

## Lesson 15

Last week we read verses 12-13 of Chapter 9, and we reviewed the history of the Maccabean revolt. Let's begin today by reading verses 12-13 of Chapter 9 again.

*12 Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to day do I declare that I will render double unto thee; 13 When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man.*

Who are the “prisoners of hope”? They are the faithful people of God who are awaiting the fulfillment of God’s promises and the coming of the Messiah. They remain prisoners because the Messiah has not yet come and has not yet freed them, but they are prisoners of **hope**. They were “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:13) But while we and Titus wait in hope for his *second* appearance, these prisoners of hope were waiting in hope for his *first* appearance.

Verse 12 tells these prisoners *to turn to the strong hold*? What is that strong hold? Some say it is Jerusalem, but Jerusalem was not much of a fortress at this time, although things would improve somewhat when Nehemiah showed up to build his wall.

I think the better view is that this strong hold is God. It was God who would send the Messiah to free his people from their prison. It was God who would protect them from Alexander and ensure their victory over the Greeks. God was their stronghold, not Jerusalem. If they were going to survive the very difficult times to come, their only hope was in remaining faithful and true to God. The walls around Jerusalem were not going to save them.

Verse 12 ends by saying “even to day do I declare that I will render double unto thee.” What does that mean? This promise is directed to the faithful people of God. Yes, they have suffered, and yes they will suffer again, but God will more than make up for that temporary suffering. He will give them a double measure of blessings.

What would God do for them during their coming conflict with the Greeks? Verse 13 begins an answer to that question.

For starters, God would bend Judah like a bow, and he would fill that bow with Ephraim. As we saw with verse 10, Judah and Ephraim are both mentioned to show that God’s faithful people would be *unified*, and God would use their unity as a weapon against their enemies.

Now, when it came to Hellenism, as we have seen, the Jews were *not* unified. Some favored the Greek influence while others did not. *But God’s faithful* people were unified! God’s faithful people knew that the Greek influence was wrong, and they fought against it. Their unity gave them strength, and God used that strength as a weapon. There is a powerful lesson there for us about the importance of remaining unified.

**1 Corinthians 1:10** — *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions*

*among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

When the Lord's church follows that command, we become a powerful weapon in the hand of God.

***Ephesians 6:12*** — *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

***Ephesians 3:10*** — *To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known **by the church** the manifold wisdom of God.*

The sons of Zion in verse 13 are the sons of the elderly priest Mattathias, known as the Maccabees, who stood up against the Greeks and successfully overthrew them. By their faithfulness and their unity, they placed a sword in the hand of God, and God used that sword to deliver them.

*14 And the LORD shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning; and the Lord GOD shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south. 15 The LORD of hosts shall defend them; and they shall devour, and subdue with sling stones; and they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, and as the corners of the altar.*

Verses 14-15 provided a further description of the Maccabean revolt, which would occur about 300 years after this was written.

Verse 14 shows God fighting for his people. He is seen over them; his arrow goes forth like lightning; he blows his trumpet; and he travels with whirlwinds of the south.

Each of these descriptions is an image of *warfare*. God is like a storm cloud hovering over the battlefield, complete with lighting, thunder (the sound of the trumpet), and mighty winds. The most violent storms in that area were the storms that came from the south.

Verse 15 tells us that God would be a shield as well as a sword. God would defend his people, and he would give them victory over their oppressors.

God's faithful people "would devour" their enemies. The figure there is of a devouring lion that consumes its prey.

The sling stones remind us of another time when God gave the victory to one of his faithful servants over a much larger and seemingly more powerful enemy.

The end of verse 15 is a frightening image. The victory of God's people is shown in graphic terms. They would figuratively drink their blood like wine, and there would be so much blood it would look like the sacrificial bowls and the altar in the temple.

We will see a similar image in Revelation, not with respect to Greece but with respect to Rome.

**Revelation 14:20** — *And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.*

God very often gives blood-thirsty people exactly what they want — blood, but it is their own blood that God gives them! That is what we see in verse 15.

*16 And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people: for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land. 17 For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids.*

Yes, there would be a great and bloody conflict between God's people and their oppressors, but verse 16 promises that God would save them in that day as the flock of his people. And history tells us that that is exactly what happened. The Maccabean revolt was successful.

**And had it not been successful, what sort of people would have been living in Jerusalem when Jesus came into this world?** Would there have been any faithful people left, or would Greek culture have done to Judaism what it would later do to the Romans? It has rightly been said that while Rome conquered the Greeks, Greek culture conquered Rome. Absent the faithful people of God remaining loyal and true to God, and keeping the world at bay, that same fate could have befallen all the Jews. Once again, there is a lesson there for us — no matter how bad things get in the world around us, we must remain loyal and true to God. He is depending on us! Our commission is to change the world — not to be changed by the world!

Notice the beautiful images in verse 16. First, Israel is God's flock. He is the Good Shepherd, and every sheep is precious to him.

Second, God's people are as precious to him as jewels in a crown. They are glittering upon his land. The land is the crown in which the precious stones, the redeemed people, are placed.

Verse 17 shows us the reaction when God's faithful people are victorious and back in their holy city. "For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids."

The subject of "his" in verse 17 is most likely Israel rather than God. Israel is once again prosperous and beautiful. The grain and the wine are symbols of prosperity and abundance.

God's people have been given a victory by God over a great oppressor, and now all is well with them. It is time to rejoice and be thankful to God. We will see that *same pattern* again when we get to our study of Revelation — a prayer for deliverance, a terrible struggle, a mighty victory, and great rejoicing.

Chapter 9 is one of the most remarkable chapters in the Bible. It accurately describes the battle plan of Alexander the Great, the protection of Jerusalem, and the Maccabean revolt centuries before those things occurred. And Chapter 9 contrasts Alexander the Great with the perfect King who was to come. And when that mighty king came into this world, he did not march in like Alexander, but rather he was born in a manger, and he rode into the city lowly, riding upon a colt.

The final six chapters have rightly been called the most challenging chapters in the Bible, and we have now finished the first of those six chapters.

## Questions about Chapter 9?

### Chapter 10

*1 Ask ye of the LORD rain in the time of the latter rain; so the LORD shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field. 2 For the idols have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams; they comfort in vain: therefore they went their way as a flock, they were troubled, because there was no shepherd.*

The first two verses of Chapter 10 continue the same thought that we saw at the end of Chapter 9 — things would all be different after the oppressor of God's people was judged.

Verse 1 says that the people would pray to God for “rain in the time of the latter rain,” and God would give them that rain. The rain “in the time of the latter rain” refers to the spring rains that they needed to have a successful harvest.

The key point in verse 1 is that the people would ask **God** for the rain rather than ask their false idols for the rain, as they had so often done before. Verse 1 is a promise from God — when his people turn to him and rely on him for help, he will send them that help. God had just delivered them from the Greeks, and God would deliver them again.

Verse 2 compares that current situation with how the people had acted in the past. Verse 2 glances back at those who did *not* seek help from God but rather from idols, and verse 2 shows how they were left destitute because of their lack of faith in God.

They had relied on idols, but those idols were vain. They had relied on fortune tellers, but those fortune tellers had been liars. Neither the idols nor the fortune tellers had provided any comfort. Their promises of rain and prosperity were not fulfilled.

And what was the result of their faithlessness? Their reliance on soothsaying and idolatry had caused them to wander away like a flock of sheep without a shepherd. Because they had not relied upon God as their shepherd, they were left without a shepherd. Instead, they went into exile and were punished for their faithlessness.

Not only did they not have their heavenly shepherd, they also had no earthly shepherd. The only kings they had known for quite some time were evil kings of Judah prior to the exile and foreign kings during and after the exile. The last good king of Judah had been Josiah who died almost 100 years earlier.

But verse 1 is a promise that the sad situation in verse 2 need not be repeated. If the people would rely on God rather than on their false idols and their fortune tellers, then God would bless them.

Verse 2 includes a key word that we will see many times in these closing chapters. The word “shepherd” occurs 13 times in Chapters 10-13. We will see the one true shepherd, but we will also see other shepherds, including a foolish and worthless shepherd in Chapter 11. “Shepherd” is a key word in these chapters.

*3 Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds, and I punished the goats: for the LORD of hosts hath visited his flock the house of Judah, and hath made them as his goodly horse in the battle.*

Let's keep in mind what God is doing in this prophecy. He is creating the perfect cradle for his son. He is making the way clear for Jesus to come into this world.

As part of that plan, verse 3 tells us that God will remove the old leaders.

The shepherds in verse 3 are the false shepherds — either the evil kings of Judah whom God had already removed or the evil foreign kings whom God had removed and would continue to remove. Jeremiah had given a similar prophecy.

***Jeremiah 25:34** — Howl, ye shepherds, and cry; and wallow yourselves in the ashes, ye principal of the flock: for the days of your slaughter and of your dispersions are accomplished; and ye shall fall like a pleasant vessel.*

God's wrath was kindled against those shepherds, and he would punish the goats. Those goats are most likely the Greek rulers who dominated Israel during the time between the testaments. One of the very worst goats was Antiochus Epiphanes, and we studied him in detail in our study of Daniel, and we looked at him briefly in our historical overview last week. He desecrated the temple under the Greeks, just as the Romans would again desecrate the temple in the first century.

How would God punish these false shepherds and these goats? He would visit his own flock of sheep and turn them into a mighty war horse.

If you are a sheep dreaming of someday becoming a mighty war horse, then this is your path! Anytime we study God's word, we need to be on the lookout for themes, and there is a theme in this verse we have already seen in this book — the transformative power of Christ.

***2 Corinthians 3:18** — But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are **changed** into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

The beautiful image in verse 3 tells us two important things about the people of God. First, they are very powerful when they rely on God. And, second, they have a vital role to play in the plan of God. God uses his people to accomplish his plans on this earth.

And, yes, those are also lessons for God's people today. We are very powerful with God on our side.

***Philippians 4:13** — I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

And we are vital to God's plan to bless the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15). If we don't go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature, then who will? God is depending on us!

The brilliant figure in verse 3 accomplishes two things. First, it promises strength and courage to God's people. Second, it reminds them that God does not accomplish his work

on earth without his people. The Maccabean victories over the Greek armies were a preparation for the coming of Messiah, and God was relying on them to do what they did.

So with the old leaders removed, what happens next? God raises up a new leader!

I love this book! At every opportunity, God tells his people about Jesus. At every opportunity, God tells his people about the church of Christ. God wanted them to know what was coming. He wanted them to know all that he was doing for them and preparing for them. That is why we are seeing Christ and his church so often in these verses.

So who is this new leader that God will raise up next? Do we really have to ask that question?

*4 Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail, out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor together.*

Who is the “him” in verse 4? The last person mentioned by name was Judah in verse 3. That could be a reference back to the Jews as a whole or to the tribe of Judah in particular.

Verse 4 is saying that out of Judah would come four things — the corner, the nail, the battle bow, and every oppressor together.

The translation at the end of verse 4 in the KJV is not very good — “out of him every **oppressor** together.” The ASV is much better — “from him every **ruler** together.” The ESV is also good: “from him every **ruler** — all of them together.”

So who is this great leader that God would raise up to help his people? We know the answer to that question! Verse 4 is a description of Jesus, the coming Messiah!

Jesus came from the Jewish people, and in particular from the tribe of Judah.

***Hebrews 7:14** — For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.*

Jesus is the corner from Judah.

***Isaiah 28:16** — Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, **a precious corner stone**, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.*

***Ephesians 2:20** — And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being **the chief corner stone**.*

Jesus is the nail from Judah. How so? What is the function of a nail? It holds things up; it holds things together.

***Hebrews 1:3** — Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and **upholding all things** by the word of his power. . .*

The word used for “nail” may also mean “peg,” which is something fixed and immovable.

**Hebrews 13:8** — *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*

Jesus is the battle bow from Judah. Jesus came to this earth to do battle against the enemies of God and against the enemies of God's people.

**1 John 3:8** — *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

And, remember the wonderful prophecy of Zecharias. (Not Zechariah, but Zecharias!)

**Luke 1:68-75** — *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: **That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;** To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he swore to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, **that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies** might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.*

And if anyone ever doubts that Jesus is a warrior, they need only turn to Revelation 19.

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

Jesus is the *battle* bow from Judah. Jesus is the nail or peg from Judah. Jesus is the corner from Judah.

But what about that last phrase? What does it mean that out of Judah came "every **ruler** — all of them together"? Who are these rulers — all of them together — who also came from Judah?

Matthew 19 gives us a *possible* answer to that question.

**Matthew 19:28** — *And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

These rulers in verse 4 *may* be the apostles. They were all certainly Jewish, but were they all from the tribe of Judah? The short answer is that we don't know for sure (unless

this verse is telling us here that they were). (And, as we said, we may not need to show they are all from the tribe of Judah because Judah here may be referring to the Jews as a whole.)

But it is an interesting question — from what tribes were the apostles? Some argue that each came from a different tribe so that all twelve could represent all twelve tribes, but we know that is not true. Why? Because some of them were brothers!

Some say Matthew was a Levite based on his name Levi in Mark 2:14, but that is not a certainty. The only certainty is that Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11:1), but he was “as one born out of due time” (1 Corinthians 15:8) and so he may not be in view here. Judas was replaced by Matthias, not by Paul. (Acts 1:26)

We know that Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, and we know that tribal allotments and laws of inheritance tended to keep the tribes together. And we know that among the apostles there were at least two sets of brothers (James and John, Peter and Andrew). We know that Philip and Nathaniel came from the same town as Peter and Andrew. And the evidence strongly suggests that Salome was both Mary’s sister and the mother of James and John, making James and John the cousins of Jesus. Putting all of that together, it seems very likely that many of the apostles were from the same tribe as Jesus, which would make them from the tribe of Judah. Perhaps they were all from the tribe of Judah, but we can’t say for sure.

But, as we said, even if they were not all from the tribe of Judah, verse 4 could still apply to them. Judah in verse 3 referred to all of the Jews, and so the references back to Judah in verse 4 may likewise refer to the Jewish people as a whole. And we know that all of the apostles were Jewish.

These rulers in verse 4 *may* be the apostles, but I think there may be a better explanation than that. These rulers in verse 4 may refer to a much larger group of rulers than just the twelve apostles. They may refer to *all* Christians.

Romans 5:17 tells us that we are now *reigning* in life through Jesus. The church is a *royal* priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). Revelation 1:5-6 tells us that we became part of a *kingdom* of priests when we were freed from our sins by the blood of Christ. Revelation 20:6 says that we *reign* with Christ.

And for those premillennialists who are looking for a 1000 year **of** Christ, they need to read the text more closely. Revelation 20:4 does not talk about a reign **of** Christ for 1000 years — it says that Christians “lived and reigned **with** Christ a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4) We are the ones who reign 1000 years, and we do so with Christ. And when we get to our study of that chapter, we will see that the number 1000 is being used there as a figure that describes the nature of our reign with Christ. It is *not* a literal 1000 years.

In my view, *we* are the rulers in verse 4! Christians reign with Christ.

But how do Christians come forth out of him (Judah) as verse 4 says? Simple. Christ came from the tribe of Judah, and we became Christians through Christ. We are blessed in Christ just as God promised to Abraham in Genesis 12, and that blessing came through Abraham’s seed.

***Galatians 3:7*** — *Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.*

I think that we in the church are the rulers in verse 4. Why do I prefer this view over the others? Because of the verses that follow. Verse 5 begins by describing this same group of rulers.

*5 And they shall be as mighty men, which tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle: and they shall fight, because the LORD is with them, and the riders on horses shall be confounded.*

That's us! We are "as mighty men!" We tread down our enemies! We fight because the Lord is with us! We confound riders on horses!

Do we see ourselves that way? Do we understand what it means to be a member of the eternal kingdom of Christ? Or are we being held back by an inferiority complex? If so, then the answer is for the church of Christ to see itself as Christ sees it!

Oh, but what can we do? The world is so big, and we seem so small. The world is so powerful, but we seem so powerless. Who is listening to us? Our web site has so few hits! We have a lot of empty seats! What can we do?

The first thing we should do is understand what the word of God has to say about us.

**Matthew 16:18** — *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

**Romans 8:37** — *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

**1 John 5:4** — *For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

**Hebrews 12:22-23** — *But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,*

**Ephesians 1:22-23** — *And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*

**Daniel 2:44** — *And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.*

**Do we believe that or not?** That is the question. Do we have any doubts about the power of the church?

Where is the church today? It is here and at other faithful congregations around the world. Where is the mighty Roman empire today? Long dead and gone. That mighty Roman empire tried to destroy the church of Christ in its infancy — that is precisely how that conflict between Rome and the church is pictured in Revelation. And what happened? The Roman empire is gone; the church is not.

That is what verse 5 is describing. “The riders on horses shall be confounded.” Those riders thought they were better armed. They thought they would just mow us all down and destroy the church. But that is not what happened, and the promise is that it will **never** happen. The church is not just any kingdom; the church is the *eternal* kingdom.

The church is the most powerful organization on earth, and it has been since the day it was established in Acts 2. It will outlast all the kingdoms of this earth, and those in the church are reigning with Christ, their Messiah and King. That is the message of verse 5. Do we believe it? The more we understand how Jesus views his church, the more we will be transformed by that knowledge.