

Zechariah Chapter 13 — The Fountain of Cleansing and the Refining Fire

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Zechariah Chapter 13 continues directly from the repentance described at the end of Chapter 12.

In Chapter 12, the people look upon the One they pierced and mourn.

In Chapter 13, God answers that mourning with cleansing.

A fountain is opened.

Idolatry is removed.

False prophecy is exposed.

The Shepherd is struck.

The sheep are scattered.

And a remnant is refined through fire.

The chapter therefore moves through several major themes:

Cleansing from sin.

Removal of false worship.

Judgment on deception.

The suffering of the Shepherd.

The refining of the remnant.

Renewed covenant fellowship with God.

One of the central truths of the chapter is that God does not merely forgive His people while leaving them unchanged.

He cleanses them.

Purifies them.

Separates them from idols.

Tests them.

Refines them.

And finally declares:

“They are My people.”

The chapter’s central message is:

God opens a fountain for cleansing, removes false worship, strikes the Shepherd, and refines a faithful remnant into a people who truly belong to Him.

I. A FOUNTAIN FOR CLEANSING

Zechariah 13:1

“On that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and the people of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.”

The chapter begins with one of the most beautiful images in Zechariah.

A **fountain** is opened.

This is not a stagnant pool.

A fountain suggests a continuing, abundant supply.

Its purpose is clear:

To cleanse from sin and impurity.

The mourning of Chapter 12 is now met with divine cleansing.

Repentance and forgiveness belong together.

God does not awaken conviction merely to leave people in guilt.

He provides cleansing.

Cross References in Simple American English

Ezekiel 36:25 — God promises to sprinkle clean water on His people and cleanse them from impurity and idols.

John 4:14 — Jesus speaks of the water He gives becoming a spring of eternal life within the believer.

Revelation 22:1 — John sees the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb.

Christ Connection

The fountain ultimately points toward the cleansing God provides through Jesus Christ.

The New Testament teaches that the blood of Jesus cleanses believers from sin.

Spiritual Lesson

God provides the cleansing sinners cannot provide for themselves.

Application

Conviction should drive us toward God's provision, not toward despair.

II. IDOLS AND FALSE PROPHETS REMOVED

Zechariah 13:2

“On that day,” declares the Lord of hosts, “I will remove the names of the idols from the land, and they will never again be remembered. I will also banish the false prophets and the unclean spirit from the land.”

Cleansing is followed by removal.

God does not merely forgive idolatry.

He removes the idols.

He removes false prophets.

He removes the unclean spiritual influence behind deception.

Three forms of corruption disappear:

Idolatry.

False prophecy.

Unclean spiritual influence.

Cross References in Simple American English

Hosea 2:17 — God promises to remove the names of false gods from His people's mouths.

Micah 5:12 — God promises to destroy sorcery and occult practices from among His people.

Revelation 16:13 — Unclean spirits are pictured as deceptive spiritual forces working against God.

Key Truth

True restoration includes separation from what corrupted us.

Application

Forgiveness is not permission to preserve idols.

God's grace calls us away from them.

Zechariah 13:3

“If anyone still claims to prophesy, even his own father and mother who bore him will say, ‘You must die, because you speak lies in the name of the Lord.’ And they will pierce him through when he prophesies.”

This verse emphasizes how seriously false prophecy will be treated.

Under the Mosaic covenant, falsely claiming to speak in God's name was a serious offense.

The surprising detail is that even family loyalty would not be allowed to excuse deliberate spiritual deception.

The point is not a general instruction for private violence.

It reflects the covenant law and prophetic picture of a society so devoted to truth that even family ties would not override loyalty to God.

Cross References in Simple American English

Deuteronomy 13:6 — Israel was warned not to follow false worship even if it was promoted by a close family member.

Deuteronomy 18:20 — A prophet who falsely claimed to speak for God faced severe covenant judgment.

Matthew 10:21 — Jesus warned that allegiance to truth can even create division within families.

Spiritual Lesson

Truth about God is more important than personal loyalty to deception.

Zechariah 13:4

“On that day, every prophet will be ashamed of their visions. They will no longer wear a prophet’s garment to deceive.”

False prophets will no longer proudly advertise themselves.

They will be ashamed.

The prophetic garment had become a symbol that could be used to create a false appearance of spiritual authority.

God says the disguise will no longer work.

Cross References in Simple American English

2 Kings 1:8 — Elijah was recognized by his distinctive appearance and clothing.

Matthew 7:15 — Jesus warns about false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but inwardly are dangerous.

Micah 3:7 — False prophets will eventually be ashamed when their false visions are exposed.

Key Principle

Religious appearance cannot make a false message true.

Application

Do not judge a teacher by image, title, clothing, charisma, or reputation alone.

Test the message by Scripture.

Zechariah 13:5

“Instead, each will say, ‘I am not a prophet. I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth.’”

The false prophet now denies the identity he once claimed.

Rather than boast about spiritual authority, he presents himself as an ordinary worker.

The image reveals shame and exposure.

Cross References in Simple American English

Amos 7:14 — Amos said he was not part of a professional prophetic guild but had worked with livestock and trees.

1 Kings 19:19 — Elisha was working as a farmer when Elijah called him.

Genesis 4:2 — Farming and working the ground were ordinary occupations from the earliest generations.

Spiritual Lesson

False spiritual status eventually collapses when truth exposes it.

Zechariah 13:6

“If someone asks him, ‘What are these wounds on your hands?’ he will answer, ‘I was wounded in the house of my friends.’”

This is a difficult verse.

In context, the most natural interpretation is that it continues the description of the disgraced false prophet.

The wounds may be associated with pagan or self-inflicted religious practices.

The false prophet attempts to explain them away.

This verse should be interpreted carefully and not automatically identified with the wounds of Christ, because verse 7 introduces the Messianic Shepherd more directly.

Cross References in Simple American English

John 20:27 — Thomas was invited to examine the wounds of the risen Jesus.

Psalms 41:9 — David speaks of betrayal by a close companion.

Isaiah 53:5 — The suffering Servant was wounded because of human sin.

Spiritual Lesson

Deception eventually becomes difficult to hide.

Application

Truth does not need a false identity to survive.

III. THE STRUCK SHEPHERD AND SCATTERED SHEEP

Zechariah 13:7

“Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, against the man who is close to Me!” declares the Lord of hosts. “Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn My hand against the little ones.”

This is the central Messianic verse of the chapter.

The Lord calls for the sword to awaken against:

“My Shepherd.”

But this is no ordinary shepherd.

He is described as:

“the man who is close to Me.”

The expression speaks of extraordinary nearness and relationship to God.

Then comes the command:

“Strike the Shepherd.”

The result:

“The sheep will be scattered.”

Jesus directly applied this prophecy to Himself on the night before His crucifixion.

Cross References in Simple American English

Matthew 26:31 — Jesus told His disciples that they would fall away because Scripture said, “I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.”

Mark 14:27 — Mark records Jesus applying this same prophecy to His arrest and the scattering of His disciples.

John 16:32 — Jesus warned that His disciples would scatter and leave Him alone.

Christ Connection

The Shepherd is Jesus Christ.

He is struck.

The disciples scatter.

The prophecy is fulfilled directly in the events surrounding the crucifixion.

Key Doctrine

Christ's suffering was not an accident of history.

It occurred within the sovereign redemptive plan of God.

Application

The cross demonstrates both the seriousness of sin and the depth of divine grace.

IV. THE REMNANT REFINED

Zechariah 13:8

“In all the land,” declares the Lord, “two-thirds will be cut off and perish, but one-third will be left in it.”

The language becomes severe again.

Judgment reduces the population dramatically.

Yet a remnant remains.

This is a recurring biblical theme.

God judges sin.

But He preserves a people for Himself.

Cross References in Simple American English

Ezekiel 5:12 — Ezekiel describes severe judgment dividing the people into portions.

Isaiah 6:13 — Even after great judgment, a holy remnant remains like a stump with life in it.

Amos 5:3 — Amos describes a severe reduction in Israel’s population because of judgment.

Spiritual Lesson

God's preservation of a remnant is an act of grace.

Zechariah 13:9

“I will bring this third through the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are My people,’ and they will say, ‘The Lord is our God.’”

The surviving remnant is not simply spared.

It is refined.

God brings them through fire.

The purpose of refining is not destruction.

It is purification.

Silver and gold are heated so impurities can be removed.

God uses trial to expose and purify faith.

The outcome is covenant relationship:

“They are My people.”

And:

“The Lord is our God.”

Cross References in Simple American English

Malachi 3:2 — God is compared to a refiner's fire who purifies His people.

1 Peter 1:7 — Trials test genuine faith like fire tests gold.

Isaiah 48:10 — God says He refines His people in the furnace of suffering.

Key Truth

God does not waste suffering.

Application

A trial can become a refining furnace in the hands of God.

V. MAJOR THEMES OF ZECHARIAH 13

1. God Provides Cleansing

The chapter begins with a fountain opened for sin and impurity.

2. Cleansing Leads to Purification

Idols and false spiritual influences are removed.

3. God Opposes Religious Deception

False prophecy is exposed and rejected.

4. The Shepherd Is Struck

The Messiah suffers according to God's redemptive plan.

5. The Sheep Are Scattered

Jesus directly applies this prophecy to His disciples abandoning Him.

6. Judgment Leaves a Remnant

Not everyone survives, but God preserves a people.

7. The Remnant Is Refined

Survival is followed by purification.

8. Refining Produces Covenant Fellowship

The chapter ends with mutual recognition:

“They are My people.”

“The Lord is our God.”

VI. CHRIST IN ZECHARIAH 13

1. Christ Provides Cleansing

The fountain of cleansing points toward the salvation God provides through Jesus.

The blood of Christ cleanses from sin.

2. Christ Is the Struck Shepherd

Jesus explicitly applied Zechariah 13:7 to Himself.

He is the Shepherd struck before the scattering of the disciples.

3. Christ Is Close to the Father

The Shepherd is described as the man close to God.

This fits the unique relationship between Jesus and the Father revealed in the New Testament.

4. Christ's Death Was According to Divine Purpose

The sword is called against the Shepherd.

The cross was carried out by wicked men, but it also fulfilled God's redemptive plan.

5. Christ Gathers the Scattered

The disciples scattered temporarily, but the risen Christ regathered and restored them.

VII. THE FOUNTAIN AND THE CROSS

Zechariah 13:1 says:

“A fountain will be opened.”

This fountain cleanses:

Sin.

Impurity.

The New Testament explains the basis of cleansing.

Jesus sheds His blood.

His sacrifice provides forgiveness.

The fountain is therefore a powerful picture of the abundant cleansing available through God's grace.

Spiritual Lesson

The same God who reveals sin provides the cleansing for sin.

VIII. CLEANSING AND SEPARATION

Notice the order of the chapter.

First:

Cleansing.

Then:

Idols removed.

Then:

False prophecy removed.

This teaches an important principle.

God does not cleanse His people so they can return comfortably to the same corruption.

Grace leads to separation from sin.

Key Principle

Forgiveness without transformation is not the full picture of biblical restoration.

IX. THE DANGER OF FALSE PROPHECY

Zechariah 13 takes false prophecy seriously.

Why?

Because claiming:

“God said”

when God did not speak is a grave offense.

False teaching misrepresents God.

It leads people in the wrong direction.

It gives false confidence.

It can destroy lives spiritually.

Application

Every spiritual claim should be tested carefully against Scripture.

X. “STRIKE THE SHEPHERD”

Verse 7 is remarkable because the striking of the Shepherd occurs within divine purpose.

Jesus later applies the text to Himself.

This means His arrest and crucifixion were not random tragedies.

They were part of the redemptive plan already anticipated in prophecy.

Key Doctrine

The cross involves both human responsibility and divine sovereignty.

Human beings acted wickedly.

God used those actions to accomplish redemption.

XI. THE SCATTERED DISCIPLES

Jesus quoted Zechariah 13:7 before His arrest.

He knew what would happen.

Peter would deny Him.

The disciples would flee.

The group would scatter.

Yet their scattering was not final.

After the resurrection:

Jesus appeared to them.

Restored Peter.

Recommissioned the disciples.

Sent them into the world.

Spiritual Lesson

Failure does not always mean final abandonment.

Christ can restore scattered disciples.

XII. THE REFINING FIRE

Fire can destroy.

But fire can also purify.

Zechariah 13 uses the second image.

God brings the remnant through fire in order to refine them.

The goal is not cruelty.

The goal is purity.

Silver must be heated.

Gold must be tested.

Faith is similar.

Trials expose what is genuine.

Application

Instead of only asking:

“How do I get out of this trial?”

We should sometimes also ask:

“What is God refining in me through this trial?”

XIII. “THEY ARE MY PEOPLE”

The chapter ends with covenant language.

God says:

“They are My people.”

The people answer:

“The Lord is our God.”

This is the goal of redemption.

Not merely:

Escape from judgment.

Removal of trouble.

Prosperity.

Safety.

The goal is relationship with God.

Key Truth

The greatest blessing is belonging to God.

XIV. KEY LESSONS FROM ZECHARIAH 13

1. God provides cleansing from sin.

The fountain is opened by Him.

2. True cleansing leads to changed worship.

Idols are removed.

3. God hates spiritual deception.

False prophecy is exposed.

4. Christ is the struck Shepherd.

Jesus directly fulfilled Zechariah 13:7.

5. The disciples' scattering was foretold.

Their failure did not surprise Christ.

6. God preserves a remnant.

Judgment does not cancel grace.

7. God refines those He preserves.

Trials can purify genuine faith.

8. Refining leads to deeper prayer.

The remnant calls upon God.

9. God answers His people.

He says, "They are My people."

10. The goal of redemption is covenant fellowship.

The people respond, "The Lord is our God."

XV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Zechariah 13 challenges us to ask:

Have I come to God for cleansing from sin?

Am I holding onto an idol that God wants removed?
Do I test spiritual claims by Scripture?
Am I more impressed by religious appearance than biblical truth?
Do I understand the significance of Jesus as the Struck Shepherd?
Have I ever allowed failure to convince me that restoration is impossible?
What trial may God be using to refine me?
Am I becoming more pure or more bitter through difficulty?
Do I truly belong to God?
Can I honestly say:
“The Lord is my God”?

XVI. QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY WITH ANSWERS

Question 1

What is opened in Zechariah 13:1?

Answer

A fountain is opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Question 2

What is the purpose of the fountain?

Answer

Its purpose is to cleanse the people from sin and impurity.

Question 3

What does the fountain symbolize spiritually?

Answer

It symbolizes God's abundant provision for forgiveness and cleansing, ultimately fulfilled through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Question 4

How does Zechariah 13 connect with Chapter 12?

Answer

Chapter 12 ends with mourning and repentance over the pierced One. Chapter 13 begins with God's provision of cleansing for those who repent.

Question 5

What does God promise to remove from the land?

Answer

He promises to remove idols, false prophets, and the unclean spiritual influence associated with deception.

Question 6

Why is the removal of idols important?

Answer

Because genuine restoration requires turning away from false objects of worship and returning fully to the Lord.

Question 7

How seriously does God treat false prophecy?

Answer

Very seriously. The passage reflects the severe covenant penalties attached to falsely claiming to speak in God's name.

Question 8

What does false prophecy do to people?

Answer

It misrepresents God, leads people away from truth, gives false confidence, and can produce serious spiritual harm.

Question 9

Why will false prophets be ashamed?

Answer

Because their claims and false visions will be exposed as lies.

Question 10

What does the prophet's garment symbolize in verse 4?

Answer

It represents the outward appearance or identity of a prophet that false teachers could use to gain authority and deceive people.

Question 11

What warning can believers learn from the prophet's garment?

Answer

We should never assume that outward religious appearance automatically proves spiritual truthfulness.

Question 12

What is the likely context of the wounds mentioned in verse 6?

Answer

In context, they most naturally belong to the false prophet and may reflect wounds connected with pagan or deceptive religious practices.

Question 13

Should Zechariah 13:6 automatically be interpreted as referring to Jesus?

Answer

No. Although some Christian interpretations have associated the verse with Christ, the immediate context strongly continues the discussion of false prophets. Verse 7 gives the clearer direct Messianic prophecy.

Question 14

Who is the Shepherd in Zechariah 13:7?

Answer

Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of the Shepherd in verse 7.

Question 15

How do we know Zechariah 13:7 refers to Jesus?

Answer

Jesus Himself quoted the verse in Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27 and applied it to His arrest and the scattering of His disciples.

Question 16

What happens to the Shepherd?

Answer

The Shepherd is struck.

Question 17

What happens to the sheep after the Shepherd is struck?

Answer

The sheep scatter.

Question 18

How was this fulfilled in the life of Jesus?

Answer

When Jesus was arrested, His disciples fled and were scattered, exactly as He had told them using Zechariah's prophecy.

Question 19

What is significant about the Shepherd being called “the man who is close to Me”?

Answer

It describes an extraordinary relationship between the Shepherd and the Lord, fitting the unique relationship between Jesus Christ and the Father.

Question 20

Does the striking of the Shepherd mean God approved of the wicked actions of those who crucified Jesus?

Answer

No. Those involved in Christ's crucifixion were morally responsible for their actions, yet God sovereignly used those actions to accomplish His redemptive plan.

Question 21

What happens to two-thirds of the land according to verse 8?

Answer

Two-thirds are cut off and perish under judgment.

Question 22

What happens to the remaining one-third?

Answer

They are preserved and then brought through a refining process.

Question 23

What does refining through fire symbolize?

Answer

It symbolizes testing, purification, and the removal of impurities from God's people.

Question 24

Why are silver and gold used as illustrations?

Answer

Precious metals are heated so impurities can be removed. In the same way, God can use trials to purify faith and character.

Question 25

Does every trial mean a person is being punished for a specific sin?

Answer

No. Scripture shows that trials can have many purposes, including testing, refining, strengthening, disciplining, teaching dependence, and displaying God's grace.

Question 26

What does the refined remnant do?

Answer

They call upon the name of the Lord.

Question 27

How does God respond when they call upon Him?

Answer

He answers them.

Question 28

What does God say about the refined remnant?

Answer

He says:

“They are My people.”

Question 29

How do the people respond?

Answer

They say:

“The Lord is our God.”

Question 30

What does this final exchange reveal?

Answer

It reveals restored covenant fellowship between God and His people.

Question 31

What is the relationship between cleansing and refining in this chapter?

Answer

Cleansing deals with sin and impurity, while refining describes God's ongoing work of purifying and strengthening His people through testing.

Question 32

What does Zechariah 13 teach about repentance?

Answer

Repentance is followed by God's cleansing and by separation from idols, lies, and spiritual corruption.

Question 33

What does Zechariah 13 teach about Jesus Christ?

Answer

It presents Him as the struck Shepherd whose death leads to the scattering of the sheep, a prophecy Jesus directly applied to Himself.

Question 34

What does the chapter teach about false religion?

Answer

God ultimately exposes and removes false worship, false prophecy, and deceptive spiritual claims.

Question 35

What does the chapter teach about suffering?

Answer

God can use suffering like refining fire to purify faith, remove spiritual impurities, and deepen covenant relationship with Him.

Question 36

What encouragement does this chapter give to someone who has failed?

Answer

The disciples themselves scattered after the Shepherd was struck, yet Christ later restored them. Failure does not have to be final when there is repentance and grace.

Question 37

What is the ultimate goal of God's refining work?

Answer

The goal is a people who truly belong to Him, call upon Him, receive His answer, and confess Him as their God.

Question 38

What is the central message of Zechariah Chapter 13?

Answer

God provides cleansing from sin, removes false worship and deception, fulfills His redemptive purpose through the struck Shepherd, and refines a faithful remnant into a people who truly belong to Him.

XVII. FINAL THOUGHT

Zechariah Chapter 13 begins with water and ends with fire.

First:

A fountain is opened.

Then:

A refining fire is kindled.

Both images describe God's work in His people.

The fountain cleanses.

The fire refines.

The fountain removes guilt and impurity.

The fire tests and purifies what remains.

Between these two images stands the Shepherd.

The Shepherd is struck.

The sheep scatter.

Centuries later, Jesus Christ quoted these very words before His arrest.

He knew the sword was coming.

He knew the disciples would flee.

He knew Peter would deny Him.

He knew the cross stood ahead.

Yet He went forward.

The Shepherd was struck.

The sheep scattered.

But that was not the end.

The Shepherd rose again.

The scattered disciples were gathered again.

Peter was restored.

The apostles were commissioned.

The gospel went to the nations.

That is grace.

Zechariah 13 reminds us that God's work is not merely about rescuing people from judgment.

He wants a purified people.

A truthful people.

A people without idols.

A people who reject deception.

A people refined by faith.

A people who call upon His name.

And finally a people about whom He can say:

“They are My people.”

And who can answer:

“The Lord is our God.”

That is the goal of redemption.

Not merely avoiding hell.

Not merely receiving blessing.

Not merely escaping suffering.

But belonging to God.

So come to the fountain.

Let God cleanse what sin has stained.

Let Him remove what competes for your worship.

Let His Word expose what is false.

Trust the Shepherd who was struck for the sheep.

And when the refining fire comes, do not assume God has abandoned you.

He may be purifying what He intends to keep.

Key Verse

“I will bring this third through the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on My name, and I will answer them.” — Zechariah 13:9

Key Phrase

God cleanses His people through grace, refines them through testing, and brings them into deeper covenant fellowship with Himself.