

Zechariah Chapter Thirteen

The overall theme of Zechariah 13 is *cleansing* which closely connects to the national mourning of *repentance* in the preceding chapter. Three words are repeated in each chapter. 1. **Land** that once 'mourned' (12.12) is now sanctified (13.2). 2. The **Spirit** of grace has been poured *out* (12.10) so the unclean spirit is *removed* from the land (13.2). 3. The **pierced** Saviour (12.10) is contrasted with the piercing of false prophets (13.3). Verse one appears to be a summary statement which is further expanded in the rest of the chapter focussing on the purification of the land (vv.2-6) and the people (vv.7-9). In summary, the nation is cleansed *morally* (v.1), *spiritually* (vv.2-6) and *nationally* (vv.7-9).

The chapter moves effortlessly between different periods of time. The first six verses envisage a time of cleansing in connection with the *manifestation* of Christ and before the establishing of the *millennial kingdom* (a 75-day transitional interval, Daniel 12.11-12). The chapter also visits *Calvary* (v.7) and the refining fire of the *tribulation* (vv.8-9).

The Spring (Fountain) of Cleansing [13.1]

v.1: 'In that day' properly refers to the Day of the Lord throughout, but as the day is long (over 1,000 years), different points during that day are in view (cp. 14.4, 9, 13, 20). See above. The image of the fountain is often associated with a divine source of life (Psalm 36.9; Proverbs 14.27; Jeremiah 17.13) but is used here as a symbol of cleansing. The Hebrew suggests something 'gushing' and therefore an overflowing, inexhaustible supply. Israel will be totally cleansed from sin's defilement. This would not appear to be a fountain of blood but **water** (cf. Jeremiah 2.13). *Ezekiel 36.25: Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.* The word 'opened' has the idea of a continuous, permanent opening. Once opened (in application to Israel), it will be perennial (cf. 1 John 1.7). The remnant was cleansed *judicially* (blood) from their sins the moment they exercised faith in Christ (12.10). Now they are being cleansed *morally* (water) from all association with sin and uncleanness.

The Sanctification of the Land [13.2-6]

v.2: Given the nation's conversion, and in preparation for the millennial kingdom there must be an *external* (as well as *internal*) spiritual cleansing of the land. Genuine conversion and repentance will always be manifested in holiness of life and living (2 Corinthians 7.1). Idolatry will be 'cut off' and false prophets and the 'unclean spirit' removed. Since the captivity, Israel has been largely cleansed from idolatry, but the basest form of idolatry is yet to affect the nation during the tribulation (Daniel 9.27; John 5.43; 2 Thessalonians 2.4; Revelation 9.20; 13.4). The existence and influence of idolatry will be so utterly destroyed that even their names will not be remembered. Idolatry promotes false prophets and originates with demons. Behind every idol and false prophet is an unseen, unclean spirit (demon), 1 Kings 22.21-23; 1 John 4.1-3; 1 Timothy 4.1-3. Note. 'Spirit of uncleanness' is a collective name for wicked spirits that promote all manner of sin and impurity and stand in contrast to the Spirit of grace (12.10). The Lord Jesus warned that demonic activity in Israel will be far worse than ever it was during the days of Christ (Matthew 12.43-45). Given that Satan is banished to the abyss during the millennium, it is not surprising that his demons are also banished from the land.

v.3: Given Israel's new holy standing and state before God, they will be zealous to remove every vestige of uncleanness. In last days false prophets and deceivers will abound (Matthew 24.11, 24; Luke 21.8). Any who prophesy falsely or are suspected of having been a false prophet will be put to death according to the Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 13.6-10). Perhaps their prophecies have now proved to be false (cf. v.4, Deuteronomy 18.20-22). Note that even the tenderest ties of parent and child will not prevent the slaying of the false prophet. Incredibly, the Mosaic law commanded stoning – but the directive here is to 'thrust through'. The allusion to 12.10 is clear. There is no middle ground – we either stand with those who pierced Christ, or we stand for His truth and honour. We are reminded that Christian parents are expected to be faithful to God and His word no matter how their children behave. Scriptural principles must not be compromised for family. **v.4:** Such will be the zeal to eradicate false prophets, they shall seek to deny any involvement in such activities. They will be 'ashamed' of past prophecies now they have proved false. The distinctive badge of the prophet was a 'rough' (hairy) garment (2 Kings 1.8; Mark 1.6) – which may have been an outward sign of a life of separation to God. Such false prophets wore these garments to deceive others into thinking they were genuine. Sadly, many today wear all kinds of 'religious regalia' purporting to have been sent *from* or speak *for* God.

v.5: Not only do they deny their past through action, but also by lip. Once so ready to speak (falsely), now they do not want to speak at all (Micah 3.7). The repetition of the personal pronoun suggests the vigour of their protestations. Literally he will say, 'Not a prophet am I; a worker of the soil am I!' The claim is that of belonging to the humblest class of people (tiller of the ground), even as a slave from his youth (lit. 'a man acquired me in my youth'). He asserts that he had always been in a condition of life in which the exercise of the prophetic office was altogether impossible.

v.6: This verse has long been a source of controversy. Some able and respected commentators such as William Kelly, JN Darby and Merrill Unger see a clear reference to Christ, but this is probably not the case. They argue that 12.11-13.5 is a parenthesis dealing with the cleansing of the land and thus v.6 resumes the subject of 12.10. However, this presupposes an unnatural break between v.5 and v.6. The Hebrew conjunction translated 'and' or 'but' (v.5) is repeated at the beginning of every verse from vv.2-6. 'Awake' therefore commences the *new* section in v.7. Also, the most natural antecedent for 'him' (v.6) is the false prophet of v.5 (not the 'pierced' one of 12.10). The false prophet has 'wounds' in his 'hands' (could also refer to the *arms* or *chest* between the hands, cf. 2 Kings 9.24) which were characteristic of pagan worship (Deuteronomy 14.1; 1 Kings 18.28). He will lamely suggest he received them at the hands of his 'friends' (or 'lovers') – perhaps meaning chastisement from his parents or master in younger years.

The Smiting of the Shepherd [13.7]

v.7: In summary, the nation has been cleansed *morally* (v.1), *spiritually* (vv.2-6) and will now be refined *nationally* (vv.7-9). The purifying of the nation actually began with the scattering of the flock among the nations following the death of the Shepherd. Jehovah commands the 'sword' (cf. Jeremiah 47.6) to 'awake' against His Shepherd symbolising the violent death He would experience. 'My Shepherd' contrasts the idol shepherd (11.16-17). This is the one of God's providing and appointment, the one who answers to His mind – his representative in and through whom the shepherd relationship between God and His people is realised (Ezekiel 34.14-16, 23). In an outstanding confirmation of the deity of Christ, this Shepherd is described as the 'man that is my fellow'. The Hebrew means a strong, young man (*geber*) – so Christ was strong in character, moral excellence and devotion to the Father's will. 'My fellow' literally means 'my equal' or 'companion'. It implies oneness of essence and nature (cf. John 10.30). This Shepherd is both human and Divine. Yet this Shepherd was to be 'smitten' with a mortal blow, as Moses smote the Egyptian (Exodus 2.12) and the rock (Numbers 20.11). The masculine gender suggests the smiting is accomplished by God – thus the death of Christ is here presented as the sovereign act of God (Isaiah 53.4), but earlier as the responsibility of Israel (12.10). Without a Shepherd, the flock is exposed. The solemn purpose of the smiting of the Shepherd is the scattering of the 'sheep' (singular) in divine discipline. This verse was applied by the Lord Jesus to the disciples as they all forsook Him and fled (Matthew 26.31, 56; Mark 14.27, 50) but this merely prefigured the great dispersion of AD70 (cp. Isaiah 11.11-12; Jeremiah 31.10). The Lord will 'turn His hand upon' (translated 'against' twice in this verse) the 'little ones' – a phrase that always denotes an act of judgment or divine discipline (even in Isaiah 1.25) – and thus likely speaks of the refining fire of v.9. The 'little ones' are therefore parallel to the 'sheep' (flock) but emphasising those that are weak and vulnerable. Alternatively, this may be a statement of comfort for the faithful remnant (cf. 11.7, 11) – God will watch over His own and preserve them *through* the fire. As Spurrell translates: 'Yet I will restore my help upon the little flock.'

The Searching (Testing) of the Fire [13.8-9]

v.8: These final two verses reach beyond AD70 for Israel have not yet been brought into the blessings of the new covenant relationship with God (v.9). There seems to be a focus here on those left *in* the 'land' (cf. v.2), whereas Ezekiel 20.34-38 deals with the refining of those scattered *among* the nations before being brought into the land. Ultimately, two thirds of the flock will be 'cut off' and die during the tribulation. One third will survive – these surely include the 144,000 – and comprise the believing remnant of those who look to Christ for salvation (12.10).



v.9: This verse explains *how* the remnant third will come to salvation. As the dross and impurity is removed from gold and silver in the heat of the fire, so the remnant is brought through the refinement of the Great Tribulation – this is spiritual purification (Isaiah 1.25; Malachi 3.3) with a view to their redemption (silver) and ultimate glory (gold). Israel has experienced the fire of Egypt (Deuteronomy 4.20) and Babylon (Isaiah 48.10), but neither can be compared to the Great Tribulation. The nation *originated* from the fire of Egypt (Exodus 6.7) and was cured of *idolatry* in the fire of Babylon. The fire of the tribulation will remedy their *unbelief*. MacArthur: *There will be a whole population of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednegos!* Such trials will cause Israel to 'call on the name of the Lord' in faith (cf. 12.10) and they will be heard (Isaiah 30.19). The nation will be established in new covenant relationship with God and owned once again as 'my people' (*ammi*, cf. Hosea 1-2). The nation will respond in the same words of disbelieving Thomas – 'the Lord is **my** God' (John 20.28). We do well to remember that the fire of trial, persecution and suffering has an important place in the life of the believer. Stubbs: *Spiritually speaking, the Lord sometimes allows us to pass through a furnace of affliction in order that the dross may be removed from our lives and that we may call upon Him.* See Hebrews 12.11; 1 Peter 1.7.