

GOD'S "I WILL"
ZECHARIAH 12:1-9

In "If I Were in Charge of the World," Judith Viorst's popular child character Alexander opines,

If I were in charge of the world
There'd be brighter night lights,
Healthier hamsters, and
Basketball baskets forty-eight inches lower.

If I were in charge of the world
You wouldn't have lonely.
You wouldn't have clean.
You wouldn't have bedtimes.
Or "Don't punch your sister."
You wouldn't even have sisters.

If I were in charge of the world
A chocolate sundae with whipped cream and nuts would be a vegetable...
And a person who sometimes forgot to brush,
And sometimes forgot to flush,
Would still be allowed to be
In charge of the world.

It's probably good that Alexander isn't in charge of the world — or anything else. But he does identify a typical longing: there is a relentless desire for control in the world. I want to control the temperature, the traffic, my schedule, my children, my spouse, my parents, my expenditures (nothing unanticipated)... And actually, I control nothing. We *are* aware that God is sovereign and we know that is good, but it is a struggle to be humble and content under His sovereignty when we are inclined to orchestrate life differently.

Or is God absolutely sovereign? Are all things under His control? From unexpected illness to broken HVAC units to car accidents to consumer good prices rising greater than income to judicial decisions to broken relationships — it seems like many things are out of control (even God's control). Is that so?

To even ask the question, “How sovereign (extensive) is God’s sovereignty?” is to misunderstand the meaning of sovereignty. To say that God is sovereign is to say that He has absolute control, direction, power, authority over everything. Nothing escapes His control — there is not a single renegade atom in the universe that is beyond His awareness or authoritative control. He sees all and He is authoritative over all.

Yet, our puny brains and fleshly hearts are inclined to diminish sovereignty to something less than what it is — so Zechariah is a helpful remind about the absolute extent and authority of God’s sovereignty.

Last week we noted that as sovereign creator, God has the authoritative right to speak (declare His will). Today we will see that in the declaration of His will, He will defend Israel physically from her enemies. (Next week we will see how God will defend and save Israel spiritually.) Zechariah 12:1-9 teaches us...

IN HIS SOVEREIGNTY, GOD WILL PROTECT HIS PEOPLE PHYSICALLY IN THE LAST BATTLE.

How will God protect Israel in the last battle? In a series of **five “I will” statements** (vv. 2, 3, 4, 6, 9; implied vv. 5, 7), God directs us to an increasing understanding of His sovereign authority in the last day.

- 1. God is Sovereign to GATHER the NATIONS to Battle (vv. 1-3)**
- 2. God is Sovereign to VANQUISH the PARTICIPANTS in the Battle (v. 4)**
- 3. God is Sovereign to CHANGE the HEARTS of His People in the Battle (v. 5)**
- 4. God is Sovereign to STRENGTHEN His PEOPLE for the Battle (vv. 6-9)**

1. God is Sovereign to **GATHER** the **NATIONS** to Battle (vv. 1-3)

- Remember the context of this chapter:
 - ✓ It follows one of the most heavy, discouraging, and difficult chapters of the Bible (11:15-16).
 - ✓ These verses begin one of the most hopeful sections in the Bible with the emphasis on **that day** — the coming day of the Lord in which God will judge the nations and bless Israel (12:3-4, 6, 9, 11; 13:1-2, 4; 14:4, 6, 8-9, 13, 20-21). **That day** particularly references the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 9, 16) which takes place at the end of the Tribulation prior to the return of Christ (14:3; Rev. 19).
 - ✓ Chs. 12-14 also emphasize the importance of the nations (13x), Jerusalem (22x), and YHWH (31x).
 - ✓ Combined, the repeated themes affirm that at the end of time, the sovereign, covenant-keeping God will justly deal with both Israel and the nations in the city of the great and final King, Jerusalem.
 - ✓ Verse 1 affirms God's right to express His sovereignty in this final battle —
 - He speaks (He has revealed a **burden**, "oracle," "pronouncement") and He **declares** (prophetically speaks). Speaking indicates authority — "I have the floor, and you will listen to what I have to say." What follows in chs. 12-14 is the establishment of all that He has spoken (and promised) previously. It is the fulfillment of His greatest declaration to Israel (Gen. 12).
 - He has the right to speak because of His **creative power**, which established His authority. No one else creates *anything* out of nothing, and no one else creates the inner man or has authority over the inner man. Because God created all things, He is sovereign over all things (including the events of the final battle against Him).
- In verses 2-3, the nations come to Jerusalem & Judah to do battle — **the peoples** and **the nations** (v. 3). And they are particularly attacking **Jerusalem** because Jerusalem is the capital of Israel (cf. also v. 9).
 - ✓ This battle is not just against Jerusalem, but also **Judah** (v. 2b). This is another expression of the world's hatred of God and God's people and they see this as an opportunity to destroy Israel.
 - ✓ The battle will be massive — Rev. 9:16 tells us that 200 million soldiers will be at this battle.
 - ✓ Why would the nations gather themselves against Israel?
 - There was (and will be) no significant wealth in Jerusalem (compared to other nations).
 - There were (and will be) no significant natural resources in Jerusalem.
 - Perhaps it is because Israel and **Jerusalem are situated** in an important place for travel north to south and even east to west.
 - More likely, it is because the nations have always been opposed to Jerusalem and sought to destroy her (**1:21**; A.D. 70) because Israel belongs to God and the nations hate God (**Ps. 2:1-3**).
 - ✓ While the nations are coming, they are also being summoned by God; He is bringing them to this place for His sovereign purpose of pouring out His wrathful judgment.

- This passage implies that without saying it, but 14:2 explicitly tells us God is behind this battle.
- This is God's summons and God's battle to fulfill His land promise to Abraham, to protect His people, to judge unrighteousness, and to inaugurate His Kingdom. Only Christ will be King.
- The nations are coming to destroy Israel, but they are coming to their own destruction — "positioning themselves for the stroke of God's unmixed wrath upon them." [Feinberg]
- **What will YHWH** do to the nations when they gather against His people?
 - ✓ ***I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that causes reeling*** (v. 2). In the OT, the cup often indicated the judgment of God (e.g., Jer. 25:15ff). Here God makes Jerusalem His instrument of judgment.
 - ✓ The nations were coming to Israel to vanquish her and they would be vanquished instead. They were coming to destroy God's people, and God's people will judge them.
 - ✓ Don't miss a subtle irony — a cup often contained wine and was used in celebration. The nations came to Jerusalem anticipating a victory and celebration as they "indulge[d] their thirst for violence, death, and power....[Instead] They will stagger about, as if in a drunken stupor, unable to defend themselves against divine retribution." [MacArthur]
 - ✓ A second image is given in v. 3 for what happens to the nations — ***a heavy stone***.
 - That the stone is so heavy indicates it is immovable — "little" Jerusalem is firmly entrenched.
 - The imagery is something like the loot being carried away by victorious army. They will come to carry away the bounty and be damaged instead (***injured*** refers to jagged cuts & lacerations).
 - Not only can the nations not lift Jerusalem to remove her, but they will be ***severely injured*** by her — in the past, Israel has been easily defeated (they have been "lightweights"), but not on this day. They will not be removed, *and* they will be the source of injury/death for the nations.
 - ✓ This will be the circumstance for ***all the peoples/nations*** (3x in vv. 2-3). No one will escape. All the nations oppose Israel and all the people of all those nations will be incapable of moving Jerusalem and all of them will be injured. The totality of the defeat of the nations is sure.
 - ✓ Even more, notice that it is God that is behind this — ***I will make...*** (both vv. 2-3). This is God's just retribution against the rebellion of the nations. They will not overthrow His people or Him.
 - ✓ The sovereignty of God assures the victory of God and His people at the end of the age. Skirmishes and losses along the way are not final or fatal for the believer. It is the last battle that counts and on that day God will utter His ultimate ***I will*** and all will be won. Oh friend, rest confidently in that.

2. God is Sovereign to VANQUISH the PARTICIPANTS in the Battle (v. 4)

- In verse four we have the third (of five) ***I will*** statements. And on this occasion it is not just about armies in general, but the participants in particular. No armies will escape; no individuals will escape.
- ***In that day*** (of Armageddon), the Lord will act again. He ***will strike every horse with bewilderment***.
 - ✓ It is notable that in that day, the horse was a symbol of strength and was the most advanced

military weapon — to have the largest contingent of horses was to be the most powerful and almost always secured victory (though God often reminded not to trust in horses: Hag. 2:22; Ps. 33:17).

- ✓ Horses are an important theme in Zech. (14x) but the horses of nations are powerless (9:10; 10:5) while Israel's horses, under the authority of God are powerful — like God's majestic horse (10:3).
- ✓ Here there is further irony — not only will the horses (weapons) be **bewildered** (like a madman and fearful), but they will be **struck with blindness** — that was a curse under the Mosaic Law (Dt. 28:28); in the end, it will be the nations and not Israel that will experience that judgment.
- Individual weapons rendered useless on that day, **and I will strike...the rider with madness** (another part of the curse of Dt. 28:28). They will be confused and terrified (incapable of good decisions).
 - ✓ God knows every rebel weapon and soldier and none will escape.
 - ✓ Further, God says, **I will watch over the house of Judah...** The horses and riders will be blind and mad, but YHWH will **watch** ("open My eyes") on Judah (a repeated theme: cf. 3:9; 4:10; 9:8).
 - The phrase suggests that He will be particularly attentive to Judah's needs.
 - It also implies that He will not strike indiscriminately and "accidentally" hit Judah. He is watching with care and His judgment is never misplaced; His people will be preserved and sustained.
 - ✓ You have likely been encouraged by the reminder "His eye is on the sparrow" (Mt. 11:29, 31). Here is another (greater) reminder — His eye is on the enemy and not one rebel soldier will escape; likewise, not one of His faithful people will unjustly suffer (ultimate) harm. His people are safe.

3. God is Sovereign to **CHANGE** the **HEARTS** of His People in the Battle (v. 5)

- One of the most significant acts of rebellion of Israel was the rejection of God as her king and desiring a king to rule them like the rest of the nations (1 Sam. 8:6-7). In that day, their rejection of God as King will be reversed and they will recognize God as their ruler.
 - ✓ The phrase **clans of Judah** is often translated "governors" or "chieftains" to reflect that the leaders of the people will follow YHWH. But generally the word is translated **clan** or "family" to indicate all the people of the tribe; that is most likely here. All the peoples have repented and changed.
 - ✓ Their repentance is to acknowledge that YHWH is their strength — from the greatest to the least of the people they all acknowledge the powerful and gracious care of God for them in their trouble.
 - ✓ And note that this is not just something they say with their lips, but they believe in **their hearts**. The acknowledgement is genuine; they inwardly believe and affirm God's sovereign provision for them.
- Remember the context in which Zechariah is prophesying — the people returned from the Babylonian captivity, but because of opposition they stopped rebuilding the temple for 20 years after the foundation was laid. They did not have confidence in God. But now they do. Now they believe He will care for them in their need. They believe **the Lord of Hosts** (armies) really is powerful for them (cf. vv. 10ff).

- ✓ If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you will not be on earth at the battle of Armageddon (which is in itself a most gracious provision for you).
- ✓ But God's victory at Armageddon is still a great comfort for you because God is an unchanging God. And since nothing will escape His notice on that day, nothing will escape His notice on this day.
 - He is carefully noting every sin of every rebel against Him — and every person and sin will be judged with His righteousness.
 - He is carefully noting those who are His — and no one of His children will suffer unjustly or accidentally. He doesn't "miss" when He sends judgment and discipline.
- ✓ If you are not a believer in Christ, God is offering His care and He desires your genuine love and trust in Him (He wants your *heart*). To trust Him is to affirm, "I am a sinner who deserves nothing from You but wrath, but I trust that when Christ died on the cross, He satisfied Your just anger against my sin, and I believe that He is worth following and obeying and I desire to do that..."

4. God is Sovereign to Strengthen His People for the Battle (vv. 6-9)

- We find another *I will* in v. 6 — *I will make the clans of Judah like a firepot...*
 - ✓ You don't need much imagination or biblical scholarship to understand the figure of v. 6 — a *pot* (typically a cooking utensil for water, but here a receptacle for fire) that is set on *wood* or a *flaming torch among* dried crops, so the people of Jerusalem will "set aflame" the surrounding armies.
 - ✓ Fire is often a symbol of judgment and here Judah will judge the nations for YHWH.
 - ✓ The goal of this destruction is the peace of *Jerusalem* — the people of the city living in rightful place.
- Zechariah reiterates in v. 7 that it is God that does this — *YHWH will save the tents...*
 - ✓ As in all this passage, it is the work of God to preserve the people. (And this should be a great comfort to the people — "He will do what we cannot do..." — and it should comfort us also!)
 - ✓ And notice that Zechariah notes that God will *also save Judah* — the people who live outside the city and are nomadic and have far fewer possessions and much less permanent homes; they are lower on the socio-economic scale. God is not just saving Jerusalem to establish the Davidic throne (though that will also happen); He is restoring and unifying His nation — both Judah and Israel (9:13).
 - ✓ Two implied lessons:
 - The Lord delivers the weak and defenseless country before the strong and well-fortified capital so both the nation and the city recognize that the victory is because of YHWH and no one else.
 - God saves Judah first to demonstrate that He does not save people according to status or wealth but by undeserved grace. It has always been that way, and even at the end of the age, He will be reaffirming the reality that salvation is not designed to bring glory to man (though every saved person benefits), but glory to God.
 - ✓ In fact, God delights to save the weak and defenseless (Js. 2:1ff; 1 Cor. 1:18ff; Mt. 5:3-4).

- They may be weak and defenseless, but in YHWH they have great power (v. 8) —
 - ✓ God will defend them and strengthen them so that the **feeblest** (“stumblers” — like weak children) are made as strong as **David** (who slayed his ten thousands, while Saul only slayed thousands). Even more, the nation (**house of David**) will be **like God** — which doesn’t mean they actually are divine, but from what they do it seems like, “who can do that but God...?”
 - ✓ In fact, the people will be **like the angel of the LORD**, i.e., a theophany, the pre-incarnate Christ.
- The end of the battle (v. 9). The final **I will** appears in this verse and it summarizes the other four.
 - ✓ When God says, **I will set about to destroy...** He doesn’t mean “I will try (and I don’t know if I can).” He means, “I have designed” **to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem**. And I will.
 - ✓ God will pursue, find, and eliminate every foe of Himself and Israel. Every threat against Him and His people will be defeated. And the work that God began in Genesis 3 will be finished (3:15).
 - ✓ Much of this chapter has been figurative. This is a definitive statement about YHWH’s victory over the nations. They will be defeated and His Kingdom will be established and supreme.
 - ✓ There will be 200 million in opposition to Israel (Rev. 9:16), and God will defeat them soundly — without any effort. The great armies of the world will be incapable against the Lord’s army.
 - ✓ This chapter is not about Israel building a massive army; this is about God fighting for His people:
 - Gideon’s 300 men routing 120,000 (Jdg. 8:10) so that God would get the glory (Jdg. 7:2)
 - Isaiah and Sennacherib’s army of 185,000 (Is. 38:36)
 - God’s battle against 200 million at Armageddon (Rev. 14:20) — “the blood flows like grape juice from an overflowing winepress and that this is found over an area of [200 miles]. The violence of the carnage of this bloodbath...is such that blood like juice overflowing a winepress is spattered everywhere even as high as horses’ bridles.” [Patterson]
 - ✓ All this chapter affirms the overwhelming opposition of the nations against Israel — and of Israel, empowered by God, overwhelming those nations with ease — God will provide cataclysmic victory in the day of greatest trouble for Israel. Jesus wins. He has won. He is winning. He will win.

CONCLUSION: Engineer and inventor Charles Kettering said, “My interest is in the future, because I’m going to spend the rest of my life there.” He’s right.

But is there safe passage to the future? And will the future be safe? In an age when anxiety and fear is prolific, will that age be safe? Yes. Yes. And yes. We will get there safely and we will be eternally safe in a safe place because God said, “I will.”

Benediction (Greg): Jude 24-25