

## Lesson 14

Last week we started Chapter 9-14, which some say are the six most difficult chapters in the Bible. But we also discussed our strategy for understanding them: we will rely on Biblical tent-pegs, which are easy-to-understand verses that we can drive into the ground like a tent peg. We can then stay within those tent pegs to make sure that our understanding of these difficult chapters does not conflict with other parts of the Bible. And we gave several examples of those tent pegs last week.

One more comment in that regard - As we move through these chapters verse by verse, I will be telling you what I think those verses mean, and I will be telling why I think that. Sometimes I will give you several possibilities, and tell you which is my favorite. But it is most definitely not my way or the highway! You may have a different understanding or a different favorite among the possibilities.

But with that said, here is the important point: just because we can't always say what something means with certainty does not mean that we can't always say with certainty what it does NOT mean. We gave several examples of that last week.

When we ended last week, we were discussing our first difficult question about Chapter 9: who or what is Hadrach in the first verse? Last week we discussed and rejected the literal view - that Hadrach is referring to some obscure Syrian city that is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. And we had started considering another option - a figurative view of Hadrach, and we looked at numerous examples of similar figurative names in the Bible.

So, if Hadrach is a figurative name, what does it depict?

Some say Hadrach was derived from one of Syria's false gods - Chadrak, but I don't think so. Instead, I think we need to break Hadrach up into parts to see what it means here. The first half of Hadrach ("Had") means sharp, and the second half of Hadrach ("Rach") means soft. So, the oracle starting in Zechariah 9 is directed to the land of *sharp-soft*, or perhaps *strong-tender* or *strong-weak*.

I think what we have here is yet another symbolic nickname. That view is bolstered by the fact that Hadrach appears nowhere else in the Bible and, in fact, appears nowhere else in the secular records. They may dig the city of Hadrach up tomorrow and force me to reconsider my position, but for now I think a symbolic view is the better view.

And this view of Hadrach is an ancient view. The Jews have long viewed Hadrach as figurative. Where

they go wrong is how they apply the term - they consider Hadrach (*sharp-soft*) to be a reference to the Messiah, whom they said would be harsh to the Gentiles but gentle to the Jews. That view is wrong - Hadrach is not the Messiah. But I think they were on to something in their figurative understanding of Hadrach based on how the word sounded when spoken. (And the fact that they felt the need so long ago to understand the word figuratively supports the view that the word should be understood figuratively now. Their interpretation suggests that they also had never heard of a place called Hadrach!)

So, what could Hadrach mean? What nation had a *sharp* side and a *soft* side? And what nation would we expect to see here in this oracle? The answers to those questions are all the same - **Persia**. Identifying Hadrach with Persia makes perfect sense in view of the historical context. Persia was the very power who was then lording over his people. But how was Persia both soft and sharp? There are several possible answers.

First, Persia had a divided character. It was militarily and economically strong but it was famous for its moral weakness. One commentary described Persia this way:

Persia was at the same time characterized by an effeminate softness that later made Persian debauchery and effeminacy a byword and the source of the moral contamination of Greece and Rome.

Second, while Persia had done some good things for God's people, such as letting them return to Jerusalem, Persia was not in the business of being nice! You can be sure anything that Persia did was intended to benefit Persia, and (as we discussed in the introduction) Persia benefited from having a Jewish buffer between themselves and Egypt. But perhaps that sort of duplicity could be another explanation for the sharp-soft character of Persia. Persia had a soft side!

A third possible explanation comes from Daniel. The Medo-Persians overthrew Babylon on the night that Belshazzar saw the writing on the wall in Daniel 5. The combined nation of Medo-Persia is described in Daniel 8:3.

**Daniel 8:3** - Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last.

Why is one horn higher than the other? Because the higher horn denotes the supremacy of the Persians in their merger with the Medes. And the higher horn comes up last. That temporal order is in

perfect accord with history. The Medes were the dominant power until Cyrus the Great came along and brought prominence to the Persians. So perhaps the sharp and soft name Hadrach denotes the sharp and soft Medo-Persia.

A fourth possibility is that the Medes are not in view here at all, but instead the sharp and soft description refers to the strength of Persia in producing conquerors such as Cyrus the Great, but also to the softness of Persia in its eventual defeat at the hands of the Greeks.

I favor the second or the fourth possibility if I have to pick just one, but God may have chosen the name based on a combination of reasons.

Whatever the explanation, I think the best view is to take Hadrach (sharp-soft) as a figurative name for Persia. But that leaves us with yet another question: Why does the text use a figurative name? Why not just call Persia Persia? There are two possible answers to that question.

First, God may have wanted to use this name simply to make the point that Persia had a sharp side and a soft side. That is why God used the other figurative names we looked at earlier. He used them to make a particular point, and sometimes as a divine insult directed at an oppressor of his people.

A second possible reason is that Persia was denoted by this hidden name so that the neighbors of the Jews would not be able to use this text in their efforts to show that the Jews were traitorous against Persia. (And it is possible that both of these reasons are correct. We don't have to choose one over the other.)

What about the rest of verse 1: *"and Damascus shall be the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD."*

Damascus was a major city in Syria, and so verse 1 is telling us that this judgment against the Persians would begin in Syria. That is, the burden would first rest upon Damascus. As for what this burden is, let's hold off on that question until we read a few more verses and get some more evidence.

The final phrase in verse 1 is difficult: *"when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD."* What does that mean?

Some say it means that God saw all of the evil that these nations had inflicted on his people. Others say it means instead that all of these people would someday recognize God. I think the best view is the simplest view. What we are seeing in these verses is a judgment by God against the Persians. I

think the end of verse 1 is simply saying that all of these people would be watching the mighty force that God would send, which means that they would in effect be watching God as he moved in judgment down upon the Persians.

## Zechariah 9:2-4

**2 And Hamath also shall border thereby; Tyrus, and Zidon, though it be very wise. 3 And Tyrus did build herself a strong hold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets. 4 Behold, the Lord will cast her out, and he will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire.**

The beginning of verse 2 should have been left as the ending of verse 1. Hamath is another city in Syria, and it would be judged along with Damascus.

With the second half of verse 2, we see that that the judgment will also come against Tyre and Sidon.

Notice that we have seen four cities so far. Also, in the next set of verses we will see four of the well-known five cities of Philistia. Why four?

For the same reason we have seen four used symbolically earlier in this book. The number four is symbolic for the earth, and what we are seeing here are God's judgments against earthly powers. This symbolic use of four is additional evidence that Hadrach in verse 1 is not just another city in Syria because, if it were, then Sidon would be the fifth city rather than the fourth city.

Even though Sidon is mentioned, the focus of the prophecy (as we will see) is against Tyre.

Tyre was known in the ancient world for its worldly wisdom. But verse 2 tells us that its wisdom would not save it. In fact, nothing that Tyre could do would be enough to save it from the force that was coming its way. Even if Tyre built a large stronghold, it would not be enough. And their silver and gold would not help them either. They could not bribe their way out of this danger.

Whatever was coming would be different from the enemies that Tyre had faced before. The city had been besieged by the Assyrians for five years and by the Babylonians for thirteen years - but this time things would be different. They would fall, and they would fall quickly.

What was coming? Again, let's hold off on that answer until we see all of the evidence.

One thing we can say for sure is that the fall of Tyre would be a shocking event. That's what verse 4 tells us. "Behold! The Lord will cast her out!" That verse also confirms that this judgment would be a judgment from God. The great commercial city of Tyre would fall into the hands of a great conqueror sent by God.

## **Zechariah 9:5-6**

**5 Ashkelon shall see it, and fear; Gaza also shall see it, and be very sorrowful, and Ekron; for her expectation shall be ashamed; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. 6 And a bastard shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.**

The Philistines are next in line for this coming judgment against the Persians. Four Philistine cities are mentioned here: Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod.

Why isn't Gath mentioned? Again, I think we are seeing a symbolic use of the number four.

Ashkelon would fear for its own safety when it saw what happened to Tyre. Eventually Ashkelon would no longer be inhabited. Gaza and Ekron would see what happened to Tyre and be very sorrowful. If the great city of Tyre fell, then what hope did Gaza and Ekron have? Ekron's trust in Tyre would be put to shame, and Gaza's king would perish.

Verse 6 tells us that a bastard would dwell in Ashdod. What does that mean?

It could mean that the city would be ruled by one born of incest or adultery, or it could simply mean that the city would be ruled by a stranger or a foreigner. Either way, Ashdod would be humiliated. These four great cities were the pride of the Philistines. When those cities fell, the "pride of the Philistines" was "cut off" as verse 6 tell us.

So, who was this great conquerer sent from God? When and how was this prophecy fulfilled? We are at last in a position to answer that question.

What have we seen? We have seen that a great force from God would start with Damascus, move to Tyre, and then move against the cities of Philistia. When did that happen and who or what was this great force sent by God?

Let's listen as *Wikipedia* answers that question!

In spring 333 BC, Alexander the Great crossed the Taurus into Cilicia. After a long pause due to illness, he marched on towards Syria. Though out maneuvered by Darius' significantly larger army, he marched back to Cilicia, where he defeated Darius at Issus. Darius fled the battle, causing his army to collapse, and left behind his wife, his two daughters, his mother, and a fabulous treasure. ... Alexander proceeded to take possession of Syria, and most of the coast of the Levant. In the following year, 332 BC, he was forced to attack Tyre, which he captured after a long and difficult siege. The men of military age were massacred and the women and children sold into slavery. When Alexander destroyed Tyre, most of the towns on the route to Egypt quickly capitulated. However, Alexander met with resistance at Gaza. The stronghold was heavily fortified and built on a hill, requiring a siege. When "his engineers pointed out to him that because of the height of the mound it would be impossible... this encouraged Alexander all the more to make the attempt". After three unsuccessful assaults, the stronghold fell, but not before Alexander had received a serious shoulder wound. As in Tyre, men of military age were put to the sword and the women and children were sold into slavery.

And another article sheds more light on the Siege of Tyre.

The Siege of Tyre was orchestrated by Alexander the Great in 332 BC during his campaigns against the Persians. The Macedonian army was unable to capture the city, which was a strategic coastal base on the Mediterranean Sea, through conventional means because it was on an island and had walls right up to the sea. Alexander responded to this problem by first blockading and besieging Tyre for seven months, and then by building a causeway that allowed him to breach the fortifications. It is said that Alexander was so enraged at the Tyrians' defense of their city and the loss of his men that he destroyed half the city.

The prophecy in the opening verses of Zechariah 9 is describing these same events. They were also prophesied by Daniel in Daniel 2:39.

**Daniel 2:39** - And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.

The kingdom in charge at the time that Daniel's prophecy was given was Babylon. The coming inferior kingdom in Daniel 2:39 was Medo-Persia. That prophecy was fulfilled in Daniel 5. The "third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth" in Daniel 2:39 was Greece, and that is what we are

seeing prophesied here in Zechariah 9.

And these prophecies were given in great detail in Zechariah 9 almost 200 years before the events occurred! Here is how one commentary describes it:

The astonishing accuracy of these prophecies points to the invasion down this very route by the famous Macedonian conqueror, Alexander the Great. In the year 333 BC, Alexander won a great victory over the Persians at Issus. Instead of pursuing his enemy into the Persian interior, which would expose his line of supply to the powerful Persian navy in the Mediterranean Sea, Alexander brilliantly turned south to roll up the Persian cities along the coast. His strategy was to eliminate the enemy navy by removing its ports, marching through Phoenicia and Philistia down to Egypt, and only then returning north to deal with the Persian ground forces.

And, again, the Persians could have known all about Alexander's brilliant plan had they just read these prophecies written 200 years before the event! (And, of course, when we read Zechariah we understand who was really behind that brilliant plan!)

But what about Jerusalem? Did Alexander the Great destroy Jerusalem? If not, why not? We will see the answer to those questions in verse 8, but first let's look at the very difficult verse 7.

## Zechariah 9:7

**7 And I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth: but he that remaineth, even he, shall be for our God, and he shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite.**

Verse 7 is one of those very difficult verses that are scattered throughout these final six chapters of Zechariah just to keep our life interesting! Here is what one commentator said about verses 1-7:

This prophecy was, no doubt, so designed by divine providence as to cover the victorious progress of Alexander the Great, for the order of the towns mentioned is identical with Alexander's line of march after the battle of Issus. Yet we dare not conclude that verses 1-7 are a prophecy of this hero's success, for verse 7 marks a result that did not follow upon his conquest.

Although I agree with that commentator that verses 1-6 precisely describe Alexander's conquest, I think that commentator is completely wrong about verse 7. Whatever verse 7 means, it must be

pointing to something that happened after Alexander's conquest. We just need to figure out what it is.

Verse 7 starts by telling us two things that the people would stop doing: *"I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth."* What do they mean?

Removing his blood from his mouth likely refers to the drinking of sacrificial blood as an act of worship or eating of victims used in sacrifice with the blood. Removing his abominations from between his teeth likely refers to the animals the people were forbidden to eat under the Mosaic law or to sacrifices offered to idols and then eaten. The people would turn from those things.

Instead, we are told that those left alive "shall be for our God" and "shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite." What does that mean?

The ESV translates the phrase "shall be for our God" in verse 7 as "shall be a remnant for our God." That means the remaining Philistines would become a part of the remnant. In fact, they would be as a governor or a chief in Israel, which means they would hold an honored position in the remnant.

The last description in verse 7 is that Ekron would be as a Jebusite. What does that mean?

The Jebusites were the ancient inhabitants of Jerusalem.

**1 Chronicles 11:4** - And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, which is Jebus; where the Jebusites were, the inhabitants of the land.

The Jebusites were not run out of the land as most others were, but instead they continued to live among the Jews.

**Judges 1:21** - And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.

Ekron was the closest Philistine city to Jerusalem, and so the point here seems to be that the remaining Philistines would also live alongside the Jews like the Jebusites had done for many years.

So, verse 7 seems to be saying that after the Philistines were conquered by Alexander the Great, they would all be converted to God.



It is true that such did not happen *immediately* after the conquest, but nowhere does verse 7 say that this would occur immediately. Did it ever happen? Yes, it did, in at least two ways.

During the time between the testaments, the Maccabean rulers of Judea successfully annexed the Philistine territory. Mosaic regulations were enforced on those who lived in the area. That might be what verse 7 has in mind, but I think a better view is that verse 7 is looking forward to the day when both Jew and Gentile would worship God together in the one church.

To see why that is the best view of this verse, let's ask an important question: **Why was God doing all of this?** Why was God using the Greeks to destroy the Persians? And why would God later use Rome to conquer the Greeks? Why? Because God was creating the perfect cradle for his son, and I am not referring to the manger. The perfect cradle was a world almost entirely at peace and in which the Greek language was used all throughout the known world. In short, it was the perfect setting for Jesus to come and bless the entire world (both Jew and Gentile) as had been promised to Abraham so long before.

And it was when that blessing came that verse 7 would be fulfilled. I think that is the best way to view the very difficult verse 7. God was doing all of this so that the Philistines of this world could turn to him, obey the gospel, and be saved. If there were no verse 7, then we would be left to wonder why we were given verses 1-6. Verse 7 is the explanation for verses 1-6.

So what happened to Jerusalem when Alexander marched through the area? Verse 8 answered that question 200 years before it happened! And what an incredible answer it is!

## Zechariah 9:8

**8 And I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes.**

Before we comment on verse 8, let's read from the writings of Josephus what happened when Alexander marched on Jerusalem (*The Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, Chapter 8, Paragraphs 4 and 5 (slightly paraphrased)):

Now Alexander, when he had taken Gaza, made haste to go up to Jerusalem; and the high priest, when he heard that, was in an agony, and under terror, as not knowing how he should meet

Alexander and his army. He therefore ordained that the people should make supplications, and should join with him in offering sacrifices to God, whom he besought to protect that nation, and to deliver them from the perils that were coming upon them; whereupon God warned him in a dream, which came upon him after he had offered sacrifice, that he should take courage, and adorn the city, and open the gates; that the rest appear in white garments, but that he and the priests should meet the king in their usual priestly attire, without the dread of any ill consequences, which the providence of God would prevent. Upon which, when he rose from his sleep, he greatly rejoiced; and declared to all the warning he had received from God according to which dream he acted entirely, and so waited for the coming of Alexander.

And when he understood that Alexander was not far from the city, he went out in procession, with the priests and the multitude of the citizens. ... and although the enemies of the Jews thought they would soon have liberty to plunder the city, the very reverse happened; for Alexander, when he saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priests stood clothed with fine linen, and the high priest in purple and scarlet clothing, with his mitre on his head having the golden plate on which the name of God was engraved, Alexander approached by himself, and adored that name, and first saluted the high priest. The Jews also did all together, with one voice, salute Alexander, and encompass him about: whereupon the kings of Syria and the rest were surprised at what Alexander had done, and supposed him disordered in his mind. However, they asked him how it came to pass, that when all others adored him, he should adore the high priest of the Jews? To whom Alexander replied, "I did not adore him, but rather I adored God who hath honored him with that high priesthood; for I saw this very person in his priestly clothing in a dream, who, when I was considering with myself how I might obtain the dominion of Asia, exhorted me to make no delay, but boldly to pass over the sea, for that he would conduct my army, and would give me the dominion over the Persians; whence it is, that having seen no other in such priestly clothing, and now seeing this person in it, and remembering that vision and the exhortation which I had in my dream, I believe that I bring this army under the divine conduct, and shall therewith conquer Darius, and destroy the power of the Persians, and that all things will succeed according to what is in my own mind." And when he had said this and had given the high priest his right hand, the priests ran along by him, and he came into the city; and when he went up into the temple, he offered sacrifice to God, according to the high priest's direction, and magnificently treated both the high priest and the priests. And when the book of Daniel was showed him, wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that he himself was the person intended.

Having read that fascinating account from Josephus, let's read verse 8 again: *"And I [God] will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that*

*returneth."*

Josephus is not inspired, but what he wrote certainly seems to fit very well with what we see here in Zechariah 8. Jerusalem was not destroyed by Alexander! Why? Because God was encamped around it. God protected Jerusalem from Alexander the Great - both when Alexander marched by Jerusalem on his way to Egypt in 332 BC and when Alexander marched back by Jerusalem afterwards.

How did God protect Jerusalem from Alexander? The Bible does not provide those details, but perhaps Josephus does. In any event, we know that God protected Jerusalem and kept it from being destroyed while these other cities were being destroyed by Alexander. And we know that protection was prophesied by Zechariah almost 200 years before Alexander the Great was born!

Remember in our introductory comments how we described the many commentators who say that Zechariah is really two books? Why do they say that? We can see why right here - if they dated the second half of Zechariah as early as the first half, then they would have to admit that the Bible contains predictive prophecy. That they can never admit, and so they do to the second half of Zechariah what they do to the book of Daniel - they try to move the date of the book until after the events it predicts. The efforts of such commentators to undermine the Bible tell us much more about those commentators than about the Bible. I am reminded of one of my grandfather's favorite quotes:

There is no deafness so permanent as the deafness that will not hear. There is no blindness so incurable as the blindness that will not see. There is no ignorance so deep as the ignorance that will not know.

We are also reminded of:

**Matthew 13:15** - For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

And we are reminded of:

**Ephesians 4:18** - Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.

One must be truly blind not to see Christ, the church of Christ, and the power of God in the book of Zechariah!

Look at the end of verse 8: "*and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes.*" What does that mean? It can't mean that at no future time after Alexander would an oppressor ever pass through Jerusalem. Why? Because Daniel had already prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of another oppressor, the Romans. We read of that in Daniel 9:27 and Daniel 12:11, and we read of that in Matthew 24:15 where Jesus refers to those same prophecies. Another oppressor was definitely coming for Jerusalem.

So what does the end of verse 8 mean? It *could* be a reference to the church, which we know from countless other passages enjoys divine protection. In fact, Daniel told us that the church would be the kingdom that would destroy other kingdoms, and not vice versa. But I'm not sure the church is in view here in verse 8.

Perhaps the best explanation is the simplest explanation. We get the simplest explanation by viewing the last half of verse 8 in the immediate context of the first half of verse 8, which is all about Alexander's invasion. That is, this oppressor is the same one who passes by and returns. If that is true, then this statement would mean that *Alexander* would never again come into the land of Judah. This would be his only encounter with the Jews, and as far as we know from secular history, that is the case. In fact, Alexander died about nine years later at the age of 32 (which means he was only about 23 when he marched on Jerusalem - about the same age that Zechariah was at the beginning of this book!).

By any earthly measure, Alexander certainly earned his title of "great." By the time of his death, Alexander's empire of roughly two million square miles stretched from the Danube to the Nile to the Indus. In modern terms, his empire included Greece, Bulgaria, much of Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Iran, Afghanistan, western Pakistan, and parts of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

You have to work pretty hard not to see the hand of God in the life of Alexander the Great! The Bible is clear about who was behind the successes of Alexander, and it was not Alexander. Alexander was simply fulfilling the role that God had arranged for him hundreds of years before he was born.

"*For now I have seen with my eyes.*" What does that phrase mean at the end of verse 8? It means that God was once again looking with favor on his people. God was noticing their plight, God was judging their enemies, and God was sending them a deliverer. And if they thought that Alexander the Great was their promised true deliver, they were badly mistaken! The next two verses tell us about the true deliverer of the Jews. We just saw the mighty Alexander the Great marching with his great army, so I

suppose the true deliver will come with even more pomp and circumstance, right? Well, let's see.

#Zechariah