

Zechariah 14 — Its Relation to Christ's Two Advents

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The Background, Structure, and Themes of Zechariah

“The historical situation is the same as that of Haggai. The people of Judah had returned from exile in 536 B.C., but the joy and enthusiasm (see Ps. 126) that had characterized their return were gone. . . . [The people] responded positively to the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah; the temple was dedicated on March 12, 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:15-18).”¹

“Accepting the division between chapters 1 to 8 and 9 to 14, [Brevard] Childs argues in favor of a relationship between the two sections. According to him the second section expands, develops, and sharpens the theological pattern of the ‘end time,’ which emerges from chapters 1 to 8. The book thus seeks to explain that notwithstanding the return from exile, the full experience of redemption still lies in the future.”² Within the basic two-part structure of the book, chapters 9-14 divide into two parts: chapters 9-11 and 12-14. The basic themes of chapters 9 to 14 involve Israel and the nations and the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth. Chapters 12 to 14 bring these themes to a climax.

Interpreting Zechariah

“The presence of visions, symbolism, and eschatological imagery classify Zechariah [particularly ch. 14] as a prophetic-apocalyptic writing.”³ In interpreting Zechariah 14, it is important to bear in mind that, in both his descriptions of blessings and plagues that will occur after the Lord’s eschatological return to earth, Zechariah uses the language of “prophetic idiom,” i.e., the OT prophets

¹ VanGemeren, *Interpreting*, 193.

² *Ibid.*, 194.

³ *Ibid.*

speak of Messiah's eternal kingdom *using the language and limited frame of reference of their own physical, Israelite context.*⁴ In light of the coming of Christ and the NT, to the extent that Zechariah prophesies about eschatological events, the prophecies cannot be taken "literally."⁵ Even Zechariah himself indicates that since he "described it [Jerusalem] as a 'city without walls' (2:4) and composed of 'many nations . . . joined with the Lord' (2:11). He is using Jerusalem as a symbol of the truth about God's kingdom which, Jesus says, is 'not of this world' (John 18:36)."⁶

As with the book of Revelation and Dan 9:24-27, historically there have been several different interpretations of Zechariah 14. Wolters lists seven: (1) Except for the last 2 verses (which pertain to end-times) the rest of the chapter was fulfilled in connection with the Maccabean Revolt of the 160s BC; (2) It covers the period from Christ's first coming to the second coming; (3) It covers Israel's return from exile to the coming of Christ; (4) It is a non-literal description of the end-times; (5) It is a literal description of the end-times; (6) It concerns the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC; (7) It is apocalyptic language not specifically tied to any historical or future event.⁷

Several passages in chapters 12 to 14 are quoted from or alluded to in the NT as applying to Christ's first advent as well as his second. However, because chapter 14 in particular is clearly eschatological, those passages from chapter 14 that apply to Christ's first advent probably are best seen as doing so because the two advents are connected: the first inaugurated the kingdom; the second consummates the kingdom.

Several aspects of Zechariah 14 relate to Christ's inauguration of the kingdom

* *Zech 14:4 (Matt 24:3; Mark 13:3; Acts 1:12)*—This was literally fulfilled when our Lord Jesus was often upon this mountain, especially when thence "*he ascended up into heaven,*" Acts 1:11.

* *Zech 14:7 (John 1:4, 9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 12:46)*—In the gospel of John, the dawning of the light [promised in Zech 14:7 to occur *'in that day'*] in the coming of Jesus is a prominent theme.

* *Zech 14:8 (John 7:37-38)*—"In fulfillment of the OT prophetic vision (Zech. 14:8; Ezek. 47:9), Jesus inaugurated the age of God's abundance. Jesus' offer of living water signals the reversal of the curse and the barrenness that are characteristic

⁴ See the main text, chapter 2, the section "Prophetic idiom."

⁵ See main text, chapter 3-Old Testament Eschatological Expectations and the Significance of Christ's First Coming.

⁶ Yilpet, "Zechariah," 1092.

⁷ Wolters, "Zechariah 14," 39-56.

of the old fallen world.”⁸

* *Zech 14:16-19 (feast of tabernacles)*—In light of its connection with the harvest, tabernacles took on eschatological meaning. It “looked forward to the final joyful harvest, when Israel’s mission on earth should be completed by gathering all the nations of the world to the Lord, as prophesied by Zechariah (14:16).”⁹ The feast of tabernacles finds its fulfillment in Jesus. John 11:52 makes clear that Jesus is gathering his people.¹⁰ However, his gathering does not involve geographical relocation to Israel or Jerusalem. Jesus said that his being lifted up by his death on the cross is what “*will draw all men to Myself*” (John 12:32). “Jesus, not the ‘promised land’, is now the focus of this long-awaited ‘ingathering.’”¹¹

* *Zech 14:20-21 (Matt 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46; John 2:12-16)*—When Jesus drove the money changers and sellers out of the temple, he was proclaiming the holiness and the beginning of the messianic transformation of the meaning of the temple.

The Olivet Discourse is a “retelling” of Zechariah 14

The setting of Jesus’ Olivet Discourse is the Mount of Olives. “This can hardly be accidental. . . . Jesus seems to intend an allusion to Zechariah 14.4-5. The context is the coming of the divine kingdom (Zechariah 14.9) and the coming great battle of the nations against Jerusalem (14.1-3). . . . The force of the setting then seems to be that this was Jesus’ paradoxical retelling of the great story found in Zechariah 14: in predicting Jerusalem’s last great struggle, the ‘coming’ of YHWH, and the final arrival of the divine kingdom, he was acting to fulfill [sic], in his own reinterpreted fashion, the prophecy of Zechariah.”¹² The idea that Jesus was alluding to or “retelling” Zechariah 14 is reinforced by his references to “fleeing,”¹³ the sun and the moon being darkened,¹⁴ and his coming with “*all the angels with Him.*”¹⁵

Zechariah 14 applies to Christ’s Second Advent, and the Eternal State He will Inaugurate when He Returns

Zechariah 14 is quoted or alluded to, or is otherwise fulfilled, in connection with

⁸ Kostenberger, “John,” 438.

⁹ Hillyer, “First Peter,” 40.

¹⁰ See also John 4:35; 10:16; Rev 5:9; 7:9.

¹¹ Walker, *Jesus*, 189.

¹² Wright, *Victory*, 344-45. See also Barker, “Zechariah,” 824-25 regarding how Zech 14:2 bears on the meaning of Jesus’ statement in Luke 21:24 that Jerusalem will be trampled on until the “*times of the Gentiles*” are fulfilled.

¹³ Matt 24:16; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:21; compare Zech 14:5.

¹⁴ Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25; compare Zech 14:6.

¹⁵ Matt 25:31; compare Zech 14:5b.

Christ's second advent:

* *Zech 14:1, 4, 6-8, 13, 20, 21 (a day for the Lord; that day)*—Matt 24:36; Mark 13:32; Luke 17:24, 31; 21:34; Acts 2:20; 17:31; Rom 2:5; 13:12; 1 Cor 1:7-8; 3:13; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; Eph 4:30; Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16; 1 Thess 5:2, 4; 2 Thess 1:10; 2:1-2; 2 Tim 1:12, 18; 4:8; Heb 10:25; 1 Pet 2:12; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 6:17; 16:14.

* *Zech 14:1-2, 14 (all nations gathered by God for war)*—Rev 16:14-16; 19:19-21; 20:7-9a.

* *Zech 14:3, 12-15 (the Lord will fight/plague the nations)*—Rev 8:7-9:20; 16:1-19; 18:8-20; 19:11, 15, 20-21; 20:9b-10.

* *Zech 14:4a (the Lord will return to earth)*—Matt 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27; Acts 1:11; 1 Thess 4:16.

* *Zech 14:4-5 (Mount of Olives will split like earthquake)*—Rev 6:14; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18-21; 20:11.

* *Zech 14:5b (the Lord will come with His holy ones)*—Matt 25:31; Mark 8:38; 1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:7; Rev 19:14.

* *Zech 14:6 (no light on that day)*—Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24; Acts 2:20; Rev 6:12.

* *Zech 14:7a (a unique day known to the Lord)*—Matt 24:36; Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7.

* *Zech 14:7b (no day nor night, but there will be light)*—Rev 21:23-25; 22:5.

* *Zech 14:8 (living waters flow from Jerusalem)*—Rev 22:1-2.

* *Zech 14:9 (the Lord will be king of all the earth)*—Rev 11:15; 19:6; 21:3, 6-7, 22; 22:5.

* *Zech 14:10 (the land will be changed)*—Rom 8:17-25; 2 Pet 3:3-15; Rev 21:10-21.

* *Zech 14:11 (no more curse)*—Rev 22:3.

* *Zech 14:13 (panic; civil war among the ungodly)*—Rev 6:15-17; 11:13; 17:16.

* *Zech 14:16-19 (the nations will worship the Lord)*—Rev 21:24-26.

* *Zech 14:20-21a (all will be holy to the Lord)*—Rev 21:3, 7; 22:3-4.

* Zech 14:21b (no Canaanite/merchant will be there)—Rev 21:8, 27; 22:15.¹⁶

Revelation Reinterprets Zechariah 14

Revelation takes every OT image and each limited frame of reference in Zechariah and expands or transforms it.

* *Zech 14:1-2 (Jerusalem)*. In Rev 11:8, the phrase “*where also their Lord was crucified*” suggests Jerusalem, but because of its rejection of Christ and persecution of the church physical Jerusalem’s true character is described as “*Sodom and Egypt*.” Further, it is called “*the great city*” which is consistently used throughout Revelation to describe Babylon the great.¹⁷ On the other hand, Rev 21:2, 10; 22:19 describe the *New Jerusalem* as the “*holy city*.”

* *Zech 14:2* quotes God as saying, “*I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle*.” That indicates that the literal, physical city of Jerusalem is not in view since “it would impossible for everyone from all the nations to come physically to do battle against Jerusalem.”¹⁸ Rev 16:14-16; 19:19-21; 20:7-9a make clear that the eschatological “*battle*” is world-wide and involves God’s defeat of all who oppose Christ and the church.

* *Zech 14:3, 12-15 (eschatological conflict)*. In the OT, “it is usually Jahweh himself who marches forth to a victorious warfare to establish his reign over his enemies (Isa. 13:4; 31:4; Ezek. 38-39; Joel 3; Zech. 14:3).”¹⁹ Second Thess 2:8; Rev 2:16; 19:11, 15; 20:9b specify that it is Christ who will slay his enemies at the *parousia* simply by the sword of the word of his mouth. Zech 14:13 reflects an “*eschatological state of chaos*” like that described in Ezek 38:21; Hag 2:22 and is indicated in Rev 6:15-17; 11:13; 17:16.²⁰

* *Zech 14:4-5a (His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives)*. Zech 14:4 is a depiction of the *parousia*. Although some take this as a literal description of Jesus returning to earth and “*touching down*” on the Mount of Olives, the combined pictures of Zech 14:4-5 as a whole cannot be taken as literal, physical descriptions, for the following reasons: (A) Zech 14:4 “*portrays God anthropomorphically, describing his feet standing on Jerusalem’s soil. The Lord*

¹⁶ The word for “Canaanite” can also mean “merchant” who bought and sold goods in the temple and elsewhere. That latter sense is how Jesus applied it when he cast out the money changers from the temple. Eschatologically, Canaanites may be referred to “not as a historical entity, but as a powerful literary symbol of illicit worship. . . . The complete spiritual restoration will forever remove every vestige of sin from creation, allowing all to worship God righteously.” Klein, *Zechariah*, 428-29.

¹⁷ Rev 14:8; 17:18; 18:2, 10, 16, 18-19, 21.

¹⁸ Klein, *Zechariah*, 400.

¹⁹ Ladd, *Commentary*, 252; see also Klein, *Zechariah*, 418.

²⁰ Ladd, *Commentary*, 233; see also Klein, *Zechariah*, 418.

appears as a colossus astride the mounts surrounding Jerusalem.”²¹ *“His feet shall stand* (v. 4) [is] a symbol of domination over every foe.”²² (B) When Christ returns, according to Rev 6:14; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18-21; 20:11, the earthquake that accompanies the *parousia*, if taken literally, has a much more cosmic scope than does the splitting of the Mount of Olives or earthquake described in Zech 14:4-5.

* Likewise, the references to “fleeing” in Zech 14:5 cannot be literal: Rev 8:7—9:20; 16:1-19; 18:8-20; 19:11, 15, 20-21; 20:9b-10 describe the “plagues” that the Lord will bring on the earth in connection with the *parousia* and also describe how at his coming there will, in fact, be no survivors among the wicked (Rev 19:20-21). “Exactly who is it that will make that escape flight when the mountains cleft? It cannot be the wicked, for the Bible teaches that they will be destroyed when the Lord returns (Mt. 25:31-46; 2 Thes. 1:7-9). Moreover, it cannot be the righteous, for they will be ‘caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air’ (1 Thes. 4:17). Who, pray tell, is left?”²³ “The ancient imagery should not obscure the theological theme of the verse. The Lord will protect his people and save them from annihilation.”²⁴ That is what Matt 24:31; Mark 13:27; Luke 21:28; 1 Thess 4:16-17; Rev 20:9 assure us.

* *Zech 14:5b (the Lord will come with the holy ones)*. The NT indicates that “all the holy ones” refers to Christians who accompany Christ at the *parousia* (or Christians along with angels). First Thess 3:13 speaks of “at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints [‘holy ones’].” Jeffrey Weima states that, for the quotation in 1 Thess 3:13, there is good evidence that Paul depends on Zech. 14:5 LXX in which “holy ones” refers to angels, but Paul appears to have reinterpreted “holy ones” to mean believers because every other time he uses the plural *haigoi* (“saints” or “holy ones”) he refers to believers.²⁵

* *Zech 14:6 (there will be no light)*. *In Zech 14:6* “there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle”; *that is paralleled by Rev 6:12; 8:12; 16:10 (and by Christ’s statements in Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25)*.²⁶

* *Zech 14:7 (a unique day; light at night)*. *Zech 14:7 says there will be neither day nor night, yet there will be light, but it does not indicate the eschatological source of light. Rev 22:5 specifies that the source of light for the new heavens and new*

²¹ Klein, *Zechariah*, 403.

²² Higginson, “Zechariah,” 801.

²³ Jackson, “Dispensationalism,” n.p.

²⁴ Klein, *Zechariah*, 405.

²⁵ Weima, “1-2 Thessalonians,” 875. See Rom 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:1-2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 2:19; 3:8; Phil. 1:1; 4:22; Col. 1:4, 26; 3:12; 1 Tim. 5:10; see also Rev 17:14; 19:14.

²⁶ As was discussed in the main text regarding the Olivet Discourse and the book of Revelation, the cosmic changes such as are described by Zechariah may or may not be literal. With respect to Zechariah specifically, Thomas McComiskey states, “Such cosmic changes characterize other prophetic descriptions of divine intervention. . . . To take them always as literal depictions of actual physical phenomena is to miss the nature of prophetic language in general and of apocalyptic symbolism in particular.” McComiskey, “Zechariah,” 1233.

earth will be the Lord himself.

* *Zech 14:8 (living water).* The reference to “*in that day*” indicates eschatological finality. Rev 22:1 parallels Zechariah’s vision by describing the “*the river of the water of life . . . coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb.*” Further, Revelation expands Zechariah’s vision by applying it to the entire new earth.

* *Zech 14:9 (the Lord will be king over all).* Zech 14:9 says, “*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.*” Rev 1:8; 3:12; 4:8; 5:5-14; 7:9-12; 11:15-17; 14:1; 21:3-7, 22-23; 22:1-5 have a much more Christocentric focus and equate “*God and the Lamb.*” Unlike Zech 14:9, the closeness of the Lord and his people in the new earth is indicated by Rev 22:5 which says the saints “*will reign forever and ever.*”

* *Zech 14:10 (the [New] Jerusalem).* In Zech 14:10, “The dimensions of the city are those of the eighth-century capital in its prime, with mention of the Benjamin (e.g., Jer. 20:2), First and Corner (e.g., 31:38) Gates, the Tower of Hananel (e.g., 31:38), and the royal winepresses (39:4).”²⁷ Rev 21:10-21 changes that picture, and turns the New Jerusalem into a Holy of Holies that is equivalent to the entire new earth.²⁸

* *Zech 14:11 (no more curse).* Zech 14:11 anticipates Rev 21:1 in which all is new and “*the first earth passed away.*” Rev 22:3 says “*there will no longer be any curse.*” The phrase is taken from Zech 14:11, but the “curse” goes beyond the Hebrew term *herem* (i.e., “putting under the ban”) used by Zechariah. The new heavens and new earth are the restoration or new creation of the entire world. Thus, reference to the curse goes back to Gen 3:13-19: “physical and spiritual death set on the human race by Adam in the first garden is permanently removed by the Lamb in the last garden at the time of the new creation.”²⁹

* *Zech 14:16-19 (feast of tabernacles).* As with Zechariah’s other images, these cannot be taken literally because the entire Old Covenant and all its feasts have been superseded in Christ.³⁰ Therefore, when Christ comes again he will not re-establish the Jewish sacrificial system and festivals, including the Feast of Tabernacles, in the physical city of Jerusalem. Further, there cannot be covenant curses in the New Jerusalem since, according to Rev 20:15; 21:27, no one whose name is not written in the book of life is able to enter the New Jerusalem but has been cast into the lake of fire. Indeed, the fact that Zechariah indicates that “any who are left of all the nations” will celebrate the feast of tabernacles shows that Zechariah is “anticipating the inclusion of the Gentiles in the covenant community—precisely what John [in Revelation] is depicting in his portrayal of

²⁷ Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, 527.

²⁸ See main text, chapter 11, the section “Overview of major ideas and sections,” regarding Rev 21:1—22:5.

²⁹ Beale, *Revelation*, 1112.

³⁰ John 7:2, 37-38; 8:12; Gal 3:10—5:4; Col 2:16-17; Heb 8:6-13; 10:9. See Menn, *Biblical Theology*.

the church as the New Israel.”³¹

* *Zech 14:20-21 (the house of the Lord and perfect holiness)*. Zech 14:20-21 indicates that there still will be a “house of the Lord” in the restored Jerusalem. Revelation 21-22 goes well beyond that. Revelation specifies that in the New Jerusalem there is no temple “for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Rev 21:22). Also, it so closely identifies the New Jerusalem with the people of God that it may be a metaphor for God’s people and his relationship with them. “The dwelling of God with man *in the form of a city* may . . . suggest the perfect social union of the redeemed with one another as God’s final and eternal answer to the successive societal failures littering the course of human history.”³²

“The final scene of Zechariah anticipates Revelation 11:15, toward which all history is steadily moving—‘the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever’—and Revelation 19:16—‘On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.’”³³ It also anticipates the absolute holiness of the new heaven and new earth, which symbolically is a new Holy of Holies.³⁴ “When every vessel in Jerusalem is as holy as the temple vessels, the whole city will have become the Holy of Holies, filled with God’s presence.”³⁵

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³¹ Smith, “Portrayal of the Church,” 116.

³² Ortlund, *God’s Unfaithful Wife*, 166n.73; see Rev 21:2, 9-10; cf. Rev 19:7-8.

³³ Barker, “Zechariah,” 833

³⁴ Compare 1 Kgs 6:16-20; 2 Chron 3:8 and Rev 21:16.

³⁵ Johnson, *Triumph*, 309-10n.12.

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