1. How and why does God "wrap up the world as we know it"? Why can't life just go on forever in the sense that life will go on until the sun burns out? Why will the world have to end the way it's described in the bible? In other words, why should we believe all this "end time stuff" and how is it going to affect my life now? Now if that isn't a hard way to start a lesson, I don't know what is.

a) We are now three chapters away from finishing this book. Chapter 12 starts a final vision that Zechariah got from God. Since he's "wrapping it up", it's logical the subject is "how is all of this going to end"? After all he's already discussed God's plans for Israel in both the short and long terms. All that's left in a sense is how does it end. A reason God wants us to know this stuff is 1) So we'll recognize it when it begins and 2) So we'll realize God and no else is in control of when our world ends since He and no one else was in control of the start of it all.

b) God doesn't give us this information so we'll drop whatever we are doing as to think "The sky is falling". He does it so we realize He's in charge and no one else! It's so we'll watch history unfold and realize it'll end His way on His timing, so accept it and don't panic!

c) For those of you who've been reading my Zechariah lessons to date, you'd realize by now that he's a "weird guy" or at the least he's been given strange visions to try to explain what it is God's trying to communicate to him. Us readers have the advantage of history to see that much of what the bible predicts has come true. That knowledge also can give us the confidence to trust in what hasn't happened yet will come true. God wants us to learn this stuff again, to realize the world's still moving as He predicted it will, and end the way He predicts it will as well.

d) Therefore God wants us to study this "how the world will end" stuff, not so we can get all weird on people, but so we understand how the "wrap up show" will happen. Obviously, the bible has a lot more to say about the "wrap up" than what is written here in Zechariah. Zechariah gives us a "Jerusalem's view" of that ending as opposed to Revelation, which is more of a heavenly view of the same topic. Let me put it this way: If we accept that Jesus is God and we believe Jerusalem will be God's headquarters to run the world one day, to study "end time" stuff explains what'll happen when all of this occurs.

e) Finally, let me say a few words to all of you "I hate bible prophecy" types. I've met many a Christian who think, "Tell me about God's love or about how God expects me to live now, but keep me away from all that end time stuff!" I could say it's a big part of the bible for a reason. I could easily say, do you care about your ultimate future? Well, you better know this stuff because it's our future whether you like it or not! What I will say is fear of death is one of the greatest fears that people have. It ranks near top along with public speaking and fear of being broke. By having an understanding of "the end" God wants to take away our fear of death so we'll realize how the world wraps up because He says so.

2. With that speech out of my system, let me give an overview of these two chapters so we'll realize what we can expect from Zechariah's "closing vision".

a) Chapter 12 starts by reminding us that God created the world. That's His way of telling us that just as He "got the ball rolling", He's going to bring it a stop one day.

b) Then Zechariah tells us that all nations will be against Jerusalem. For example, realize the United Nations has past more resolutions condemning Israel than it has all other nations combined. I once read of a diplomat who worked at the United Nations who complained, "Can we please talk about something other than Israel for a change?" All I'm saying is I've seen this prediction by Zechariah come to pass pretty much in our lifetime.

c) Anyway, Zechariah is "warming up" with that prediction. He says in spite of all of their complaining about Jerusalem, God will protect that city that the world complains so much about. A day will come when the world realizes God Himself is protecting that place!
Then the text talks about how God will miraculously protect Israel, beginning with open country area surrounding that city and finally He will protect Jerusalem itself.

e) What puzzled me is we live in a world of bombs that can be launched remotely, why is it necessary for an army to surround that city as to attack it and lose? Most of us get the fact the Muslim world hates Israel and wants it destroyed. What I struggle with, is in our time era of remote controlled airfare, why have an army? Then I realized the methodology isn't the issue. It's that God's going to miraculously stop that attack and His effort to do so will make the world realize not only that He exists, but He's "running the show".

i) So why is there so much hated of Israel? Part of it is religious. Muslims think their religion should encompass the world. Israel's end would be their ultimate victory.

ii) I'm positive part of it is demonic. If Satan can successfully wipe Israel off the map, it'd be like then thinking truthfully, "God lost once and for all".

iii) That's why I see God stepping in at some point as if to say, "OK, enough's enough" I'm going to end all of this political complaining and threatening to my city, as I'm going to bring this to an end once and for all. We're reading the "This is how all of this is going to come" about here in Zechariah. Speaking of which:

iv) Chapter 12 ends with a "spirit of grace" message. I see this as saying once God has wiped out Israel's enemies, it's time to end a lack of belief of Him within Israel. So a time will come where the Israelis will accept Jesus. Paul states this same idea in Romans Chapter 11. It's the idea that there is a fix number of non-Jewish people to be saved and then God focuses on Israel once again and leads them to salvation.

v) Think about it logically, if Jesus is going to return to rule from Israel, it's necessary to have a country full of people who believe Jesus is God. That's why the "Spirit of Grace" has to be poured out on that country before Jesus returns.

f) Chapter 13 gets into the important issue of "OK, Jesus returns, then what?" The text there talks about God cleansing Israel of its sins. This is about the death of idolatry. Idols are so common we aren't even aware of them. I think of idols as symbols of what we consider to be the most important things in life. If we're only interested in fame or fortune, there may be things in our home that represent those desires. My point is when Jesus returns He will not stand for any competition, so whatever false gods are out there will be destroyed. The point is God will be cleansing the land He's going to rule over.

3. OK John, all of this is well and good and you can assume most of us already believe all this stuff, although we may not describe it that cleanly or succinctly. If we already believe Jesus is God and we believe He'll rule the world one day from Israel, why should we worry about all this end time stuff until it starts occurring? Why focus on it now? We may accept this is as how the future will be, but we have "bills to pay and life to deal with" in the meantime. The answer is perspective. If we only care about the "here and now", we tend to forget about what's really important and what will matter for all of eternity. It's about having peace and joy in our lives no matter what we have to deal with. That's why we need to have the eternal perspective so that the "here and now" won't scare us if we know it's not eternal.

4. Believe it or not, that whole introduction leads to my lesson title: "How God deals with rejection". Let's be honest, most people reject God from ruling over their lives. All of us can feel rejected at a moment in time. God wants us to know that despite the fact His own people reject Him at times, despite the fact nonbelievers reject God ruling over their lives, despite the fact we Christians also fail to live as He desires, He'll deal with that rejection by effectively saying, "I'll end life as people know it one day, because I want to have a world were people love Me out of their free will just as I love people out of My (God's) free will!" That's why it's necessary to learn of the consequences that the world will face for that rejection. That's what this lesson is all about.

a) Sorry if that's a bit long, but that's the reality of the world we live in whether we like it or not. With that statement out of my system, now and only now can I begin all my verse-by-verse commentary on these chapters.
Chapter 12, Verse 1: This is the word of the LORD concerning Israel. The LORD, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares:  "I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations.

a) Let's be honest, before God can begin to discuss being rejected by the world, first He has to establish who He is, so we know who we're dealing with. That's why Verse 1 reminds us of the fact God created the world that we live in. Personally, I think it requires a much more faith to believe we came from a carbon atom than to accept the idea that God made all of us. However, I'd rather play it safe with my eternity, so I'm betting on God!

b) Now the important question, why is Zechariah starting his final vision that God gave him with the fundamental fact that He created everything? Because most of the text in the last three chapters (all one vision) deals with the issue of most people rejecting God. I'd argue most of the world believes in God's existence, only a small percentage of people believe in the God of the Israelites as the "true God". Over and above that, a much smaller group are willing to use their lives as a witness for Him. What about babies who die, or people who are naïve about God? I trust in a God who judges the world fairly based on what we did know or could have known about Him.

c) Anyway, now that I got the "God's in charge and He made everything" statement out of my system, the next bit of information we get is that "He's going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding nations reeling". Bear with me while I explain that.

i) The obvious is that Jerusalem is the most important city mentioned in the bible as well as the fact that Jesus will rule there one day. If memory is correct, that city is mentioned over 800 times in the bible. My simple point is that location is central to God's plans for the world.

ii) What I love to point out about Jerusalem is, if it wasn't for the fact it's so central in the bible, there's nothing special about it. Realize there are no natural resources in that city. It's not on a river or the ocean. It's not the largest city in Israel today. It is considered important historically to Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

iii) Let me explain the latter really quick: In the 1920's (thereabout) the uncle of Yassar Arafat, the leader of the Palestinians for the later part of the 20th Century, decided he wanted more tourists to come to Jerusalem. Therefore he declared the Muslim's great prophet Mohammed, was taken up to heaven from that "Dome of the Rock" mosque in that city. There isn't any archeological evidence to support this and the only verse in the Koran that mentions his death never mentions Jerusalem. In fact, the verse that discusses his death isn't listed among the many verses written on the Dome of the Rock. My point here is I'm convinced that Palestinian leader made up that story in order to get Muslim tourists to visit Jerusalem.

d) OK John, nice story. What does it have to do with this verse? Remember how I said there are no natural resources or "things of value" about Jerusalem? The Muslims now consider the city to be sacred even though the Koran has no references to it. Yet, if you know even the basics of the Middle East, you'd realize the pure hatred the Muslim world has against Israel. Sometimes I think the leaders of the surrounding countries encourage this as to get people's minds off their local issues. The point being is for a city with "nothing special" to it, it sure gets a lot of attention and a lot of tourists to see this historical place. Let's be honest, the city already is a "cup of trembling" for all nations. Like I stated in my lesson introduction, the joke of the United Nation's is "Can we talk about something other than Israel?" As an example, there have been 45 resolutions against Israel since 2006. Far more than all other nations combined.

e) So why call Jerusalem a "cup of trembling"? Think of people worried about something. It is a picture of "trembling" and we must admit that trembling is in the news a lot!
f) All this leads to Verse 3. The essential point is all nations will be gathered against Israel at a time where God will miraculously save Israel from an attack. Ezekiel 38-39 discusses a great battle against Israel where "everyone else" loses. Revelation speaks of a great battle against Israel where again, "everybody else" loses. So are all these bible prophets talking about the same thing? I'd answer probably, because Zechariah's getting all "end time" on us here. My point is whatever Zechariah is talking about, it's some battle where the entire world goes against Israel and through God's help (which will be obvious), God wins!

i) I have to admit for a country as small as Israel, it's hard for me to picture the entire world fighting against it. It seems like overkill to me. The way I view this is it will become a worldwide decision from non-Christian heavily dominated countries to want to wipe Israel out. Even the Roman Catholic Church's official position is that of "Amillenialism" which essentially means God's done with Israel as a nation and Jesus will just return to rule the world. "Us" Evangelicals don't hold that view.

ii) Most of us have heard the term "Armageddon". It's a large valley in Israel. This is not where this final battle takes place but the "staging area" for this great army that wants to wipe out Israel once and for all to set up. In a sense, there is no real battle of Armageddon, as it's more of a "wipe out" by God. I'm pretty positive that battle as described in Revelation 16:16 is the same "wipe out" Zechariah's describing here in these verses. Bottom line, the effort to wipe out Jerusalem will fail miserably in whatever day all of this occurs.

iii) Suppose you don't really care about all this "end time" stuff and you'll only worry about it if you're around for it. What's far more important is to realize God's got a limit to how much rejection He's going to put up with! Just as there must be some final person to be in heaven, so there's a limit to what God's willing to put up with before He says, "OK everybody, that's a wrap and watch this to prove it!" What it means for you and me is it's a reminder of what's important, using our lives to be a witness for Him before whenever "all this" begins.

iv) Hey look, there are more verses in this chapter! :)

6. Verse 3b: All who try to move it will injure themselves. 4 On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness," declares the LORD. "I will keep a watchful eye over the house of Judah, but I will blind all the horses of the nations. 5 Then the leaders of Judah will say in their hearts, 'The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the LORD Almighty is their God.'

a) The last part of Verse 3 is translated: "All who try to move it will injure themselves". This is God's way of saying, "Don't mess with My special little section of real estate." Through the millenniums, there have been unsuccessful efforts to set up "Jerusalem" elsewhere as a possible solution to the Middle East problems. It's strange to realize that the God who did create all things looks at this one little piece of real estate and says, "That's mine, nobody can mess with it!" That's what He does with Israel and Jerusalem in particular.

b) So if that's true, why did He allow the Romans to destroy it? Why was it pretty much of a "nothing" until the modern nation of Israel conquered it again in 1967? Part of the answer is we're reading "end time" stuff. The point is unlike most ancient cities that are now a big pile of ruins, Jerusalem is still alive and kicking and God's saying He's going to rule there one day, so don't mess with it!

c) Keep the big picture in mind here. That is: God is not going to let the world He created to go on as it is until "The sun burns out". A reason for the 2,000-year and counting time gap between Jesus First and Second Coming is for God to collect some fixed number of people to be a part of heaven and draw close to Him for eternity. Jesus promised us He'll return one day. My point is that 2,000-year and counting gap won't continue as an eternal one. It comes back to my lesson title that effectively says, "You (plural) want to reject me from being in charge? Watch this!" That's why Zechariah effectively says, "A big wrap up show is coming, so be on the look out for as sure as we're sitting here reading all of this!"
d) All of that leads me perfectly to the rest of these verses. Since God will win in the end, the people who trust in Him will win as well! That's why the rest of the verses talks about the "house of Judah" (the name for the Southern Israel kingdom or a nickname for all Israel) is going to benefit from this eternal king ruling over that land.

e) The idea of "horses being blinded" refers to the nations that want to destroy Israel. It's just another colorful way of saying, "God's going to win, deal with it". Will it be a literal thing as well? I won't put it past God. I just figure if the bible says "God will win in the end and those who support Him will win with Him", I want to be on the winning team!

f) Finally Verse 5 is saying the Israel leaders at that time (be it spiritual or civil leaders) will realize they're winning this war not because of their leadership, but because God Himself leads the fight on behalf of Israel. The point for you and me of course is that we can make a difference for God not based on our own power but God working through us. Does that mean these verses are literal or figurative? Both. It's figurative in the sense that God will work through anyone willing to commit their lives to make a difference for Him. It's also literal in the sense there has to be a "wrap up show" one day and we're reading about it in Zechariah's final three-chapter vision. Speaking of which:

7. Verse 6: "On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves. They will consume right and left all the surrounding peoples, but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place.

7. Verse 6: "On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves. They will consume right and left all the surrounding peoples, but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place.

a) Speaking of the leaders in Israel at that time, Verse 6 is saying in a colorful way that they'll do a lot of damage to the nations around there. God's giving Zechariah an image that the people of his day could relate to. A "firepot" is essentially something on fire used to start a bigger fire. A "torch" on (grain) sheaves is the same thing. The idea is Israel's leaders are going to do damage around that area, but none of that damage will affect God's city. It's a strange way of describing God's victory through His people over His enemies.

b) Again, remember my theme of "You don't want God to rule, well watch this and let's just see who's going to win here!" We have an extension of that here. The motivation for us is to "be a part of the winning team" as this is going to happen as sure as we're living.

8. Verse 7: "The LORD will save the dwellings of Judah first, so that the honor of the house of David and of Jerusalem's inhabitants may not be greater than that of Judah. 8 On that day the LORD will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD going before them. 9 On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.

a) A good question to ponder here is how do we know this isn't describing some event in the past? Let's be honest, there have been lots of wars over Jerusalem in history. How do we know this is "end time stuff"? A clue is God gets specific here. He is saying the country area surrounding Jerusalem will be saved first and then Jerusalem next. Could it refer to the fact that the nation of Israel as it was formed in 1948 didn't include Jerusalem and that city was won in the 1967 war? Possibly. Let's be honest, in those wars, all the nations that surrounded Israel attacked them, and Israel still won. I'm as positive as anything that God was behind that, as there is no human explanation for Israel defeating that big of an army that attacked it.

b) However, it also "has to be end time" as well. Most of the residents of Israel today are not religious. Let's be honest, Jesus didn't return right after Israel became a country again. It is a matter of reminding ourselves, that God works on His timing, not ours. I'm convinced there has to be an obvious "wrap up show" where God makes it obvious not only to Israel but to the world that He's in charge, He's calling the shots and He Himself will lead them to a great victory. The term "The Angel of the Lord" shows up here. As I've stated in the past, most Christian scholars argue that's a term for "Jesus in His pre-incarnate state". It's not a "definite" thing, but many scholars argue it that way. The key point is God says He will destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.
That leads me back to the war of 1967 when the surrounding nations attacked Israel. Let's be honest, they lost, but they're still in tact today. Verse 9 says that God will destroy those nations that attack Israel. That's why I see this battle not as the 1967 victory, but as the big "end time" wipeout that's also known as the battle of Armageddon. As I love to point out, that battle isn't so much a battle as it is a wipe out. The essential point here is all of those who don't want God to rule over their lives will get theirs in the end, so we might as well be involved with the winning team now and save a lot of trouble as the "losing team" will suffer forever.

That leads me to the classic question of, "Why do people have to suffer forever for the mistakes of this lifetime?" For example, can't say 1,000 years in hell be enough of a punishment for choosing to fight against God? Obviously by the time they do "hit hell" people will know they bet on the wrong horse! Why an eternal suffering? First, I don't make the rules, God does. Second, it's giving people what they want, an eternity away from His presence. Finally, ask yourself how much punishment is enough to satisfy a God who demands perfection to be with Him forever? That is why we must accept God Himself paying for our sins as we can never be good enough based on how we live our lives! OK, most of us know the Gospel message well, but I had to sneak that in here since we're discussing eternal suffering!

Bottom line, we'll recognize this final battle when it occurs because the Israel land around Jerusalem will "win first" and then Jerusalem itself will see a great victory. Until then, it's time to take on the last few verses of this chapter.

Verse 10: "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

I suspect most of us Christians can describe "Grace" in our sleep. The short version it does refer to a special blessing that we don't deserve as in our salvation. "Supplication" is about God answering our prayers. It doesn't mean everyone living in Israel then will win the lottery. It means God will bless Israelites living there then because He has poured out His grace upon them.

Let me explain this concept another way. Paul states in Romans 11:25-26 that one day will come when all of Israel will be saved. I'm pretty positive he's talking about the same thing as Zechariah here. It's the idea that if Jesus is coming back to rule the world from Israel, it would be necessary if Israel was full of Christian believers! That's why the text says God's grace will be poured out on Israel in that day.

OK then, you might say, how do we know it's not talking about another Messiah since the Jewish people for the most part don't believe Jesus is the Messiah? Notice the second line of this verse. It reads, "They will look on me, the one they have pierced". That last word "pierced" refers to one who is killed violently, like being shot or say, hung on a cross! It is the idea of Israelites thinking, boy did we blow that one, now what? Pray for forgiveness! That's the idea of "grieving bitterly" as one would grieve if we've lost our firstborn child. I don't think there is any pain in life worse that facing the death of one of our children. The idea is the Israelites will grieve for the "pierced one" so hard, it'd be as hard as if their own child dies. The good news for the Israelites in the land whenever this occurs, is they'll get the grace and supplication that Zechariah talks about.

Verse 11: On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, and all the rest of the clans and their wives.

Apparently, Zechariah isn't done describing how Israel will grieve. He names a historical example. It had to do with the death of last good king in Israel and the mourning for him.
b) The text even says the grieving includes the descendants of King David, and the house of Nathan, who I suspect is the prophet who did the whole "confession" thing about David's affair with Bathsheba. I don't think all the names are important. What's important is this will be a time where the land of Israel will be full of Israelites who will mourn that they'd blown it as far as trusting in Jesus, and that big "pity party" will be accepted by God.

c) OK John, we get all of this. Time for one of your patented, why should we care speeches? I'll assume most of the readers aren't Jewish. Yes, it's for us to realize Israel as a nation will win in the end, so we should be pro-Israel for that reason alone. However, most of us do get that, so one more time, why should we care? Because that's God's "game plan". It's the not so subtle reminder that our lives are the "small stuff". His "game plan" will still occur on His timing and we must accept it. My "now what" is another reminder that since He'll win in the end, let's not waste our lives only caring about making a living or just doing the things that don't matter for eternity. It's another reminder to stay busy "for Him" until He comes back to "set up shop" as I love to call it. I can't think of a better use of our time!

d) One more thing that's always puzzled me before we move on to Chapter 13. Is God going to somehow make it known what tribe all the Israelites are from again? Will He just point to people and say, "Whether you realize it or not, you're family line is from this tribe". I'm also curious if bodies are ever found that would identify Jewish "DNA" to identify tribes. I don't know, it's just one of those weird things I spend way too much time thinking about.

e) On that strange note, time for Chapter 13.

11. Chapter 13, Verse 1: "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.

a) As I read this verse, my first thought is "what's the fountain?" All of Christians know well that the only way to forgive sins is to trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, I am wondering is this fountain literal or spiritual?

i) Another bible mystery to me, is why does the final chapter of the final book of the bible speak of a river flowing from God's temple? I've always held the view that if the literal interpretation makes sense, seek no other sense. Since Zechariah's gone all "end times" on us here, I'd bet that he's discussing the same water source that is being discussed in the last chapter of Revelation (first two verses).

ii) Anyway, back to the question: Why is a literal fountain necessary to clean them of their sins? I assume most of realize baptism is a public acknowledgement for us to show the world we've been cleansed of sin and not a literal cleansing. A reference is made in Revelation 22 of a river that supplies water for trees there who's fruit is used to heal the nations. My point is both this verse and that Revelation verse use water as a way to say "God's using water for the cleansing of sin".

iii) So is water literally necessary to cleanse us of our sins? That topic's been debated for millenniums. Since people associate water with cleaning, maybe it's symbolic. Maybe it is just a way for people to say, "In order to feel cleansed from my sins, I want to be baptized to publicly show that I've been cleansed. My point is although I believe with all my heart that the only way to have forgiveness of our sins is for us to accept God's full payment of our sins by dying on the cross for us. Even with that said, having water in "eternity" is a way for people to publicly feel "clean" for all of their sins, like a baptism ritual. I suspect that's what the "fruit" is all about in the Revelation 22 Chapter. It's a way to express "I believe Jesus paid the complete for my sins", and by eating the "right fruit" (as opposed to the bad one back in the Garden of Eden), we're eating what God wants us to eat to be cleansed of our sins and accept Him as being in charge of our lives!

b) Whether you realize it or not, I believe I just figured out why the first sin involved eating fruit and why the final chapter of the bible involves eating fruit. This bible illustration is God's way to show us how we accept His payment for our sins, by living as He desires!
12. Verse 2: "On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more," declares the LORD Almighty. "I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land.

a) If there is one thing I've learned from studying Zechariah, is just when you think this guy can't get any weirder, he never fails to let us down! Sometimes you just have to "go with the flow" and accept it as is, and just try to understand what he's communicating the best we can. My first question here is why does Zechariah jump from talking about a fountain in Jerusalem in the "end times" to dealing with idolatry in Israel? What's the connection? It is that, "If God wants to cleans Israel of sin, what sins is He talking about? Let's face it, most of us don't kill people every day and most of us don't steal every day. That's why a specific reference to idolatry begins in Verse 2. If you ask me what specific sin has caused the most damage, I'd argue gossip, as that's the most common sin. If you asked me what sin is the most prevalent, I'd say idolatry, as that's the sin of turning our focus on things other than God. We tend to think of idolatry as "Little statues", but it's much more than that. It's about worshipping anything and everything other than the true God. Therefore, this becomes a key topic here on the issue of "If God's going to clean us of our sins, what sins are in focus here?"

b) One of the most common mistakes Christians make in witnessing to others, is we think it's necessary for one to clean up their lives first and then give it God. It's like saying we can't be a Christian unless we first do, "this, this and that". Turning our lives over to God must be the first step so that God's power can work through us so we'll have His power within us in order to draw us closer to Him and use our lives for His glory!

c) Anyway, if God's going to work on our lives once we turn it over to Him, it'd make sense that the next thing to work on is eliminate other things we worship. That's why the focus here is on idolatry. It's not just about removing statues to other gods in Israel, it's for us to realize God wants to be "#1 on a list of 1" in every aspect of our lives.

d) OK then, we get the "idolatry" stuff, what about the false prophet reference? Think about it logically: If one's got to get rid of idolatry, one has to eliminate people and sources that are leading people away from God. It'd be like saying, "Go destroy all the idols and their messengers while you're at it!" Obviously, it doesn't mean we Christians are to go murder people who preach other gods, but it does mean we turn from them. That's also why one of the final things John the apostle says in 1st John is to "Keep ourselves from idols".

e) With that said, remember we're reading about the "wrap up show" here in Zechariah. It's God saying, "I've had enough of disobedience, I'm "cutting off" who can get saved at this point and I'm going to wrap up the world as we know it once and for all!" To do all that, it does mean God has to end idolatry and those who preach it. That's why Zechariah does "turn on a dime" in Verse 2. Now that we got that, we can move on to Verse 3.

13. Verse 3: And if anyone still prophesies, his father and mother, to whom he was born, will say to him, 'You must die, because you have told lies in the LORD's name.' When he prophesies, his own parents will stab him.

a) All of a sudden Zechariah gets violent! He is saying that if anyone practices idolatry, that person must die. It says his or her own parents must kill them. First, one has to admit it's a pretty good incentive to not practice idolatry. The next thing I pondered is what would motivate a parent to want to kill their own children? I love my children and when they do mess up, I disciplined them when they're little and I try to show the consequences of their actions now that their older. However, I can't imagine wanting to kill them for sin! What we are reading here is the reminder that we must love God more than our own family. It does not mean we're to kill our children when they mess up, but we're to put God first in our lives even over the love we have for our own children!

b) Remember we're reading "end time" stuff: This is not a call to murder our children if they turn from God. It's saying when all this stuff happens, "alternatives won't be permitted".
c) This verse also leads to other questions: Will there still be death when Jesus returns? I'd say this is one of those verses that gives us a clue that when Jesus returns, there needs to be people to "rule over". What I'm saying is when all the bad stuff of Revelation occurs, I believe there has to be people for God to rule over! If we Christians will reign with Him to enforce His rule, there has to be people to rule over. All that means death will still exist in that future time era of Jesus literally ruling over the world.

d) Does that mean people will literally have the ability and will to kill their own children if their children turn from God? I'd say yes, but I also suspect it'd be a rare occurrence. In the Old Testament there are some laws on the book that you don't read any examples of that law being enforced. For example, the Old Testament requires stoning people who've committed adultery, but you don't read of any actual executions that way. Yes I'm sure it did happen on rare occasions, but my point is the bible doesn't record any of them. All I am saying is I suspect this is one of those cases where the laws on the books as to keep us on the "straight and narrow", but considering how much we love our own children, I am wondering how much enforcement of this law will actually occur. Maybe I'm wrong, but I'm just thinking about this logically which is what bible meditation is all about!

i) I told you Zechariah is a weird guy and he never fails to let us down that way!

ii) Speaking of dealing with "bad people" let's move on to Verse 4:

14. Verse 4: "On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his prophetic vision. He will not put on a prophet's garment of hair in order to deceive. He will say, 'I am not a prophet. I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth.' If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body?' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.'

a) Remember "that day" is an end-time event. Let's put it this way: Satan is not going down without a fight. I'm positive demonic influence will influence as many people as possible before their time comes to an end. Remember that Satan is well aware he loses in the end so he's trying to delay that event as long as possible. The reason Zechariah's getting weird on us again (besides the fact "it's him") is he's trying to warn people that just because some person claims their getting a vision from God, does not mean it is. Such visions have to be tested against God's word. Remember Jesus said we'll recognize people by their fruit. It's a colorful way of saying "We'll recognize true and false teachers by what they teach".

b) Since we're discussing deception, let's discuss it here. Why does the text mention that the (false) prophet's garment will be hairy? How does that make a difference? I suspect that some false prophet will claim he's just like John the Baptist and will try to dress like him. It's like saying, "I'm dressing weird, because that's who I represent". The point is Satan is going to do his best to deceive people until the very end. Remember that the final battle is "Armageddon. The bigger the army that Satan can raise to fight against Israel means, "he likes his odds better". That's why all this deception is here.

i) Even if this is "Post Armageddon", the point is demon's still want to delay as long as possible Jesus rule over the world. Revelation 20 states that after 1,000 years of His rule, Satan gets one last shot at power, before he's down for the count! All I'm saying is I don't know the "when", but this will happen one day.

c) The "farmer" reference reminds me of "Amos". The prophet Amos was famous for saying in effect, "I'm a nobody, picked by God to deliver a message". My point is whoever these prophets are they're going to claim, "We're not professionals, we are a bunch of nobodies that got visions from God".

d) Remember that the marching orders are to kill such false prophets. Therefore, it's logical that such false prophets have wounds on their body. It could be from cutting themselves to prove their worthiness as prophets or others could inflict that. The important thing is that it doesn't matter what they claim, what is important is what they teach in comparison to God's word. That and that alone is how we judge a false prophet. Even if they have a lot of truth to what they say, if they're denying the Gospel, "out they should go".

9
OK John, this is all interesting stuff, but let's assume none of us will be around when all of this goes down. Why should we care? For starters, the way to recognize false prophets in that day is the same as we do today. It's actually simpler than one thinks. If someone will claim that Jesus was never fully human or never fully God that's denying the Gospel. If it is a message of "We must do x, y and z to earn our salvation", we'd know we're barking up the wrong tree. Even if a preacher says, "If you'll write me a check, God now owes you ten times that amount!" The "health, wealth and prosperity" message is not the true gospel message. My point of all of this is simply that false teachers are around us today just as they'll be around when all of "this" takes place. As I said, it doesn't mean we're to kill such false preachers, but we are to turn from that message when we recognize it.

Finally let me address the last line that reads, "The wounds I was given at the house of my friends". That line does not refer to Jesus. Jesus wasn't wounded in any friend's house as I assume all of us know. Even if one argues it refers to all of Israel as his "friends", I would still say that's not a good fit. More likely it refers to self-inflicted wounds trying to prove one's prophet status when such a person is not a prophet.

The good news is if Verse 6 is definitely not talking about Jesus, Verse 7 definitely is.

Verse 7: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!" declares the LORD Almighty. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones.

As most of you know, sheep are dumb animals. If a shepherd doesn't keep them together they will scatter all over the place. So who is scattering sheep (people) and why?

The more I read this chapter, the more I'm convinced this is "end time" leading up to, and not after Jesus "sets up shop". Verse 8 refers to the death of 2/3 of the Israelites during the time of all that "Revelation bad stuff". We'll get there in a bit. My point is what Zechariah is talking about dealing with false teachers in the last set of verses, then while he's talking about bad news, Zechariah "goes all the way" and describes the bad news of what's going to happen in Israel prior to Jesus ruling over the world.

Let me pause and ask a related question: Why all the death before Jesus returns? Why do so many people get killed when the AntiChrist rules? Yes, I can see war as he wants to be the world leader and he's forcing himself on the scene. Still if this man allows the Jewish people to build their temple, why wipe most of them out? If Satan's goal is to delay Jesus rule over the world, how does all that killing help? If God loves the Israelites as much as the bible claims He does, why allow the "sheep to be scattered"? The best way to explain it is to realize if there are no Jewish people to occupy Israel "in that day" than Satan wins. God promised Abraham that his descendants would inherit that land forever. That's why Satan is doing his best to wipe out the Jewish race. It's not just the "Holocaust", it's been a horrid pattern all through history.

OK then, why does God allow all this horror to happen? Of course, we could just say God knows all things and knows Satan would hatch this plan. One answer is the fact that God allows free will to exist and that includes the right to turn away from Him. The 20th Century saw more killings than all previous centuries in our history. Stop to realize that the three biggest 20 Century "butchers" were atheists. That'd be Hitler, Stalin and Mao Zedung who actually killed more than the other two. All I'm saying is a lack of a belief in God will bring far more murder than a world where the leaders fear the eternal consequences of killing!

Back to the question: Why does God allow it? Don't know. I just know if that's all there is to life, it's very unfair. If there's an eternity and judgment will be based on how we think and acted toward God in this life, only then is it fair.

As to the specific "scattering of Israel" is that "end time" or covering the last 2,000 years (approximately) when Israel wasn't in that land? "Amillenialism argue this "scattering covers the last 1,900 years of history."
iv) To state what is probably obvious to most of you by now, I don't hold the view. I see "end times" as just that. It is the idea of, "If a bible literal interpretation makes perfect sense, seek no other sense". Over and above that, the issue of how God is going to do things doesn't interest me as much as the "why" question. I just figure that He created the world therefore, He's free to do what He wants with it. If He is going to literally rule over our world one day as promised all through the bible, I'd better prepare for that event and do what Jesus called me to do, tell others all this is going to occur one day so we better accept that reality.

v) Ok, now that I've scared everyone half to death, time to move on!

16. Verse 8: In the whole land," declares the LORD, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it.

a) Believe it or not, the important question here is what is the "whole land"? Is that referring only to Israel or the whole world? In the World War Two Jewish Holocaust, two thirds of Jewish people in Europe died. That's why amillennialists argue this verse is now history, and not some end time event. The number of Jewish people who were living worldwide when all that took place was closer to one-third of the world's Jewish population.

b) My point is as hard as it to accept, I think this verse is describing another Holocaust! It is describing whenever the (not a, but the) anti-Christ comes on the scene, and unfortunately he's going to be worse than Hitler in that regards. In one sense, I truly hope my view here is wrong. I wouldn't wish that on anyone let alone a worse repeat of that holocaust! This reminds me of one of the traditional phrases recited at Jewish Sabbath's. It is the idea that every Jewish generation must face the threat of annihilation.

c) Consider this verse from the standpoint that the antichrist will come on the scene one day with the desire to wipe out Israel once and for all. That's what devout followers of Islam desire would happen. My point is there is a worldwide desire to wipe Israel off the map and I could see another horrid holocaust happening to try to make that desire come true! That's why there is such a desire to wipe Israel out, because in Muslim end time thought, it triggers the coming of their messiah!

d) There is one more way to think about this: The desire to wipe out every last Jewish man woman and child is in effect the desire to wipe out the God we're accountable to as far as the 10 Commandments as an example. Most people believe God exists, but still want to live however they feel like without worrying about the effects of their lives. Yes, we are saved by grace, but the great question of course is what are we doing with that salvation? What God desires for all of eternity is people who accept the fact not only that He exists, but that He will rule over our lives and by accepting that rule, we will have far greater joy than any other way we could chose to live out our lives!

e) Remember that we're reading about "Satan's last stand" and he's going down by taking as many people that he can with him in that day. Satan causes all this death and destruction not because he hates people, but because he hates the idea of being "second fiddle" to God Himself. The death of lots of people in that day is the consequences of that choice. Again, realize that most people living in Israel today are secular. I can see most of them accepting a false messiah if it brings peace to that reason. It's when that false guy does the "double-cross" and demands to be worshipped as God, is literally when "all hell breaks loose" and all of this horrid stuff begins. To put it simply, I don't desire to see two thirds of Israelites being killed in that day, but I accept the bible as God's word, and it's written as a warning that this is going to happen. If we realize that eternity is infinitely longer than this life, in that sense, "dying for the true God" is not really a death, but just a change in location.

f) My favorite illustration for the death of the believer is as follows. Sometimes a little child will fall asleep in their parent's arms. The next morning they wake up in bed and wonder how they got there. That moving act is how we'll be transformed from one life to another in a sense without us realizing it.
The reason I'm spending so much time on these final verses, is because it's my desire for us Christians to not fear death. I'm not encouraging suicide, but I'm just saying the reason we were created is to give God the glory! My Christian philosophy includes the idea that I don't fear death, but I'm not too crazy about pain! One reason why the bible goes into so much detail about how the world ends, is to take away our fear of death. By realizing this is how the world as we know it ends, it gives us a sense of comfort that we're part of the winning team. So how do we know all of this isn't a bunch of fables? History has shown us how much of the bible has come true already. Since we have that hindsight, we should be able to trust the "end time" stuff as well. Could my interpretation be wrong on some of the finer points? Sure. Again, I don't worry about the "how" so much as the "why". That is the fact that Jesus is God, He will rule over the world one day and we were created as to make a difference for Him in this world. Whether we like it or not, that's how the game is to be played out in life, so again we might as well be a part of the winning team!

Hey look, there's one more verse here!

Verse 9: This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'

For the last page, I've been focusing on the fact two thirds of Jewish people will die. What we see Zechariah doing here, is focusing on the other third. One reason I don't believe the World War Two Holocaust was "it", is simply because the "remaining third" after that war neither turned to Jesus or even became devout religious Jewish believers. That's why I do believe all of this is "end time" as the Israelites who survive this will turn to God as to say in effect, "Boy did we blow it. God's in charge and hopefully we've learned our lesson."

OK John this is all horrid stuff, and I'd like to not think about this too much. Since most of us are non-Jewish Christians, why care about all this "Jewish end time stuff"? Yes, we get the idea that God's going to work through that nation once again, but how does any of it affect our lives here and now? The short answer is "It's not an exclusive club." It is not us thinking, "We're in, you're not, too bad for you!" God didn't create us to say go believe in Jesus then go back to your life. He created us so that we'd use our lives as a witness of the fact He exists and share that knowledge with others. That's what the great commission is all about, spreading the word about Jesus to others and helping others to grow in faith of who He is and what He's done for us. So now that you know all this "weird stuff" accept it for the Gospel truth that it is and let's all use our lives for His glory.

Since we made it through this tough sledding, let's close in prayer and ask God's help for us to use our lives as He sees fit to make that difference for Him.

Heavenly Father, we read of all this death and destruction, and honestly it's scary to realize just how painful this life can be. It's hard to accept that "death and hell" is the ultimate future for most people in this world. It's much easier to think God loves everybody and wouldn't allow for something that horrible to happen. The hard part is realizing that because You are perfect, You demand perfection. It doesn't mean we don't mess up. It means we accept the concept of being perfectly forgiven of our sins. With that knowledge, fill our hearts with Your love so that we can share Your love with others around us. Fill us with the boldness we need to make the difference for You that You desire we make. Make it obvious to us exactly what it is You desire of us this day as we use our lives for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.