

10. The final section of chapter fourteen (vv. 16-21) brings Zechariah's second burden – and his entire prophecy – to a close. It describes the glorious and enduring outcome of Yahweh's intervention on behalf of Jerusalem, and so also the fulfillment of the set of promises regarding Zion and her restoration that are the subject of Zechariah's larger prophetic message. The general thrust of this passage is not difficult to discern, but its details appear strange and even perplexing to many. This is because it incorporates ideas and symbolism that were ingrained in Israel's history and experience and are unfamiliar to contemporary Christian readers, particularly those who've had limited exposure to the Old Testament scriptures. Many modern day Christians scratch their heads at this context, but it would have made perfect sense to Zechariah's Hebrew audience.

The details will be considered in turn, but a general overview is helpful at the outset. The first thing to note in that regard is that this passage focuses on Jerusalem as the center of Yahweh's worship in the world. After He completes His retribution against Jerusalem's adversaries, He will restore Zion's glory – this time and forevermore establishing her in perfect purity and taking His throne in her midst, never to depart again. Accordingly, all of the people of the nations who remain are obligated to worship Him at His sanctuary and the Feast of Booths provides the occasion for this annual global pilgrimage. Any who refuse to keep the feast and go up to Jerusalem are punished with drought.

This is the general thrust of the passage and it provides the framework for considering the specific details. But as indicated, these details must be examined within their Israelite context. This context – as the whole of Zechariah's prophecy – was constructed for and delivered to the exiles of Judah who'd returned to Judea (along with those who would follow in the coming century). The Lord intended it to address their historical circumstance and eschatological expectation and longing – *specifically, their reconstruction of the Jerusalem temple in the hope of Yahweh's return and, with it, the end of Israel's exile and the restoration of David's house, throne and kingdom*. The entirety of Zechariah's prophecy is framed by and speaks to these issues, and so it is with this capstone passage which put the Lord's exclamation point on all He had promised.

- a. In terms of specifics, the first consideration is the *subjects* of this worship scenario. Two things immediately appear from the passage:
- 1) The first is that these people constitute the remnant of the nations whom the Lord had come against in His deliverance of Jerusalem (14:16). This shows that Yahweh's destruction of these assailing nations wasn't absolute; there was a remnant within them that survived His hand. This, in turn, implies that the Lord either overlooked them in the exercise of His wrath or regarded them as innocent of the offense He was punishing. Since it's impossible that He would overlook guilty parties, Yahweh must have, in some sense, found – or rendered – these persons innocent.
 - 2) Secondly, the passage's focus on a remnant of the nations raises the question of Israel's place in this outcome. This burden concerned Israel (12:1), and yet its summary conclusion makes no mention of them.

The answer is that Israel's presence in this kingdom scenario ("Israel" as embodied in David's regal *house*, *Judah* as David's kingdom and *Jerusalem* as its seat; ref. 12:1-13:2) is implied by the larger burden. For the burden (as indeed the entire prophecy) has already firmly established Yahweh's purging and restoration of Judah, Jerusalem and David's house; thus the focus of this concluding passage is the participation of the *nations* in this restoration. A remnant from the offending nations and peoples come as worshippers to Yahweh's sanctuary, not to the exclusion of Judah and David's house, but to worship Him together with them. This latter-day union of Israel with the Gentiles is thematic in the prophets and Zechariah is no exception (ref. again 2:1-13, 6:9-15, 8:1-23, 9:1-10; cf. Isaiah 9:1-7, 11:1-12, 49:1-13, 53:1-55:5; also Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-5; etc.). Indeed, given Israel's role as Abraham's covenant seed, it could not be otherwise (Genesis 12:1-3, 28:10-14).

- b. The second thing to consider is the *Feast of Booths* (Tabernacles) as the occasion for this worship pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Many Christians wonder why the prophecy singled out this particular feast and dispensational scholars, in particular, are keen to explain why the Feast of Booths is uniquely suited to the conditions during the alleged future millennial kingdom (which they believe this passage refers to). The following is representative:

"The feast of Tabernacles is significant in this regard because it is the festival which looks forward to the Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah (for the Israelites will dwell 'in booths' when they re-enter the land, just as that first generation in the promised land had done). Therefore this feast will be a memorial and a celebration of the Messiah's reign (and of Israel's return to the land – God having fulfilled all of His promises to them in this regard). As far as other nations are concerned, failure to come to this festival would naturally constitute a grave offense, for that would be saying, in effect, that they were not happy with the King's rule (cf. Lk.19:14; 19:27). And we know, of course, that in spite of the perfect righteousness of His rule and the glorious conditions of the Millennium, there will, nevertheless, be many who will become bitter and dissatisfied, even to the point of rebelling against Him in the end (cf. Ps.2; Rev.20:7-9)."

But the place to begin is with the fact that this prophecy was directed to Jews of the exile and they would have interpreted it through the lens of the Israelite history and Israel's role in God's purpose for the world. Thus the first point of consideration must be the historical context, basis and purpose for this feast.

- The Feast of Booths was the last of Israel's seven ordained annual feasts and one of the three which required all capable male Israelites to travel to Jerusalem. The other two were Passover (with the Feast of Unleavened Bread) and Pentecost (Feast of Weeks). These latter two were spring feasts and, being separated by only 50 days, the Jews who traveled far would often remain in Jerusalem (or its vicinity) during the intervening period.

Conversely, the Feast of Booths was a fall celebration. And because it was associated with the fall harvest, it was sometimes referred to as the Feast of Ingathering. Pentecost was the spring harvest counterpart to the Feast of Booths (Israel had two growing and harvest seasons) and so was also known as the Feast of Harvest (cf. Exodus 23:14-17; Leviticus 23:34ff; Deuteronomy 16:13ff; cf. also 2 Chronicles 8:12-13).

- The Feast of Booths celebrated the fall harvest, but it had a second, more important function: It commemorated Israel's forty years in the wilderness when the people lived in "booths," or temporary shelters (ref. again Leviticus 23:34-43). Thus this feast was intimately tied to the Exodus event and spoke of the time between Israel's redemptive deliverance and her entrance into Yahweh's sanctuary-land. Stated differently, the Feast of Booths spoke of *transition*: movement from bondage into liberation unto ingathering and final inheritance. *Its premise was a circumstance of temporary sojourn in which deliverance and residence in Yahweh's presence looked to ultimate destination and rest.* This will prove critical in understanding why this feast stands at the center of this passage.

- Again, the Feast of Booths was the third of Israel's feasts which required all males to travel to Jerusalem. Passover and Pentecost imposed this obligation in the first (spring) festal cycle and Booths in the second (fall) festal cycle. Thus both of Israel's harvest seasons were marked by another "ingathering," namely Yahweh gathering in all male Israelites (representing their families and so the whole house of Israel) to Himself in the place of His habitation. *Importantly, this ingathering theme drew upon the exodus and sojourn themes since Israel's gathering to Yahweh in His sanctuary land was the goal of their deliverance and wilderness sojourn.* Yahweh had delivered Abraham's covenant descendents from Egypt, not to set them free from bondage, but to restore them to Himself that they should be with Him and worship Him in truth – that they should be His people and He should be their God (cf. Genesis 17:1-8 with Exodus 15:1-18, 25:1-8; also Zechariah 1:1-3 with 2:1-11, 8:1-8, 13:1-9).

- c. The Feast of Booths stood upon the premise of past deliverance and present sojourn, but also future ingathering (hence the alternate title, Feast of Ingathering). And this theme of ingathering is central to Zechariah's prophecy – *both in terms of Yahweh's promise to end Israel's exile and His pledge to gather in the nations.* Israel's historical celebration of the Feast of Ingathering highlighted the covenant nation's wilderness sojourn as it anticipated and prepared for its rest in Yahweh's presence. Hence the requirement that all Israel – represented in their male members – should travel to Jerusalem to keep the feast. But because the Lord's goal was the ingathering of all of the earth's families (2:10-11, 9:9-12), *it's absolutely appropriate that Zechariah would portray the time of deliverance, renewal and ingathering in terms of the nations keeping the feast in an annual journey to Jerusalem to worship the Lord in His sanctuary.*

In the time of renewal when the Lord established His reign in His Branch-King, He was going to gather in a remnant from all the earth and this ingathering would bear witness to the fact that He had at last fulfilled His promise to purge and restore Zion and endow her with innumerable children – faithful children who would serve Him in truth (Isaiah 53-54). It is this reality that provides the basis for Yahweh’s judgment upon those peoples who do not keep the feast (14:17-19).

These who refuse to go up to Jerusalem and keep the feast are guilty of denying the truth that Yahweh has become King over all the earth. Zechariah makes this clear by twice stating that this pilgrimage was for the express purpose of “worshipping the King, the Lord of Hosts” (cf. vv. 16-17 with v. 9). Therefore, those who decline to join this pilgrimage are refusing to worship the King, which means they are refusing to acknowledge His lordship and reign. And by denying Yahweh’s kingship they also deny His kingdom; they refuse to acknowledge what He has done and what it means for them. *In a word, they refuse to be reconciled to Him and gathered in as children of His kingdom under His lordship.* This is the meaning behind the symbolism of their failure to go up to Jerusalem to keep the feast and it explains why Yahweh lifts His hand against them.

One final thing to note about this before turning to the punishment itself is the important fact that the Lord’s establishment of His kingdom and kingship – His reign over all the earth – allows for the continuance of human disbelief and rebellion. Dispensationalists find in this further support for their contention that sin and death will continue in the millennial kingdom (which they believe this passage refers to). But there is another way to understand this dynamic, and that is in terms of the present state of the kingdom.

- The New Testament is absolutely clear that Jesus, in His person and work, inaugurated the eschatological kingdom of God. He is the enthroned King-Priest presiding over His Father’s kingdom and building His house by His Spirit precisely as Zechariah prophesied (4:1-10, 6:9-15).
- In David’s Branch, Yahweh has become King over all the earth, but His reign has not yet subdued the whole creation. Yes, the Branch has been supremely exalted with all things in subjection under His feet. His authority and power are unqualified, but that same power and authority permit enemies to remain until the appointed time: Sin, death, the creational curse and even the serpent and his minions have all been condemned, yet they are allowed to continue for a season (cf. Ephesians 1:18-23 with Romans 6:1-14, 8:9-25; 1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 12).
- So also all men are now subject to the definition and demands of God’s kingdom. The old order of things has been condemned and put to death in Jesus and, in Himself, He has inaugurated the everlasting new order of the new creation. *Thus human obligation and disobedience now concern King Jesus and conformity to His lordship and the ethic of His kingdom.*

All people – whether or not they acknowledge it or approve it – are “in” God’s kingdom in the sense that it is the sole authentic paradigm of creaturely existence. Existence according to *any* other paradigm or notion is fraudulent and culpable; it is conformity to that which has been condemned and done away in Jesus (1 John 2:15-17). This means that every created thing is now subject to the truth of this everlasting kingdom and the demands of its King. Put differently, *righteousness is now conformity to the truth of new creation*; it is conformity to the King Himself who is the substance and beginning of this new creation.

All people *exist* within the bounds of this kingdom but not all *embrace* it. Many continue to insist upon a definition of themselves and the world which contradicts the truth: They are determined to persevere in their falseness as a truth unto themselves; they serve themselves as king and will not be gathered in as children of the King. In Zechariah’s language, though they are part of the surviving remnant, they will not go up to Yahweh’s sanctuary to worship Him as King.

This is their violation, and *drought* is the penalty they incur for it (14:17). In the Scriptures, rain is a symbol of divine blessing even as it connotes life and flourishing. Palestine is an arid and harsh land and the people of Israel utterly depended upon the seasonal rains; without them, all things perished and the land became desolate. Though the rainy season in Palestine is fairly predictable, there were times in Israel’s history when the Lord withheld the rains to the nation’s devastation. As the rains symbolized Yahweh’s outpoured blessing (Ezekiel 34:20-31), their absence represented His judgment against His people and His rejection of them (cf. Deuteronomy 11:1-17 and 1 Kings 8:22-36 with 1 Kings 16:30-17:1; Isaiah 5:1-6; Jeremiah 3:1-3, 14:1-22; etc.). So it is here: Those who reject Yahweh’s kingship and kingdom will be rejected by Him and left desolate.

d. It’s notable that *Egypt* is alone identified among these nations that may perhaps refuse to keep the Lord’s feast and worship Him as King (14:18-19). Two observations are important here:

- First, this identifies Egypt as among the peoples who remain after the Lord has executed His retribution on Zion’s behalf. This is important because it accords with Isaiah’s testimony that, in the day of Yahweh’s restoring work, Egypt would become part of His covenant people (Isaiah 19:18-25). And the significance of Egypt being incorporated into Yahweh’s household resides in the fact that Egypt epitomized human rebellion and opposition to His rule, kingdom and people. In that day, the Lord’s great enemy was to become a son in His house. Such would be His second triumph over Egypt (Rahab) (Isaiah 51:9-11): When He again led the ransomed into His presence, the people of Egypt would be among them.
- At the same time, this Egyptian remnant might possibly rebel against Yahweh’s kingship; in this case, Egypt will have shown itself to be *Rahab* indeed – the dragon symbolizing human rebellion and opposition.

Thus Egypt here serves a two-dimensional symbolic function:

- 1) On the one hand, Egypt highlights the critical truth that Yahweh's work of purging, renewal and ingathering encompasses *all* of the families of the earth, just as He had pledged to Abraham. No group or individual would be beyond His reach or the power of His restoring hand. Even the most ardent and obstinate of enemies could – and would – be purged and gathered as sons into His kingdom. Indeed, it could not be otherwise, for if it were, none from the house of Israel could be delivered and restored. For, in its unbelief and disobedience, Israel was indistinguishable from even Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Isaiah 1:1-15 with Revelation 11:1-8).
- 2) On the other hand, Egypt also symbolizes the human rebellion which continues in the context of Yahweh's kingdom. Though He has taken His throne as King over all the earth, there are men who continue to deny His kingdom and reign and live in contradiction and opposition to Him.

One final observation follows from this and concerns the dynamic of Yahweh's retribution. *Specifically, the prophecy indicates that His retribution continues on even after He has fully accomplished it.* That is, the Lord's triumph over the assailing nations is the basis of His establishing His throne and kingdom; but having taken His throne as victor, He continues to come against those who refuse His kingship and kingdom. The reason this is important is that it highlights a key principle of the present form of God's kingdom: Though Yahweh has dealt conclusively with the matter of human alienation and contradiction, it still remains and He continues to punish it. The difference is that now the offense is opposition to the *reality* of His kingship and kingdom rather than to its *promise*.

- e. Finally, Zechariah's prophecy ends on the climactic note that Yahweh's triumph would mean that Zion and all her inhabitants would at last be authentically "holy to the Lord" (14:20-21). While holiness is often conceived in terms of moral purity, its fundamental meaning is *consecration*: A thing is holy when the Lord sets it apart to Himself. *Thus holiness is first and foremost a state of being and only then a set of practices.* In the depiction here, everything in Zion is characterized by this state; there is no longer any distinction between sacred and profane (common) because all things are equally set apart to the Lord and His worship and service (cf. Leviticus 10:8-11; Ezekiel 22:23-26). When Yahweh at last rose up to deliver, purge and restore, His work would pertain not just to people, but to the entire creation. In Zechariah's language, Yahweh was going to purge the *land* of its falseness and impurity (3:9-10, 5:1-11, 13:1-2).

And yet, Zion's holiness stands in contrast here with continuing rebellion outside her habitation; not all come to Zion to worship the King. Thus, while Zion herself is pure, she hasn't taken all things into her grasp. One day – through eradication as well as ingathering – that goal will be realized (cf. Matthew 13:24-43 with Luke 13:22-30 and Philippians 3:17-21; also Revelation 21:1-8, 22-27, 22:14-17).