

The Kingdom Feast of Tabernacles

📖 Zechariah 14:12-21

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Today we come to the last lesson from the OT in our series Major Prophetic Passages. The way the prophetic picture develops is by progressive revelation. The procedure is to move from the OT to the NT. If you've been here for this series, you know there is a very clear prophetic picture emerging. Daniel is the key to this picture. He teaches us that Israel will be in exile under four successive Gentile kingdoms, each a larger and more complexly evil form until there is a global empire ruled by a global dictator who persecutes the nation Israel to a great degree but God delivers them at the moment of their greatest distress into a fifth and final kingdom, the kingdom of the Son of Man. Ezekiel adds major aspects to this picture. He teaches us that Israel will be regathered to the land in two phases during the final Gentile kingdom in preparation for the final kingdom. The first regathering is physical only, a return to the land from all over the world in unbelief in preparation for their time of great distress. The second regathering is spiritual, a return to the Lord in belief in preparation for the fifth and final kingdom. The return in belief is linked to an Islamic invasion of the land led by a Russian Czar because the Lord will deliver them and they will know the Lord has done this. Zechariah adds other aspects to the prophetic picture. He teaches us that the Campaign of Armageddon will also be instrumental in the nation Israel turning to the Lord in faith. This campaign is led by the anti-Christ who leads all the armies of the world against Israel. But at the critical time, when Jerusalem is captured, the Lord will pour forth His Spirit bringing about a repentant faith among the nation Israel. Once in belief the Lord will go forth on their behalf as on a day of battle and ultimately stand triumphant on the Mt of Olives. This is the prophetic picture that emerges from Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah and we must have this picture in mind when we turn to the NT major prophetic passages, lest we make mistakes. The first NT passage we will visit is Jesus' most extensive teaching on prophecy recorded in Matthew 24-25. The second will be prophecies related to the Church by Paul in 1 and 2 Thessalonians and there we will be interested to see how the Church fits into the prophetic picture outlined thus far. Lastly we will start the Book of Revelation. What I'm trying to do by doing it this way is build the picture progressively as the Lord revealed the pieces prophet by prophet so that you understand why we are premillennial and pretribulational. This is important because I have seen a number of people leave the pretribulational position. They often remain premillennial but they become mid-trib or pre-wrath or post-trib in their view of the rapture. In my estimation, the reason for this, and I'm not being condescending, but this is a complex arrangement and

they aren't putting the pieces together in the right way, as He revealed them under progressive revelation and the consequences of that are reading later pieces back into older pieces in a strange way. So what we are trying to do is avoid that and by allowing later pieces to be added to the picture but not read back into the picture. Today we will finish our studies in Zechariah.

What's happening in Zech 12-14 is the Campaign of Armageddon is being revealed. This campaign involves all the nations of the world gathering against Israel at the end of the Tribulation. The campaign will occur in two phases. During the first phase Jerusalem will suffer defeat. The enemy nations will plunder the houses, rape the women, divide the spoil, take half of the inhabitants for execution and trap the other half in the city. It is at this time that the Lord will pour forth His Spirit to do a great work among them. As a result, they will look upon the one they pierced with a repentant faith and will mourn as a mother and father mourn the loss of an only son. This will initiate the second phase of the campaign. In this phase Jerusalem will enjoy the Lord's deliverance as He goes forth to deliver them as on a day of battle. The enemy armies will be struck with confusion and they will kill one another. The Lord will send a great earthquake which will divide the Mt of Olives from east to west. The northern half will move north while the southern half will move south. This will create a very large valley for the trapped remnant of Israel to escape. As they flee to safety the Lord will physically return on an entirely unique day characterized by thick darkness. At the end of that day He will put His feet down on the Mt of Olives and His kingdom reign will begin. The earthquake will have renovated the surface of the earth into its design for the millennial kingdom. The land of Israel will be an elevated plain with the Temple at the highest point located at modern day Jerusalem. The Temple will be enormous, one-mile square. A stream will flow out from beneath the altar toward the east and then south through the Levitical inheritance and into the city of Jerusalem nearly 50 miles away, providing abundance of agricultural produce. The city of Jerusalem will be ten miles' square. The stream will flow through the city and then divide so that half of it goes west to the Mediterranean Sea and the other half goes east to the Dead Sea. These life-giving waters will transform the Dead Sea into fresh and it will teem with life. The land of Israel will enjoy peace and security forever in fulfillment of the covenants as the Lord will reign as King in their midst and the whole world will worship Him.

Today in Zech 14:12 the author backs up to give us more details about the second phase of the Campaign of Armageddon. This is the phase where the Lord goes forth to fight on their behalf. As Tom Constable says, "Chronologically these verses describe what will follow verse 3."¹ The Jews in the city will have suffered a terrible defeat, half of them will have been taken off for execution, the Spirit will have been poured out and the other half will be trapped but in faith. It is at that time that the Lord will go forth to fight on their behalf to deliver them. In this phase of the battle we have already seen in 12:4 that the Lord will strike the enemy with bewilderment and they will begin killing one another, in 12:6-8 the Lord will strengthen the Jewish remnant so that even the feeblest among them will be like David and those of the house of David will be like God in their heroic feats of battle and in 14:3 the Lord will split the Mt of Olives with a great earthquake providing a way of escape for the Jewish remnant. Today more details are added to this picture of the Lord going forth to fight.

In 14:12, the Lord will strike the enemy with plague. **Now this will be the plague which the LORD will strike all the people 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.** The Hebrew word translated **plague** is actually the same root translated **strike**, the first is the noun and the second is the verb. Literally it reads, "this will be the plague which the LORD will plague all the people." The word **plague** reminds us of the Exodus and the ten plagues God sent on Egypt for their anti-Semitism. The bowl judgments in Revelation are also referred to as **plagues** of great distress. This plague corresponds to the most severe and vexing plague under the seventh bowl in Revelation. The reason for **the plague** will be because these **people...have gone to war against Jerusalem. Jerusalem** is the city but it represents the wider people of Israel who consider Jerusalem the eternal capital city of the Jewish people. And woe to those who go against it for the Lord will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling and cause it's attackers to stagger in drunkenness. Anti-Semitism is the ultimate reason the Lord will send the plague. Anti-Semitism is hatred of a Jewish person because they are Jewish. It is essentially hatred of God because God has attached Himself to the Jewish people by unconditional covenants. These covenants define the plan of God for history. As such the Jewish people are at the center of God's plan to bless the world and that is why they are called the apple of His eye. To touch them is to try to destroy the plan of God and He will not allow that to be successful. Here is the plague described in three ways that will bring it to a halt. First, **their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet.** Wherever they have flesh it will begin to simply **rot** away. It will decay and begin to fall off of their bodies until they are nothing but a skeleton. Unger said, "...the flesh will **rot** or "decay" so quickly, that the victim will become a skeleton erect upon his feet, with his flesh a putrid mass about it."² The Hebrew construction is an infinitive absolute, meaning "the Lord will cause" this flesh to rot in a sudden and rapid way so that they are still on their feet as they rot away. Second, **their eyes will rot in their sockets.** Their eyes **will** decay while they are still attached to **their sockets.** Third, **their tongue will rot in their mouth.** Their **tongue will** decay while it is still attached to **their mouth.** The **tongue** is consumed because it blasphemed God. The eyes are struck because it sought out God's people to destroy them. The world has never seen anything like this. J Vernon McGee said, "May I say, this is a terrible thing." May I agree, it is terrible. It can be avoided, believe in the Lord Jesus and they will be saved.

In 14:13 we are given more details regarding the bewilderment the Lord will strike the enemy with as described earlier in 12:4. **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.** The word **great panic** means "to go about wildly, to be distracted." This is entirely caused by the Lord, it is from Him, and the panic will be among them. **They will seize one another's hand** means that one will raise his hand against another to strike and another will grab that hand. The phrase **and the hand of one will be lifted against the hand of another** means that they will use the other hand to strike. Unger explains, "Each attacker will first seize the other's hand with one hand to hold him powerless. Then he will lift his other hand to strike his neighbor, whose hand is also raised against him." In this way they will slaughter one another. Interestingly, there is no

need for guns for people to kill one another. All guns are is an equalizer for those who are weaker. But killing can be accomplished simply by one's hands. The text is clear that close quarters combat will take place as the enemies become confused and fight among itself and decimate their own forces.

In 14:14 we learn that **Judah also will fight at Jerusalem**. This is an expansion of 12:6-8 where we saw Judah fighting at Jerusalem as a firepot among wood chips and a flaming torch among sheaves. Thus, all **the wealth of all the surrounding nations will be gathered, gold and silver and garments in great abundance**. To the victor go the spoils and the spoils of Jerusalem which had gone initially to the enemy nations to be divided among them in the city, will now change hands and be returned to the Jews. And beyond that all **the wealth of all the surrounding nations will be gathered** to Israel to bring into the kingdom as the precious metal base for the new economy. This too reminds us of the Exodus when on the night the Lord struck the firstborn of all Egypt the Israelites went out with all the wealth of Egypt, both silver and gold as well as clothing (Exod 11:2; 12:35). In this way those who plundered them were plundered, an outworking of Gen 12:3, those who curse you will be cursed in the same way.

In 14:15 **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**. Just as the human enemy will be under the plague that results in destruction so it will be for the beasts of burden they use in their attack against Jerusalem. During the conquest Joshua and his armies were instructed to wipe out everything, both man and beast, so it will be again at the conquest of Messiah. Both man and beast will be under the ban and scheduled for destruction. Of course, it is not all the beasts of the earth but only those **that will be in the camps** of the soldiers that go up against Jerusalem. All of this death will accrue to the massive bloodletting described in the book of Revelation as flowing for 200 miles at a depth of four feet, a massive slaughter unparalleled in combat. And so the Lord will make an end to His enemies as His feet come to rest upon the Mt of Olives where He will judge the surviving Jews and Gentiles for entrance and reward in the kingdom.

14:16 takes us into the kingdom. **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**. The description of **any who are left of all the nations** must refer to believing Gentiles who did not go up against Jerusalem at Armageddon. They did not go up because they are believers and know God's plan for the Jewish people. Because they are believers they will enter into the kingdom in their mortal bodies and maintain their national identity. No believer ever acquires a new national identity. German believers remain German and Israeli believers remain Israeli. National distinctions remain forever. The Hebrew description, **any who are left**, implies that not many will be left, that it is a small number in the grand scheme. In the kingdom, these Gentile believers from each nation **will go up from year to year to worship the King**. They will live in their own respective nations on earth but will have a scheduled pilgrimage. The pilgrimage **will be to go up** to Jerusalem. Of course, Jerusalem will be sitting on an elevated plain, high above the surrounding valleys so they

literally must **go up**. The Hebrew words **from year to year** means “annually.” They will be required to make this pilgrimage once a year. The purpose of the pilgrimage will be **to worship the King**. As we learned in 14:9, the Messiah will be king over all the earth and He will be the only one and His name the only one. There will be no false gods or idols during the kingdom. He will be the only one who receives worship. He is God and King. He is also referred to as **the LORD of hosts**. **Hosts** is literally “armies” in the Hebrew. He is the Lord of all creation and as such all of creation serves as His armies as they obey His command just as a soldier obeys command. The **worship of the King** will be according to **the Feast of Booths**. This is the only one of the seven OT feasts that is ever said to be kept during the kingdom period. Why? Because it will be the only one that has not been fulfilled and the millennium will be its fulfillment. The Feast of Passover was fulfilled by Christ on the cross. He is the Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is being fulfilled positionally as individuals believe in Christ during the Church Age and experientially as they live by the Spirit. The Feast of Firstfruits was fulfilled by Christ’s resurrection. He is the firstfruits of the dead. The Feast of Pentecost was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Church began. These Spring Feasts have all been fulfilled or are being fulfilled during the Church age. The Fall Feasts still remain to be fulfilled. The Feast of Trumpets will either be fulfilled at the Rapture or at the Second Coming with the gathering of all Israel. The Day of Atonement will be fulfilled at the spiritual regeneration of the nation Israel near the end of the Tribulation. The only feast that will remain unfulfilled at that time will be the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. Unger says, *“Only the Feast of Tabernacles at that time will be unfulfilled in its prophetic aspect as typical of the kingdom rest of Israel after her regathering, and the blessedness typified by that festival will be in process of fulfillment throughout the kingdom age.”*³ It looks forward to the time when Israel will enjoy rest, feasting on the fat of the land and drinking of the fruit of the vine. Jesus said, “I will not drink of this vine until I come again in My kingdom.” The Feast of Tabernacles will be a time of great joy, celebration and rest. It is mentioned three times in these closing verses and should be understood in its fulfillment as equivalent to the kingdom. That is why the title of this lesson is *The Kingdom Feast of Tabernacles*. They are to be kept connected in a one to one correspondence in terms of their extent. Of interest is the fact that this feast was celebrated for eight days with the eighth day holding a particular joy associated with it. The first seven days the Israelites lived in make-shift booths but the eighth day they left the booths and returned to the luxuries of their homes. By correspondence the first seven days will find their fulfillment in the millennial phase of the kingdom and the eighth day will find its fulfillment in the eternal state of the kingdom. Of this eighth day Unger said, “This feature looks beyond the millennial kingdom to the eternal state when time merges into eternity, and it shall be said, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with me, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people” (Rev. 20:1). The kingdom age will be characterized by a tabernacling of God with men that will be greater than any previous era. But the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles, in prefiguring the eternal state, points to a tabernacling of God that will be endless and absolute.”⁴

14:17 makes this going up to worship the Lord a point of obedience for Gentile nations which if not attended to will result in cursing. **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. This note reminds us that during the kingdom the Lord will rule with a rod of iron. It will be an absolute rule and the point of required obedience for avoiding the rod of iron will be going up to Jerusalem to worship the King. By **families of the earth** is meant representatives of each nation on earth. Not every individual will have to make the pilgrimage any more than every individual in OT Israel had to go up for the feasts. But a representative of each family will be necessary to remain in obedience to the rod of iron Ruler. The punishment to be meted out for dissenters who send no representatives is that **there will be no rain on them.** The word is not the word for early or latter rains but great gushes of rain consistent with that which is suitable for plentiful crops. The effects of disobedience will be immediately visible and devastating upon the land and its agricultural produce among both crop and herd, a strong incentive to go up and **worship the King.** Nevertheless, its inclusion reminds us that the millennial kingdom will be inhabited by people like you and I, still possessing a sinful nature prone to rebellion against God and His rule over our life. Even Christ's presence will not precipitate belief in all circumstances.

In verse 18 Egypt is singled out among the nations. **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.** Egypt is interesting because it boasts in not being dependent upon rains but upon the swelling of the Nile for its agricultural productivity. However, it really is dependent on rains because those which cause the Nile to swell originate in the heart of Africa. Further, they have faced famine before as we know that in the days of Joseph there was famine for seven years. The point is that Egypt should not think that it can escape punishment because of the Nile. The Nile has been worshipped as a god but it is not a god and if Egypt does not go up then they will face famine along with any other nations that **do not go up** annually **to celebrate the Feast of Booths.** Verse 19 states this obliquely. **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.** For the third time the **Feast of Booths** is mentioned and shows that the point of obedience for Gentile nations in the millennial kingdom is keeping this feast annually. The Lord deserves to be worshipped and demands it of all nations on earth in that time. To withhold it because of spiritual recalcitrance constitutes sin resulting in the withholding of blessing. Of course, the punishments under His rod of rule reign will extend beyond the mere withholding of rain for other infractions of millennial law. His rule will be absolute and punishment meted out immediately. Putting the pieces together we see that the Messiah will rule from Jerusalem which will be the elevated capital of the entire millennial earth as well as its religious and governmental center, and justice will flow down like water and righteousness like an everlasting stream.

In 14:20-21 the passage moves on to picture the extent of holiness in Jerusalem and Judah in the kingdom. **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 verse 20 the description of

the inscription upon **the bells of the horses** will be **"HOLY TO THE LORD."** The significance of this inscription is that it was the inscription on a gold plate mounted upon the turban of the high priest. The high priest was considered in ancient Israel the most holy man in the entire nation. He alone was permitted to wear this headdress with its inscription. But in the millennial kingdom even the bells on the horses will have this inscription. Unger wrote, "Hebrew word order emphasizes the fact that the most common and ordinary things of life, such as **the bells of the horses** (i.e. every common horse), used merely to decorate the brute animal, shall in that day be as holy unto the Lord as was the high priest's engraved turban." Why? Because the entire nation of Israel will have been cleansed of sin and will be fulfilling the purpose and function of the high priest in ancient Israel, the representative of God to the nations. Thus, they will at the last fulfill Exod 19:5-6, to be a priestly nation. As such holiness will pervade every aspect of Jerusalem and Judah and the land and everything within it, including the most common articles such as a horse's bells. To take it even further verse 20 adds **And the cooking pots in the LORD'S house will be like the bowls before the altar.** The **bowls before the altar** were considered holy whereas cooking bowls were considered common. But in the kingdom every bowl will be holy, including common cooking bowls. Holiness will permeate every phase of life because He who is Holy will dwell among men.

In 14:21, to further emphasize the saturation of holiness. **Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah**, that is, the entire land, **will be holy to the LORD of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them.** There will no longer be distinctions between sacred and profane, holy and secular, but all will be holy, everything to the nth degree will be holy in the most astonishing display of righteousness the world has ever seen. Those who do not adhere to the very strict procedures in and around the land of Israel will be strictly and immediately judged. This sheds new light on Jesus' reward to Peter that he would be given the keys of the kingdom and to the twelve that they would be given thrones and take part in the keys to the kingdom rule. This reign of keys must relate to power to grant or deny entrance into the holy land and in particular the holy precincts of the Temple and Jerusalem. It has nothing to do with the papacy, entering the Church or passing through pearly gates. It has to do with granting right of passage into holy places during the kingdom. And **all who sacrifice**, for there will be **sacrifice** in the millennial kingdom. Why will there be **sacrifice** when Christ has been sacrificed? Of course, it will not be for eternal salvation. Eternal salvation is always in all times been based on the eternal sacrifice of Christ alone. But for at least two reasons sacrifices for other purposes will be offered in that time, neither of which is disparate or inconsistent with the other. First, for a memorial of the sacrifice of Christ. Just as OT sacrifices foreshadowed Christ's sacrifice so millennial sacrifices will memorialize Christ's sacrifice. Second, for forgiveness of breaches of ceremonial cleanliness relating to mortal flesh. Such breaches will require sacrifice for cleansing external impurities that arise by nature of being flesh. So they will be offered for external cleansing issues but the way of spiritual cleansing will remain the same, faith alone in Christ alone.

And lastly, **there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts in that day.** The **Canaanite** was an ancient inhabitant of the land of Israel. However, they were particularly morally degenerate and

corrupting in their religious deviation. As such the term **Canaanite** became proverbial in Israel for a morally degenerate person. In that day no morally degenerate person will be permitted to desecrate the holy precincts of the Lord's temple, but it will be holy throughout down to the tiniest details. Unger concludes, "As the Holy City of Jerusalem itself, it will be the mecca of the millennial earth, and no profane or wicked person shall be allowed to desecrate its holy precincts. Israel, in high priestly glory and service, will adorn it, and the Holy Land with its holy people will grace it."⁵

This concludes our survey of major prophetic passages in the OT. The general picture gleaned would have been the picture in the mind of Christ and the apostles; four successive Gentile kingdoms would rule over Israel as God's discipline, during the fourth kingdom the Jews would return to the land in unbelief, the fourth kingdom would progress into a horrible monster ruled by the anti-Christ who would commit the abomination of desolation in the Temple and set out to destroy the Jewish people culminating in the Campaign of Armageddon during which the Lord would pour forth His Spirit on the Jewish people so that they look on the Messiah with a repentant faith and He would return to deliver them and establish the kingdom. Our study of Jesus' most extensive teaching on prophecy will have this background picture in mind but with the added truth of the Jewish people's rejection of the Messiah and the consequent destruction of the Temple proclaimed. This element caused the disciples to ask what would be the time of the destruction, the sign of His coming and the end of the age. Evidently they detected a new element in the prophetic picture and did not know how it would fit into the overall scheme revealed in the OT. In the Luke account of the Olivet Discourse Jesus clarifies that indeed this was a new element and that there would be a destruction of the Temple that occurred before the end of the age when the rest of the prophetic picture would be fulfilled. Paul in his epistles would reveal further an entire mystery age between these events during which the Church would develop. He also reveals mystery truths related to the Church that help us understand the prophetic picture of the Church. A key is the word "mystery" and how one defines it. Jesus defined it as some revelation hidden in God. That is to say that these truths about the Church were previously unrevealed and now being revealed for the first time. This means they are not in the OT and are therefore disconnected from the OT prophetic picture. This is the key to understanding the rest of the prophetic picture.

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Zec 14:11.

² Merrill F. Unger, *Zechariah: Prophet of Messiah's Glory*, 263.

³ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 266-7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 271.