of Revelation. This, along with the prophecy in Micah 5:5 of Israel's deliverance from invasion by "the Assyrian" (an illusion to the

picture of Sennacherib), might be a companion to this prophecy in Zechariah 12 referring to the end of the age, when the nations will descend upon Jerusalem (as described in Zechariah 14:2 and Revelation 16:16).

To learn more about the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem by King Sennacherib, [see our commentary on Isaiah chapter 36.](#)

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>1</sup>The burden of the word of the LORD concerning Israel.**

***Thus declares the LORD who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him,*** <sup>2</sup>**“Behold, I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that causes reeling to all the peoples around; and when the siege is against Jerusalem, it will also be against Judah. <sup>3</sup>It will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it. <sup>4</sup>In that day,” declares the LORD, “I will strike every horse with bewilderment and his rider with madness. But I will watch over the house of Judah, while I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness. <sup>5</sup>Then the clans of Judah will say in their hearts, ‘A strong support for us are the inhabitants of Jerusalem through the LORD of hosts, their God.’**