

Zechariah 12:6-9

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/zech/zech-12/zechariah-126-9/>

The LORD promises to defeat the adversaries of Judah and protect the weakest Israelites first. He will give every Israelite strength, so that they will be like fire burning in overwhelming force against their enemies. Even the poorest and weakest Israelite will fight with the strength of King David, and as an army they will fight with the power of God and His angel. The hostile forces who have gathered against Jerusalem will be destroyed that day.

This prophecy likely looks to the End Times, when Jesus will save His people from their enemies.

In the previous section, Zechariah revealed God's plan to defend and redeem the inhabitants of Judah when their enemies attack them (vv. 1-5). In the present passage, the *LORD* repeated the temporal phrase, *In that day*, reminding the post-exilic Judeans that this prophecy has a future fulfillment (v. 6).

Perhaps the people reading these promises at the time Zechariah preached them would have had in mind the story of King Hezekiah from Isaiah 36-37 where God promises and then miraculously defends Judah against the Assyrians. In a future time it seems that the nations of the earth will descend upon Jerusalem as the Assyrians did in the time of Hezekiah (Micah 5:5; Zechariah 14:1-4; Revelation 16:16).

Things will appear dire, as they did in the time of Hezekiah, but God will deliver Israel in that day. He will do so through bringing confusion upon the peoples (Zechariah 12:4) but He will also infuse the *clans of Judah* with the courage and strength to resist the attacking enemies.

Zechariah depicts Judah's future military victory using two comparisons: *I will make the clans of Judah like a firepot among pieces of wood and a flaming torch among sheaves* (v 6). Judah's enemies would be no match for Judah. The *clans of Judah* would be like a torch of fire and its enemies like straw.

In the first comparison, *the LORD* used the term *firepot*, a firepan used to carry embers from a fire to start another fire (Leviticus 10:1-2). If this firepan is placed near a woodpile, the firepan will win; the woodpile will ignite and go up in smoke. In the analogy, Judah is like the *firepan* and its enemies like *pieces of wood*.

In the second comparison, *the LORD* spoke about a *torch*, which is laid among *sheaves*, or bundles of grain or straw. Again, the torch will win, as the straw will go up in flames. Judah will be like the torch and its enemies like the bundles of straw.

When God established a covenant granting the land of Israel to Abram, a flaming *torch* and a smoking oven passed between pieces of the sacrificial animals (Genesis 15:17). This format is called a "blood covenant" and the idea is "Thus shall it be done to me if I violate this covenant."

Normally the two people making the covenant would walk between the animals, but in the case of God's covenant with Abraham, the torch and the oven passed between. It is likely the torch represented Jesus, who would be of the seed of Abraham; Jesus is the light of the world. And the oven likely represented God, who is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24). Thus God made an eternal covenant with Abraham's eternal seed. Here in *Zachariah* the *flaming torch* could also represent the power of Jesus, Israel's Messiah, fighting on its behalf.

When Samson wanted to burn the food supply of the Philistines, he "caught three hundred foxes, and took torches, and turned the foxes tail to tail and put one torch in the middle between two tails" (Judges 15:4). The fire consumed their growing crops in the field. All the more will *sheaves*, consisting of gathered (and therefore dried) stalks, turn to flame when exposed to the fire of the torch.

In *Zechariah*, the LORD used the images of the firepan and the *flaming torch* to explain the future destructive power of the *clans of Judah*. Like *fire* destroys a woodpile, the Judeans *will consume on the right hand and on the left all the surrounding peoples* (v 6). The phrase *on the right hand and on the left* stands for all directions, all the surrounding nations. Again, since Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews scattered and dispersed after the Roman conquest in 70 AD, this must speak of an event still in our future (as of this writing in 2023).

The Judean army will attack all their foes and defeat them, *while the inhabitants of Jerusalem again dwell on their own sites in Jerusalem* (v 6). Like an immovable rock, the people of God will remain intact. Nobody will harm them. This seems to refer to the time of Jesus's return in Revelation 19-20, which appears to also be reflected in the events of *Zechariah* 14.

The prophet *Zechariah* now switches to the third person to describe what *the LORD* would do for His covenant people. He stated, *The LORD also will save the tents of Judah first* (v. 7).

The verb *save* means "to deliver"; context determines what is being delivered from what. Here the *tents of Judah* refer to the dwellings of the commoners. *Zechariah* likely used the term *tent* to contrast the dwelling of the lower classes with those of the more affluent living in the capital city.

The LORD chooses to deliver the lower-class citizens *first*, prior to delivering those who have more resources, *so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not be magnified over Judah* (v 7).

The *glory of the house of David* may refer to the leaders, as the phrase *house of David* is used to describe the monarchy, the ruling family of Judah. However, *house of David* is also used to refer to all of Judah (1 Kings 12:19).

The word "glory" means the essence of something being shown. The *glory* of the kingly family would be its authority and the trappings of power, just as gray hair is the glory of the elderly and strength is the glory of young people (Proverbs 20:29, 16:31).

The *glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem* would normally include its material wealth. However, in the immediate context, the *inhabitants of Jerusalem* are gifted with courage and power to

defend Judah (Zechariah 12:5). So in this case, the *glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem* might refer primarily to their capacity to defend the country.

If so, they are outstanding leaders, because they are serving those outside Judah first; those living in the countryside, the farmers and ranchers tending crops and herding sheep and dwelling in tents, would be given preference in being delivered. This could follow the principle of the last being first. God will deliver the lower class first. This might mirror a biblical theme of God raising up those who are low and placing those who are last over those who are first (Matthew 19:30, 20:16).

This deliverance of the common people demonstrates that God values them just as much as those with more prominence—with God there is no partiality (Deuteronomy 10:17). But it might also demonstrate that unlike the bad leaders in Chapter 11, Israel now has excellent leaders, leaders who serve others, including those of the common class. If that is the case, they are showing the glory of their greatness as leaders, for truly great leaders are those who serve others. Accordingly, it could be the leaders of Jerusalem implementing the principle of putting the last first.

The *house of David* could also apply to Jesus, who will return to defend Jerusalem in the last days (Zechariah 14:1-4). The LORD promised to raise a descendant of King David who would occupy “the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Samuel 7:13). That descendant is Jesus (Matthew 1:1). Thus, this prophetic word could apply to the events of Revelation 20 which occur after Jesus returns to earth.

The phrase *House of David* may also apply to Judah as a whole, as the authority of a nation represents the nation. If that is the case, then this prophecy could also apply to Jesus’s second coming, when He comes with an army and defeats the nations assaulting Israel, as described in Revelation 19 and Zechariah 14:1-5.

Once again, Zechariah introduced the temporal phrase *In that day* to picture the future deliverance of Judah. Then, he informed the Judeans that *the LORD* would *defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem* (v 8). The verb translated as *defend* means to cover or to protect. It occurred earlier in Zechariah, where *the LORD* promised to protect the Judeans and restore their fortunes because they are so precious to Him (Zechariah 9:15). As we will see in Chapter 14, “Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle” (Zechariah 14:3).

This event is possibly pictured by God’s deliverance of Judah during the reign of Hezekiah, when God brought a plague on the invading Assyrians, and 185,000 of them fell in one night (Isaiah 37:36). God will *defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem* as well as those in the countryside. However, God will also strengthen the *inhabitants of Jerusalem* such that they are as formidable of warriors as the warrior king *David* (v 8).

In our passage, the LORD would protect and sustain those living in *Jerusalem, and the one who is feeble among them in that day will be like David* (v 8). Those who are *feeble* normally cannot protect themselves. But *in that day* when God provides for His people, the *feeble* in the nation

will be like David the king, who was a mighty warrior himself, and who also had a guard of mighty men to protect him.

The reference to *David* was to remind the post-exilic community of Judah of the warrior-king who killed the Philistine giant Goliath (1 Samuel 17). Zechariah alluded to *David* to inform *the inhabitants of Jerusalem* that they all will be as protected as the valiant David because their Suzerain God will *defend* them and empower them to fight and defend Judah.

As for *the house of David*, *it will be like God, like the angel of the LORD before them* (v 8). As the people of Jerusalem are like David, the leadership of Judah will be like unto *the angel of the LORD*. It was the *angel of the LORD* that struck and defeated the Assyrians who invaded Judah during the reign of Hezekiah (Isaiah 37:36).

The image of the *angel of the LORD* going *before them* evokes the image of the manifestation of God's presence as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night going before the nation of Israel during their exodus from Egypt (Exodus 13:21-22). In that instance, God went before and protected the Israelites from the Egyptian army, blocking its path while Israel escaped through the Red Sea (Exodus 14:19).

The term for *God* is "Elohim" in Hebrew. Sometimes, it refers to the true God (Genesis 1:1). Other times, it refers to false deities (Deuteronomy 6:14). In some contexts, it can even refer to subordinate spiritual beings, angels in Psalm 8:5 and even humans in Psalm 82:6.

Here in Zechariah, the prophet used the description *God* to compare the strength of Judah's leaders (*house of David*) as being like God going before Israel in the exodus in terms of its relative ability to protect the nation.

And as Judah's rulers are comparable to God's power to protect, the *feeble among them* will be comparable in power to *David*, the warrior king who slew Goliath. This description of comparative strengths illustrates a dramatic escalation of capacity to protect and defend. This is an enormous contrast to the weak state of Judah at the time of Zechariah.

In the Old Testament, the title *angel of the LORD* refers to a special divine messenger. Sometimes, it may be a manifestation of God Himself (Genesis 16:10,13; Judges 13:21-22). In these divine manifestations it seems likely that *angel of the LORD* refers to the pre-incarnate Christ, as He is the agent that holds all creation together (Colossians 1:17).

In this passage, the term *angel of the LORD* speaks of God as a warrior, recalling His mighty acts of deliverance for Israel upon their exodus from Egypt (Exodus 13:21-22).

The *LORD* closed this section with a summary statement concerning the defeat of the nations. He introduced the temporal phrase *In that day* to speak of that future time when the event will occur. Then, He said, *I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem* (v 9).

The phrase *all the nations* refers to the same people mentioned in the previous verses. There, Zechariah referred to them as "all the people around," "all the peoples," "all the nations of the earth," and "all the surrounding peoples" (vv. 2, 3, and 6). These nations will one day attack

Jerusalem but will have no success because *the LORD* will fight for Judah and defeat the enemy nations.

This could refer to the event in Revelation 19:19 where the kings of the earth gather to fight against Jesus. This could be the same event described in Zechariah 14:1-5, where Jerusalem is saved from destruction by what appears to be a “just in the nick of time” return of Jesus to earth.

This prophecy of future events seems to refer to a time still future as of this writing (2023). It fits the description of the events described in Revelation 19 and 20 together with Zechariah 14:1-5, where the nations of the earth gather against Jerusalem, then are vanquished. It appears there will be at least two different instances of a great battle against nations gathered against Jerusalem, one where Jesus returns to deliver Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:1-5), and one after He has reigned over the earth for a thousand years (Revelation 20:7-9). We know from history that there was a third great battle—the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, as predicted by Jesus (Matthew 24:2). However, in that destruction, the nation was vanquished by Rome and the people scattered. So it does not fit this prophecy.

Biblical Text

⁶“In that day I will make the clans of Judah like a firepot among pieces of wood and a flaming torch among sheaves, so they will consume on the right hand and on the left all the surrounding peoples, while the inhabitants of Jerusalem again dwell on their own sites in Jerusalem. ⁷The LORD also will save the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not be magnified above Judah. ⁸In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the one who is feeble among them in that day will be like David, and the house of David *will be* like God, like the angel of the LORD before them. ⁹And in that day, I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.