

Israel: Past, Present, and Future #4

Zechariah 14:1-11

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After having been dispersed among the nations for nearly two thousand years, many Christians believe that God remembered His covenant with Israel in 1948 and brought them back to national life (it was the dry bones of Ezekiel 37 coming to life). Many interpret Israel's establishment by a United Nations charter in 1948 and the ensuing wars in which Israel was victorious as evidence that God had restored Israel unto Himself.

But is that an accurate interpretation of historical events in light of what God's Word teaches about Israel in its present state of unbelief and rebellion against Jesus, the Messiah? What change of heart toward Jesus has occurred in Israel as a nation from the days when Jesus said: "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you" (Matthew 21:43)? Has Israel as a nation now embraced the gospel of Christ so as to become God's friend or is Israel still God's enemy due to their rejection of the gospel: "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes" (Romans 11:28)? If nothing has changed in the collective heart of Israel toward Jesus, the Messiah, would not the inspired words of Paul still remain in effect: "wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (1 Thessalonians 2:16)?

Until Israel as a nation looks in faith and repentance to Jesus whom they pierced (Zechariah 12:10), their establishment as a nation in 1948 should not be viewed as a sign of God's blessing upon a covenant-keeping nation; nor should we stand with Israel in whatever policies Israel adopts while presently being a covenant-breaking nation. Israel has a right to defend herself against hostile attacks as any nation does, but we cannot stand with Israel (or with any nation, not even our own nation) when it is God's enemy and is a covenant-breaking nation that despises Jesus as Messianic Savior and King.

God's covenant blessings will only be realized when Israel as a nation turns in faith/repentance unto Jesus and renews her covenant with God in terms of the New Covenant confirmed in Christ's blood (the New Covenant is the fulfillment/realization of God's Covenant of Grace in the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, and the Davidic Covenant).

Our main points are: (1) Israel Will Be Judged by the Lord in the Future (Zechariah 14:1-2); (2) God's Judgment upon Israel Will Only End When Israel Turns in Faith to Jesus as Messiah (Zechariah 14:3-11).

I. **Israel Will Be Judged by the Lord in the Future (Zechariah 14:1-2).**

A. Background Information to Zechariah.

1. Zechariah was a post-exilic prophet (ca. 520-480 b.c.) who was mightily used of the Lord to challenge and to encourage the remnant of Israel that returned from Babylonian captivity to complete the temple that had begun to be rebuilt 15 years earlier, but still only had the foundation laid (due to enemies and due to worldliness).

2. The latter part of the prophecy of Zechariah (Zechariah 9-14) stretches forward from his time to the future in Israel's history: times of apostasy, faith, repentance, and salvation by Jesus, the Messiah. There seems to be especially much overlap in content in Zechariah 12-14. Each of these chapters covers the same future events in which the Lord would judge Israel through hostile nations and yet mercifully save Israel from her enemies when she turned in faith and repentance to Christ.

B. Questions

1. **Who** is this Jerusalem/Judah that is defeated by this coalition of nations (Zechariah 14:2; Zechariah 12:9; Zechariah 13:8-9)? Does this speak of Israel in the land that is attacked and defeated by these hostile nations, or is this a prophecy of hostile enemies that come against Christ's Church (composed of both

Jews and Gentiles) and Christ coming to deliver His redeemed and saved Church?

a. Though one will find sound commentators (past and present) on both sides of this question, it seems to me that these chapters are addressing national Israel in her unconverted state being defeated by hostile nations yet turning in faith and repentance to Christ.

b. Throughout the Book of Zechariah, Jerusalem and Judah refer to national Israel (Zechariah 1:12; Zechariah 8:13-15). That should not change just because we move from the past to the future. A consistent/contextual interpretation should lead us to view Jerusalem and Judah in the same way whether in the first or in the latter chapters.

c. This Jerusalem/Judah in Zechariah 12-14 are not likely Christ's Church, for they do not believe in Christ, and it is they that put Christ to death that shall repent (Zechariah 12:10). This is an excellent Old Testament passage affirming the deity of Christ (Zechariah 12:4).

2. **When** will these hostile nations come against Israel?

a. They will come after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Zechariah 12:9-10; Zechariah 13:7-9; Zechariah 14:3-4).

b. Thus, this prophesied battle against the Jews was not fulfilled by the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes (ca. 168 b.c.).

c. Likewise, this prophesied battle against Jerusalem and Judah was not likely realized in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 a.d.

(1) For in Zechariah 14:2 half of Jerusalem is taken into captivity and half left in Jerusalem, but in 70 a.d. the city was completely destroyed and depopulated.

(2) Moreover, does it not seem strange that nothing is said here about the temple being destroyed? If this refers to the destruction of 70 a.d., what was most important was the destruction of the temple.

(3) In these chapters, victory is given to the Jews over these hostile nations when Jerusalem/Judah turn in faith to Christ. Israel will dwell safely in the land (Zechariah 14:11). That was not the case in 70 a.d.

(4) And finally, Jesus did not destroy the Romans at that time and bring all of the nations of the earth at that time under His rule (Zechariah 14:11).

d. I submit that this prophecy is yet to be fulfilled in the future. And if that is the case then there is yet coming a time that an unbelieving, Christ-rejecting Israel will be overcome by a confederation of hostile nations of the world as a further judgment upon them, but a judgment that will lead to God's mercy being poured out upon them to look in faith and repentance to Christ whom they pierced. This prophecy confirms the words of Paul in Romans 11:28 (not only in the present, but also into the future). The Charter of the United Nations in 1948 did not change the heart of Israel or bring her to Christ to be restored as a Christian nation. Israel is unchanged from the time of Christ and Paul and from the time of the U.N. charter of 1948. Presently, Israel is God's enemy and is a covenant-breaking nation and will be so until she turns in faith and repentance to Christ (which she will do as is prophesied).

C. It is prophesied that God will bring this confederation of enemy nations against a covenant-breaking, unconverted Israel at a yet future time (Zechariah 14:2; Zechariah 12:2-3; Zechariah 13:8-8).

1. What events might lead all these nations to join in war against and defeat Israel?

2. I speculate at this point, but perhaps an attack against Iran, or the refusal to part with certain territory occupied by Palestinians in accordance with a peace plan adopted by the United Nations, or the attempt to rebuild the temple. Who knows? God does not state what leads to this attack against Israel, but Israel will be defeated/dispersed.

II. **God's Judgment upon Israel Will Only End When Israel Turns to Jesus Christ (Zechariah 14:3-11).**

A. We see here that the Lord will miraculously intervene on behalf of those who yet remain in

Jerusalem to deliver them (Zechariah 14:3-5).

1. Very graphic language is used of Christ's deliverance of Israel, and yet I do not think this refers to the bodily Second Coming of Christ. This type of language is used many times in Scripture to refer to His invisible coming in historical judgments (Judges 5:4-5; Psalm 18:6-10,17; Isaiah 63:1-4; Micah 1:3-4).

2. Christ must remain seated on the throne of David in heaven at God's right hand until He destroys all His enemies (Psalm 110:1; Revelation 20:7-11). The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). Christ's Second Coming to destroy death can only come AFTER the millennium (a postmillennial coming)—not BEFORE the millennium (a premillennial coming). Why? There is both sin and death in the millennium according (Isaiah 65:20—sinners enter into the millennium even according to Premils—therefore there must be death—"the sting of death is sin" 1 Corinthians 15:56—where there is sin there is death—Romans 6:23). The curse is restrained during the millennium, but not until the new heaven and new earth is the curse destroyed.

3. Finally, the conversion of Israel will have its effect in blessing upon the whole world as the "living waters" of the gospel proceed from her to all nations (Zechariah 14:8). Then it shall be fully realized that "the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one" (Zechariah 14:9).

B. Thus, from these texts in Zechariah 12-14, we can summarize certain events that will occur before and after Israel's conversion.

1. Israel is in the land and yet is unconverted (God's enemy) before these nations descend upon her (1948).

2. A confederation of nations will attack an unconverted Israel and will defeat her and will lead many captive to other nations.

3. God will turn unconverted Israel to Jesus Christ through the gospel. Israel as a nation will cry out in faith and repentance to Jesus, as Messiah, and He will miraculously intervene and deliver Israel from her enemies (the importance of Jewish evangelism).

4. Israel as a nation will then dwell safely in the land from that point forward (Zechariah 14:11). Israel will be a Christian nation that has come into the Church of Christ and has embraced the New Covenant in Christ. Israel will disseminate the "living waters" of the gospel throughout the whole world (Zechariah 14:8; Romans 11:15).

5. Jesus, the Messiah, will reign as King over all the kingdoms of the earth and all the kingdoms of the earth will engage in covenant with Him in one faith, doctrine, worship, church government (Zechariah 14:9; Psalm 72:11,17; Psalm 86:9; Revelation 11:15).

6. Hopefully, you can see from these passages that Israel was not restored to the Lord in 1948, but yet remains God's enemy until she turns in faith and repentance to Jesus, the Messiah (Zechariah 12:10). At that time, God will have mercy upon her as we read in Romans 11:26-29.

7. Israel did not have to pull mercy from God as if the Lord was reluctant to give it. Mercy cannot be pulled from God—it is freely given to those who are undeserving of it. That's what mercy is. As we grow to love God's mercy to us, let us also grow to extend it to one another—not on the basis of what one deserves, but simply because of God's mercy to us. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

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