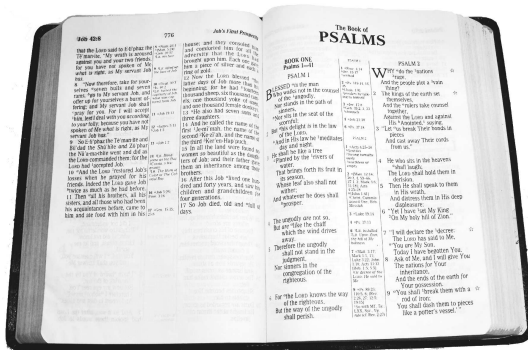


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



February 2020

Bible readings from Zechariah and Psalm 18

ZECHARIAH

Zechariah prophesied at the same time as Haggai during the reign of King Darius II of Persia, beginning approximately 520 BC. These two men encouraged and challenged the Jews to take up again their work of rebuilding the temple which had ceased several years earlier on account of slander and opposition (Ezra 5:1–2). Zechariah's prophecy is also one of hope for the restored kingdom of Israel and looks forward to the coming of Messiah's kingdom. There are more prophecies here which point to the Lord Jesus Christ than in any other Old Testament book apart from Isaiah.

Outline of Zechariah

1. A call to repentance – 1:1–6
2. Eight visions in the night – 1:7 to 6:8
3. The crowning of Joshua the high priest – 6:9–15
4. God's answers to the people's question – 7:1 to 8:23
5. The destruction of Judah's enemies – 9:1 to 10:12
6. The rejection of the Messiah and his victories 11:1 to 14:21

Some of the prophecies relating to the Lord Jesus Christ

- He will come to live in the midst of his people (2:10–11)
- He is God's '*servant the BRANCH*' (3:8)
- 'The Branch' is both Priest and King (6:12–13)
- The King and Saviour will ride into Jerusalem on a donkey (9:9)
- Sold for thirty pieces of silver (11:13)
- Pierced (12:10)
- The Shepherd smitten at God's command (13:7)
- He will come again with all his saints (14:5)

Recommended commentaries for Zechariah:

T.V. Moore: Zechariah (published by Banner of Truth).

Iain M. Duguid: Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi (Evangelical Press).

Return to me ... and I will return to you

Zechariah begins his prophecy by reminding the people, ‘*The LORD has been very angry with your fathers*’ (2). The people still had bitter memories of the exile in Babylon which God had brought about because their ancestors had rejected the call of the prophets to turn from their evil ways. Zechariah used the lessons of Israel’s history to warn his generation and to urge them to avoid the mistakes of their fathers. **If more Christians would learn their Bible history and their church history and take to heart the lessons, they would be spared many of the mistakes of the past.** They would also appreciate the price paid by the martyrs to give us the Bible in our own language and to bring reformation to our shores.

The prophet reminded the people that their ancestors had refused to turn from their evil ways. He asked, ‘*Where are they?*’ (4–5). They had gone, and so had the prophets who had faithfully brought God’s Word to them. Though they had departed, the Word of God that they had brought to the people had been fulfilled. There is a stark warning for us all here. We may refuse to listen to the Word of God when the Lord speaks to our hearts, but God will do as he has determined to do (6).

Those who rejected the message of the gospel in past ages, *where are they?* They are separated from God for ever! It is too late for them to repent. Where are the faithful servants of God who lived among them and were rejected and persecuted? They are now with their Lord in heaven. Where will you be? If you have strayed from the Lord like those exiles of old, his word for you is, ‘*Return to me ... and I will return to you*’ (3). God will return to you so that you will know his presence with you and his smile upon your life. If you are not a Christian, do turn away from your sin and come to the Lord Jesus, asking him to save you from your sins. Trust in him alone to save you and he will certainly hear your prayer. **Where are they? – Where will you be?**

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I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal

Zechariah had a series of visions at night and in his first vision he saw a man riding on a red horse which stood with other horses and their riders among myrtle trees (7–8). Zechariah was guided by an angel in his visions and he asked questions when he did not understand the significance of what he saw (9,19,21). We will learn more from God's Word if we are prepared to ask for help where we do not understand.

The man on the red horse is identified as '*the Angel of the LORD*' and those with him as God's angels sent to go throughout the earth and to report back to God (10–11). '*The Angel of the LORD*' is thought by many commentators (eg. Matthew Henry, T.V. Moore) to refer to the Lord Jesus Christ appearing before he took human flesh (cp. Judges 13:21–22). The myrtle is a beautiful shrub with glossy, dark green leaves which exudes a fragrant odour when bruised. It has star-like clusters of fragrant flowers and here symbolises Israel who had been crushed and destroyed by the arrogant, godless nations of the world. Four months had passed since Haggai had prophesied that the Lord would shake the heaven and earth and overthrow the nations but nothing had happened (Haggai 2:21–22). The angels reported that the godless nations were enjoying peace and prosperity and this appeared to contradict what God had said would happen (11).

The Angel of the LORD asked if God would not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah *and the LORD answered ... with good and comforting words* (13). He said, '*I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal*' (14). He was very angry with the nations who had fulfilled his purposes in punishing the wayward Israelites, but had gone too far with evil intent (15). He promised to bless and comfort Jerusalem and see that his house would be built there (16–17). God is *zealous* ('jealous', AV; ESV) for his people. Those who touch us touch the apple of his eye (2:8). **Christian! God loves you and cares for you. He will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5–6). Be encouraged!**

The craftsmen are coming to terrify them

Zechariah saw four horns in his second vision. The horn was a symbol of power to the pastoral people of those times. The strongest animal in the herd is the one which uses its horns to the best effect to gain the ascendancy. The prophet asked the angel to explain the meaning of the four horns and was told that they were the powers that had scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem (18–19). They represented the enemies who surrounded God’s people on every side.

God then showed Zechariah four craftsmen and explained that the powerful enemies of his people were no match for them. – *The craftsmen are coming to terrify them*. They would cast out the strength of the nations who lifted up their horn (strength) against the land of Judah (20–21). This vision and its interpretation would have been a great encouragement to those rebuilding the temple. God was with them and he would bring down every enemy who sought to harm them. Iain M. Duguid comments, ‘But when it comes to the enemies of God, the bigger they come, the harder they fall. The horns which wreaked terrifying destruction on Judah will be terrified by the coming craftsmen (COMMENTARY ON HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH, page 87).

Satan has many willing servants whom he uses to harass and attack the Lord’s people. We must always remember that God will protect us and frustrate the plans of our enemies. The Lord has his craftsmen who *are coming to terrify them*. They were safe! **The Lord will never leave us and his ‘craftsmen’ are always ready to come to our aid. We are never alone; let us worship our almighty King and rejoice in him!**

*A sovereign protector I have
Unseen, yet for ever at hand,
Unchangeably faithful to save,
Almighty to rule and command.
He smiles and my comforts abound;
His grace as the dew shall descend
And walls of salvation surround
The soul he delights to defend.*

(Augustus M. Toplady)

Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day

The Lord had told Zechariah, ‘*a surveyor’s line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem*’ (1:16). In this vision, Zechariah saw a man with a measuring line in his hand to measure the dimensions of the city. The interpreting angel was about to go after him but was intercepted by another angel. This angel passed on a message to be given to the man who had the measuring line. Jerusalem would be extended far beyond its present dimensions. She would prosper and flourish to such an extent that she would be as towns without walls. She would be safe, however, because God would protect her as if she were surrounded by a wall of fire. He promised, ‘*For I will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst*’ (1–5). The Lord then called upon the Jews remaining in Babylon to flee and to return to their own country. They would then share in Jerusalem’s coming prosperity and escape the doom that was to befall Babylon (6–7). The nations which plunder the Lord’s people are very foolish! God said, ‘*He who touches you touches the apple of his eye*’ (8).

Zechariah speaks not only of the blessing that was soon to befall Jerusalem but also of Christ’s church which is the new Jerusalem (10–13; Galatians 4:27–28; Hebrews 12:22–24; Revelation 21:2). The language of verse 10 is very similar to that found in chapter 9, verse 9 which speaks of Christ’s coming into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. The church embraces Jew and Gentile and ‘*many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become my people*’ (11).

T.V. Moore writes, ‘The incarnation of Christ, and his indwelling in the church, are grounds of the highest joy (v. 10) ... The church of God shall cover the earth, and become in fact what it is in right, the mightiest agency in human history. Though now feeble and despised, she shall one day include many nations’ (v. 11) – COMMENTARY ON ZECHARIAH, pages 60 & 61. **We have a glorious message to proclaim!** — Men, women, boys and girls who are alienated from God, may through the death of Christ, be reconciled to God and joined to the Lord’s people and know his presence among them (11).

See, I have removed your iniquity from you

In his fourth vision, Zechariah was shown *Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him* (1). The angel is identified here as God (2). The Lord rebuked the devil, telling him that he had chosen Jerusalem which was *a brand plucked from the fire* (of Babylon). Joshua was standing in filthy garments which were taken from him and replaced with rich robes and a clean high priestly turban. The Lord said to him, *‘See, I have removed your iniquity from you’* (4). The high priest represented the nation before God and his robes were for glory and for beauty (Exodus 28:2). This vision was to encourage the temple-builders. They had sinned but the Lord is merciful. They were precious to God and would have a great future. Satan was opposed to them and had stirred up adversaries to have the work halted (Ezra 5:2–3 where Joshua is translated ‘Jeshua’). The opposition failed to prevent the work (Ezra 6).

The vision also illustrates what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. **He has removed the filthy garments of sin from us and clothed us with garments of salvation and covered us with the robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10)**. His righteousness has been put to our account (imputed to us – Romans 4:22–25). The devil will accuse us (same word translated ‘*oppose*’, verse 1) and condemn us (Revelation 12:10) but God has forgiven and cleansed us through the merit of Christ’s death and our great Saviour prays for us (Romans 8:33–34).

*Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.*

*Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through thee I am,
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.*

(Nicholas L. von Zinzendorf)

My Servant the BRANCH

The Angel of the LORD reminded the high priest that his sins had been forgiven so that he would walk in God's ways. Obedience to God brings rewards. Joshua would judge God's house and have charge of his courts and walk among those who stand before God (the angels; verse 7). **We have been saved to be holy to the Lord and only as we seek to be holy can we be truly happy** (1 Peter 1:6–8, 15–16; 2:9).

Joshua and his fellow priests were a wonderful sign pointing to the great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:14). God describes him as '*My Servant the BRANCH*' (8; cp. 6:12;). These titles are used of Christ in several Old Testament prophecies ('*Servant*' – Isaiah 42:1; 50:10; 52:13; Ezekiel 34:23 and '*Branch*' – Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15). Why is Christ called '*the BRANCH*'? The Hebrew word used for 'branch' describes a shoot sprouting up from the roots of a tree which had fallen down. The royal house of David had become like a fallen tree, but from its roots would spring a tiny shoot which would grow into a mighty tree (cp. Isaiah 11:1,10; Romans 15:12). **Christ's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and every knee shall bow before him (Philippians 2:9–11).**

Some commentators believe that the stone laid before Joshua may refer to the corner-stone of the temple but Iain Duguid differs. He writes, 'This stone is most probably part of the high priest's clothing, a gemstone with seven facets associated with the turban and inscribed with an '*inscription*' ... This stone has been prepared by God and engraved by him, for he is the one who will act to remove '*the iniquity of the land definitively*'" (HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH AND MALACHI, pages 101–102). The Lord said, '*I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day*' (9). The atonement for sin to be made by God's *Servant the BRANCH* would be complete and never needing repetition like the sacrifices of the Old Testament priesthood (Hebrews 7:26–27; 10:14). Verse 10 paints a picture of the security, prosperity and peace (cp. 2 Kings 18:31) that will come with the reign of Christ.

‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD

The angel roused Zechariah for him to see his fifth vision. He asked the prophet, *‘What do you see?’* and he replied that he saw a solid gold lampstand with a bowl on top. The bowl contained oil which was fed to seven lamps through seven tubes, one to each lamp. The bowl was continually supplied with oil from two olive trees which stood on either side of the lampstand (1–3).

Zechariah asked the angel the meaning of the vision and was told that it was the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel the master-builder of the temple (the fourth vision was directed to Joshua, the high priest). God’s message to Zerubbabel was to encourage him to persevere in his work. The seven lamps were continually supplied by the oil (symbolising the Holy Spirit) from the two olive trees. He and his helpers could not call upon human resources of might and power but they had One who would supply their every need! — *‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts* (6). The Holy Spirit moved upon the heart of King Darius II to give moral and financial support to the temple builders (Ezra 6). Surely this is also a word to every hard-pressed Christian worker! We may labour with very limited human resources, but the Holy Spirit is with us and in us. We do not and we must not resort to worldly measures to build up the church of God. Let us look to the Lord to bless our work and let us pray that God will be pleased to pour out his Spirit in revival that our nation may be transformed through the ministry of a renewed church.

The obstacles standing in the way of Zerubbabel were like a great mountain and it seemed that the work would never be completed. God would make the mountain become a plain and the hands which began the building work would place the headstone in position with joyful shouts rejoicing in the grace of God (7). **Do you see obstacles in your Christian life and work as immovable mountains, or do you see them as an opportunity to prove the Lord and to triumph in him?**

‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.

For who has despised the day of small things?

The Lord continued with words of encouragement for Zerubbabel telling him that he would certainly complete the building of the temple. He would then know that the Lord had sent Zechariah to prophesy to him (8–9). When we are discouraged, we may think that what we are doing for the Lord is insignificant and small but we must remember that all we do for God is important! The Lord asked, *‘For who has despised the day of small things’* (10). He does not despise such a day and neither should we! Small beginnings may lead to great things being accomplished for God! *‘These seven’* are the eyes of the Lord which see everything that is happening throughout the whole earth (10; cp. 3:9). He was watching over and caring for the team of temple builders and he rejoiced to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. The plumb line was a confirmation that the work of rebuilding the temple would be completed.

Zechariah asked the angel to explain who was represented by the two olive branches. He was told, *‘These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth’* (11–14). Many Bible commentators believe that they refer to Zerubbabel and Joshua, but Iain Duguid believes them to be the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The words, *‘anointed ones’* (14) are literally ‘sons of oil’ in the Hebrew. They were ‘oily’ or full of the Holy Spirit (oil symbolises the Holy Spirit). There is a reference to this vision in the book of Revelation where the two witnesses (a picture of the church) are identified as the two olive trees and the two lampstands (Revelation 11:3–4).

In a *‘day of small things’* we tend to think more about the discouragements we encounter than the encouragements that the Lord gives to us. Does the weakness of the church discourage you? Do you feel overwhelmed by the apparent hostility or indifference of those who are lost to the gospel we preach? **Persevere and seek to be a channel of blessing to those around you in this ‘day of small things’.** Never forget that our great God does not change.

The curse that goes over the face of the whole earth

The prophet turned and raised his eyes to see a flying scroll which was twenty cubits long and ten cubits wide (35 feet x 17.5 feet).* The scroll was inscribed on both sides and the interpreting angel told Zechariah that this was *'the curse that goes over the face of the whole earth'* (1–3). Two particular sins were singled out for denunciation – stealing, and swearing false oaths in the name of the Lord. These sins may have been those most obvious in the life of the nation at that time. To be guilty of just one sin is to violate the whole of God's law, however (James 2:10–11). The penalty for these sins was to be cut off (*'expelled'*) from God's people (3). Sin is not a private matter. The curse came not only upon the thieves and perjurers, but also upon their families (4). Our behaviour has a profound influence for good or evil upon those with whom we live.

All who offend God's law, even in one point are cursed (Deuteronomy 27:26). It is a terrible thing to have the curse of God upon us. It means that we will be shut out of heaven if we die in our sins. **The glorious news of the gospel is that the Lord Jesus Christ became a curse to redeem sinners from the curse of the law.** Through him, we know blessing and are taken into God's family (Galatians 3:10–14; 4:4–7). *He was cut off from the land of the living* and suffered a terrible death to save us from our sins (Isaiah 53:8). Let us lift up our hearts to God in praise and thanksgiving for our great salvation!

*'Tis finished! the Messiah dies,
Cut off for sins, but not his own;
Accomplished is the sacrifice,
The great redeeming work is done.
'Tis finished! all the debt is paid;
Justice divine is satisfied;
The grand and full atonement made;
God for a guilty world hath died.* (Charles Wesley)

* One cubit is the equivalent of 17.5 inches (44.45 centimetres).

This is Wickedness!

The angel told Zechariah to look up to observe what was coming into view. He saw an ephah (a measuring basket) which was covered by a circular lid of lead. The lid was raised to reveal a woman and the angel exclaimed, *'This is Wickedness!'* The woman was the personification of the wickedness of the whole land. The angel thrust the woman down into the basket which he sealed with the lid (5–8). The prophet then saw two women with wings like those of a stork. They lifted the basket between them and flew up into the sky. Zechariah asked the angel where they were going with the basket and was told that they were going to the land of Shinar (Babylonia) where a house would be built for it and where it would remain (9–11).

What is the meaning of this vision? – Many writers, (eg. Matthew Henry and T.V. Moore), take this seventh vision as a prophecy of the scattering of the Jews following the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. We must remember, however, that the Jews had been discouraged in their building work but God had promised to be with them. The previous vision showed that those who break God's holy law are cursed. This vision points to sin being removed from the land of Israel and driven to a land governed by those who were antagonistic to God (of which Babylon is the symbol). The New Testament depicts Babylon as a wicked woman who opposes the church (Revelation 18). In the restored Israel, sin would be restricted among God's people, as they sought to apply the precepts of the law to their own lives.

Wickedness has greatly flourished in recent years as we have forsaken the standards set out in God's Word. The godless ways of the world are constantly paraded before us in the media. **We must resist the pressure to fashion our lives by the world's wicked ways.** Let us be determined as we depend upon the Lord, to be holy and to shine as lights in the darkness around us.

The Lord of all the earth

The New Bible Commentary (second edition, 1958 reprint) describes this final vision of Zechariah as ‘probably the most obscure one of the series.’ The prophet saw four chariots which were drawn by horses of different colours. The chariots appeared from between two mountains of bronze. The chariot drawn by the black horses went to the north country, followed by the chariot with white horses. This may point to the sorrow brought upon the Babylonians when their revolt against Darius failed. The peace that followed was symbolised by the white horses. The dappled and strong horses pulled their chariot toward the south country (probably Egypt) to bring judgment, and were then told to *walk to and fro throughout the earth* (6–7). The red horses are not sent out, suggesting that their work was already completed.

Zechariah asked the angel to explain the vision and was told, ‘*These are the four spirits of heaven, who go out from their station before the Lord of all the earth*’ (1–5). The chariots speak of the agencies used by God to fulfil his purposes for his people (cp. Psalm 68:17). The mountains are symbols of strength and immutability (unchangeableness). John Calvin writes, ‘The prophet no doubt understood by these mountains the providence of God, or his hidden counsel, by which all things have been decreed before the foundation of the world; and hence he says, that they were mountains of brass, as they could not be broken.’

This vision was yet another word of reassurance to Zerubbabel and those who built the temple with him. They were surrounded by many enemies, but ‘*the Lord of all the earth*’ was in control of all that was happening around them. His angels were watching over them and caring for them (cp. Psalm 91:9–11). The purposes of the sovereign, almighty God cannot be frustrated (cp. Isaiah 14:24,26–27). There is also a reassuring message for the Christian here. – **God will build his church, whatever the discouragements that may beset us or the difficulties we face. Let us persevere and not lose heart!**

He shall build the temple of LORD

Zechariah had received his last vision of the series and the Lord then commanded him to perform an act which was full of symbolism. He was to make crowns (the Hebrew noun is plural, perhaps indicating that the crown consisted of two or more parts) from the gold and silver brought by captives who had returned from Babylon (9–11). Zechariah was told to set the crown on the head of Joshua the high priest. What was the significance of the crown? God said that it was to be kept in the temple as *a memorial in the temple of the LORD* for the captives who had brought the gold from Babylon (10,14).

The Lord's message for the high priest also pointed to the coming of the promised Messiah (*'the BRANCH'*, cp. 3:8). He would build up the temple of the Lord as both King and Priest (12–13). – *'He shall build the temple of the LORD'* is stated and repeated. The Lord Jesus holds both offices of King and High Priest. He is building his church into *a holy temple in the Lord* (Ephesians 2:19–22). The church is a spiritual house and not a physical building and in it Christ bears the glory (13; cp. Ephesians 3:21).

The work of completing the building of the temple was not only for the people of Jerusalem. Those who were *far away* would also assist in the work (15). This also points to the new era under Christ. Many would come from far away and build the temple of the Lord (the church). These words refer to the inclusion of Gentiles in the church, who are described as those who are *afar off* in the New Testament (Acts 2:39; Ephesians 2:11–13).

The chapter closes with a call to diligent obedience to the voice of God (15). **A holy temple (the church) requires obedient people if it is to grow and see the work of evangelism flourish at home and abroad. Do you *'diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God'*?**

Did you really fast for me — for me?

Two years had passed from the time that Zechariah was given his visions (1; cp. 1:7). Haggai had begun to prophesy two months earlier (Haggai 1:1). The Hebrew of verse 2 shows that a deputation of Jews came from Bethel (which means ‘the house of God’) *to pray before the LORD*. They also came to ask the priests and prophets concerning the observance of fasts. The Jews had observed certain fasts since the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple (cp. 8:19).

- The fast of the fourth month commemorated the breach of the walls of Jerusalem and the entry of the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:3–4).
- The fast of the fifth month, the burning of the temple and of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:8–9).
- The fast of the seventh month, the assassination of Gedaliah (2 Kings 25:25).
- The fast of the tenth month, the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:1).

The question was, ‘Should they observe these fasts now that they were back in their land and able to worship God in Jerusalem?’ The Lord answered with some searching questions, ‘*Did you really fast for me — for me?*’ This ritual was meaningless! Should they not have rather ‘*obeyed the words which the LORD proclaimed through the former prophets*’ to past generations (5–7)? God reminded them of those words in verses 9 and 10 (cp. Isaiah 1:10–20; Jeremiah 7:3–15). Their message had fallen on deaf ears and hardened hearts, ‘*thus great wrath came from the LORD of hosts*’ (11–15).

There is a solemn warning in these verses. We too can be like those Jews of old and content ourselves with empty religion. It is possible to pray, read the Bible, attend services each Lord’s Day, but to be doing these things for ourselves and not for the Lord (5–6). If our hearts have not been changed, if we lack in compassion and mercy, our religion is futile (9–10). **The Lord requires practical Christianity from us. Actions speak louder than words (James 1:27; 2:14–20; 1 John 3:16–18). How real is your religion?**

‘Will it also be marvellous in my eyes?’ says the LORD of hosts?

God had punished the Jews and sent them into exile because of their disobedience to his law (7:8–14). Jerusalem had known plenty of religious ceremony but little of truth and righteousness. The Lord said, *‘I am zealous for Zion with great zeal’* (2; cp. 1:14). He cared very much for his people and his city! He promised to return to the city and dwell among her people so that Jerusalem would be called *‘the City of Truth ... the Holy Mountain’* (3). Here is a beautiful picture of a city which enjoyed peace and which was secure. The elderly would relax in those streets which had known bloodshed and had been in ruins following the Babylonian invasion. The city would be full of children, able to play safely in her streets (5). This promise may have appeared to be marvellous (too good to believe) for the returning exiles, but all things are possible with God. *‘Will it also be marvellous in my eyes?’ says the LORD of hosts* (6). Many of us long for God to send revival to the church and to bring many thousands into his kingdom. Would this be too much for us to take in? Is it beyond belief? Look at Ephesians 3:20–21 for the answer!

Those rebuilding the temple were encouraged to let their hands be strong and not to fear (9,13; cp. Haggai 2:4). The Jews had been a curse among the nations, but God would save Judah and Israel and they would become a blessing (13). The great blessing for the nations coming through Judah was the Lord Jesus Christ. God had been determined to punish sinning Israel but he was now determined to do good to Jerusalem (14–15). God designated Jerusalem, *‘the City of Truth ... the Holy Mountain’* and he reminded his people that he expected them to love truth and to be righteous(16–17). We live in times when many church leaders have little conscience about compromising vital Christian truths. If we play fast and loose with truth, wickedness will soon prevail. If we have little concern for truth, whether in matters of doctrine or in living and speaking honestly, we do not please God. **Those who truly love God will love what he loves and hate what he hates!**

Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you

Zechariah now gives a further answer to the question of the Jews from Bethel concerning the observance of fasts (cp. 7:3). The Lord said that they were to be changed into days of festivity because of God's blessing upon the people (19). T.V. Moore writes, 'When God makes the sun shine, the tear-drops should be dried; and when his blessing comes upon us, the memory of our sorrows should be used only to enhance our present joy. But the moral condition of this is reiterated, "*love truth and peace*" (COMMENTARY ON ZECHARIAH, page 121). The Jews did not continue to '*love truth and peace*' and were judged by God in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem (cp. Matthew 23:37–39).

God promised that many nations would come to seek him in Jerusalem (20–22). This would have been a great encouragement to Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest, but the promise looks beyond their time. We should not look for a future glory for earthly Jerusalem. The prophecies relating to her coming glory are fulfilled in the church (Galatians 4:26–27; Ephesians 3:20–21).

Some misguided Christians seek to attract people into their churches by putting on entertainment with pop-gospel groups and clowns. Such efforts will not encourage sinners to repent or to seek the Lord. **Sinners will be encouraged to seek the Lord when they see the godly living of Christians and their love of truth and peace** (19). When we shine as lights in this dark world, there will be those who will say, '*Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you*' (21–23). Let us be Christlike, seeking always to please God. We will then know that he is with us and so will those who are not Christians, and we will enjoy the blessing of the Lord in our lives!

The burden of the word of the LORD

Some modern versions of the Bible render the Hebrew word translated ‘burden’ (1) as ‘oracle.’ The Hebrew word indicates a weight and so I prefer the translation before us: *The burden of the word of the LORD*. The prophet was weighed down; he was burdened by his message from God (cp. 12:1; Malachi 1:1). The weight of impending divine wrath upon the objects of the prophecy could also be described as a ‘burden.’ The preacher of God’s Word should be a man with ‘a burden’. He does not speak about himself, but proclaims Christ Jesus the Lord. He is an ambassador for Christ who has an urgent message (2 Corinthians 4:5; 5:20). Do pray for those who preach the Word of God, especially your own pastor. They have an awesome responsibility before God.

The verses we have read contain prophecies against neighbouring lands, some of whom were longstanding enemies of God’s people:

- Syria (whose capital is Damascus). We do not know why this nation is called ‘*the land of Hadrach*’ (1).
- Tyre and Sidon (2–4).
- Philistia (5–8).

These prophecies were fulfilled almost two hundred years later when Alexander the Great and his army invaded the region. Tyre was an island port and her people imagined that they were safe from their attackers. In 332 BC, Alexander laid siege to this island fortress for seven months and captured it after constructing a causeway from the mainland. Ashkelon and the other Philistine cities were near enough to Tyre to fear the invaders. The Philistines had no scruples about drinking blood and verse 7 indicates that their remnant would forsake this practice and that some would be identified with the people of God. Jewish historian Josephus indicates that the remaining Philistines were assimilated by the Jews. The future is bleak for those who do not know God but he protects his people. He said, ‘*I will camp around my house*’ (8). **What have we to fear when God watches over us and cares for us?**

Behold, your king is coming to you: he is just ... and lowly

Additional Reading: Matthew 21:1–11.

Bible prophecy often has the ‘near’ alongside the ‘far’ within a single passage (eg. Matthew chapter 24). The previous verses in this chapter point to events a couple of hundred years after Zechariah, but today’s reading is specifically applied to the Lord Jesus Christ by the gospel writers. The prophecy was fulfilled exactly when he rode into Jerusalem on the donkey just a few days before his crucifixion.

Alexander (see yesterday’s reading) was a great king and conqueror, but our precious Saviour is far more glorious and powerful. *Behold, your king is coming to you: he is just ... and lowly* (9). Consider his character as described here:

- He is ‘*just*.’ There is no trace of unrighteousness in him. All his ways are perfect and good.
- He is ‘*lowly*.’ Though he is the eternal Son of God, he humbled himself and became obedient to the Father’s will (Philippians 2:5–8). He did not enter Jerusalem on a prancing war-horse, but upon a donkey.

The kingdom of Christ is one of *righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Romans 14:17). His conquests are not through earthly weapons and his kingdom covers the whole earth (10).

It is wonderful that our almighty King should humble himself and die to bring us salvation! **Do you know this precious Saviour?** He says, ‘*Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and I will give you rest for your souls*’ (Matthew 11:28–29).

*Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.*

(Isaac Watts)

Because of the blood of your covenant

A covenant is a binding agreement between two or more persons, bringing them into a special relationship and commitment to each other. The covenant was usually sealed by blood sacrifice (eg. Exodus 24:1–8). God reminded the people of his covenant with them and promised, *‘Because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit’* (11). The prophecy before us probably refers to the misery of the Jews when they were oppressed by the Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes. Humanly speaking, prisoners left to languish in a deep pit, had little hope. The Jews, however, were prisoners of hope because of the covenant and they would return to their stronghold (*‘Zion’*). God promised to restore to them double their former prosperity (12).

The Lord promised to use Judah and Ephraim (the northern kingdom, Israel) to raise a successful revolt against the sons of Greece (the Seleucids – see above). This began under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus in the December of 167 BC. The covenant keeping God promised to appear over his people, to defend them and to save them (14–16). They are his flock and are precious to him like the jewels in a crown (16). Commentators differ on whether the beauty and goodness (17) refers to God or to his people.

The Lord Jesus is the Mediator of a far better covenant which is sealed with his blood which was shed at Calvary. This covenant was established on better promises which are for every Christian. (Hebrews 8:6; 9:14–15). God is for us and nothing whatever can separate us from his love (Romans 8:31–39). **God is totally committed to us and he expects us to be totally committed to him.** When the Lord Jesus has done so much for us, dare we be half-hearted in our devotion to him?

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.* (Isaac Watts)

Ask the LORD for rain

God had promised to give his people good harvests (9:17) but they were not to take his promises for granted. They were urged, '*Ask the LORD for rain in the time of the latter rain*' (1). The former rain fell in the autumn and was essential for the germination of the newly sown seeds. The latter rain fell in March or April to swell the grain and was necessary for a good yield. The flashing clouds are a description of the thunderstorms which often come with the latter rain. What lessons are there here for us? T.V. Moore writes, 'We must not suppose that because God has begun to bless us, we may relax our prayers and efforts. The former rain may be given, but we must also ask for the latter rain. We may have the former rain of conversion, but if we would have the latter rain of ripened sanctification of nature, we must continue to ask of God. So, also in the revival of religion. The former may occur, and souls be converted, but if we would have the ripening of the seed in active Christians, we must ask of God, and he will give growth, greenness and maturity' (COMMENTARY ON ZECHARIAH, page 159)

The Lord answers prayer and never fails those who trust in him but idols speak delusion and are useless (2). The diviners who speak on their behalf and indeed all occult practitioners speak lies and provide false comfort. Those who trust in such people and their idols go astray like sheep and this is to be seen today in the mad quest for self-realisation through the new age movement. Those who dabble in the occult are on a slippery slope to hell unless they repent! God was angry with the shepherds of Israel (leaders and priests) who had failed to give a righteous lead to his people (3). He promised to visit his flock and to make the house of Judah as a royal horse from which he would raise up leaders (described as '*the corner-stone, tent-peg, etc.*'; 4–5). Though this prophecy was fulfilled in the Maccabean period, there is greater fulfilment in Christ who came from Judah, who watches over his church and who will crush all his enemies.

Let us now come to God in prayer and ask for rain, for his showers of blessing upon Christ's church and upon ourselves.

They shall walk up and down in his name

These verses present us with a picture of an ingathering of Jews from captivity. The ‘house of Joseph’ and ‘Ephraim’ are terms used to denote the ten tribes of the northern kingdom, (6–7; cp. Amos 5:6,15; Hosea 12:1). They shall rejoice as God whistles for them (8). The bee-keeper ‘hissed’ or ‘whistled’ to collect his swarm and a shepherd would whistle to summon his sheep. God only has to whistle to bring back his scattered people and he promised to redeem them. Their past deliverances from Egypt and Assyria are a symbol of their future ingathering (10). Matthew Henry points out that verse 10 ‘has its spiritual accomplishment in the gathering in of precious souls out of a bondage, worse than that of Egypt or Assyria, and the bringing of them in to the glorious liberties of the children of God and their enjoyments, which are as the beautiful, fruitful pastures in the land of Gilead and Lebanon’ (Matthew Henry – BIBLE COMMENTARY).

God spoke of sowing or scattering the Jews among people in distant lands (9). The dispersed Jews built synagogues throughout the Middle-East and the apostles preached the gospel in many of them so that Jews and Gentiles were brought to faith in Christ (eg. Acts 13:42–44; 14:1; 17:1–4). The prophecy before us points to the conversion of a remnant of the Jews (see also Romans chapters 9 to 11). Let us pray for the continuing fulfilment of these prophecies. ‘*So I will strengthen them in the LORD, and they shall walk up and down in his name,*’ says the LORD (12). The second part of this verse could be translated as in some modern versions, ‘*they shall walk in his name*’, meaning that they will lead lives that are pleasing to God. **Those who belong to God should walk (live) to please him. Do you?**

*When we walk with the Lord
In the light of his word,
What a glory he sheds on our way!
While we do his good will,
He abides with us still
And with all who will trust and obey.* (James H. Samnis)

Their shepherds do not pity them

This chapter opens with a dramatic scene of devastation. Invaders are seen coming from the north, thrusting their way through the forests of Lebanon and continuing southwards through Bashan and the Jordan valley (1–3). *‘The pride of the Jordan’* is a phrase describing the beautiful and dense shrubbery that lined the banks of the river. This prophecy may refer to the invading Roman legions which took possession of Israel and her neighbours after the era of the Maccabees and before the coming of Christ.

The Lord told Zechariah to perform a series of symbolic actions which represented Christ’s coming to the Jews, their rejection of him and its bitter consequences (4–17). *‘The flock for slaughter’* means the flock destined for slaughter because of their rejection of the good shepherd (4,7). Over a million Jews were slain in AD 70 following their rebellion against the Romans. The ‘shepherds’ (3,5,8,15–17) refer to the leaders of the people, both religious and civil. Israel had often been governed by bad shepherds: *‘their shepherds do not pity them’* (5). Matthew Henry comments, ‘Christ had compassion on the multitude, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as if they had no shepherd; ... but their own shepherds pitied them not, nor showed any concern for them. Note, it is ill for a church, when its pastors have no tenderness, no compassion for precious souls, when they can look upon the ignorant, the foolish, the wicked, the weak, without pity’. **Always remember to pray for God’s under-shepherds (pastors) in his church, that God will keep them faithful and tender in their ministry. Encourage them by being faithful and godly yourself.**

Zechariah symbolised the good shepherd and said in obedience to God, *‘So I fed the flock for slaughter, in particular the poor of the flock’* (7). *‘The poor of the flock’* were those who clung to the Messiah. He took two shepherd’s staffs, one called *‘Beauty’* (or ‘Grace’), the other *‘Bonds’* (or ‘Union’) which symbolise the favour that God bestowed upon his people because of his covenant with Christ and because of his desire for their unity.

So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver

The Lord loathes unfaithful under-shepherds and he removed three of them in a month (8). The Jews did not appreciate the good shepherd despite all his gracious care of them. Zechariah broke in two his staff, 'Beauty' (Hebrew = 'Grace') as a sign that God was withdrawing his favour towards them. He made void his covenant by which other nations were restrained from attacking his people (10). The faithful 'poor of the flock' watching the prophet knew that this was the word of the Lord (11). The other staff, 'Bonds' (Union) was broken to indicate the disunity in Israel following the rejection of the good shepherd (14).

Before leaving the flock, the good shepherd asks for his wages and was insulted when offered the price of a servant who had been gored by an ox (12; cp. Exodus 21:32). *So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver.* The Lord led the prophet to show his contempt for the princely price they set on him by casting it down in the house of the Lord for the potter who made the least valuable of all the vessels (13; cp. 2 Timothy 2:20). This was a prophecy of the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 27:3–10). The gospel account attributes this prophecy to Jeremiah which was a term to cover all the prophetic books (Jeremiah was placed first in the prophets in the first century AD).

The shepherd who had no concern for the flock whom God would raise up (15–17) speaks of the Romans who ruthlessly destroyed the Jewish state in AD 70. They would themselves be judged by God and their arm would wither and they would be blinded in the right eye, indicating that they would be punished with weakness and ignorance.

Many men and women reject Christ not for thirty pieces of silver, but for love of their own sinful ways or for love of the world. If we reject Christ and his offer of salvation, we must not be surprised if he rejects us!

The LORD, who stretches out the heavens

The opening words of verse one are better translated as in the Authorised Version — *The burden of the word of the LORD for* (not ‘against’) *Israel*. We have before us a wonderful picture of God as the almighty creator and sustainer of the universe and as the giver of life: *Thus says the LORD, who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundations of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him* (1). The promises of the same sovereign God to protect Jerusalem would have been a great encouragement to Zerubbabel and his fellow Jews as they sought to build the temple in the face of cunning opposition.

Notice the expression, ‘*In that Day*’ (3,4,6,8). God promised to ‘*make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness*’ to her enemies so that they would stagger about in helpless confusion (2). He would make Jerusalem ‘*a very heavy stone*’ which would cut them in pieces if they attempted to move her. God would strike her enemies with confusion and the leaders of Judah would gladly acknowledge that they owed their safety to the inhabitants of Jerusalem who were strengthened by God (3–5). Those leaders would be like a fire, devouring their enemies and the people living in the tents of Judah in the countryside would be saved first. The Lord would so defend the people of Jerusalem that the feeble of the city would be as David was at the height of his power. God would surely destroy all those who came against Jerusalem (6–10).

How has this prophecy been fulfilled, or does complete fulfilment still lie ahead? The Lord did give the Jews great victories in the second century BC under the Maccabees but Israel was later occupied by the Romans and Jerusalem destroyed in AD 70. The prophecy cannot apply to the city of Jerusalem today. Matthew Henry correctly points out that the Lord’s protection of earthly Jerusalem foreshadows his care of his church, which is ‘*Jerusalem above*’ (Galatians 4:25–26). We must read these promises in the context of Christ’s church. **Are you discouraged? Are you struggling because of crushing opposition? – Remember, we are more than conquerors through him who loves us (Romans 8:35–37). Trust in him. He will never fail you.**

They will look on me whom they have pierced

Today's reading contains a promise of a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit leading to sorrow for sin and penitent prayer through a sight of the pierced Messiah: *They will look on me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for him* (10). It is important to see that it is Jehovah (the Lord) who speaks these words. The Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ is God! The change of person in the sentence from 'me' to 'him' does happen in prophetic passages and 'me' is the correct translation. This prophecy was fulfilled when the Lord Jesus died on the cross (Luke 23:48; John 19:37) and when thousands of Jews were saved on the Day of Pentecost and in the years immediately afterwards (Acts 2:36–41).

The depth of the mourning is shown by the reference to the grief following the death of good King Josiah in the Valley of Megiddo (11; cp. 2 Chronicles 35:22–25). The extent of the mourning is shown as it is described as taking place throughout the land and affecting some of the leading families; it was the custom for women to mourn separately from the men (12–14).

These verses illustrate the pattern of true repentance for sin which cannot take place without a work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. The Spirit points us to a crucified Saviour and gives us a sight of the loathsomeness of our own sin. We then mourn as we realise that Jesus died on account of our sin. John Newton describes this experience in his hymn, 'In evil long I took delight, unawed by shame or fear' (see next page). The grace of God is seen in the lives of those who have so received Christ and his Spirit. They will also call upon the Lord ('*supplication*'). When Saul of Tarsus became a Christian, Ananias found him praying (Acts 9:11).

There is little mourning over sin in many of our churches today, very little appreciation of the need for godly sorrow and heartfelt repentance. **If we will not mourn now because of our sin, we will mourn when Jesus comes again because of its consequences, leading to our eternal loss (Matthew 24:30; Revelation 1:7).**

Looking at the Cross

*In evil long I took delight,
Unawed by shame or fear,
Till a new object struck my sight,
And stopp'd my wild career.*

*I saw one hanging on a tree,
In agonies and blood,
Who fix'd his languid eyes on me,
As near his cross I stood.*

*Sure never till my latest breath,
Can I forget that look;
It seem'd to charge me with his death,
Though not a word he spoke.*

*My conscience felt, and own'd the guilt,
And plunged me in despair;
I saw my sins his blood had spilt,
And help'd to nail him there.*

*Alas! I knew not what I did:
But now my tears are vain;
Where shall my trembling soul be hid?
For I the Lord have slain.*

*A second look he gave, which said
"I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid,
I die, that thou may'st live."*

*Thus while his death my sin displays
In all its darkest hue,
(Such is the mystery of grace,)
It seals my pardon too.*

*With pleasing grief and mournful joy,
My spirit now is fill'd,
That I should such a life destroy,
Yet live by him I kill'd.*

(John Newton)

A fountain shall be opened

'*In that day*' (1,2,4) refers to the gospel age (cp. 12:11). There is a wonderful promise here of the fountain opened for the removal of the guilt of sin and for the cleansing from sin: *In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness* (1). When the Lord Jesus was pierced, blood and water poured out from his side (12:10; cp. John 19:34–37). When we repent of our sin and mourn over it, seeking God's mercy, he will forgive us and cleanse us. **Let us thank God for opening a fountain for the forgiveness and cleansing of sin. How great should be our love for Christ!**

*There is a fountain filled with blood,
 Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
 And sinners plunged beneath that flood
 Lose all their guilty stains.* (William Cowper)

The history of Judah before her captivity in Babylon, was repeatedly marked by idol worship, listening to false prophets and turning to occult practices. When the Holy Spirit is poured out in revival, these things are driven out (2). When the Lord visits his people they will recognise the evil nature of false prophecy and hate it. We are also provided with a picture of the intensity of that hatred of idolatry when even parents will rise up against their children who become false prophets (3). Verses 4 and 5 can be taken to refer to the false prophet who repents of his wickedness and turns his back on his evil ways, or to the false prophet who in times of spiritual refreshing, seeks to hide what he has been doing. Many professing Christians claim to be able to prophesy in the name of Christ. When their prophecies prove to be false, they show no shame or repentance. We must vigorously reject these people and their heresies (cp. Matthew 7:21–23).

Verse 6 is not a prophecy relating to Christ. It is the false prophet who has been wounded, possibly during some ritual associated with his false religion (cp. 1 Kings 18:28).

Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered

Jehovah, *the LORD of hosts*, summoned the sword (the symbol of judicial authority to impose the death penalty; Romans 13:4) to strike the shepherd. Who was this Shepherd sentenced to die by Jehovah? He is described as the man who is his ‘*Companion*.’ The New Bible Commentary (2nd edition, reprinted 1958) points out that the Hebrew word ‘gebher’ rendered ‘*man*’ is emphatic, indicating that the Shepherd is a man par excellence, while the word ‘amith’, translated ‘*Companion*’ contains the idea of fellowship on equal terms. ‘*The Shepherd*,’ the Lord Jesus is both God and Man!

There is here another prophecy of the sufferings of Christ who was to be pierced, and from whom a fountain was to be opened for sin and for uncleanness (1; cp. 12:10). ‘*Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered*’ was quoted by Jesus as referring to himself (Matthew 26:31). The Lord Jesus was stricken and smitten by God and suffered divine wrath to redeem us from the curse of the law (Isaiah 53:4-6; Galatians 3:10-14). The scattering of the sheep was fulfilled when the disciples fled in fear after Jesus was arrested (Matthew 26:56) and also in the dispersion of the Jews after their rebellion against the Romans. Many were cut off (8) and slaughtered when Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. A third part would be gathered in however and some would turn to Christ. God would bring them through the fire of affliction, refined as silver and tested as gold (9).

The language of verse 9 is very similar to that referring to Christian Jews of the dispersion to whom Peter wrote his first letter. They were passing through the fire (1 Peter 1:1, 6-7; 4:12) but they greatly rejoiced in the Lord Jesus Christ whom they loved and served. God owned them as his people and they proclaimed the praises of him who had called them out of darkness into his marvellous light (9; cp. 1 Peter 2:9-10). **Christian, if you are going through testing times, remember that God will bring you through the fire and when you call upon him, he will answer you (9).**

The LORD will go forth and fight

Matthew Henry's comment on verses 4 and 5 could be applied to the whole chapter. – 'These verses are dark and hard to be understood.' The Bible contains '*some things hard to understand*' (2 Peter 3:16) and we must recognise that other Christians may differ from us in their interpretation of certain difficult passages. Some take this chapter literally but I believe that we have before us a glimpses of the gospel age, the destruction of Christ's enemies at his second coming and the blessedness of heaven.

If we interpret all the chapter literally, it would point to an earthly Jerusalem which will overcome all her enemies at the return of Christ. He will stand on the Mount of Olives which will be split in two. The people of God will then escape from judgment through the great valley (1–5). This interpretation has serious difficulties. We know that when Christ returns, his people will be caught up to meet him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:14–17). There will be no fleeing from Jerusalem along a great valley. The New Testament teaches that the church is the new Jerusalem above (Galatians 4:25–26). She is in a continual struggle with the powers of evil and will be until the Lord Jesus returns in great power and glory. The church knows periods of darkness as well as of light (6–7) but she is the channel of God's blessing to a needy world from whom *living waters shall flow* (8; cp. John 7:37–39; Revelation 21:6; 22:17). The Lord is sovereign over all the earth (9).

Iain Duguid comments, 'The prophet has painted many word pictures of the glorious future that lies ahead for the people of God. None the less, his last oracle does not lie at the end of a smooth and easy pathway, but on the far side of many dangers, toils and snares. In particular, it appears that the period immediately preceding the Lord's final victory will be a time of great trial for his people (COMMENTARY ON HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH, page 179). *The LORD will go forth and fight* against those who oppose his church (3). **This is our confidence in discouraging times and if God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31)?**

Holiness to the LORD of hosts

Verses 12 to 15 vividly describe God's judgment to be poured out upon the enemies of his people. There will be a day of reckoning when the Lord Jesus returns bringing plagues and great panic (cp. Revelation 6:12–17). The scene of a remnant of Jerusalem's enemies going up each year to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles presents a great problem if taken literally (16–18). It hasn't happened yet and will not happen in the future because the sacrifice of Christ at Calvary has put an end to all Jewish sacrifices and to the ceremonial law. The ritual of the Old Testament offerings and worship foreshadowed the good things to come under Christ. Any observance of Jewish feasts or sacrifices (21) would plainly contradict the teaching of the Book of Hebrews (eg. chapters 9 and 10).

Verses 16 to 19 point to the gospel age when people of all nations shall worship God in his church. The Feast of Tabernacles was an occasion of joyful praise. It is used here as a symbol of joyful Christian worship. We must always be reverent in our worship but reverence does not exclude joy! Miserable faces and unenthusiastic worship do not honour God. Those who refuse to worship will be punished, if not immediately, certainly at the end of the age (17–19).

The symbolism of all the utensils of the temple being '*holiness to the LORD of hosts*' (21) points to a church which is a holy temple to the Lord (1 Corinthians 3:16–17). The exclusion of the Canaanite from God's house (21) is a picture of the final state of the church in heaven. Nothing that defiles shall enter it and all that is wicked and unclean shall be shut out (Revelation 21:8,26–27; 22:14–15). Words are insufficient to describe the happiness of heaven, but happiness comes from holiness. Lasting joy is the portion of those who are godly! **If you have no desire to be holy, do you think that you would be happy in heaven?**

He delivered me because he delighted in me

David sang this psalm after God had delivered him from Saul and other enemies (see the title of this psalm which is also found in 2 Samuel, chapter 22). Verses 2 and 49 are quoted in the New Testament with reference to the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 2:13; Romans 15:9). The whole of the psalm breathes out praise to God for his deliverance. *I will love you, O LORD, my strength* (1). The Hebrew word translated ‘love’ denotes a deep, heartfelt love. Do you love God with all your heart?

Look at the description of God’s greatness and strength in verse 2: *My rock ... my fortress ... my deliverer ... my strength ... my shield ... the horn of my salvation* (the ‘horn’ is a symbol of strength)... *my stronghold*. We have a strong God who is deserving of our trust and worthy of our praise (2–3). The Lord does hear us and he does deliver us (6, 16–19). Are you going through a time of trial? Do you feel weary in the Christian warfare? Meditate on today’s reading and take heart; the Lord will never fail you.

This psalm not only tells of God’s strength but also of his grace. *He delivered me because he delighted in me* (19). God delights in his children and those who would fight us fight the Almighty (cp. Acts 5:39; 9:1,4–5). How encouraging! *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8:31). Christian, if you are feeling depressed or lonely, remember that the Lord delights in you; he will never forsake you.

True religion means enjoying a relationship with the God who delights in his people. Notice the repetition of ‘*he ... me*’ in verses 16 to 19. **Do you know God by personal experience? Can you honestly testify to his gracious dealings with you? Do not be content with a mediocre, dull ‘Christianity’.** Seek the Lord and call upon him in prayer. He will make himself known to you so that you too will praise him from a heart overflowing with love. *I will love you, O LORD, my strength.*