

Zechariah 13:7-9

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/zech/zech-13/zechariah-137-9/>

The LORD describes the death of His anointed leader, resulting in the scattering of His covenant people. This prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus (Matthew 26:31). Two-thirds of the nation will be cut off but the remaining third will experience spiritual renewal and live in perfect communion with God.

In Zechariah 13:1-6, the LORD promised to restore and purify the Judeans by removing idols and false prophets from the land. The people would devote themselves to God so wholeheartedly that a false prophet's parents would be willing to execute him. False prophets would become so unpopular that they would begin to conceal their identity and profession for fear of punishment.

In the present section, the LORD describes a coming day when His anointed leader will die, causing two-thirds of the population to perish, while a remnant of Israel (one-third) will be saved and will proclaim the LORD to be their God. This appears to be a departure from the era spoken of in Chapter 12 through 13:6, when Israel will come to recognize Jesus as Messiah. This section begins by speaking of the time of Jesus's first advent, when He will be rejected, and pierced.

God began with the imperative: *Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man, My Associate* (v. 7). The verb *Awake* means "to excite" or "to stir up." That is, to make someone or something active. Often, Yahweh is the one who causes this activation. For example, "The LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom" to allow all the exiles to return to their homeland (Ezra 1:1). Similarly, "The LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God" (Haggai 1:14).

Here in our passage, the LORD commanded the *sword* to wake up as if it were a warrior. This instrument of death, the LORD stated, would be *against My Shepherd and against the man, My Associate*.

The phrase *My Shepherd* means a divinely appointed leader of Israel (Ezekiel 34:23). The expression *My Associate* conveys the idea of an intimate relationship between God and *the man*. That *Shepherd* is not an ordinary *man*. He is not like the "worthless shepherd" who did not care for the people of God (Zechariah 11:17). He is the LORD's special representative on earth and His Associate, meaning that their nature is identical. In essence, God and His *Associate* are one (John 10:30). The *Shepherd* is the same as the *Associate*—both were fulfilled by Jesus.

God summoned the *sword* to *strike the Shepherd so the sheep may be scattered*. The *Shepherd* is the pierced one mentioned in Zechariah 12:10. He is the true *Shepherd*, Jesus. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus interpreted the "Shepherd" in Zechariah 13:7 to refer to himself. Jesus is the Messiah. He is God's *Associate* (John 1:18, 5:37, 6:46). He is "the Good Shepherd" (John 10:11, 14). Thus, when Zechariah prophesied, *Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered*, he

predicted that when the people arrested and executed the Messiah, His followers (“the sheep”) would fall away in fear.

On the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told His disciples that Zechariah’s prophecy was about to be fulfilled that very night when they scattered like *sheep* to escape the doom that would come upon Him (Matthew 26:31). The prophet Isaiah also prophesied concerning the Messiah’s abandonment when he wrote: “He was despised and forsaken of men, a man acquainted with grief and sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3).

It is worth remarking that even though the prophecy states that the “disciples” would “all fall away because of Jesus,” they were still responsible for their cowardice and sin (Matthew 26:31). The fulfillment of this prophecy did not absolve them of responsibility and make them blameless. They all chose to flee; they scattered and fell away because they did not understand God’s plan (Matthew 16:23).

Jesus’s prediction about the disciples was accurate. Within a few hours of telling them this truth, they all fell away and were “scattered because of Him that night” (Matthew 26:31). Once the crowds came out to arrest Jesus, “then all the disciples left Him and fled” (Matthew 26:56).

Verse 7 concludes by saying, *I will turn My hand against the little ones*. To *turn the hand* against someone is to harm or hurt that person. The *little ones* represent the young lambs of the flock or the most unfortunate ones (Zechariah 11:7). In context, the phrase *little ones* could refer to the sheep that are scattered. But it seems to fit better to refer to the people of Judah, as the next verse refers to *all the land*.

The prophet Zechariah now explained how God would unleash His judgment on the people of Judah. He began with the clause, *It will come about in all the land*, to refer to the time when God would intervene in history to accomplish some specific aspect of His plan (v. 8). Zechariah then paused to insert the prophetic expression ‘*declares the LORD*’ to confirm the source of the message and add credibility to it.

Then, he resumed his speech about God’s judgment upon the *land* and said *that two parts in it would be cut off and perish. But the third will be left in it*. That likely means that two-thirds of the Judean population would die or be exiled. But God would preserve the remaining third. The fulfillment of this prophecy might have taken place in 70 A.D., when the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem, causing many deaths, and also causing the Jewish people to escape and run in all directions. It could also refer to a future time, as in the next chapter which refers to a future instance when Jerusalem will come under attack.

The chapter ends on a positive note in which *the LORD* explains the destiny of the remnant, those who were faithful to God. He stated, *I will bring the third part through the fire*. In the ancient world, people used *fire* to cook their food (Exodus 12:8; Isaiah 44:15), make them warm (Isaiah 44:15), and give them light to see (Isaiah 50:11). Fire is also an instrument of warfare because the victors used to burn down the cities of the ones they had conquered (Joshua 6:24, 8:8, Judges 1:8).

Fire was also used to refine metals and burn refuse (see respectively Isaiah 1:25 and Leviticus 8:17). This application seems to fit this passage. The Old Testament prophets often used the term

fire to depict God's judgment (Amos 1:4, 5:6; Ezekiel 36:5). In Zechariah, the purpose of God's *fire* is to purify the righteous ones, removing impurities: *refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested* (v 9).

The verb *refine* (“šārap” in Hebrew) means to remove impurities, such as the refining process of a precious metal being purified. The verb *test* means to try something or put it to the test to ascertain its nature, including its imperfections. In the ancient world, people would place crude metals in a furnace and smelt the metals to remove the dross (Ezekiel 22:17-22). Once *refined*, the precious metal would go through an evaluation (*test*) to assess its value. This process isolated pure metals from low-quality materials in order to purify the metal. In Zechariah, *the LORD* used the metaphor of refining and testing to explain how He would cleanse the remaining Judeans in the future. The day of the LORD will be like a refiner's fire purifying His people (Malachi 3:2).

The Apostle Paul applies this same picture of a refining fire to apply to all believers, saying that each will stand before the judgement seat of Christ and have their deeds judged with fire:

“...each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.”
(1 Corinthians 3:13-14)

When the predicted transformation takes place, and God's faithful are refined, God stated, *they will call on My name, and I will answer them* (v 9). To *call on the name of the LORD* means to acknowledge His power and worship Him. It means approaching *the LORD* with a thankful spirit and offering petitions to Him with a sincere heart. For instance, after *the LORD* commanded Abram to leave his country and go to the land of Canaan, Abram obeyed Him and entered Canaan. While stationing between Ai and Bethel, “he built an altar to *the LORD* and called upon the name of the LORD” (Genesis 12:8). Abram praised *the LORD* and sought His protection and wisdom.

In our passage, God foresaw the day when the remnant who were faithful, those who were purified through God's refining fire, would contemplate Him with gratitude and a repentant spirit. At that time, He will grant their petitions (Isaiah 30:19). He will forgive their sins and restore fellowship with them. The renewed covenant people will serve God faithfully. He *will say*, ‘*They are My people.*’ This likely refers to a time when Israel will return to God and follow Him faithfully.

Israel will acknowledge Yahweh as their only Suzerain (Ruler) and *say*, ‘*The LORD is my God.*’ These two statements recall the covenant Yahweh established with the Israelites (Leviticus 26:1-2). They speak of a covenant renewal to a spiritually restored people (Ezekiel 36:28; Hosea 2:23). Such a restoration will cause the people to be in perfect harmony with their *God*. Fellowship will be restored between God and His people.

Biblical Text

**⁷“Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd,
And against the man, My Associate,”
Declares the LORD of hosts.**

**“Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered;
And I will turn My hand against the little ones.**

⁸“It will come about in all the land,”

Declares the LORD,

“That two parts in it will be cut off *and* perish;

But the third will be left in it.

⁹“And I will bring the third part through the fire,

Refine them as silver is refined,

And test them as gold is tested.

They will call on My name,

And I will answer them;

I will say, ‘They are My people,’

And they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’