

# Zechariah 14:12-15

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*The LORD will strike Jerusalem's enemies with a plague that will rot out their feet and tongues and kill their animals. Panic will confuse them, prompting them to attack one another. Meanwhile, the Judeans will join the residents of Jerusalem in collecting the spoils of the enemy.*

In the previous section, Zechariah foresaw a day when everyone would recognize the LORD as the true and living God. All people would bow before Him in adoration and praise. In that day, Jerusalem would become the center of God's universal reign. All her residents would live peacefully and securely (Zechariah 14:9-11).

In the present section, the prophet described how the LORD would defeat Jerusalem's foes to grant her such a peace. He declared, *Now this will be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples who have gone to war against Jerusalem* (v. 12).

The LORD will fight for Israel Himself. It seems likely that the episode of the king of Assyria's attack on Hezekiah, as described in Isaiah 36-37 and 2 Kings 18-19, is a prophetic picture of this future day when the Beast and his braggadocious false prophet will lead an attack on Jerusalem (Revelation 19:19-20). In the Hezekiah episode, God struck 185,000 Assyrian soldiers dead, causing their defeat (Isaiah 37:36). Here Zechariah predicts something similar will happen during this future event. The future event might be led by the Beast of Revelation, who is represented by the king of Assyria (Revelation 19:19, 16:16; Micah 5:5). To read our commentary on the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem, [click here](#).

The term *plague* ("maggēpâ" in Hebrew) which the LORD *will strike* Judah's enemies with describes a sudden blow or death sent to someone as a consequence for rebellion against God. For example, the LORD sent plagues to the Egyptians to let them know there is none like Him "in all the earth" (Exodus 9:14). Likewise, the spies "who brought out the very bad report of the land died by a plague before the LORD" (Numbers 14:37).

In Zechariah, God would send a *plague* to strike the nations that attacked *Jerusalem*, the holy city.

Jerusalem is located south of the center of Judah, about thirty-seven miles east of the Mediterranean Sea and about twenty-four miles west of the Jordan River. Jerusalem will be victorious because God will fight for her. She will become the seat of authority and justice in Jesus's kingdom (Isaiah 33:5; Psalm 110). For this reason, God will destroy all her enemies. *Their flesh will rot* (v 12).

To *rot* means "to decay" or "to waste away." When God intervenes to judge Jerusalem's adversaries, He will afflict them suddenly with a severe disease *while they stand on their feet*. It seems that amid their daily activities, they will suddenly become severely ill: *Their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongue will rot in their mouth* (v 12). It sounds like the flesh of Israel's enemies will suddenly dissolve.

Although the *plague* will be severe, it will not be the only punishment. Zechariah stopped talking about it for a while to tell his audience about a second tool God would use to defeat the nations. He declared, *It will come about in that day that a great panic from the LORD will fall on them* (v. 13).

Once the LORD sends *panic* to the enemy nations, *they will seize one another's hand, and the hand of one will be lifted against the hand of another* (v. 13). It seems that fear and anxiety will confuse them, causing them to attack one another instead of strengthening each other to fight against God's covenant people.

In the meantime, *Judah will fight at Jerusalem* (v. 14). The people of Judah (the region that surrounds the area of Jerusalem) will ally with the people of Jerusalem against the attacking nations. With God's help they will be victorious. As a result, *the wealth of all the surrounding nations will be gathered* (v. 14). Once they defeat the enemy nations, they will collect valuable items from them like *gold and silver and garments in great abundance* (v. 14). Israel's enemy will lose their riches in a complete and utter defeat.

Zechariah resumed his speech about the *plague*. Just as it will strike all the peoples attacking Jerusalem, *so also like this plague will be the plague on the horse, the mule, the camel, the donkey and all the cattle that will be in those camps* (v. 15). The prophet included several kinds of animals in this list to show the extent of God's judgment on the nations attacking Jerusalem. This seems reminiscent of the tenth plague God sent to Egypt which affected the animals as well as the people (Exodus 12:29).

Ancient people often used *horses* to form cavalries for purposes of war (Exodus 14:9; 1 Kings 4:26). They were instrumental in battle due to their strength and speed (Jeremiah 12:5; Joel 2:4). The *mule* is a hybrid animal, an offspring of a horse and a donkey. In the monarchic period, people of royal status and the rich often used mules (2 Samuel 18:9, 1 Kings 1:33 and 2 Kings 5:17).

The *camel* was a beast of burden used to transport goods and people (Genesis 37:25). It was helpful in time of war (Judges 6:5) because it could walk 60 to 75 miles a day and carry a load weighing at least 600 pounds. It has thick elastic pads of fibrous tissue on its feet and can walk on hot desert sands.

The *donkey* was another beast of burden that carried goods and people (Genesis 22:3-5; Exodus 4:20). The phrase *all the cattle* in Zechariah likely refers to sheep and goats that the enemy would kill to feed their warriors in their military camps.

The *plague* would kill all these valuable animals to allow the enemy soldiers to suffer and die. Victory belongs to the LORD and His covenant people. Since this event appears to be in the future to us, we might speculate that these animals are figurative since military operations no longer use animals, but rather machinery. The animals could be symbolic of future instruments of war just as the Assyrian king appears to be symbolic of the future Beast, the one who will rule the world along with his false prophet.

This Beast is apparently called "the Assyrian" in Micah 5:5, indicating that the Assyrian ruler Sennacherib and his mouthpiece Rabshakeh are images of the future Beast and false prophet.

(You can see the story of the Assyrian assault on Jerusalem thwarted by God in Isaiah 36-37). So just as ancient rulers project to future rulers, perhaps the ancient instruments of war project to the future instruments of war.

[Click here to read our commentary on Isaiah 36.](#)

However, given the disasters that will grip the world in the last days, perhaps humans resort back to using animals again for warfare.

It is so sweet to trust in Him, the only true God who deserves all worship and praise.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>12</sup> Now this will be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples who have gone to war against Jerusalem; their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongue will rot in their mouth. <sup>13</sup> It will come about in that day that a great panic from the LORD will fall on them; and they will seize one another's hand, and the hand of one will be lifted against the hand of another. <sup>14</sup> Judah also will fight at Jerusalem; and the wealth of all the surrounding nations will be gathered, gold and silver and garments in great abundance. <sup>15</sup> So also like this plague will be the plague on the horse, the mule, the camel, the donkey and all the cattle that will be in those camps.**