

Joy To The World

*“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus,
for he will save his people from their sins.”
(Matthew 1:21 ESV)*

*“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy
that will be for all the people.”
(Luke 2:10 ESV)*

And Makes The Nations Prove

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Zechariah 14:1-21

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone – and Happy New Year! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Zechariah 14:1-21 – that's on page 799 in the pew Bibles. We've been taking our cues this Christmas season from the four verses of that old Advent Carol, Joy To The World. This morning we are being guided by verse 4 which says:

“He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love”

That's the end of the story isn't it?

And that's the climax of the Book of Zechariah. The climactic VERSE in Zechariah is generally recognized as Zechariah 14:9 which says:

And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one. (Zechariah 14:9 ESV)

That expression: the LORD will be ONE and his name ONE means that on that day – he will be the ONE and ONLY ONE who is worshipped in all the earth.

Every idol will have been cast down.

Every rebel will have been cast out.

On that day the Lord will be ONE and his name ONE – are you looking forward to that day church?

Me too.

Zechariah 14 is about the COMING of the LORD that makes that vision a reality. It is about the GREAT, CLIMACTIC intervention of GOD on the last day. Bryan Gregory says here:

“On that day, the prophets proclaimed, the Lord would intervene with a jolt into history in order to fight for his people and to judge the nations. This cataclysmic intervention is precisely what is in view in the final chapter of Zechariah.”¹

I like that: “intervene with a JOLT.”

That’s exactly what this is and that’s exactly what we need isn’t it? Things are looking pretty grim out there and they seem to be getting worse. Now, as Christians we know that the absolute END of this story is truly marvellous. We’ve heard sermons on the streets of gold, we’ve been promised that every man will sit under his own fig tree, we’ve heard talk of Wedding Banquets, and resurrected bodies, rivers of life and trees of life whose LEAVES are for the healing of the nations – that all sounds ABSOLUTELY WONDERFUL!

But how do get there?

¹ Bryan R. Gregory, *Longing For God In An Age Of Discouragement* in The Gospel According To The Old Testament (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2010), 206.

What is the CATACLYSMIC intervention – what is the GREAT JOLT – that will transform THIS WORLD into THAT WORLD?

That is the question we are looking at today and Zechariah 14 is the perfect passage to facilitate that conversation. There are a number of “Second Coming” or “Climactic Coming” passages that we could look at in the Bible. We could look at Revelation 19, we could look at Matthew 13:36-43, we could look at Isaiah 63:1-6 – all of these passages are depicting the same CLIMACTIC COMING of the Lord. They each fill in an important part of that story. They are like TRANSPARENCY SLIDES – do you remember those? Each one has some colour and some detail and when we stack them up on the old-fashioned overhead projector a clear and glorious picture begins to emerge. This passage, here in Zechariah 14, might be the most detailed of the bunch. As we read it we ought to be able to identify 7 major themes associated with this climactic intervention of the Lord.

Now – I should warn you – there is some adult language in the first few verses of this passage. This is, after all, a climactic intervention, which means that it comes at a time when things are very dark indeed for the covenant community. Maximally dark – and the language of the text reflects that. If you have little ones with you, now might be a good time to distract them with a candy or to hustle them down to the nursery. I leave that to you. This is a grown-up passage – but it is in the Bible and we believe therefore that it is here for our profit and edification. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1:

¹Behold, a day is coming for the LORD, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst. ²For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. ³Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. ⁴On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward. ⁵And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as

you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

⁶On that day there shall be no light, cold, or frost. ⁷And there shall be a unique day, which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but at evening time there shall be light.

⁸On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter.

⁹And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one.

¹⁰The whole land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem shall remain aloft on its site from the Gate of Benjamin to the place of the former gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses. ¹¹And it shall be inhabited, for there shall never again be a decree of utter destruction. Jerusalem shall dwell in security.

¹²And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.

¹³And on that day a great panic from the LORD shall fall on them, so that each will seize the hand of another, and the hand of the one will be raised against the hand of the other. ¹⁴Even Judah will fight at Jerusalem. And the wealth of all the surrounding nations shall be collected, gold, silver, and garments in great abundance. ¹⁵And a plague like this plague shall fall on the horses, the mules, the camels, the donkeys, and whatever beasts may be in those camps.

¹⁶Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths. ¹⁷And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. ¹⁸And if the family of Egypt does not go up and present themselves, then on them there shall be no rain; there shall be the plague with which the LORD afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths. ¹⁹This shall be the punishment to Egypt and the punishment to all the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths.

²⁰And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the LORD." And the pots in the house of the LORD shall be as the bowls before the altar. ²¹And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the LORD of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day. (Zechariah 14:1–21 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

In the Cornerstone U class on The Book of Zechariah we talked about how Apocalyptic visions like this are more like paintings than they are like pages in the phone book. They use common imagery from the culture and history of the people to whom they were originally given but they speak about things associated with the great, climactic intervention of the Lord, which fundamentally reorders all life and reality. As I mentioned above, I think we can clearly identify 7 major themes in this depiction.

The Day Of The Lord: 7 Major Themes

The first theme we meet in the narrative is the theme of a Great Reversal.

1. Reversal

Look again at verse 1:

Behold, a day is coming for the LORD, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst. (Zechariah 14:1 ESV)

So if we were going to turn this painting into a movie then the first scene would present the covenant community at the absolute nadir of its existence. The people of God are defeated. They are despoiled. The nations have triumphed over her – or so it appears. They certainly believe that because here in this scene they have begun to divide the spoil. Churches have been seized and sold. Assets confiscated and redistributed.

The world believes itself in absolute POWER over the covenant community. They have surrounded her, assaulted her and despoiled her.

But then look at verse 3:

Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. (Zechariah 14:3 ESV)

That's the TURNING POINT! That's the cataclysmic intervention – and it results in a complete reversal of fortune. Look down at the second half of verse 14:

And the wealth of all the surrounding nations shall be collected, gold, silver, and garments in great abundance. (Zechariah 14:14 ESV)

Are you seeing that? That's a complete reversal of the situation described in verse 1. In verse 1 the covenant community was despoiled – her assets seized and redistributed – but here in verse 14 the assets of the surrounding nations have been collected – gold, silver and garments in great abundance.

What's the text saying?

The text is saying that when the Lord comes he will GIVE BACK ALL THAT THE ENEMY HAS TAKEN. If you are faithful to him, if you persevere in faith – if you endure unto the end – you will LOSE NOTHING! More than that, you will gain the entire world.

The Coming of the Lord EFFECTS a GREAT REVERSAL.

And the Coming of the Lord EFFECTS a GREAT DELIVERANCE – that's the second theme, and it obviously overlaps with the first.

2. **Deliverance**

When all hope seems lost, when every light in the heavens has gone out, when the strength of the church is crushed, her assets seized, her people scattered, her vulnerable ones despoiled – when all power is spent and all defence shattered:

Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle.⁴ On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east (Zechariah 14:3–4 ESV)

This is the Great Deliverance that turns the tide of the Last Battle. If you are a Tolkien fan, this is Gandalf arriving on his White Horse with all the Riders of Rohan, cresting the hill from the east, at first light on the morning of the fifth day. When all hope is lost, when the few survivors are huddled up in the last remaining stronghold with the enemy battering relentlessly at the door –

Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. (Zechariah 14:5 ESV)

This vision in Zechariah is clearly depicting the same scene as the vision in Revelation 19:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. (Revelation 19:11–14 ESV)

This is Jesus taking the field, in history, on our behalf, when things are at their darkest. This is DELIVERANCE and RESCUE on a cosmic scale – and that leads us to our third major theme, the theme of disruption.

3. Disruption

Look at verses 6-7:

On that day there shall be no light, cold, or frost.⁷ And there shall be a unique day, which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but at evening time there shall be light. (Zechariah 14:6–7 ESV)

So significant is this cataclysmic intervention that it actually disrupts the natural functioning of the cosmos. Bryan Gregory says here:

“In God’s promise to Noah, he had promised that the normal rhythms of seasons and days would not cease for as long as the earth endures (Genesis 8:22). To claim that the eschatological battle would produce a time of continuous daytime without frost was to declare that this vision is the long-awaited goal of history.”²

The invasion of Jesus Christ into the realm of time from the throne room of God in all his ETERNAL GLORY - is DISRUPTIVE to say the least. It overwhelms the natural cycle; it snaps the wires and blows the fuses. It creates more than a WRINKLE IN TIME – it SEIZES the gears and SHUTS DOWN the entire system.

But this is not a DESCENT into chaos and darkness, rather this an ASCENT into order and light.

For at evening time there shall be light.

The Book of Revelation picks up this theme as well; in Revelation 22:5 it says:

And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:5 ESV)

With the coming of Christ, the old world is gone, and the new world is come – and thanks be to God, there is light.

We hear more about this new world in verse 8, which focuses our attention on the theme of renewal.

4. **Renewal**

Verse 8 says:

² Gregory, 207.

On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter. (Zechariah 14:8 ESV)

You will recognize similarities between this depiction and the depiction of the New Heavens and New Earth by John at the end of the Book of Revelation. He mentions the river flowing out of Jerusalem as well in Revelation 22. He says:

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” (Revelation 22:1–2 ESV)

The Coming of the King cracks the world and reorders Creation. A stream is opened that brings life and renewal to all it touches. We reach the summit of this depiction in verse 9:

And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one. (Zechariah 14:9 ESV)

This is the world renewed and reordered to the original design and intention. This is everything flourishing under the Lordship of God. This is the end to which Christ CAME and COMES.

The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 talks about Christ’s CLIMACTIC COMING to conquer all and to bring all into subjection – and he speaks about the same exact ultimate ending. He says:

When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:28 ESV)

Do you see that?

Jesus CAME and Jesus will COME AGAIN to bring all things into subjection to God – that God may be all in all; that the LORD would be ONE and his name ONE in all the earth.

That is the END – that was the DESIGN, that was the INTENT, that is the GOAL and that is the FUTURE, thanks be to God!

So we see the world renewed and restored and of course that will involve and that MUST involve the theme of judgment.

5. Judgment

We begin to encounter that theme in verse 12:

And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. (Zechariah 14:12 ESV)

Now remember, Apocalyptic imagery uses the past to paint pictures of the future, and that definitely seems to be the case here. Zechariah appears to be using the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians in the 8th century BC to speak about the FUTURE great assault upon the covenant community just prior to the climactic coming of the Lord.

It will be like that, he is saying.

Do you remember “that”?

You read about it last week if you are doing the RMM. In 2 Chronicles 32:21 it says:

And the LORD sent an angel, who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. (2 Chronicles 32:21 ESV)

There is a much more graphic depiction in Isaiah 37:36 which says:

And the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. (Isaiah 37:36 ESV)

In the 8th century there was a great army surrounding the city of Jerusalem ready to snuff out forever the life of the covenant community. And then all of the sudden, they were all dead bodies. The Angel of the Lord went out and KILLED them where they stood.

It will be like that – Zechariah says.

their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.

There can be no new creation without the curse and stain of sin being forever OBLITERATED and DESTROYED. As we spoke about last Sunday, in his First Coming Jesus absorbed and obliterated all the sins of his people on the cross.

Here in his Second Coming he obliterates and abolishes all sin remaining in the world; wherever and in whomever it is harboured. As Jesus said:

Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers,⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Matthew 13:40–43 ESV)

Old Testament and New, there is no NEW CREATION without fire.

That brings us to our 6th and penultimate theme; the theme of worship.

6. Worship

Look at verses 16-19:

Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths.¹⁷ And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them.¹⁸ And if the family of Egypt does not go up and present themselves, then on them there shall be no rain; there shall be the plague with which the LORD afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths.¹⁹ This shall be the punishment to Egypt and the punishment to all the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths.

(Zechariah 14:16–19 ESV)

When the plague falls all those who oppose God will melt away, leaving behind only those who worship him – and so worship him they will. Year after year they will go up to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Booths. Why this feast in particular? Anthony Petterson says helpfully here:

“The festival is elsewhere associated with the temple and includes the foreigner’s sharing in the blessing of God.”³

So that makes sense! In the Old Testament the Feast of Booths did not involve any sacrifices for sin, which of course would be unnecessary now, but it does involve the foreigner’s sharing in the blessings of God - how fitting! In Christ we are grafted in – and in eternity we will worship the Lord together as one.

The vision makes that point in rather dramatic fashion. “Everyone goes up”, it says. “Everyone worships and those who do not are punished!” Now I don’t think that the prophet is suggesting that even after the renewal of all things there might actually be a family or tribe of people who would refuse to worship their God and King at the Feast of Tabernacles – rather I think this is a poetic and colourful way of stressing the universality of worship and devotion in the age to come.

Most of the commentators take that approach; Thomas McComiskey for example says here:

³ Anthony R. Petterson, *Zechariah* in the ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton: Crossway, Volume VII, 2018), 726.

“Again, a hypothetical allusion underscores the prophet’s efforts to convey a sense of absoluteness.”⁴

Everyone will worship. To refuse would be unthinkable.

That leads us to our final theme: the theme of universal holiness.

7. Holiness

Look at verses 20-21:

And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, “Holy to the LORD.” And the pots in the house of the LORD shall be as the bowls before the altar.²¹ And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the LORD of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day. (Zechariah 14:20–21 ESV)

In the New Heavens and the New Earth there will be no distinction between holy and common - because the Lord will be over all and in all. Everything THERE will be like the holiest things we can imagine HERE. The horse will be like the alter, the pots in the house will be like the pots in the temple and there shall no longer be a TRADER in the house of the Lord on that day. No one there for the wrong reason, no one there to take or abuse. All such people will have been removed and the taint of their influence cleansed.

We see the same theme at the very end of the Bible in Revelation 22:14-15:

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. (Revelation 22:14–15 ESV)

⁴ Thomas McComiskey, *Zechariah* in The Minor Prophets Volume Three (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 1242.

That is the absolute end of THIS STORY and the beginning of a new story towards which all of history has been moving.

A blight removed.

A people healed.

A universe restored.

A King enthroned and enjoyed FOREVER and ever, and ever, amen.

Joy to the world, brothers and sisters, the Lord is come.

Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.