

XXV. The Return of the King

May 24, 2020 Zechariah 14:1-11

Theme: Upon the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, He will complete the salvation of His people, consummate redemptive history, and establish His blessed, eternal, heavenly kingdom.

Aim: To wait with eager expectation for the promised return of the King and the establishment of His eternal kingdom.

Key Verses: ⁵Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.... 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 (Zechariah 14:5b, 8-9).

Review

Last week, we looked at the short but loaded prophecy of Zechariah 13:7-9. Four important theological doctrines were packed into these verses, which pictured the Shepherd being struck by the sword, the sheep being scattered, and the remnant being purified. First, in the covenant of redemption, we saw how it was God the Father who raised the sword of justice against God the Son. In the eternal council of the Godhead, Jesus freely subordinated Himself to the will His Father, in order to accomplish redemption as a vicarious sacrifice for all the elect. It is in this manner that the atonement satisfies both the holy justice and righteous mercy of God simultaneously to save the elect.

Secondly, in his mediatorial role, Jesus, who is fully God, takes upon Himself mortal flesh, thus uniting both His divine and human natures in one person. Only a man could pay the debt owned by men; only God had the power and the ability to pay that debt. Therefore, the Messiah had to be both man and God, two natures in one person. Although the dual nature of Messiah is hinted at in this and other Old Testament passages, the full extent of its truth was not revealed until the first advent of Jesus Christ.

The third major topic covered by Zechariah concerns the sanctification of God's holy remnant, pictured as a process of precious metal refining. Sanctification is not only fighting a holy war, or walking in step with God, or cleansing remaining sin; it is also a lengthy and sometimes painful process of purification. It is only by passing through the refining fire of God that He can sanctify and transform us into His holy people.

Finally, the passage closes with another reminder of the Immanuel Principle of the covenant of grace: *I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The LORD is my God'*. God redeems us and refines us, not so that we can do whatever we want, but rather that we would become His beloved and treasured people, justified through redemption, sanctified through refining, and glorified to dwell with Him forever in eternity. Therefore the theme of these verses can be summarized as: *By taking upon Himself the penalty of our sin, Jesus Christ, the God-man, redeems and refines His covenant people according to the foreordained will of God.*

Introduction

As we come to chapter 14 of Zechariah, the interpretive challenges continue to mount. Here in our passage (verse 1-11), we encounter a devastating defeat, an overwhelming victory, and a day unique in history since creation. No wonder Martin Luther threw up his hands at trying to explain this passage. Luther wrote two commentaries on Zechariah during his life. The first, written in Latin, abruptly ends at chapter 13, verse 9 and makes no mention at all of chapter 14. Later, in his German commentary on Zechariah, Luther wrote, “Here, in this chapter, I give up. For I am not sure what the prophet is talking about” (cited by Boice, p. 220). If you also have trouble understanding the final chapter of Zechariah’s prophecy, at least you are in good company!

The best term to describe this chapter is “apocalyptic,” which comes from the Greek *apocalupsis*, meaning “to reveal, to uncover, to unveil, or to disclose.” The book of Revelation is also known as “The Apocalypse,” not simply since *apocalupsis* is its first word, but also because it is a revealing or pulling back of the curtain that hides heaven and future history from the eyes of man. Apocalyptic literature (e.g., portions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, and all of Revelation) uses heightened language, images, and metaphors to portray the intended meaning. The events are typically far outside of routine experience, and normal human language completely fails to describe accurately the events portrayed. The genre often concerns the end of the world, being filled with fantastic imagery, ominous portents, and cryptic descriptions. “It is therefore quite improbable to understand these descriptions as literally coming true. They are true, but the language they are using is to be likened more to that of a sketch or cartoon in which only certain elements are present, and not necessarily precisely portrayed. It is the language of symbol and metaphor that has to be employed to described the unusual, indeed the unique. There is only one consummation of all things” (Mackay, p. 253). The problem, as no doubt, Luther realized, is how does one approach understanding the meaning of this type of text?

In chapter 14, it is clear to virtually all interpreters (apart from a few older ones who attempt to find fulfillment in the period of the Maccabees), that the events depicted in our verses do not correspond with any actual historical events that have taken place in the 2500 years between Zechariah and us. Therefore, they indeed must refer to future events. But of course, there is a great diversity of opinion on how to understand the vision of the future that Zechariah relates. In general, there are three main interpretive approaches, which essentially line up with the three dominant millennial views on the consummation of the end times.

The first method understands the description here in Zechariah to be symbolic of the entirety of the church age. Rather than point to a specific fulfillment at a future point in time, this view sees multiple examples of the general principles taught in the text as applicable in the spiritual experience of Christians throughout history. This spiritual or *typological* interpretation is often associated with postmillennial eschatology. Since, as we have seen from previous studies in Zechariah, the prophet indeed uses Old Testament language to typify New Testament realities (e.g., Jerusalem and/or Judah correspond to the church, not the modern nation of Israel), at one level this is a valid approach. We absolutely can and should draw spiritual applications for our current situation from these verses. However, those who hold this position typically do not see the consummation of history as also being predicted in this chapter. H. C. Leupold is a representative of this interpretive school:

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Our verses do not, therefore, apply to any one situation. They do not describe a siege, capture, and captivity which actually occurred. By means of a figure they describe a situation which obtains continually through New Testament times. God's people shall continually be antagonized and suffer bitter adversity at the hands of their foes and shall in consequence be brought low; but there shall always be an imperishable remnant, and that not so extremely small (cited by Boice, p. 221).

However, while a typological understanding of chapter 14 provides valuable insight, we've also seen in our studies that the prophecies contained in Zechariah's book often have more than one level of fulfillment. For example, while the sheep being scattered may symbolically and spiritually represent the diaspora of the church as the gospel spreads through the nations, at the same time a historical fulfillment in the abandonment of Jesus by His disciples in Gethsemane is also clearly true. Indeed, one of the biggest criticisms of this typological view is that it applies a historical interpretation to prophecies which are clear, while "spiritualizing" a more general application to the church age when a historical fulfillment is less obvious.

In contrast to the first position, premillennial interpreters, and especially those of the dispensational school, look forward to a future *literal* fulfillment of the prophecies in these verses. This conviction is driven, amongst other reasons, by their adherence to a "literal hermeneutic," which attempts to assign the plain meaning of language to the biblical text and thus to take those descriptions at face value. This is a sincere and honest attempt at remaining faithful to the text of the holy Scriptures.

One of the consequences of this literal approach is that it maintains a clear distinction between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church, since promises made to Israel must be fulfilled in Israel, not the church. Thus, in chapter 14, we have a literal war of the nations against the Jews of Jerusalem, at which time the Lord Jesus Christ physically returns to earth. Upon His setting foot upon the Mount of Olives, the ensuing earthquake creates a new valley in the land of Palestine and allows the surviving Jews to escape the beleaguered city. In addition, the earthquake forms a new river, levels the surrounding area, and lifts up the physical city of Jerusalem. Jesus then establishes His millennial kingdom on earth, ruling for a literal one thousand years (derived from Revelation 20, not Zechariah 14) over the nations from His earthly capital of Jerusalem. Baron, a historical premillennialist and a Zionist Jew of the early 20th century, is an ardent supporter of this literal view:

We have here a great and solemn prophecy which will yet be literally fulfilled in the future. And when it is objected by some of the modern writers that the literal fulfillment is "impossible," because it would involve not only national upheavals, but physical convulsions of nature, our answer is that *this is just what the prophet declares as most certainly to take place*; and, as if to anticipate the objection on the ground of its being naturally "impossible," or, according to human judgment, "improbable," he reminds us at the very outset of this section, "*Who stretches forth the heavens and lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him*" (Zech. 12:1), *with whom nothing is impossible* (Baron, p. 491).

Demanding this strict separation between Israel and the church and thus denying New Testament Christians of their spiritual inheritance contained in the Old Testament promises is a fundamental mistake in biblical interpretation, and it leads to all sorts of wild speculation and theological error. One of the major themes of the book of Ephesians is the union of Jew and Gentile into one

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redemptive people who have unity with one another and are heirs to the promises of the Old Testament. The apostle Paul calls this a mystery that was hidden in the Old but now revealed in the New Testament:

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:6; cp. 2:11-22).

As we have seen in our previous studies in Zechariah, there is only one City of God, although it has a different outward appearance in the various dispensations of redemptive history. It is not surprising that the Old Testament does not use words like “church” to describe the entire people of God, because it was a mystery and the terminology did not exist at the time of those prophecies. Therefore, old covenant terms, which were the only ones available then to the prophets, need to be interpreted and understood in the clearer light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Since the Bible is filled with figurative language and evocative poetry, any attempt to force a literal meaning without understanding the genre is fraught with problems. This is particularly true when it comes to deciphering the clearly symbolic language of apocalyptic literature. However, those who hold to the literal view do have a valid point in looking toward the future and the literal return of Jesus Christ in His second coming. The events portrayed in Zechariah 14 rise to a level beyond a mere typological interpretation, and require a historical fulfillment, even if it still lies in our future at the end of the age.

The third interpretive viewpoint appreciates both the spiritual application of the typological perspective and the desire for the future promised literal return of our Savior. Those who hold an amillennial understanding of eschatology are most likely to favor this approach. As we have already seen, Zechariah has covered the intertestamental time period in his prophecy as well as the first advent of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ from many different angles, which have had not only a historical fulfillment, but ongoing spiritual and even ultimately eschatological applications. The next event on the “redemptive timeline” is the conclusion of the church age at the second coming of the Messiah. Thus, it is to the very end of the world that we must turn our gaze in these final verses of Zechariah. Phillips is a representative of this middle “*Reformed*” way:

Zechariah 14 completes the historical progression we have followed all through these final oracles that began in chapter 9. They start with the centuries to come shortly after the restoration of Jerusalem, including the conquests of Alexander (9:1-8) and the Maccabean wars of the Jews (9:13). The great bulk of these prophecies then focus on the coming of the true king (9:9), His rejection by the people, and God’s subsequent judgment on Jerusalem (11:1-14), but then the cleansing of many who look on the One they had pierced and are saved (12:10-13) which takes place in our present gospel age. As we follow the progression of redemptive history, the next great event, after the coming of Christ and the spreading of the gospel, is His second coming to vindicate His beleaguered people, judge the earth, and bring His eternal reign of blessing and peace. That is what chapter 14 brings to view, not just broad principles about life in this world, and not the beginning of a thousand-year political reign of Christ centered on the earthly city of Jerusalem, but the end of all things in the consummation of God’s eternal city in purity and peace (Phillips, p. 305).

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As we eagerly and expectantly await the promised return of the King, we can take heart in the theme of this passage, which can be summarized as: *Upon the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, He will complete the salvation of His people, consummate redemptive history, and establish His blessed, eternal, heavenly kingdom.*

A. The Coming Day (Zechariah 14:1-2)

In this last chapter of Zechariah, the prophet seems to take us back to the siege of Jerusalem that introduced the final oracle or burden of this prophecy (see 12:1-9). Indeed, those commentators who view the text literally and are expecting an earthly millennial kingdom, do connect the events of chapter 14 back with those of chapter 12. While there are some similarities (e.g., defeat of enemies and salvation of the people of God), there are also some significant differences. Here, in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 14, the city of Jerusalem is soundly defeated by her enemies and the remnant is only delivered by the direct and glorious arrival on earth of the LORD in verses 3-5. The next verses (6-11) describe the unique and blessed character of “that day.” In verses 12-15 of the present chapter, the enemies of God are completely destroyed, and by the end of this grand vision in verses 21-22, even the smallest and most insignificant of items are deemed holy, which will be the state of affairs in the new Jerusalem after the consummation of all things. Meanwhile, in chapter 12, the LORD does not return physically to rescue His subjugated people, but rather preserves them from defeat by strengthening them and confusing (but not completely destroying) their foes. The emphasis there is on strength to overcome opposition while in this life, not on the blessed state of holiness that is ours in eternity. Therefore, we should look at the description in chapter 14 as an advancement upon the portrait in chapter 12, not merely the same picture seen from a different viewpoint.

1. A Day is Coming (14:1a)

¹*Behold, a day is coming for the LORD...*

“On that day” has been a constant refrain in the last three chapters of Zechariah. Chapter 14 starts out with a variation on that theme, saying *a day is coming for the LORD*. The emphasis of this phrase is not simply on the coming day, but on the one who is coming on that day, i.e., the LORD. This prophecy is first and foremost about what God does on behalf of His beleaguered and downtrodden people when He comes.

As pointed out previously, “the day of the LORD” is any time when God draws close to His people and their enemies in evaluation, which usually results in judgment for the wicked and salvation for the righteous, both to the glory of His name. Zechariah has used the phrase “on that day” to point to various days of the LORD throughout redemptive history, but this alternate phrase, which focuses on the LORD who comes, will be the last such day in all of time. This is the day of which Paul speaks in his second epistle to the Thessalonians:

⁶God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, ¹⁰when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled

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at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10).

2. A Day of Cataclysm (14:1b-2)

...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.

From Zechariah's description, this day clearly comes at a time of distress and desperate straits for the people of God. Their enemies, the hostile nations of the world, have besieged the holy city and broken through to capture it. The awful scene of plunder and rape described by the prophet is typical for battles of this type in the ancient world (cp. Is. 13:16). The survivors are represented as standing by helplessly while their enemies take all their possessions away from them: *when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst*. Overall, Zechariah paints a terrible picture, as God's people are overwhelmed and conquered by their enemies.

Zechariah is not the only prophet to describe scenes of global warfare against the City of God as a prelude to the return of Christ. For example, the prophet Joel writes:

¹“For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, ²I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land (Joel 3:1-2).

In Joel's vision, God gathers the nations together in the “valley of decision” as they come against God's people. Likewise, Ezekiel sees God call to Gog and the nations, gathering them together against His people at the end times (Ez. 38-39; cp. Rev. 20:7-9). Revelation 16:16 says that God draws the nations to Armageddon for the final battle. Notice that in all of these prophecies, including Zechariah 14:2, that it is God who gathers the nations against His people. Nothing, not even this most severe trial at the end of history, is outside of God's sovereign control.

These and other biblical prophecies indicate that before the LORD's return in glory, the people of God will undergo a particularly difficult period of trial and testing. This appears to be the final stages of the refining process spoken of in Zechariah 13:9. The church will undergo persecution and suffering as the entire world is against them. The apostle Paul describes an intensification in anti-Christian sentiment and persecution in those last days:

³Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

In His Olivet discourse, Jesus describes the great suffering of those days as a prelude to His second coming:

²¹For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. ²²And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short (Matthew 24:21-22).

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While the initial application of our Lord's words might be in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, they find ultimate fulfillment in His second advent, which He describes just a few verses later (Mt. 24:29-31). Indeed, all would be lost, were it not for the preserving providence of God and His intervention into the affairs of men, as the prophet Daniel confirms:

“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book” (Daniel 12:1).

The same sentiment is expressed in different terms by the prophet Zechariah at the end of verse 2. Although the situation appears extremely bleak for the city of God, yet there remains hope. Despite half of the survivors of this conquest being taken away as captives into exile, yet *the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city*. God always preserves His true remnant.

It should not shock us that future hostility from the world awaits the church of Jesus Christ. Satan and his minions have sought to destroy God and His people since the Garden of Eden. We should not be surprised at the level of contempt and enmity in which our culture today holds the church. Christians are laughed at, marginalized, mocked. And we can only expect the situation to grow worse as time goes on. Bentley applies these verses to our modern circumstances:

Think of the condition of the church today. Satan has done his worst. He has plundered the church. That means that the church has been deprived of her most treasured possessions. One way in which this has happened is in regard to the purity of the gospel. The gospel has been contaminated and watered down because some of the doctrines of God's Word are unacceptable to “modern Christians.” The purity of the gospel has been plundered because in so many places of worship it has ceased to be preached in its fulness and its freeness....

In certain periods of her history the church has been taken over by those who prevented the ordinary people from reading the Bible for themselves. Only church leaders were authorized to give the accepted meaning of the Word of God. Some of the people of God have been raped. Satan has so ravaged many that they are not sure to whom they belong. They have been so bruised and battered that they find it almost impossible to read the Bible with understanding, and prayer is an almost meaningless exercise. The description of the devastation of Jerusalem in verses 1 and 2 is a picture of the depleted church of Jesus Christ in our day. But, despite the gloom, verse 2 gives us hope. There is a remnant left. Not all have been taken away or polluted. Those who are left are true to God and His Word. They obey Him and follow His commands (Bentley, pp. 215-216).

B. The Coming LORD (Zechariah 14:3-5)

1. The LORD Fights (14:3)

³*Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle.*

On the surface, the situation appears grim. The people of God are outnumbered and overwhelmed. In this cosmic spiritual battle, it finally seems as if Satan has won. Of course, he thought he had won at the cross as well, only to find that his greatest triumph was actually his worst defeat. And just as in that amazing turn of events where the death of God's Son in His

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first advent guaranteed salvation for the elect, it is the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ that secures our salvation for all eternity. Just when the battle seems hopeless and the cause is completely lost, it is at that moment that *the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when He fights on a day of battle.*

How does the LORD fight “on a day of battle”? It is not by putting on physical armor and striding onto the battlefield to engage the enemy in hand-to-hand combat. Rather, it is the unleashing of His providential power upon the hosts of darkness. We have only to look back at the pages of the Old Testament to find multiple examples of God’s fighting on behalf of His people in this way.

For example, it was God who brought down the walls of Jericho (Jos. 6:15-21) and delivered the Midianites into the hands of Gideon’s small band of 300 men (Jdg. 7:15-23). God saved King Jehoshaphat from the combined armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir by turning the enemies of Judah against each other (2 Chr. 20:15-23). The Angel of the LORD struck down the enormous Assyrian army of Sennacherib, which was besieging Jerusalem and King Hezekiah (2 Kgs. 19:35). When the Syrian army came to capture the prophet Elisha, God struck them with blindness so that they could not fulfill their commission (2 Kgs. 6:18). Indeed, Elisha was well protected by the LORD of hosts:

¹⁵When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” ¹⁶He said, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” ¹⁷Then Elisha prayed and said, “O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:15-17).

But the premier example of God fighting on behalf of His people, and likely the event to which Zechariah alludes to here, is the deliverance of the children of Israel from Pharaoh and the chariots of Egypt at the Red Sea:

¹³And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. ¹⁴The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent” (Exodus 14:13-14).

Indeed, the children of Israel had nothing to do or say in the matter of the destruction of the armies of Egypt, as God was the one who brought the Red Sea crashing down upon the oppressors of Israel and drowned them. God is our warrior king who fights for His people and delivers them from all enemies. When He enters the fray, the outcome is never in doubt—the salvation of His people is guaranteed:

“I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

²The LORD is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.

³The LORD is a man of war;

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the LORD is his name (Exodus 15:1a-3).

2. The LORD Stands (14:4-5a)

⁴*On 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.*

⁵*And 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.*

As verse 7 will go on to say, this coming day of the Lord is a “unique day” in the history of mankind. One of the ways in which it is unique is the manner of the final and ultimate deliverance of God’s people. Here in verse 4, the Lord Jesus Christ is pictured as standing on the Mount of Olives. This mountain lies to the east of the city of Jerusalem. This is only the second of two references to this hill by this designation in the Old Testament, although its name should be familiar to readers of the New Testament gospels. “Referred to by Ezekiel as ‘the mountain which is on the east side of the city’ (Ez. 11:23), it is in fact a ridge, two and a half miles long, running north to south on the east side of Jerusalem, and separated from the city by the deep Kidron valley. As it is [200 feet] higher than the Temple mount, it completely blocks any view to the east, and it was inconveniently steep as an escape route from the city” (Baldwin, p. 201). King David certainly found this to be true as he fled Jerusalem and his son Absalom by climbing up and over the Mount of Olives (2 Sam. 15:30).

In the New Testament, Jesus often went to the Mount of Olives to pray (e.g., Jn. 8:1; Lk. 22:39). Jesus delivered the Olivet discourse on this mountain in Matthew 24. And on the night of His betrayal, after celebrating the Last Supper, Jesus and His disciples went to the Mount of Olives, where Jesus prayed and was ultimately arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:30; Mk. 14:26). But of primary interest in the context of Zechariah 14 is the ascension of Jesus Christ after His resurrection, which also occurred on “the mount called Olivet”:

⁹And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” ¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away (Acts 1:9-12).

Notice how the angels predict that when Jesus returns again, He will do so in a similar way, presumably by coming down from the clouds and alighting upon earth at the same place He left it, i.e., the Mount of Olives. That is what Zechariah also seems to be prophesying in verse 4. “On that day,” on that very unique and special last day of history, when the LORD intervenes to destroy His enemies forever and deliver His people for eternity, He will stand on the Mount of Olives in the same way He did when He last physically stood upon the earth.

The language which follows is typical of apocalyptic literature, which uses cataclysmic imagery of earthquakes and shaking of the heavens to portend great and momentous events associated with the consummation of history. The footfall of the Lord Jesus upon the Mount of Olives is of such momentous report that it produces an earthquake, splitting the mountain in two. Half the

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mountain moves northward and the other half southward, leaving in the middle a large gap or valley.

The net result of this geographical change is that a convenient escape path has been opened up for the citizens of Jerusalem. Previously, they had been surrounded by the invading armies of the nations. Any potential escape route had been cut off by the disposition of the enemy forces or the inhospitable terrain. However, now a broad, flat valley through the middle of the Mount of Olives, not unlike the broad dry land between the walls of the Red Sea, had been opened up miraculously by the power of God to provide a way of deliverance for His people. While we should not require that this prophecy be literally fulfilled, nonetheless it contains the timeless truth of how God acts, both in the past and on that final day. Just as in the exodus of old, God not only goes out to fight His enemies, but He also moves to deliver His people as well. This is the design of God's salvation work in history, and He continues to act in the same way today. Phillips explains:

This fits the pattern by which God often rescues His people. Christians are beset by dangers and many fall away in fear. But those who hold fast to the Lord find a way of deliverance they could not have imagined, as the Lord suddenly comes to their aid. Paul says this about the temptations we experience even now (1 Cor. 10:13)... We need to remember this when times are dark and hope is dim, how God has wonderfully delivered His people before and will again, and therefore to be strengthened in our faith (Phillips, p. 309).

Zechariah says that *you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah*. In dating his prophecy, the prophet Amos also makes reference to this same earthquake:

The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake (Amos 1:1).

Although not mentioned elsewhere in the Scriptures, this earthquake must have been memorable. While the prophet Amos lived through that event, by Zechariah's day, it was some 200 years or more in the distant past. And yet, it was still proverbial of a devastating natural disaster, such that it remained in the consciousness of the people of God even after their exile and restoration. The earthquake in Uzziah's reign was memorable, just as September 11, 2001 is for us. I also will never forget the day we evacuated our house by boat after Hurricane Harvey on August 30, 2017. And yet, those days will pale in comparison to the events that will occur "on that day," the final day of history.

3. The Lord Comes (14:5b)

Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

The end of verse 5 summarizes what we have already been discussing: *Then the LORD my God will come*. In this statement, the prophet makes the Lord's return personal. Although he has been relating the LORD's return in the third person, Zechariah suddenly interjects himself into the scene: the LORD is "my" God. "My God is the one who comes!" The prophet cannot contain his excitement at the vision of the future deliverance and glory that he sees.

In verse 3, the LORD comes as the Warrior, fighting on behalf of His people and defeating their enemies. In verses 4-5a, He comes as the Savior, providing a way of deliverance and safety for

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His people. And in verse 5b, He comes as the Holy One, surrounded in glory, having *all the holy ones with him*.

The emphasis in verse 5b is on the LORD's glory and holiness. In His first advent, the Son of God came in humility, but His second coming will be in exaltation (cp. Phil. 2:5-11). The purpose of the incarnation was for Jesus to provide a way of salvation through His vicarious atonement; the consummation of all things ends in Christ's glorious return to judge the wicked and to establish the eternal state for the elect.

The picture of the Lord's return in glory with His angels at the last day is repeated in the New Testament:

For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done (Matthew 16:27).

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne (Matthew 25:31).

⁶...since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels (2 Thessalonians 1:6-7).

It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones" (Jude 14).

The New Testament also adds that all of the saints who have died before the second coming of Christ in glory will accompany Him:

¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17).

The day is coming when the LORD will come again. Will you be ready for His return? Whether we meet Him in the air on the last day of history or in heaven upon the last day of our lives, we will stand before the Lord of glory. Verses 6-11 give us a preview of what that day will be like for those who put their trust in Him.

C. The Coming Day of the LORD (14:6-11)

1. A Unique Day (14:6-7)

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.

What will "that day" be like, the day in which Christ returns to defeat His enemies and deliver His people for the final time in history? As verse 7 puts it, it *shall be a unique day*, a day unlike any other in history. After all, there is only one consummation of all things! This day is *known*

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to the *LORD*, meaning that He is the only one who knows exactly what will happen and when it will occur. While the timing of our Lord's return is completely unknown to us (cp. Mt. 24:36; Mk. 13:32), the events of the day still remain a bit of a mystery for us, since human language fails to adequately describe the changes that will occur, despite the best attempts of the prophet to explain it.

The latter part of verse 6 is apparently difficult to translate from the Hebrew. It starts out by saying that there will be a lack of light on that day, but the meaning of the final two words is questionable. The ESV translates them as *cold* and *frost*. However, these words in the original seem more likely to be related to the loss of light from the sun, moon, and stars or from other bright or valuable objects. The New American Standard Bible translates verse 6 as follows, with an explanatory footnote:

In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle (Lit. *glorious ones will congeal*) (Zechariah 14:6, NASB).

Overall, this sort of translation from the NASB fits in better with verse 7, which also describes a one-of-a-kind day in which light and darkness are confused in a radical reordering of creation. It almost appears to be a reversal of the created world, reverting to a time before the creation of the heavenly lights. God spoke light into existence on day 1 of creation (Gen. 1:3-5), but the sun, moon, and stars only came into being on day 4 (Gen. 1:14-19).

The symbolism of a cataclysmic reordering of the heavenly sphere upon the consummation of creation is a common theme in apocalyptic literature. For example:

For the stars of the heavens and their constellations
will not give their light;
the sun will be dark at its rising,
and the moon will not shed its light (Isaiah 13:10).

Then the moon will be confounded
and the sun ashamed,
for the Lord of hosts reigns
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
and his glory will be before his elders (Isaiah 24:23).

The sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining (Joel 3:15).

²⁹“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:29-31; cp. Mark 13:24-27).

This unique day in history is one in which day and night, light and darkness apparently no longer have any meaning. Perhaps this is because ultimately these ideas are related to the concept of “time.” God put the heavenly bodies into the sky to “be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years” (Gen. 1:14). The 24 hours it takes for the earth to rotate on its axis, causing the sun

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apparently to rise and set, defines the length of a day. The year is determined by the number of days it takes the earth to orbit around the sun. Seasons are determined by the tilt of the earth's axis as it progresses around its heliocentric orbit, and months are determined by the orbit of the moon around the earth. Thus, all of these astronomical concepts that God established and that we instinctively recognize are the foundational building blocks of measuring the passage of time. The rock group Chicago once sang, "Does anyone really know what time it is? Does anyone really care?" The uniqueness of that day comes from the metaphorical (or literal?) recreation of the celestial order, which reduces "time" to a meaningless construct, and hence ushers us into eternity.

The prophet Isaiah makes the same sort of prediction, which is amplified in the book of Revelation:

¹⁹The sun shall be no more
your light by day,
nor for brightness shall the moon
give you light;
but the Lord will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.

²⁰Your sun shall no more go down,
nor your moon withdraw itself;
for the Lord will be your everlasting light,
and your days of mourning shall be ended (Isaiah 60:19-20).

²³And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.... ⁵And 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 21:23; 22:5).

This unique day is the last day of history and the first day of eternity, when time itself will lose all meaning.

2. A Blessed Day (14:8-11)

Not only is "that day" *a unique day*, but it is also a blessed day. In verses 8-11, the prophet Zechariah describes four blessings of the eternal state.

a) *Living Waters (14:8)*

⁸*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.*

The first blessing of eternity is an *abundance of living waters*. Three attributes of the living waters that flow "on that day" are highlighted in verse 8. First, there is mentioned the location of the living waters. Continuing with the geographical changes depicted in the earlier part of the chapter, it seems as if the earthquake described as splitting the Mount of Olives in half also caused a spring of fresh water to flow out of the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the source of this newly formed river.

Second, the destination of the living waters is described both to the east and to the west. To the west, the water flows to the shores of the Mediterranean (i.e., *the western sea*). To the east, the water flows to *the eastern sea*, that is, the Dead Sea. Presumably, since this river is described as

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“living waters,” the fresh water flowing outward would purify and vivify the salty water of both Seas.

Finally, the abundance of the living waters is stressed: *It shall continue in summer as in winter.* Free-flowing fresh water in abundance throughout both the winter and summer months was a tremendous blessing in the semi-arid landscape Palestine. The main water supply for the city of Jerusalem was from wells or small streams and brooks that often would dry out during the hot summer months. A guaranteed year round supply of fresh water was a tremendous blessing.

How are we to understand the blessing of living waters in the age of eternity? Those who employ a literal hermeneutic believe that an actual, physical river will flow from the city of Jerusalem during a millennial kingdom on earth. This is apparently the same literal river that the prophet Ezekiel foresees in Ez. 47:1-12. There, the prophet sees a river running out from the threshold of the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. It becomes a mighty eastward flowing river, emptying into the Dead Sea and turning that saltwater body into a freshwater sea teeming with life. However, Zechariah’s river runs both east and west, while Ezekiel’s only runs east. That seems to be a bit of a problem for a literalist to harmonize!

However, if we realize that rivers and flowing “living waters” are often symbolic in Scripture of God’s blessings of salvation to His people, then we will not have the problem of trying to understand how figurative language has to conform to a strict literal interpretation. This water imagery goes all the way back to Eden, where a river flowed out of the Garden and become four separate mighty rivers, filled with provision and blessing for mankind (Gen. 2:10-14).

The lack of a physical river springing forth from Jerusalem did not prevent the Psalmist from using that metaphor to describe the joy that comes from being in the presence of the God of our salvation:

⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

⁵God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns (Psalm 46:4-5).

Zechariah is not the only prophet to look forward to abundant waters in the eternal state. The prophet Joel also prophesied in a similar vein:

“And in that day
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the streambeds of Judah
shall flow with water;
and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord
and water the Valley of Shittim” (Joel 3:18).

Zechariah’s description of living waters find its initial fulfillment in the church age before reaching its final consummation in eternity. The prophet Isaiah links the blessings of living water with the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the church:

For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring,

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and my blessing on your descendants (Isaiah 44:3).

This prophecy in Isaiah is picked up in the words of our Lord at the Feast of Tabernacles:

³⁷On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” ³⁹Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:37-39).

So, how do we put this all together? Remember the three main features of Zechariah’s prophecy about living waters. First, the location or source of the river is from Jerusalem, i.e., the church. As God pours out His Holy Spirit on the church, the blessings of salvation flow outward from the church to impact the nations. The grace of salvation and faith come from hearing the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which has been entrusted to the safekeeping of the church. The church is to evangelize the world, to share the gospel and water the nations with the Word of God. Thus, during the present age, the church is the primary source of spiritual blessing in the world.

Where does this river of living water flow? To the east and to the west; i.e., to all nations. The Old Testament nation of Israel is no longer the sole recipient of God’s covenant blessings or the only location of access to our LORD. True worship of God is no longer tied to one place or one city; rather “those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24), regardless of their whereabouts or ethnic background. The true Israel of God knows no international boundaries; it is composed of saints “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9; 7:9).

Finally, the living waters are abundant and available year round. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not just for some people in some parts of the world at some periods of history. It is exactly and especially what all people need in every place in every age. Thus, in the spiritual or typological sense, we have a beautiful picture of the never-ending blessings of God’s grace as He pours out His Spirit upon the church, resulting in its expansion as the nations are evangelized with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This picture is certainly true and definitely one aspect of the vision of the living waters here in Zechariah 14. But Zechariah’s vision extends beyond the church age and into eternity as well.

Ezekiel’s vision of this same great river in chapter 47 of his prophecy is appropriated by the apostle John in his description of the new Jerusalem that will be established in eternity:

And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing (Ezekiel 47:12).

¹Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through 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).

We don’t just receive the blessings of the Holy Spirit in the current age, but ever so much more so in the age to come. There is perfect peace, provision, and satisfaction awaiting us in heaven.

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The living waters of God will heal all our hurts, bind up our wounds, cure our diseases, remove our pains, strengthen our bodies, and quicken our souls. We will have nourishment, health, prosperity, and joy in eternity, primarily because it is a place where all sin and evil has been banished, and where we will dwell in the presence of our great God and Savior forever. This is the promised blessing of *living waters* that will be ours through Jesus Christ for all eternity.

b) *LORD Is King (14:9)*

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

The second blessing of the eternal state described by Zechariah is that the *LORD reigns as king*. The end of history arrives with the return of the King, when Jesus Christ comes to subjugate all His enemies and establish His eternal reign over the cosmos. What Zechariah sees here corresponds to the heavenly host's declaration at the sounding of the seventh and final trumpet: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

In the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples, the second petition is very familiar: "Thy kingdom come." WCF SC Q&A 107 states: "In the second petition, which is, *Thy kingdom come*, we pray that Satan's kingdom may be destroyed, and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it, and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened." On that last, unique, blessed day, we will no longer need to pray this petition, because the kingdom of glory will have arrived! Until then, we join in with the final prayer in the Scriptures – "Come, Lord Jesus":

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20).

There are two features of our Savior's eternal reign that are specially marked out here in verse 9. The first is the extent of His rule: *And the LORD will be king over all the earth*. Mackay elaborates:

Although the word "earth" may also be translated "land," and that at first seems to fit in with the Palestinian orientation of the surrounding verses, in fact "earth" is required to do justice to the extensive scope of what is being described here. Many of the psalms had spoken of the reign of the LORD, "the great King over all the earth" (Ps. 47:2; 93:1; 97:1; 99:1-2), and Zechariah is describing the time when His universal dominion will be openly and outwardly acknowledged on all sides. He at present rules all, but His authority is not recognized by a world in rebellion against Him. The time will come when the LORD will not only be, but also be seen to be, the universal ruler (Mackay, p. 260).

The second emphasis is on the unity of His name: *On that day the LORD will be one and his name one*. The *Shema* is the great monotheistic declaration of the Old Testament, which is quoted by devout Jews, even today, on a daily basis:

⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

The *Shema* excludes all other gods or idols from our hearts—it requires us to submit to and love Him alone. "What is now predicted is that there will be universal acknowledgment of this. 'Name' refers to all the character and attributes of the one who alone can truly say, 'I am that I

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am’ (Ex. 3:14). They will be acknowledged as the only true authority and standard. He will be universally honored as the unique one (cp. 1 Cor. 8:5-6)” (Mackay, p. 260). In eternity, there will be no other kingdoms, no other kings, no other gods vying for the attention of men. All men will serve only one King and one Lord, Jesus Christ. All false gods, all vain worship, indeed, all sin will be done away with, leaving behind the pure, universal, glorious, righteous, and holy kingdom of God.

What a joy it will be to live as a citizen in the kingdom of this king! “The government shall be upon His shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Is. 9:6). This is the promised blessing of the *return of the King*. Phillips summarizes:

The Lord who has been king *de jure* is now king *de facto*; here, He takes up in fact the authority that all along He has possessed by right. All His rivals are put beneath His feet; in all the world there will be but one Lord and one name to which all will look to salvation (Phillips, p. 312-313).

c) *Land Remade (14:10)*

¹⁰*The 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.*

The third blessing of the consummation is the *exaltation of the City of God*. This blessing is connoted by two interrelated pictures. The first is a flattening of the land. Consistent with the context of the passage and the language of geographical and cosmological disruption being used, the exaltation of God’s city is metaphorically depicted by an upheaval in the topography of the land of Judah. The earthquake which split the Mount of Olives and created the river of living waters (upon the return of the King), is also responsible for flattening mountains and creating plains: *The whole land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem.*

The town of Geba was six miles northeast of Jerusalem, on the northern border of Judah with Benjamin (1 Kgs. 15:22; 2 Kgs. 23:8). Meanwhile, Rimmon was thirty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem, representing the southern boundary of Judah (cp. Jos. 15:21, 32). Thus, the changes described here are to affect the entirety of Judah. In the original Hebrew, the land is to be remade like the Arabah, the broad valley in which the Jordan River and Dead Sea reside. Most English translations understand this to mean that the Judean hills are to be flattened into a plain, similar to the picture envisioned by Isaiah:

³A voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

⁵And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Isaiah 40:3-5).

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The purpose of leveling the land of Judah is to enhance the prospects of the city of Jerusalem, which remains high and lifted up. This is the second picture that Zechariah gives to depict the exaltation of God's city: *But Jerusalem shall remain aloft on its site*. The description that follows is intended to encompass the entire perimeter of the city, signifying that the entirety of the city is raised up under the administration of its righteous King. Baldwin describes these locations:

The Gate of Benjamin, leading to Benjamin's territory, is likely to have been in or near the north-east corner of the wall (Jer. 37:12-13). *The place of the former gate* is unknown, but as the *Corner Gate* marked the western limit, the former gate was possible a site in the north wall. *The Tower of Hananel* (Neh. 3:1; 12:39) was the most northerly point of the wall, and *the king's winepresses* were to the south, near the King's Pool (Neh. 2:14) and the king's garden (Neh. 3:15). Thus, the naming of landmarks on the east, west, north, and south walls emphasizes that the whole city is included (Baldwin, p. 204).

Zechariah's prophecy is in accord with what the earlier prophets Isaiah and Micah wrote about the exaltation of Jerusalem:

It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the Lord
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be lifted up above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it (Isaiah 2:2; cp. Micah 4:1).

Remember that symbolically, the city of Jerusalem and the land of Judah represent the entire people of God, now constituted in the New Testament as the church of Jesus Christ. Phillips explains:

The point here is theological rather than topographical; it is the prophetic ideal achieved in the glorification of God's mountain and city (cp. Is. 2:2)... Jerusalem was a small and insignificant city in the eyes of the world. Babylon, Susa, Memphis—these were the exalted cities, the centers of action and the first in importance. But in the end will be revealed what has always been true: it is God's city—His church, His people—which really is foremost in significance. It is always the case that, unnoticed by the world, what really matters is what God is doing through His people. It is the simple act of service born of faith in Christ, the caring witness to the gospel, the worship arising from a humble heart—things about which the world does not care, and which will never bring praise from men—that God values most and which He will exalt on that day. Revelation 21:10-11 speaks of God's city raised up in glory and shining with the holy works of His people (Phillips, p. 311).

Thus, the third blessing, the exaltation of the City of God, is nothing less than the glorification of God's church, His holy people. Justification, God declaring us righteous, has led to sanctification, the process whereby God purifies us through His refining fire, in order to prepare us for glorification, when we at last are fit for heaven, able to enjoy its glory forever..

d) *Living in Security (14:11)*

¹¹*And it shall be inhabited, for there shall never again be a decree of utter destruction. Jerusalem shall dwell in security.*

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The fourth and final blessing of Zechariah's eschatological vision is *eternal peace and prosperity*. This is depicted in three ways. First, the City of God, with its life-giving river, its righteous King, and its exalted position, *shall be inhabited*. At first glance, this seems anti-climactic. Why wouldn't the city be inhabited? But we shouldn't presume upon God's grace. There is no inherent reason that any of us should have citizenship in God's city based upon our own merit or qualifications. In fact, if the prerequisite for admission were our own righteous works, then the city indeed would be a deserted ghost town! But the very promise of habitation in the holy city presupposes a remnant saved by grace, a people rescued from sin and death and redeemed by the spotless blood of our precious Lamb, Jesus Christ.

Indeed, in Zechariah's day, the population of Jerusalem was precariously low. Although the temple had been reconstructed, it would be another 50 years or more before Nehemiah would rebuild the city walls. In that day and age, an open city was an invitation for an invading army to pillage your possessions and take you away captive into slavery. There certainly was no security or uncontested safety in living within the precincts of Jerusalem of that day. Even in Nehemiah's day, the population of Jerusalem was so sparse that citizens living in the countryside of Judah were chosen by lot to relocate to the capital (Neh. 7:4; 11:1-2). Thus, the promise of an inhabited city was no mean thing to Zechariah and the returned remnant of Judah.

The second aspect of the city's establishment is its perpetuity: *for there shall never again be a decree of utter destruction*. This is a reference to the Old Testament concept of the "ban" or "curse" (Heb. *herem*). When Israel invaded the land of Canaan, they imposed the "ban" on the city of Jericho, its inhabitants, and all its possessions. Everything inside the town was to be "devoted to the LORD for destruction" (Jos. 6:17-18). Because Achan disobeyed the ban and stole some possessions from Jericho (Jos. 7:1), Israel later lost the battle of Ai (Jos. 7:4-5). When Achan's treachery was uncovered, he and his family suffered the ban of destruction for his sin (Jos. 7:24-25).

The fate of those who disobey God is the same: the curse of utter destruction. Israel herself fell under the ban of God because of her sin (cp. Is. 43:28; Mal. 4:6). For those who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ and made righteous by His atonement, we no longer have any fear of the curse of God falling on us, because it has already fallen on the Savior in our place:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" (Galatians 3:13).

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Thus, the promise of the ban of God's curse being lifted is one of very good news! It corresponds to the vision of the New Jerusalem by the Apostle John:

No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him (Revelation 22:3).

The final element of this blessing is safety: *Jerusalem shall dwell in security*. The people of God have nothing to fear, because the Lord is in their midst. He is not only their King, but their comforter and security system. God had earlier promised during the third night vision of Zechariah:

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And I will be to her a wall of fire all around, declares the Lord, and I will be the glory in her midst (Zechariah 2:4).

If the Lord is for us, who can be against us? (cp. Rom. 8:31). The net result of this promised blessing, where the City of God is inhabited in perpetuity and in safety, is peace and prosperity for its citizens. Heaven is not some kind of “second-best” alternative. It is a place to be desired above all others, for only there can life be lived to the fullest, as it was originally designed to be lived, secure in the protection of our Savior and King, the Lord Jesus forever.

Conclusion and Application

The New Jerusalem, the eternal City of God, the eschatological kingdom of heaven, is the culmination of redemptive history. The world started in a beautiful, perfect paradise of a Garden, but it will end in a glorious, wonderful, City where the abundance of living waters, the presence of the righteous King, the exaltation of a glorified people, and the peace and prosperity of holiness will extend for all eternity. The theme of this passage has been: *Upon the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, He will complete the salvation of His people, consummate redemptive history, and establish His blessed, eternal, heavenly kingdom.*

What an amazing prophecy and a glorious hope! Truly the Christian has much to look forward to, and we should wait with eager expectation for the promised return of the King and the establishment of His eternal kingdom. But of course, we have more to do than just wait for the consummation. We need to live holy lives now in light of that hope, as the Apostle Paul exhorts and Phillips explains:

¹¹For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹²training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Titus 2:11-14).

This message is not just about a distant future. It tells us that where Jesus comes to reign, there is peace. This is true now, just as it will be throughout the earth on that great day to come. Zechariah prophesies Christ’s return to His city with a mighty salvation, If you through faith will crown Jesus king of your life, then He will come to you now with the same power to remove your sin, cleanse your walls, and strengthen you to join Him in triumph. And as king, He will be your Lord and protector, leading you through life until “on that day” He has finished your salvation, and you, like His city, dwell in security and peace forever (Phillips, p. 314).

What can we say in response but this: “Come, Lord Jesus!”

For next time: Read Zechariah 14:12-21.