

Zechariah Chapter 9- John Karmelich

1. As I'm fond of saying, "Now what"? The last two chapters were sort of a "Q&A" with God telling the Israelites what'll happen to them in the near and distant future. Now that the Israelites know the plan, now what? That's why Zechariah got more to say. Chapters 9-14 are two more messages God gave Zechariah. The first of these is Chapters 9-11. The final message is the final 2 chapters. I'm only going to cover Chapter 9 in this lesson as it has too much "stuff" to be combined with the other chapters. Half of the chapter reads like a news flash. The other half gives predictions about the end times. My job as usual is to explain why we should care about any of this stuff.
2. Time for another explanation of this chapter: Half of it tells the story of how Alexander the Great conquered the land around Israel. Zechariah wrote this about 200 years before it occurred. There are bible critics who can't stand Zechariah's accuracy and try to late-date the book. I consider that easy to disprove if for no other reason than it is common knowledge this book was translated into Greek before all the historical events (from our perspective) took place. My point is careful study of this book shows that Zechariah predicted is exactly what happened hundreds of years later.
 - a) However, I correctly pointed in the last lesson that the purpose of bible study isn't to learn history. I said the purpose is to learn how this applies to our lives. Yes, thirty percent of the bible is predictions and that's to validate it as the word of God.
 - b) The real question is how does any of this history apply to our lives today? To begin, this chapter has predictions about our future that we'll either see on the news one day or "live from the balcony of heaven". My point is the bible accurately tells the future, so accept it.
 - c) The next thing to realize is God doesn't just list ancient history (our perspective) or future history (from Zechariah's time span) to "hear His head roar". It's a reminder that the God we worship knows all things before they occur. He tells us our future so we won't worry about what's going to happen "tomorrow". I keep thinking of the poor Christians (that is poor financially) who gave of their earnings to Paul to help other Christians in need. Did the Christians who gave get rich after that? No. Did God put that giving in a special box for them when they get to heaven? No. They gave because it was the right thing to do. It is simply another example of putting other's needs as a priority over our own.
 - i) I state that hear so as we read about God working in the ancient world we realize God doesn't change and He cares as much about us than He does about them. We are to learn "ancient history" to realize God's there, He's still in control and He teaches us what has happened and what will happen that will effect our lives.
 - ii) OK John, that's all well and good. How does any of that affect the problems I have to deal with right now? It puts them in perspective. If God got His people to trust Him "then", then He can also get us to trust Him now, simply by believing Jesus is God, He did pay the complete price for our sins and He will guide us through that "issue of the day" as He cares as much about us as He did "them".
3. OK enough of all of that. Back to the premise. Besides reading about what Alexander the Great did, we are also going to see a prediction of what Jesus did hundreds of years before it happened. I'm talking about "Palm Sunday", when Jesus rode into Jerusalem desiring to be worshipped. It is given here in Zechariah as a contrast to what Alexander did. Yes, I'm going to discuss both in lots of details in this lesson, as that's me! What I want everyone to consider is why did Jesus make this event occur as it did? In the Gospels, you may notice Jesus constantly went out of His way to say in effect, "Don't tell anyone I'm God". It was hard enough for Jesus to "work" without the crowds thronging Him wherever He went. So if Jesus went to that much trouble to effectively say, "Don't worship Me now", why have "Palm Sunday" which is when He rode in town on a donkey exactly as predicted here in Zechariah in order to be worshipped as God?
 - a) One answer is it was predicted here. Another reason is I believe Jesus held those Israelites accountable to know the time of His arrival and accept Him as their Messiah!

- b) Anyway, this chapter lists the "Palm Sunday" appearance of Jesus riding on a donkey in a comparison to what Alexander the Great did when He came in that area.
4. From there the chapter jumps to events of His Second Coming as well as explain His purpose for both of His comings in the first place. There's an old saying about bible predictions I should state here: Reading bible predictions about the future is like seeing a mountain range in the distance. What we can't see from that perspective is there could be a large valley between two separate mountains. My point is often bible predictions look way into the future with a big gap between one event and the other. Let me explain it this way: Paul taught the only "mystery" not given in the Old Testament is the Christian church. That means, a prediction that ties to an event of Jesus First Coming may be followed by a prediction tying to His Second Coming as the Old Testament hides the "Christian church" valley between those two predictions. Chapter 9 has one of those.
5. OK John, it sounds like Zechariah gets "weird again" in this chapter. You must admit, he's written some pretty strange stuff in the earlier chapters. I won't deny that. I will say that Zechariah uses idioms and names of places that people of his time era would understand. Remember Zechariah's primary audience was people living in Israel around 500BC. My job is to "modernize" it by taking what's happened in history since then and realize in hindsight that the visions given to Zechariah by God are accurate snapshots of history. Yes that means, I'm going to teach about Alexander the Great in details you may not care to learn. More importantly, I'm going to show how Zechariah got the privilege of explaining aspects about Jesus First and Second Coming that we can read in the New Testament as well as things we will see either from "Heaven's Balcony" or video screens.
- a) Think of explaining part of Alexander the Great's history as a necessary background as to understand why Zechariah teaches us what He does. It's also there for us to compare it to what Jesus did and will do as being far greater than all the great accomplishments of that man who conquered the known world and died before he was thirty years old!
 - b) So what do you call this lesson, "Understand the past, so we can understand our future!"
 - c) With that said, sit back, enjoy the ride and let's read of one of the greatest men in history as he (Alexander) will be greatly overshadowed by what "THE" greatest man in history who also happens to be God, did do, and will do in the future.
 - d) OK then, time to get started on my verse by verse commentary.
6. Zechariah Chapter 9, Verse 1: The word of the LORD is against the land of Hadrach and will rest upon Damascus-- for the eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel are on the LORD-- ² and upon Hamath too, which borders on it, and upon Tyre and Sidon, though they are very skillful.
- a) Let's start with a warning. Verses 1 through 7 are describing the destruction of a bunch of places near Jerusalem. It isn't until Verse 13 that Greece is even mentioned. We know this is describing Alexander the Great's conquest of these places near Israel as his conquests of these places happened pretty much exactly as they're described here in these verses.
 - b) Therefore, in order to explain what these verses meant historically, I should start with the issue of who is Alexander the Great. Once we get through this, even briefly, you'll realize how much of an impact he's not only had on Middle East history, but admired all through world history for what he accomplished and how fast he accomplished it.
 - c) Before I do that, a little "who, what, where and why" is in order here. As opposed to all of the previous visions of Zechariah, there is no "date stamp" here. Most scholars figured the date was much later in his life, but truthfully, who knows? Let's just say this was written around 500BC give or take a few decades. The "where" is in Jerusalem. That is important as one has to see bible "history" from God's perspective and that means where God will be ruling the world from one day. The "how" is about the future. Remember the last chapter dealt with what's going to happen to Israel in the future. Therefore, one can think of all of the rest of Zechariah as more "what's going to happen in our future" lecture. It's to remind them and us that God knows the future, so we don't have to worry about it. Further, He's revealing key events about the future so we'll recognize them when they occur. Speaking of key events in history, time for a discussion of Alexander the Great.

- d) Remember at that time, the greater Middle East was united by the Medo-Persian Empire. They were two groups that united to conquer that known world. That would be from the east end of Europe all the way to India. It includes Greece. Realize Greece was not united under a single leader until the father of Alexander. Greece's geography makes it tough to unite. There were three or four main "city states" that were the center of power in Greece. When outsiders threatened them, they united to fight. Alexander the Great's father was a general and lead a Greek army to defeat "Medo-Persia" (think Iran) in some major battles. Like many great generals, that man died in battle and then Alexander got promoted to be the next leader of this united Greek army.
- i) Let me give a little more background on Alexander: Because his father was a great general, he could afford a great tutor for his son. The famous Greek philosopher, Aristotle was Alexander's tutor. Aristotle believed God existed, but he essentially believed once God set the world in motion, He didn't care about it. Aristotle also taught that the Greek gods from Apollos to Zeus were not real. I'm stating all of this to realize what was Alexander's background before he started conquering the world around him.
 - ii) The reason I know all of this is essentially from two historians. The more famous of the two historians is Josephus, a Pro-Roman Israelite living at the time of Jesus. He wrote a history of the Jewish people that included a lot of info about "Alex". A second historian was a Greek who lived around the time of Alexander. I'll just say what we know about Alexander the Great is fairly well established in history.
 - iii) Anyway one of those two writers said that before Alexander was dispatched to go replace his father, Alex had a dream that he'd conquer the known world in a swift manner. He also saw in a vision a priest of God who'd anoint him. The reason I'm stating that legend, is Alexander spared Jerusalem because when he got there, the High Priest was dressed the same way as his vision and that got the sparing of the city. That story is not in the bible, but simply a well known legend about "Alex".
 - iv) What really made Alexander famous was the fact he conquered the known world faster than anyone in world history ever has. Essentially, he was made the top guy when he was 22. He died at the age of 32 literally complaining, there are no more worlds left to conquer. When his staff asked who would take over, he said, "give it to the strong". He had four top generals who essentially split the empire after that episode took place. By the way, the life of Alexander the Great was also predicted in Daniel Chapter 8, Verses 5-8 a few hundred years earlier. Daniel's vision about Alexander is amazing to read in light of how he actually conquered the world.
- e) Believe it or not, we actually made it back to Zechariah Chapter 9, Verse 1. All this info is necessary as again, the first few verses of Zechariah explain Alexander's conquering of the cities near Israel literally in the order they were actually conquered by the Greeks. Just as I stated in my introduction, the reason this is in the bible, isn't to learn historical facts, but to validate the bible as God's word and proof that God knows history before it occurs.
- f) Anyway, Chapter 9 starts with a warning against "Hadrach". It was a place north of Israel in what would be Syria today. The traditional way that an army would conquer a city was to surround it and starve it out. Alexander did that too, but the Greeks also built weapons that destroyed city walls that was innovative for that time.
- i) So what did the residents of "Hadrach" do to get God's wrath? While I'm asking it, what about the other cities named in the first few verses of this chapter? It comes back to the idea that God holds us accountable for what we know about Him. The nations (city-states) near Israel knew that the Israelites claimed to worship the one who created all things. The other nations near Israel worshipped other deities that they even admitted were local "gods" and not the true God. Speaking of God, He's saying, "Hey, you knew I existed, you ignored Me and it's judgment time!"

- ii) Therefore we read in Verse 1 of the destruction of some place called Hadrach. The next city on the list is the more famous city of Damascus. From what we know of history, Damascus wasn't completely destroyed by Alexander, but he did conquer it and required the residents there to turn their allegiance from the Persians to now be apart of the fast growing Greek Empire.
- iii) The next placed mentioned is someplace called Hamath. As I love to joke, none of these cities are on the "final exam". We don't get a quiz when we get to heaven as if God says, "OK, name some cities Alexander the Great conquered". I believe God is much more interested in the question of do we believe Jesus is God and died for all our sins and what did we do with that information?
- iv) Coming back to Verse 1, between the references to Damascus being conquered and before the reference to wherever "Hamath" was located, we get a phrase translated "for the eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel are on the LORD". That idea refers to the fact that God knows all things, watches over all people, and each one of us is accountable to God based on what we know or could have known about Him.
- g) As you can tell, I'm having fun discussing all of this and we're still on Verses 1-2. Yes, I'm going to speed it up after this, but it's important to get the flavor of what Alexander did as he conquered the world around him at great speed. OK, time for more background:
 - i) One of the great powers of that region was a placed called "Tyre". It was a seaport that'd be in Lebanon if it existed today. That city had a powerful navy. They grew rich through that navy and by trading with other places. Their "sister city" is Sidon as they were both part of the same heritage. They were famous as far back as King David and his son King Solomon (roughly 500 years earlier). Anyway, Tyre was a "force to be reckoned with". If you've ever heard of the Phoenicians, they were the one's who lived there. Our alphabet essentially came from them, by the way.
 - ii) Anyway, back in the days of the Babylonian Empire, Nebuchadnezzar (that same guy who wiped out Israel) spent five years trying to conquer and destroy Tyre. I'll just say he gave up and that was that. When the Persians came to town, they spent 13 years laying siege to Tyre. The residents of Tyre slowly but surely escaped to a nearby island a half mile offshore with most of the wealth from that city. In a sense the Persians did conquer Tyre but it was an "empty victory" as all valuable stuff is now "offshore". Still, the Persians destroyed the main city of Tyre.
 - iii) Anyway, now comes Alexander the Great. He wasn't going to put up with this. He took the ruins of Tyre and built a bridge to the island city of Tyre off the coast. He also had a navy to prevent Tyre from escaping again. The short version is Tyre got destroyed in a matter of months. Compare that to the last two empires who could not destroy that place after years of trying! If you go there today, it's all ruins.
 - iv) Believe it or not, this does tie to Verse 2 of Zechariah 9, as the verse states Tyre and Sidon were "very skillful" as yes, they escaped two great empires. However, what the verse also implies is that they did fall to the Greeks despite that skill.
 - v) By the way, Alexander the Great is not mentioned by name here, but since we got the hindsight of history, that's how we know all of this is true.
 - vi) The good news is we actually made it to Verse 3 and I can do this one quickly:
- 7. Verse 3: Tyre has built herself a stronghold; she has heaped up silver like dust, and gold like the dirt of the streets. ⁴ But the Lord will take away her possessions and destroy her power on the sea, and she will be consumed by fire.
 - a) Remember how I said that Tyre got rich via a strong navy and trade? That's what Verse 3 describes here. Yes, Alexander did conquer them and destroy that city. So what did they do to deserve this? The short version is they trusted in their wealth and not God. That is what sealed their fate. Ezekiel 28 is a great cross reference here: He wrote over a hundred years earlier, and described Tyre's fall and the demonic power behind Tyre that also fell!

- b) Bottom line, Tyre fell and even using the colorful idioms as told here in Zechariah, it died pretty much exactly as Zechariah describes it in here in Verses 3 and 4.
 - c) OK, since Alexander did that in a relatively short time-period, what's next? He went south into the land of Israel. The "good news" is Alexander decided to focus on an enemy of Israel: The Philistines. The short version is this group controlled five coastal cities in Israel since at least the time of Israel's first king (Saul) over 500 years earlier. They were among the nations that God wanted the Israelites to "wipe out for trespassing on God's land", but let's just say the Israelites never accomplished that goal. That's why God said in effect, "If you can't do that, I'll get someone who will, because again they're on My land!"
 - i) With that long introduction completed, time for Verses 5-6:
8. Verse 5: Ashkelon will see it and fear; Gaza will writhe in agony, and Ekron too, for her hope will wither. Gaza will lose her king and Ashkelon will be deserted. ⁶ Foreigners will occupy Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.
- a) Here we have the five cities named of the Philistines. The short version is Alexander with his large army wiped out all five cities in a relatively short time span. Remember that Alex lead an army that conquered from Greece to India so "he didn't have time to spare".
 - b) Bottom line, that's that for the Philistines after over 500 years of being Israel's "pain in the rear" neighbor for at least half a millennium.
 - c) I also can't move on without sharing one more fact. The reason the land of Israel is called "Palestine" is because that's how the Romans pronounced "Philistine". When Rome wiped out Israel as an insult to the Jewish people, they renamed that land of Israel "Philistine" after that long gone group. Personally, I like to cross out maps that refer to Israel as that Palestine because God calls that land Israel and that's good enough for me! Realize in the time of the Romans, the original Philistines were long gone. The local people living in that area today are not descendants of the original Philistines, but others who moved into that area. Now that you know that, time to get back to the text.
9. Verse 7: I will take the blood from their mouths, the forbidden food from between their teeth. Those who are left will belong to our God and become leaders in Judah, and Ekron will be like the Jebusites. ⁸ But I will defend my house against marauding forces. Never again will an oppressor overrun my people, for now I am keeping watch.
- a) Meanwhile, God's still "ticked off" at the Philistines. Not only is He angry with them for being in His land, but also because of all the wars they fought against His people!
 - b) So what's deal with "forbidden food" and "blood from their mouths"? Here the Philistines were in Israel's "back yard". They knew well of God's existence but still made sacrifices to their own god and ate food in his honor. Anyway, those that survived Alexander's army conquering that land moved into the Israel's territory. Remember at Zechariah's time, the nation of Israel didn't exist, but Israelites were back in the land as the Persians let them go back home again. Anyway, the survivor's of Alexander's massacre were now part of that Jewish culture as the Philistines are no more.
 - c) At the end of Verse 7 is a reference to the Jebusites. That's one of the groups the Israelites did wipe out when they first moved into that land. Zechariah's audience would be aware of that, which is why we have this reference in effect to saying, "Hey you know how those Philistines have been a pain in our side for centuries? Well, a short time from now (about 200 years in the future) they'll be as dead as the Jebusites are to you today.
 - d) By now you're getting the flavor of Middle East history around 320BC being told around the year 520BC by Zechariah. That leads right into Verse 8. The key point is Alexander's army didn't destroy Israel. How do we know this? Because they lived to write about it.
 - e) Anyway, God's saying to a bunch of Israel's living in that land that's still under control of the Persians that "God's still protecting His people, even though they're subject to the rule of another empire, God will not "allow" others to overrun them. So what about Rome? It is a matter of history that they conquered Israel. Let me explain that quickly.

- f) In the last lesson, I talked about the fact that Jesus said it was God's desire to gather all of His people together, "as a mother hen gathers her chicks" (Based on Matthew 23:37). After Jesus said, he next stated one of the most tragic verses in the New Testament: "Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Matthew 23:38-39, NIV). The point is Jesus held the Israelites accountable for knowing the time of His visitation. That's why it was necessary for Jesus to have "Palm Sunday". Matthew 23:38-39 is tragic because when the Israelites failed to honor Jesus as God, that's when Jesus said, "Your house is left to you desolate". That is Jesus literally condemning Israel "to death" for failing to realize that He was their Messiah. The good news is that "death" is not permanent. Jesus then says in Verse 39 "until you say (Israel as an entity) "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord". The essential point is Israel will collectively ask for Jesus' return before He returns.
- g) So does that mean Zechariah is a contraction to Matthew? To repeat Zechariah 9:8 again, it says, "Never again will an oppressor overrun my people, for now I am keeping watch". Yet, Rome did overthrow Israel as well as the Greeks after Alexander for example. That is why both Jewish and Christian scholars see Verse 8 as "prophetic". It's not implying that just because Alexander spared (Jerusalem), which were getting to in a moment, it does not mean Israel will never be conquered again. Obviously, that's happened in history. What it implies is when the Messiah comes (what we Christians call Jesus at His Second Coming) then and only then will Israel no longer have to fear being conquered again.
- i) Another reason that Zechariah wrote that God won't destroy Israel is he wanted to reassure them as they rebuild the temple it won't be a "wasted effort".
- h) This now leads to my second favorite part of this lesson. (My favorite is Verse 9 coming up.) This is about Alexander the Great and Jerusalem. OK time for more historical facts:
- i) The Israelites were pro-Persians as they were the one's who let the Israelites return to their own land. They didn't consider Alexander' plans to take over the world at that point. So here is Alexander coming to Jerusalem and the Israelites thought "What do we do now?" The official Jewish commentary (take that source as that) says that a long line of priests came to greet the Greek general as he approached. The head priest was the last of that line. Alexander recognized head priest's outfit as what he saw in his vision before his conquests began. Another legend is that the head priest showed Alexander a copy of the book of Daniel, which stated centuries earlier that a Greek leader would conquer the known world.
- ii) The Israelites agreed to be taxed by Greece in exchange for not being conquered. I also read that the Israelites all agreed to name their next born son Alexander as to honor the king. Whether or not this story is true is secondary. What we do know is Alexander the Great spared Jerusalem. Again, these events occurred over 2,300 years ago and sources are limited.
- iii) Bottom line time, Alexander the Great spared Jerusalem and the Israelites living there did change from being Pro-Persia to Pro-Greece.
- iv) All that leads to one of the most famous verses in the Old Testament.
10. Verse 9: Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
- a) Ok, us veteran Christians know this verse is quoted in Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15. The question is why is it listed here? Glad you asked. Alexander the Great loved to ride on a tall white horse. He was tall and wore a crown/helmet. It was said he stood over 13 feet high riding that horse. So here is Zechariah effectively saying in contrast to "big dude #1" riding in town on a white horse, the "Really big dude" (in terms of power) will ride into town gentle and riding on a donkey. Technically a colt (young donkey). Given Zechariah's predictions hundreds of years in advance, one has to admit the contrast is amazing.

- b) Even Jewish sources consider this verse "Messianic". They just say when the Messiah will come, one way they'll recognize him is by this scene. Obviously, Christians can say they blew that big entrance, as the Gospels record it happened about 2,000 years ago.
 - c) Now the fun part: When you read of Jesus in the Gospels He always went out of His way to avoid publicity. He didn't want to be thronged more than He was so He essentially said to those He performed miracles on, "Please keep quiet about it so I can move around".
 - d) Yet, "Palm Sunday" is the one exception. This is the one day recorded in the Gospels when Jesus "went out of His way" to publicly be worshipped as God. Ok, what's the deal here?
 - i) I'm convinced Jesus held the Jewish people accountable to know the time that He's to come to earth. (We'll get to that in a moment.) While I don't suspect Jesus made them accountable to the exact date, I'd say He held them accountable for knowing the approximate time that He'd show up on the scene.
 - ii) My proof requires a detailed study of the last four verses of Daniel Chapter 9. For those not familiar with it, Daniel made a prediction that there would be a period of sixty nine "weeks of years" from the time the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt until the time Jesus was on the cross. If one does the math (or study my lesson on those four verses), let's just say it works out to Palm Sunday. As most of you are aware Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey accepting worship as God. That is the literal fulfillment of Verse 9. Yes of course it's also meant as a contradiction to how kings normally came into town (on chariots or horses), but I'm convinced it was deliberately arranged by Jesus as if to say, "So are going to accept Me as Your king or not? " As I said a page back, when the Israelites choose to reject Him as the king, that triggered Jesus comment about "Look, your house is left to you desolate" from Matthew 23.
 - e) I read an interesting Jewish commentary where they try to reconcile the prediction of the Messiah riding on a donkey versus Daniel's prediction of "him coming with clouds" (7:13). They claim if the Israelites are "not worthy" the Messiah will come on a donkey. If they're worthy, He'll come "with clouds". In a sense, that prediction is correct based on the fact of Jesus' rejection by the people. I know it's trivial, but I couldn't resist sharing that.
 - f) OK then, now that "that fact" has been historically established and why, onto Verse 10.
11. Verse 10: I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.
- a) The first thing to say about Verse 10 is that it "jumps at least 2,000 years in the future) as to discuss events tying to Jesus Second Coming. If one studies their bible carefully, you will find a bunch of these "gaps in time". As I said in the introduction, the only mystery in the Old Testament is the existence of the Christian church. Therefore, it's common in the Old Testament to "jump 2,000 years and counting" as if the church era never existed.
 - b) With that little speech out of my system, let me now focus on the specific's of this verse. I stated earlier that Alexander the Great was famous for riding on a tall white horse. Verse nine focused on the Messiah coming on a young donkey. Now here in Verse 10 Zechariah is discussing about removing the "war horses" from Jerusalem. Let me explain that one:
 - i) It is "Messianic" in the sense that at Jesus Second Coming, that's the end of wars as we know it. Therefore, no more "war horses".
 - ii) Also keep in mind that Deuteronomy 17:16 forbids the Israelites from multiplying "war horses". The reason for that is God wanted the Israelites to depend upon Him for protection and not "war machinery". So why does Israel have weapons today? Because until the Messiah comes, they need to do what's needed for protection.
 - iii) Anyway, with that promise of "No more war when the Messiah" comes, Zechariah is promising that all the weapons of war will be destroyed. If you don't know the reference to Ephraim, it was a long dead, Northern Israel Kingdom at Zech's time.

- iv) Let me put it this way: One reason I'm positive this refers to Jesus Second Coming is because Ephraim didn't exist when either Zechariah wrote this or existed when Jesus came the first time.
- v) Realize a key reason why religious Jewish people rejected Jesus is they wanted the Messiah to overthrow Rome and bring in worldwide peace. They didn't want God to "die for their sins" as they want to prove their worth to God by their works.
- c) When most people think of the Apocalypse, they think of God destroying the world as we know it. However, the idea of the Apocalypse is more about "change". It's about changing from a world dominated by war, to a world of peace with the Messiah ruling over it. That is why the final line of Verse 10 says, "He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth." The point is life after this event goes on. The "new life" will be one with Jesus ruling the world from Israel.
- d) OK John, we're in desperate need of one of your "why should we care" lectures. Can all of this be a "pipe dream" by Zechariah to comfort Israel, since they're a part of a big empire? If we accept that this was written centuries before Alexander the Great's time, why change our lifestyle, if all this future "Messiah stuff" won't happen say for hundreds of years from now? In other words, why should I care about this stuff now, when we don't know when it will occur? A great old saying goes, "If we can't live for Jesus now, what makes us think we can live for Him when He returns?" I've come to realize this life is a "prep course" for eternity. As a simple example, I sing at church, because I figure I'll be praising God for all of eternity. I find ways of serving the people around me as I figure eternity will be full of service. I make a difference for others as that brings me far more joy than if I only live for myself. The point is not "when" Jesus is going to return, it's the fact that He will. It's fact just as Zechariah accurately described Alexander the Great's conquest of the Middle East centuries before it occurred. The point is we should prepare for Jesus Second Coming as if it could occur today.
 - i) Of course we still must live life. We still have "bills to pay and things to get done". My point is if one sees the big picture of the purpose of life (to glorify God) then it is much greater than the stuff we must do. If we're willing to dedicate our lives to making a difference for God, and give Him the best of our day, no matter what we must face in life's nothing compared to an eternity full of joy as we'll spend all that future glorifying God then as we do today. My point is let's get used to it now as that's the way it'll be forever. That's why we live for Him now as to prepare us for how we'll live forever.
 - ii) Gee John, that's all interesting and I suppose it's true. What does any of this have to do with Verse 10? It describes a future time of Jesus ruling from one end of the world to another. Therefore, our choices are to prepare to be a part of that world or be rejected from it. Now if that isn't a motivation to use our lives to make some sort of difference for Him now, I don't know what is.
 - iii) In the meantime, look, there is a Verse 11.
- 12. Verse 11: As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. ¹² Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.
 - a) Remember how I opened this lesson with "now what"? Now that we know the game plan what's the "now what"? Zechariah describes the Israelites living then as "set free from the waterless pit". OK that requires an explanation. In the ancient world, prisoners were put into "waterless pits" as a place they can't escape from. The biblical example is the story of Joseph as he was thrown in a waterless pit (Genesis 37:24). In the bible, word pictures are generally consistent from book to book. The idea of a waterless pit is symbolic of being in prison. Anyway, God says because of the "blood covenant" He made with the Israelites, it is symbolic of God freeing them from that waterless pit of a prison. Let me explain:

- i) Way back in Genesis 15, God promised Abraham that He would make him a great nation. As a "sign" of that deal, God told Abraham to bring Him several animals. Those animals were cut in half and placed on the ground. Abraham went to sleep that night and had a vision of God Himself walking among those dead animals. I will be the first to admit, this is strange. The "blood covenant" is symbolized by the animals being cut in half and God walking among them.
- ii) The point of all of this is God "made a deal in blood" with Abraham that God will give the land of Israel to the Israelites, period. The deal is sealed in spilled animal blood to validate that promise as if He's saying, "I'm swearing on My life it's true".
- iii) What this means for you and me is that if we trust in Jesus blood payment for the complete payment of our sins (as in God Himself paying the price) then we too are released from the prison of only caring about enriching our lives. When we realize there is more to life than just trying to get all we can, that's when we are released from our own "waterless pit" so we can use our lives to make a difference for God.
- iv) Bottom line, Verse 11 is the "Gospel Message" from God's perspective!
- b) All of that leads to Verse 12 and "now what". Verse 12 says that whatever suffering we've endured in that "waterless pit" will be far outweighed by the joy we get by using our lives to be a witness for Him.
- c) Specifically Verse 12 says that God will "restore twice as much to you". Time for another bible history lesson. When it comes to "inheritance", the oldest son would receive twice as much as any of the other children, in exchange for being in charge of the inheritance. It is a "duty fee". For example, when Joseph was dying, he told one of his 12 sons, that his two sons (of that one son) would be considered Joseph's own son. What was meant by that act is to give Joseph a "double portion". Joseph wasn't the oldest son, but because He rescued the family from a famine, he was given that honor. (This is all from Genesis 48.)
 - i) The point as it relates to you and me is yes we'll suffer in this lifetime. Let's face it nobody lives forever, and death, whenever it occurs is painful. Suffering is a part of life as much as joy is. All I'm saying is using our lives to make a difference for Jesus does not mean we'll have a pain free life. Early in this lesson, I discussed the fact that poor Christians who helped Paul financially were still financially poor. A life of giving does not make one wealthy in this lifetime. However, the joy we get of using our lives to make a difference for others is far, far greater than whatever pleasure we can get from just trying to enrich our own lives. I'm not condemning financial success. I'm just putting it in perspective of what really matters in life. A life used to make a difference for God is infinitely greater than a life only used to a point of only caring about ourselves.
- d) Bottom line time again: Just as God promises the Israelites to take them out of their pit of only caring about themselves, and just as God promised to render them "double" for all of the suffering caused by caring only for themselves, so He promises "double" to us if we're willing to use our lives to make a difference for Him. Does that mean if I give a dollar this Sunday at church, God owes me two? No, it doesn't work that way. That promise means we'll get "double the joy" living for Him than over whatever pleasure this life can offer by only trying to enrich ourselves.
- e) Shorter version: "It's worth it".
- f) Before I move on to the last five verses of the chapter, let me pause to ask, why's this here? Why jump from Alexander the Great's life story, to Jesus coming to Jerusalem on a colt of a donkey, to Jesus ruling the world to verses about "what now?" Why this sequence? Why does Zechariah lay it out this way? It's to remind us, 1) God knows all things, 2) God will still rule the world one day and 3) Here's what to do in the meantime. It's a strange way to lay out the future and what we're to do in the meantime, but it shows that He does know all things and how we should respond because He knows all things!

13. Verse 13: I will bend Judah as I bend my bow and fill it with Ephraim. I will rouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and make you like a warrior's sword.
- a) OK then, "now what"? Now that the Israelites understand the game plan, what's going to happen to them in the meantime? Notice we get the first mention of Greece in this chapter here. Realize that when Zechariah wrote this, Greece was not a united country. That area was a bunch of cities that was all part of, or bordered on the Persian Empire. The fact that Greece is even mentioned as an entity is further proof that God knows history in advance.
 - b) That leads me back to the now what. If Greece is going to be prominent in Israel's future, what is their "now what"? What does their future hold for them?
 - c) OK, time for another history lesson: When Alexander the Great was dying, he was asked who will run the empire? His famous dying words were "give to the strong". He had four top generals who in effect divided the kingdom into four parts. This was also predicted in the book of Daniel centuries earlier (Daniel 7:6). The short version is two of those generals controlled the Middle East and Israel was constantly caught in the middle as descendants of the two leaders who controlled that area fought around and over Israel. We can read in Daniel Chapters 11-12 the descendants of those two leaders as they fought in that area.
 - i) A little more history is needed here. One of those descendants hated the Israelites so much that he desecrated God's temple and demanded he was to be worshipped as God. That led to a revolt about a century or two before the Romans. My point is there was a brief time in Israel's history where they were not under Greek rule at the time of this revolt. The Jewish holiday "Hanukah" is based on that revolt. We may not realize it but Jesus participated in the festival that remembered that time in Israel's history as told in John Chapter 10, Verse 22.
 - d) That's a nice bit of bible trivia John, but what does it have to do with Verse 13? I'd argue that when the verse says all of Israel will "bend it's bow" against Greece it's a reference to the "Hanukah" revolt at that time in history. Let me explain that a little better. When the bible describes Ephraim and Judah together, it's a colorful way of describing descendants the Northern and Southern Israel kingdom reunited. Those were the two dominate tribes of the 12 tribes of Israel. While the word "Zion" can specifically refer to the land below the city of Jerusalem, it can also refer to Israel as a whole. My point is Zechariah is predicting that during the time the Greek's ruled the greater Middle East, Israel will be successful in a revolt against Greece.
 - e) OK John, that's nice and we know how much you love history. Why is this here and why should we care? First, it's an example of God giving the Israelites hope in spite of the fact they'll be dominated by foreign empires and suffer through history. It's another example to us that God knows all things in advance. It's a reminder that despite whatever suffering we go through in this lifetime, God's people will win in the end.
 - f) OK then, what's the "Now what" of that story? Glad you asked! Verse 14:
14. Verse 14: Then the LORD will appear over them; his arrow will flash like lightning. The Sovereign LORD will sound the trumpet; he will march in the storms of the south,¹⁵ and the LORD Almighty will shield them. They will destroy and overcome with slingstones. They will drink and roar as with wine; they will be full like a bowl used for sprinkling the corners of the altar.
- a) Obviously, Jesus didn't return to rule over the world at that time. So what's the point? To explain, first remember that "prophecy is patterns". The reason it's that way, is God gives us a short-term fulfillment to prove that the prophet is a prophet of God. Then there is the long-term fulfillment that is God's main intent of giving that specific prophecy.
 - b) What I'm getting at is just as a Greek descendant of one of those four generals desecrated God's temple then, so there will be somebody in the future who will desecrate the temple in the future. How do I know this? Because Jesus Himself tells us in the Gospel tells us of how this story will repeat in the future. Yes I'll explain that better:

- i) Jesus gave a long dissertation recorded in three of the four gospels about what will happen before He returns. One of the fascinating things Jesus said is "When you see (notice that last phrase carefully) standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel". (Matthew 24:15;)
 - ii) I bring it up here because when that Greek Emperor desecrated the Jewish Temple by slaughtering a pig on the altar there, that event occurred about 150 years before Jesus spoke. I assume the apostles past "high school history" and knew about that. Yet Jesus said, "when you see" as if it's a future event. In fact, Jesus went on to say the phrase translated "let the reader understand". That means this message wasn't for the apostles themselves but for us readers. In other words, Jesus is prophesying of a future event that triggers His return.
 - iii) That means whoever the antichrist is, he'll allow a temple to be built in Jerusalem. Then after a period of time (3.5 years to be specific), that guy will enter the temple and claim "he's god". Anyway, that specific event triggers Jesus effectively saying, "Enough of all of this, time for Me to return and rule."
 - c) OK, that's pretty standard "pre-tribulation" theology for those who don't know it. So why are you telling us this here and now? Because it leads us back to Verse 13 and 14.
 - i) Verse 13 tells the story of Hanukkah and the Jewish rebellion that overthrew the Greek rule for awhile. Verse 14 then talks of the ruling over the world. My point is the Israel overthrow of the Greek government was the first fulfillment of Zach's prophecy, but Jesus said "when you see" about two centuries later. Jesus is saying that a second fulfillment is coming and that's when Verse 14 comes into play.
 - ii) Weird? Yes. True? I'm convinced it is. That's Zechariah's style for what it's worth.
 - iii) With all that stated realize Verse 14 describes a battle, or more likely the end of the battle. When the bible talks of the battle of Armageddon, realize it's a wipeout and not a battle. Verses 14-15 describe this wipeout from Zechariah's perspective.
 - iv) Yes the verses are colorful, but they still describe a battle wipeout.
 - d) One final question and then the last two verses. Why doesn't God just end every rebellion against Him? Why does He allow free will? So people come to Him out of our free will and not out of force. So why the big "wrap up show"? Why not just end evil with a snap of His fingers (so to speak)? Why all the Revelation "horror" and the Armageddon show? For starters, as proof that God is God and He keeps His word. It's proof the bible is what it claims. Finally, it's there as proof to the world that God exists as there would not be any other explanation for it. I could see the headlines the next day. "God wipes out millions of people without any explanation." The point is we get an explanation and it's judgment for our sins. The point is God warns us all of this will occur so we'll recognize it when it does.
 - e) Well then, now that I've scared everyone half to death, time for the last two verses.
15. Verse 16: The LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown. ¹⁷ How attractive and beautiful they will be! Grain will make the young men thrive, and new wine the young women.
- a) To understand these last two verses, realize we have to be talking "end times". The Jewish race has suffered horribly for thousands of years. Even though they beat back the Greeks for a season, then the Romans came and killed most Israelites living there back then. One can study history for the last 2,000 years and see a lot of hatred for the Jewish nation and I haven't even mentioned the holocaust yet.
 - b) I'm reminded of something I read years ago: The great mistake Jewish people make is the failure to realize Jesus is the Messiah. The great mistake Christians often make is we can forget we're worshipping a Jewish God. So is salvation for the Jews or the Christians? I'd say both in the sense that God made an unconditional promise that the land of Israel is the possession of Abraham's descendants. When Jesus does return to rule there, there must be a great revival of Israelites who accept Jesus as the Messiah when all of this takes place!

- c) All that "happy talk" leads me back to the last two verses. It reads "God will save them on that day as the flock of His people". That refers to Jewish people who get saved at the time of Jesus return. Realize these last two verses are describing life in Israel after Jesus Second Coming and not before. So what does "precious jewels" refer to? It's a colorful way to tell of life in Israel after His return. It's a time of great joy and happiness. War is over and the Messiah is there ruling over the world from Israel. Yes, "it's happy ending time.
 - d) The last line is also strange in our years. It compares the men to grain and young women to new wine. Realize the term "new wine" is fresh grape juice. In both cases, it's not literal but an idiom that people will flourish in that day, like crops in their prime!
16. OK then, time to stand back and take a breath. Let's be honest, it's a weird chapter. We went from the battle reports of Alexander the Great through that territory, to Jesus on Palm Sunday, to Jesus at His Second Coming to Armageddon to life in Israel after Jesus "sets up shop". That covers a lot of historical ground as well as future events. OK, what's the deal here? From our perspective we get events that we know are historically accurate and events about the end times. This tells us we can trust the bible about the future as it's been 100% accurate to date.
- a) Still why these events? In effect, they're focusing on the Messiah's appearing. The verses about Alexander the Great are meant as a contrast to what THE Great conqueror and king is going to do. It's like saying as impressive as Alexander was, watch Jesus as He appears once for the payment of sins (yet be rejected) and despite that rejection will show up again to come rule over the world. That's the lesson in one paragraph.
 - b) I have to admit I was tempted to call this lesson "Now what" but I use that phrase so often I picked ""Understand the past, so we can understand our future!" That works just as well as we studied famous historical events in the Middle East including aspects of Jesus First Coming so we can better understand the end time events whenever they occur. That title still works will and now that I'm wrapping this up, I'm sticking to it.
 - c) With that said, this lesson has mercifully come to an end. Let's pray.
17. Heavenly Father, as we read of bible predictions, we realize it's tough to understand events that occurred millenniums ago. We also know it's hard to interpret the future as it hasn't happened yet. Yet we do know that You know all things, including the future. You give us key events from the past and the future as to remind us, "You're God, deal with it". With that knowledge in mind, let us use our lives as a witness for You. Help us not to waste our "now what", the time you have given us as a witness to You. Make it obvious to us exactly what it is You desire of us today as we use our lives for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.