

## **Moving Mountains**

### **Zechariah 14:1-21**

When I was a kid, there was this puppet on TV called Mr Squiggle. He had this long pencil for a nose. He'd start off with a bit of paper with a couple of lines or shapes on it and he'd think about it for a while and add a few more lines and shapes and ask the host of the show if she could guess what it was. She'd make a couple of wrong guesses and Mr Squiggle'd add a few more lines and shapes and again ask her to guess. She'd get it wrong again and he'd add some more and then tell her it was finished and still she couldn't guess what it was. And then he'd tell her the picture was upside down or on its side and she'd turn it round the right way and then it was obvious what it was.

I think reading Zechariah's feels a bit like that. We keep getting all these bits and shapes that go together to make up a picture of what God promises to do. And as he adds more bits, we keep looking at the picture and we're not sure what the final picture looks like. We're not sure if he's finished the whole picture. We're not sure if it's upside-down or on its side. At times it seems hard to put it all together right.

### **The Nature of that Day**

One of our major problems has to do with the expression *on that day*. It kept recurring throughout chapters 12 and 13. It keeps popping up in chapter 14. Chapter 14 also starts with the words:

*A day of the LORD is coming ...*

This is a common theme, not only in Zechariah, but also in many of the other prophets. As you read the prophets, you get the impression of this great day that's coming.

That's how Israel read them. So, they expected:

- It would be a day when God would intervene.
- It would be a day when God would put things right.
- It'd be a day when God would rescue His people.
- It'd be the start of a glorious new age.

It'd all happen at one decisive moment.

When Jesus comes, that day arrives. As we've seen over the last few weeks:

- He's the King who comes to them riding on a colt.
- He's the Shepherd whose leadership's valued at thirty pieces of silver.
- He's the One who's pierced on the cross.
- He's the One from whom forgiveness flowed to God's people.

And so it goes on as He fulfils all these different aspects of Zechariah's message. That coming day arrives when Jesus comes. And yet, that was 2000 years ago. What happened to the glorious new age? God's enemies still prosper. What we live in doesn't look like the pure and righteous and just kingdom of God. What's gone wrong?

And the answer is that nothing's gone wrong – other than that we had a wrong view of *that day*. As we see the fulfilment of that day in Jesus, we see that it's not an instantaneous thing. There are three significant aspects to *that day*.

- The first is Jesus' first coming. Jesus is enthroned as King – and He's enthroned on the cross. On the surface, it doesn't look very glorious. He's rejected. He's beaten. He's crucified. He's pierced. It looks like He's totally defeated. But by that, He does what Zechariah promises. He brings the possibility of forgiveness. He brings the possibility of cleans-

ing. He brings the spirit of grace and supplication that causes people to mourn over their sin. From our perspective in history, that's in the past.

- The second is Jesus' return. This is still future. At that point, God's enemies are utterly overthrown. Rebels are eliminated. God's reign is completely evident. There is peace and purity.
- The third is this long period in between – what the New Testament refers to as *the last days*. This is the period we live in. This is the time to preach.
  - To tell people what Jesus has done.
  - To tell people God's judgment is coming.
  - To ask people to change sides – to thank Jesus for what He's done, to submit to God and to flee from the coming judgment.

Zechariah 12 and 13 – the passage we looked at last week – deal with Jesus' first coming and lead into the period of the *last days*. Zechariah 14 deals with the *last days* and Jesus' return.

## The Ongoing Battle

Verse 1:

*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.*

*Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle.*

God gathers the nations to fight against Jerusalem. It looks similar to how chapter 12 began:

- On both occasions, God gathers the nations against Jerusalem.
- On both occasions God intervenes to rescue His people.

Yet, there are differences as well.

- In chapter 12, the nations come to Jerusalem to pillage and plunder, but they stagger away as if drunk for they find Jerusalem an immovable rock. In chapter 14, Jerusalem initially falls, the city is ransacked and half the population go into exile.
- In chapter 12, the battle leads up to the piercing of the Commander-in-Chief and the striking down of God's Shepherd. In chapter 14, the battle leads up to the new creation.

We think God's job is to give us a pleasant and comfortable existence as we wait for Jesus to return and usher in the perfection of God's kingdom. That's not the Bible's picture. God's people live in the midst of a hostile environment. The nations rage against God – and they're none too pleased with those who want to join God's side.

- Jesus sends His disciples as sheep among wolves.
- Peter reminds Christians that they're aliens living in a foreign land.
- Paul warns that godly living in this world brings with it persecution.

Yes, the day of the Lord is coming – and, when it comes, God will put everything right for His people. But that day isn't here yet – and, until it arrives, this is what God's people should expect: the nations arrayed against them. We're in a battle zone. People in battle zones live as if there's a war going on.

I've been re-reading Brian Herbert and Kevin Anderson's science fiction trilogy that's set 10,000 years before the Dune novels. It's about this great battle that's going on across the universe between humanity and the thinking machines. Those leading humanity have the constant job of reminding people they're at war. The battle drags on and on an on – decade after decade – and people begin to lose their focus. They're tired of the war effort. They're tired of the sacrifices they must make. They're tired of the death of their sons and daughters. They start having protests against the war. They mistakenly think that if they stop fighting, the thinking machines will simply leave them alone.

That's the sort of temptation we face. We grow tired of the battle. We think: Wouldn't it be nice to just sit back, relax, put my feet up and enjoy all the creature comforts available to me?

- Why do I have to keep sacrificing my money so I can give more to missions?
- Why do I have to keep sacrificing my time so I can serve non-Christians with the gospel?
- Why do I have to put up with the mockery for telling people I'm a Christian?

It's because we're still in battle conditions.

### **The New Creation**

But the battle won't last forever – for God will step in. He will bring this war to a decisive conclusion. Four quick pictures. The first – verse 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. 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.*

When God comes, the geography changes. Remember the God we're dealing with here – the God who opened this oracle by reminding us:

*This is the word of the LORD concerning Israel. The LORD, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares:*

God made the whole landscape in the first place. He's quite capable of rearranging it if He desires.

The purpose of this rearrangement is to provide a way of escape for His people. It reminds us of how God fought for Israel when they came out of Egypt – when they were hemmed in by the Egyptian army and He opened up the Red Sea so that it formed a wall on each side and gave them a way of escape. He'll again provide an escape for His people. The Mount of Olives blocked the way of escape to the east of Jerusalem. But when God descends, He splits the mountain in two.

The second picture – verse 6:

*On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the LORD. When evening comes, there will be light.*

They're a difficult couple of verses. If you look them up in different translations, you'll find quite a bit of variat-

ion. It's a bit of a paradox – it starts off with no light and finishes with a day that doesn't end.

- Some think it refers to the darkness of God's judgment followed by the never-ending day of God's eternal kingdom.
- Some think it refers to changing the created order so there are no more extremes in temperature.
- Some think it refers to the elimination of various heavenly bodies such as stars.

The overall point remains much the same. This is the dawning of God's eternal kingdom. The old creation gives way to the new.

The third picture – verse 8:

*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. The LORD will be king over the whole earth.*

Palestine had a fairly predictable climate. It had long, hot summers and fairly wet winters. There were some permanent rivers – but most watercourses were wadis: they flowed during the wet winter months, but dried up over the summer. There were definite times when there was water and when the crops would grow. It wasn't like PNG where there's so much rain that almost anything will grow all year round.

But on that day, when God intervenes, the situation will change dramatically. Now, there'll be a permanent river flowing out of Jerusalem – or perhaps two permanent rivers. One will flow west to the Mediterranean Sea and the other east to the Dead Sea. There'll be water all year round. The seasons will be transformed. The land will be fertile. God will supply abundantly.

The fourth picture – verse 9:

*On that day there will be one LORD, and His name the only name.*

*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. It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure.*

Jerusalem will be elevated. The surrounding land will be dropped and flattened. In this way, Jerusalem will dominate the landscape. She'll be the highest point in the region – the focal point.

- She'll be the centre of attention.
- She'll be secure – you can't sneak up on her.
- She'll be the place of rule – the point of her height.

But more importantly, God will be the only God – and He'll be acknowledged as the only God.

These are all cataclysmic descriptions.

- Mountains splitting.
- The cycle of day and night stopping.
- Changing the seasonal nature of things.
- Jerusalem rising above the surrounding land.

It's the end of the world as we know it. It's the bringing in of God's grand new order. This is where history's heading.

### **The Fate of God's Enemies**

Having rescued His people and secured their place, the picture now turns to the fate of God's enemies. Some are judged and destroyed. 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. 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. Judah too will fight at Jerusalem. The wealth of all the surrounding nations will be collected—great quantities of gold and silver and clothing. A similar plague will strike the horses and mules, the camels and donkeys, and all the animals in those camps.*

It's not a pretty picture as the nations are struck with plague and panic. These people have lived for themselves. They've ruled their own lives without reference to God. They've established their own kingdoms and pursued their own wealth. It'll all be for nothing. They'll lose it all.

And, whatever they've produced that's worthwhile as they lived in defiance of God – the gold, silver, clothing – it will simply be taken into Jerusalem. It will enrich God's kingdom. In God's great scheme of things, everything comes back to honour Him. In all things, He will be glorified – even in His judgment on His enemies.

Yet, not all who have been God's enemies are destroyed. Some are converted. 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. 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. 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. 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.*

God rules and the nations acknowledge His rule.

The Feast of Tabernacles was a time of grateful rejoicing. It commemorated the desert wanderings and God's provision during that time – how God had brought them safely through the wilderness on their way to the land He'd promised them. It also celebrated the ingathering of the harvest from the orchards and vines. This was one of the highlights of their year – as they celebrated God's goodness to them.

Why is Egypt singled out for special mention? I think they're here as a warning – possibly at two levels.

- Egypt didn't rely on local rains. The Nile was her water supply. They'd be tempted to think they were exempt from relying on Jerusalem for water. They could ignore God. They could make it on their own. They had their own water. They could stay independent from God.
- And, related to that, Egypt's a prime example in the Bible of hearts hardened towards God – especially Egypt's king. Why were they destroyed? Was it because they were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time? Was it because they offended God without knowing it? No. God sent them plague after plague to warn them of their evil – but they refused to listen. Despite the warnings, they would

not submit to God.

The day of the Lord is a great day – but not for everyone. It's when God puts things right.

- For those who've joined God's side, it's the fulfilment of their hope. It's what they've been living for. It's the goal they've kept before them.
- But for those who've refused to join God's side, it's a day of darkness and disaster and judgment. It's a day of weeping and wailing. For they've chosen the losing side. They've refused to submit to their Creator.

God reigns. His will will be done. His rule will be seen to extend over everything. He will be honoured – both in saving a people who honour Him and in judging those who don't. Why would anyone continue to harden their hearts and refuse to submit to Him? It doesn't make sense. Yet, the Bible indicates that the majority will do just that. They'll refuse God – and thus they'll be judged by God forever.

### **The Kingdom of God**

Zechariah concludes with a brief picture of God's kingdom. 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. 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.*

There'll no longer be any need for special vessels to be

used in Jerusalem – all the special bowls and altars and clothes and things that were dedicated solely for use in the tabernacle and later the temple. Those things were necessary at the time to teach the people the difference between what was clean and could come into contact with God and what was defiled and could not be used in God's dwelling. That was absolutely crucial for a sinful people having the pure and holy God living in their midst.

But that's not necessary any more. Evil's been removed. The people are purified. They have hearts that long for God's perfect will. There's no longer any defilement in God's city. Everyone is holy.

And there won't be any Canaanites around anymore. This isn't a racial slur. Rather, when Israel came into the land God gave them, they were told to destroy the Canaanites already living there. These people were wicked. They'd defiled the land. They worshipped idols. Their defilement was to be removed. Israel failed to obey God. The result was that the Canaanite idolatry was a constant source of temptation for Israel – and it was a temptation they failed to resist. Israel defiled herself with this idolatry and was kicked out of the land because of it. But the time's coming when the obedience will be complete. All idolatry will be completely removed. All that's morally and spiritually impure will be absent.

More than that. The word the NIV translates as *Canaanite* could also be translated *merchant* or *trader*. You can see that in the footnote. This was another area in which wickedness had invaded God's people in the past. They placed their devotion to making money ahead of their devotion to God. They ignored God's instructions about

the Sabbath and honesty and fair trading and the poor and did their own thing instead. They succumbed to the idolatry of greed. That wickedness too will be totally absent from God's perfect kingdom.

### **Are you Ready?**

This is the day of the Lord that's coming. It's a great day. God tells us about that day so we'll be ready for it. Yesterday, Tim and Katrina got married. It's a day that's been in their calendar for several months. They knew it was coming. They made all sorts of preparations for it. They wouldn't have dreamed of coming to that day unprepared. Can you imagine Katrina waking up yesterday morning and saying: I wonder what I'll wear today?

This is a far more important day. It's the crucial day for which you need to be prepared. It's easy to lose sight of that. Life gets busy, cluttered, messy, complicated, even exhausting. We get distracted. We forget that Jesus is central to history – and eternity. We're tempted to give other things priority. We forget that we're living in a war zone – and that battle will go on until Jesus returns.

God wants us to be saturated with preparation for this day. Not everyone will be ready. Many will be judged. What will help you get ready?

- A bigger house?
- A faster car?
- An overseas holiday?

Being ready for that day has to do with Jesus – for the day is all about Him.

- Accepting Jesus' offer of salvation from your rebellion against God.
- Submitting to Jesus as King as you seek to live for

Him day by day.

Living for Him becomes the focal point. He determines what you do – how you spend your money, the company you keep, what you do with your time, what your goals are, the things you talk about, the way you think about people, the character you develop – all of it. And you recognise the war zone. The world battles against God. People continue to harden their hearts. But your task is to fight on – to pray that people will change sides and to ensure that people hear the message of God's kingdom and God's King.

Or, as someone else has put it, in getting ready for that day, our goal is to present Christ to everyone and to present everyone mature in Christ.