

The Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

Lesson 9: They Will Look on Me Whom They Pierced -- Zechariah 12:1-13:9

Imagine standing in a crowd on a hill outside Jerusalem, watching a man die. You did not drive the nails yourself, but you were there, part of the shouting, or part of the silence that let it happen. Then, in a moment you cannot explain, you really look at Him, not glance, but look, and something breaks open inside you. The face you helped wound is the face of the One you needed all along. The grief that rises in you is not the grief of getting caught; it is the deeper, cleaner sorrow of seeing what your sin actually cost. Centuries before that hill, Zechariah saw it coming. He wrote of a day when God would say of His own people, 'They will look on me, on him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child.'

Zechariah has been a book of strange and shining visions, of horsemen and lampstands and a Branch who would build the temple of the Lord. Now, as the book moves toward its great climax, the imagery turns toward a single figure and a single day. God speaks first of protection: Jerusalem will become a cup that makes the surrounding nations stagger, a heavy stone that gashes everyone who tries to lift it. The nations rage and gather, but the people of God are held in His hand, and He fights for them. It would be easy to read this as a promise of military victory and miss the deeper war being won, the war for the human heart.

Because right in the middle of all this protection, God pours out something better than armies. He pours out 'a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy,' and suddenly the people are not celebrating a battlefield triumph but weeping over a pierced One. Family by family they mourn, the house of David and the house of Nathan, the house of Levi and the house of Shimei, husbands apart and wives apart, each heart undone in private before God. This is not the despair that crushes; it is the godly sorrow that leads to repentance and life. And on the far side of that mourning, a fountain opens, 'a fountain for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.'

John tells us plainly that this prophecy met its fulfillment at the cross, where the soldier's spear pierced the side of Jesus and the disciple remembered, 'They will look on him whom they have pierced' (John 19:37). So read these two chapters slowly, and let them carry you to Calvary and to your own heart. Here is the God who shields His people, the Shepherd who is struck so the sheep can be gathered, the fountain that washes away sin, and the refining fire that turns a scattered, sinful people into a tested and faithful remnant who say, 'The Lord is my God.' Look on the One who was pierced, and let the looking do its work.

Group Discussion: Zechariah pictures God pouring out 'a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy' so that His people finally 'look on him whom they have pierced' and mourn (12:10). Why do you think real repentance so often begins not with fear of punishment but with truly seeing the love we have wounded? How is godly sorrow over sin different from merely feeling bad about getting caught?

Personal Reflection: If you stood at the cross today and 'looked on him whom they pierced,' what specific sin in your own life would you see most clearly written there? Where do you most need to move from a vague, comfortable regret to the kind of honest mourning that leads to genuine change?

Read Zechariah 12:1–13:9

Study Questions

1. The prophecy opens with God identified as the One 'who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundation of the earth and formed the spirit of man within him' (12:1), and then promises to make Jerusalem 'a cup of staggering' and 'a heavy stone' to the surrounding nations (12:2–3). What does it tell us about God that He grounds His promise to protect His people in His power as Creator? How does His sovereignty over the nations give His people confidence?
2. God says He will give His people such strength that 'the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David' (12:8). Where in your own life do you feel feeble, outmatched, or unequal to what God has put in front of you? How would it change the way you face that thing to believe that God's strength, not your own, is what carries the day?
3. The turning point of the whole passage is the moment God pours out 'a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy' so that the people 'look on me, on him whom they have pierced' (12:10), a prophecy John applies directly to the crucifixion of Christ (John 19:37). What does this verse reveal about who Jesus is and about what was really happening at the cross? Why is it significant that God says they pierced 'me'?

4. The people mourn over the pierced One 'as one mourns for an only child' and 'weeps over a firstborn' (12:10). Have you ever truly mourned over your own sin, not just its consequences, but the sin itself and what it cost the Lord? What keeps you from that kind of honest grief, and what might it look like to let it come?
5. Zechariah describes the mourning spreading family by family, even husbands and wives grieving 'by themselves' (12:11-14). What does this teach about the deeply personal nature of repentance, that no one can mourn over the pierced One on someone else's behalf? Why must each person come to God individually even within a believing community?
6. After the mourning comes the promise: 'On that day there shall be a fountain opened... to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness' (13:1). Where in your life are you still trying to clean yourself up by your own effort, willpower, or self-improvement, rather than coming to the fountain God has opened? What would it mean to stop scrubbing and simply come to be washed?
7. God promises to 'cut off the names of the idols from the land' and remove the false prophets and the unclean spirit (13:2-6). What does it reveal about God's purpose that cleansing from sin is paired with the removal of idols and lies? Why can there be no real forgiveness without also turning away from the false things we have trusted?
8. Idols today rarely look like carved statues; they are the people, comforts, ambitions, and images we quietly trust to give us what only God can give. What is one 'idol' that God may be calling you to let Him cut out of your life so that your heart can be wholly His? Be specific about what it is and why it holds you.

9. God says, 'Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered' (13:7), words Jesus applied to Himself and to the scattering of His disciples on the night He was arrested (Matthew 26:31). The same God then says of the refined remnant, 'They are my people,' and they answer, 'The Lord is my God' (13:9). How does the striking of the Shepherd at the cross make possible the gathering and refining of a faithful people? What does it mean that God Himself ordained the smiting of His own Shepherd, and how does the fire that follows produce not destruction but a tested, purified people who belong wholly to Him?
10. Look back across the whole passage, from the pierced One, to the mourning, to the open fountain, to the refining fire that produces a people who say 'The Lord is my God.' Name one specific way the Lord is using this prophecy to form you right now, whether it is looking honestly at the cross, mourning a particular sin, coming to the fountain to be cleansed, or trusting Him in a refining fire, and the first step you will take this week.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: John 19:31–37, the soldier's spear and the direct fulfillment of 'they will look on him whom they pierced'; 2 Corinthians 7:9–11, godly grief that produces repentance and life, not the worldly grief that brings death; 1 John 1:7–9, the blood of Jesus cleansing us from all sin as we walk in the light; Matthew 26:31–32, Jesus quoting 'strike the shepherd' and promising to go before the scattered sheep; 1 Peter 1:6–7, the trial of our faith refined like gold in the fire.

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