

September 20, 2026

THE PROMISE AND REJECTION OF THE SHEPHERD-KING

Zechariah 9:1-11:17

(9 of 10 in a series through Zechariah)

As we get to Zechariah 9, I believe we've come to one of the more difficult sections of the book, and what's more, we're taking the largest section of text that we've looked at so far for the sermon text. Therefore, I want to start by explaining why we're looking at chapters 9-11 this morning. As I noted when we began this study, Zechariah breaks down into two halves—chapters 1-8 and 9-14. In chapters 1-8, you have these temporal markers identifying the sections, like "I the eighth month, in the second year of Darius" (1:1). But in the second half of the book the temporal markers disappear, and instead you found an announcement of an oracle that Zechariah received, as we see at the beginning of chapter 9: "The oracle of the LORD."

We'll also see the same thing beginning chapter 12, which means that the book of Zechariah concludes with two oracles—two messages that God gave the prophet to declare to his people. The first of these two oracles runs from chapter 9 all the way through the end of chapter 11, while the other runs from chapter 12 through chapter 14. So, as we take this first of these two prophetic messages this morning, our text will be Zechariah 9-11. It seems appropriate to keep this one message from Zechariah that extends over three chapters together for our sermon text.

But doing this does present some challenges. First, we're covering a lot of material, and so we won't be able to look at all of it in detail. Second, the material itself is challenging to follow and interpret at points. Even understanding the content can leave you asking the question, "When is all that Zechariah says will happen supposed to take place?" So, let me start there, and then we'll look at how we can tackle these three chapters.

I think the easiest way to think about these prophetic declarations is to put them in the same category we've seen through the first eight chapters. As Zechariah has prophesied about what God will do among the people, we've consistently said, "In some small measure, these prophecies were fulfilled in the sixth century (and perhaps a short time thereafter) but only to the degree that they are shadows of a greater fulfillment to come in Jesus and ultimately the new creation." I think that's the same approach we should take here. Zechariah ends his book by giving us two final prophetic messages that might have some shadowy fulfillment in the sixth century but mainly point us to realities that are fulfilled in the coming of Christ and his redeeming work.

But the big payoff of this first oracle is that it strongly affirms that Jesus is indeed God's promised king, shepherd, and savior. As we know, many refuse to bow the knee in recognition of Jesus as God's crucified and risen king, and in part his rejection by many is self-fulfilling. In other words, it goes like this: I reject Jesus as king, and if he really were king, wouldn't more accept him, and so because he's rejected, he must not be God's promised king. But I want to show that one of the most powerful answers to this challenge comes from this first oracle in Zechariah. In fact, I hope

that Zechariah 9-11 might even become a weapon for us in showing others that Jesus is indeed God's true king to whom all must bow. But let me start by walking through Zechariah's oracle, and the first thing he shows is that God promises salvation to his people.

God promises salvation to his people

In 9:1-8, the oracle begins by declaring how God will judge his enemies. He mentions Hadrach, Damascus, Hamath, Tyre, Sidon, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, Ashdod, Philistia. This is the only place Hadrach is mentioned in Scripture, but archeologists seem to think it was a city in Syria. Now, if that's the case, then what Zechariah does is that he names all the main cities that made up the western portion of the Persian empire. He works from north to south and says that they'll all be judged. And historically, all of these cities were thought of as the enemies of God. Some of them because they literally attacked the Lord's people. Think of the Philistines, for example. Others were enemies of God simply because they arrogantly refused to see their need for God. That's what we see with Tyre, for example.

And let's center on Tyre for a second because the Lord says much about this city, and historically its judgment was fascinating. In verses 3-4 Zechariah declares, "Tyre has built herself a rampart and heaped up silver like dust, and fine gold like the mud of the streets. But behold, the Lord will strip her of her possessions and strike down her power on the sea, and she shall be devoured by fire."

Tyre was a city that had originally been built as part of the mainland, but over time developed the main part of the city on an island that was surrounded by two walls which were 150 feet high. Additionally, they had an effective navy that patrolled the island. And they were quite effective in trade. So, as the text mentions, it had gold and silver as plentiful as dust and had been a rampart around the island city. How in the world would an army even be able to get to the city, let alone destroy it with fire, as this oracle declares?¹

Well, when Alexander the Great came to power, one of the things he wanted to accomplish was the defeat of the Persian empire. And his attack on the empire started in the north and worked southward along the coast, just like the cities are ordered. And when he got to Tyre, he did something ingenious. He took apart the structures that had made up the old city on the mainland and had his soldiers throw the scraps into the water, until he had constructed a roadway to the city, over which they could travel. Then, he recruited ships from the cities he'd defeated along the way to have them take out Tyre's naval resources. Finally, he broke through the city, destroyed it, and burned much of it, just like the Lord says. Sometimes the Lord raises up Alexanders just to accomplish his purposes against his enemies.

¹ All of these historical details are drawn from Richard Phillips, *Zechariah*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 199.

But the ultimate reality we're to see is not Alexander's crusade, as much as it may have been a shadow of what the Lord would ultimately do to his enemies. We're to see that God judges his enemies ruthlessly, no matter how immune they feel they might be to his judgment. This includes Satan, sin, and death itself on that final day. There will be none who refuse to bow the knee to Jesus in this life who will escape God's judgment on that final day. That's the first part of Zechariah's message to his people—God will one day judge his enemies.

Why then am I saying that God promises salvation when it's all about judgment?" The answer is that this is what salvation looks like. Throughout the Scripture, salvation is seen in terms of God judging his enemies and delivering his people. The latter requires the former. The first promise of salvation in Genesis 3:15 is about God crushing the serpent's head. God delivers his people from slavery by drowning the Egyptian army in the sea. David delivers the people by taking out Goliath. God delivers his people from oppression in the historical narrative books of the Old Testament by having his people utterly eliminate tribes left and right. And at the cross, Jesus deals a fatal blow to Satan, sin, and death itself. We may not feel it as much because we've not tasted great persecution, but when God announces that he's going to judge his enemies, his people should hear it as a promise of their coming salvation. In Revelation 6, as the martyrs cry out for Christ to return, they're asking for judgment to come. That's how salvation is viewed. And that's Zechariah's message—salvation is coming.² Second, we see that God promises the king who'll save his people.

God promises a king who will save his people

After the promise of salvation in 9:1-8, the Lord opens the second half of chapter 9 by telling his people to rejoice greatly and shout aloud. Why? He tells them, "Behold, your king is coming to you" (9:9). But what's odd is the character of this king. Kings are historically arrogant and ruthless. And yet this king is righteous, humble, mounted on a donkey, bringing peace (9:9-10). Now, what's key for us is that both Matthew and John quote this text when Jesus is riding on a donkey into Jerusalem for the last week of his life. In other words, the New Testament makes clear that this promised king is Jesus. And he fits. He's righteous—without sin. He's humble, saying he came to serve and not to be served. He brings peace, eliminating hostility between God and his people and well as his people with one another. But what's key is he brings us salvation.

This is mentioned repeatedly in this section. In verse 9 we're told he has salvation. And in verse 16 we're told that our God will save his people. And he'll bring salvation as he reigns "from sea to sea" (9:10), something the Lord told us he is right now doing as we rose from the grave and declared that all authority in heaven and on earth was his.

² One other thing I'll note here is that Tyre's judgment was promised by God under Isaiah before Zechariah promised the same thing (Is 23). And Isaiah prophesied that about 400 years prior to Alexander's conquest of the city. I bring that up because it can sometimes feel as if that final day of salvation isn't coming. After all, Jesus' promise to return is now 2,000 years old. But don't count delay as a reason to lose hope. God will fulfill his promises.

Also interesting is that the Lord will use his people to bring about this work of salvation. Notice, for example, how he declares in verse 13 that Judah is his bow, Ephraim his arrow, and that he will stir up his sons against the sons of Greece and wield them like a warrior's sword. Does this mean that the Lord is raising up an army to bring about a violent assault on the world? No. It's just what Aaron mentioned last Sunday. The church has been brought to Christ to be sent out into the world, storming death itself and bringing life to those imprisoned to Satan and sin. We are at war with Satan, sin, and death, and we will not fail. The Lord will bring people to himself from every tongue, tribe, and nation.

Interestingly, we even see a glimpse of this back in 9:7. After mentioning Philistia facing judgement, Zecharia gives a picture of the people becoming a remnant for the Lord, becoming part of his people like Judah. This is what the Lord does with his gospel. He binds the enemy and brings them to himself as prisoners released from the slavery of sin and death—which is what we do when we proclaim Christ's Word and his gospel.

And so the Scripture is unambiguously clear. The Lord brings his king, Jesus, in order to save his people even as he will judge his enemies. And we will one day reign with our Lord. But it demands that we bow the knee to him in this life. Otherwise, we will face the judgment that we see in 9:1-8. Therefore, the question we must answer is why we would die in our sins and face God's merciless judgment when we can repent, believe, and find forgiveness and life in the crucified and risen king, Jesus? Then, in the third section of the oracle, we see that God provides the shepherd who will lead his people.

God promises a shepherd who will lead his people

Chapter 10 begins on a note you wouldn't expect. Suddenly, we're dealing with the issue of rain. What's going on? Well, it seems that the people were in a time where it hadn't rained, and they were desperate. And as we saw last week in 1 Kings 18, there is a temptation in those times to turn to foreign gods like Baal. Therefore, Zechariah tells them in 10:1-2 to ask God for rain and recognize the silliness of their idols and false household gods they're tempted to turn to—or perhaps had already turned to.

But the reality is that this is simply setting the stage for what he wants to deal with from 10:1-11:3. He wants to focus on Israel's shepherds, which is to say, their leaders. After exhorting the people not to turn to their false gods to appeal for rain, the Lord identifies the issue at the end of 10:2, saying, "Therefore the people wander like sheep; they are afflicted for lack of a shepherd."

However, by saying that the people lack a shepherd, he's not suggesting they have no leaders. He's merely saying they don't have good, righteous leaders. We know that because the very next verse says, "My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the LORD of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah" (10:3). And this theme of punishing the shepherds brackets this text on the other end as well, as the Lord says in 11:3, "The sound of the wail of the shepherds, for their glory is ruined!"

So now the Lord is promising to punish Israel's corrupt leaders who have led them to into idolatry. But notice the Lord doesn't stop with the promise to punish their corrupt leaders. First, he promises to bring a good shepherd to the people. In 10:4, we read, "From him [i.e. the house of Judah] shall come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow." From the tribe of Judah, the Lord will raise up one who will be the foundation of his church (the cornerstone), one who will provide stability (the tent peg), and one who will fight for his people (the battle bow). He will be the good shepherd, even as Jesus identifies himself in John 10.

But not only will the good shepherd come, but he will gather his sheep to himself. That is to say, he will come and save them. In a series of statements from 10:6-12, the Lord continually proclaims what he will do, saying, "I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back because I have compassion on them. . . . I will whistle for them and gather them in, for I have redeemed them. . . . I will bring them home from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria, and I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon, till there is no room for them. . . . I will make them strong in the Lord."

This imagery is of a new, glorious Exodus where God brings his people out of their slavery to sin and to himself. And, no doubt, this was partially fulfilled as more exiles made their way to Jerusalem. But that was a mere shadow of what the Lord is doing now. Right now, our good shepherd is calling people to himself from every tongue, tribe, and nation—including you and me. And the Lord is using us to gather others. His gathered people are like "mighty men in battle" (10:5), going against the gates of hell and calling more of Christ's sheep to their good shepherd.

But perhaps even more encouraging is the result of the good shepherd calling us. Notice in 10:6. He has compassion on his people "and they shall be as though I had not rejected them, for I am their God and I will answer them." Or again, in verse 12, "I will make them strong in the LORD, and they shall walk in his name." In other words, when the Lord saves you, bringing you to himself, it's as though you were never his enemy, a sinner under his wrath. You're completely reconciled to the Lord, who says to you, "I am your God, and I will answer you when you call to me." And then he empowers you (by his Spirit) to obey him. These are not blessings a child of God should ever take for granted.

And, finally, note how the good shepherd raises up other leaders. From Judah shall come the cornerstone, tent peg, battle bow, and *every ruler*. In other words, the Lord is not only gathering his sheep to himself, but he's raising up and providing for them good leaders, good shepherds. Now, certainly, there are some wicked shepherds in the church at large. But I am grateful for the men whom the Lord has raised up to serve as shepherds here. I know they are uncompromisingly committed to upholding the Word, leading us toward the Lord, and overseeing our souls in a way that is honoring to the Lord.

This is a glorious promise over 500 years before the coming of Christ that God will provide his king who will judge wicked men so as to deliver his people, call his sheep to himself, provide his

sheep godly shepherds, and bless his sheep as he utilizes them in this world. But there is one more, perhaps surprising element. God's promised shepherd-king will be rejected.

God's promised shepherd-king will be rejected

When you get to 11:4-5, suddenly Zechariah is instructed to act out a prophetic message. This is sometimes done by the prophets where they would picture the message they were preaching, and that's what's done here. Zechariah is told to become a shepherd because the flock—the people—are being abused. Their leaders treat them as those who can be slaughtered or sold so that the shepherds might get rich. They have no pity for the sheep. And so, at this point, you probably think you can see where this is going. Zechariah will act as a good shepherd, and it will be a message to the people, "Don't worry, you're going to be cared for and protected; the good shepherd is coming." After all, that's what's already been declared in 10:1-11:3. However, in verse 6, you can see that things aren't that straightforward. The Lord speaks of the people not being the object of his pity, falling into the hands of their abusive neighbors, and the Lord refusing to deliver them.

We see the picture more fully starting in 11:7. Zechariah starts to act it out. He gets two staffs, naming one Favor and the other Union to illustrate his gracious covenant and unity he brings to his people. Then, he notes that in one month he destroyed three shepherds, no doubt stepping in their place as a shepherd over the people (v.8). But then he says that he got impatient with the people, and they also detested him. So, he ends up telling them, basically, "Fine, I'm done being your shepherd. Devour one another if you want." He breaks his staff, Favor, showing that the covenant is broken. And the people discern this is God's Word against them. But then things get interesting.

He tells the people that they can pay him for the work he's done as their shepherd if they want, and if they don't want to, fine. And they end up giving him thirty pieces of silver, which was the prescribed amount paid for a slave who'd been killed. In other words, thirty pieces of silver is the value of a slave's life. That's what they're telling him they think of him—he's worth the same amount as one who would have been deemed the lowest standing in society. Therefore Zechariah is told by the Lord to throw the money into the temple, while also breaking his other staff. And the oracle ends with the Lord telling Zechariah to play the role of a foolish shepherd because that's who the Lord is handing the people over to, one who will devour the people.

Now, perhaps this feels surprising after the good news of the coming good shepherd and his work described in 10:1-11:3, and yet this is just how things played out. Over 500 years later, the good shepherd did come. He called out the religious leaders of the day for their wicked and abusive practices, and yet most being abused by those wicked shepherds didn't delight in him but rejected him. In fact, one of his own betrayed him, exchanging the shepherd's life for thirty pieces of silver in fulfillment of this text. And so everything that Zechariah declared in this first oracle became a reality.

But why is this helpful to see that Zechariah prophesied the good shepherd's rejection? Well, because you might conclude that something is wrong if Israel's promised king came and was rejected by his own people. Maybe you would assume he's not the Messiah. But 500 years earlier the Lord declared that all of this was taking place as he foretold. And ultimately the shepherd's rejection wasn't the end of his ministry but a crucial step in it. He was rejected and killed but was really just laying down his life as the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. And on the third day he rose from the grave, showing he wasn't just the shepherd but God's king. And then he empowered and commissioned his church to go storm enemy-occupied territory and gather many others who would be his disciples, just as God promised in Zechariah. And so, today, let's keep trusting and keep obeying God's shepherd-king, Jesus. Amen.