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Zechariah: Chapter-by-Chapter Commentary

February 17, 2022



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Transcript

The book of the prophet Zechariah is the penultimate book within the Book of the Twelve. It is helpful to read it alongside its immediate predecessor, the Book of Haggai. Haggai and Zechariah ministered at the same time, both encouraging the people in the rebuilding of the Temple.

We read of their ministry in Ezra chapter 5, verses 1-2. Now the prophets Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozedach arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

And the prophets of God were with them, supporting them. And then in Ezra chapter 6, verses 14-15. And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo.

They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia. And this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. There were 24 divisions of priests originally in the Temple and we read of some of the priestly divisions that returned in Nehemiah chapter 12.

In Nehemiah chapter 12, verse 16 we discover that Zechariah was one of the chief priests, representing the house of Iddo. Recognising that Zechariah was a priest can help us to make more sense of some of the imagery of his prophecy. In 586 BC, the city of Jerusalem had fallen to the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar.

The Babylonians had been dominant in the region since around 605 BC after the battle of Carthage. Babylon however was defeated by Cyrus in 539 BC. By Cyrus' decree the Jews had been sent back to Jerusalem.

After an initial start made to the rebuilding of the Temple under the governorship of Shesh-Bazer, the Jews had faced opposition from their neighbours and had abandoned the work. Now over a decade and a half later, and chiefly through the word of Haggai who had encouraged them to take up their building again, the Temple was being constructed again. Haggai's first recorded prophecy was on the sixth month, the first day

of the month, in the second year of the reign of Darius.

On the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month they had taken up work on the Temple once more. Three months to the day after the recommencement of the rebuilding of the Temple, Haggai had delivered his last recorded message, an encouragement to the people and then another encouragement to Zerubbabel that the Lord would empower and bless them in their labours. Zerubbabel, who had become the governor of the people, was also a descendant of David.

Paying attention to the chronology of Haggai can be helpful when we start to read Zachariah. Zachariah's ministry begins in the eighth month of the second year of Darius. Haggai's initial rebuke to the people has been delivered.

At the end of the sixth month they had taken up work on the Temple again and Haggai had also addressed them on the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles. The first message of the Book of Zachariah then comes after the first three messages of the Book of Haggai, before the messages with which the Book of Haggai concludes. It's important to recognise that these messages are concerned with the rebuilding of the Temple.

As we see in Ezra chapter 5 and 6, the messages of Haggai and Zachariah were instrumental in galvanising the people and encouraging them in the task of rebuilding the Temple. Imagery within the book that might otherwise confuse us will come into sharper focus when we consider that Zachariah is a priest and that his ministry at this point is focused upon encouraging the people in the building work. Haggai and Zachariah are two witnesses bearing testimony to the word of the Lord to the people at this time.

Zachariah's first message is a warning to repent. This might surprise us as the people had already committed themselves to rebuilding the Temple on the 24th day of the sixth month and Haggai had already delivered the opening rebuke of his prophecy to them on the first day of that sixth month. Is Zachariah merely repeating a message that has already been received? It seems more likely that we should read Zachariah as reinforcing that original message.

The Temple will be of little worth if the hearts of the people worshipping within it have not returned to the Lord. The Temple is among other things a symbol of the people and their relationship to the Lord. If the people do not have a right relationship with the Lord, the Temple can become a dangerous source of presumption, undermining its proper purpose.

The people need to learn from the cautionary example of their fathers. Both the prophets and their fathers had passed away, but the word of the Lord delivered by the prophets had stood firm. What's more, that word had overtaken their fathers.

It had had its full effect in the destruction of the previous Temple and in the devastation

of the central site of Israel's worship for almost 70 years. It was imperative that the people took this lesson to heart if they were not to suffer the same fate themselves. One feature of Zachariah's prophecy here that's worth noting is the repetition of the expression, the Lord of hosts.

The Lord is the God of armies and when Israel feels beleaguered in its return to the land, in the smallness of their numbers and the precarious political position that they hold relative to the other people surrounding them, they can take comfort and assurance in the fact that the God that they worship is the great and powerful God over all armies and kings, with myriads upon myriads of angels in his host. Unsurprisingly, considering the fact that they had already responded positively to the message of Haggai, the people reaffirm their repentance in response to the prophecy of Zachariah. Part of the founding of this Temple will be the turning of the people's hearts back to the Lord.

Having learnt the lessons from the previous Temple and its destruction, the vision that follows in verses 7 to 17 comes on the 24th day of the 11th month, five months to the day after the beginning of the rebuilding of the Temple that's recorded in the Book of Haggai, is still in the second year of Darius, in 520 BC. This is the first of a series of night visions in the opening chapters of the Book of Zachariah. The imagery of this vision, along with the imagery of other visions in this series, can be difficult to understand.

However, James Jordan's insight that these all have to do with the building of the Temple, I think, gives us the key to understand what's taking place. These visions are being delivered while the Temple building is occurring, they are means of encouraging the people in the task, and they encourage the people by relating the work on the building of the Temple with the work that God is doing within the world more generally. It is as if while the people are working on the Temple in Jerusalem, the Lord himself will be working upon the right ordering of the world.

What is being done on earth is also being done in heaven. In the vision he sees a man riding on a red horse, standing among myrtle trees, and behind him red, sorrel, and white horses, probably best understood as dark and light chestnut, and white in colour. The identity of the man riding on the red horse is likely given to us in verse 11, where it speaks of the angel of the Lord who was standing among the myrtle trees.

The angel of the Lord is the messenger of the covenant, and also the commander of the army of the Lord, the same figure that Joshua meets in chapter 5 of his book. Translations of verse 8 will often place the myrtle trees in a glen, however the word used here is more typically understood as the deep or the depths, elsewhere in the Old Testament. Others understand the word here to refer to being in the shade, under the trees.

Myrtle trees are small evergreen trees. Mark Boda observes that they can grow to the size of a small bush, 2-3 metres, or a small evergreen tree of 6-9 metres. The flowers are

used for perfumes and spices.

Jordan notes that the Hebrew name of Esther, who was also operating around this period, Hadassah, also relates to the myrtle, an interesting detail that might be worth further examination. In the book of Isaiah, the myrtle tree is associated with images of restoration. Isaiah chapter 41 verses 19 and 20.

I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive. I will set in the desert the cypress, the pine, and the plain together, that they may see and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the Lord has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it. Again in chapter 55 verse 13.

Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress, instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle, and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. Elsewhere the imagery of a grove of trees might remind us of the Garden of Eden, or the building of the temple, which draws upon the imagery of the Garden of Eden. Jordan suggests that we might see in myrtle trees some similarity to cedar trees that are used in the temple building.

The myrtle is a smaller analogy to the cedar. Imagery of divine horses is seen in the book of 2nd Kings chapter 2 with the ascension of Elijah into heaven. Elsewhere in Revelation chapter 6 verses 1 to 8, where the four living creatures, in response to the opening of the first four seals, summon four horses that go out into the world, bringing devastation in their wake.

Later in Zechariah chapter 6 verses 1 to 8, we also see horses that go out into the world. Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four chariots came out from between two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of bronze. The first chariot had red horses, the second black horses, the third white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled horses, all of them strong.

Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, What are these, my lord? And the angel answered and said to me, These are going out to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves before the lord of all the earth. The chariot with the black horses goes toward the north country, the white ones go after them, and the dappled ones go toward the south country. When the strong horses came out, they were impatient to go and patrol the earth, and he said, Go, patrol the earth.

So they patrolled the earth. Then he cried to me, Behold, those who go toward the north country have set my spirit at rest in the north country. There is an obvious comparison and contrast to be drawn between that, the final of the night visions, and this which is the first.

In the final night vision there are chariots going out to war, drawn by horses. In this first

night vision, the horses and their riders are not drawing chariots, they are merely inspecting or maybe spying out the whole of the earth. What is taking place here is preparing for action that will take place later.

In Revelation chapter 6 the four horses seem to be associated with the four living creatures or cherubim. The lord is enthroned above the cherubim, which in 1st Chronicles chapter 28 verse 18 is described as the golden chariot of the cherubim spread their wings and covered the ark of the covenant of the lord. We see the reality corresponding to this furniture within the temple in places like Ezekiel chapter 1 and the vision of the throne chariot of the lord that Ezekiel sees at the beginning of his ministry.

While the lord's throne chariot is driven by cherubim, angels and human beings are placed upon horses. Jordan suggests that the colour of these horses may correspond with the colours of fire. Dark red, a lighter red and white, just as the throne of the lord is surrounded by fire and the movements within it are like movements of fire, so these angelic horses are like fiery horses.

The horses seem to have riders who give answers to the angel of the lord as he inquires of them. There is also an interpreting angel who speaks to Zachariah, much as Gabriel interprets the visions of Daniel to him. How then can we put the elements of this vision together? First of all, in the angel of the lord we see the commander of the armies of god.

Angelic forces have been sent throughout the earth. The four sets of horses, the red, sorrel and white horses and then the man on the red horse, representing the four corners of the earth and also the four cherubim. The myrtle tree is associated with blessing.

It also reminds us in some ways of the temple and the garden of eden. Yet the myrtle trees are situated not on a mountain as we might expect, but in the depths or perhaps in a glen. The angels patrolling the earth on their horses report back to the angel of the lord, declaring that all of the earth remains at rest.

This however does not appear to be good news, because the angel of the lord responds to the news by speaking to the lord of hosts, asking him when he will have mercy upon Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. It has been almost 70 years since the destruction of the temple and the deportation to Babylon. When will he have mercy upon them? Interpreting the imagery in terms of this, maybe we should see in the myrtle trees an image of the people and of the lord's presence in their midst.

They seem to be beleaguered. They are situated not on the mountain, but in the depths. They are not a forest of great cedars.

They are rather a gathering of smaller myrtle trees. The world may be at peace, but it is

at peace under the rule of a pagan nation. This is not as things ought to be.

However, as the angelic riders patrol the earth, they seem to be preparing for action that will take place soon after. As Haggai had foretold, a great shaking of the world is going to take place, a shaking that will continue for many years, getting greater and greater. At the end of the book of Hebrews we are told that God will once more shake the heavens and the earth, most likely referring to the establishment of the reign of Christ and the bringing down of the temple and the old covenant order in AD 70.

Recognizing that this is the chief subject matter of the book of Revelation, and that book of Revelation also has an image of horses being sent out by the cherubim, we might notice a further illuminating parallel between the angel of the Lord in the midst of the myrtle trees here, and Christ in the middle of the tree-like lampstands in Revelation chapter 1. The Lord delivers a message of reassurance and comfort to the angel who talks with Zechariah, declaring that the Lord is jealous for his people, that he has returned for them, and that he is angry with the nations that are at ease, as they have overstepped their bounds in bringing his judgment upon his people. In verse 3 of Zechariah's first prophecy, the Lord had said, return to me, and I will return to you. They had returned to the Lord, and now the Lord had returned to Zion.

With his renewed presence in their midst, the temple, Jerusalem and the cities of Judah would all flourish once more. In the second of his night vision, Zechariah is shown four horns. We are not told in what form he sees these four horns, but he is told that the horns represent those forces that have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem.

Horns are obviously connected with beasts. They represent the power and the authority of beasts. We see this in the book of Daniel, where the horns symbolise particular rulers or authorities, also in the imagery of the book of Revelation.

As Jordan notes, it's probably significant that in places like 1 Samuel chapter 16, the king is anointed by the horn. It communicates authority and power. Significantly, the imagery of the horn is also associated with the altar, which has four horns, one at each corner.

In Revelation chapter 7 verse 1, we see four angels at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. The altar corresponds to the earth, and the four horns to the powers that govern the earth. The four horns that have scattered Judah, meaning Israel and Jerusalem, are pagan powers that dominate the earth.

We don't necessarily need to identify four specific powers. Rather, we can see this as a representation of the world being dominated by these pagan forces. The reality that the altar corresponds to, the earth and its four corners, has taken a perverse and adulterous form.

The Lord, however, will answer these four false horns with four craftsmen. Craftsmen elsewhere in scripture are particularly associated with the building of the tabernacle and the temple. We might think of the work of Bezalel and Aholiab, of the various craftsmen that accompanied them.

We might also think of Hiram and his work on Solomon's temple. The Babylonians had deported the craftsmen and the artisans and the smiths, and all skilled workers, to ensure that Jerusalem could not rebuild the temple, its walls, or re-establish a well-armed fighting force. Now, however, with the rebuilding of the world, against the forces that dominate it, he will establish the reality that corresponds with the temple symbol.

The four craftsmen are like four builders that are forming the true altar of God. They correspond to the four false horns, being sufficient to the task of overcoming them and establishing the true worship of God in their place, the world becoming the four-horned altar of the Lord once more. A question to consider.

In both of the books of Haggai and Zechariah, we see the reaction of some of the elderly people to the re-establishment of the temple, their dismay and sorrow at its smaller proportions. All of this led to a tendency to disregard its significance. How might the prophecy of Zechariah here encourage the people to think of the temple and its building in a different way? Zechariah's night visions come in the earlier stages of the rebuilding of the temple after the return from exile, in a situation where the Jewish returnees seem beleaguered and pressured by their adversaries on various sides, and also dispirited by a sense of how much reduced the glory of the nation has been, and how much smaller the new restored temple is from the former one.

Zechariah's messages bring divine encouragement and a sense of what God is doing in their time and through their work. As James Jordan argues at length, it's important to recognize the connection between these visions and the rebuilding of the temple that's taking place. Zechariah's visions are directly addressing the situation in the nation at the time, when the people are re-establishing this building for the Lord's presence in their midst.

He is giving them a divine perspective, helping them to recognize that as they are raising this symbol of God's throne on earth, the Lord is establishing his rule in a new way among the nations. In the first chapter there were two key visions, the visions of the horses among the myrtle trees in the depths, and the second vision, the vision of the four horns and the four craftsmen. Both of these visions related to temple themes, and as we move into chapter two, temple themes continue in various ways.

In scripture, sacred space is generally measured space. We are given the dimensions of the tabernacle and also the temple. In the book of Ezekiel, we are given a number of measurements concerning the visionary temple, in some passages that provide important parallels to this passage.

In Ezekiel chapter 4 verses 2 to 3, in visions of God, he brought me to the land of Israel and set me down on a very high mountain, on which was a structure like a city to the south. When he brought me there, behold, there was a man whose appearance was like bronze, with a linen cord and a measuring reed in his hand, and he was standing in the gateway. There would seem to be some obvious parallels between this figure in Ezekiel chapter 40 and the figure that we encounter in Zechariah chapter 2. However, there are also some important differences.

The figure in Ezekiel chapter 40 is measuring using a measuring rod, whose dimensions are given to us as six long cubits. Here the measurement occurs through a measuring line. The measuring rod would usually be used for measuring buildings, a measuring line for measuring land.

This, as James Jordan notes, is already an indication that what is being measured is not the architectural structures that are bounded by city walls, but larger tracts of open countryside in which people would dwell. This would seem to support the view that the interaction between the angel and the young man in verse 4 might not be with the man that goes out to measure, who already has the instruments suited for the task, but with Zechariah himself. On the other hand, the fact that he is instructed to run to speak to the young man might suggest that he is pursuing the man that has already gone out.

The prophecy that he has given concerns a new way that Jerusalem will exist among the nations. Jerusalem at that time was not fully fortified, it had some of the remaining wall around it, but the wall was still to be rebuilt and wouldn't be rebuilt until the time of Nehemiah many years later. In the context of Nehemiah, the rebuilding of the wall is designed to give the people security and safety from their opposing enemies, and to enable Jerusalem to enjoy greater independence and power.

In that context, the lack of a full wall is a sign of weakness and vulnerability. Here, however, the image of a city without walls is of a city that has confidence in its existence. It can spread out, the people are secure, they are not threatened by their enemies, so they don't need to be bounded by a wall to the same degree.

They do, however, enjoy a defense. It's the defense that the Lord himself provides. He is a wall of fire all around, and the glory in their midst.

This, of course, is imagery that should remind us of the story of the Exodus. The Lord guards and accompanies his people with the pillar of cloud and fire, and is the glory in their midst as his presence accompanies them in the tabernacle. Exodus themes are found elsewhere in this chapter, particularly in the spoils and plunder taken by former servants in verse 9, and a mixed multitude of other nations joining themselves to the Lord in verse 11.

At the end of chapter 1, Zechariah had been shown the four horns that had scattered

Judah, that is, Jerusalem and Then the Lord showed him four craftsmen as a response to the horns, those who would build up the temple, establishing the throne of the Lord in the world, over against the powers of the nations that represented a sort of false altar. The world is going to be set up as a true altar once more. Perhaps a clue to the meaning of verse 6 is found in Revelation chapter 7 verse 1. After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.

In contrast to most commentators upon this text, Jordan suggests that there is a significance in the fact that the people have been spread abroad as the four winds of the heavens. This is different from saying that they have been scattered or divided to or toward the four winds of heaven. The possibility is raised that they are not being put into the power of the four winds of heaven to divide and scatter them, but they are being set up like the powers of the four winds of heaven, spread out among the earth, but empowered by the Holy Spirit so that they might act as the winds of God among the nations.

The call then in verses 6 and 7 to flee from the land of the north and to escape to Zion, according to Jordan, is not so much a call to return back to the land of Israel, but rather a call for spiritual separation, something similar to what we see in the book of Revelation in Come Out of Her My People. Many of the Jews were in danger of fitting in a bit too much in the lands of their exile. They needed to flee from the land of the north and escape to Zion in the sense of disassociating themselves from cultures that they would easily become assimilated into in their pagan ways.

The new life of Jerusalem is not so much a city that's bounded by walls in the middle of the land of Israel, rather it's a larger confident city that's spread out among all of the nations like the winds of heaven, bounded not so much by physical fortifications but by the protective power of the Lord. The Lord will act on behalf of his people. Anyone who threatens his people, he will act against them and prove his power over them.

The enemies of the Jews will become plunder for them. We might think here of the way that the Lord gave the Egyptians into the hands of his people so that they plundered the Egyptians as they left the land. Once again this fits in with various Exodus themes in the chapter.

We might also, as Jordan suggests, see a connection between this and the story of Esther. In Esther chapter 3 verse 8 for instance, Haman says to King Ahasuerus, there is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. In that book Haman tries to destroy the Jews in a great genocide but the Lord through Esther and Mordecai dramatically saves his people.

Such an event could then be seen as a fulfillment of part of what the prophecy here is speaking about. Israel's life is no longer focused very narrowly within the walls of

Jerusalem. As a nation they are spread out throughout the whole world and it is God himself who surrounds them with protection.

This is a cause of rejoicing for Zion. The Lord has returned to dwell in the midst of her once more and as his presence is manifested among them, many nations will join themselves to the Lord in that day. Again we see some sort of fulfillment of this in Esther chapter 8 verse 17.

And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews for fear of the Jews had fallen on them. Such actions of the Lord on behalf of his people would demonstrate that they were his people and that he was their God. They were the Lord's special portion and Jerusalem was once more the site of his dwelling.

This prophecy then would have been a source of great encouragement to the people rebuilding the temple. It ends with a declaration that the Lord has roused himself from his holy dwelling. He is about to act in the earth to shake up the nations and to act on behalf of his people.

Even as his people have been spread throughout the world scattered to the four winds, they have become like the four winds and now empowered by the wind of his spirit, they would affect his work among all of the nations. While the new temple might look inglorious and small in comparison to the old Solomonic temple, it would be the site of the Lord's symbolic throne as he demonstrated his power in a new and more glorious way among all of the peoples. A question to consider, enumerate the different Exodus motifs that you can see within this chapter.

How can they help us to understand what is taking place here? The book of Zechariah is a book written in the context of the rebuilding of the temple. Zechariah's prophecies along with those of Haggai encouraged the people in this project and the night visions with which the book of Zechariah begins relate to the work that the people are undertaking. In particular, the night visions disclose what God is doing in order to re-establish the true worship of the temple.

The whole temple system had to be established by the Lord and so it was not possible for the people merely to rebuild the temple and for it to operate as normal. Rather, the Lord had to take the initiative and in these chapters we see the way that the Lord is re-founding the system and through the message of his prophet Zechariah giving his people assurance of this fact. The temple is being rebuilt but to have a functioning temple you need to have a functioning priesthood.

The problem is that the priesthood to be properly operative needs to continue. When there has been a break in the priesthood and in the worship of the temple everything needs to be started off again. In Leviticus chapter 16 we have the law for the day of atonement, a day in which the high priest and the tabernacle were cleansed, blood being

sprinkled over the mercy seat in the holy of holies.

This atoned for the sins of the past year and kept the system operating. However, with the temple destroyed the system and the ritual has broken down. There's no way to cleanse the priest, there's no way to cleanse the people and because the ritual has been rendered inoperative as a result of the destruction of the temple there's no clean priest to perform it now.

The whole priesthood needs to be reinitiated and it's not entirely clear how that can happen. In this night vision the Lord addresses this concern and this problem. Joshua the high priest, elsewhere called Jeshua, is the son of Josedach but he has a problem.

His clothes of office are defiled. The garments of office of the high priest, garments of glory and beauty, are described in Exodus chapter 28. They represent the people before the Lord and the defilement of Joshua's clothes display the people's sin in the presence of God.

Ideally the high priest was supposed to come into the presence of God and be accepted on account of his garments, garments that declared that he was holy to the Lord. But Joshua's garments seem to be performing the opposite function. They declared the defilement of the people.

In the vision Zachariah sees the divine council. We have visions of the divine council in places like 1 Kings chapter 22. The Lord enthroned in the heavens, surrounded by his servants.

Here Joshua is in the presence of the council. We might think of this in connection with the day of atonement where the high priest would enter into the very throne room of the temple, the holy of holies, which represented God being enthroned above the cherubim. Ideally the high priest would enter into the divine throne room and he would have the angel of the covenant at his right hand pleading and interceding for him.

The right hand is the place where the person would look to for support. Psalm 109 verse 31. For he stands at the right hand of the needy one to save him from those who condemn his soul to death.

Or in Psalm 109 verse 6. Appoint a wicked man against him. Let an accuser stand at his right hand. Here in Zachariah chapter 3 it is an accuser that is at the right hand of the high priest, Satan himself.

The power of Satan the accuser comes from the defilement and sin of the people. While Christ intercedes for his people on account of his atonement, Satan accuses people on the grounds of their guilt. Overcoming the resistance of Satan requires atonement for the defilement of the people and the priesthood.

He is opposing the work of re-establishing the temple. As long as he can point to the defiled garments of Joshua that represent the defilement of the people, the rebuilding of the temple can be frustrated. Somehow the high priest needs to be set apart once more.

Set apart from the impurity of the people. As we have seen the crucial ritual of the day of atonement could not be performed where there was neither an intact temple nor a pure and continuing priesthood. There was no assurance that the people would be accepted before God.

However the accusations of Satan are not allowed to stand. The Lord is going to act on behalf of Jerusalem and on behalf of the priesthood. It is going to be re-established once more.

The original installation of the priest was performed by the prophet Moses and Zachariah the prophet is going to participate in something similar here. Joshua is described as like a brand plucked from the fire. He is one who has survived the judgment of exile that has fallen upon the people.

However to be re-established the Lord has to deal with the problem of the clothing. The high priest, particularly when clothed with his garments of office, represented the people and their spiritual state before the Lord. We see this in Numbers chapter 18 verse 1. So the Lord said to Aaron, you and your sons and your father's house with you shall bear iniquity connected with the sanctuary and you and your sons with you shall bear iniquity connected with your priesthood.

As James Jordan has pointed out, the ability of the high priest to enter into the presence of the Lord, particularly on the day of atonement, without being destroyed was most especially connected with the golden plate that he had upon his forehead. Exodus chapter 28 verses 36 to 38. You shall make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it like the engraving of a signet, holy to the Lord and you shall fasten it on the turban by a cord of blue.

It shall be on the front of the turban. It shall be on Aaron's forehead and Aaron shall bear any guilt from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall regularly be on his forehead that they may be accepted before the Lord.

Jordan observes the significance of the absence of this in the story of Uzziah in 2nd Chronicles chapter 26 verses 19 and 20. Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to burn incense and when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the Lord by the altar of incense.

And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him and behold he was leprous in his forehead and they rushed him out quickly and he himself hurried to go out

because the Lord had struck him. Where a person going into the presence of the Lord did not have holy to the Lord upon his forehead, he was in danger of being struck by the Lord. In this vision then the Lord is dealing with the problem of the garments of the high priest that represent the spiritual state of the people that the high priest brings before him.

While the day of atonement was the continuing celebration this is a sort of foundational day of atonement, a day in which the high priest is prepared for his ministry at the very outset. This is one of those passages in scripture where the angel of the Lord seems to be identified with the Lord himself. We see this particularly in verse 2 Perhaps surprisingly, Zachariah then speaks up, calling for a clean turban to be put upon the head of the high priest.

As we have seen in Exodus chapter 28, this was an important aspect of the high priest's vestments. The angel of the Lord then delivers a word of encouragement and assurance to Joshua and to his companions, presumably the chief priests. They are being installed in their office and there is an assurance here that their office will be effectual in bringing atonement for the people.

As they are accepted, the people can be accepted. A priest is, as Peter Lighthouse has argued, a palace servant of the Lord, one who acts as a steward in the Lord's house where the Lord's throne is symbolically situated. Joshua in particular as the high priest will be able to come into the very presence of the Lord in the Holy of Holies.

This is followed by a surprising promise in verse 8. Joshua the high priest and his companions, the chief priests, are signs that the Lord will bring his servant the branch. We read of the figure of the branch elsewhere in the book of Jeremiah chapter 23 verse 5 Behold the days are coming declares the Lord when I will raise up for David a righteous branch and he shall reign as king and deal wisely and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. And then again in Jeremiah chapter 33 verse 15.

In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. The restoration of the priesthood then and the temple service is a sign and a guarantee of the coming of the messianic branch and of the re-establishment of the Davidic kingdom. The cleansing and re-establishment of the priesthood is a sign that the Lord has not given up on his people, that there is still a future awaiting for them and in such a manner a promise that one day the Messiah would come.

If we've been paying attention to the symbolism so far the meaning of the stone in verse 9 should not be surprising to us. The single stone with seven eyes that corresponds with the promise to remove the iniquity of the land relates to the golden plate that was upon the forehead of the high priest which was also engraved with holy to the Lord. That was seven Hebrew characters and here the stone has seven eyes.

What more can we make of the symbolism here? Why not just describe it as a golden plate that was inscribed by the Lord? Why has the golden plate become a stone that is inscribed and that has seven eyes? When we think of the Lord inscribing a stone we might think of the tablets of stone of the law. In Deuteronomy chapter 6 verses 5 to 9, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The engraved stone that's placed upon the forehead of the high priest here represents the law that's placed as the frontlets between his eyes, symbolically placing the commandments of the Lord upon his mind and also as a mark of divine ownership upon him. What about the seven eyes? In the next chapter of Zechariah in chapter 4 verse 2 we read, He said to me, what do you see? I said, I see and behold a lampstand all of gold with a bowl on the top of it and seven lamps on it with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. And then again in verse 10, for whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

These seven are the eyes of the Lord which range through the whole earth. The lampstand in the temple is connected with the almond tree or the watcher tree. In Exodus chapter 25 verse 37 we are given instructions for it.

You shall make seven lamps for it and the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it. The high priest of course could be symbolically associated with the lampstand. When Aaron's rod budded in Numbers chapter 17 it produced almond blossoms.

The high priest was also a watcher within the house of the Lord and also within the house of Israel more generally. In the stone with seven eyes that is placed upon the forehead of the high priest perhaps we're seeing a deeper correspondence between the high priest and the temple in which he serves. The engraved tablets of stone though no longer in the ark of the covenant are associated with the holy of holies.

The golden lampstand with the holy place. In his garments the high priest is being represented as a sort of living temple. The Lord is going to cleanse the high priest and re-establish the worship of the temple but perhaps verse 9 is looking forward to something even greater.

The removal of the iniquity of the land in a single day seems to have an eschatological referent. Elsewhere the imagery of people being under their own vine and fig tree is an image of true peace and prosperity in the land where every single person enjoys productive property and every single person enters into some degree of enjoyment of the blessing of the land that the Lord had given to his people. We see this language used in first kings chapter 4 verse 25 of the reign of Solomon for instance.

And Judah and Israel lived in safety from Dan even to Beersheba every man under his

vine and under his fig tree all the days of Solomon. And then again in Micah chapter 4 verses 3 to 4. He shall judge between many peoples and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation neither shall they learn war anymore but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree and no one shall make them afraid for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

This promise then with which the chapter ends seems to have a messianic flavor to it. It has in view the full and true establishment of the kingdom of David in the true son of David who is expected to come. A question to consider in Jude verse 9 we read but when the archangel Michael contending with the devil was disputing about the body of Moses he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment but said the Lord rebuke you.

How does Zechariah chapter 3 help us to read Jude verse 9 and how does Jude verse 9 help us to understand Zechariah chapter 3 more fully? Zechariah chapter 4 continues the night visions of the prophet Zechariah. Up to this point in the book he has had four different visions. The visions of the riders among the myrtle trees in the deep, the vision of the four horns and the four craftsmen, the vision of the man with the measuring line and then the vision of the re-clothing of Joshua the high priest in the preceding chapter.

That vision was focused upon Joshua as the high priest and now the fifth vision particularly focuses upon Zerubbabel the governor of Judah and also the heir of David. The visions of Zechariah more generally relate to the rebuilding of the temple and the re-establishment of the nation. For all the people's building it would be of little effect were the Lord not with them.

In these visions however it is revealed to Zechariah that the Lord is re-establishing the people. He is going to raise up his throne in Jerusalem once more. He's going to establish his rule in the world.

He's going to extend his kingdom and surround and protect his faithful people. He's going to cleanse the priesthood and now in this chapter he's going to empower his people and their rulers. This vision begins with Zechariah being awoken which might suggest as Mark Boda argues the opening of a new section in the vision reports.

James Jordan sees a journey through a night within the visions and this is the turning point at midnight. Zechariah sees a vision of a lampstand of gold. It is difficult to work out exactly what the lampstand looked like.

There was a lampstand of course in the tabernacle and there were 10 lampstands in the temple. The lampstand in the tabernacle is described in Exodus chapter 25 verses 31 to 40. You shall make a lampstand of pure gold.

The lampstand shall be made of hammered work. Its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes

and its flowers shall be of one piece with it and there shall be six branches going out of its sides. Three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it.

Three cups made like almond blossoms each with calyx and flower on one branch and three cups made like almond blossoms each with calyx and flower on the other branch. So for the six branches going out of the lampstand and on the lampstand itself there shall be four cups made like almond blossoms with their calyxes and flowers and a calyx of one piece with it under each pair of the six branches going out from the lampstand. Their calyxes and their branches shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it a single piece of hammered work of pure gold.

You shall make seven lamps for it and the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it. Its tongs and their trays shall be of pure gold. It shall be made with all these utensils out of a talent of pure gold and see that you make them after the pattern for them which is being shown you on the mountain.

We should not presume that the lampstand in Zachariah chapter 4 is the same in appearance as that within the tabernacle or the temple. The shape of the lampstand in Zachariah's vision is most probably very different from the lampstand described in the book of Exodus although the symbolism is clearly related. We see commonalities in the seven lamps and in the construction of the lampstand of pure gold but beyond that they are quite different.

There are seven lamps with seven spouts. Part of the challenge that we have here is working out the meaning of the key terms and then developing some picture of how it actually looked. David Peterson, working in part from archaeological evidence of lamps from the region, suggests that we should think of each of the lamps as likely holding seven wicks, each with its own channel, spout or pinched lip in the bowl holding the oil, so that each of the seven lamps would contain seven lights.

We should probably think then of one large bowl with seven smaller bowls around it, each with pinched lips or indentations within which a wick would be draped which could be lit. The whole thing would give a great deal of light. Zachariah's lampstand might have looked more like a birdbath in shape with seven sevenfold lamps around it than with the way that the lampstand of the temple is commonly imagined, an image that is drawn in part from the representation of the menorah on the arch of Titus in Rome.

As Peterson notes, Zachariah's lampstand makes no mention of branches for instance. The lampstand in the tabernacle has cups instead of a bowl and it doesn't have channels in the way that Zachariah's does. The lampstand in the tabernacle draws heavily upon arboreal imagery but Zachariah's does not to the same degree.

There is no connection to almonds for instance. The fact that the lampstand has 49 lights

should not escape us. 49, seven times seven, is a number that is significant as it's connected with jubilee.

Numbers associated with jubilee, 25, half a jubilee, 49 the number of years that would pass before the jubilee and then 50 the year of jubilee, are all numbers that are repeated within Ezekiel's vision of the restoration temple. Solomon's temple took the original lampstand of the tabernacle and multiplied it by 10, having five on each side, but this is a sort of a glorified or jubilee lampstand, seven times seven. We see related imagery of course at the beginning of the book of Revelation with the seven golden lampstands, presumably lampstands with seven branches, as in the lamps of Zachariah's vision each of the seven is sevenfold.

We can see a sort of Russian doll or perhaps fractal pattern here. As you zoom in more closely the pattern repeats on a smaller level. The lamb for instance in Revelation chapter 5 verse 6 is described as follows, and between the throne in the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a lamb standing as though it had been slain with seven horns and with seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

The seven horns and the seven eyes might remind us of the seven lampstands and the seven lights. The seven lampstands are the seven churches and then the seven stars or lights are the seven angels of the seven churches, but these have their analogy within the lamb himself. The lamb's sevenfold glory flows out and repeats itself on a lower plane.

We can probably see the lampstand in Zachariah's vision then as representing the people of God as light within the world. Although the lampstand is not tree-like here it is connected with two olive trees. Zachariah sees these two olive trees, one on the right and one on the left.

Jordan suggests that we should see the lampstand as standing before the Lord with the olive trees as being on either side of the throne of the Lord, on the right and the left, but above and behind the lampstand. The interpreting angel who guides Zachariah through his visions, just like Gabriel guides Daniel through his visions, asks him the question of whether he understands what he is seeing. Zachariah does not.

It's possible that he understands the fundamental symbolism but does not understand how it relates to their situation. What we are given next is not so much an interpretation of the symbolism but an explanation of what its import is. This glorious and elevated seven times seven full lampstand represents something about the way that the Lord will relate to his people and most especially to their leader Zerubbabel.

Zerubbabel is currently leading the people in this task of rebuilding the temple, a great yet a daunting operation that had been abandoned for almost 15 years, only being

restarted a few months previously. To that point the Jews had faced opposition from their neighbors and been frustrated in their task as a result of it. The frustration of the people to this point had probably occurred in large part as a result of the guilt of the people that had not yet been taken away.

Now however as the filthy garments of the high priest that represented the guilt of the people were removed, being replaced with clean garments, the opposition behind it all, Satan the accuser himself, could no longer be so effective. Zerubbabel and the people would achieve their purpose not through human might but by the work and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Nothing that stood in Zerubbabel's way would be sufficient to provide an impassable obstacle.

The great mountains of the time might be the political powers in the region and the greater power of the Persian empire behind them. In the first of Zachariah's visions the myrtle trees were in the deep, an image that implied something about the state of the people of God at that time. They however are going to be raised up, the Lord is going to establish them as it were on the mountain and any other mountain that will presume to oppose them would be flattened.

Zerubbabel himself will bring forward the top stone of the temple accompanied by shouts of rejoicing among the people. The exact nature of this stone is unclear. Mark Boda suggests that it is the beginning stone, the head stone or the chief corner stone.

However in verse 9 we see that the hands of Zerubbabel had already laid the foundation of the house, something that he had done a number of years previously. Peterson raises the possibility that the stone is the former stone, something that connects the temple with the previous temple that had been destroyed as part of the rededication. James Jordan connecting this with the tin stone that's mentioned in verse 10 speculates that the stone in question was one that was placed above the threshold to the temple.

As such with the two pillars of Jacob and Boaz on either side it corresponded to the Lord's presence between and above the cherubim. The Lord assures Zerubbabel and the people that the rebuilding of the house will not be a long and drawn out process. In fact just as Zerubbabel had laid the foundation he would complete the building.

This would demonstrate the Lord's presence with his people and also the truth of the ministry of Zachariah. As we also see in both Ezra and Haggai a number of the people were disheartened as they compared the temple that was being rebuilt with the former temple of Solomon. The new edifice was much smaller and less impressive by comparison.

However throughout the night visions of Zachariah as the veil is being removed and we're seeing the work of the Lord it becomes apparent that though the physical edifice of the temple is much smaller its spiritual reality is much elevated. The Lord's throne

that it symbolizes is going to be lifted up in the years that follow. Many translations speak of the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel yet a large number of commentators dispute this reading of the text suggesting that it should be seen not as a plumb line but as the tin stone.

The question then is raised what is the significance of this tin stone? Jordan as I've already noted sees this as being placed above the doorway. Peterson argues that it is most likely a royal signet stone perhaps a metallic tablet that is placed at a key point in the foundations of the building. The meaning of this action probably wouldn't be that dissimilar to some official or royal unveiling a plaque for a new building.

Jordan argues that the seven mentioned in verse 10 relate to this stone. The stone that he sees as being above the threshold corresponds to the stone of the preceding chapter which is upon the forehead of the high priest on his turban. Some analogy should definitely be drawn between these two things however I don't believe that this is a reference to the stone rather it's a reference back to the lamp as Carol and Eric Myers argue What we are given now is an explanation of the meaning of the vision.

Zachariah did not understand what the elements of the vision meant but now they are explained to him. From the last part of verse 10 to the end of the chapter we have an explanation of the vision by its elements in order. First the seven lamps and then the olive trees and their various components.

Elsewhere in scripture we see an association between the lamp and the ruler of the people. In 2nd Samuel chapter 21 verse 17 for instance, then David's men swore to him you shall no longer go out with us to battle lest you quench the lamp of Israel. In 2nd Kings chapter 8 verse 19, yet the Lord was not willing to destroy Judah for the sake of David his servant since he promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever.

The imagery of the eyes of the Lord is also found in places like 2nd Chronicles chapter 16 verse 9. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. Given the context in which the flowing of the oil is particularly important some commentators believe that we should understand the eyes here as wells or springs, another meaning of the Hebrew term. These are eyes or springs from which water or oil flows out to the whole earth to give sustenance and strength.

While this meaning might not be entirely excluded from the text it seems far more likely to me that the focus here is upon eyes. Eyes are means of judgment and rule. They observe and inspect the earth and then cast judgment upon it on whether it is good or bad.

We might think of the description of David in 2nd Samuel chapter 14 verse 20. But my Lord has wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on the

earth. We might also think of the horses that patrol the earth and report back to the Lord in chapter 1 of Zechariah.

Perhaps the king and the people here are being represented as extensions of the Lord's authority within the world. The Lord will act and rule through them. The olive trees are then explained in verses 11 and following.

In thinking about the two olive trees, one on the right and one on the left, we should probably think the two great statues of the cherubim in the Holy of Holies in the temple. And we should also think of the two pillars, Jachin and Boaz, placed at the threshold of the building. As described in 2nd Chronicles chapter 3, the wings of the two cherubs in the Holy of Holies reached out and touched each other, forming between them, as Jordan observes, a sort of threshold, with the Lord's presence symbolically situated above that threshold.

We then get more details concerning the olive trees than we had in the initial account of the vision. There are two branches of the olive trees which are poured out by some means into the bowl of the lampstand. Many regard this means as being two golden pipes.

However, Boda and some others translate the verse in a way that makes reference to people who are working upon the tree. Boda reads verse 12 as follows. Then I responded a second time and said to him, What were the two branches of the olive trees which are in the hands of the two oil pressers, the ones who empty golden oil from them? In this reading then, the attention is placed far more upon these figures of the oil pressers, not upon the olive trees by themselves.

The image of the oil pressing that we have here, straight from the tree, is very similar to the image in the dream of the cup bearer in Genesis chapter 40 verses 9 to 11. So the chief cup bearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, In my dream there was a vine before me, and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes.

Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. Our reading of verse 12 has a lot of bearing upon our understanding of verse 14 and the two figures who are called sons of oil. Many bible translations as commentators see sons of oil as an obvious reference to people who are anointed.

However if we've noticed the figure of the oil pressers, it could very likely be a reference to them. Against the more common traditional reading, that sees in this a reference to Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the leader of the people as the two anointed ones, we might see the two anointed ones who stand before the Lord as the prophets who are entering into the divine council, Haggai and Zechariah. It is through their pressing of the

oil of the spirit that the oil is fed in to fuel the lamp of the people and their rulers.

The lamp perhaps has a specific applicability to Zerubbabel as the heir of David. Furthermore as one aspect of the sevenfold pattern, we might observe that in 1st Chronicles 3 verses 19-20, Zerubbabel has seven sons. The twofold witness of the Lord's prophets will equip his people to burn as a powerful light within the world, fuelled by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

A question to consider, how could we unpack the relationship between the two olive trees, the two cherubim in the Holy of Holies and the two pillars at the threshold of the temple, Jachin and Boaz? Zerubbabel's Night Visions Zechariah chapter 5 continues Zechariah's night visions, containing the sixth and the seventh. In total there are eight night visions and James Jordan suggests that they can be mapped onto each other in a chiasmic structure. The first concerns horsemen in the deep, the last concerns horsemen and chariots going out.

The second is of four horns and four craftsmen and the seventh, which he argues corresponds to it, is the woman in a basket. We'll reflect upon possible connections as we look through it. The third and the sixth are the man with the measuring line and then the flying scroll and then the middle two are the cleansing of the high priest and then the vision of the lampstand and the olive trees that relate to Zerubbabel.

The sixth vision is of a flying scroll. It's unusual in a number of respects. Its dimensions are strange.

It is quite out of proportion for a scroll. A scroll would be very long compared to its width but this is only twice as long as its width and the scroll itself is huge. It's 20 cubits by 10 cubits.

The specificity of the dimensions and the strangeness of the dimensions suggests that they are symbolic. There are a few possible connections that we could think of here. In 1st Kings chapter 6 verse 3 we read of Solomon's temple.

The vestibule in front of the nave of the house was 20 cubits long, equal to the width of the house and 10 cubits deep in front of the house. In 1st Kings chapter 6 verses 23 to 26 we see a further item with dimensions of 10 cubits by 20 cubits. The cherubim inside the holy of holies with their wings stretched out.

The altar of bronze in 2nd Chronicles chapter 4 verse 1 also is 20 cubits long, 20 cubits wide and 10 cubits high. So any of the sides of the altar would have the same dimensions of this scroll. Beyond these items there is also the holy place in the tabernacle in the wilderness.

I am most inclined to relate these dimensions to the doorway of the temple and perhaps secondarily to the dimensions of the cherubim. Considering that the verses that follow

speak about a curse going out from the house of the Lord presumably, cleaning people out who are sinful and entering into particular houses of the wicked, perhaps it makes sense to relate these to the dimensions of a doorway. The scroll then might symbolise who has and does not have access into God's presence.

Once we've appreciated this, its connection with the third vision, the man with the measuring line and the establishment of Jerusalem as a place where God would dwell in the midst, will make a lot more sense. As the temple and the holy place are restored, the boundaries of holiness start to be applied throughout the land. Judgment moves out from the temple.

The fact that the scroll is a flying scroll underlines its effectiveness. It has been sent on a mission by the Lord and it will achieve its purpose. The purpose of the scroll is to bring secret sins to light.

In Deuteronomy chapter 27 the people had to ascent to a curse declared upon those who were secret sinners, calling for God to act in judgment against them. The effectiveness of the law could not depend entirely upon the judges and the rulers of the people. As we see in the book of Deuteronomy but also in the Psalms, it required the Lord to act against the wicked.

Where the Lord did not act against the wicked and secret sins were unpunished, wickedness could fester and gain strength in the land, frustrating the work of the righteous. Jordan draws attention to the fact that there is a curse written on both sides of this scroll. Ezekiel's scroll which he ate in Ezekiel chapter 2 verse 10 was written on both sides.

More importantly perhaps the tablets of the law were written on both sides in Exodus chapter 32 verse 15. Jordan remarks that the curses here come upon the person who steals and the person who swears falsely. Swearing falsely he argues is connected to the third commandment bearing the name of the Lord in vain, whereas stealing is connected with the eighth commandment.

The third commandment is the middle of the first five commandments and the eighth commandment the middle of the second five commandments. Perhaps then we should see these two commandments as standing for the whole. Once true worship has been established then the Lord is going to actively enforce his law ensuring that his people aren't overwhelmed by sin.

This flying scroll represents the holiness of the house of the Lord which also relates to the holiness of Israel as those in whose midst God dwells. As it goes out into the land it will tear down all rival houses. In this context we might recall the decree of Darius concerning the house of the Lord in its rebuilding in Ezra chapter 6 in verse 11 of that chapter.

The seventh vision is perhaps the toughest vision of all to understand. It is very difficult to determine what the imagery within it relates to. A great many of the commentators are baffled by it and fail to give much of an account of many of its details.

By far the most compelling treatment of this vision that I've encountered is that offered by James Jordan and in a more recent treatment by Anthony Pettison. Both of them argue that we need to pay attention to all the elements of the vision taken together. It will only be as we see the full picture that the particular elements will start to make sense.

If we look at each of the elements by themselves and try and relate them to other parts of scripture we'll be drawing a blank. The basket or more properly the ether does not have strong connections elsewhere. Likewise the women with stalk wings.

A further point that Jordan stresses is the importance of understanding this in the light of the temple. All of these visions relate to the rebuilding of the temple and the significance of what the Lord is doing through that. Recognizing this key fact we can use it as a key to understanding what is taking place in this vision and this will be easier to do if we think visually about what is being presented to us.

Zachariah is instructed by the interpreting angel to look at what is going out and what he sees going out is described as an ether. Many translations refer to this as a basket but ether is the better translation. The ether was a measurement that was used in the worship of the temple.

We also have a number of references in scripture to the ether being adulterated as a measure. For instance in Micah chapter 6 verse 10. The interpretation of the second half of verse 6 is also complicated.

Many commentators consider the original reading of this text to be this is their iniquity in all the land. However the text that we have has eye. In the broader context the meaning of the eye might be related to the eyes of the Lord that go throughout the whole earth and the eyes on the stone given to Joshua back in chapter 3. There the eyes were connected with sight and with judgment.

The eye is also a spring. From this eye would flow false judgment and false authority and it's going to be removed. However it seems more likely to me that the reference is to the iniquity of the people.

In verse 7 we discover that there is a leaden cover upon the basket. Literally a leaden talent. We've already seen an ether and now we see a talent.

Maybe there's some reference to the wicked commerce of the people being made here. Inside the basket a woman is sitting. As with the scroll earlier in the preceding vision the proportions of the elements of the vision seem to be badly off.

The woman is represented to us as wickedness. She is thrust back into the basket, trapped beneath the leaden weight or the talent and then in the second stage of the vision two women come with wings like a stork. Between them they lift up the basket and fly away with it.

Zachariah is told that they are bringing it to the land of Shinar, the place where Babel and Babylon was, to build a house for it. There the basket would be placed down on a base, presumably within its own shrine. Once we've recognized this it gives a clue to the meaning of the entire vision.

The vision primarily works by means of inversion. Lead is heavy but inglorious. Gold is heavy and glorious.

The lead is an inversion of the gold. Women with the wings of unclean birds are the inversion of winged cherubim who are holy and are also represented as males. What we're seeing here is a correspondence with the Ark of the Covenant but a parody and an inversion of it.

The leaden talent or cover is the mercy seat. The women with the wings of unclean birds who carry the basket with the leaden weight or cover upon it are parodies of the two cherubim above the Ark of the Covenant. And the movement is also a reference to the site of Babel and Babylon.

Rather than being delivered from Babylon, brought to Jerusalem and established with a new temple there, this is being removed from Jerusalem, brought to the land of Shinar and placed within a shrine there. The woman is identified as wickedness. She is like the harlot or the adulterous woman and she is locked up, bound beneath the lead talent.

The central power of sin is going to be restrained and bound and removed the land. As it's removed however, it will be established elsewhere. There will be a more effective division between the righteous and the wicked but wickedness will still continue to operate.

This vision in the chiasmic structure that Jordan has identified can be paralleled with the second vision concerning the four horns and the four craftsmen. The four horns represented the powers that had scattered Judah and together they represented a sort of parody of the true altar. As the altar of the Lord was rebuilt however, these four horns would be cast down.

We might also hear behind this a reference to Ezekiel chapters 8 to 11. There in a remarkable vision, Ezekiel saw the Lord departing from the temple in Jerusalem. The spirit of God, after judging Jerusalem, lifted Ezekiel up and brought him to the land of Chaldea.

The Lord's departure from the house left it empty to be possessed by evil powers, wicked

powers that had already been within it prior to the exile. Now however, instead of the Lord leaving the temple because of the wickedness within it, the Lord is back in the temple in the midst of his people and wickedness is going to be expelled into the far country. We should recognize themes associated with the day of atonement here.

The Lord is cleansing and re-establishing his worship. Joshua the high priest was re-clothed back in chapter 3 and now wickedness is going to be cast out. This draws upon Leviticus chapter 16 verses 20 to 22.

And when he has made an end of atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness.

The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness. The woman in the ether, trapped beneath the lead talon and carried by the women with the wings of unclean storks to the land of Shinar, is enacting the meaning of the scapegoat. Anthony Pettison sums up the vision very well and brings out a number of further details that we have not previously commented upon.

The vision itself evokes many associations that remain elusive until the whole picture is developed. The ether, talon and stone of lead are words associated with trade and bring to mind issues of injustice. The ether is also associated with worship and offerings in the temple.

In Hebrew, wickedness, *harusha*, sounds like *asherah* and brings to mind idolatry. However, it is the second half of the vision with its clear allusions to Ezekiel chapter 8 which makes it clear that the ether is a parody of the Ark of the Covenant with anti-cherub attendants who raise up the ether between the earth and heaven to carry it to Shinar where an anti-temple will be established for it. In doing this, wickedness will be sent back to where it belongs.

This then clarifies some of the earlier ambiguous associations such as the talon of lead, which sounds like mercy seat and the posture of the woman who is enthroned in the basket under the lid. It is an ingenious presentation. There is also an echo of the Day of Atonement ritual in Leviticus chapter 16 which has two distinct phases.

After the temple is cleansed, the scapegoat is sent far away. These two phases are mirrored in the wider visionary sequence with Joshua being cleansed and the temple being built, visions 4 and 5, and now wickedness itself is being sent far away. An important function of this vision and the previous one is to reassure God's people that he himself will deal with the sin that in the past has incurred his wrath and precluded his blessing.

A question to consider, where in the book of Revelation do we see elements of this vision being drawn upon? The night visions of Zachariah take up the first six chapters of the book. The series of the visions end in this chapter with the eighth. The visions give Zachariah and through him the people an insight into what the Lord is doing in their days.

Although many of them are discouraged by external opposition and by the apparent reduction in the glory of the restoration temple, the Lord wants them to perceive, not by human sight but by faith in his promise and vision, what is really taking place, something far more glorious than they might otherwise have appreciated. To this point we've had seven visions. The first is the horseman in the deep, the world being at rest but at rest because the Lord has yet to act for his people.

That was all going to change very soon. The second, the four horns and the four craftsmen. The four horns scatter Judah representing pagan powers like the four horns of a false altar.

However the four craftsmen are sent to cast them down, establishing the throne of the Lord instead. The third is the man with the measuring line, a man sent out to measure Jerusalem as the holy place of the Lord's dwelling. The fourth vision concerns the cleansing of the high priest.

Satan's opposition is overcome as the high priest Joshua has his filthy garments removed and he is clothed once more for his office, representing the removal of the iniquity of the people. The fifth vision was of the lampstand and the olive trees. Zerubbabel and the people were fueled like a glorious lamp by the power of the Holy Spirit for their work in the land.

The sixth vision was of a flying scroll, the Lord's judgment coming out from the temple to purify his people. The seventh, a woman in a basket going out from the land. The wickedness that had been at the heart of the people was being removed and expelled.

And now the eighth vision is of the chariots and horses going out. James Jordan has argued that there is a chiasmic structure in these visions. The first of the night visions had four sets of horses and this vision has four chariots.

As in the first vision, the horses and their riders patrol the earth. We've returned to elements of the first vision when the world was at rest, but now the Lord is going to act in a new way, establishing his order and disrupting that false peace. At the heart of the temple, in the Holy of Holies, the Lord's chariot was situated.

1 Chronicles 28, verse 18 speaks of the golden chariot of the cherubim that spread their wings and covered the ark of the covenant of the Lord. Outside the temple, there were chariots of water. Angels are presented as riding chariots in the ascension of Elijah.

We also see chariots in 2 Kings 6, verse 17, where the eyes of Elisha's servant were opened to see horses and chariots of fire on the mountains surrounding them. Psalm 68, verse 17, also speaks of the chariots of the Lord. The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands.

The Lord is among them. Sinai is now in the sanctuary. Chariots were military vehicles, key parts of the armies of many ancient Near Eastern nations.

In contrast to the horses of the first vision, these chariots are prepared and sent out for war. Here there are four chariots. In Zachariah's visions we have already seen four sets of horses, four horns, four craftsmen, and four winds of heaven.

The number four seems to represent, among other things, the whole of the earth, each of the directions of the compass, and each corner of the world. The four chariots in Zachariah's vision come forth from between two mountains. In working out the meaning of the symbolism here, it is helpful once more to remember that Zachariah's night visions focus upon the temple, its rebuilding, and the re-establishment of the Lord's throne, and the people's worship within it.

When looking for clues to the meaning of elements of the visionary imagery, we should look first to the temple and to its furniture. We should observe that the mountains here seem to function as a sort of threshold, with the horses coming out from between them. Significantly, they are made of bronze.

Commentators speculate about their identity, but the most natural way to understand these is by recalling the two bronze pillars, Jacob and Boaz, that were at the entrance to the temple. In addition to being a symbolic model of things such as the human body, the temple was a symbolic model of the cosmos. The courtyard contained symbols of the land, the bronze altar.

It contained a symbol of the sea, the bronze sea. And perhaps we should see the bronze pillars as symbols of, among other things, mountains. The earth and the heavens were poetically conceived of as having supporting foundations and pillars.

Job chapter 9 verses 4 to 6. He is wise in heart and mighty in strength, who has hardened himself against him and succeeded. He who removes mountains and they know it not, when he overturns them in his anger, who shakes the earth out of its place and its pillars tremble. Job chapter 26 verse 11.

The pillars of heaven tremble and are astounded at his rebuke. Psalm 75 verse 3. When the earth totters and all its inhabitants, it is I who keeps steady its pillars. Once we have appreciated the connection between mountains and pillars, the meaning of the bronze mountains may make a bit more sense.

As in others of Zachariah's visions, what he is seeing is not merely the physical earthly

temple, but the heavenly reality to which it corresponds and symbolizes. The bronze mountains flank the entrance to the Lord's throne room in heaven, from which the chariots are sent forth. As in Ezekiel's vision of the restoration temple, and in other aspects of Zachariah's night visions, we see that the divine reality that corresponds to the modest building of the temple is quite remarkable.

The people seeing the restored temple may only see bronze pillars of relatively short stature, but these bronze pillars represent the entrance to the Lord's palace and should be seen as if they were vast bronze mountains. In verses 2 and 3 we are given the colors of the horses of the chariots. We were also given the colors of the horses back in chapter 1, but the colors are different here.

The colors of the horses here have much more in common with the colors of the horses in John's vision in Revelation chapter 6 verses 1 to 8. Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, Come. And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer. When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, Come, and out came another horse, bright red.

His rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword. When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, Come, and I looked, and behold, a black horse, and its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine.

When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, Come, and I looked, and behold, a pale horse, and its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth to kill with sword and with famine, and with pestilence, and by wild beasts of the earth. What are we to make of the colours of the horses in Zacharias' vision? Elsewhere in the prophets we see groups of destroyers listed, typically three or sometimes four in number.

Most commonly these are given as pestilence, sword and famine, with captivity as an occasional addition. The horses in Revelation seem to represent conquest, sword, famine and death or pestilence. Here in Zacharias we should presume that the red horses are connected with blood, and therefore the sword, and the black horses with death, mourning and desolation, perhaps also economic disaster.

The white horses represent victory and conquest. The dappled horses represent plague, sickness and pestilence. Jordan suggests that the dappled horses might make us think of leprosy.

Zacharias asks the interpreting angel about the meaning of the horses. He is told that the horses are going out to the four winds of heaven. The four winds of heaven were formally mentioned in Zacharias chapter 2 verse 6 in the third of the visions.

For I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens, declares the Lord. There the Lord declared that he was making his people like the four winds of the heavens. The second vision also referred to four craftsmen responding to the four horns.

As in the case of the third vision, we should recognise connections to this final vision. In chapter 1 there was a man riding on a red horse to whom the three sets of horses and their riders reported. Here there are four sets of horses mentioned, but only three of them are mentioned as going out.

There is no reference to the first chariot with the red horses going out. Likely we should connect the chariot with the red horses with the man on the red horse in chapter 1. Although some wonder whether the red horses are referred to as the strong horses in verse 7, it is likely that they do not go out. The Lord's judgments are occurring by means other than war, chiefly through pestilence and plague and by economic disaster.

The chariots that go forth go in the direction of the north and the south. The two chariots that go north are the black chariot followed after by the white chariot, presumably symbolising devastation and desolation, followed by conquest. The chariot that goes south is the chariot pulled by the dappled horse, representing pestilence and plague.

Fittingly it seems to go to Egypt, which would be struck again as it was in the exodus. The two great powers that dominated much of Israel's life were the northern power and the southern power. The southern power was typically Egypt, the power in the north was Assyria, Babylon or Persia or some other power like that.

It's possible, as Anthony Pettison notes, that the south country might be a reference to Edom, however Egypt is the more likely possibility. The horses sent forth are described as strong, they are the war horses of the Lord, eager for battle. As they perform their work they set the spirit of the Lord at rest, having accomplished the purpose for which they were sent out.

The chariots deal with the bad peace that the patrolling riders described in chapter 1 verse 11, establishing a good rest for the spirit of the Lord in its place, perhaps we should also note a hint of a Sabbath theme here. After the night vision's end, Zechariah receives a prophecy and is instructed to perform a sign act. He is instructed to take some recently returned exiles, Heldi, Tobijah, Jediah and Jeziah, taking silver and gold from them and making a crown with it.

Returning exiles brought with them large quantities of treasures for the rebuilding of the temple and other purposes, often donated by rulers, as we see in Ezra. The form of the

term used for crown here is plural but the context makes it clear that this is a single crown. As Pettison notes, some commentators see in this a composite or two-tiered crown which would be a fitting image for the vision.

The crown is then placed upon the head of Joshua the high priest, symbolising the uniting of the offices of king and priest. Zechariah then delivers a prophecy concerning the coming branch. The figure of the branch was previously mentioned in chapter 3 verse 8, again in connection with Joshua.

Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign. Behold, I will bring my servant the branch. There it was clear that Joshua himself was not the branch but that he was a sign of the coming branch.

The figure of the branch is mentioned elsewhere in scripture, in places like Jeremiah chapter 23 verses 5 to 6 where it is clear that he is the messianic heir of David. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely, and this is the name by which he will be called.

The Lord is our righteousness. As Jordan underlines, it is the priest who has made a king, not the king who has made a priest. Although the high priest had a turban with a golden plate with holy to the Lord engraved upon it, here he is given the sort of crown that the king might wear.

In the Old Testament kingship and priesthood were separated. However the expectation was that one day a priest would come who would enjoy the prerogatives of kingship. Most famously there is a reference to priesthood after the order of Melchizedek in Psalm 110 verse 4 which was of great interest to the author of Hebrews.

The sign act immediately raises some questions. Is Joshua being identified as the branch? From chapter 3 where he is presented not as the branch but as a sign of the branch, and from the fact that Joshua is not a descendant of David, it doesn't seem to be that he is the one being referred to as the branch here. The branch is said to branch out from his place, perhaps a reference to his arising from the root of Jesse.

He will build the temple of the Lord. Although the temple of the Lord is currently being built by Zerubbabel and according to divine promise Zerubbabel would also finish that building, this seems to point forward to a greater temple which the Messiah, the branch, would construct. We are told that there will be a priest upon or by his throne.

Whose throne? The branch's? Some see two different figures here. Jeremiah chapter 33 verses 17 to 18 speak of continuing Davidic kingship and Levitical priesthood. For thus says the Lord, David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel,

and the Levitical priest shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever.

However this does not seem to fit the context or the language well, especially when we consider the way that Joshua the high priest has just been symbolically crowned. It is probably better to take his throne as a reference to the throne of the Lord. The Lord establishes the branch to rule in his own name.

What is the meaning of the statement, the council of peace shall be between them both? It most likely refers either to the branch and the Lord or to the Lord and the people, not to the offices of priest and king considered in the abstract. Seeing it as about the relationship between the branch and the Lord might fit with the description of Psalm 110 verses 1 to 5. The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter.

Rule in the midst of your enemies. Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power in holy garments from the womb of the morning. The Jew of your youth will be yours.

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord is at your right hand.

He will shatter kings on the day of his wrath. The crown is a sign. It will be placed in the temple as a memorial, presumably for the Lord primarily.

It is a sign of the fact that just as the four men brought treasures from the north country that were used to make a royal crown, the Lord would one day establish the branch who would build the great temple of the Lord where the crown of rule and receive tribute and gifts from people of far off for his establishment of the Lord's house. A question to consider, James Jordan underlines the way that this prophetic sign draws our attention to the fact that the prophecies of Zechariah have a near and also a further fulfillment. What are some of the ways in which the other night visions of Zechariah might anticipate a longer term fulfillment? After an initial prophecy delivered shortly after the people started rebuilding the temple following the word of Haggai, the first six chapters of Zechariah are mostly concerned with the eight night visions of the prophet, a section introduced with the superscription of chapter one verse seven.

Those visions were most likely all received near the end of the second year of Darius, the year in which the temple rebuilding work was taken up again. Chapters seven to eight serve as a bridge between those visions and the oracles of chapters nine to fourteen. They are a unity starting with a new superscription and the questions of verses two and three which are addressed at the end of chapter eight.

However this chapter also continues themes of earlier chapters. Mark Boda and other

commentators have observed ways in which chapters seven to eight can be read as a recapitulation and digest of the earlier chapters of the book of Zechariah and even also the book of Zechariah's companion prophet of Haggai. The prophecies of chapter seven come two years into the rebuilding project which started in 520 BC and would be finished in 516 BC in the sixth year of Darius, 70 years after the temple of Solomon had been destroyed.

While the prophets prior to the exile had largely dated their messages relative to the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel, now the dating is relative to a Persian king. The Jews are under the reign of the Persian empire and the dating reflects this situation. The prophecy is introduced with a brief narrative section.

The city of Bethel was formerly within the northern kingdom of Israel and a key site of its idolatry. Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat, had set up a rival sanctuary there to that in Jerusalem. It was now part of the Persian administrative province of Yehud or Judah as we see in Ezra chapter 2 verse 28 where men of Bethel and Ai are listed among the returnees to the land.

The people of Bethel had sent an official delegation to Jerusalem seeking the Lord's favor and also inquiring of the priests and prophets of the Lord concerning the continued observance of the fast of the fifth month. Bethel does not seem to have been the same center of false worship after the return from exile. Now they largely seem to share the same worship as the rest of the people centered upon Jerusalem.

Although the temple had not yet been completed it was already a site of sacrifice. The altar had been set up again the better part of 20 years previously and the rebuilding was already well underway so perhaps other parts of the temple and its complex were in use at this time. Almost 70 years previously in 586 BC the temple had been destroyed.

After its destruction and the fall of the kingdom of Judah it seems that the people had observed a ritual fast in the fifth month which according to 2nd Kings chapter 25 verse 8 was the month that the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem. Two months later in an event grimly reminiscent of the story of the brothers betrayal and selling of Joseph, Gedaliah the Jewish governor that the Babylonians had established was assassinated spelling an end to the possibility of Jewish autonomy within the Babylonian empire. The fast of the fifth and the seventh months commemorated the devastation of the first temple and the death of Gedaliah, events that together marked the utter ruin of the nation.

Both of these fasts continue to be practiced by Jews today, Tishba'ath and Som Gedaliah. The people of Bethel however were unsure of whether they should continue the fast of the fifth month now that the temple was being rebuilt. Was it time to leave that fast behind them? Presumably the leaders of Bethel need clarity on the matter as they determine whether or not that fast would be observed in the following year.

The word of the Lord that Zechariah receives is addressed not merely to the delegation from Bethel but to the priests and all the people of the land. The message interrogates the practice of the fast exposing its real motives although the narrative concerning the delegation from Bethel only mentions the fast of the fifth month. Zechariah's message also speaks of the fast of the seventh, the fast commemorating the assassination of Gedaliah.

In the prophecies of Jeremiah and Daniel the period of Babylonian hegemony is given as 70 years. In 2nd Chronicles chapter 36 verses 20 to 22 the 70 year period is related to the period of Babylonian dominance but also to the period of the lands lying desolate. In Zechariah chapter 1 verse 12 and 7 verse 5 the 70 years seem to extend over two decades beyond the period of Babylon's dominance to relate to the time of the temples lying in ruin.

This period would end very shortly as the temple would be completed in 516 BC 70 years after its first destruction. The Lord wants the people to examine the motives that drive their fasting. In Isaiah chapter 58 verses 3 to 5 we find another example of the prophetic questioning of the practice of fasting.

Fasting that has bad motives or is otherwise displeasing to God. Zechariah's prophecy challenges the people to ask themselves whether their fasting was really a mourning of their sins, a turning away from their iniquity, and a setting of their whole hearts upon seeking the Lord and his mercy. Or was their fasting merely hypocritical, perhaps mourning the devastation that was the consequence of their sins but not the sins themselves, nor truly addressing themselves to the Lord.

Their fasting, the message implies, has been self-serving as have their feasts. Their religious rituals mask the fact that their hearts are still not set upon the Lord. As a consequence their religious rituals are illegitimate and indeed offensive to the Lord.

It is unclear whether verse 7 belongs more with the verses that immediately precede it or those which follow. It might fit with either, highlighting the consistency of the word of the Lord through Zechariah with the messages delivered through the earlier prophets. Prior to the exile, during periods when Judah enjoyed a prosperous and independent existence in the land, the Lord had addressed Judah by his prophets, warning them of the importance of practice that was congruent with their profession and their religious performance, as we see in verses 5 to 6. Alternatively, if we take verse 7 in relation to the verses that follow, it underlines the consistency between the message of the Lord prior to the exile and now following the exile.

Although verses 9 and 10 might initially be read as words addressed to the people after the exile, verses 11 and following focus primarily upon the response of the people prior to the exile and the way that the exile was a consequence of their rejection of the Lord's word. Looking back at places like Jeremiah chapter 7 verses 5 to 7, we can see what

Zechariah is picking up upon here. For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

Judah had failed to respond properly to that word and now the same word is addressed to them again, but now attended by the cautionary example of their fathers before them. The Lord's focus in this charge is particularly upon the need for justice within the life of the people and their society. The perversion of justice, especially in the case of the weakest and most vulnerable and dependent within the society, is frequently a matter for which the Lord condemns his people within the prophetic literature.

The Lord is the guardian and defender of the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, and the poor, marginal figures who depend heavily upon the justice, the mercy, and the kindness of the people in the society more broadly. Where they are mistreated, the Lord will act against their oppressors. The response of the people to the Lord's warning prior to the exile was stubborn refusal to listen.

It wasn't as if it was hard to hear. The Lord sent many former prophets by his spirit, each bearing the same message, but the people hardened their hearts against him, preparing themselves for judgment as a result, and provoking the Lord's wrath. For their refusal to hear, they received poetic justice.

The Lord called to them by his prophets and they refused to hear. So when they call upon him, he will refuse to hear. The Lord then came like a whirlwind upon them, scattering them among the nations, devastating and desolating the land that he had given them.

A question to consider, where else in the scriptures would we go to find teaching concerning appropriate fasting? Zechariah chapters 7 and 8 are a bridge from the visions of the opening six chapters to the oracles of chapters 9 to 14. Chapter 7 began with a delegation sent by the people of Bethel inquiring about the continued practice of the fast of the fifth month. That fast commemorated the destruction of the temple, but now that the temple is being rebuilt, it's natural to wonder whether it should be continued.

The message of Zechariah in response to that question continues in this chapter. In these two chapters there is also a gathering of themes that run throughout the book. Chapter 7 presented the cautionary example of past generations, while chapter 8 articulates a vision of hope from which people can draw confidence for the future.

The material of these chapters can be divided by prophetic formulae of the kind that we see in chapter 7 verse 1, verse 4, verse 8, chapter 8 verse 1 and chapter 8 verse 18. Chapter 8 verse 1 stands apart from the other formulae in speaking of the word of the

Lord of hosts coming without specifying to whom it came, although we should presume that it was Zechariah. Along with these prophetic formulae dividing larger sections of material, we have the formula thus says the Lord of hosts by which the material of chapter 8 can be divided into 10 short thematically clustered oracles.

Reading the oracles of this chapter we should often recognize echoes of language of earlier parts of the book. For instance, the declaration of the Lord's jealousy for Jerusalem recalls places like chapter 1 verses 13 to 16. And the Lord answered gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.

So the angel who talked with me said to me, cry out. Thus says the Lord of hosts, I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion, and I am exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease. For while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster.

Therefore thus says the Lord, I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy. My house shall be built in it, declares the Lord of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. The declaration that the Lord has returned to Zion in verse 3 recalls chapter 2 verse 10.

Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the Lord. Similar resonances can be found throughout this section, serving to underline previous messages delivered both by Zechariah and by Haggai. It is quite likely that this material from Zechariah was compiled at a later point by the editor or editors of the book of Zechariah, or perhaps by Zechariah himself, and arranged in order to accent such themes.

The jealousy of the Lord is a prominent dimension of the Old Testament's witness to his character, most notably within the Ten Commandments. As a jealous God, the Lord will not tolerate any who would take his glory from him, or who would seek to attack, destroy, or estrange his people from him. Nor will he passively tolerate his people's own betrayal.

The jealousy of the Lord is a consistent reason for his salvation of his people. He will not allow other powers to take his people from him. He will also act for the sake of his great name.

The jealousy of the Lord can, among other things, be understood as an expression of his love, a love that will not let his people go. As in the third vision of the man with the measuring line, verse 3 speaks of the Lord's return to dwell in Zion, in the midst of his people. Through his presence within her, Jerusalem will become the faithful city, starting to reflect the Lord's character.

Alternatively, we could interpret this statement as a reference to the Lord's own faithfulness, by which the city will be named. The Lord's holy presence will set her apart

as holy to himself. The former prophets had warned of the desolation of the streets of the wicked city, the silencing of its songs, the stilling of its squares, and the cessation of its commerce.

As Jeremiah chapter 9, verse 21 expressed this, for death has come up into our windows. It has entered our palaces, cutting off the children from the streets, and the young men from the squares. The prophetic vision of a good city is a place where the elderly can pass their final years, enjoying rest from their labors, and where carefree children can play in safety.

It's a place of joy, play, and song, where the gentle passage of life through its seasons, and from older generations to their successors, is visible and peaceful. The restoration of the joy of the city is also declared in places like Jeremiah chapter 33, verses 10 to 11. Thus says the Lord, In this place of which you say, It is a waste, without man or beast, in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man or inhabitant or beast, there shall be heard again the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank-offerings to the house of the Lord.

Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever. For I will restore the fortunes of the land, as at first, says the Lord. This promised future is remarkable, and may seem incredible, perhaps meeting with incredulity from some who struggle to see beyond the current situation of the city.

However, the Lord, who has the power to achieve this, does not suffer from the same constraints of vision. The account of the restoration of Jerusalem and its future peace continues in verses 7 and 8. The Lord's people, who had been scattered, will be regathered, a promise familiar from places like Jeremiah chapter 31, verses 7 to 8. For thus says the Lord, Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations. Proclaim, give praise, and say, O Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel.

Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labour, together a great company. They shall return here. A surprising detail in Zechariah's prophecy is the reference to the east and the west countries.

It is far more typical for the scriptures to speak of the north and the south, even though Egypt was in the south-west, and Mesopotamia in the north-east. However, the actual reference is from the land of the rising and the land of the going in of the sun, which suggests that the Lord is going to gather his exiles from the whole circuit of the sun's daytime passage, from one end of the heavens to another, a far more comprehensive gathering than from the east country and from the west country might imply. He will manifest his character as the faithful and righteous God as he saves and restores his

people.

Verse 8 includes the familiar covenant formula of I shall be their God and they shall be my people. The longest of the ten oracles of the chapter is the sixth, running from verse 9 to verse 13, bookended by the charge, Let your hands be strong, encouraging the people in the task of rebuilding the temple. This prophecy most likely refers not to the initial founding of the temple under the governorship of Shesh-Baza, but to the restarting of the work on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month of the second year of Darius.

Zacharias' prophecy here recalls that of Haggai chapter 2 verse 15 to 19. Now then, consider from this day onward, before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to the wine-vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty.

I struck you and all the products of your toil, with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did not turn to me, declares the Lord. Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider, is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have yielded nothing. But from this day on I will bless you.

As in that prophecy, there is a contrast between the former days of lack and danger and the days of prosperity, plenty, blessing and security that will follow. Judah and his land will be fruitful, experiencing the blessings of the covenant rather than its curses, and in fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, Judah would become a byword for blessing among the nations. The Lord's judgment upon his people had been driven by a set purpose.

His purpose to bless Jerusalem and Judah is no less determined. At the end of the preceding chapter in verses nine and ten, the Lord had reminded the people through Zechariah of the message that he had given their forebears by the prophets prior to the exile. Thus says the Lord of hosts, render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow the fatherless, the sojourner or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.

The father's refusal to pay attention had led to their destruction. However, as the generation of the remnant of the returnees heed the warning of the Lord delivered in their own generation, they will experience the Lord's determined purpose to do them good. Chapter seven had begun with the inquiry of the men of Bethel concerning the practice of the fast of the fifth month, commemorating the destruction of the temple.

Now that the temple was being rebuilt in Jerusalem, should the situation change. Along with the fast of the fifth month, there was also the fast of the seventh to commemorate the assassination of Gedaliah the governor and the end of Judah's autonomy. Here

toward the end of the section, the Lord addresses the question of the men of Bethel again.

The Lord speaks not only of the fasts of the fifth and the seventh months, but also of fasts of the fourth and tenth months, likely two other fasts related to the downfall of Jerusalem. Jerusalem's walls had been breached in the fourth month, and the siege of the city had begun in the tenth. It is possible that various fasts were practiced at different places in the land, and that not every city observed the same days.

Addressing a wider audience, Zechariah might be mentioning fast days beyond those in view when his word was more focused upon Bethel. Mourning and the sorrowful memory of the past would be eclipsed by the celebration of new blessings. Fasts would be transformed into feasts.

This transformation is one that would be received and enjoyed by the people as they lived in terms of the Lord's blessing and liberation. The gift of the law at Sinai, for instance, was the means by which Israel could live out the reality of their freedom that had been wrought by the Exodus. The more that they rejected the way of justice and faithfulness, the more that they would find themselves being bound once more, subdued by oppressors, and suffering the consequences of their sins.

For this reason, the promise of coming blessing here is attended by a charge to love truth and peace. Faithfulness, justice, and peace would be the manner in which their liberty would be enjoyed, and they must desire and pursue such things. Several of the prophets speak of pilgrimages to Jerusalem from the nations in the days to come.

As Zion is raised up, people will flock to her from the peoples, bringing gifts and tribute to the Lord and seeking his face in his favor. Indeed, the book of Zechariah itself will end with another development of this theme. Jerusalem's blessing will have a magnetic effect for others, drawing them to its light.

This theme continues in the tenth and final oracle of the chapter. Gentiles will be so eager to join themselves to the Lord's people that ten of them will grasp a single Jew in order to accompany him to Jerusalem and to identify with the Jews, as the Lord is manifestly with that people. This might, among other things, be seen as both a reversal of Babel, the mention of the men from different tongues, and a fulfillment of the blessing of Abraham.

A question to consider, can you think of any further ways in which this chapter alludes back to earlier parts of Zechariah and Haggai? In Zechariah chapter 9 we begin a new section of the book. Chapters 9 to 14 contain two extended oracles that are marked out by prophetic formulae. The first part of Zechariah ran from chapters 1 to 6, containing the night visions of Zechariah.

Chapters 7 to 8 transition between those earlier chapters, summing up some of their themes and leading us to chapters 9 to 14, with which the book concludes. The oracles contained in these chapters are extremely difficult to understand, and there is little agreement to be found among scholars, many of whom date these prophecies to a period later than that of Zechariah. Determining the events to which these prophecies refer is also difficult, with a considerable range of different positions being held by different scholars, positions that don't map easily onto differences between conservatives and liberals, for instance.

Many of the prophecies of these chapters seem quite vague, others more symbolic. Some of these prophecies, related to Christ in the New Testament, have been taken to be referring specifically to him, whereas there are other commentators who recognise that Christ is being referred to, yet believe that there are more immediate references in view. Given the fact that verse 13 speaks of conflict between the Jews and the Greeks, many commentators think that we might be dealing with the aftermath of the conquest of the land by Alexander the Great.

Our historical knowledge of the relevant periods here is fairly sketchy, and as a result it's difficult to rest too much upon any particular connections that we might make. Looking at the chapter more broadly, it seems to speak of an invasion and conquest of the land. There are various themes of exodus scattered throughout as well.

In Zechariah chapter 6, in the final one of the night visions, the chariots were sent out from between the two bronze mountains. The Lord was going to shake things up among the nations. And in this chapter we see the movement of the Lord, starting with Syria, down to Phoenicia and then to Philistia.

Moving from north to south, the Lord is acting within the land. Having discovered an Assyrian stele with a reference to Hadrach, we know that it was one of the cities of the region. The full extent of the boundaries of the promised land that are mentioned in various parts of Deuteronomy and elsewhere include the realm of Damascus and in the prophecy of Ezekiel, in the idealised division of the land.

Tyre, Sidon and the realm of the Philistines are also included within Israel's territory. Tyre and Sidon were Phoenician cities, famous for trade, and had long had dealings with Israel over its history, most notably during the reign of Hiram. Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, was a Sidonian princess, and many of the materials used for Israel's temples were obtained from Tyre and Sidon.

Tyre is also mentioned in the prophecy of Amos chapter 1 verses 9-10. Thus says the Lord, For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they delivered up a whole people to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood. So I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre, and it shall devour his strongholds.

After it was conquered by Alexander the Great, Tyre would indeed be destroyed by fire. Tyre and Sidon, which had become very rich by their trading, prided themselves upon their wealth and also their security. Tyre seemed impregnable as a city, an island fortress defended by its breakwater.

It had withstood lengthy sieges in the past, lasting many years. Playing upon the word for Tyre, saw, the Lord speaks about Tyre building herself a rampart, a matzah. However, there is an irony here, as the word matzah is also the word for siege.

Tyre was successfully overthrown by Alexander in 332 BC. While he had originally tried to blockade the city and capture it using more conventional means, he ended up having to build a causeway to the city and then breached its walls. In addition to Tyre's pride in its security, it took pride in its wealth.

It had heaped up silver like dust and fine gold like the mud of the streets. There is again an irony here. Silver and gold are plentiful, but they are plentiful like the dust and mud of the streets, which are trampled and end up proving worthless.

Ezekiel 28, verses 2-5 also speak of these traits of Tyre, particularly its pride in its wealth and its wisdom and the way that those things would be brought to nothing. Son of man, say to the Prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord God, Because your heart is proud, and you have said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas. Yet you are but a man, and no God, though you make your heart like the heart of a God.

You are indeed wiser than Daniel. No secret is hidden from you. By your wisdom and your understanding, you have made wealth for yourself, and have gathered gold and silver into your treasuries.

By your great wisdom in your trade, you have increased your wealth, and your heart has become proud in your wealth. Tyre's wealth and strength would end up coming to nothing. With the coming of Alexander the Great, it would be entirely overthrown.

Given the power and wealth of Tyre, its defeat would terrify and dismay the Philistines, with whom they were often associated. The Philistines do not seem to have been a great force at this point in history. Their significance here is probably on account of their lengthy historical conflicts with Israel, rather than on account of their strength at that moment in time.

As in Amos chapter 1 verses 6-8, there is no reference to Gath here, which appears to have been removed from the list of the major cities of the Philistines some time previously. After his defeat of Tyre in 332 BC, Alexander had gone down to Gaza, taking that city with the same siege engines with which he had taken Tyre. Taking the city, he had put the men to the sword, taken the women and the children as slaves, and dragged the eunuch who had commanded the city, and refused to kneel to him, around the city

behind a chariot while still alive.

Gaza was clearly justified in being dismayed by the news from Tyre. The consequence of the conquest of Philistia is the humbling of its pride, the cutting off of its abominations, and the repopulation of its territories. The Jebusites had formerly controlled the territory of Jerusalem, and many of them seemed to have been assimilated into the nation of Israel over time.

Ornan the Jebusite, for instance, sold the land that became the place for the temple. Despite the judgment falling upon them, and their loss of nationhood, and their humbling as a people, there is a blessing held out for the Philistines, the prospect of assimilating into the people of Israel that surround them. Those that remain can also become a remnant for God.

They can be like a clan or extended family within the nation of Judah. As this power under his control moves from the north to the south, the Lord will protect his people and his house. Even in the midst of Alexander's sanguinary invasion, which devastated surrounding powers, they would be spared.

We don't know exactly how and why Jerusalem was spared, but there is a fascinating passage at the end of book 11 of Josephus' Antiquities of the Jews, within which he relates the events that followed the defeat of Gaza. Jadda, the high priest at the time, had heard news of Alexander's victory, and was unsurprisingly greatly dismayed. He and the rest of the people sacrificed to the Lord and sought his help.

He then received a dream in which he was told that he should open the gates of the city, prepare it for a celebration, get the people to wear white garments, and the priest to dress in their clothes of office. He should not be afraid. The Lord would protect them.

While Alexander and the men following him had originally intended to plunder and destroy the city, when Alexander saw Jadda and the procession that was coming out to meet him, his mind was quite changed. Josephus writes, For Alexander, when he saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priest stood clothed with fine linen, and the high priest in purple and scarlet clothing, with his mitre on his head, having the golden plate whereon the name of God was engraved, he 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, Parmenio alone went up to him and asked him how it came to pass that, when all others adored him, he should adore the high priest of the Jews. To whom he replied, I did not adore him, but that God who hath honoured him with his high priesthood.

For I saw this very person in a dream, in this very habit, when I was at Dios in Macedonia, who, when I was considering with myself how I might obtain the dominion of Asia, exhorted me to make no delay, but boldly to press over the sea thither, 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 that habit, 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. Josephus goes on to record that the high priest and the other priests showed Alexander the references to him within the book of Daniel.

As a result, Alexander granted the Jews special favours within the empire. If this account of Josephus is even partially true, then Alexander's campaign very neatly fits the initial things foretold within this chapter. Verses 9 to 10 are commonly related to Christ as they refer to the triumphal entry within the book of Matthew and elsewhere.

However, in the more immediate context, they may refer primarily to the figure of Alexander the Great. According to Josephus' account, Alexander the Great enjoyed a peaceful triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem, coming not with the violence of warhorse and chariot as he had at Tyre and Gaza, but in peace and with celebrations as a welcome deliverer. The description of the king that is coming might also recall Genesis chapter 49 verses 10 to 11 and the blessing upon Judah.

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples, binding his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine. He has washed his garments in wine, and his vesture in the blood of grapes. There is also here an allusion to the messianic Psalm 72 verse 8. May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

This would very naturally be fulfilled in the figure of Alexander. However, it looks forward to a figure that's even greater than Alexander. Alexander is a world emperor.

We have an even greater world emperor, of course, in the figure of Christ. As Christ enters into Jerusalem in his triumphal entry, he is having an even fuller fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah. He may not be the immediate and initial referent of the prophecy, but he is the one in whom it finds its fuller realization.

The book of Daniel prophesies into the intertestamental period, particularly in chapter 11, concerning the events that will happen following the defeat of the empire of Persia. The period in question is described with symbolic language. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

This would strongly evoke the memory of the figure of Joseph in Genesis chapter 37

verse 24. And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty.

There was no water in it. There is a similar waterless pit within the story of Jeremiah, who also ends up being taken down into Egypt against his wishes. The prophecy of verses 11 to 13 might look forward to a time beyond the conquest of Alexander, to the period when the land was under the control of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the brutal king of the Greek Seleucid dynasty, who sought forcibly to Hellenize the Jews and to defile their worship.

The conflict between the traditional and the Hellenized Jews led to civil war. This civil war escalated when Antiochus entered on the side of the Hellenizers. The events of this period are described in the books of the Maccabees.

The Maccabean revolt was a near miraculous success, leading to Jerusalem being recaptured in 164 BC. And the temple rededicated. By the 140s BC, Israel has secured semi-independence of the Seleucids under the rule of the Hasmonean dynasty, who were ethnarchs or kings and also high priests.

The Jews would later achieve independence and the Hasmonean kingdom would expand to include much of the surrounding region. The conflict described in verse 13 seems to refer to a joining together of the faithful people in opposition to some other force. Judah refers to the people of the south and Ephraim the people formerly associated with the Newerland kingdom.

They are joined together like a bow and an arrow. The conflict between the sons of Zion and the sons of Greece might, as Peter Lightheart observes, not primarily be the conflict between the external forces of Greece and the Jews, but rather the conflict between the faithful traditional Jews and the Hellenized Jews, those who had allowed the worship of the Lord to become corrupted. The Lord would empower them in their struggle.

He had bent Judah's bow and made Ephraim his arrow and his arrows would go forth like lightning. We see a rapid cycle of images in verse 15. Lightheart notes the movement from devouring or eating, presumably referring to the power of the sword, to treading down the slingstones, the weapons of the adversaries.

Treading down slingstones is however a strange image and Lightheart suggests that it is most likely because it transitions from treading down the weapons of the adversaries to an image of treading out grapes in a harvest. Elsewhere in the scripture the image of treading out grapes is used for victory in battle and this victorious wine pressing leads to the Jews drinking and roaring as if drunk with wine. They become full like a bowl, which might be an image of wine but also an image of blood and it is such a transition from an image of wine to an image of blood that seemed to inform the final image of this verse.

Drench like the corners of the altar. The import then is that this would serve as a sort of purification of the land. The corners or the horns of the altar represent all the extremities

of the land.

Those would all be sacrificially cleansed, sacrificially cleansed through victory in battle. The Lord's hand would be demonstrated in all of this. He would save his people as his own flock, setting them apart as his special possession, like precious stones or jewels in a crown.

This would lead to joy and celebration in the goodness of the Lord and the flourishing of the people. A question to consider, as we reflect upon the original context and meaning of the one entering Jerusalem, how might it help us better to understand the ways in which the gospel writers are using this prophecy? The oracle that began in chapter 9 of Zechariah continues into chapter 10. Chapter 9, I argued, foretold the coming of Alexander the Great and then looked forward to the period of the Maccabees.

The conflict between the sons of Zion and the sons of Javan, or the sons of Greece, relates to the conflict between the Hellenized Jews and the traditional Jews within that period. Chapter 9 contained allusions back to the story of the patriarchs and to the Passover and the Exodus, in details such as that of the waterless pit that recalled the pit into which Joseph was thrown. Such Exodus themes continue and become more prominent in chapter 10.

From the waterless pit in chapter 9 verse 11 to the rain of verse 1 of chapter 10, we might see a deliverance from drought. This recalls Deuteronomy chapter 11 verses 13 to 17, verses that promise the rains in their season if the people obey the Lord. Verse 2, which speaks of the futility of the household gods or the teraphim and the lies of the diviners, seems a little out of place within the historical context.

After the Jews return from exile there do not seem to be the same problems with idolatry as there were prior to it. Indeed, the reference to household gods and diviners might recall an earlier period of Israel's history. The teraphim, of course, are most associated with the story of Jacob and Laban.

Jacob's teraphim, or household gods, being taken by Rachel. The character of Micah in Judges chapter 17 also has household gods. Perhaps, as with the reference to the waterless pit in the preceding chapter, the people's failures in the area of idolatry are being described in a way that is designed to bring to mind these earlier stories of Israel's history.

It is also possible to see the reference here as referring back to the reasons why they were sent into exile in the first place, rather than to sins that would happen later in the nation's history. Such a statement would certainly be reminiscent of prophecies such as that of Jeremiah. In verse 16 of the preceding chapter, the Lord had described his people as a flock.

On that day the Lord their God will save them as the flock of his people, for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land. Flock, sheep, and shepherd imagery becomes more prominent within this oracle, especially in the following chapter, but also here, where the Lord speaks about the people wandering like sheep, lacking a shepherd. The shepherd that they lack here might be a reference to a Davidic ruler, or another sort of good king.

This figure should be distinguished from the shepherds plural that are mentioned in verse 3, the ones against whom God's anger is hot. Those shepherds are most likely the leaders of other nations. They are related to the leaders, or more literally the he-goats.

In places like Ezekiel chapter 34, the Lord speaks against the false shepherds of his people. Here the false shepherds are most likely referring to the Seleucid rulers. The Lord will rise up against those false shepherds as the true shepherd of his people.

He will make Judah, the ruling tribe that represents the whole, like a majestic steed in battle. In the preceding chapter he described making Judah his bow and Ephraim his arrow. Once again the Lord is going to act with power, not just for his people but through his people, equipping them as a weapon of his warfare.

As the Lord's majestic steed, they would put to shame the riders on horses that are verse 5. The riders on horses are most likely the Seleucid kings and their armies. The Lord acting as the shepherd of his people to restore them and re-establish them, placing faithful shepherds over them, is also described in places like Jeremiah chapter 23 verses 3 to 5. Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord.

Behold the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. Verse 4 of Zechariah chapter 10 also describes the establishment of new rule within the nation. Here however the governing metaphor is architectural.

The ruler is compared to the cornerstone from which the building is built up, the tent peg that gives security. The Lord would also make Judah, as in verse 13 of the preceding chapter, his battle bow. Where formerly Judah had been harassed and oppressed, Judah would subdue their enemies and trample them underfoot.

Former oppressors would be crushed, receiving the consequences of their wickedness. The northern kingdom of Israel had been removed from the land in 722 BC by the Assyrians. The southern kingdom had finally been overthrown by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

The great division in the kingdom, first a judgment for the sin of Solomon, and a consequence of the arrogance and hubris of his son, continued for many years where the nations warred against each other and sometimes enjoyed a fragile peace. However both Jeremiah and Ezekiel foretold a time when the two nations would no longer be separate. There was already a sense in which this was coming to pass after the return, when the as Jews, all entering more fully into the status of Judahites.

However in the time of Zechariah, the people who had returned to the land were only a small number relative to the numbers that formerly existed there. Their territory was limited, much of the former land had been lost to them and they were also under the rule of the Persians. The overwhelming majority of Jews still existed in exile communities outside of the land.

Here the Lord seems to be speaking of a greater restoration still to come. He will re-establish his people, not just as a small territory within the former region of Judah under foreign rule, but as an independent nation enjoying something nearer to the extent of its former boundaries. It would be as if they had never been sent into exile in the first place.

As the nation enjoyed its new independence and its boundaries extended, the land would be dramatically repopulated. The people had been sown among the nations, dwelling in exile communities for a few centuries, and yet as the Lord whistled for them, as a shepherd might whistle for his flock, many would return to the land. The Lord speaks of bringing them from Egypt and from Assyria.

A number of different waves of refugees from Judah had gone down to Egypt at various points in history. One of the most notable of these waves of refugees is described for us in the book of Jeremiah, as people fled after the assassination of Gedaliah, the governor of Judah. Egypt, of course, was the place from which the original Exodus had come up.

Assyria no longer existed as an empire, but the Assyrians were the ones who had removed the people from the northern kingdom and settled them in territories far from the land. While the Assyrians were no longer a power, the consequences of their historic actions remained. The Lord speaks of bringing his people to the land of Gilead and Lebanon.

Gilead in the region of the Transjordan and Lebanon in the far north represent some of the furthest extremities of the land of Israel. As the Lord brought back the people and repopulated the land, it would also recover territory that had long been lost. The Lord describes his paving of the way for this using imagery taken directly from the story of the Exodus, passing through the Sea of Troubles, striking down the waves of the sea, and all the depths of the Nile being dried up.

Foreign rulers would also be humbled as the Lord restored his people. Perhaps the Assyrians here are standing in part for the Syrian Seleucids, who will be humbled

through the Maccabean Revolt and the subsequent rise of the Jewish nation under the Hasmonean dynasty. A question to consider, looking closely at this chapter, how can you see the theme of strength and strengthening being played out within it? Zechariah chapter 11 seems to continue the oracle that began in chapter 9. The preceding two chapters, I argued, dealt primarily with the context of the Greek period.

It spoke of the Jews under the Seleucids, and then of the Maccabean Revolt and the conflict with the Hellenized Jews. These concluding chapters of Zechariah are some of the hardest to understand in the entire Bible, and in the minds of many commentators this is the hardest of all. Within the chapter, Zechariah seems to perform some sort of prophetic drama, representing the Lord being rejected as the people.

The question of when to relate this to is a difficult one. In light of the ways that this chapter is used within the Gospel of Matthew particularly, many have seen this as looking forward to the story of Christ. Peter Lighthouse, considering the context of the preceding chapters, argues that this should be seen to relate to the Maccabean period, and perhaps leading up to the time of the Herods.

That period is also dealt with within Daniel chapters 11 and 12. Thinking about in terms of a theological pattern, he compares this to the wilderness period under Moses, and the rejection of Moses, the shepherd of his people, by the people. This also continues the themes of Passover and Exodus that have been at play in the preceding chapters.

Anthony Pettison, using people like Michael Stead, argues that this chapter should be read as retrospective, casting a theological judgment upon Israel's history that had led up to the removal of Israel and Judah from the land, and their current position under foreign rule. Of the positions on offer, I find this perhaps the most compelling. Within his Gospel, Matthew uses Zechariah, but his use of Zechariah, as in his use of other Old Testament prophecy, is subtle, and his approach to fulfillment is not as straightforward as many readers would presume.

This is particularly important in his use of Zechariah chapter 11, which he seems to attribute to the prophet Jeremiah. This has caused commentators all sorts of headaches. Did the evangelist make some mistake? Was some error made in copying the Gospel? Far more likely, and more interesting, is the possibility, and indeed likelihood, I would argue, that Matthew was engaged in a very elaborate intertextual play, bringing the prophecy of Zechariah into correspondence with a number of prophecies within the book of Jeremiah.

As we begin looking at this chapter, we immediately face the question of where verses 1 to 3 fit into the larger context. Do they relate primarily to the preceding chapter, or do they relate primarily to what follows? The verses seem to be a lament concerning a disaster that has, or will befall Israel. This would seem to be out of keeping with the themes of victory with which chapter 10 ended.

Consequently, it seemed more likely to me that this should be read in association with the material of chapter The imagery of these verses is an imagery of a great forest fire, and of trees being felled. Such imagery is familiar from other prophets, perhaps especially the prophet Isaiah. Trees symbolize rulers and prominent people.

We see this in places like Isaiah chapter 2 verses 12 to 13. For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up, and it shall be brought low, against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up, and against all the oaks of Bashan. Again in Isaiah chapter 10 verses 17 to 19, the light of Israel will become a fire, and his holy one a flame, and it will burn and devour his thorns and briers in one day.

The glory of his forest and of his fruitful land the Lord will destroy, both soul and body, and it will be as when a sick man wastes away. The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few that a child can write them down. Imagery of cedars can also be connected with great buildings such as the temple and also with the buildings of the rulers of the people.

Within the temple complex in Jerusalem prior to the exile for instance, the temple building was built with cedars, but also some of the king's buildings. There was the house of the forest of Lebanon for instance. The dynastic house of the king could also be referred to in such a manner in Jeremiah chapter 22 verses 6 to 9. For thus says the Lord concerning the house of the king of Judah, You are like Gilead to me, like the summit of Lebanon, yet surely I will make you a desert, an uninhabited city.

I will prepare destroyers against you, each with his weapons, and they shall cut down your choicest cedars and cast them into the fire. And many nations will pass by this city, and every man will say to his neighbor, Why has the Lord dealt thus with this great city? And they will answer, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God, and worshipped other gods and served them. This it seems to me is the best way to understand what this lament is referring to.

It's referring to the house of the rulers of Judah and Israel. The cedar is the greatest of the trees, and perhaps it's being spoken of in the singular here because it represents the king. But the cedar is not alone.

There are also the glorious trees that are ruined. The frame of the prophecy may be expanding at this point to include the whole ruling class. The Oaks of Bashan and the Thick Forest, these are other great ruling trees that have been removed.

The imagery of a felling of a great tree in scripture is of course used in the second dream of Nebuchadnezzar where he sees himself as a great tree that has cut down. The destruction of the thicket of the Jordan might refer to the removal of some of the defense of the nation. Its removal has led to the emergence of predatory lions who used to dwell there, and they will prey upon the flock.

These lions seem to be another way of speaking about the false shepherds that will be discussed later on in the passage. This lament, I believe, describes the situation to which the nation had been brought as a result of its sins. Even after the return from exile they still languished in this position.

In the more difficult part of the passage that follows, Zechariah is commissioned to perform a number of symbolic actions. It is possible that these were enacted as a sort of prophetic drama, but others wonder whether they were primarily delivered in an oral or written form, as some of them will be difficult to play out. The meaning of the initial charge given to Zechariah is debated.

What does it mean to become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter? Is the shepherd here being presented as an evil figure who is going to kill the sheep? Alternatively, should we see the picture as one of the shepherd coming in to protect the flock from being slaughtered? Verses 5 and 7 might give support to this. Another possibility, and one that I lean towards, is that the slaughter refers to the destiny of the people on account of their unfaithfulness and the unfaithfulness of their rulers. The lord becomes shepherd of the flock, but the behavior of the undershepherds dooms the flock to destruction.

Their actions described in verse 5 involve the selling of the sheep to those who would slaughter them. This most likely refers to the actions of the kings of Judah and Israel, who entered into imprudent and idolatrous alliances with other kings, selling the flock of the lord to those who would destroy them. As a result of the behavior of the people and their rulers, the lord determined to deliver them into the hands of their neighbors, other nations and their kings.

He wouldn't deliver his people from their hands. In the symbolic sign act of becoming the shepherd of this flock, Zechariah had taken two staffs, one that was called favour and the other called union. The reference to destroying three shepherds in one month in verse 8 has puzzled commentators.

Lighthart, for instance, argues that this might refer to the fall of the Hasmoneans and the rise of Herod. Perhaps the three shepherds are three high priests, or Gentile rulers such as the Seleucids, or perhaps three kings of Israel or Judah. Advocates of that last position, for instance, can argue that it refers to Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah being removed from the throne in short succession.

The one month symbolically refers to that brief span of time. Stead observes the way that this passage draws upon imagery and language from the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter 12 verse 3. But you, O Lord, know me, you see me, and test my heart toward you.

Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and set them apart for the day of slaughter.

Stead remarks upon the connection between verse 9 and Jeremiah chapter 19 verse 9. I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and their daughters, and everyone shall eat the flesh of his neighbor in the siege and in the distress with which their enemies and those who seek their life afflict them. He also references Jeremiah chapter 23 verse 2, connecting it with the final verses of the chapter concerning the foolish shepherd.

Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people. You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the Lord.

Pettison summarizes Stead's argument. In the account of the fall of Jerusalem in Jeremiah chapter 52, on the ninth day of the fourth month, in verse 6, the city wall is breached and the army scattered. Significantly, King Zedekiah is captured and his sons perish.

Jeremiah chapter 52 notes that one month later, on the tenth day of the fifth month, verse 12, Nebuchadnezzar's commander Nebuchadnezzar arrived and burned the temple, palace, and houses of the city, broke down the city wall, and carried many into exile. In this month in which Jerusalem fell, its leadership is exiled or killed. Against this background, Stead proposes that the three shepherds are the three types of leadership that perish when Jerusalem fell, the king, the prophets, and the priests.

Even if we differ with certain aspects of this reading, it has a long pedigree. In some form, it goes all the way back to the Jewish Targum of the book of Zechariah. This occurred as the people rebelled against the Lord and detested him, and the Lord would no longer bear with them in their rejection of him.

He ceased to act as their shepherd, surrendering the flock to its fate. The reference to those who are left devouring the flesh of one another might refer to predatory leadership. It might also refer to the great curse of the covenant, where those who are left in the siege would end up eating the flesh of their children.

The breaking of the staff favour is an annulling of the covenant. Zechariah seems to perform this action in some context in public. He is witnessed by sheep traders, which within the drama represent either the foreign kings or the kings of Israel and Judah that sold the people to them.

Alternatively, we might translate the expression not as sheep traders, but as the afflicted of the flock. Verses 12-14 seem to describe a symbolic action by which the good shepherd was more firmly rejected. Peterson suggests that we should see this as an ultimatum.

The prophet is suggesting that either they pay up and relieve him of his duties, or cease to detest him as they are described as doing in verse 8. They decide merely to give him his

wages, letting him go from his position. 30 pieces of silver are weighed out for him. In verse 13, the Lord instructs him to throw this money to the potter, as it is rendered in most translations, or perhaps the moulder, as Peterson suggests.

Charles Torrey argues that what is in view here is the foundry within the temple that melted down gold and silver gifts that were given to the temple to be stored in the treasury. Peterson observes the development of this theory, with the recognition that much of this melted down silver would have been sent to the Persians in the form of taxes. This of course is significant, because the money with which the shepherding of the Lord was rejected is now being given to pagan nations.

Perhaps there is another dimension to this. In Exodus chapter 21 verse 32, we read of the restitution that has to be paid if an ox gores a slave. If the ox gores a slave, male or female, the owner shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

Judah and Israel had become like goring oxen, goring the servants of the Lord, the prophets. The Lord argues that in the rejection of Zachariah's symbolic shepherding, he was being rejected. They were putting a measly price upon the Lord as their shepherd, the money being thrown into the house of the Lord, his money being paid to the Lord, to pay him off for the fact that they had been goring his servants, the prophets.

We might here think back to 1 Samuel chapter 8 verse 7, as the Lord said to Samuel, Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Zachariah then breaks the second staff, called union, annulling the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. This might look back to the breaking of the bond between the northern and the southern kingdoms during the days of Rehoboam and Jeroboam.

It might also have in view the removal of the northern kingdom from the land. Ezekiel chapter 37 speaks of the joining of two sticks together, the stick of Joseph and the stick of Judah. This refers to the period after the restoration.

This is one of the reasons why for me it seems most likely that this prophecy refers back to the period prior to the exile. It is explaining how the flock of Israel ended up in the position that it is currently in. As he has twice been rejected as the good shepherd, the Lord gives Zachariah one further instruction.

He must now take up the equipment of the foolish shepherd. The Lord will no longer deliver, as he had formerly done, the people from their wicked shepherds. He would hand them over into the hand of foolish shepherds, foreign nations who would not care for the flock.

As they had tolerated such behavior from their own shepherds, now they would suffer

such treatment from foreign shepherds. The condemnation of the final verses might remind us of Ezekiel chapter 34 verses 1 to 6. The word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel.

Prophesy and say to them, even to the shepherds. Thus says the Lord God, Ah shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves, should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.

So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered. They wandered over all the mountains, and on every high hill.

My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. A question to consider. Can you think of the key moments within the history of Israel and Judah in which they most definitively rejected the shepherding of the Lord over them? Zechariah chapter 12 begins a new oracle.

Chapters 9 to 11 were the first oracle or burden, and this is the second. It runs from chapter 12 to chapter 14 to the conclusion of the book. It's introduced as an oracle concerning Israel and speaks of the Lord's judgment upon the nations, his purging and transformation of Jerusalem.

The oracle will end with an account of a new, holy Jerusalem. Both chapter 12 and chapter 14 contain accounts of sieges of Jerusalem. However, Peter Lighthouse suggests that these are two different sieges.

The first siege of Jerusalem in this chapter is one brought about by surrounding nearby nations, and that siege is effectively broken. The second siege of Jerusalem involves all nations, and that siege is successful. The city is captured.

Another possibility is that these are describing two different stages of a single siege, or maybe it's the same event viewed from different perspectives. After introducing the oracle as the word of the Lord concerning Israel, we have a doxology that underlines the fact that the Lord who speaks is the creator God. He's the one who creates, and he's the one who can recreate.

The oracle concerns a great salvation that the Lord will bring about through Jerusalem. Jerusalem will become a cup of staggering to all of the surrounding peoples. This imagery is found in Jeremiah chapter 51 verse 7, for instance.

The cup of wrath is a means of intoxicating people with the wine of the Lord's judgment. In that verse from Jeremiah, we read, The intoxicating cup of the Lord's wrath is an

image that is used on a number of occasions within the book of Jeremiah. The cup is handed round from nation to nation, and finally Babylon, which has been the cup for other nations, will receive the cup itself.

The second half of verse suggests that the siege of Jerusalem is one in which Judah also participates. There is a sort of civil war scenario here, where Judah has joined the surrounding nations to attack the city of Jerusalem. However, even with all of the neighboring peoples and Judah itself gathered against her, Jerusalem will be victorious.

It is also possible to read this as stating that the siege that faces Jerusalem also afflicts Judah, rather than Judah participating in the siege against Jerusalem with the surrounding nations. In addition to being described as a cup of staggering, Jerusalem is also described as a heavy stone for all of the peoples. It is an obstruction.

It is something that cannot easily be moved. Any who try to do so will injure themselves. In the gathering together of the nations, we might also hear an echo of Psalm 2 verses 1 to 9. The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.

He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord holds them in derision. Then He will speak to them in His wrath and terrify them in His fury, saying, As for Me, I have set My king on Zion, My holy hill.

I will tell of the decree. The Lord said to Me, You are My son. Today I have begotten you.

Ask of Me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. The nations have assembled, or perhaps we should see this as the nations have been assembled by the Lord against Jerusalem, against by implication His anointed.

Their assaults, however, are entirely doomed to failure. One of the curses of the covenant in Deuteronomy chapter 28 verses 28 to 29 reads as follows. The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind, and you shall grope at noonday as the blind grope in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways, and you shall be only oppressed and robbed continually, and there shall be no one to help you.

In verse 4 this judgment seems to fall upon the enemies of Jerusalem. Their horses and riders are smitten with panic and madness. A reading of the second half of verse 4 depends upon our understanding of the place of Judah relative to Jerusalem and the other nations.

Has Judah joined with the other nations against Jerusalem, or is Judah also suffering the attack? If the latter is the case, then Judah seems to take heart from seeing the way that

the Lord is on the side of Jerusalem. If the former, then Jerusalem seems to repent and turn to the Lord. If this were the case, then the end of verse 4 describes the Lord sparing Judah, not visiting upon Judah the judgment that the other nations suffer.

If however it is the case that Judah is also the object of the nation's attacks, then the Lord is here protecting Judah. The clans of Judah will be large extended kin groups, much larger than families, but smaller than tribes. Seeing the way that the Lord is strengthening Jerusalem, they either take heart or have a change of heart.

The result of this is that they become successful against the nations that have gathered against Jerusalem. The imagery of the flaming torch and the blazing pot recalls theophanic elements from the vision of Abraham in his deep sleep in Genesis chapter 15. Bearing the glory of the Lord, this renewed Judah is successful against all of its adversaries.

Jerusalem would also be successful and made secure. The glory of this great victory will be shared out among all of the people, not just belonging to Jerusalem and the house of David, but fully including Judah. The Lord would protect but also empower his people.

They will be so strengthened that the heroics of David that are described in places like 1 Samuel would be commonplace among them. Meanwhile, the messianic house of David, which we should presumably associate with the promised branch, would be like God or the angel of the Lord. In the Exodus, Moses is told that he will be like God to Pharaoh and also like God to Aaron.

King David is compared to the angel of the Lord by the wise woman of Tekoa in 2 Samuel chapter 14 verses 17 and 20 and then by Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel chapter 19 verse 27. Through his people, the Lord would win a great victory over all of the nations that came against Jerusalem. We might here recall the way that Judah is compared to the Lord's bow with Ephraim as his arrow and then how the people are compared to a war horse for the Lord.

In verse 10, the Lord pours out a spirit of grace upon his people and as a result they start to mourn. They mourn over him whom they have pierced. Who is this one that they have pierced? In the context, it seems to be associated with the Lord himself.

Whether this figure is the Lord himself or one closely related to the Lord is not immediately clear, but there are likely some clues to be derived from the wider context. If we recall the second half of the preceding chapter, we should remember the 30 pieces of silver. There we noted that in Exodus chapter 21 verse 32, 30 pieces of silver was the restitution given to a master for a gourd servant.

Having received the 30 pieces of silver, Zechariah threw them in the house of the Lord, presumably to the moulder in the foundry. The Lord declares that this was the price at

which his people had valued him. The figure that they mourn here in chapter 12 is described as like an only child.

The figure seems to be a Davidic figure. Putting the pieces together, it would seem that the pierced one is the Davidic branch. He is the covenantal son of the Lord.

He is the servant of the Lord, who has been gourd by the people who have rejected the Lord, and in rejecting the Lord, have rejected his servant. The mourning over this figure is compared to the mourning in the plain of Megiddo. This is presumably looking back to 2nd Kings chapter 23 verse 29, where King Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Necho as Josiah went out to meet him at Megiddo.

Josiah was the reforming king of Judah, and he was the one last chance for the people. After Josiah, there were a string of wicked kings that led, ultimately, to the destruction of the nation. The mourning for Josiah is described in 2nd Chronicles chapter 35 verses 24 to 25.

So his servants took him out of the chariot, and carried him in his second chariot, and brought him to Jerusalem. And he died and was buried in the tombs of his fathers. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.

Jeremiah also uttered a lament for Josiah. And all the singing men and singing women have spoken of Josiah in their lament to this day. They made these a rule in Israel.

Behold, they are written in the laments. The verses that follow describe what seems to be a comprehensive mourning of the whole of the people. The whole land is mourning, and each of the families are mourning.

Various theories have been advanced to try and explain the names that are included here. Why Nathan and Shimei? Some have tried to understand the houses David, Nathan, Levi and Shimei in terms of prophet, priest and king. David being the king, Nathan the prophet, Levi the priest, leaving Shimei.

Some have connected Nathan with the prophet of David's court, and Shimei with the relative of Saul who opposed David. A more likely explanation is to connect Nathan with David and Shimei with Levi. Shimei was the second son of Gershom, Levi's first son.

Nathan was one of the sons of David by Bathsheba. The line of Christ is traced through Nathan in Luke chapter 3. Perhaps what we're supposed to see here is a mourning that includes people throughout the land and all different statuses and offices, people throughout both the extended priestly and kingly houses. Stepping back from the chapter and seeing the bigger picture, we should note a number of themes that recall the Exodus.

In the gathering together of the people against Jerusalem, we might recall the pursuing

of the children of Israel by the Egyptians. The glory of the Lord that is described as surrounding them in verse 6 might recall the pillar of cloud and fire for instance. The angel of the Lord going before them might recall the Exodus again.

Exodus chapter 23 verse 20. Behold I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. All of these details recall the first stages of the Exodus and most particularly the Passover.

In verse 10 we see this most clearly. They weep over the pierced one like a firstborn child. This of course is reminiscent of the Egyptians mourning over the firstborn children after the 10th plague with the death of the firstborn sons.

How ought we to understand the fulfillment of this prophecy? I think an important thing to take into account at the beginning is that the prophecy is not necessarily intending to give us a clear blow by blow account of what's going to take place. A prophecy is not just a bare prediction of something that's going to happen in the future. Rather it gives us the general shape and meaning of events that are going to occur.

From a knowledge of that general shape and meaning, we can't easily predict the specific form of events in which that general shape and meaning of the Lord's fulfillment will be realized. There are a great many potential surprises in that area. This prophecy refers I believe to the death and resurrection of Christ and its aftermath.

Most obviously there's the piercing of the firstborn son. That text of course is alluded to in John chapter 19 verses 34 to 37. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and at once there came out blood and water.

He who saw it has borne witness. His testimony is true and he knows that he is telling the truth that you also may believe. For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled.

Not one of his bones will be broken. And again another scripture says they will look on him whom they have pierced. And then in Revelation chapter 1 verse 7. Behold he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him even those who pierced him and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.

Even so amen. As Anthony Pettison points out the events of verse 10 are fulfilled in Pentecost and its aftermath. The spirit of grace that is poured out upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem is the Holy Spirit that Christ receives and pours out upon his church at Pentecost.

As Peter preaches with boldness the people are cut to the heart and repent. They mourn what they have done. So what then is the attack of the nations upon Jerusalem? Pettison argues that this is fulfilled in a surprising manner.

Christ the David that goes before the people is the target of the attack. What's more this sort of connection can be seen in the words of the apostles. For instance in Acts chapter 4 verses 24 to 28.

And when they heard it they lifted their voices together to God and said sovereign Lord who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them who threw the mouth of our father David your servant said by the Holy Spirit why did the Gentiles rage and the people's plot in vain the kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed for truly in this city they were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. The apostles here are presenting a war as having taken place a war focused upon the anointed one the branch the Messiah as predicted by Zachariah but realized in a form that no one could possibly have predicted the nations did indeed gather together at Jerusalem for a battle. The Messiah was besieged it seemed he was defeated but the siege was broken and he was victorious.

Other details of the chapter start to come into focus. Jerusalem is described as becoming like a burdensome stone in the gospels of course Christ is described as the rock of stumbling. Matthew chapter 21 verses 42 to 44 Jesus said to them have you never read in the scriptures the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone this was the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes therefore I tell you the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits and the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces and when it falls on anyone it will crush him.

Once we recognize that this is referring to Christ many of the details that might be scandalous otherwise start to come into focus too. David shall be like God like the angel of the Lord going before them who better to speak of in such language than Christ himself who is God who is the angel of the Lord. Likewise in verse 10 when they look on me on him whom they have pierced God in human flesh in Jesus Christ is the one who has pierced as they look on Christ they are looking upon God.

Petsen writes this gathering against the Messiah in Jerusalem proved to be the day of salvation for God's people even though it involved the Messiah's death. A further parallel with chapter 12 verse 10 can be seen in Acts where after Jesus's death God's spirit is poured out on the around 120 believers in Jerusalem and God fearing Jews are then cut to the heart and repent. Hence the New Testament connects this day with Jesus's death.

Jesus ends up drinking the cup of God's wrath Luke chapter 22 verse 42 so that God's people from Israel and the nations do not have to. Boda rightly comments God's rescue of Jerusalem and defeat of the nations was already accomplished prior to AD 70 although

unknown to the Jews and Gentiles at the time Christ's death on the cross was God's means of delivering Jerusalem. Yet the New Testament also connects the day with Jesus's return when all the nations will mourn the one who is pierced for example Revelation chapter 1 verse 7. The result of the action of the servant of the Lord and the branch is an emboldening of the people and empowering of them.

The people are made strong and courageous by the gift of the spirit of Christ. Their hearts are also softened so that they can turn back to the Lord. We might see in the final verses of the chapter the people turning back to the shepherd that they had rejected as the ox mourns the servant that it gored.

The people mourn the king that they pierced. Restoration becomes possible once more. The hope of the nation that once perished at the death of Josiah is now rekindled.

Hope is restored and the people are equipped to stand against their foes. A question to consider. The fulfillment of this prophecy in the New Testament does not look like anything that people would have expected.

How does this prophecy help us more fully to understand the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection and the events of Pentecost and its aftermath? Zechariah chapter 13 continues the oracle that began in chapter 12. The preceding chapter ended with the spirit of grace being poured out upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Israel leading to a great mourning of the households over the pierced one like a firstborn. The mourning there was akin to the general mourning of Egypt at the time of the tenth plague associated with the Passover.

This is described in Exodus chapter 12 verses 29 to 30. At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon and all the firstborn of the livestock. And Pharaoh rose in the night he and all his servants and all the Egyptians and there was a great cry in Egypt for there was not a house where someone was not dead.

Every Egyptian household lost a firstborn and so each household primarily mourned for their own loss. However in Zechariah chapter 12 all of the households of the nations are mourning for one firstborn the pierced one the shepherd the branch or the servant of the Lord. If chapter 12 involves a sort of Passover chapter 13 opens with a Pentecost.

The opening up of the fountain for sin and uncleanness connects with the pouring out of the spirit of grace at the end of chapter 12. We've already come across imagery that might relate to the opening of such a fountain earlier in the book of Zechariah. In the night visions the stone of the high priest had seven eyes and the seven lamps of the lampstand in chapter 4 were also described as having seven eyes.

Considering that the word translated eyes can also be translated as springs and that the

vision of the lampstand and the olive trees in particular explores the theme of the flowing out of power we might understand the eyes to be springs from which fuel for the burning lamps proceeds. Here in chapter 13 however the fountain is principally one for cleansing from impurity like the water prepared in Numbers chapter 19. We might recall the water that flowed out from Ezekiel's visionary temple in chapter 47 of his prophecy.

In Jeremiah chapter 2 verse 13 the Lord describes himself as the fountain of living waters. Joel chapter 3 verse 18 while using a different term declares and in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine and the hills shall flow with milk and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the valley of Shittim. The fountain that is opened up in Zechariah chapter 13 is presumably one that comes from the house of the Lord and is ultimately a fountain of the life of the spirit.

Perhaps we might connect this with the blood and water that proceeds from the pure side of Jesus in John chapter 19 verse 34 especially in light of the allusion to Zechariah chapter 12 verse 10 in the context and also to the living water that Jesus says will come from him in John's gospel. We might also in light of all of the Exodus themes in the surrounding chapters relate this to the water that comes from the rock. Passages like Ezekiel chapter 36 verses 25 to 27 might also be in the background here.

I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols I will cleanse you and I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. The fountain cleanses the land from its wickedness, idolatry and uncleanness. Prophecy, presumably false prophecy, is driven out.

A flip side of making the people holy is the expulsion of that which is wicked from their midst. The more pronounced the setting apart of the people the more pronounced is the removal of the wicked. This pattern was already evident in the vision of the flying scroll in chapter 5. The cutting off of a name is elsewhere used to refer to the destruction or removal of a person's posterity.

Here, used with regard to the idols, it likely refers to the cessation of their worship. As no one calls upon the names of the idols any longer their names are extinguished. Prophecy is especially singled out here.

While some commentators argue that the text envisages a cessation of all prophecy, as we attend to the descriptions of the prophecy that is cut off it should be apparent that it is false prophecy that is in view. The prophet in view here speaks lies in the name of the Lord, puts on a hairy cloak in order to deceive and seems to be inflicting wounds upon himself as a sort of pagan prophetic practice. False prophecy had been a pervasive problem in the history of the people, especially prior to the exile.

Even though there was nothing like the same problem with false prophecy after the return it still persisted in some forms. In We see that Tobiah and Sambalat used mercenary prophets to deliver false prophecies to scare and discourage Nehemiah and the rebuilders of the wall. False prophets could face the death penalty as we see in Deuteronomy chapter 18 verses 20 to 22.

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, how may we know the word the Lord has not spoken? When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously.

You need not be afraid of him. False prophets perverted the word of the Lord, sowing distrust of the word of the Lord among the people. They also pretended divine authority for their own false words in order to serve their personal ends.

Deuteronomy cautions about the danger of pity and emotional bonds in such situations. In chapter 13 verses 6 to 8. If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter, or the wife you embrace, or your friend who is as your own soul entices you secretly saying, let us go and serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known, some of the gods of the people who are around you, whether near you or far off from you, from the one end of the earth to the other, you shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him. Here in Zacharias oracle, even the father and mother of the false prophet will rise up against their son and put him to death.

Whereas formerly false prophets had enjoyed prominence and security, greatly outnumbering true prophets and doing their work in the open, as we see in the days of Ahab for instance, now the false prophet will have to act as secretly as possible, hiding himself, not dressing as a prophet and trying to explain away the wounds that he had presumably sustained as part of his false prophetic rituals. To understand the wounds of the prophet described here, we should probably think of the prophets of Baal who cut themselves as they called upon Baal in their conflict with Elijah on Mount Carmel. The short chapter ends with a further part of the oracle containing words that Jesus refers to himself in Matthew chapter 26 verse 31.

Then Jesus said to them, you will all fall away because of me this night, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. In the oracles from chapters 9 to 14, shepherd and flock imagery is common, especially in chapter 11 where Zacharias performed a prophetic sign act, representing the Lord as the good shepherd of his people, rejected for the foolish shepherds. The oracle here seems to look back prior to the events described in the verses that precede it, referring to the death of Christ, the shepherd of the Lord, which precedes the mourning of the people and the opening of the

fountain in Pentecost and the time that follows.

The shepherd is described by the Lord as the man who stands next to me, as one intimately associated with him. This is the Davidic branch and specifically Jesus Christ. When the shepherd was struck, the flock will be scattered.

In 1 Kings chapter 22 verse 17, Micaiah the prophet foretold that as King Ahab was struck, all Israel would be scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. When the people lost their leader, they would lose their unity and all flee in different directions. Without a shepherd to go before them, they would be thrown into great disarray.

The sword that strikes the shepherd here is mysteriously commanded by the Lord himself, striking the very man who is at his right hand, the man so closely associated with him. At this point we discover the key event that will later lead to the mourning of the people over the one that they pierced. They are the ones who are like the sword that strikes the shepherd, unwittingly enacting the Lord's purpose, being the means by which the blow is delivered, even while in rebellion against him.

We might recall the words of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 verses 22 to 23. Men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.

This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and full knowledge of God. You crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. Here Jesus, of course, is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

The Lord would then purify his people, cutting off the wicked and refining the righteous. The division of the people into thirds should draw our minds back to Ezekiel chapter 5 verses 1 to 4. And you, O son of man, take a sharp sword, use it as a barber's razor and pass it over your head and your beard. Then take balances for weighing and divide the hair.

A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city when the days of the siege are completed. And a third part you shall take and strike with the sword all around the city. And a third part you shall scatter to the wind and I will unsheathe the sword after them.

And you shall take from these a small number and bind them in the skirts of your robe. And of these again you shall take some and cast them into the midst of the fire and burn them in the fire. From there a fire will come out into all the house of Israel.

Ezekiel's sign act depicted the preservation and refining of a remnant of one of the thirds. In Zachariah's prophecy we see something similar, although it is a whole third and

not just a remnant of a third that is preserved and refined. It shouldn't be difficult to find reminders for Isaiah chapter 53 in the description of the Lord and his shepherd in this chapter.

Anthony Pettison writes, the figures in Zachariah and Isaiah are presented as humble and gentle. Zachariah chapter 9 verse 9, Isaiah chapter 42 verse 2. They bring blessings to the nations. Zachariah chapter 9 verse 10, Isaiah chapter 42 verse 1, 4 and 6 and 49 verse 6. They release captives from the pit or dungeon.

Zachariah chapter 9 verses 11 to 12, Isaiah chapter 42 verse 7 and 61 verse 1. They gather those who have been scattered from Israel. Zachariah chapter 9 verse 12, Isaiah chapter 49 verses 5 to 6. Significantly they are struck. Zachariah chapter 13 verse 7, Isaiah chapter 53 verse 4 and pierced.

Zachariah chapter 12 verse 10, Isaiah chapter 53 verse 5. They are associated with shepherd imagery. Zachariah chapter 13 verses 7 to 9, Isaiah chapter 53 verses 6 to 7. Though the servant is likened to a sheep rather than a shepherd. The figures in Zachariah and Isaiah are rejected by the people.

Zachariah chapter 12 verse 10, 13 verse 7, Isaiah chapter 53 verse 3. They are connected with the pouring out of a spirit upon people. Zachariah chapter 12 verse 10, Isaiah chapter 44 verses 3 to 5. Contrary to Peterson's assessment they are said to suffer by Yahweh's intent. Zachariah chapter 13 verse 7, Isaiah chapter 53 verses 6 and 10.

And their deaths result in forgiveness for the sins of the people. Zachariah chapter 13 verse 1, Isaiah chapter 53 verses 5 to 6. In addition the people later mourn over them. Though the mourning in Isaiah is implicit.

Zachariah chapter 12 verse 10, Isaiah chapter 53 verses 4 to 12. There is also an echo of Isaiah chapter 53 verse 12 in Zachariah chapter 14 verse 14 with the spoil that is divided as a result of the servant's death. These similarities seem too numerous to be coincidental.

A question to consider. How might we start to piece together an account of the atonement from Zachariah's oracles of the Lord, the people and of the Lord's shepherd? Zachariah chapter 14 concludes the second of the two oracles with which the book ends. The oracle which runs from chapter 12 to chapter 14 seems to prophesy two sieges of Jerusalem.

The first from which the city is delivered and in this chapter a second one that is successful overthrowing the city. The people had mourned over the struck shepherd like a firstborn much as Egypt mourned the death of their firstborn in the tenth plague at the time of the Passover. The striking of the shepherd and the scattering of the sheep was

followed by a pouring out of the spirit of grace upon the house of David and upon Jerusalem and the opening of a fountain cleansing the people from their sin and uncleanness.

Chapter 14 is once again a challenging chapter to interpret with many mysterious and apocalyptic images of the overthrowing of a world order. However as we look at these images more closely in the light of wider biblical symbolism much of this chapter will come into focus. At the beginning of chapter 14 we begin the account of the second siege.

Once again nations are gathered against Jerusalem but this time the city is taken, plundered and the women violated. As Peter Lighthouse observes the description of this in verse 2 is taken from Isaiah chapter 13 verse 16 a passage that concerns the overthrow of Babylon. Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes, their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.

The imagery and language of that chapter is prominent in other accounts of Jerusalem's overthrow in Jesus' Olivet discourse and in the book of Revelation where Jerusalem itself is spoken of as Babylon the great. The adoption of the language from Isaiah chapter 13 might suggest some implied association between the two. In the overthrow of the city half are cut off while the other half remain.

Once again this is similar to the prophecy in Jesus' Olivet discourse concerning the events of AD 70. In Luke chapter 17 verses 34 to 35 which also speak of a judgment that strikes half of the people. I tell you in that night there will be two in one bed, one will be taken and the other left.

There will be two women grinding together, one will be taken and the other left. Jesus is most likely purposefully alluding back to Zechariah chapter 14 in his words. The city of Jerusalem is overthrown however in verse 3 the Lord also fights against the nations that overthrew the city.

Verses 4 to 5 describe a miraculous splitting of the Mount of Olives in two. We might recognize a theophanic motif here. As the Lord comes the mountains shake and can be removed.

Mountains are brought low and valleys raised up. The Mount of Olives is rarely mentioned in the Old Testament. The Mount of Olives appears in David's departure from Jerusalem during the in 2 Samuel chapter 15 verse 30.

Another significant reference to the Mount of Olives albeit not explicitly by name is found in Ezekiel chapter 11. In Ezekiel chapters 8 to 11 the prophet Ezekiel is brought in a vision to Jerusalem where he sees the abominations that are being committed in the temple area. In his vision the Lord's throne chariot rises up from the house and comes

out to judge the idolaters and the wicked of the city before the Lord departs from the temple altogether.

In chapter 11 verses 22 to 23 we read Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city. The feet of the Lord standing on the Mount of Olives should recall the glory of the Lord standing on the Mount of Olives in Ezekiel's vision.

Given the similarities with 2 Samuel and more importantly Ezekiel chapter 11 this seems to indicate that what is happening here is a departure or an exodus from the city. The Lord is leading an exodus from Jerusalem as he departs from it, much as he had once led the exodus out of Egypt. In the Gospels we also see the interplay between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives.

In the events of Holy Week and the crucifixion and what follows there is a sustained opposition between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives as Jesus symbolically moves out of the city and acts over against the city from the Mount of Olives. In this we might see Christ enacting the departure of the Lord from Jerusalem. The imagery here is designed to recall the earlier exodus.

Just as the waters of the Red Sea were divided in two to create a passage for the people to pass through on dry land, so the division of the Mount of Olives is the creation of a valley path between two great mountainsides enabling the people to flee. In the story of Lot and Sodom there was a window of escape provided so that Lot could flee from the city prior to its destruction. The same thing is happening here as the faithful are given an avenue of flight.

The earthquake in the reign of Uzziah that's referenced here was obviously an important event in the people's memory. It's a key date in the prophecy of Amos for which it seemed to provide an initial confirmation. Even a few centuries later the people still seem to be speaking about it.

In the Olivet discourse Jesus foretells the existence of a small window of opportunity during which those who heeded his word might flee from the city in Matthew chapter 24 verses 15 to 20. So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel standing in the holy place, let the reader understand. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house. And let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days.

Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a sabbath. The early Christian writers

Eusebius and Epiphanius both relate a tradition in which the Christians of Jerusalem forewarned about the destruction of the city, fled to Pella where they escaped its overthrow. In Revelation chapter 18 verses 4 to 5 the Lord summoned his faithful people out of the condemned city.

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, come out of her my people lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues. For her sins are heaped high as heaven and God has remembered her iniquities. Lighthouse makes the intriguing suggestion that we might think the Mount of Olives as the veil of Jerusalem.

The Mount of Olives stands before Jerusalem obscuring the city. However that veil as it were is going to be torn in two and a passage provided through it with texts like Matthew chapter 24 and 25 and the book of Revelation. This chapter foretells the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 while also portraying with the book of Revelation the two-sided character of that destruction.

As the old Jerusalem is being destroyed a new Jerusalem is being established. The escapees from the old condemned Jerusalem will become a glorious transformed new Jerusalem. Although the siege against Jerusalem was successful and the city was devastated, the concluding half of the chapter speaks of a radical reversal and transformation.

The formerly besieged Jerusalem will dwell in safety. The city that was overthrown rises up anew and transformed. The plundered city will be a place to which the wealth of the nations will be gathered.

The nations that came up against Jerusalem to war against it will gather there in order to worship the Lord in her. As Lighthouse notes the remnant that escapes the death and overthrow of the stricken city becomes living waters flowing out to give life to the world. This occurs as a new light comes at the evening time, a dawn breaking at the descent of the night.

The final night vision of chapter 6 had described the chariots coming out from between the two bronze mountains which were associated with the bronze pillars of the temple, mountains being symbolically connected with pillars. The chariots were coming out from between the mountains in order to bring the Lord's judgments out into the world. Here with the division of the Mount of Olives two mountain sides form a threshold to the city.

Much as Jachin and Boaz, the two bronze pillars of the temple are for the house of the Lord. Out from the city flow living waters into the world. This flow is not merely a wadi through which waters would flow only in the rainy season but it's a continuing river.

At the beginning of the preceding chapter a fountain had been opened up for the house of David and for Jerusalem for cleansing from sin and uncleanness. Now however the

waters of this fountain are flowing out into the wider land and world. Ezekiel's visionary temple also had such a fountain from which a great river of living water came to heal the land, something which Ezekiel describes in chapter 47 of his prophecy.

In John's gospel we have several references to the opening of a fountain and the flowing out of living water in passages that are almost certainly purposefully alluding to this Old Testament background. Perhaps the greatest image of the flowing of living water out of the city is given to us in Revelation chapter 22 verses 1 to 2. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. Also on either side of the river the tree of life with its 12 kinds of fruit yielding its fruit each month.

The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. This description from Revelation should also remind us that the image of the river flowing out is an image from Eden. As at the end of Revelation there are two closely associated portraits of Jerusalem, one of a wicked and condemned city being destroyed and the other of a renewed and transformed city being glorified.

Earlier in Zechariah's night visions he saw visions both of a glorified Jerusalem that would be inhabited without walls and of a sort of perverted parody of the Ark of the Covenant containing an image of a woman of wickedness that was being separated from the purified city and brought to Shinar, the place of Babylon, where a new temple was being formed for it. Here we see something similar. Even as Jerusalem is being engulfed by death, a glorious and transformed Jerusalem is being established and torrents of life are flowing out from it.

We should recognize that the two images belong closely together. The torrents of life flowing out from Jerusalem should be connected with the people fleeing from the condemned city between the mountains. From one perspective they may look like desperate escapees, refugees from a calamity.

However we are granted a different perspective from which it becomes apparent that they are really the chariots of the Lord proceeding to do battle against the nations, as in the final night vision of chapter 6, bringing the nations under the Lord's rule. They may look like they are just fleeing from death but they are an outflow of life. What may look like the breaching of the city's defenses that allow the enemies to flood in is the opening up of once damned life-giving waters now permitted to flow out.

The result of all of this will be the establishment of the Lord's kingdom as his throne is over all of the earth, his uniqueness as Lord recognized among all peoples who will all call upon the name of the Lord, the only name from which true deliverance will come. There is doubtless an allusion back to Israel's confession in the Shema from Deuteronomy chapter 6 verses 4 to 5 in verse 9. Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul

and with all your might.

Here, as at other points in the prophets, particularly in the prophet Isaiah, the expectation is that monotheism is a truth that will be eschatologically demonstrated as the sovereignty of the one creator God is manifest over all of the earth and against all other pretenders to his rule, every other name named among men being humbled before him. The radical recreation of Jerusalem described in this passage continues. The mountains were opened up, the night was turned into day, a river of living waters came forth from the city and in verse 10, Zechariah speaks of yet further transformation.

Formerly elevated parts of the land will be brought low while Jerusalem, here defined by landmarks that functioned as some of its boundaries at its prime, will stand as a sentinel of divine blessing over the whole land, waters flowing out from it to water all of the region, which is now entirely below it. The imagery here is closely related to that which we see in places like Isaiah chapter 2 or in Psalm 48 verses 1 to 2 which reads, Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God. His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth.

Mount Zion in the far north, the city of the great king. This new Jerusalem will be inhabited and will dwell in security, never again to be destroyed in a like manner. In thinking about this new Jerusalem, we should recall the description of the Jerusalem inhabited without walls, a description of a secure people but also a description that might suggest a city that exceeds any single location.

Besides raising up this new Jerusalem, the Lord will judge all of the nations that wage war against it. A deathly plague will cause them to rot even while they are on their feet. The old Jerusalem was earlier described as a sort of Egypt, with the passage of escape from it being provided by the division of the Mount of Olives.

Here the nations that oppose Jerusalem suffer plagues much as Egypt once did. As they fight against the transformed new Jerusalem, they will die. The gathering together of the nations for judgment is a motif of a number of prophecies, perhaps most notably in Jesus' Olivet Discourse in Matthew chapter 25.

While commentators more typically regard Christ's division of the nations like a shepherd separating sheep from goats, as an event belonging to the final day of judgment, it seems more likely to me that it refers primarily to the judgment that goes out to the nations as the new Jerusalem is established and the old Jerusalem destroyed. The ascended Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and his rule goes out into all of the earth by means of his people. Those who bless his people will be blessed with the healing water of life by the powerful river of the spirit that flows out in and through them, while those who wage war against them or mistreat them will suffer a living death, nations being overthrown by Christ and his might, the plague of the Lord afflicting the entirety of their nations.

As they left Egypt in the Exodus, the children of Israel plundered the Egyptians. The chapter began with the old Jerusalem being plundered by its enemies, but now the wealth of the nations is being gathered as they fight against the renewed Jerusalem. Reading this passage we should probably think of Psalm 46 with which much of its imagery resonates.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved. God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter, he utters his voice, the earth melts.

The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth, he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the chariots with fire.

Be still and know that I am God, I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress. Whereas the nations had once come up to Jerusalem to attack her, now the nations will assemble to the new Jerusalem to worship the Lord of hosts, the Lord judging any who do not do so.

Whereas holiness had once been narrowly focused in the old Jerusalem, holiness pervades the new Jerusalem. In Exodus chapter 28 verses 33 to 38 we read the following description of the garments of the high priest. On its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet yarns around its hem with bells of gold between them, a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate around the hem of the robe.

And it shall be on Aaron when he ministers and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the holy place before the Lord and when he comes out so that he does not die. You shall make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it like the engraving of a signet, holy to the Lord. And you shall fasten it on the turban by a cord of blue.

It shall be on the front of the turban, it shall be on Aaron's forehead and Aaron shall bear any guilt from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall regularly be on his forehead that they may be accepted before the Lord. What had once been peculiar features of the high priest's garments, the bells and the engraved plate reading holy to the Lord, would now be found even on the horses in the city.

Given the way that horses are used as symbols of the Lord's army and people elsewhere in Zechariah, perhaps we should see the horses here as possibly being symbols of the people of the Lord from all nations, all of them now enjoying holy status. As God

cleanses things, there will no longer be found that which is common. Another image of this is seen in the vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation, which has the dimensions of a cube as a sort of magnified holy of holies, the whole city enjoying a holy status once exclusive to the Lord's throne room.

The trader that is excluded from the house might bring to our minds Jesus' cleansing of the temple in the Gospels. The merchant might be a reference to the Canaanites, as the word is elsewhere used with that sense. However, it seems to me that we are to reason from the dramatic extension of holiness that the opportunistic merchant who formerly would have sold items for sacrifice to pilgrims is now unnecessary, as holiness has spread such figures who could limit or extract money from people's access to God no longer have a reason to trade, as holiness is so commonplace that they cannot create a market in it.

Zachariah's oracle here is one with many resemblances to that of Isaiah chapter 2 verses 2-4. It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills, and all the nations shall flow to it. And many people shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk in his paths.

For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Before we conclude the book of Zachariah, we should ask why there is the reference to the Feast of Tabernacles here. Lighthouse suggests that the Feast of Tabernacles continues a sequence of festal allusions within the oracle of chapters 12-14. The oracle begins with Passover allusions, the opening feast of the festal calendar.

From there it moves to Pentecost with the pouring out of the Spirit of Grace and the opening up of the fountain. Then we have the Day of Atonement. Fittingly, the Feast of Tabernacles, the final feast of the calendar, concludes the book.

We might think of the Feast of Tabernacles as the final feast of the festal calendar and as a feast of dwelling in assembly with the Lord, as the eschatological feast. It is a feast associated with prayers for rain and the gift of living waters from the Lord, after covering has been made for the iniquities of the land on the Day of Atonement shortly beforehand. It is also known as the Feast of Ingathering, as the end and the climax of the agricultural year, as the fullness of the harvest is finally completed.

As such, it is natural to connect it to the full and final gathering of the complete measure of the people of God. Finally, the Feast of Tabernacles was, as James Jordan notes, a

feast with subtle associations with the nations, as 70 sacrifices, corresponding to the number of the nations in the table of the nations in Genesis chapter 10, were sacrificed the course of the feast. A question to consider, where can you see connections to this final chapter of Zechariah in the book of Revelation?