

Zechariah Chapter 14- John Karmelich

1. My lesson title is "It's going to get worse before it gets better". First, for those of you who've read my Zechariah studies, thank you. As most of you know I'm convinced Zechariah's a weird guy or at the least he's been given strange visions by God, which are tough to understand. We've made it to the final chapter of the book, so naturally the big question is how does it end? Then of course I need to tackle the "why should we care" issue. I'll begin with how he wraps up his book, how that relates to my title, and then I will touch on the why should we care question. Let's remember that this chapter finishes a vision Zechariah got from God that started in Chapter 12.
 - a) God called Zechariah along with the prophet Haggai to encourage the Israelites to rebuild God's temple after some of them came back to Israel after the Babylonian captivity. To put a time stamp on it, this is about 520BC. For the sake of my newcomers, Israel as a country was "wiped off the map" by a large empire based out of Iraq today called the Babylonians. They were conquered by another empire based out of a part of what is Iran today. When all this happened, the leader of this new empire gave a decree that Israelites could go back to that land if they desired. About 50,000 took up that offer. All of this is chronicled in the book of Ezra. Anyway, Zechariah was one of two prophets God did send to the Israelites to "get moving" on rebuilding God's temple once they're back there.
 - b) Zechariah got a bunch of visions from God, which he lays out in what we refer to today as a 14-chapter book. There were no chapter breaks in the original text. His visions are tough to understand which is why I jokingly refer to Zechariah as weird. He may or may not be that way, but to be honest his visions are tough to interpret let alone apply to our lives.
 - c) The essential idea of the book lays out what's going to happen to that nation in the future. The book even mentions Greece by name as I like to say, became the next "big boys on the block" as far as Middle East domination. The book never mentions the Romans by name, but history lines up with what Zechariah predicted. My point is even though he wrote it a long time before the Greeks or Romans were ever significant, what he predicts about the centuries after it was written, fits well with those periods and even includes events we get mentioned in the Gospels. The Gospels quote Zechariah a few times as to say events that occurred around Jesus' time were fulfillments of Zechariah's predictions. The point being is Zechariah wrote "history in advance" given the fact he's quoted in the New Testament
2. OK, now that I've got that speech out of my system, what is the last chapter all about? You might recall the last few verses of Chapter 13 describe a future where two-thirds of the Israelites will be killed. It's end times and unfortunately, I'm convinced this is going to be even a worst Holocaust than what Hitler orchestrated. If I told you that in the future, two thirds of your descendants will die violently, that'd prediction would raise your interest to want to know more. This last chapter of Zechariah is effectively a commentary on those last two verses of Chapter 13.
3. Before I explain some of the details of this chapter, I'm way overdue for the "why should we care" speech. Even if we believe Zechariah is God's word, why should we care if we're not Jewish? Why should I care when I've got "bills to pay and work to be done"? Even if it's a part of "how Jesus wraps up the world" scenario, again how does any of this affect my life today?
 - a) Great questions. For starters, the fact that Zechariah so accurately predicted history many centuries before it occurred in the book so far, validates him as a legitimate prophet. The next thing to realize is the idea of "It's going to get worse before it gets better". Most of us adults have been through enough experiences in life, where let's be honest things did get a lot worse before they got better. As the old bible saying goes, "This too shall pass". God gives us this, as He knows all things before it is written. God knows all of this horror will take place and yet He doesn't step up to stop it just as He doesn't step in to stop all of the horrid things we face in life. That's because God loves all creatures, including the people who do the hurting as well as the one's who were hurt.

- b) The point being that if there is no next life, it's all very unfair. If there's an eternity, then it is logical that how we act in this life is evidence of our views about God. As we know He's a God of justice as well as a God of love. He's perfect in both those aspects. Therefore, He had to pay the price Himself for our sins since none of us can ever be perfect. Yes I know there are exceptions for babies and children who die, but I'm not going there right now. I am just saying that horrid things happen in this life, and a just God and a loving God will sort it out His way on His timing. In the meantime, often things have to get worse before they will get better. That in effect is the underlying lesson of this last chapter. The specific story of Israel's "end" is both tragic and beautiful, as we'll discuss in a minute. I'll assume you get the fact that we must trust in God's love and power to give us the strength to face what we must face in life. That's the "behind the scene" story of this final chapter. It's also the "how does it end" message not only for our own life but life on earth as we know it.
4. In the meantime, it's time for details about Chapter 14. Let's begin again with the comment that it is an expansion of the horrid events described in the last few verses of Chapter 13.
- a) Zechariah tells us a time is coming where all the nations (armies of multitudes of nations) are going to attack Jerusalem. Like I said in the last lesson, this seems like overkill since it is such a small country. The issue is hatred of Israel "as a concept". If there is no God that we're accountable to, we're free to live however we want without any guilt due to our sins in life. Even Muslims who argue there is a God, but the Jewish God "is not Him" do want Israel destroyed because they believe Islam alone is the "true God". Bottom line is there is going to be a great "duke out" once in for all over Israel one day within that land.
 - b) Anyway, once that war begins, it's going to seem like the nation of Israel's going down for count. The early verses of this chapter describe Jerusalem being captured by enemies, and those enemy soldiers will "divide up the loot" and unfortunately even rape women. Half of the city will go into exile, but the battle isn't over. God Himself "becomes the cavalry" to step in and bring this to an end once and for all.
 - c) Just to prove this isn't describing some historical event, Zechariah gives us details of what will occur then, just to prove, "This is it and this is a wrap up of history as we know it".
 - i) Those events include changes to Israel's geography where a major earthquake will occur that forms a new valley east of that city, which allows Israelites to escape.
 - ii) The same earthquake will also literally lift Jerusalem higher in elevation.
 - iii) That same "day" will cause a worldwide darkness, I suspect so people will realize this isn't just an earthquake but a God-ordained event.
 - iv) If that's not enough, there will be a new river starting in Jerusalem that flows water all year round. I touched upon that in the last lesson as well. We get more details in this chapter about that new river.
 - d) If all of that is not enough, then Jesus will literally reign as king over the entire earth. You will see His name "LORD" inscribed on common items as if to remind us that God is now in charge of all things so "Deal with it"!
 - i) Let's just say the war continues and it's going to be a "wipe out" since the God who created the universe is now in charge of everything.
 - ii) Finally, the survivors of this war (world wide) must honor God since He won, and He is now ruling over the world.
 - e) Ok you get the idea of "it's going to get a lot worse before it gets better" scenario. I assume most of us know that's a part of life and it'll be how life as we know ends. Since that will be the reality of how "God wraps it up", we must accept it as it'll occur.
 - f) I realize this is tough sledding, but if we're curious as to how things will end, we need to know this stuff as it'll be part of our future for Christians as well Israel's future, since we'll live forever as part of God's eternal kingdom. With that long speech out of my system, it's time for details. Therefore, I ask that you join me as I go verse-by-verse through this final chapter of Zechariah. Thanks for reading, and here we go.

5. Verse 1: A day of the LORD is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. ² 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.
- a) Let's start with the question of who's the "you" and the "your" here? A clue is the last few verses of the previous chapter. Zechariah was describing how the nation of Israel is going to suffer a major defeat, as nations will gather to fight against Israel. As I said, this lesson is about the idea of "it's going to get worse before it gets better". All I'm saying is the "you" is referring to Israel and it's capital city of Jerusalem in particular.
 - b) Therefore, this verse is saying that Jerusalem will be losing a war badly, even to a point of God's enemies dividing up the "loot" they've captured there. If that isn't bad enough, then we get mention of houses ransacked and women raped. Half of the residents of that city (Jerusalem) will go into exile. The rest of them will escape.
 - i) Some theorize this ties to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. I don't see it that way, simply because the rest of the chapter describes the Messiah (king) on the scene to "save the day". All I'm saying is these verses don't describe anything historically so it must be something in the future.
 - ii) The other thing to realize is that even though Israel exists today as a nation and the people living there are mostly secular, unfortunately Jerusalem will be defeated again one day as described here in this book.
 - iii) Most of us know that much of the world hates the idea of Israel's existence as that fact is considered the major obstacle to world peace. Many wrongly think that if Israel is just destroyed, that'll solve that problem once and for all. I'm convinced that way of thinking is actually demonic as hatred of Israel's existence is a hatred of God's desire to rule over the world one day from that location.
 - iv) What's relevant to our future, is one day it's going to seem like, "Jerusalem's going to go down for the count in a war, until literally Jesus comes in to save to day".
 - v) Again, remember in effect we're reading an expanded commentary of Zechariah's comments in the last few verses of the previous chapters. Back then he said that a total of two-thirds of all Israelites are going to be killed in the future before the day of the Messiah's coming. (What we Christians call Jesus Second Coming).
 - c) OK John, we get the idea that a lot of Israelites are going to suffer one day in the future in a time period of Jesus returning. Most of us have read Revelation and realize tough times are going to come to this world one day. So why should we care about all this stuff when we've got our own problems to worry about here and now? Part of the answer is for us to realize how to recognize God's "wrap up show" when it occurs. More importantly, think of it as a reminder that in life, "It's going to get worse, before it gets better". If we're honest we realize this life gets hard at times. Unfortunately dealing with death and suffering is a horrid business and we do are best in life to deal with pain as it comes. What God's trying to teach us here is that yes life is painful at times, but yes God wins in the end. God never promises us a pain free life. Instead He promises to be there with us through the pain, so that we can realize "this" isn't forever.
 - i) So are you saying by reading of Israel's future "bad news before the good news" it will remind us, "that's how God works"? Often yes. So why does God allow all of this suffering in the first place? If God's so good, why does He allow people to go through all of this? Why does He allow so much suffering in the world? To begin it reminds us that if evil is real, so God must exist that allows it in the first place. A world created "by accident" can't explain evil's existence. The next thing to realize is God "proves His existence" by victories over that evil. Often horrid dictators do get overthrown. I can't explain why evil exists, but I'm positive there is a God who is greater than that evil who leads those who trust in Him to victory over it.

- d) OK, I paused to get all "philosophical" on everyone as I want everyone to grasp the idea of God having a plan for the world that's bigger than all the pain we go through in this life. I need at this point to get back to Israel and "end times" as it's a prime example of bad stuff occurring before the "cavalry comes to the rescue". Let's face it, living in a time and place where one's enemies ransack homes, kill lots of people, rape lots of people and divide up a lot of our stuff, is as horrid a nightmare that anyone can cook up if we're among those who are on the losing end of this.
 - e) So if God loves His people so much, why allow it to occur? Yes, we get the idea that we're reading history in advance and this is how it's going to occur. Still, why does God allow a thing so horrid if He loves His people so much? Yes I can say the world's cursed by sin or I could say there are demonic forces that don't want God's plan to occur. However, that is not going to help us face our own pain in this world. All we can do is trust that God will rescue us from that suffering His way and on His time. To quote one of my favorite ideas on suffering, when we get to heaven, the only word we'll get out of our mouth is the word is the word "Oh" as in "Oh, that's why You allowed this to occur"! As you can tell by now, once I start getting philosophical, it's hard to stop. Therefore I better go back to the text.
 - f) The last part of Verse 2 states that half the people living in Jerusalem whenever all of this is going to take place will be spared. That's the glimmer of hope despite all the bad news snuck in the first two verses of this chapter.
 - g) The good news is the "Calvary's coming" which is a reference to how good guys do win in old western movies.
6. Verse 3: Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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.
- a) Like I've been saying all through Zechariah, just when you think he can't get stranger than he already has, he never fails to let us down in that regards.
 - b) To explain all of this, I need to give a quick Jerusalem geography lesson. That city is built on a hill. Not a Mount Everest, but a good size hill or small mountain none-the-less. If my memory is correct it's a little under 3,000 feet above sea level. Right across (to the east) of the old city is a small hill called "Mount Olives". It's a popular walk to go down the hill from Mount Olives back up to the east side of the old city. It's only about a hundred feet or so down, and another 100 or so back up to the old city walls of Jerusalem.
 - c) The next thing to realize is when the word "LORD" is in all capitals, that refers to the most holy name of God. For those people who don't think the Messiah is God, notice in Verse 3 we get God's most holy name and then the text says "he" as in "The LORD" is the one who is standing on Mount Olives. "He" is the cavalry coming to the rescue! If nothing else, we know that these verses are not describing anything historical, as neither Jesus nor anyone else for that matter did what is being described in these verses.
 - d) Geologists familiar with the Middle East are well aware of the fact there is a long fault line that runs from Jerusalem east for many miles. For those of you not familiar with how it is that earthquakes happen, let's just say it's due to "pressure" on those fault lines. All of that leads us right back to the text. Realize when Jesus returns, He'll come to the same place of where He last left. In the opening chapter of the book of Acts, it says Jesus left earth from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:11-12). My point is simply that Jesus returns to the same spot He left from as that same verse in Acts that says He'll return "the same way".
 - e) That leads to the question of "when"? How do we know this will happen? Because when it occurs, a major earthquake will occur that literally splits the Mount Olive into two and a new major valley east of Jerusalem will form. That should make the evening news!

- i) I'm reminded of a classic joke, where God announces the world's end will happen tomorrow. Some newspapers will write, "God will end life as we know it and the women and children will be hurt the most!" The Wall Street Journal will report it does not know how this will affect the market and Christian religious papers are going to say, "It's about time"! Like I said, this lesson is about the bad news coming prior to the good news.
- f) Meanwhile, back to geography and the Israelites. This new valley will be a way for those who survive this horrid tragedy to escape Jerusalem. It may help to remember when we read about "Armageddon" in the bible, that's the "staging area" for the battle. That battle itself takes place in Jerusalem. Here in Zechariah, we're getting battle details we don't get in say, Revelation. One of those details is when "The cavalry comes" we know it's the real deal because of this major earthquake and a large new valley forming.
- g) Speaking of "meanwhile", let me get back to the text. The next thing the text tells us is that new valley extends to someplace called "Azal". It's location is debated. I'd argue it's some city that no longer exists east of Jerusalem. What we do know from other bible references is those who escape this horrid battle run to Bozra, an ancient city, part of modern Jordan across the Jordan River. Isaiah 63:1 says God protects His people (Israelites) when they'll flee to Bozra. My point is that ancient city has a part of that final battle scenario as a place Israelites flee to, in order to escape the killing, raping and looting of Jerusalem.
- h) Finally, Zechariah compares this "fleeing" to an event in ancient Israel history. To make it simple, there was a major earthquake roughly 100-200 years earlier. It's famous enough to be referenced by Zechariah as if to say, "we all know our history and we had a earthquake that caused so much damage, it caused our ancestors to run away and not rebuild what is damaged". Realize there are ruins in Israel today of places abandoned after an earthquake that occurred many centuries ago. My point is simply, such major events cause people to think, "I will not live here any more, it's too dangerous". Zechariah's saying is just as that earthquake made people run for their lives, so when Jesus returns to the Mount of Olives, that too, will cause an earthquake and will cause lots of people to flee for their lives.
- i) Obviously, unless we happen to be in Jerusalem when this happens, this won't affect us in a direct way. What is relevant is to understand the circumstances when Jesus comes back so we're not fooled by anyone claiming to be Jesus, but these things don't happen.
 - i) Wait a second John. You said Satan knows his bible well. What is preventing him from duplicating some of this stuff? Nothing, and I suspect when the Antichrist is on the scene he'll try to duplicate some of this stuff. However, the way we know if it's the "real thing" is if he's interested in people worshipping him or God!
 - j) What's more amazing is to realize we're just getting warmed up with the weird stuff that's this final chapter. I'll just say that Zechariah goes out with a "bang" kind of like a firework show that has a big ending. Bottom line, stay tuned we're going out with a big bang!
- 7. Verse 6: On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. ⁷ It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime--a day known to the LORD. When evening comes, there will be light.
 - a) Well if the earthquake then doesn't convince people that this is "the day" of Jesus return, a second sign is there will be no light (darkness). Yet it won't be cold. I don't know if it'll be a worldwide darkness, or a local issue. We can't tell from the text. Does it mean the sun's rotation is changing? Don't know. The text just says that when the evening comes, there's going to be light again. What popped in my head as I read this was a reference in Isaiah, as it states there will be no more sunlight or moonlight because in "that day" God Himself will be their everlasting light. (Based on Isaiah 60:19, in a section that discusses end-time events.) Notice the last sentence doesn't say, "When the evening comes the sun will come out again". It just says, there will be light. Although I can't prove it, I suspect since Isaiah and Zechariah are both discussing "end times", I'm willing to bet their describing the same thing from different perspectives. (I warned you Zechariah doesn't let up!)

8. Verse 7: On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter.
- a) I'm not going to repeat what I discussed near the end of the last lesson. Remember that I said Chapter 14 is in effect a commentary on the last few verses of Chapter 13? Those last few verses mention a new water source that begins in Jerusalem and runs year round.
 - i) One can find references to that same water source in Ezekiel 47 and Revelation 22.
 - ii) What's new here in Zechariah 14 is where the water sources stops: The water runs in two directions: One toward the western sea, which is the Mediterranean and it runs to the Dead Sea on the east end (or to the Jordan and dump into that sea).
 - iii) A couple of things to realize here: The geography of the Middle East won't change to a point where for example, there won't be any more Mediterranean or Dead Sea. Ezekiel 47 tells us fish will exist in the Dead Sea at that day. If you don't know the Dead Sea gets that name for two reasons: First, there's so much salt there, nothing lives in that sea as far as fish. The second reason is there is no "outlet". The water just evaporates to the heat. It's nickname is "dead" as it's dead as a water source to supply the surrounding area.
 - b) OK John, we're glad you learned your geography. Why should we care about any of this stuff? For starters, if we're Christians and will live forever, God wants to draw close to us in that day. That mean's we'll be hanging around this place whether we like it or not!
 - i) The second and less important reason is so we can tell when the "real" Jesus shows up on the scene as lots of strange things will happen to the world to prove forever He is God and we have to deal with it.
 - c) In the meantime, we're not even half way through the chapter. The "really strange stuff" (yes, stranger then what we've had so far) is still coming up.
9. Verse 9: The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.
- a) Christianity is about 32% of the world's population. I won't argue that all of them are true believers. That's just based on where people live or what they claim is their religion. That means the majority of people don't believe in Jesus. (Judaism is only 0.2%). I'm giving the stats on this because Verse 9 says the LORD will be king over the whole earth.
 - i) Try to imagine how that's going to "go over" in the Muslim world. Or for Hindu's or Buddhists. It's one thing to tell us bible-believing Christians, here's how the big wrap up show will go down! It's another to tell this to people who've never heard of Jesus or don't believe the Gospel story that Jesus is God so go deal with it!
 - ii) Let me explain it another way: When a future comes after a major world war, with most people having access to smart phones or video screens, imagine the shock of seeing all of this geography changes, and lack of sunlight. Everyone's got to think, "Something really weird is going on around here, better start paying attention!"
 - iii) That's how I see the "survivor's" of the Revelation "bad stuff" reacting to all of this. It has to be strange for someone is India or some island in the Pacific to realize that the true God is the God of the Israelites. Let's face it, it's going to take lots of really big "weird stuff" to convince the world this is true, which is why we got Zechariah.
 - iv) Anyway, Verse 9 will be a reality just like all the other predictions of this book.
10. Verse 10: The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah. But Jerusalem will be raised up and remain in its place, from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses.¹¹ It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure.
- a) I warned you Zechariah "goes out with a big bang", and I wasn't kidding. Remember all of that talk about a major earthquake there then? One might wonder, won't Jerusalem suffer from that damage? That's what Verse 10 is telling us. The short version is that city will be in tact after the earthquake, and also be raised up higher in elevation.

- b) When you read references like Geba and Rimmon, it's simply the land around Jerusalem is going to be a big flat area. This earthquake we read of here will be "selective". That just means it affects the land around Jerusalem, but that city itself will be in tact after it's done. In fact, Jerusalem will be raised higher in elevation. The text isn't saying Jerusalem will be the next Mount Everest. A good comparison I read is it'll be a solitaire diamond standing out on a ring. It's the idea that everything around Jerusalem will be fairly flat are, and the city of Jerusalem will stand out among that real estate as a big hill.
 - c) The geography even mentions some of the landmarks of the old city, (The First Gate, The Corner Gate and a specific tower). The underlying point is this city will survive through this earthquake in tact even though it may be raised higher in elevation.
 - d) The final geography lesson is combined with a "future history" lesson that says this city is never going to be destroyed again.
 - e) OK then, I'm glad I now know about future history before it occurs in Israel. As you said near the start of this lesson, "This is all well and good and I'm glad I know about where it is Jesus will rule from one day, but I've got a life here and now, so why worry about all of this stuff before it occurs?" For starters, it reminds us of our ultimate future, as Christians will be resurrected. Bottom line is this will be our future so we might as well know some things about it. Remember if we're going to live forever, this life is "nothing" compared to how long this reality is going to last! I'm not saying we have to drop our lives as to worry about all of this! I'm saying put our present problems in perspective of this reality, which will be our future. This positive ending of the world that we know, should put whatever is our issues in perspective of what's important for all of eternity! Therefore, I encourage everyone to pay attention for a bit to this stuff, (i.e., keep reading through the bible so we can learn what God's got in store for us as well as how He wants us to live now) so we can realize why we should bother to live as Jesus calls us to live!
 - f) OK, enough guilt for these verses, let's try the next verse!
11. Verse 12: This is the plague with 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.
- a) A natural question to ponder at this point is, "We get that God wins and the Israelites win in the end, but what do the losers get as a "consolation prize"? Let's begin by remembering that fighting against God's will is never a good choice to make in life. In effect that's what sin is, doing things that are not God's will, and there are always consequences for sins!
 - b) The specific's of the sin of attacking God's people reads here like watching a scene out of a horror movie. Let me use a simple fairly recent example. In the movie "Raiders of the Lost Ark" was a scene where non-believers found "The Ark of the Covenant". If you've studied the temple structure (or tabernacle structure) in the Old Testament, the most holy object in that structure was this ark. Short version is it is a gold covered wood box roughly the size of a footlocker. There were two statues of angels above it. Anyway, in the movie, when a bunch of bad guys (nonbelievers) opened the box, they all died a horrible violent death of their skin literally melting. It's the closest thing I could think of to compare to this picture we have here in Zechariah of people dying in a violent way.
 - c) I'm going to attempt one more strange speculation here. (After all of this Zechariah study, "I'm going with the flow" of getting weird here.) Some modern commentators read of this horrid death and say, "Wow, that reads like a neutron bomb". That bomb is a nuclear one with a unique type of destruction: It essentially destroys protein molecules that make up human, plant and animal life, but it leaves buildings in tact. It's a very bad news bomb!
 - i) Let me say at this point that I have no idea whether or not a neutron bomb will be involved in this destruction process. I simply read of Zechariah's description here of flesh melting, and I'm reminded of both the neutron bomb and that scene in the movie "Raider's of the Lost Ark" is they're both describing that type of horror.

- ii) At the least, one has to admit, to study Zechariah requires some basic knowledge of a lot of history and some interesting scientific facts. Even though the visions of this book are strange, it's an interesting education to realize all we've covered as to try to understand what Zechariah is talking about!
 - d) OK enough of the horror show. Remember my lesson title, "It's going to get worse before it gets better." We got to admit, that horror is the "worse part". We're talking about death of lots of people here. If you recall I stated that about two-thirds of the Israelites are going to die at this time? If that isn't enough horror, we get here the horror of what will happen to those who attack God's people! Like I've implied earlier, when God wraps up life as we know it, "God's going to put on a show for us", which to be honest will be a horror show if we're not part of the winning team!
 - e) With that said, let's get back to the text.
12. Verse 13: 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. ¹⁴ Judah too will fight at Jerusalem. The wealth of all the surrounding nations will be collected--great quantities of gold and silver and clothing. ¹⁵ A similar plague will strike the horses and mules, the camels and donkeys, and all the animals in those camps.
- a) Apparently not every dies from the "neutron bomb" type of episode. Verse 13 tells us that a panic will occur and the enemies of Israel will fight against each other. Remember that a great battle is fought on the ground with the goal of destroying Israel once and for all. The area of land known as Armageddon is actually the staging area for the battle. When all of the American, Canadian, Australian and English troops attacked the beaches of the coast of Normandy (French coast) in World War II, the "staging area" was England. I bring that up here, as to remind us there's going to be a large army of people fighting Israel. If there is a nuclear bomb or even just people dying from bomb blasts, the point is the rest of those troops will go into a great panic. That's what I suspect Verse 13 is talking about. What I'm getting at here is the "flesh melting" horror story of the previous verses, isn't the complete end of this battle. There will be troops who survive that aspect. Those other soldiers will damage their own cause by fighting amongst themselves. That's "Verse 13".
 - b) Verse 14 then switches perspective to the "winning team". The war won't just be a battle between those who live in Jerusalem versus this army fighting against them. Others who live in Israel will also fight for it. The reason we see the word "Judah" and not "Israel" as a nation fighting is because back then, the Southern Israelite Kingdom was a recent memory as the people who came back to that land used to live in that kingdom.
 - c) Anyway, the last part of Verse 14 describes the Israelites collecting the spoil of that war. If nothing else, it shows that gold, silver and clothing will still be considered valuable in the time era of Jesus' return. Eternity will not be naked people staring at Jesus doing nothing of any value. I'm positive God's going to fill us with joy for all eternity as "life" will go on in a different capacity.
 - d) You might recall that this chapter opened with the enemies of the Israelites wining as they divide up the spoil. Here the "battle has turned for good" as God's people are now who is dividing up that spoil of war.
 - e) Bottom line, with "Jesus showing up on the scene" the tide has turned in the war.
 - f) Finally Verse 15 talks about the animals being hurt or killed that were part of the camps of the enemies. My first thought of course, is what did those animals do to deserve this? I'd say the issue is "punishment of the supplies of the troops". It's a way to prove that God is doing the damage. Just as the "10 Plagues" on Egypt including killing animals to indicate that "God's God and don't mess with Him", I think God uses that same method as to show people that only God could do that type of damage and no one else". Does that mean God is allowing innocent animals to suffer? Yes in the sense that God's willing to do whatever is necessary to get people to draw close to Him and prove He is God.

- g) One more thing before I move on. Let's be honest, modern warfare doesn't involve lots of animals. I envision tanks and motored vehicles and not camels. Keep in mind Zechariah had no knowledge of those things in his day. Could the loss of "camels" be tanks? If that is the case, I don't have a problem with the text being translated that way. Obviously lots of the animals are for food or clothing. My point is don't avoid taking the text seriously just because animals are described for warfare as opposed to modern machinery.
 - h) Now that I've beaten that to death, we can move on. Like I said earlier, Zechariah maybe the toughest book in the bible to interpret. If you've read all my lessons on him, we have covered such topics as Alexander the Great to neutron bombs! I'm not saying all of those future interpretations are perfect. We have to watch history play out to find out. All I am saying is Zechariah is "staying weird" to the end and we're watching a grand finale that is like I said, somewhat comparable to a fireworks grand finale. Time to press on.
13. Verse 16: Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.
- a) Here in Verse 16, the war is over. Apparently there are survivors on the "other side". All I'm saying is that when Jesus comes back to rule over the world, there has to be people to rule over. Therefore, we have survivors.
 - b) So what do the survivors do? They have to send representatives to keep one of the feasts that God ordained way back in the book of Exodus. (Like I said, Zechariah stays weird to the end!) Ok, what gives and why should I care?
 - i) Let's start with a little review of Jewish holidays. There are three "groups" of days designated by God as holidays for Jewish people to observe. Three of them are in the spring. The most famous is "Passover", which is the day God "past over" all the Israelites and killed the first-born Egyptians. Without going into a lot of detail, the three springtime holidays all tie prophetically to Jesus First Coming.
 - ii) There is one holiday "all by itself", called Pentecost. That day ties to Jesus as that is the day the "church was born" with the Holy Spirit coming on believers. (Acts 2.)
 - iii) Then there are three "fall holidays" that run together. One is "New Year's", one is a "Day of Atonement" where Israel is to express sorrow for their sins. The final one is "The Feast of Tabernacles". (Some bible experts believe all three fall holidays do somehow tie to Jesus Second Coming, with "New Years and Atonement" tying to a day of sorrow for blowing it as far as not realizing it's Jesus Second Coming.) That is just speculation, but I couldn't resist throwing that in here while I am discussing Jewish holidays.
 - iv) Also realize there are other Jewish holidays, but these seven are all ordained in the first five books of the bible and are given greater weight than other holidays.
 - v) OK then, why is it after Jesus returns do the nations (most likely representatives of nations) have to send representatives to Israel to celebrate "Tabernacles"? I thought you'd never ask. That holiday commemorates the time God "fellowshipped" in the wilderness. It's the time of the giving of the 10 Commandments, and not the waste of years they wandered in the desert for disobedience.
 - vi) My point is God wants the Israelites to remember the time when He drew close to them at Mount Sinai. Now for the good part: The reason God wants all the people who survived through that war to do "Tabernacles" is so they'll draw close God as the Israelites did when He gave them the 10 Commandments. In other words, this festival is all about drawing close to God. Since Jesus returns to "set up shop", now it's time for people to draw close to Jesus and "Tabernacle" (get close) with Him.
 - vii) So where are us Christians when all this takes place? We're already with Jesus as a part of His return. I'll discuss that as part of my wrap up.
 - viii) In the meantime, it's time for the tough related question: What will happen to the nations that refuse to send a delegation to this feast? Thought you'd never ask!

14. Verse 17: If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, they will have no rain. ¹⁸ If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The LORD will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. ¹⁹ This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.
- a) So what is the punishment for not showing up? No rain. That may not seem like much of a punishment. However, droughts are not to be taken lightly as one who's lived my life in California, they occur "every so often". A bad one can be deadly. So why doesn't God just "snap His fingers" and kill those who don't show up? Because what God desires when He returns is to draw close to people. Having a punishment that's bad but not severe enough to kill us is a pretty good incentive to show up next year to that festival!
 - b) Remember that we're talking about life after Jesus returns. As most of you know, I hold a strange view that when we're resurrected, we'll exist in more than three dimensions. That is how all us Christians can draw close to God at the same time. However, those living at that time, won't be "there" yet, so God's showing us His incentive plan to get people living at that time to draw close to Him.
 - c) The last question here is, what about places like Egypt that don't get rain? Egypt gets less than an inch of rain per year. The Nile River flows from lakes in modern Ethiopia. They flow to the Mediterranean via that river. All I'm saying is God's setting up His incentive program to get people to draw close to Him. If lack of rain won't do the trick, God's got a few other "tricks up His sleeve" for places like Egypt.
 - d) You got to admit, Zechariah never fails to let us down with being strange, even to the end of the book. Speaking of which, we only got two more verses to go.
15. Verse 20: On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the LORD's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. ²¹ Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD Almighty.
- a) In the Old Testament, there is only one place where the words "Holy to the LORD" can be seen. It's on a headpiece worn by the High Priest. (Exodus 28:36). As opposed to just that High Priest having a sign saying "Holy to the Lord", that inscription (in Hebrew I assume) will be "everywhere". It'll even be written on bells hanging from horses and in "everyday" cooking pots. The point isn't that these specific items are special, but it's the idea of God is "Holy" and His name will be written "everywhere" in that day to remind people who their dealing with.
 - b) You got to admit, that's a strange way to wrap up the book, but that's "Zechariah". What I believe he's trying to communicate is that when He literally comes to rule from Jerusalem, all things are "set apart" for Him. Let me explain that one.
 - i) The idea of "Holiness" is to set something aside of a specific purpose. For example if you had a special plate in your home and only one person is allowed to ever use it, we'd say that plate is "set aside" for that specific purpose. The idea of God being Holy is the idea that He's perfect in all His ways. He's incapable of sinning, just as He's incapable of lying and incapable of being anything less than perfect.
 - ii) What about the old joke of "Can God make a rock so big He can't lift it?" He never does anything that isn't His will. It's not what He can or can't do, but what He will or will not do that counts. God can't lie or else we can't trust Him. He can't sin or else we can't trust Him. He can't force us to love Him because then we're coming to Him not out of our own free will! What about the fact we're not perfect? That is why God Himself had to pay the price for our sins, so we can be perfectly forgiven for our sins. That's the Gospel message.
 - c) So what do we do after all of this "show" has come and gone? Great question:

- i) Stop and consider what gives us joy in this life: Making a difference for Jesus and others. I can't think of any greater joy than using our lives to be of service to Him and other people. That's what makes this life worth living. While I can't prove it, I do suspect heaven will be more of the same. We're not going to be sitting on some cloud somewhere plucking a harp for eternity! We'll somehow draw close to Him, as He'll draw close to us! I suspect there'll be an infinitive number of ways that He will fill us with joy as we use eternity to make a difference for Him and be helpful to others around us. Can I prove all of that? No, but I suspect God wants us to be full of joy for eternity, and that's how to have a joyful relationship.
- ii) Then let me ask the question: Where are "we" in this picture? First Thessalonians 3:13 says that when Jesus returns He comes back "with all His saints". That means we Christians return to earth with Him. Like I said, heaven won't be boring. We'll return to earth with Him. So what's are role in that battle? Do we just watch or are we involved? First I suspect the sight of multitudes of people that come out of the sky has to scare God's enemies then and there! Since we "can't die again", that will make us an invincible force to be reckoned with. Whatever Jesus calls us to take on when this occurs, it'll be His orders, so I'm positive we'll have the ability as well as the strength to carry out those orders.
- iii) OK, enough of all that "weirdness", let's wrap up Zechariah as after 14 chapters I'd consider him the "champion" of getting strange on us.
- d) The last sentence of the chapter says, "There will no longer be any Canaanites in the house of the LORD Almighty". Yes that's a strange way to end the book, but that's Zechariah!
 - i) Time for my final history lesson of this book. When God lead the Israelites to that piece of real estate, His instructions to them was to kill every last living person in that land. I admit, that's a strange thing for God to order. It wasn't an order to go kill everyone they meet, just the specific groups living in that land. Ok, what did the Canaanites do to deserve this? The short version is they were trespassing on God's land. It's like God saying, "This is My land, and only I decide who can live here!" There is an interesting little reference in Genesis where God told Abraham that it'd be 400 years before his descendants return to the land of Israel, as the sins of the Canaanites was not complete. (Genesis 15:16, implied.) What we've learned from history and archeology is that those people living there were so bad in terms of their sexual sins, let's just say it's amazing that God waited as long as He did to wipe them out. It's as if God said, "I've been waiting for centuries for those people to act civilized and not have sex with anything (including animals) that breathed, I now have to treat them like a horse that broke it's leg. The most merciful thing that I (God) can do at this point is put them out of their misery." Anyway, God did use the Israelites to execute that judgment on a people that were "beyond hope".
 - ii) OK John, I'm glad you know your ancient history. Why is this reference given here the final verse of the book? Why end it with a reference to an historical event that is describing a nation that is no longer exists? That's Zechariah's way of saying, no one will be living in His holy land that does not live the way God wants us to live!
- e) I admit that's confusing. Let me explain it better: The idea of Jesus literally ruling over the world is about living in a world where we all live as God desires we live. Since Jesus will be there (Jerusalem), that would mean He won't tolerate anyone to be there who won't be living as He desires. Remember how I said we return with Jesus at that time? I'm willing to bet what we do is "enforce" His rules! Imagine if every time we had an argument with a person an angel stepped in and said, "no arguing". We'd be complaining that God won't give us the opportunity to do our own will! Because God gives us free will, no angels ever step in to stop our arguing or say, stop a shooting from occurring. However, when all this occurs one day, we work to "enforce" God's laws on the land.

- i) So does mean nobody kills each other in that day or no one say, has sex with any person they're not supposed to? I suspect so. The idea is Israel is God's land so it must operate under God's rules. Those who survive the "Revelation days" will be forced to live, as God desires they live. We're the "enforcers" of those laws. It may not seem like a great way to live, but again, we're choosing to live as God wants us to live by His rules! Does that mean all of us spend eternity as "God's cops?" No it doesn't work that way. What it does mean is we choose to live as God desires that we live. We will somehow work to encourage others to live that same way. Just as Christians work today to make a difference for Jesus, we'll also work "then" to live as He desires we live and make a difference for Him.
 - ii) Which, of all things, leads me back to the "Canaanites". They represented any and all people who refuse to live as God desires. They were wiped out for that reason. I don't think literal Canaanites will be in Israel then. They were wiped out even in the time that Zechariah wrote this. What it means is nobody will be allowed to live where God is literally living. It's God saying, I won't tolerate any disobedience to Me being on the throne ruling over the world at that time.
 - iii) Yes it's strange, but let's be honest, it's a perfect way to end a book filled with a lot of strange visions. The bottom line is a day's coming where Jesus will literally rule over the world and those who refuse to accept that rule and live, as He desires that we live will not be tolerated! Whether we like it or not, that's our eternal future so we might as well accept it and get used to it!
 - iv) Of all things that leads back to you and me today. There's a famous expression in Christianity that goes, "If you can't live for Jesus today, what makes you think we can live for Him eternally?" The point being that since this is our eternal future, it is a matter of getting used to it now and using our time and resources to go make a difference for Him now, since that's the way we'll live eternally. A shorter version is, "Start living for Jesus now as that's how eternity will work!"
 - f) On that somewhat positive note, I'll wrap this up with my closing prayer. Before I do that realize I've got one more book to cover in this series on the Minor Prophets. I'll give all of my sources that helped me prepare all these studies after my commentary on Malachi. In the meantime, I'm overdue to wrap up this series in my closing prayer.
16. Heavenly Father, we realize You didn't die as to make us "Healthy, wealthy and prosperous", but because it's the only way to reconcile the fact You're perfect in justice and perfect in being loving at the same time. We know we'll spend eternity in gratitude for what You've done for us. When we enter that eternity, we realize we've all along been a part of Your plan for the world. Help us to use our lives as a witness for You just as You'll guide us for eternity. Fill us with Your boldness so we can have that power to make that difference for You. Guide us as we go through all of the high's and lows of life knowing that Your plans for us far exceed anything and everything we can ever desire that isn't Your will. Be with us as we make that difference. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.