

ZECHARIAH: GOD'S PRESENT DIRECTIVES AND FUTURE HOPE

XVI: God's Help Through The Maccabean Era

(Zechariah 9:11-17)

I. Introduction

- A. Zechariah along with Haggai called the returning Hebrews back to rebuilding the temple, and he gave God's directives and future hope. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the Book of Zechariah," p. 1310)
- B. Zechariah chapters 9-14 present two "burdens" or oracles, with Zechariah 9-11 predicting Messiah's first advent and rejection by Israel and Zechariah 12-14 foretelling His second advent and acceptance by Israel.
- C. Zechariah 9:11-17 predicted God's Help for Israel through the Maccabean era during the rule of Greek overlords, and we view the passage for our insight and application (as follows):

II. God's Help Through The Maccabean Era, Zechariah 9:11-17.

- A. Following the brief digression of Zechariah 9:10 where Zechariah predicted the application of Messiah's offered but refused and hence postponed peace during His first advent's Triumphal Entry in Zechariah 9:9, Zechariah returned to predicting God help for Hebrew exiles who were returning from Babylonian Captivity.
- B. Thus, Zechariah 9:11 predicted that based on His Abrahamic Covenant, God would send forth more Hebrew exiles from their Babylonian Captivity, that captivity being likened in Zechariah 9:11 to a cistern (*bor*, Kittel, Bib. Heb., p. 966; B. D. B., A Heb. and Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 92) where there was no water, what was often used as a dungeon for prisoners in that era, Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 1563.
- C. The "fortress" to which they would "return" in Zechariah 9:12 NIV was Jerusalem, and they were called prisoners of "hope" due to God's promise to restore them to twice as much blessing as before, what would be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom that Israel expected would be instituted at Messiah's (first) advent, *Ibid.*
- D. This blessing would occur after God had helped Israel in the Maccabean era as predicted in Zechariah 9:13-17:
 1. When Alexander the Great's Greek empire at his death was divided among his four generals, the Greek rulers of Israel ruled the Hebrew people in 169-135 B. C. with the rulers named Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Antiochus V Eupator, Antiochus VI and Antiochus VII Sidetes, *Ibid.*
 2. Secular history records how Antiochus IV Epiphanes had tried to subdue his Greek rivals in Egypt by invading Egypt in 168 B. C. only to have the Romans direct him to leave Egypt at once, Z. P. E. B., vol. Four, p. 5. "Having learned of Rome's might when he served as a hostage for fourteen years," Antiochus IV "quickly retreated," embittered at this public humiliation, *Ibid.*
 3. En route to his home back in Syria, Antiochus IV decided to make Palestine loyal to himself "in order to act as a buffer state between himself and the Romans. Considering himself (the Greek god) Zeus Epiphanes, he ordered a cultic Hellenization policy" and tried to "exterminate the Jewish religion by forbidding them to live in accordance with their ancestral laws. He forbade the observance of the Sabbath, customary festivals, traditional sacrifices, and circumcision of children, and ordered the destruction of copies of the Torah. Idolatrous altars were set up and the Jews were ordered to offer unclean sacrifices and to eat swine's flesh (2 Macc. 6:18). The climactic deed was on Chislev 25 (16 December, 167 B. C.) when the Temple of Jerusalem became the place of the worship of the Olympian Zeus, offering swine's flesh upon the altar of Zeus which was erected on the altar of burnt offering," *Ibid.*
 4. An aged priest Mattathias who had five sons, John, Simon, Judas, Eleazar and Jonathan, when pressed by an agent of Antiochus to offer unclean sacrifices, refused, killed the agent, tore down the pagan altar, and fled with his sons and followers into hiding and began the Maccabean revolt, *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.
 5. Accordingly, God predicted in Zechariah 9:13 that the northern and southern tribes of Israel (Ephraim and Judah respectively), would unite and be empowered by God to defeat their Greek rulers, Zechariah 9:13.
 6. "The description of a thunderstorm controlled by God (v. 14) pictures poetically Israel's empowerment for victory over her enemies (v. 15)," *Ibid.*, Bible Know. Com., N. T.
 7. The final victory of the Maccabees is foretold in Zechariah 9:16-17 (*Ibid.*), and they cleansed the temple, instituting the Feast of Dedication, what was later called Hanukkah. (*Ibid.*, Ryrie, fn. to John 10:22)

Lesson: *In accord with His Abrahamic Covenant, God promised not only to restore returning Hebrew exiles from Babylon to the land, but to enable them to defeat their oppressive Greek rulers before the arrival of the Messianic Kingdom. This was fulfilled in God's helping Israel during the Maccabean era in the Intertestamental Period.*

Application: *May we trust in God's help even in our era today where we face spiritually oppressive secular rulers.*