

Lesson 22

Last week when we ended we were looking at Zechariah 13:6, "And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends."

Our question was whether that verse belongs with verses 3-5 (which is still describing the false prophets in the previous verses) or instead belongs with verse 7 (which we know refers to Christ).

The most popular view is the verse 6 is still describing the false prophets, and last week we looked at several different ways to understand verse 6 in that way.

But there is an alternate view - that verse 6 is describing the Messiah, and, in particular, is describing the wounds he suffered on the cross.

And as for being wounded in the house of his friends, one commentator argued that Jesus was not wounded *by his friends*. But that is not what the text says - it says that this person was wounded *in the house of* his friends. That house could be the house of Judah. Or the verse could be referring to Psalm 41:9, which is quoted in John 13:18.

John 13:18 - I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.

Which is the better view? It's a close call, and either view could be correct, but I lean toward verse 6 being Messianic.

Modern commentaries are *very* confident in their opinion that verse 6 is *not* Messianic, and perhaps they are correct. But I think they may have been much too quick to dismiss the possibility that verse 6 is a Messianic prophecy.

I would likely lean the other direction on this question if it weren't for verse 7, which we know is Messianic and which the New Testament links to Christ's friends, which makes it very similar to what we see here in verse 6.

And as for taking a view that is opposed by the majority of commentaries, I have usually followed Mark Twain's advice when it comes to studying the Old Testament prophets. He said, "Whenever you

find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect."

Zechariah 13:7

7 Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

Notice how the good shepherd is described in the opening phrase of verse 7 - the Lord of hosts describes him as "my fellow." The Hebrew word translated "fellow" refers to someone united to another by the possession of common nature, common rights, and common privileges. That reminds us of Hebrews 1:8.

Hebrews 1:8 - But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

And it reminds us of what Paul wrote in Philippians 2.

Philippians 2:6 - Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.

That is what it means when God the Father refers to God the Son as "my fellow."

Verse 7 confirms that we are correct in understanding the time frame of these verses to be in the first century. How? Because Jesus himself told us that verse 7 was fulfilled in the first century.

Mark 14:27-30 - And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.

Peter then declared that he would not be offended even if everyone else was, but Jesus told Peter that he would soon deny him. That New Testament linkage of verse 7 to Jesus' denial by a friend adds some weight to the view that verse 6 is also Messianic.

The inspired explanation of verse 7 found in Mark 14 adds an important pronoun. Zechariah 13:7 says, "smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered," which leaves open the question of who does the smiting. Mark 14 answers that question - "**I will smite the shepherd**, and the sheep shall be scattered."

The speaker in verse 7 is the Lord of hosts, and so God is the one who smites the shepherd. What does that mean? What it means is that the sword that awakes in the first part of verse 7 is then used by God the Father to smite the Messiah. This is what Jesus was referring to in his statement to Pilate.

John 19:11 - Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, **except it were given thee from above.**

It was God's will that Jesus die on the cross. Why? Because it was through that perfect sacrifice that God fulfilled his promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 that in his seed all the earth would be blessed.

So much deep and wonderful theology is laid open for us in this short verse! What we see here is that God the Father awakens his sword to smite the shepherd who is his fellow, which means the shepherd is also God. We could discuss those concepts for weeks and still not even begin to plumb their depths!

And what happened after this great smiting of the good shepherd? What happened was that the sheep scattered, including Peter! The good shepherd was left to face his accusers standing alone.

He could have called ten thousand angels, to destroy the world and set Him free. He could have called ten thousand angels, but He died alone for you and me.

But even though he was deserted in his time of need, verse 7 ends with a comforting promise: "I will turn mine hand upon the little ones." These little ones are the poor of the flock that we saw earlier. They are the faithful remnant.

John 10:11 - I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

Luke 12:32 - Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

The sheep scattered, but both God the Father and God the Son remembered the little ones. He would gather them again with his hand. It was for those little ones that the first part of verse 7 was taking place. It was for their sake that God the Father smote God the Son.

Zechariah 13:8-9

8 And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut

off and die; but the third shall be left therein. 9 And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.

Verses 8 and 9 provide more detail on the scattering of the sheep that we saw in verse 7. While that scattering included the desertion by the apostles, it also included much more, as these two verses explain.

First, these scattered sheep included both the faithful sheep (the third part brought through the fire) and the unfaithful sheep (the two parts that shall be cut off and die).

The identity of these two groups of sheep has already been explained to us. The unfaithful sheep are those who rejected their Messiah and clamored for his crucifixion. They were cut off because of that rejection, and they died in the judgement of AD 70 that was caused by that rejection.

And the sheep brought through the fire? They are the faithful remnant who were scattered but then gathered up again by God. They call on God's name, and God hears them. God says to them, "It is my people." And they say, "The LORD is my God." Verse 9 paints a beautiful picture of the remnant, and it is one that we have seen before.

But what is meant by this phrase: "And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried"?

That phrase is a promise of great tribulation, but it is also a promise of great deliverance. Remember our time frame - we are still looking at events of the first century. What great tribulation was faced by the faithful people of God in the first century? We have two possibilities.

The greatest and most dangerous threat to God's people at this time was their great persecution by the Roman empire, the most powerful nation on earth. What hope did they have in coming through that fire? How could they ever survive against Rome? The very end of verse 9 answers that question - they came through that fire because of God's loving care for them and because of their faith in God. "I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God."

Another possibility here is that it is describing the deliverance that occurred when Jesus opened a way of escape for his faithful people to flee Jerusalem before its destruction, as we studied earlier. Those who heeded Jesus' warnings in Matthew 24 were able to see the signs and escape the city in

time.

Either of these views or both of these views could be correct. I lean toward saying that *both* deliverances are in view here. Why? Because we will see both of these deliverances described in Chapter 14.

Chapter 14

Perhaps we should begin our study of Chapter 14 the same way that Martin Luther began his commentary on this chapter: "In this chapter I surrender, for I am not certain of what the prophet treats."

But we don't need to surrender if we proceed carefully, keep the time frame in mind, keep the context in mind, and apply our interpretative guidelines!

Let's look now at what some say is the single most difficult chapter in the entire Bible - Zechariah 14! (I personally would hand that award to Daniel 9, but Zechariah 14 is certainly in the running!)

Zechariah 14:1-3

1 Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. 2 For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. 3 Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

Our first two questions are *what* and *when*? *What* is the Jerusalem under consideration here (physical or spiritual or perhaps both), and *when* would these events occur (first century, the end of the world, or some other time)?

As for which Jerusalem this is, we are immediately faced with a problem in these first three verses.

If we just looked at verse 2, we would think we were looking at *physical* Jerusalem - "For I will gather all nations **against Jerusalem** to battle." But if we just looked at verse 3, we would think we were looking at *spiritual* Jerusalem - "Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight **against those nations**."

Why is God gathering nations in verse 2 and then fighting against those same nations in verse 3? It's questions like that that cause Zechariah 14 to be considered so difficult.

But is this question really all that difficult? Haven't we already seen and studied in this book the very thing that is being described here? Didn't God gather Rome (which, at that time, represented and included many of the nations of this world) to come in judgment against Jerusalem? And didn't God later fight against Rome, both as punishment for what Rome had done to Jerusalem and for what Rome was doing to the church? I think the first three verses of Chapter 14 are simply a summary of what we have already seen in the prior chapters.

But we will see an important difference as we continue. These verses will describe these events from the perspective of God's *faithful* people rather than from the perspective of the *unfaithful* people.

The people in Chapter 14 will see God fighting *for* them rather than *against* them. They will see a way of *escape* rather than a way of *death*. They will see what things will be like for them *after* the city is destroyed.

If that is all true, then it answers our question about the time frame. We are still in the all-important first century, where we have been for quite some time in this book.

Everything we have seen in these closing chapters has been focused on the first century. That was when the Messiah came. That was when the eternal kingdom was established. That was when the Messiah was rejected by many he came to save, and that was when those who rejected Christ were judged as their city and their temple were destroyed by the Romans. That was also when Rome sought to destroy the church, but failed.

And how did Chapter 13 end? Chapter 13 ended with a trial by fire experienced by God's people, which occurred in the first century. We should not be surprised if Chapter 14 expands on the theme we saw in the closing verses of Chapter 13.

But most commentaries say that Chapter 14 is describing the end of the world. Are they all wrong? Yes, I think they are all wrong.

And here is the main reason I think they are wrong - they all say that Chapter 14 is describing the great battle that will occur at the end of the world. But do you know what? **There will be no great battle at the end of the world.** We are **not** heading toward some cataclysmic battle between good and evil as so many false prophets proclaim today. There is nothing in the New Testament (or the Old)

to support that notion.

And remember one of our guidelines for these difficult chapters - if we think we see in these chapters something that is not more fully revealed in the New Testament, then our view of these chapters is almost certainly wrong.

What does the New Testament say about the end of the world?

- The trumpet shall sound at an unexpected time determined by God (1 Corinthians 15:52, Mark 13:32, Matthew 24:44, 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).
- Jesus will descend from heaven with a shout (1 Thessalonians 4:16).
- Jesus will bring the spirits of the faithful dead with him (1 Thessalonians 3:13, 4:14).
- The bodies of the dead will be raised, with the dead in Christ rising first (John 5:28-29, Acts 24:15, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 15:52).
- All will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to bend their knee and be judged, with some receiving eternal life and the others receiving indignation and wrath (2 Corinthians 5:10, Romans 2:6-8, Hebrews 9:27).
- Those righteous who are alive will not sleep but will be changed and will meet Christ in the air to join those righteous who were raised, and so shall we ever be with Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:51, 1 Thessalonians 4:17).
- The kingdom will be delivered to God (1 Corinthians 15:24).
- The earth will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:10).

Where in that list is a great cataclysmic battle between good and evil? Where in that list do we find the innumerable forces of the antichrist marching into Palestine? Where in that list do we see atomic bombs dropped on the Holy Land? Where in that list do we see an earthly kingdom located in Jerusalem led by Christ for a thousand years? **Nowhere! None of that is in the Bible.**

Why do so many people today teach otherwise? Because they don't know the word of God. Because they haven't taken the time to rightly divide and understand the word of God. Because they have seen

"The Omen" more often than they have read the book of Revelation. Because they read books written by authors more interested in having a bestseller than in accurately teaching the word of God. Because they listen to peddlers who sell their false prophecies to a gullible public on the Internet and late night TV (2 Corinthians 2:17).

The Bible tells us what will happen at the end of the world, and "giant cataclysmic battle between good and evil" is not on the list! All that evil people will do on that last great day is rise from their graves, bend their knees to Christ, receive indignation and wrath at their judgment, and then watch as their world is burned up by fire. They will not have an opportunity to wage war against God. The battle was won at the cross! That is what the Bible teaches about the end of the world.

So, with that in mind, let's back up and look more closely at the first three verses.

Verse 1: *Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee.*

"Thy spoil" - whose spoil? The end of Chapter 13 was describing the people of God - is it *their* spoil? I don't think so.

The word "Behold" here starts a new section, and the word "thy" is explained in verse 2, which begins with the word "for," suggesting that verse 2 is there to explain verse 1. This spoil is the spoil of those in Jerusalem, which will be divided in the midst of them. Verse 1 says that this day is coming, and it did come in AD 70 when Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed by Rome.

Verse 2: *For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.*

Verse 2 is describing the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Here is how Jesus described those same events.

Matthew 24:21 - For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

That was the day of the Lord in verse 1 that was coming. Many people were killed, and many others were led away as captives to take part in the triumphal procession in Rome celebrating the destruction of their city.

What does that last phrase mean? "The residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city."

It is a difficult phrase, but I think it is best explained by the verses that follow. The word "residue" could be translated as "remnant," a word we have seen before. This group of people not cut off from the city is the group of people that escaped the destruction of the city. They are the ones who heeded the warnings of Christ in Matthew 24 and who escaped the doomed city in time.

If half are taken captive and a remnant escapes, what about the others? They are killed. Although their deaths are not mentioned explicitly here, their deaths are *implied* by the phrase "the city shall be taken." To take a city almost always involved the deaths of large numbers of its inhabitants, so that part would have been understood and expected. The verse then explains that not all were killed - some were taken captive and some escaped.

Verse 3: *Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.*

What happens after the city was destroyed? We already know the answer to that. Jesus came in judgment against Rome, and the book of Revelation describes that conflict. Does Revelation show Jesus going forth to fight Rome? I'll say!

Revelation 19:11-16 - And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

That is what verse 3 is describing. The first three verses of Chapter 14 are a summary of what saw in the prior chapters about the destruction of Jerusalem and the fates of the faithless and the faithful.

Zechariah 14:4-5

4 And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and

toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. 5 And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.

Verses 4 and 5 describe the faithful people of God who heeded the warnings of Christ in Matthew 24 and who escaped Jerusalem before the city was destroyed. Before we look at the text of these two verses, let's review what Jesus said about that escape and review what happened when that escape actually occurred.

First, what did Jesus say about that escape?

Matthew 24:15-22 - When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

The parallel passage in Luke 21 provides some additional details.

Luke 21:20-21 - And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.

So what warning signs did Jesus tell his followers to look for? Two things. First, the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, and second, Jerusalem surrounded by armies. To what historical events do those two warning signs apply? We have already talked about the second one - Jerusalem compassed with armies - so let's start with that one first.

Jerusalem was encompassed by Roman armies twice in this time period - first by Cestius Gallus in AD 66, and then a few years later by Vespasian and Titus. If Jesus' followers had waited for the second Roman army, they would have waited too long. There was no window of escape open at that time.

But, as we said earlier, Cestius Gallus surrounded Jerusalem but then inexplicably ordered a retreat. I think Gallus' army was the sign that Jesus told his followers to watch for, and the time period after Gallus' retreat was their window of escape.

But does that present a problem with the other sign - the abomination of desolation? Yes, but it's a problem we can solve.

What is the abomination of desolation? It is a horrible desecration of the temple, and Daniel has two different prophecies about an abomination of desolation.

First, Daniel foretold an abomination of desolation that occurred during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, during the Greek rule of Palestine between the testaments. That desecration was followed by a restoration and purification of the temple, which gave rise to the celebration of Hanukkah still observed today.

Second, Daniel foretold another abomination of desolation that would occur in the first century. It is that second desecration foretold by Daniel that we are seeing here, and it is that second desecration that Jesus was describing in Matthew 24:15, where he referred to Daniel by name.

The big difference is that this second desecration of the temple would *not* be followed by a restoration or a purification as was the first desecration. Instead, this second desecration would be final.

So what is the problem? The problem is that the abomination of desolation is usually identified with the destruction of the temple in AD 70. But if the people had waited for that sign, it would have been too late for them to escape.

The solution to that problem is to recognize that the abomination of desolation was more of a *process* than a singular event. The destruction of AD 70 marked the *end* of that process.

So what marked the *beginning* of the abomination of desolation? Remember the historical review we had earlier about the Jewish civil wars. What was the focus of their fighting? The temple. One group of zealots occupied the inner court, and another group of zealots occupied the outer courts - and those two groups did not start working together until Titus was breathing down their necks.

Some might think that the Zealots would never desecrate the temple, but that view is wrong. The Zealots were not zealous for the law; they were zealous in their hatred of Rome. Here is how

Josephus described the Zealots at this time:

As for the dead bodies of the people, their relatives carried them out to their own houses; but when any of the zealots were wounded, he went up into the temple, and **defiled that sacred floor** with his blood, insomuch that one may say it was their blood alone that **polluted our sanctuary**. (*War of the Jews*, 4.3.1)

These men [the Zealots], therefore, trampled upon all the laws of men, and **laughed at the laws of God**; and for the oracles of the prophets, they ridiculed them as the tricks of jugglers; yet did these prophets foretell many things concerning the rewards of virtue, and punishments of vice, which when these zealots violated, they occasioned the fulfilling of those very prophecies belonging to their own country; for there was a certain ancient oracle of those men, that the city should then be taken and the sanctuary burnt, by right of war, when a sedition should invade the Jews, **and their own hand should pollute the temple of God**. Now while these zealots did not quite disbelieve these predictions, they made themselves the instruments of their accomplishment. (*War of the Jews*, 4.6.3)

Josephus tells us that the Zealots polluted the temple. The occupation of the temple by the Zealots was the *beginning* of the abomination of desolation; the destruction of the temple by the Romans in AD 70 was the *end*. If the people were going to use that abomination of desolation as a warning sign, they would need to look for its *beginning*, not for its *end*.

Does the timing work? Yes. Cestius Gallus arrived in AD 66, and the fighting among the Zealots in the temple began the very next year, in AD 67. Those two events were the warning signs that Jesus told his followers to look for - Jerusalem encompassed by an army, and a public desecration of the temple.

When Gallus retreated, the window of escape was open. And what were Jesus' followers supposed to do when they saw those things? In a word, **run!** They were to flee the city.

But that command to flee raises another potential problem. Why were they commanded to leave so quickly? It took another year or more before the Romans returned and once again encircled the city. Couldn't they take their time in escaping?

Two answers. First, they were to flee quickly because Jesus told them to flee quickly (and do we really need another reason when that is the first reason?). Second, they were to flee quickly because of the horrors they would face if they stayed. Here is how Josephus describes what happened to those who stayed behind in the city:

Then did the famine widen its progress, and devoured the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying of famine; and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; the children also and the young men wandered about the market places like shadows, all swelled with famine, and fell down dead wheresoever their misery seized them. ... Nor was there any lamentation made under these calamities, nor were heard any mournful complaints; but the famine confounded all natural passions; for those who were just going to die looked upon those who were gone to their rest before them with dry eyes and open mouths. A deep silence, also, and a kind of deadly night had seized upon the city ... And every one of them died with their eyes fixed upon the Temple. (*The Jewish Wars*, 5:12:3)

When the Romans were come to the houses to plunder them, they found in them entire families of dead men, and the upper rooms full of dead corpses ... They then stood on a horror of this sight, and went out without touching anything. (*The Jewish Wars*, 6:8:5)

Josephus tells us that 97,000 people were taken captive and enslaved, and over one million people died. That is why Jesus told his followers to drop everything and run when they saw the warning signs.

And Jesus opened a door of escape for them by removing the Roman forces for a short time. That is what Jesus said in Matthew 24:22 - "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." The Roman siege was shortened from what it might have otherwise been when Gallus Cestius retreated. It was during that time that the elect were able to escape.

#Zechariah