

Lesson 13

When we ended last week we had just started looking at Chapter 9. Let's read again the first verse of that chapter.

1 The burden of the word of the LORD in the land of Hadrach, and Damascus shall be the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD.

Last week we asked, what is Hadrach? And we had first considered the possibility that Hadrach was either a city in Syria that has not yet been discovered or was a city called Hatarikka, which is mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions. But we had a problem with that view — why would God give such a long pronouncement against an obscure Syrian city that is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible?

Also, note that verse refers not just to Hadrach but to *the land of Hadrach*. That sounds less like a city and more like a region or a nation.

When we ended last week, we were looking for a better explanation, and fortunately there is a better explanation.

It is possible that Hadrach is not the *literal* name of any city or nation, but is instead a *figurative* name. Before we consider what the name might depict, let's ask another question — are such figurative names used anywhere else in the Bible? Yes.

- **Isaiah 21:11** (“The burden of Dumah”) refers to Edom using the word Dumah, which means silence.
- **Jeremiah 25:26** (“and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them”) and **Jeremiah 51:41** (“How is Sheshach taken!”) refer to Babylon using Sheshach, which means humiliation.
- **Isaiah 29:1** (“Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt!”) refers to Jerusalem as Ariel, which means the hearth of God.

And we see this done with *people* as well as with cities.

The book of Jeremiah, for example, gives Pharaoh Neco one of the greatest nicknames in history. In Jeremiah 46:17 we read, “Call the name of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, ‘Noisy one who lets the hour go by.’” (RSV) (“The Man with No Power but with Plenty of Noise”) (TLB paraphrase) In the original languages, that nickname is a pun — it has a similar sound in Hebrew to Pharaoh's actual Egyptian name.

We see another example in Jeremiah 20.

Jeremiah 20:3 — And it came to pass on the morrow, that Pashur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then said Jeremiah unto him, The Lord hath not called thy name Pashur, but Magor-missabib.

Pashur was the priest who ordered Jeremiah to be beaten and placed in stocks. When Jeremiah got out of the stocks, he told Pashur he had a new name — Magor-missabib,

which means “terror all around.” That would be the plight of Judah when Babylon approached if the people listened to Pashur.

So if we determine here that Hadrach was a divinely inspired (possibly insulting) nickname, then it would not be the only one in the Bible.

But what could Hadrach mean, and to what could it refer? What does the word mean?

Some say Hadrach was derived from one of Syria’s false gods — Chadrak, but I don’t think so. Instead, I think we need to break Hadrach up into parts to see what it means here.

The first half of Hadrach (“Had”) means sharp and the second half of Hadrach (“Rach”) means soft. So, the oracle starting in Zechariah 9 is directed to the land of sharp-soft.

I think what we have here is yet another symbolic nickname. That view is bolstered by the fact that Hadrach appears nowhere else in the Bible and, in fact, appears nowhere else in the secular records. They may dig it up tomorrow and force me to reconsider, but for now I think a symbolic view is the better view.

And it is an ancient view. The Jews have long viewed the term as figurative. Where they go wrong is where they apply the term — they consider Hadrach to be a reference to the Messiah, whom they said would be harsh to the Gentiles but gentle to the Jews. That view is wrong — Hadrach is not the Messiah. But I think they were on to something in their figurative understanding of Hadrach based on how the word sounded when spoken. (And the fact that they felt the need so long ago to understand the word figuratively supports the view that the word should be understood figuratively way now. That is, their interpretation suggests that they also had never heard of a place called Hadrach!)

So, what could Hadrach mean? What nation had a sharp side and a soft side? And what nation would we expect to see here in this oracle? The answers to those questions are the same — **Persia**.

Persia had a divided character — it was militarily and economically strong but famous for its moral weakness.

We have already seen in our study of Daniel a prophecy of Rome that made a similar point. The famous “feet part of iron and part of clay” in Daniel 2:33 was pointing to mixture of strength and weakness that would be seen in the then future Roman empire. And we will see this again about Rome when we get to Revelation.

But the nation in view here is not Rome, but instead is Persia. And that view makes perfect sense in view of the historical context. This oracle from God is directed against Persia, the very power who were then lording over his people.

Those who were with us for our study of Daniel will remember that Medo-Persia was the second great nation in Nebuchadnezzar’s vision, with the first being Babylon and the final two being Greece and Rome. In that study, we went into some detail about the history of Medo-Persia.

The Medo-Persians overthrew Babylon the night that Belshazzar saw the writing on the wall in Daniel 5. The combined nation of Medo-Persia is described in Daniel 8:3.

Daniel 8:3 — *Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last.*

Why is one horn higher than the other? Because the higher horn denotes the supremacy of the Persians in their merger with the Medes. And the higher horn comes up last. That temporal order is in perfect accord with history. The Medes were the dominant power until Cyrus the Great came along and brought prominence to the Persians. So perhaps the sharp and soft name Hadrach denotes the sharp and soft Medo-Persia.

Another possibility is that the Medes are not in view here at all, but instead the sharp and soft description refers to the strength of Persia in producing conquerors such as Cyrus, but also to the softness of Persia in its eventual defeat at the hands of the Greeks.

One commentary gives yet another possible meaning of the softness of Persia: "Persia was at the same time characterized by an effeminate softness that later made Persian debauchery and effeminacy a byword and the source of the moral contamination of Greece and Rome."

Whatever the explanation, I think the best view is to take Hadrach (sharp-soft) as a figurative name for Persia.

But that leaves us with one more question: Why does the text use a figurative name? Why not just name Persia? There are two possible answers to that question.

First, God may have wanted to use this name simply to make the point that Persia had a sharp side and a soft side. That is why God used the other figurative names we looked at earlier. He used them to make a particular point, and sometimes as a divine insult directed at an oppressor of his people.

A second possible reason is that Persia was denoted by this hidden name so that the neighbors of the Jews would not be able to use this text in their efforts to show that the Jews were traitorous against Persia. (And it is possible that both of these reasons are correct. We don't have to choose one over the other.)

What about the rest of verse 1: *"and Damascus shall be the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD."*

As we said, Damascus was a major city in Syria, and so verse 1 is telling us that this judgment against the Persians would begin in Syria. That is, the burden would first rest upon Damascus.

As for what this burden is, let's hold off on that question until we read a few more verses and get some more evidence.

The final phrase in verse 1 is difficult: "when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD." Some say it means that God sees all of the evil that these nations have inflicted on his people. Others say it means instead that all of these people will someday recognize God.

I think the best view is the simplest view. What we are seeing in these verses is a judgment by God against the Persians. I think the end of verse 1 is simply saying that all of these people would be watching the mighty force that God would send, which means that they would in effect be watching God as he moved in judgment down upon the Persians.

2 And Hamath also shall border thereby; Tyrus, and Zidon, though it be very wise. 3 And Tyrus did build herself a strong hold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets. 4 Behold, the Lord will cast her out, and he will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire.

The beginning of verse 2 should have been left as the ending of verse 1. Hamath is another city in Syria, and it would be judged along with Damascus.

With the second half of verse 2, we see that that the judgment will also come against Tyre and Sidon. The focus of the verses that follow is on the fall of Tyre.

Why is Sidon mentioned if the focus is on Tyre? The answer to that question may depend on the symbolic number four.

Notice that we have seen four cities so far. Also, in the next set of verses we will see four of the well-known five cities of Philistia. Why four? For the same reason we have seen four used symbolically earlier. Four depicts the earth, and these are God's judgments against earthly powers.

This symbolic use of four is additional evidence that Hadrach in verse 1 is not just another city in Syria because, if it were, then Sidon would be the fifth city rather than the fourth city.

Tyre was known in the ancient world for its worldly wisdom. Verse 2 tells us that its wisdom would not save it.

In fact, nothing that Tyre could do would be enough to save it from the force that was coming its way. Even if Tyre built a large stronghold, it would not be enough. And their silver and gold would not help them either. They could not bribe their way out of danger.

Whatever was coming would be different from the enemies that Tyre had faced before. The city had been besieged by the Assyrians for five years and by the Babylonians for thirteen years — but this time things would be different. They would fall, and they would fall quickly compared with the previous sieges.

What was coming? Again, let's hold off on that answer until we see all of the evidence.

One thing we can say for sure is that the fall of Tyre would be a shocking event. That's what verse 4 tells us. "Behold! The Lord will cast her out!" That verse also confirms that this judgment would be a judgment from God. The great commercial city of Tyre would fall into the hands of a great conqueror sent by God.

5 Ashkelon shall see it, and fear; Gaza also shall see it, and be very sorrowful, and Ekron; for her expectation shall be ashamed; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. 6 And a bastard shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.

The Philistines are next in line for this coming judgment against the Persians.

Four Philistine cities are mentioned here: Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod. (Gath is not mentioned for the reason we discussed earlier.)

Ashkelon would fear for its own safety when it saw what happened to Tyre. Eventually Ashkelon would no longer be inhabited.

Gaza and Ekron would see what happened to Tyre and be very sorrowful. If the great city of Tyre fell, then what hope did Gaza and Ekron have? Ekron's trust in Tyre would be put to shame, and Gaza's king would perish.

Verse 6 tells us that a bastard would dwell in Ashdod. What does that mean? It could mean that the city would be ruled by one born of incest or adultery, or it could simply mean that the city would be ruled by a stranger or a foreigner. Either way, Ashdod would be humiliated.

These four great cities were the pride of the Philistines. When those cities fell, the "pride of the Philistines" was "cut off" as verse 6 tell us.

So, who was this great conquerer sent from God? When and how was this prophecy fulfilled? We are at last in a position to answer that question.

What have we seen? We have seen that a great force from God would start with Damascus, move to Tyre, and then move against the cities of Philistia.

When did that happen and who or what was this great force sent by God? Let's listen as *Wikipedia* answers that question! (Also, look at the map on your handout beneath the mosaic portrait of Alexander the Great.)

In spring 333 BC, Alexander the Great crossed the Taurus into Cilicia. After a long pause due to illness, he marched on towards Syria. Though out manoeuvred by Darius' significantly larger army, he marched back to Cilicia, where he defeated Darius at Issus. [See handout] Darius fled the battle, causing his army to collapse, and left behind his wife, his two daughters, his mother, and a fabulous treasure. . . . Alexander proceeded to take possession of Syria, and most of the coast of the Levant. In the following year, 332 BC, he was forced to attack Tyre, which he captured after a long and difficult siege. [See handout] The men of military age were massacred and the women and children sold into slavery. When Alexander destroyed Tyre, most of the towns on the route to Egypt quickly capitulated. However, Alexander met with resistance at Gaza. The stronghold was heavily fortified and built on a hill, requiring a siege. When "his engineers pointed out to him that because of the height of the mound it would be impossible... this encouraged Alexander all the more to make the attempt". After three unsuccessful assaults, the stronghold fell, but not before Alexander had received a serious shoulder wound. As in Tyre, men of military age were put to the sword and the women and children were sold into slavery.

And another article sheds more light on the Siege of Tyre.

The Siege of Tyre was orchestrated by Alexander the Great in 332 BC during his campaigns against the Persians. The Macedonian army was unable to capture the city, which was a strategic coastal base on the Mediterranean Sea, through conventional means because it was on an island and had walls right up to the sea. Alexander responded to this problem by first blockading and besieging Tyre for seven months, and then by building a causeway that allowed him to breach the fortifications. It is said that Alexander was so enraged at the Tyrians' defence of their city and the loss of his men that he destroyed half the city.

The prophecy in the opening verses of Zechariah 9 is describing these very events. They were also prophesied by Daniel in Daniel 2:39.

***Daniel 2:39** — And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.*

The kingdom at the time that prophecy was given was Babylon. The inferior kingdom in Daniel 2:39 was Medo-Persia. That prophecy was fulfilled in Daniel 5. The “third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth” in Daniel 2:39 was Greece, and that is what we are seeing prophesied here in Zechariah 9.

And these prophecies are given in great detail in Zechariah 9 almost 200 years before the events occurred!

Here is how one commentary describes it:

The astonishing accuracy of these prophecies points to the invasion down this very route by the famous Macedonian conqueror, Alexander the Great. In the year 333 BC, Alexander won a great victory over the Persians at Issus. Instead of pursuing his enemy into the Persian interior, which would expose his line of supply to the powerful Persian navy in the Mediterranean Sea, Alexander brilliantly turned south to roll up the Persian cities along the coast. His strategy was to eliminate the enemy navy by removing its ports, marching through Phoenicia and Philistia down to Egypt, and only then returning north to deal with the Persian ground forces.

And, again, the Persians could have read all about that brilliant plan had they just read these prophecies written 200 years before the event!

But what about Jerusalem? Did Alexander the Great destroy Jerusalem? If not, why not? We will see the answer to those questions in verse 8, but first let’s look at the very difficult verse 7.

7 And I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth: but he that remaineth, even he, shall be for our God, and he shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite.

Verse 7 is one of those very difficult verses that are scattered throughout these final six chapters of Zechariah.

Here is what one commentator said about verses 1-7:

This prophecy was, no doubt, so designed by divine providence as to cover the victorious progress of Alexander the Great, for the order of the towns mentioned is identical with Alexander’s line of march after the battle of Issus. Yet we dare not conclude that verses 1-7 are a prophecy of this hero’s success, for verse 7 marks a result that did not follow upon his conquest.

Although I agree with that commentator that verses 1-6 precisely describe Alexander’s conquest, I think that commentator is completely wrong about verse 7. Whatever verse 7 means, it must be pointing to something that happened after Alexander’s conquest. We just need to figure out what it is.

Verse 7 starts by telling us two things that the people would stop doing. Removing his blood from his mouth likely refers to the drinking of sacrificial blood as an act of worship or eating of victims used in sacrifice with the blood. Removing his abominations from between his teeth likely refers to the animals the people were forbidden to eat under the Mosaic law or to sacrifices offered to idols and then eaten.

The people would turn from those things. Instead, we are told that those left alive “shall be for our God” and “shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite.”

The ESV translates the phrase “shall be for our God” in verse 7 as “shall be a remnant for our God.” That means the remaining Philistines would become a part of the remnant. In fact, they would be as a governor or a chief in Israel, which means they would hold an honored position in the remnant.

The last description in verse 7 is that Ekron would be as a Jebusite. The Jebusites were the ancient inhabitants of Jerusalem.

1 Chronicles 11:4 — And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, which is Jebus; where the Jebusites were, the inhabitants of the land.

The Jebusites were not run out of the land as most others were, but instead they continued to live among the Jews.

Judges 1:21 — And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.

Ekron was the closest Philistine city to Jerusalem, and so the point here seems to be that the remaining Philistines would also live alongside the Jews.

So, verse 7 seems to be saying that after the Philistines were conquered by Alexander the Great, they would all be converted to God.

That did not happen immediately after the conquest, but nowhere does verse 7 say that this would occur immediately.

Did it ever happen? Yes, in at least two ways.

During the time between the testaments, the Maccabean rulers of Judea successfully annexed the Philistine territory. Mosaic regulations were enforced on those who lived in the area.

That might be what verse 7 has in mind, but I think the better view is that verse 7 is looking forward to the day when both Jew and Gentile would worship God together in the church.

To see why that is the best view of this verse, let's ask an important question: **Why was God doing all of this?** Why was God using the Greeks to destroy the Persians? And why would God later use Rome to conquer the Greeks?

Why? Because God was creating the perfect cradle for his son, and I am not referring to the manger. The perfect cradle was a world almost entirely at peace and in which the Greek language was used all throughout the known world. In short, it was the perfect

setting for Jesus to come and bless the entire world (both Jew and Gentile) as had been promised to Abraham so long before.

And it was when that blessing came that verse 7 would be fulfilled. I think that is the best way to view the very difficult verse 7.

God was doing all of this so that the Philistines of this world could turn to him, obey the gospel, and be saved. If there were no verse 7, we would be left to wonder why we were given verses 1-6. Verse 7 is the explanation for verses 1-6.

So what happened to Jerusalem when Alexander marched through the area? Verse 8 answers that question — 200 years before it happened! And what an incredible answer it is!

8 And I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes.

Before we comment on verse 8, let's read from the writings of Josephus what happened when Alexander marched on Jerusalem. ("The Antiquities of the Jews," Book 11, Chapter 8, Paragraphs 4 and 5 (slightly paraphrased).)

Now Alexander, when he had taken Gaza, made haste to go up to Jerusalem; and the high priest, when he heard that, was in an agony, and under terror, as not knowing how he should meet Alexander and his army. He therefore ordained that the people should make supplications, and should join with him in offering sacrifices to God, whom he besought to protect that nation, and to deliver them from the perils that were coming upon them; whereupon God warned him in a dream, which came upon him after he had offered sacrifice, that he should take courage, and adorn the city, and open the gates; that the rest appear in white garments, but that he and the priests should meet the king in their usual priestly attire, without the dread of any ill consequences, which the providence of God would prevent. Upon which, when he rose from his sleep, he greatly rejoiced; and declared to all the warning he had received from God according to which dream he acted entirely, and so waited for the coming of Alexander.

And when he understood that Alexander was not far from the city, he went out in procession, with the priests and the multitude of the citizens. ... and although the enemies of the Jews thought they would soon have liberty to plunder the city, the very reverse happened; for Alexander, when he saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priests stood clothed with fine linen, and the high priest in purple and scarlet clothing, with his mitre on his head having the golden plate on which the name of God was engraved, Alexander approached by himself, and adored that name, and first saluted the high priest. The Jews also did all together, with one voice, salute Alexander, and encompass him about: whereupon the kings of Syria and the rest were surprised at what Alexander had done, and supposed him disordered in his mind. However, they asked him how it came to pass, that when all others adored him, he should adore the high priest of the Jews? To whom Alexander replied, "I did not adore him, but rather I adored God who hath honored him with that high priesthood; for I saw this very person in his priestly clothing a dream, who, when I was considering with myself how I might obtain the dominion of Asia, exhorted me to make no delay, but boldly to pass over the sea, for that he

would conduct my army, and would give me the dominion over the Persians; whence it is, that having seen no other in such priestly clothing, and now seeing this person in it, and remembering that vision and the exhortation which I had in my dream, I believe that I bring this army under the divine conduct, and shall therewith conquer Darius, and destroy the power of the Persians, and that all things will succeed according to what is in my own mind.” And when he had said this and had given the high priest his right hand, the priests ran along by him, and he came into the city; and when he went up into the temple, he offered sacrifice to God, according to the high priest’s direction, and magnificently treated both the high priest and the priests. And when the book of Daniel was showed him, wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that he himself was the person intended.

Having read that fascinating account from Josephus, let’s read verse 8 again: *“And I [God] will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth:*

Josephus is not inspired, but what he wrote certainly seems to fit very well with what we see here in Zechariah 8. Jerusalem was not destroyed by Alexander! Why? Because God was encamped around it. God protected Jerusalem from Alexander the Great — both when Alexander marched by Jerusalem on his way to Egypt in 332 BC and when he marched back by Jerusalem afterwards. [See handout]

How did God protect Jerusalem from Alexander? The Bible does not provide those details, but perhaps Josephus does. In any event, we know that God protected Jerusalem and kept it from being destroyed while these other cities were being destroyed by Alexander. And we know that protection was prophesied by Zechariah almost 200 years before Alexander the Great was born!

Remember in our introductory comments how we described the many commentators who say that Zechariah is really two books? Why do they say that? We can see why right here — if they dated the second half of Zechariah as early as the first half, then they would have to admit that the Bible contains predictive prophecy. That they can never admit, and so they do to the second half of Zechariah what they do to Daniel — try to move the date of the book until after the events it predicts. The efforts of such commentators to undermine the Bible tell us much more about themselves than about the Bible.

I am reminded of a favorite quote of my grandfather:

“There is no deafness so permanent as the deafness that will not hear. There is no blindness so incurable as the blindness that will not see. There is no ignorance so deep as the ignorance that will not know.”

We are also reminded of:

Matthew 13:15 — *For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

And we are reminded of:

Ephesians 4:18 — *Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.*

One must be truly blind not to see Christ, his church, and the power of God in the book of Zechariah!