

DECEMBER 22

Zechariah 2-3

When we read about God restoring Jerusalem, we need to remember this has nothing to do with some kind of divine patriotism. It all has to do with redemption. Yesterday we read in Revelation how the dragon pursued the woman. That would make a great animated cartoon, but in the history of our world it has been utterly tragic for Israel. When the covering angel went rogue to make himself the object of worship for mankind, he was able to take the guardianship of the nations. God allowed that, but kept one nation for himself as a way to reach all of mankind. Actually, it wasn't even a nation, it was a man, Abraham. Since that time, and even with God's promises, Israel has suffered terribly and failed, but not without help. Satan has made a mockery out of God's attempt to use Israel. Yet God has used Israel. Even in its failure, we see our hearts and our sin and our depravity reflected in their rebellion and inability to love and obey God. What a hard, inglorious service they have rendered to humanity. Yet, from that nation, according to the flesh, came the Christ, the Savior. And the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. God will honor Israel. Surely God is guiding nations today, Israel included; but the future generation of Israel we are reading about will not be like Israel today. That future Israel will be honored because they will be humbled and believing. They will willingly serve God and suffer terribly. Yet they will be used to defeat the enemy and win the day for all mankind.

Zechariah 2

Vs. 1-5 So here are poor Zerubbabel and Joshua struggling to rebuild the temple. The glorious dream of returning to the land with God's blessing has turned into disappointment. Imagine what this vision would have meant to them. Remember that at the time Zechariah was speaking, there were no walls around Jerusalem. They felt vulnerable and unprotected. God said that in the future glory of Jerusalem, the city will be so large that it won't have walls. But, the crowning jewel is that the Lord will be dwelling in her midst, giving it security.

Obviously this is the Millennial Kingdom.

One other note, with all of these angels running around, we hear more about angels in Zechariah than any other book in the OT. This is rivaled only by Revelation. And, you'll notice that one of these angels has been referred to as the angel of the Lord. He hasn't said enough yet to know if it is just *an* angel of the Lord or if it is *THE* angel of the Lord. The mystery will soon be revealed.

Vs. 6-13 This declaration was an immediate encouragement to the Jews who still lived comfortably in Babylon, to have the courage to return to Jerusalem. But, this is clearly looking to the future also.

V. 8 Just a reminder, *the apple of His eye*, means His eyeball, not a piece of fruit. An arrogant person might touch something God liked when they thought He wasn't looking, but who would be so insane as to actually try to injure God's eyeball?

V. 11 This is salvation for the nations, not just Israel. They will all be God's people.

V. 13 This is either a warning or an encouragement, depending on your relationship to the Lord. This "rousing" is what we are seeing in Revelation.

Zechariah 3

Now that God has made the future city secure and blessed, the people of Israel have to be fit for worship.

V. 1 Did you notice yesterday in Revelation 12:10, that it said, *the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down*? Here he is. Satan, ironically, insists that God must punish the sin of each person. If God doesn't, He is unrighteous. I think it is actually an attack on God's holiness.

Apparently Satan has something to gain, if he can prove that God is unrighteous and violates His own holiness. That is why, I think, it is important to the angels that God is holy.

Notice that *the angel of the Lord* is standing next to Joshua too. In this scene it not only applies to Joshua's standing before God, but also the nation's right to represent God. In v. 8 it says that Joshua and those with him are a sign; that is, they are all representing something else. In this case, they are representing the nation as Satan accuses it before God. There was a lot to accuse.

V. 2 So, how does the Lord say, *the Lord rebuke you*? The angel of the Lord is God the Son before He came to earth, born as a human. Since Jesus hadn't yet been born and died for our sin, the great question hanging in the heavenly air is, "What right does God have in not punishing Joshua's sin? How can God forgive sin righteously?" Oddly enough, the one standing next to Joshua would pay for sin and prove God's righteous right to forgive sin without having to damn the sinner.

Vs. 3-5 Knowing this is Jesus speaking makes this scene amazing. This is what happens to every person who confesses Christ as Savior.

Vs. 6-10 Joshua and these men are encouraged to keep leading the people to the Lord.

V. 8 Promised to the nation is *the Branch*, the Messiah and eternal King.

V. 9 Promised is that God will remove the sin from Israel *in a single day*. That is definitely for the end times.

For the *seven eyes*, see Revelation 5:6.

V. 10 Promised is not only peace and prosperity, but the *neighbor* probably refers to the nations. Look at Isaiah 55:5.

Revelation 13

During this pause in the judgments, different dramas and personalities of the Tribulation are described. The angel declared the mystery of God, that the saints of God would conquer Satan by their testimony and sacrifice. The two witnesses were the first of these martyrs of the Great Tribulation (the final 3.5 years), commencing this mystery. Now, we learn about Satan's two witnesses. These two work to reverse the testimony of God's two witnesses and His people, to get mankind to worship Satan through them. As you read through this, keep in mind that some of what we read in Daniel comes in handy here.

Vs. 1-2 In Daniel 7, four nations arise from the sea. Here, coming *out of the sea* is a composite nation, made up of elements of the four beasts in Daniel 7. It is symbolically the mixture and final expression of human government without God. If we take our lead from Daniel, the horns and heads refer to kings or leaders. So far we know we have a nation or confederation of nations. Notice that in Satan giving it his power and authority, this is like what Satan told Jesus he could do in Luke 4:6-7, "*To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.*"

Vs. 3-6 The imagery slowly begins to lead to one man, representing this nation, but also representing Satan. This one man has apparently taken the offer that Jesus turned down. He is the antichrist. When the antichrist takes his place in the temple, apparently he will appear to be the Messiah and demand worship. He will have satanic power and will have survived a "JFK"-like assassination attempt. Even though he has been on the rise for the first 3.5 years, his true power and authority doesn't fully manifest itself until he gives himself fully to Satan for the final 3.5 years. The antichrist will receive worship. That is pretty amazing.

Note that in order for the antichrist to put himself forward as a messenger of God, he will verbally, and in other ways, try to destroy Christianity and Judaism. He will make a new religion, as we'll see in v. 8.

Vs. 7-9 This is the same as the little horn in Daniel 7:25 and 8:24. We know that this is the antichrist, so he is an individual representing a nation and he himself is also called the beast out of the sea. We are back to the mystery announced by the angel in chapter 10, because he takes it upon himself to war against God's people.

V. 8 How would you get Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, liberals, atheists and such to all worship together? Signs and wonders help, but he will need to redefine spirituality to make this work.

In the middle of a destroyed world filled with anarchy and disorder, the nation and man that is the antichrist will be a welcomed savior, but only for those who do not believe the Word of God. Anyone who has the Word has the playbook and knows what's going on.

Vs. 9-10 These verses are given an extremely solemn emphasis. God's people will need to hold this truth for help and encouragement. Since God is purposefully giving His people into the enemy's hands, believers (Jew and Gentile) shouldn't be anxious about their lives, whether they are hiding or dying. It is God who is working, and if He has determined a person to be safe, it won't matter if they walk out on the street singing "Onward Christian Soldiers;" they won't get caught. On the other hand, if God has determined a person for martyrdom, it doesn't matter where they hide, or whether they zig or whether they zag when they run, they will get caught. In all of the stress and anxiety, they are to keep a sober and steady mind and heart. God is still in control in this satanic chaos. God will use every believer in a very intentional way.

Vs. 11-17 Enter the second *beast*. This one comes *out of the earth* and is usually referred to as "the false prophet." That is an understatement. These two men are the satanic version of the two witnesses.

The things this beast, or prophet, does seem pretty straightforward. Though you can find a parallel for the antichrist in Scripture, this other guy has no clear reference unless he is the embodiment of every false prophet in the Bible.

V. 12 The *presence* could also be, "by the authority of."

V. 15 It seems that God allows this and Satan cannot make life; it will be some kind of illusion. Notice that this is worship by compulsion. If you don't worship, you die.

Vs. 16-17 In reordering the world after the first 3.5 years of death and destruction, this might make sense for identification, but it has a very religious slant to it. Notice too that people are compelled to receive the mark. The antichrist's government will use this as a way to root out opposition. Imagine that the resources of the world will be scarce and you won't be able to buy without this mark.

V. 18 This might be a mystery that will make sense for the people in the Tribulation, but all the guesses of all the wise have proved futile up to now.

I was reading this morning where Jesus told people to strive to enter by the narrow door while it was still possible. The moment of death is certainly too late to believe, but I think for many people that time of irreversible unbelief comes while they are still alive, when unbelief becomes so set in their hearts that they never will understand. I think this is why comparatively few people come to Christ after the age of 40. But we don't know who will believe, and God doesn't give us the option to ask, so we work and share the gospel.

In the first years of the Tribulation, there will be an opportunity for people to respond to God out of need and out of the witness of those following Christ. In the final 3.5 years, the degree of satanic influence grows more visible and more powerful. Satan has been cast out of heaven and seems to go for broke. Jesus said in Matthew 24:24, *For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.* There will still be people who respond to the 144,000 in the Great Tribulation (last 3.5 years), but it will become extremely hard. And believers will have to be totally anchored in the Word.

In all of this, both for us reading Revelation and for those living through it, there is one thing to remember; Jesus is coming and we will see Him.

Psalm 141

Vs. 1-2 It sounds like David felt he was in danger. *Incense* and *prayer* are seen together.

Vs. 3-4 It seems like David was being tempted to take shortcuts and not to wait on the Lord. While David was running, he led and lived with men who did not have his same level of faith in God. I'm sure when they sat together deciding what to do, David was constantly having to correct attitudes and plans that were not honoring to God. A spontaneous example of this was when he was in the cave and could have killed Saul at the urging of his men. He resisted, but I'm sure it wasn't easy.

V. 4 Apparently the word *delicacies* has the sense of sexual license. This is fueled by power and arrogance and self importance. As a king David had that, and later, sadly, abused it. Getting away from the Lord and His Word is fatal for everyone, even His servants.

Vs. 5-7 He prays to remain open to godly counsel and knows that he will be vindicated for following God. David would rather be rebuked by the godly than to follow the other guys.

Vs. 8-10 As for David, his eyes were on God to seek Him regardless of what others thought or did. And, as we have seen before, it is suggested that the wicked fall into their own traps and are repaid in kind for their deeds. Amen.

Proverbs 30:18-20

Vs. 18-19 These things all seem to have something to do with submission to God's forces in nature or love.

V. 20 This *way* is not very wonderful. Here it is not the man leading and the woman responding to the way God has made things as in v. 19, but rather sin being planned by this woman in opposition to God's way. The way of sin, apparently, is equally unexplainable.