

# Pentwater Bible Church

*Zechariah*

*Message 22 God Always Protects Israel*

*October 6, 2013*



Jacob Wrestling with the Angel by Rembrandt van Rijn cir. 1659/60

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# Pentwater Bible Church

**The Book of Zechariah**  
**Message Twenty-Two**  
**The Lord Will Always Restore His People Israel**  
October 6, 2013  
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Painting by Sharlene Lindskog-Osorio

THE LORD ALWAYS RESTORES ISRAEL

Zechariah 9:12-15

*<sup>12</sup>Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope: even to-day do I declare that I will render double unto thee. <sup>13</sup>For I have bent Judah for me, I have filled the bow with Ephraim; and I will stir up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and will make thee as the sword of a mighty man. <sup>14</sup>And Jehovah shall be seen over them; and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning; and the Lord Jehovah will blow the trumpet, and will go with whirlwinds of the south (ASV 1901).*

THE LORD IS ISRAEL'S REFUGE

Zechariah 9:12

<sup>12</sup>*Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope: even to-day do I declare that I will render double unto thee (ASV 1901).*

The prisoners of Zion are going to be rescued by God Himself and He will provide them with a double blessing. As promised in verse eleven *“because of the blood of thy covenant I have set free thy prisoners from the pit wherein is no water.”* Now God tells the Jews to turn to their stronghold (*levetsahron*), which is Him. This Hebrew word *levetsahron*, translated as stronghold is found only here in the entire Old Testament. It can mean citadel or place of safety. Some have taken this to refer to Jerusalem. It is better directed to the only one who is our only true stronghold, the Messiah. It is best to view Him here as the entire ninth chapter has been discussing His first and second advents. God Himself is referenced as the safe hiding place and defense of His people in other sections of Scripture (Joel 3:16). The third chapter of Joel uses a different Hebrew word for stronghold, which is *oomahoz*, but the conveyance of God protecting Israel is the same. He has blessed them and provided them with many covenants to certify His promises to bless them. In the Hebrew text the word hope is actually *“The Hope.”* The definite article personifies this hope and adds certainty to the observation that this refers to God in Christ the Messiah. Zechariah speaks about, this special hope of Israel, *“the hope which offered them a future through all the years of expectation.”* For most of the Jews this will not be fully realized until He appears again to establish His righteous rule on the earth.

The same hope is carried over to the New Testament as Paul speaks of it as *“the hope of Israel,”* for which the Jews of Rome caused him to be bound as a prisoner (Acts 28: 20). He also referenced this hope when he said in his defense before Agrippa: *“I stand here to be judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers, unto which promise our twelve tribes earnestly serving God night and day hope to attain. And concerning this hope I am accused by the Jews, O King”* (Acts 26:6-7). Paul also spoke of *“the blessed hope and the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”* (Titus 2:13), for then the hope of the Church, and Israel, and the world, will be fully realized.

The double blessing mentioned in this verse references Exodus 4:22 and Deuteronomy 21:15-17. In the Exodus passage wherein God is commanding Moses saying, *“And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith Jehovah, Israel is my son, my first-born:”* Jehovah God is saying that Israel is the *“First Born”* of all the nations. The Deuteronomy passage presents some important aspects of the First Born status.

## Deuteronomy 21:15-17

*<sup>15</sup>If a man have two wives, the one beloved, and the other hated, and they have borne him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the first-born son be hers that was hated; <sup>16</sup>then it shall be, in the day that he causeth his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved the first-born before the son of the hated, who is the first-born: <sup>17</sup>but he shall acknowledge the first-born, the son of the hated, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath; for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the first-born is his (ASV 1901).*

The double portion of the First Born is clearly stated in this passage. There is however a situation of forfeiture of the First Born status. Personal unfitness or transgression could cause the forfeiture of this coveted status. The Exodus passage shows that in a spiritual sense, God considered the nation of Israel as His firstborn among all nations. Jacob whose name was changed to Israel was not the firstborn son of his parents Isaac and Rebecca. He was born second, because his brother Esau emerged first from the womb. Nonetheless, though he was the younger, Israel still received the blessing of the firstborn. Esau despised the First Born (Genesis 25:34) status and sold it to his brother Jacob for a meal. Therefore Jacob/Israel became the First Born spiritual nation on the earth. Other instances of this forfeiture of the First Born status are in Scripture.

Jacob's own firstborn son Reuben lost his rights to the First Born son status. From his deathbed Jacob gave each of his twelve sons as well as Joseph's two sons Ephraim and Manasseh a forecast of what their tribes would become. Jacob prophesied over Reuben:

## Genesis 49:3-4

*<sup>3</sup>Reuben, thou art my first-born, my might, and the beginning of my strength; The pre-eminence of dignity, and the pre-eminence of power. <sup>4</sup>Boiling over as water, thou shalt not have the pre-eminence; Because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; Then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch (ASV 1901).*

Israel then divided up the blessings of the First Born status to two of his sons. Judah got the spiritual blessings, as the Messiah would come through his line. Joseph got the physical blessings as Israel blessed his two sons. The Lord Jesus stated this principle, *But many shall be last that are first; and first that are last (Matthew 19:30)*. Here He was referencing the Jews who would be rejected during the Church Age but in the Millennial Kingdom would be running the world's government along with King Jesus who will rule all from David's Throne in Jerusalem. Moses prophesied this quite clearly to the Jews.

Deuteronomy 28:13

*And Jehovah will make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if thou shalt hearken unto the commandments of Jehovah thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them (ASV 1901).*

The dispensing of a double inheritance and punishment is also given in two other passages. In these passages Israel as God's First Born among the nation had a corresponding responsibility of obedience to God's Law. If Israel did not realize the blessing due to disobedience they would be doubly punished. Several passages affirm this.

Isaiah 40:2

*<sup>2</sup>Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem; and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she hath received of Jehovah's hand double for all her sins (ASV 1901).*

Jeremiah 16:18

*<sup>18</sup>And first I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double, because they have polluted my land with the carcasses of their detestable things, and have filled mine inheritance with their abominations (ASV 1901).*

As the serious Bible student notices, Israel's sorrows and sufferings surpass that of all the rest of mankind. But Israel's disobedience and consequent sufferings will not last forever. In the diaspora they were, "prisoners of the hope," and when restored to their land and brought back into favor as God's "first-born" among the nations, then as He told the Jews through Isaiah:

Isaiah 61:7-9

*<sup>7</sup>Instead of your shame ye shall have double; and instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be unto them. <sup>8</sup>For I, Jehovah, love justice, I hate robbery with iniquity; and I will give them their recompense in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. <sup>9</sup>And their seed shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which Jehovah hath blessed (ASV 1901).*

## THE VICTORIOUS ROAD TO THE MILLENNIUM

Zechariah 9:13-15

*<sup>13</sup>For I have bent Judah for me, I have filled the bow with Ephraim; and I will stir up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and will make thee as the sword of a mighty man. <sup>14</sup>And Jehovah shall be seen over them; and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning; and the Lord Jehovah will blow the trumpet, and will go with whirlwinds of the south. <sup>15</sup>Jehovah of hosts will defend them; and they shall devour, and shall tread down the sling-stones; and they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, like the corners of the altar (ASV 1901).*

Zechariah now receives assurance that not only will their double chastisement *not* last forever but also He will use them to personally defeat their enemies. The example used here in Judah the southern kingdom metaphorically representing a military bow and the northern kingdom Ephraim metaphorically representing a missile to be projected from the bow. The actual force provided to the arrow will be God as He says, *“And Jehovah shall be seen over them; and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning;”* So in essence God Himself is the warrior using Judah and Ephraim as the armaments! This section of Scripture chronologically depicts the persecutions of the Greeks against the Jews and their eventual victory over them by the Jewish Maccabees. Previously He turned Alexander away from Jerusalem by divine intervention. He will allow the Jews to be victorious over one of Alexander’s successors Antiochus Epiphanies IV in the war of 175-163 B.C. Jehovah God will be seen over the Jews *and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning; and the Lord Jehovah will blow the trumpet, and will go with whirlwinds of the south.* He will hover over them as a storm with the arrows leaving the bows as lightning quickly leaves the center of a storm to reach its target. The Greeks had dominated the Jews on a number of occasions for which the Lord will get His vengeance as described here.

The Greeks held the Children of Israel as slaves (Joel 3:5-7). The Phoenicians were merchants, and would buy and resell anybody as a slave. There was an active slave trade in the 6th and 7th centuries B.C. The Mycenaean Greeks came to Greece a little before Moses time. Old Testament scholar Gleason Archer in Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties p.296 mentions that Greek coins from the late 6th century were found in Palestine from the issues of Peristratus, which would be prior to the exile. After listing numerous references to Greek mercenaries in Neo-Babylonian documents, he concludes "In light of such data as these, it is nothing short of naïve to suppose that a late ninth-century Joel could not have known anything about the Greeks.

The Maccabean war is one instance where the Jews miraculously prevailed against the Greeks in spite of the Greeks superior strength. The Greek Antiochus Epiphanies sought to force Greek culture and manners on the Jews. In imposing Hellenism, Epiphanies was following the intentions of Alexander whose dream was to create an empire, not just by the sword but by culture. Because of this Hellenization, the region was speaking Greek by the time of Christ and the New Testament, which was written in Koine Greek and spread quickly.



By the introduction of Hellenistic cults and non biblical foods, Epiphanies tried to put an end to the Jewish religious community. The events were the cause of the Maccabean struggle. Severe punitive measures merely brought the matter to a head and the revolt followed.<sup>1</sup>

Women who had had their children circumcised were put to death...with their babies hung round their necks." (I Macc. 1:60, 61) As a result of the persecution many Jews hung on to God and His commandments.

Many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die. Very great wrath came upon Israel. (I Maccabees 1:62-64)

In 170 B.C. A law was announced requiring all citizens to present themselves four times a year to pay formal homage to Antiochus Epiphanies as the senior god of the Seleucids. The day chosen for these periodic submissions was Shabbat, the Jewish day of prayer and they preferred not to leave their homes. Epiphanies was met by a revolt and the setting up of a small state in which the high priest was the central figure. He launched a war of persecution against the Jews soon after that. The Maccabean revolt gained the Jews their independence for a short while. God let the Jews get themselves out of the trouble they brought upon themselves.

The Zechariah prophecy continues chronologically to the time of the end when God will defeat all their enemies, as all nations shall besiege Jerusalem in the final stages of the Campaign of Armageddon. God is using the Greek persecutions as examples for His defeat of Israel's enemies. For then will God issue the judgments to be inflicted on the world's armies who shall be gathered against Jerusalem, not only directly by the hand of God, but also by the hand of Israel, who shall then be made strong in Jehovah, so that *"the feeble among them shall in that day be as David, and the house of David shall be as God, as the Angel of Jehovah before them"* (Zechariah 12:8).

The fifteenth verse illustrates the word of the Psalmist, "Through God we shall do valiantly, for He it is that shall tread down our adversaries (Psalm 60:12) *Jehovah of hosts will defend them; and they shall devour, and shall tread down the sling-stones; and they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, like the corners of the altar"* The devouring (or "eating") and "drinking" is understood in a figurative sense.

NEXT WEEK: ISRAEL'S FINAL DELIVERANCE BEFORE KINGDOM BLESSINGS

**Please call or e-mail with any questions or comments**

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus, Flavius. *The Works of Josephus* Translated by William Whiston. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987, 323.