

2

ZECHARIAH 9-14

Introduction to Zechariah 9-14

There are 14 chapters in the Zechariah scroll as it has come down to us in the Bible. Scholars are unanimous in seeing chapters 9-14 as a collection of material that comes from a different period of history from the first eight chapters of the scroll. The late 6th century was the period of the ministry of the prophet Zechariah (520-518). Chapters 1-8 of the scroll that bears his name reveal the prophet Zechariah as confident that the dire situation in Jerusalem and Judah would be reversed when YHWH returned. Like Haggai, Zechariah was confident that YHWH would bring in a new order, for YHWH is 'YHWH of hosts' (Zechariah 1:3), the 'lord of the whole earth' (Zechariah 4:14). Haggai, Zechariah's contemporary, looked to Zerubbabel to restore the Davidic dynasty. Zechariah spoke more vaguely of a coming 'Branch' of the Davidic line, who would be YHWH's instrument in reconstructing the temple. They both anticipated the coming of a David-like Messiah.

Zechariah 9-14 fit best with a period some sixty or so years after Zechariah, some time in the first half of the fifth century. Some parts could be earlier and some later. See the Introduction pages 8-9 on the way in which prophetic (and other) scrolls developed. See also pages 11-14 for a summary of the situation of Yehud in the period after the exile, as well as the international and internal factors that influenced the history of the Yehud community in the fifth century.

The hopes expressed by Zechariah had still not been realised. Yehud was still in an economically depressed, politically powerless, and generally hopeless state. Remarkably the author(s) of the second part of the Zechariah scroll, and the other contemporary prophets, kept alive the hope that there would be a new order. They did so by keeping before the eyes of the people the oracles of earlier prophets, significantly Zechariah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. They also endorsed the vision of the Deuteronomic School that continued its work during the first half of the fifth century. The author(s) of Zechariah 9-14 applied the inspired insights of these older prophets to the new situation in which the Jews found themselves. Significantly, as outlined in the Introduction, they asserted that the new order promised in the past would come, but they would have to wait on God, for their only hope was in a direct divine intervention in history.

Readers interested in an extensive bibliography are referred to pages 60-84 of the commentary on Zechariah 9-14 by Carol and Eric Meyers (The Anchor Bible Series, Doubleday, 1993).

Inspired by Zechariah 9-14?

For Christians these five chapters have a special interest because of the number of times verses are quoted in the New Testament (see 9:9; 11:12; 12:10; 13:1; 13:7; 14:21). Jesus' Jewish disciples saw him as fulfilling the dream entertained by the authors of these chapters: 'On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity' (Zechariah 13:1). God is watching over those he loves to protect them (9:8; 12:4).

The authors follow tradition in being critical of those who claim to speak for God, but are not sent by God (see chapter 11; 13:2-6).

They see the nations of the world coming to Jerusalem, and so to YHWH (14:16).

1. ZECHARIAH 9-11

¹An Oracle: the word of YHWH in the land of Hadrach and Damascus is its resting place. For the eye of the people and all the tribes of Israel is on YHWH; ²and Hamath also, which borders on it, Tyre and Sidon, for they are very shrewd.

³Tyre has built itself a bulwark, and heaped up silver like dust, and gold like the dirt of the streets. ⁴But now, the Lord will strip it of its possessions and hurl its wealth into the sea, and it shall be devoured by fire.

⁵Ashkelon shall see it and be afraid; Gaza too, and shall writhe in anguish; Ekron also, because its hopes are withered. The king shall perish from Gaza; Ashkelon shall be uninhabited; ⁶foreigners will settle in Ashdod, and I will make an end of the pride of Philistia. ⁷I will take away its blood from its mouth, and its abominations from between its teeth; it too shall be a remnant for our God; it shall be like a clan in Judah, and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites.

⁸Then I will encamp at my house as a guard, so that no one shall march to and fro; no oppressor shall again overrun them, for now I am watching with my own eyes.

Like Nahum and Habakkuk, the writings of Zechariah 9-11 are introduced as ‘an oracle’ (נְבִיאָה, māššā’). As in Malachi, ‘oracle’ is followed by ‘the word of YHWH’. The two terms together give a strong emphasis to the authority claimed for what follows.

At the time this oracle was composed the land of Judah and its people were impoverished. Verses 1-8 declare that YHWH’s word still stands and the Promised Land will be restored. YHWH is pictured marching down from Syria to Jerusalem. He sets out from Hadrach, at the extreme north of Syria, encamps (‘rests’) at the capital, Damascus, then at Hamath. The lands of the north are no longer a threat. His march takes him along the Mediterranean coast through Phoenicia (Tyre and Sidon, noted for their shrewdness in acquiring wealth) and then Philistia (Askelon, Gaza, Ekron, Ashdod). These lands rightly belong to God’s people. They will be pacified in order to be incorporated into Greater Israel.

Verse 2 speaks of Tyre’s practical know-how that made it the key trading port along the Mediterranean coastline. Verse 3 speaks of its bulwark that has secured it against attack for centuries, and its wealth (see Ezekiel 28:4). None of this secures it against YHWH.

The city states of Philistia depended upon Tyre’s trade. Its fall fills them with dread (verse 5).

The people of Judah were forbidden to eat meat unless the blood was first drained from it (see Deuteronomy 12:16). The Philistines had no such scruple (verse 7). The goal of YHWH’s cleansing is to incorporate Philistia into Judah (verse 7), as were the Jesubites, the original inhabitants of Jerusalem (see Joshua 15:63).

Having conquered, pacified and purified Judah’s neighbours, YHWH settles in his temple. Jerusalem is secure (compare Zechariah 2:8-9). In verse 1 all eyes were on YHWH. The section concludes with YHWH watching over his city to protect it.

Throughout the Bible we often find the call for Jerusalem to shout for joy that YHWH, their king, is in their midst (see, for example, Zechariah 2:10; Zephaniah 3:14-15; also Psalms 47, 96 and 98). Drawing on the promise announced by earlier prophets (see Jeremiah 23:5; 33:14-22; Zechariah 3:8), verse 9 announces the coming of a human king (compare Matthew 21:5 – Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem). The description portrays this as a fulfilment of Jacob’s vision of the destiny of his son, Judah:

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine.

– Genesis 49:10-11

Such will be the dominion of this promised Davidic king that Ephraim and Jerusalem will have no further need of military defence (see Psalm 46:9-10; Psalm 76:3), just as the king himself has no need of a war horse (see Zechariah 4:6). This is because YHWH has pacified the entire region (verses 1-8).

A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save.

– Psalm 33:16-17

The king is the ‘righteous shoot’ of Jeremiah 33:15 (see Zechariah 3:8; 6:12): he will faithfully carry out God’s will. He, like the land and the people, is ‘saved’ in the sense of Psalm 33:16 (compare Deuteronomy 33:29). He is not a warrior king – and so is no threat to Judah’s Persian overlord. Like Moses (see Numbers 12:3), he is ‘humble’: he knows his complete dependence upon God.

He is the prince of peace promised in Isaiah 9:6-7. His kingdom will be a restoration of the kingdom of David and Solomon, and comprise the whole of the land promised to Israel from of old. The final words of verse 10 quote Psalm 72:8.

The future envisioned here is eschatological: it can only come about through the intervention of God.

⁹Rejoice greatly, O Daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O Daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; righteous is he, and saved, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he will command peace to the nations; his dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

¹¹As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. ¹²Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double. ¹³For I have bent Judah to me; I have set Ephraim as a bow. I will arouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword.

¹⁴Then YHWH will appear over them, and his arrow go forth like lightning; the Lord YHWH will sound the trumpet and march forth in the whirlwinds of the south. ¹⁵YHWH of hosts will protect them, and they will destroy and overwhelm the sling stones. They will drink and carouse as with wine; they will be full like a bowl used for sprinkling the horns of the altar.

¹⁶On that day YHWH their God will save them for they are the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they will shine on his land. ¹⁷For what goodness and beauty are his! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women.

The intensifying of Persian military activity in Judah in the middle of the fifth century made any thought of independence unthinkable. Verses 11-17 are an assurance that YHWH will put an end to violence. Verses 1-8 spoke about the restoration of the land. Here we are assured of the restoration of the people. In the Book of Exodus, when the people agree to abide by the covenant God has made with them, Moses, having sprinkled the blood of the sacrificed animal on the altar (representing God), sprinkles it over the people. He speaks of

the blood of the covenant that YHWH makes with you on the basis of these words.

– Exodus 24:7

In reaction to the atrocities committed by Babylon against Jerusalem, Jeremiah has the city cry: 'May my blood be avenged on the inhabitants of Chaldea'. To which YHWH responds: 'I am going to defend your cause and take vengeance for you' (Jeremiah 51:35-36). Those responsible for Zechariah 9:11-17, describe YHWH's fulfilling of that 'covenant of blood' (verse 11).

In verse 11 there is an allusion to the story of Joseph who was thrown into 'a waterless pit' (Genesis 37:24). We are being assured that YHWH will see that his imprisoned and enslaved people will be liberated.

'Greece' ('Javan', verse 13) was a key player during the fifth century (see Introduction page 12; see also Joel 3:7, which speaks of the slave trade; also Isaiah 66:19-20).

Verses 14-15 describe the battle. Even the sling stones hurled from their catapults against the city walls will be ineffectual. The victory of Jerusalem's warriors will lead to riotous celebration.

'On that day' signals an eschatological perspective. YHWH will bring salvation to his flock. Their king will wear a crown glittering with jewels (compare Isaiah 62:3), and God's land will shine brightly in the light of his people, gathered from the lands of their imprisonment.

The result of this divine victory will be prosperity and peace (verse 17). God's restoration of Judah involves the whole community, including those now exiled far from their land.

Verse 1 links back to verse 17 of chapter 9. People are told to ask rain from YHWH, and not to put their trust in the ‘teraphim’ (figurines of ancestors or household gods; see Genesis 31:19, 30-35), or diviners who claim to be able to influence human affairs (see Deuteronomy 18:10-11). People who consult these ‘wander like sheep; they suffer for lack of a shepherd’ (verse 2), for lack of a genuine prophet to enlighten them. Who is being addressed is not made clear, but in the light of the rest of the chapter, it is likely that the author is addressing exiles from the northern kingdom.

The ‘shepherds’ who are the object of God’s anger (verse 3) appear to be false prophets. The ‘he-goats’ appear to the leaders of the community (the flock).

YHWH, the warrior God (‘YHWH of hosts’, verse 3) will reach out to these exiles through Judah’s army and leader. He is the ‘cornerstone’ of Psalm 118:22, ‘the stone that the builders rejected’, chosen by God. He is the ‘tent peg’ that secures the tent (see Ezra 9:8-9), the ‘battle bow’ that secures victory, the ‘overseer’ who will coordinate everything according to God’s will (see Isaiah 60:17).

Judah will wage a successful war, ‘for YHWH is with them’ (verse 5). The authors are, once again, envisioning the eschatological future promised by God. Judah will be strong with YHWH’s strength, and Joseph (the hill country of Samaria) will be saved by YHWH (verse 6).

Judah and Ephraim are going through hard times, experiencing YHWH’s rejection. But YHWH has compassion on them and will answer their cry and reverse their condition (verse 6). Ephraim (‘the house of Joseph’) will flourish once again. YHWH who is their God will redeem them.

¹Ask rain from YHWH in the season of the spring rain, from YHWH who makes the storm clouds, who gives showers of rain to you, the vegetation in the field to each one. ²For the teraphim utter nonsense, and the diviners have seen what is false; the dreamers tell false dreams, and give empty consolation. Therefore the people stray like sheep; they suffer for lack of a shepherd.

³My anger has flared against the shepherds, and I will punish the he-goats; for YHWH of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah, and will make them like his proud war horse.

⁴Out of them shall come the cornerstone, out of them the tent peg, out of them the battle bow, out of them every overseer – together. ⁵They will be like warriors in battle, trampling the foe in the mud of the streets. They will fight, for YHWH is with them, and they shall put to shame the riders on horses. ⁶I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph.

I will bring them back because I have compassion on them, and they will be as though I had not rejected them. For I am YHWH their God and I will answer them. ⁷Then the people of Ephraim will become like warriors, and their hearts will be glad as with wine. Their children will see it and rejoice, their hearts will exult in YHWH. ⁸I will signal for them and gather them in, for I have redeemed them, and they shall be as numerous as they were before.

⁹I have sown them among the nations, and in far countries they will remember me, and they will rear their children and return. ¹⁰I will bring them home from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria; I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon, until there is no room for them.

¹¹He will pass through the sea of distress, and the waves of the sea will be struck down, and all the depths of the stream will dry up. The pride of Assyria will be laid low, and the sceptre of Egypt will depart. ¹²I will make them strong in YHWH, and they will walk in his name, says YHWH.

^{11:1}Open your doors, O Lebanon, so that fire may devour your cedars! ²Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen, the mighty ones destroyed.

Wail, oaks of Bashan, for the thick forest has been felled!

³Listen, the wail of the shepherds, for their wealth is destroyed! Listen, the roar of the lions, for the pride of the Jordan is destroyed!

The people of the northern kingdom are scattered among the nations (see Ezekiel 5:2; 6:18). In verse 9 they are assured that in fact YHWH has sown them there. In other words they will grow there, and in time they will return to their own country.

They will come back from Egypt and Assyria and they will be so numerous that they will flow across the Jordan into Gilead, and north into Lebanon. Even these will not be able to contain them.

The 'he' of verse 11 refers to YHWH who is pictured defeating the powers of primeval chaos (compare Psalm 74:13-17). It picks up, too, the imagery of the Exodus. YHWH will bring back the exiles from the collapse of the northern kingdom in 721.

'Them' in verse 12 may be intended to include the peoples of Judah and Israel. He will make them strong, and they will remain devoted to him (compare Malachi 1:11).

Verses 1-3 celebrate the fulfilment of the promise just made in 10:3-12. It is as though Israel has already overflowed into Lebanon and Gilead ('Bashan') as was promised in 10:10 above. Both areas will be deforested to make room for agriculture and grazing. The proud trees are also symbols of the foreign nations that YHWH will cut down.

There is a fable-like quality about these verses, with the lamenting of the trees and the lions lamenting the changes that are happening in their environment. The mention of 'shepherds' is unexpected. The rest of chapter 11 identify them as 'prophets' and explain why they are bemoaning the reversal that YHWH is bringing about.

The focus shifts from international affairs and the promised restoration of Judah and Israel to the internal affairs of Judah. If the author is not to be dismissed as a dreamer, he has to present a truthful picture of the disasters of the past – disasters that are still affecting the present, which YHWH is promising to reverse (chapters 9-10). The author claims an intimacy with ‘YHWH my God’ that the tradition associates with Moses (see Deuteronomy 4:5), who calls him to be a ‘shepherd’ (a prophet) for God’s ‘flock doomed to slaughter’ (verse 4).

The flock is being bought and sold into slavery, and no one is being held responsible. The term ‘shepherds’ of verse 5 extends to anyone with the power to do what is being condemned here. In the context the focus is on false prophets (compare Deuteronomy 13:4-5; Jeremiah 14:13-16; 23; Ezekiel 13).

Verses 4-6 state that the terrible events of Israel’s past had YHWH’s approval: ‘I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the land’ (verse 6). ‘I will deliver no one from their hand’ (verse 6), from the hand of those who sell the people to make money, and the hands of those who purchase them only to slaughter them. In the Older Testament world in which it is assumed that God controls everything, this conclusion is inevitable (see Introduction pages 17-18).

In verse 7-14 the prophet carries out the commission given him by YHWH. He takes over as shepherd, and he takes two staffs and names them in a way that looks beneficial for the sheep (verse 7). There is an allusion here to the symbolic actions of Ezekiel 37:15-23.

Verse 8 seems to refer to false prophets who were causing problems for the author. Presumably the author’s contemporaries knew who was being referred to.

Then, unexpectedly, he resigns from being shepherd, leaving the sheep to their own devices. This enables him to depict the terrible events that destroyed Israel and led to the depressed Judah which he is addressing.

⁴Thus said YHWH my God: Be a shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. ⁵Those who buy them kill them and go unpunished; and those who sell them say, “Blessed be YHWH, for I have become rich”. For their shepherds have no pity on them. ⁶For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the land, says YHWH. I will cause them, every one, to fall each into the hand of a neighbour, and into the hand of the king. They will devastate the land, and I will deliver no one from their hand.

⁷So, for the sheep merchants, I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. I took two staffs; one I named Favour, the other I named Unity, and I tended the sheep.

⁸In one month I disposed of the three shepherds, for I had become impatient with them, and also they detested me.

⁹So I said, “I will not be your shepherd. What is to die, let it die; what is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed; and let those that are left devour the flesh of one another!”

Worthless leadership and chaos

¹⁰I took my staff, Favour, and broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples. ¹¹So it was annulled on that day, and the sheep merchants, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of YHWH.

¹²I then said to them, “If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” So they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver. ¹³Then YHWH said to me, “Throw it into the treasury”—this worthy sum at which I was valued by them. So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them into the treasury in the house of YHWH. ¹⁴Then I broke my second staff, Unity, annulling the family ties between Judah and Israel.

¹⁵Then YHWH said to me: Take once more the implements of a foolish shepherd.

¹⁶For I am now raising up in the land a shepherd who does not care for the perishing, or seek the wandering, or heal the maimed, or nourish the healthy, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs.

¹⁷Oh, my worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! Let his arm be completely withered, his right eye utterly blinded!

By breaking the staff that promised divine favour, the prophet is carrying out a symbolic gesture that speaks of God breaking his covenant with his people (verse 10; compare Ezekiel 16:59). This is the covenant of peace promised by God in Ezekiel 34:23-25 and 37:24-26. Similarly, when he breaks the second staff (verse 14) he symbolically annuls the promise found in Ezekiel 37:21-24 of a united Judah and Israel.

The word of God is valued at no more than the money to be paid to an owner whose slave has been gored to death by an ox (see Exodus 21:32; compare Matthew 26:15, 27:5). It is all they think God’s word is worth! He is instructed to throw it back.

Two traumatic events of Judah’s past stand behind the breaking of the two staffs. The first is the breakdown of the dual kingdom of David and Solomon at the end of the tenth century. The second is Judah’s breaking of the covenant, which led to the disaster of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the Babylonian exile at the beginning of the sixth century.

The prophet is instructed to put on the clothing worn by the members of the prophet guilds, described here as ‘foolish shepherds’(verse 15).

Verse 16 describes the behaviour of the worthless shepherds of the day, the false prophets who are the author’s special focus in this chapter. He is drawing on Ezekiel 34:16, and applying to false prophets what Ezekiel had to say about leaders generally.

Our author is not glossing over the events of the past. Nor is he saying that everything now is good. Significantly there are still false prophets in Judah. He is claiming divine authority for the promises he has declared in chapter 9-10, and he concludes this chapter by declaring that false prophets do not have the final say. They will have their right arm severed: powerless to act. They will have their right eye destroyed: powerless to see.

ZECHARIAH 12-14

¹An oracle: the word of YHWH concerning Israel: Thus says YHWH, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the human spirit within:

²See, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling for all the surrounding peoples; Judah will be under siege as well as Jerusalem.

³On that day I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all the peoples; all who lift it shall grievously hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth shall come together against it.

⁴On that day, says YHWH, I will strike every horse with panic, and its rider with madness. But on the house of Judah I will keep a watchful eye, when I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness. ⁵Then the clans of Judah will say to themselves, "The inhabitants of Jerusalem have strength through YHWH of hosts, their God."

⁶On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot on a pile of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves; and they will devour to the right and to the left all the surrounding peoples, while Jerusalem shall again be intact in its place. ⁷And YHWH will give victory to the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not exceed Judah's.

⁸On that day YHWH will shield the inhabitants of Jerusalem so that the feeblest among them on that day will be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of YHWH, at their head.

Chapter 12 opens in the same way as chapter 9, with the words: 'an oracle: the word of YHWH'. The words 'concerning Israel' alert us to the fact that although the chapter is directed to Judah it is as God's people. In verse 1 YHWH is depicted as the creator, the one who 'formed the human spirit'.

Verses 1-8 describe a battle to be waged 'on that day' between the nations and Jerusalem. Nations besiege Jerusalem, keen to slake their thirst by drinking Jerusalem's blood. YHWH, however, has a deeper purpose. Though they do not know it, they are really drinking the 'cup' of YHWH's anger (see Jeremiah 25:15-28; Isaiah 51:17-22). All the nations intend to hurt Jerusalem, but it is they who will be hurt.

Verses 3-6 describe a Jerusalem that is freed from outside oppression by YHWH who renders harmless the war machines of the foreigners. YHWH's resolve to preserve Jerusalem will benefit the whole of Judah (verse 5), over whom God is keeping a watchful eye (verse 4; see 9:8).

One consequence is that 'the clans of Judah' will conquer the surrounding nations. It is YHWH who will give them victory. He will also ensure that the inhabitants of Judah achieve victory 'first', so that Jerusalem and the house of David do not think themselves above the clans of the countryside (verse 7).

The feeblest of the 'inhabitants of Jerusalem' will be like King David. The Davidic House (the king) will be like God (compare Exodus 4:16), acting with God's power and authority. The coming Messiah will be 'like the Angel of YHWH'. Those observing him will see God revealed in him. He will lead his people on their journey (see Exodus 13:21; 14:19).

The text reiterates God's purpose to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.

In verse 10, he promises to pour out over the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of 'grace' (חֵן, ḥēn) and 'supplication' (תַּהֲנוּנִים, taḥ^anūnīm). Both these nouns derive from the verb ḥānan, which refers to the many practical ways in which God's grace is given. The noun ḥēn refers to the gracious way in which God chooses to look upon Jerusalem. Here it includes giving them a change of heart. The noun taḥ^anūnīm denotes the cries that arise to God from Jerusalem pleading for a continuation of God's grace. In this case a plea for forgiveness,

Verse 10 refers to someone whom 'the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem' have pierced. The person pierced is not named. The accent is on the extent of the mourning, which is compared to the mourning that followed on the tragic death of King Josiah in the plain near the mountain of Megiddo in 609 (see 2Chronicles 36:20-25). 'Hadad-Rimmon' may be a place, or it may refer to elements in the cult of Baal. If, as appears likely, the author is referring to a contemporary event, the description of the victim appears to indicate some very significant person who had been struck down by his rivals (compare John 19:37).

The author, however, may be staging a dramatic mourning ritual to invite the community to seek forgiveness for a long history of rejected prophets.

The family of the house of David represent kingly leadership (verse 12), as does the family of Nathan, David's son (see 2Samuel 5:14). The family of the house of Levi represent priestly leadership (verse 13), as does the family of the Shimeites, a descendant of Levi (see Exodus 6:17; Numbers 3:21).

The following verse (13:1) goes on to say that, terrible as their behaviour has been, YHWH will see that Jerusalem is cleansed (compare Ezekiel 36:25-29; also Numbers 19:11-20).

⁹On that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

¹⁰Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they will mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. ¹¹On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.

¹²The 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; ¹³the 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; ¹⁴and all the families that are left, each by itself, and their wives by themselves.

¹On that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.

²On that day, says YHWH of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more; and also I will remove from the land the prophets and the spirit of impurity.

³And if any prophets appear again, their fathers and mothers who bore them will say to them, "You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of YHWH"; and their fathers and their mothers who bore them shall pierce them through when they prophesy.

⁴On that day the prophets will be ashamed, every one of them, of their visions when they prophesy; they will not put on a hairy mantle in order to deceive, ⁵but each of them will say, "I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the soil; for the land has been my possession since my youth." ⁶And if anyone asks them, "What are these wounds on your chest?" the answer will be "The wounds I received in the house of my friends."

The words of Ezekiel that the author is drawing on in verse 1, speak of God cleansing his people from all that makes them unclean. The author sees Jerusalem cleansed by God's cosmic waters. We should recall that one of the rivers of paradise is called 'Gihon' (Genesis 2:13), which is the spring that supplied Jerusalem (see 2Chronicles 32:30). One thinks of the cleansing brought about by the primeval Flood. The prophet declares that the day will come when all will be cleansed.

In verse 2 the author portrays God as removing the danger of idolatry. God will also remove 'prophets' whose words do not come from God (compare Ezekiel 14:8; Deuteronomy 13:1-5). Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah speak out against prophets who claim to speak for God, but are not sent by him (see Jeremiah 14:14; 23:16; 27:15; Ezekiel 13:6-8).

So destructive for the community is false prophecy that verse 3 places on the parents the responsibility to 'pierce' a false prophet through if he goes to prophesy. This is the term used in regard to the unnamed victim in 12:10. There it was a genuine prophet who was 'pierced through', and the community came to mourn their action. Here an injunction is placed upon parents to treat a false prophet in this way.

The author wants to dissociate genuine prophets from those who claim the title but do not speak for YHWH. Out of shame a genuine prophet will not only steer clear of the title (verse 5). He will also refuse to wear the clothes associated with the prophetic guilds (verse 4). The prophet Elijah was recognised by his hairy mantle (1Kings 19:13). There is an allusion here also to Jacob who put on a hairy mantle in order to deceive his father (Genesis 27). It is noteworthy that Amos was at pains to deny he was a prophet (see Amos 7:14). A genuine prophet claims to be a 'tiller of the soil' (verse 5, see Genesis 2:5, 15).

It appears that members of the prophetic guilds included self-flagellation among their practices (see 1Kings 18:28).

To this point the author has been using ‘shepherd’ to speak of prophets. Jeremiah and Ezekiel upon whom he is drawing use ‘shepherd’ also to speak of political leaders. This seems to be the idea here. The word ‘associate’ (גֵּבֵר, *geber*) is never used in the Bible to speak of a prophet.

In verse 1 he foretold a purification of ‘the House of David’. Here he looks back over the tarnished history of the monarchy, which YHWH forcibly brought to an end in 587 (compare Ezekiel 5:1-12). The sheep were scattered in the exile.

A remnant (one in three) survive. It is of interest to note that the population of Yehud after the return from exile is estimated as being about a third of what it was before the destruction of the city and the exile. Things did not pick up till the time of Nehemiah in the middle of the fifth century.

These will be purified and will experience an intimate communion and covenant with YHWH. The concluding covenant formula (see Exodus 6:7; Deuteronomy 26:17-18) recalls Zechariah 2:11; 8:7-8 and 10:6 (see also Jeremiah 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 31:33; Ezekiel 36:28; 37:27).

⁷“Arise, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate,” says YHWH of hosts. Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones.

⁸In the whole land, says YHWH, two-thirds will be cut off and perish, and one-third will be left alive. ⁹And I will put this third into the fire, refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested.

They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, “They are my people”; and they will say, “YHWH is our God.”

¹See, a day of YHWH is coming: your spoil will be divided in your midst, ²for I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem, for war. The city will be taken, and the houses looted, and the women raped. Half the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city.

³YHWH will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. ⁴On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east. The Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount will withdraw northward, and the other half southward. ⁵You will flee by the valley of the mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azal. Thus you will flee as you fled because of the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah. Then YHWH my God will come, and all the holy ones will be with you.

⁶On that day there will no longer be cold or frost. ⁷And there will be continuous day (it is known to YHWH), not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light. ⁸On that day living waters will flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it will be so in summer as in winter. ⁹YHWH will be king over all the earth; on that day YHWH will be one and his name one.

¹⁰The whole land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem will remain aloft on its site from the Gate of Benjamin to the place of the former gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's wine presses. ¹¹And it will be inhabited, for never again will it be doomed to destruction; Jerusalem will abide in security.

When the author describes his vision of the 'day of YHWH that is coming', he begins with the terrible defeats that Jerusalem has suffered (verse 1-2), defeats that are YHWH's means of punishing and purifying his people.

In verses 3-5 YHWH takes Jerusalem's side 'against those nations'. He comes from the east, having created an east-west rift that divides the Mount of Olives, thus creating a valley through which the inhabitants of Jerusalem can escape the terrible, eschatological ravages described in verses 1-2. The earthquake referred to must have been especially destructive (see Amos 1:1).

YHWH will come with his angelic host. They arrive at the conclusion of the battle in order to set up the new (and holy) age for Jerusalem.

In verses 6-9 we are told that when YHWH comes darkness will be no more and a fountain will gush forth in the midst of Jerusalem, the holy centre of the earth, to fill the Dead Sea with fresh water and to irrigate Judah all the way to the Mediterranean. YHWH will rule over the whole earth. Verse 9 concludes with an affirmation of monotheism.

Verses 10-11 depict the paradise that Judah will become on that day, from the north (Geba) to south (Rimmon). Jerusalem will rise aloft in its place, never again to be destroyed.

In verses 12-15 YHWH sends a plague that annihilates the armies ranged against Jerusalem. They turn against each other. Judah stands with Jerusalem. The plundering of Jerusalem recorded in verses 1-2 is reversed. Even the animals that carry the military equipment are destroyed by a mysterious epidemic (verses 15).

In verses 16-17 the foreigners who survive the plague come once again to Jerusalem (see Zechariah 8:23). This time, however, it is to celebrate the kingship of YHWH on the Festival of Booths, which celebrated the New Year, creation, the temple and the monarchy.

Nations which do not come up to worship will be punished. Egypt is singled out because of its special place in Israel's history.

Such will be YHWH's transformation of Jerusalem and its cult that the distinction between the holy and the impure will vanish. Everything shares in the holiness of YHWH. Throughout Israel's history the Canaanites were a constant threat to Israel's purity (see Deuteronomy 20:16-18). 'On that day' this will no longer be the case, for they, along with the other nations, will acknowledge YHWH as Lord.

¹²This will be the plague with which YHWH will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot away while they are still on their feet; their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. ¹³On that day a great panic from YHWH will fall on them, so that each will seize the hand of a neighbor, and the hand of the one will be raised against the hand of the other. ¹⁴Judah, too, will fight in Jerusalem. The wealth of all the surrounding nations shall be collected – gold, silver, and garments in great abundance. ¹⁵And a plague like this plague will fall on the horse, the mule, the camel, the donkey, and whatever animals may be in those camps.

¹⁶Then all who survive of the nations that have come against Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, YHWH of hosts, and to keep the Festival of Booths. ¹⁷If any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, YHWH of hosts, there will be no rain upon them.

¹⁸And if the family of Egypt do not go up and present themselves, then on them shall come the plague that YHWH inflicts on the nations that do not go up to keep the festival of booths. ¹⁹Such will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to keep the Festival of Booths.

²⁰On that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to YHWH." The cooking pots in the house of YHWH will be as holy as the bowls in front of the altar. ²¹Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be sacred to YHWH of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take from them and cook in them. There will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of YHWH of hosts on that day.

