

The Coming day of Complete Fulfilment – part 1

Text: Zechariah 14:1-15

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Scriptures: Zechariah 14:1-15

Series:	Zechariah. Sermon 18 of 19 (part 1 of a two-part sermon)
Theme:	On the last day, all the promises of God come to complete fulfilment as the final battle is fought, peace is won, great numbers celebrate from all the nations and everyone and everything remaining is completely holy.
FCF:	There are times in the Christian life when we can feel like giving up
Proposition:	Persevere today in the certain hope that all God's promises will be completely fulfilled in Christ on the last day.

Introduction

Would you like to **know** what the words of our **text mean**? Would you like to **understand** how they point us to **Christ**? Would you like to **be sure about** how you are called to **respond**?

Martin Luther briefly covered Zechariah 14 in his commentary but began with the words: "*Here in this chapter, I give up. For I am not sure what the prophet is talking about*". 500 years later, we are blessed with many books written by Christian authors who have laboured to unpack the meaning of challenging sections of Scripture like this one. By God's grace we can be sure about much of what the prophet is talking about!

In our text we find the culmination, the 'coming together', of many of the main themes of Scripture:

1. The promise of **Warfare** between God and His enemies. Conflict began when God said in the garden after the fall: "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers" (Gen 3:15)
2. The promise of **Judgement** of God upon His enemies. Even those, like Assyria and Babylon whom he first uses to judge his own people
3. The promise of **Home**. God created a garden home for our first parents in Eden. He promised a land to Abraham.
4. The promise of **Celebration** for the gathered church. "*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, Rejoice*" (Phil 4:4). **Heb 10:25** "*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching*".
5. The promise of **Holiness**. "*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.*"; "*See, this (the live coal carried by the seraph) has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.*" (Isaiah 6:3b-7)

This is a 'big Bible theme' text. The central purpose of this passage, and of the whole book of Zechariah, is to bring encouragement in the midst of struggle and disappointment - in order to

urge God's people to persevere in light of the great promise of God which will most certainly be completely fulfilled in Christ on the last day, at the close of this age.

1. The final battle (1-5)

We begin with the last battle. We read of the coming 'war to end all wars' in chapter 12 when the Lord will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Him and His people, symbolized by the city of Jerusalem.

The first five verses describe this last battle on the coming 'day of the Lord'. These words come to the exiles returning from captivity in Babylon; there the prophets Daniel had spoken of the last battle against the Antichrist (11:36-45) and Ezekiel of God and Magog (38-39). The message to the nations is that His people went into exile, not because God was powerless to protect them, but as a result of his judgement on their unfaithfulness to him (Eze 39:21-24). The promised restoration of Israel following her punishment demonstrates to the nations that the God of Israel is truly the Holy One (Eze 39:25-29).

The exiles who returned to rebuild Jerusalem needed ongoing encouragement from God's Word. Don't we too? Yet, this final battle begins with what seems to be a **defeat**. The images here are both graphic and disturbing – look at verses 1 and 2: *"A day of the LORD is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city"*.

Here God's judgement begins with His own people, symbolized by the city of Jerusalem. This is a pattern which we see in Scripture, for example: Jeremiah (25:29) *"See I am **beginning** to bring disaster on the city that bears my Name"*. Apostle Peter (1 Peter 4:17-18) *For it is time for judgment to **begin** with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"*

In the text the refining suffering of temporal judgement is expressed in the images of brutal conquest; a captured city, ransacked houses, raped women and exiled citizens. In 1 Peter, we see this in non-symbolic language which is easier for us to grasp: **1 Peter 4:12-13** *"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed"*.

When suffering comes your way, particularly because you follow Christ, don't be surprised! It does not mean that the Lord has abandoned you, or that you do not have enough faith, or necessarily that you have sinned. If Christ learned obedience through what he suffered, how much more you and I?

But notice, importantly in our text, that a remnant remains: 'the rest of the people will not be taken from the city'.

Now, the battle turns as the Lord, the Divine Warrior, comes to champion the cause of His people: (v3-5) *"Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the*

day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him”.

Here as the Lord fights for His people, He powerfully provides a way of escape for them, symbolically through the Mount of Olives which is a ridge running north to south on the east side of Jerusalem. Whilst ‘Azel’ is an unknown location, the meaning of this prophecy is clear:

Despite the intensity of the invasion, as we have seen, there is a remnant who escape. They flee just like those who escaped an earthquake event which was so memorable that it is used to timestamp the words of Amos the prophet what *“he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah”* (Amos 1:1). This prophecy is a picture of deliverance. *“Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him”.* (v5b)

The victorious Divine Warrior now enters Jerusalem with his ‘holy ones’; referring either to an angelic army (cf. Deut 33:2) or his people (1 Thess 4:16-17) or both. This connects with the vision of Christ, the Rider on a white horse judging and making war, followed by the armies of heaven as described in Revelation 19.

After Christ instituted Lord’s Supper, they sung a hymn (likely Ps 115-118) and he left the upper room with his disciples to go to the Mount of Olives. It was then and there that he quoted that verse from Zechariah 13 (7). *“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered”.*

The feet of Jesus once stood on the Mount of Olives. From there he looked down at the temple and predicted its destruction. He said that false leaders would come and lead many astray, but that the ones who endured to the end would be saved (Mark 13). He exhorted his disciples to persevere, to keep going. Later Jesus went to Calvary and there on the cross *‘With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom’.* (Mark 15.37-38). We remember his death in the sacrament of Lord’s Supper.

Warfare is a major theme in the Bible culminating in this final battle. Another theme is the coming judgement.

Hebrews 9:27 puts it this way *“Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment”*

2. The final judgement (12-15)

Do you remember how the earlier part of Zechariah is structured? It’s called a chiasm. There are eight night visions and the climax comes not at the end – not with number eight, but in the middle. We see the same pattern in our text this morning. The climax comes in v6-11, so we’re going to end with that in our third point this morning and first look at the later section 12-15.

I haven't seen the 2011 movie 'Zombie Apocalypse', neither do I wish to. It's rated 'R' (restricted) for 'strong zombie violence and gore'. The words now before us present a graphic picture of 'strong violence and gore' in describing the final judgement plague "*which the LORD will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. On that day men will be stricken by the LORD with great panic. Each man will seize the hand of another, and they will attack each other*" (Zech 14:12-13)

Remember when the Lord struck the Assyrian army under Sennacherib with a terrible plague (2 Kings 19:8-37)? Recall the 10 plagues which preceded the exodus from Egypt? This end time judgement is similar, but on a huge scale. 'Wide screen, graphic images, Biblical proportions'. This event not only affects all the enemies of God, but also their livestock, horses, mules, camels, donkeys and other animals.

The emphasis here, in this symbolic picture, is that of the **complete and final destruction** of God's enemies. The NT uses this language in 1 Cor 15:24-26: "*Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death*".

It was Jesus who destroyed the last enemy death on the cross of Calvary, a place where 'strong violence and gore' were seen. Isaiah (53:3-4) describes the scene prophetically: "*He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted*".

At Lord's Supper we remember the cross of Christ. Blood and gore. Nails and thorns. Anguish and sorrow. Pain and grief. Agony and despair. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?". Graphic. Restricted to word pictures, because no movie, or image could ever portray the wrath of God's judgement upon His Son. No screen could show what it was like for God to make him who knew no sin to be sin for us.

Jesus destroyed the last enemy death on the cross by giving up his own life for others, for rebels like you and me. Isaiah again (53:3) "*He was pierced for **our** transgressions, he was crushed for **our** iniquities; the punishment that brought **us** peace was upon him, and by his wounds **we** are healed*".

The benefits of His victory come to us! The plunder, the spoil, the riches of his grace come to us! We didn't work for them, we didn't fight for them, we don't deserve them, but they are ours!

This is what is pictured symbolically in v14 as gold, silver, and garments are collected up in great abundance, recalling the plundering of the Egyptians during the exodus (Ex 3:22) and a reversal of the ransacking of Jerusalem in v2.

By God's grace alone in Christ alone, brothers and sisters, we will come through the last judgement, not only being pardoned and declared 'not guilty' but being blessed with all the

unfathomable riches of Christ to enjoy forever in the New Heavens and New Earth, to where we now look.

3. The final home (6-11)

As we move to the climax in the centre of our text, we see that the darkness of war and judgement (ref. Amos 5:18) changes to ceaseless light. There is no night-time frost.

There was a time in history when God brought a great flood of which we read in Genesis 7:23 *“Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark”*

After this judgement on the whole earth, God made promises to Noah, including this one: (8:22) *“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”*

Our text prophesies that this earth will cease to endure. It will come to an end as will the current daily pattern of day and night will stop. The book of Revelation explains *“there will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light”*.

Living waters flow out from Jerusalem, symbolically bringing refreshment to all the land. This water is a continuous supply, not drying up in summer or winter. In a dry region like Palestine or the Canterbury plains in summer, water brings life. Water transforms a desert into a garden.

During the exile Ezekiel had been shown a prophetic image by the Lord of water flowing out from the temple. He measured its depth, eventually finding it deep enough to swim in, *‘a river that could not be passed through’*. (Eze 47:1-12). Remember that Zechariah (13:1) had prophesied of a fountain that would *“be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity”*.

The OT Scriptures connect water with the gift of the Spirit (e.g. Isa 44:3; Eze 36:25-27). Jesus uses this imagery when he says on the last day of the feast of tabernacles: **John 7:37b-38** *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”* In Revelation, John is shown *“the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb”*. (Rev 22:1-2). The message here is that of continuous, abundant life which comes from God, the Life-Giver and Christ, the Lamb, the Life-Redeemer.

Look there is more! Not only life, but the restoring of the land!

Symbolically to become flat like the Arabah. Jerusalem, the city of God, will be at the centre, raised up. This city will be defined by distinct boundaries – First Gate – probably on east side, Corner Gate on the West, Tower of Hananel near NW corner and the king’s winepresses to the South. The city, in need of rebuilding at the time of the returning exiles, is inhabited in this prophetic message. God promises *‘never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure’* (v11). The city will not need protecting walls. This will be the eternal home for God’s people, who live in absolute safety.

Our local church community foreshadows the new Jerusalem, our final destination. The final battle fought and won, the final judgement completed, the final restoration finished. How is all this possible? Look in the middle of our text to the 'chiastic centre'. The final home, a place of security, peace and permanence, comes because the King is there v9. "*The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name*".

Our final home is secured for us because Christ has gone ahead, the first fruits of the general resurrection to come. He has secured a place for each one of us who believes in Him. We remember this when we 'proclaim his death until he comes'.

Now, the call is to keep going, because we are not there yet! Persevere today in the certain hope that all God's promises will be completely fulfilled in Christ on the last day.

AMEN