Zechariah 14 and the Coming Worldwide Kingdom

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Zechariah 14 has significant information concerning the kingdom of God, and thus should be a major area of study for those desiring to understand the kingdom. Important for our purposes is verse 9 which states:

And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.

This is an explicit text that the LORD will be king over the earth. Thus, we can say there will be an earthly kingdom. At that time no nation will worship its own gods, unlike today, for the Lord will establish His rule and there will be no doubt who the true God is.

With Zechariah 14, we learn much about this earthly kingdom, both in timing and nature from what comes before and after verse 9. Let us start with verses 1–8 which indicate that the Lord’s rule over the earth comes in the context of certain future events.

A Kingdom after Tribulation (1–8)

Verses 1–8 show that the Lord’s reign upon the earth is preceded by a time of calamity upon Jerusalem. Verse 1 indicates that “a day is coming” which puts the events of Zechariah 14 in the future. Verse 2 then predicts a time of turmoil that will befall Jerusalem:

For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city.

God says “I will gather” which indicates that what is to take place is in accord with His sovereign plans and initiative.

We also see that “the nations” will be coming “against Jerusalem.” Note that “nations” here is plural which means the attack involves several nations, not just one.

The city being attacked is “Jerusalem.” This means that the city of Jerusalem has important significance to God. The consequences of this attack upon Jerusalem initially are awful—the city is captured; houses are plundered; women are taken advantage of; and half the city is exiled.

According to verse 3, “the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations.” This indicates that the terrible calamity upon Jerusalem is temporary and not permanent. Jerusalem is attacked and wounded, but only for a time. The Lord comes to Jerusalem’s defense.

Verse 4 states that the LORD’s feet “will stand on the Mount of Olives” in front of Jerusalem on the east side. And the Mount of Olives “will be split in its middle from east to west.” Verse 5
declares that the LORD God will come with His holy ones, His heavenly army. Verses 6 and 7 also indicate that there will be cosmic signs. Verse 8 shows that at this time “living waters will flow out of Jerusalem.” Half will flow toward the eastern sea and half to the western sea. This will be the case in both summer and winter. Thus, kingdom conditions will bring nourishment and prosperity to the area.

All of these things lead up to the statement in verse 9 that: “And the LORD will be king over all the earth.” Thus, various events happen in connection with the Lord’s kingdom over the earth:

- The nations will attack Jerusalem and cause temporary harm to the city (2).
- The Lord will fight against these nations who attack Jerusalem (3).
- The Lord will return to the Mount of Olives and cause major geographical changes to the area (4).
- There will be cosmic signs (6–7).
- Living waters will flow out of Jerusalem (8).
- The Lord will be king over the earth (9).

I understand these events to be literal. As Merrill states, “There is no reason to take this in any but a literal way, unless one is prepared to deny a literal coming of YHWH as well.”

Also, these events, individually and collectively have not yet happened in history. Therefore, we should expect a future fulfillment of them.

In sum, Zech 14:1–9 gives us important information concerning the timing of God’s kingdom. On a future day, when Jerusalem is under siege by the nations, the Lord himself will defend the city and its inhabitants, returning to the Mount of Olives. Cosmic signs and major topographical changes will take place. At that time, “The Lord will be king over all the earth” (14:9).

The Nature of the Kingdom (Zechariah 14:10–21)

Zechariah 14:1–9 revealed the timing of the kingdom of God. God’s kingdom comes in the context of a multi-national siege of Jerusalem that is foiled by the Lord’s intervention on behalf of Jerusalem and the people of Israel. At that time, “The Lord will be king over all the earth” (v. 9).

Verse 10–21 reveal important details about the nature of the kingdom. The kingdom involves even more changes to Jerusalem as verse 10 indicates: “All the land will be changed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; but Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site from Benjamin’s Gate as far as the place of the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king’s wine presses.” Verse 11 also shows that “Jerusalem will dwell in security.”

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Verses 12–15 describe what will happen to those who previously waged war against Jerusalem. Destruction, panic, and plague befall the enemies of Israel.

Now this will be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples who have gone to war against Jerusalem; their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongue will rot in their mouth. 13 It will come about in that day that a great panic from the LORD will fall on them; and they will seize one another’s hand, and the hand of one will be lifted against the hand of another. 14 Judah also will fight at Jerusalem; and the wealth of all the surrounding nations will be gathered, gold and silver and garments in great abundance. 15 So also like this plague will be the plague on the horse, the mule, the camel, the donkey and all the cattle that will be in those camps.

Verses 16–19 then detail the relationship of the nations to the kingdom:

16 Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. 17 And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. 18 If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the LORD smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. 19 This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Several points from this section are worthy of note.

First, there are some people from the nations that survive the judgments of the Lord (v. 16).

Second, those who survive the judgments of the Lord from among the nations will go to Jerusalem to worship the King. The nations must now come to worship the King in person as He rules from Jerusalem, His capital city. This shows that Jerusalem as a city and Israel as a nation have future significance.

Third, survivors from the nations will celebrate the Feast of Booths. This feast was one of three times on Israel’s calendar when God’s people were to present themselves at the sanctuary (see Lev. 23:34–44). The purpose of the feast was to celebrate the Lord’s provision for Israel during their wilderness journey.

So how will an Israelite feast relate to the nations when the Lord rules upon the earth? Eugene Merrill points out that “there is evidence that this was an occasion for some kind of recognition of the king as YHWH’s son and representative.” Thus, “For the nations to observe the Feast of Tabernacles was for them to come in submission before the King of all the earth and render to Him their expressions of subservience.” In short, the Feast of Booths will be an opportunity for the nations of the earth, as national entities, to express their allegiance to the Lord.

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Fourth, nations that do not observe the Feast of Booths will experience negative consequences. The Lord will smite the nations that disobey. Egypt for example, who appears as a representative of the nations at this time, will not experience rainfall. This shows that during this phase of the Lord’s reign over the earth, disobedience is still possible for some and that the Lord’s righteous reign involves punishment on occasion.

Verses 20–21 indicate that everything during this period will be holy to the Lord, even those things usually considered mundane:

In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, “HOLY TO THE LORD.” And the cooking pots in the LORD’S house will be like the bowls before the altar. Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the LORD of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts in that day.

In sum, this section reveals that the Lord will reign from Jerusalem over the nations. The nations must show their allegiance by observing the Feast of Booths. Those nations that do not obey the Lord will experience negative consequences, including the withholding of blessings.

**Theological Implications of Zechariah 14**

Let us highlight some key theological implications of this chapter.

First, Zechariah 14 affirms that there is a coming kingdom upon the earth. Verse 9 explicitly states—“And the LORD will be king over all the earth.” God will rule over the planet He created. Eugene Merrill is correct that, “The God who led His people through spatial, temporal history will recreate the cosmos in those same categories. This is why a literal hermeneutic is essential in the absence of compelling evidence otherwise.”

Second, Zechariah 14 affirms that the kingdom follows tribulation. The kingdom comes following the siege and deliverance of Jerusalem.

Third, Zechariah 14 affirms the future significance of Jerusalem and the people of Israel. Jerusalem is not only delivered by the Lord, it appears to operate as the capital city of the Lord’s kingdom. Jesus himself predicted that a day was coming when Gentile domination over Jerusalem would come to an end (see Luke 21:24).

Fourth, the coming kingdom has universal implications. The kingdom does not just involve Israel—it involves all the nations. The Messiah will be “king over all the earth.” The concept of God’s blessings being mediated through Israel to the Gentiles is affirmed once again (see Gen 12:2-3).

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Fifth, Zechariah 14 affirms that there will be an intermediate kingdom that is distinct from the present age and the final eternal state. Wayne Grudem states the issue well:

Here again the description [Zech 14:5–17] does not fit the present age, for the Lord is King over all the earth in this situation. But it does not fit the eternal state either, because of the disobedience and rebellion against the Lord that is clearly present.4

These conditions of Zechariah 14 can only occur in an intermediate kingdom between the present age and the eternal state. While people from all nations are being saved in the church age, the nations themselves do not obey our Lord (see Psalm 2). In fact, they persecute those who belong to the Lord. In the coming kingdom Jesus will rule the nations while He is physically present on earth. The nations will obey and submit to His rule, but as Zechariah 14 points out, whenever a nation does act as they should there is punishment. On the other hand, in the eternal state there will be absolutely no disobedience on the part of the nations. The picture of the nations in the eternal state is only positive. The kings of the nations bring their contributions to the New Jerusalem (see Rev 21:24) and the leaves of the tree of life are said to be for the healing of the nations (see Rev 22:2).

To compare:

**Present Age:** Jesus is in Heaven and the nations do not yet submit to Jesus as King.

**Millennial Kingdom:** Jesus rules the nations on earth and punishes those nations that do not act as they should.

**Eternal State:** The nations act exactly as they should with no need of punishment.

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