

Zechariah 13:1-6

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The LORD promises to purify the Judeans. This cleansing entails removing idols and false prophets from the land. The people will devote themselves to God so wholeheartedly that even a false prophet's parents would be willing to execute him. False prophets will apply their craft to avoid detection, asserting they are not prophets at all.

In the previous chapter, the LORD promised to destroy all the adversaries of Judah, giving her victory and elevating her to prominence. He would pour the spirit of grace and supplication on the Judeans to reconcile them to Him; they would recognize Jesus whom they pierced and repent of their prior rejection. At that time, they will repent genuinely and mourn bitterly to express their sorrow for grieving God by rejecting His Messiah (Zechariah 12:6-14).

In the present chapter, the prophet Zechariah continues the theme of cleansing and purification. He began with the temporal phrase *In that day* (v 1). This appears to refer to the time designated in Zechariah 12:10, when God promises to “pour out” on His people “the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son.” At this time of Jewish repentance, *A fountain will be opened* (v 1).

The term *fountain* (“maqor” in Hebrew) denotes a spring of flowing water. The passive form of the verb [*be opened*] describes the continuous flow of this spring, the artesian well that would provide clean water *for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem*. The *fountain* is an image of abundant provision and purification. It would seem to infer that this *fountain* connects to the “Spirit of grace and of supplication” from Zechariah 12:10. God will pour out His Spirit upon His people like a *fountain* of water pouring out from its source.

The *house of David* likely refers to the descendants of King David, to whom the LORD promised to raise a descendant who would occupy “the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Samuel 7:13). The *inhabitants of Jerusalem* were those living in the city. These two groups represent all the people living in Judah. In the day when they come to see Jesus as the One whom they pierced, He will *open a fountain* to cleanse them from *sin and impurity*.

The term for *sin* (“chātā” in Hebrew) denotes missing the mark or straying from the right path. The word *impurity* (“niddā” in Hebrew) means uncleanness. For example, when Hezekiah became king in Judah, he assembled the Levites and said, “...carry the uncleanness out from the holy place” (2 Chronicles 29:5). In Zechariah, a *fountain* of purification will be *opened* to purify the repentant and believing remnant of Judeans from all sins and unrighteousness.

This statement echoes the terms of the New Covenant, as found in Jeremiah 31:31-34 (see also Ezekiel 36:25-28 and Romans 11:26-29). Since this is connected with the time period when the Jews come to recognize Jesus as their Messiah, it would seem that this fulfills God’s promise to

restore Israel to Himself; they will become a part of the New Covenant. The fountain of blessing could include an allusion to Jesus's blood, which sealed the New Covenant (Mark 14:24).

Zechariah next told his audience that the LORD would destroy the idols and false prophets of the nation of Judah. He introduced the sentence with the expression, *It will come about in that day* to remind the Judeans that those promises were still future (v. 2). Then, before telling the people what would happen, he inserted the prophetic formula *declares the LORD of hosts* to confirm the divine nature of his message. It seems the day in mind is still the time period when the Jewish people will come to recognize Jesus as their Messiah (Zechariah 12:10).

The term *LORD* is the covenant name of God, as given to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14–15). It describes God as self-existent, eternal, compassionate, and faithful (Exodus 6:2-8; 34:5-7). The term *hosts* is the translation of the Hebrew word “sabaoth,” meaning “armies” and referring to the angelic army of heaven. The phrase *the LORD of hosts* describes God's power as a warrior leading His heavenly army to defeat His enemy and deliver His covenant people (Amos 5:16; 9:5; Habakkuk 2:17). He is the supreme God who will bring all things to pass according to His plan.

Having inserted the formula to confirm the divine source of his message, Zechariah spoke on God's behalf using the first-person pronoun. He stated, *I will cut off the names of the idols from the land* (v 2). To *cut off* means to destroy or remove. It denotes shearing an animal or removing the hair or wool which forms the animal's coat (Genesis 31:19; Deuteronomy 15:19). The Suzerain (Ruler) God of Judah proves Himself the LORD of history, showing His superiority by removing *the names of the idols from the land*.

In the ancient world, a *name* given to somebody or something was so important because it spoke of the essence of that named entity. For example, someone's *name* reflected his reputation or character. Thus, to *cut off* that *name* means to remove it from having relevance. In our passage, the prophet told his listeners that God would eradicate *idols* or false gods in the land of Judah, *and they will no longer be remembered*. They would disappear, and nobody would recall their former existence.

Not only would God destroy *idol* worship, but also He would *remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land* (v 2). The term *prophet* (“nābī” in Hebrew) means “proclaimer” or “forth-teller.” It usually describes someone who received a call from God to be God's spokesman. In our passage, however, “nābī” describes some false prophets who either spoke lies in the name of the true God or prophesied in the name of other gods (Jeremiah 6:13, 26:7–8, 27:9, 28:1). They did so to mislead people by telling them to do something that the LORD forbid (Jeremiah 23:13, 25).

In context, since the day spoken of seems to be connected to a time when Israel will look upon God, whom they pierced, and mourn, it could be that this refers to the removal of those who speak falsely about Jesus. God would *remove them with the unclean spirit from the land*. It seems this removal and cleansing will open the Jewish people to return to their God and be fully restored in Him.

The *unclean spirit* (literally, “the spirit of uncleanness”) is an impulse that motivates people to perform wicked deeds. The agents of idolatry were the false prophets, but the spiritual power that animated them was demonic. Since the evil spirits energizing them were *unclean*, they hated God and His moral standards for righteousness (1 Kings 22:19-23). They led their followers into moral impurity and false religion. Since these actions were against God’s character and norms, He would eliminate them to purify the land. This implies that God will remove spiritual forces of deception from a place of influence on His people.

Zechariah next outlined the punitive actions people should take against a false prophet. He stated, *If anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who gave birth to him will say to him, ‘You shall not live’* (v. 3). The remarkable fact in this passage is that the prophet’s parents will confront the offender. The idea seems to be that even blood will not prevent people from seeking truth and calling out deceivers. The commitment to truth will supersede all other connections.

The verb to *live* means to remain alive or to continue to exist. When God purifies the land of Judah, His people will have such a strong desire to serve Him that even a false prophet’s parents would be willing to carry out the death penalty on their own child. The parents would also state the reason for their son’s punishment: *For you have spoken falsely in the name of the LORD*. This penalty is according to the Mosaic law, which states, “The prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die” (Deuteronomy 18:20, 13:10).

Nevertheless, there is a slight difference between the penalty in Deuteronomy and the one in Zechariah. In Deuteronomy, the means of execution is stoning. In Zechariah, however, it is piercing. Zechariah stated, *His father and mother, who gave birth to him, will pierce him through when he prophesies*. That means that the lying prophet’s parents would execute him while he performs his prophetic duties.

Zechariah reintroduced the expression *It will come about in that day* to remind the Judeans that those promises were still future (v. 4). The inferred time is the *day* when the Jews turn to their Messiah whom they pierced, and when they turn from false teaching and are committed to following the truth.

Then, Zechariah said, *The prophets will each be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies*. This again refers to the false prophets. It seems that in addition to the people mourning their prior blindness at not seeing Jesus as their Messiah, even the false prophets come to be ashamed at their false statements.

The term translated as *vision* (“*hāzôn*” in Hebrew) comes from a verb meaning “to see” or “to behold.” It is a technical term used for one form of divine revelation (Ezekiel 12:27, 13:16). In Amos and Zechariah, it refers to some visual representations of God’s will (Amos 7, Zechariah 1:7-6:15).

Therefore, in the coming age, the lying prophets will be embarrassed to continue to misrepresent the LORD and mislead His covenant people (Micah 3:7). It appears they will resign their

positions. The phrase *they will not put on a hairy robe in order to deceive* (v 4) indicates they will stop wearing the garb of a prophet, indicating they have, appropriately, “resigned.”

The *hairy robe* is a robe of coarse hair. In Old Testament times, it was the traditional prophet’s garment, as the book of 2 Kings makes clear (2 Kings 1:8; see also Matthew 3:4). In this age of restoration, the false prophet will resign his profession and refrain from wearing prophetic clothing. Instead, *he will say, I am not a prophet. I am a tiller of the ground* (v 5). He will quit being a false prophet and take up another occupation—farming.

The expression *I am not a prophet* is perhaps an imitation of the style of the pre-exilic prophet Amos. While Amos was prophesying concerning God’s judgment upon the religious structures of the nation Israel and their king, a priest named Amaziah sent a letter to King Jeroboam II to tell him that Amos had conspired against him. He then asked Amos to return to Judah and cease prophesying in Bethel because Bethel was a sanctuary. It was a royal residence (Amos 7:10–13). Amos *replied to* Amaziah, saying, “I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet. I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs” (Amos 7:14).

In Amos’s case, he wanted to validate his prophetic message by telling Amaziah that the LORD had called him out of his profession to minister to the Israelites (Amos 7:15). However, in our passage, the lying *prophet* will deny having a prophetic role and will say, *I am a tiller of the ground* (or a farmer).

Taken alone, this assertion could be out of shame leading to repentance. But in context it seems more likely that the false prophet is claiming a case of mistaken identity, saying “I am not the person you are thinking of, I am someone else.” This seems likely since in this era of repentance the people no longer tolerate false prophets, to the point that even parents will see their own children executed for being a false prophet (v 3).

The false prophet will go further, apparently claiming that he is not even a local: *For a man sold me as a slave in my youth*. He will put forth these false claims to avoid being detected as a false prophet. At that time, someone will confront him and *will say to him, ‘What are the wounds between your arms?’* These *wounds* are also likely a symbol of the prophet. But the prophet has a story to cover that up as well.

The term *wound* denotes an injury (1 Kings 22:35, Isaiah 1:6). In Zechariah, it likely refers to self-inflicted bruises that often betrayed the profession of an ecstatic prophet. The terms *between your arms* refer to the body, either the back or the chest (2 Kings 9:24). The questioner suspected that the prophet lacerated himself, as the prophets of Baal used to do when performing a mourning ritual (1 Kings 18:28).

The false prophet replies, *Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends* (v 6). He will provide the questioner with a false answer in order to avoid detection. In making these statements, the false prophet will seek to hide his profession so that the people will not execute him. The primary point of this illustration is to emphasize that in this era when Israel turns to God there will be no tolerance for falsehood. Those who previously were false prophets, who spoke lies, will now apply their craft to avoid detection.

Biblical Text

¹“In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity. ²“It will come about in that day,” declares the LORD of hosts, “that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land. ³ And if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who gave birth to him will say to him, ‘You shall not live, for you have spoken falsely in the name of the LORD’; and his father and mother who gave birth to him will pierce him through when he prophesies. ⁴ Also it will come about in that day that the prophets will each be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies, and they will not put on a hairy robe in order to deceive; ⁵ but he will say, ‘I am not a prophet; I am a tiller of the ground, for a man sold me as a slave in my youth.’ ⁶ And one will say to him, ‘What are these wounds between your arms?’ Then he will say, ‘*Those* with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.’