

# OpenTheo

## October 2nd: Zechariah 12 & Matthew 22:34—23:12

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The deliverance of Jerusalem from its siege. Jesus challenges the scribes and Pharisees.

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## Transcript

Zechariah chapter 12. The oracle of the word of the Lord concerning Israel. On that day, declares the Lord, I will strike every horse with panic, and its rider with madness.

But for the sake of the house of Judah, I will keep my eyes open, when I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness. Then the clans of Judah shall say to themselves, The inhabitants of Jerusalem have strength through the Lord of hosts their God. On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot in the midst of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves.

And they shall devour to the right and to the left all the surrounding peoples, while Jerusalem shall again be inhabited in its place, in Jerusalem. And the Lord will give salvation to the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may not surpass that of Judah. On that day the Lord will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the Lord going before them.

And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hidadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo.

The land shall mourn, each family by itself, the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves, the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves, the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves, the family of the Shimeites by itself, and their wives by themselves, and all the families that are left, each by itself, and their wives by themselves. 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 is 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, Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand, making all the earth drunken.

The nations drank of her wine, therefore the nations went mad. 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 2 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 neighbouring 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 1-9. Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain? 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 28-29 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. Our 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 nations' 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 warhorse 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 gored 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 2 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 2 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 first born child.

This of course is reminiscent of the Egyptians mourning over the first born children after the tenth plague with the death of the first born sons. How ought we to understand the fulfilment 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 fulfilment will be realised. 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 first born son. That text of course is alluded to in John chapter 19 verses 34 to 37.

As Anthony Pettison points out, the events of verse 10 are fulfilled in Pentecost and its aftermath. 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. 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 realised 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

marvellous 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 recognise 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, Peterson writes, A further parallel with chapter 12 verse 10 can be seen in Acts, where after Jesus' 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' 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, Yet the New Testament also connects the day with Jesus' return, when all the nations will mourn the one who was pierced. For example, Revelation chapter 1 verse 7, 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? Matthew chapter 22 verse 34 to chapter 23 verse 12 But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? And he said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment, and a second is like it.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he? They said to him, The son of David.

He said to them, How is it then that David, in the spirit, calls him Lord, saying, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet. If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son? And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions. Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do.

For they preach but do not practice, they tie up heavy burdens hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others, for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honour at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the marketplaces and being called Rabbi by others. But you are not to be called Rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers.

And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant.

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. At the end of Matthew chapter 22, the challenging of Jesus by the religious and the political leaders continues and then is concluded. The Pharisees present the third question to test Jesus here, and perhaps we should recognise some similarities with Satan's testing of Christ early in the Gospel.

These questions are malicious tests, not honest and innocent questions. They gather together against the Lord, and that language should remind us of the second psalm. Bear in mind the conversation that follows, where it is the anointing of the Davidic king that is at issue, the Davidic Messiah.

And the Pharisees gathering together against Christ is similar to the nations gathering together against the Lord and his anointed in that psalm. They are hoping that Jesus is going to choose some particular law that reveals an imbalance in his teaching. Perhaps the greatest commandment is, you shall not commit adultery, or maybe remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Whatever Jesus answers, he will seem to tread on some toes and open himself up to some criticism that he has unbalanced teaching. But Jesus' answer, once more, is incredibly shrewd. The greatest commandment, and there is a greatest commandment, is the summary commandment of the Shema.

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. And that statement is the greatest commandment.



In this commandment, the entire law is encapsulated. And the second great commandment arises from it. These two commandments sum up the entire Ten Commandments and all the other attendant commandments.

The law is not just a collection of 600 plus miscellaneous laws. It's a system of truth and justice summed up in the call to love God and neighbour. These positive commandments that lie at the heart of all these negative restrictions.

You can think about the two statements that Jesus references in their original context. In Deuteronomy 6, verses 4-5, the statement about loving the Lord your God, that comes immediately after the gift of the Ten Commandments, or the repetition of the Ten Commandments in chapter 5. And it's the beginning of all that summary material. All the material that follows from it and helps to flesh out what that commandment means.

Leviticus chapter 19 is where the law concerning loving your neighbour comes from. And there that commandment comes at the end of a list of other commandments. You shall not oppress your neighbour or rob him.

The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind. But you shall fear your God, I am the Lord.

You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great. But in righteousness shall you judge your neighbour.

You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people. And you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbour. I am the Lord.

You shall not hate your brother in your heart. But you shall reason frankly with your neighbour lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people.

But you shall love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord. Now reading that list you probably noticed that it sums up most of the second table of the Ten Commandments.

We have the first table summed up in loving the Lord your God and the second table summed up in loving your neighbour as yourself. And all of the Law and the Prophets flow from these two great principles, these positive principles at the heart of everything. And now we should see that this is antithetical to the way the Pharisees approached the Law.

The Pharisees seemed to approach the Law just as a miscellaneous series of commandments. They do not have a sense of its inner motion and its inner purpose and dynamic. Rather it is something that is just a set of legalistic binding commands and nothing more.

There is no sense of the love that lies at the heart of it. And what Jesus teaches here is that there is a logic to the Law and that logic is love for God and neighbour. And we will not truly understand why Jesus dumbfounds the Pharisees until we realise just how powerfully his teaching here undermines their entire approach to the Law.

These commandments express the positive truth at the heart of all the thou shalt nots. And those positive truths are the whole subject matter of the Law and the Prophets throughout the entire Scriptures. It is these principles that stand in the dead centre of everything.

Everything arises out of these. Jesus poses a challenge in response to the Pharisees' challenge to him and his challenge is about the Christ referencing Psalm 110. It is a Davidic Psalm in which David refers to the Christ as his Lord which makes no sense at all if the Christ is merely his son.

And the Pharisees clearly don't have a way of thinking about this. They don't have a category within which this would make sense. The Christ seems to be more than merely the son of David according to the flesh.

There is obviously some theological problem here. How do we deal with this? And at this point the Pharisees are completely unable to answer him. They're stuck.

They're dumbfounded. They're stumped. In chapter 23 we see Jesus moving on to speak to the crowds and to his disciples.

Jesus began in chapter 5 by gathering his disciples around him and then the crowd around them and now he's speaking to the same sort of group. This reminds us then of the Sermon on the Mount. This is the final great message of the Gospel of Matthew.

And the Sermon on the Mount is the first great message. And as we look at this message more closely we'll begin to observe ways in which there is a symmetry between it and the opening sermon. What we have here is something binding the book together.

That there is a unity to Jesus' message and the teaching that he goes through has a logic and an order to it. And Jesus' entire teaching has been leading to the point that he reaches in this chapter. This chapter will sum up the entire message of his teaching.

And Matthew really does focus upon Jesus' teaching to a greater degree than most of the other Gospels. In this message, having overcome the challenges of the religious and political leaders, Jesus speaks to the crowds and the disciples concerning them. He has also just spoken of the fact that the Christ, who he is, will sit at God's right hand with all of his enemies being placed under his feet, being made his footstool.

Christ is the true King and now he speaks concerning the false shepherds of Israel. Jesus' challenge throughout this chapter is focused upon the false shepherds of Israel, not upon

the flock of Israel. The false shepherds are the wicked vinedressers.

They are the people who dishonoured the King, who invited them to the wedding. The flock of Israel are like the sheep without the shepherd. They are like the vineyard that is going to be given into the hands of those who will produce its fruit.

The Pharisees currently sit in Moses' seat and much of their teaching is correct and legitimate and should be followed. But their lives are full of hypocrisy and their vision of the law is burdensome and oppressive. They are ignorant of the true liberating intent at the heart of the law.

They have all these commandments that they speak in terms of but they are ignorant of justice, mercy and faith, those principles at the heart. They do not recognise the way that love is the binding truth behind all of the law, the glue that holds everything together. And so they just have these burdensome commands.

They lay heavy burdens upon the people, not like Moses in whose seat they sit, but like Pharaoh, the one who Moses stood against. They are concerned with the praise of men and with social status. They love the markers and the honorific titles of the religious authority, the special seats that they are given, the special titles and names that they enjoy.

And there is some exaggeration and satire here no doubt, much as in the earlier descriptions that Christ gives of people sounding a trumpet before them when doing their charitable works. But the new shepherds that will take their place must not follow such an example. The ministry of Christ's body must be characterised by humility.

The point isn't to dismiss all titles. We see the apostles using titles on occasions. No, the point is not so much a strict denial of the legitimacy of all titles or respect of ministers of Christ.

No, it's about the nature of that ministry. It's a ministry that is honoured, but it's honoured precisely in the practice of self-effacing ministry in Christ's name to others. It isn't exalted over others.

It's a ministry performed by brothers, not by those who are over us. Personality cults and cults of church office have no place in the kingdom. Honour comes in a completely different form from that which the Pharisees seek.

Those who seek to exalt themselves will be humbled. But the flip side of this reveals the true character of ministry in the kingdom of God. The one who humbles himself will be exalted.

This is what Christ himself does. And this whole passage emphasises the uniqueness of Christ. Christ is the one who sits at God's right hand.

All of us are under the Christ. All of us are ministers of Christ. We're sent by him and we are responsible to him.

And all true ministry flows from and points to Christ, not to itself. If our ministry is pointing to ourselves, then it is a false ministry. It's not a true ministry of Christ.

A question to consider. How do we see Paul applying some of Jesus' teaching here in places like 1 Corinthians 1?