

# Zechariah 14:16-21

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/zech/zech-14/zechariah-1416-21/>

*Zechariah predicts a day when the survivors among the nations will go to Jerusalem yearly to celebrate the Feast of Booths and worship the LORD. Anyone who refuses to comply will experience drought. Jerusalem will become a holy city.*

Zechariah 14:12-15 described how the LORD would defeat the nations attacking Jerusalem to give her victory. He would strike them with a severe plague to rot out their eyes and tongues and kill their animals. Then, He would confuse them through panic, causing them to attack one another. In the meantime, Judah would ally with Jerusalem to collect the valuable items discarded by their defeated adversaries.

The present section tells the reader what will happen to the survivors among the nations. It begins with the adverb *then* followed by the clause *it will come about* to show the sequence of events. In other words, the writer explained what God would do after Jerusalem's victory. Once He defeats the foreign armies, *any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year*. The purpose of the annual pilgrimage is *to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths* (v. 16).

The phrase *go up* refers to making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is higher in elevation than the roads approaching it from the coastal plains. Therefore, traveling to Jerusalem is spoken of in scripture as ascending (*go up*).

The Hebrew term translated as *LORD* is Yahweh, the self-existent and everlasting God who revealed Himself to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). Yahweh is His covenant name. It describes His relationship with His people. That name comes from the Hebrew verb "to be." That is why God instructed Moses to say to the Israelites, "I AM has sent you" (Exodus 3:14). In Zechariah, the everlasting God is called *the LORD of hosts*.

The Hebrew term translated as *hosts* is "Sabaoth" in the Hebrew language. It means "armies" and often refers to the angelic armies of heaven (1 Samuel 1:3). Thus, the phrase *the LORD of hosts*, which occurs throughout the prophetic books, often describes God's power as a warrior leading His angelic army to defeat His foes (Amos 5:16, 9:5; Habakkuk 2:17).

Here in Zechariah, the phrase *LORD of hosts* demonstrates the LORD's power as the supreme warrior who has complete control over all human affairs. That is why the survivors among the foreign nations will pay homage to Him and *celebrate the Feast of Booths*.

The *Feast of Booths* is a seven-day festival that begins after the completion of the fall harvest (Leviticus 23:44). According to the book of Leviticus, this festival is to begin "on the fifteenth day" of the seventh month called "Tishri," roughly corresponding to October in our calendar (Leviticus 23:34). During this joyful celebration, the people of God were to give Him thanks for the harvest and for His past provisions and protection during their wilderness wandering (Deuteronomy 16:13-16).

As part of the festival requirements, the Israelites would leave their homes for a week to dwell in temporary *booths* or tents made from the branches of trees (Leviticus 23:42). The term *booths* refers to temporary structures made of branches and foliage. They provided shade during the day and protection from the dew and winds during the night (Genesis 33:17; Jonah 4:5). This festival is kept to the present day.

Zechariah told his audience that the remnant among the nations would one day become God's worshipers. They will worship with Israel annually during the celebration of *the Feast of Booths*. *And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them* (v 17).

The nations that are defeated by the power of the LORD will now worship God and *go up to Jerusalem* each year to do so. This means they will participate in the annual ritual of the Feast of Booths that commemorates the LORD caring for the Israelites when they wandered in the wilderness. It was there that God gave them the opportunity to learn to trust Him (Deuteronomy 8:2-5).

The book of Ezekiel also indicates that in the era of the Messiah reigning on the earth there will be a "prince" who rules and who will offer burnt offerings (Ezekiel 42:1-4). It seems best to fit that this will be Jesus after He returns again. It appears that there will be a new temple (Ezekiel 40-44) and sacrifices will be reinstated. Presumably these sacrifices will be reminders of what Jesus has already done, similar to the Lord's Supper also reminding New Testament believers of His sacrifice for them (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

This worship will be required. Any nation who does not properly show its respect will endure drought, *there will be no rain on them*.

In the ancient world, drought was a fragile reality because it could lead to crop failure. Drought often impacts a country's economy negatively and results in famine. The book of Genesis tells us that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob relocated because of drought-related famine (Genesis 12, 26, 41). In Deuteronomy, the absence of rainfall was one of the curses the LORD pronounced against Israel for covenant disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:22-24).

Here in Zechariah, the LORD will withhold the *rain* to punish *the families of the earth* who refuse to make an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship Him. For example, *if the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them* (v 18). The Hebrew word translated *the families* is used in Genesis to refer to the various kinds of animals. It apparently refers to various nations or ethnic groups. It seems that each people group or nation will be required to send ambassadors to represent their kind.

The prophet Zechariah might have used *Egypt* to illustrate the certainty of the divine judgment because that country did not rely directly on rainfall for its productivity. Its agriculture depended primarily on the annual flooding of the Nile River. The point seems to be that even the people of *Egypt* will experience drought if they reject the opportunity to go to the annual pilgrimage in Jerusalem. For Egypt this might indicate that the drought is so severe that it affects the rate of water flow of the Nile River.

But Egypt will not be the only nation to suffer drought. Drought *will be the plague with which the LORD smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths* (v 18). The term *the nations* would appear to apply to all nations of the earth other than Israel. The Hebrew word translated to English as *the nations* is sometimes translated as “Gentiles,” which is a term that applies to all peoples that are not Hebrews.

The term *plague* is the same word for when the LORD sent plagues to the Egyptians to let them know there is none like Him “in all the earth” (Exodus 9:14). Likewise, the spies “who brought out the very bad report of the land died by a plague before the LORD” (Numbers 14:37).

In Zechariah, God would send a *plague* in the form of drought to strike the survivors among the nations who refuse to worship Him and *celebrate the Feast of Booths*. The prophet summarized the thoughts of verses 17 and 18 when he said, *This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths*.

The term translated as *punishment* is “chāṭā” in the Hebrew text. It often means “sin.” But in the Hebrew mind, there is a connection between an action and its consequences. Therefore, “chāṭā” refers to the evil deed and its associated consequences. The wicked action brings calamity to the sinner over time (Exodus 32:34; Hosea 8:13). In Zechariah, the drought will be a consequence of choosing to ignore God’s requirement. The consequence will be *punishment* chosen by those nations who defy God’s direction to participate in the *Feast of Booths*. The mention of *Egypt*, conjointly with *all the nations*, emphasizes all the people groups that will experience drought.

Zechariah continued his speech and introduced the temporal phrase *In that day* to speak about the future time when the LORD will intervene in the affairs of men to end wickedness and restore righteousness on earth. In that new age, *Jerusalem* will be holy: *There will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, “HOLY TO THE LORD”* (v 20).

The horses in this coming era wear bells as ornaments on their harness, and on these bells will be a special inscription “*HOLY TO THE LORD*.” This is probably telling us that in this new era common things like transportation (*horses*) will be as much worship to the LORD as religious ceremonies were in the past.

The Jews hearing or reading the words of Zechariah would immediately recognize the phrase *HOLY TO THE LORD* (Hebrew “Kadosh L’Yahweh”) as being what was inscribed on a plate attached to the brow of the turban worn by the High Priest (Exodus 28:36). In this new era that is coming, it appears that even the harness of a horse will be holy unto the LORD.

The term *holy* means “set apart.” Something *holy* to God is available for His use within the sacred space of the temple precinct where He dwelt. When Moses instructed the Israelites to make a golden plate for the High Priest’s head, he told them to inscribe “Holy to the LORD” (Exodus 28:36). In Zechariah, the prophet sees a time when even animals used as transportation or instruments of war, like *horses*, will become *holy*.

Not only is transportation holy to the Lord, so is every day activity like cooking. And *the cooking pots in the LORD’s house will be like the bowls before the altar* (v 20).

The ancient Israelites used *sacred bowls* for the most significant ritual activities (Exodus 37:16).

In the new era that Zechariah foresaw, even ordinary items like the bells on the horses and the cooking pots will become holy as unto the LORD. People will treat these items like *the bowls before the altar*. Every *cooking pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD of hosts* (v 21).

The picture being painted is that all things will be aligned with God's good design for creation. All things will be applied according to His will, on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). God is pleased in our current age by obedience and promises a great reward of inheritance for those who do all things as unto Him (Colossians 3:23). In this new era that Zechariah predicts is coming, it appears that doing all things as unto the Lord will become normal—every day activities will be done as unto the LORD.

This would imply that the earth will be filled with people loving and serving one another, since this is the primary thing God asks of His people (Matthew 22:37-39). The earth will fill with God's righteousness—meaning that the earth will then be functioning in harmony with God's (good) design (2 Peter 3:13).

The *LORD of hosts*, who is all-powerful, will transform Jerusalem and Judah, conferring a sacred status on them so much that all the *cooking pots* in the land become *holy*. Thus, *all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them* (v 21). There will never be a shortage of holy vessels in Jerusalem because common pots can be used; what once was common is now holy.

Further, *there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts in that day* (v 21).

The Hebrew word for *Canaanite* [“kēna‘ānî”] can also mean “merchant.” It occurs with this meaning in Proverbs 31:24, where the NASB translates it as “tradesmen.” The prophet Hosea used the term as a wordplay to explain how the Israelite merchants reproduced the illicit practices of the Canaanites in carrying false balances in their hands (Hosea 12:7). But in the new era, there will be no room for immoral merchants, taking advantage of the worshipers as they bring their sacrifices to the LORD. Once the King comes, He will stop all illegal practices to restore His creation to its perfect state as before the Fall of Man (Genesis 3).

When Jesus cleared the temple of merchants, He said,

““Is it not written, ‘MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS’? But you have made it a ROBBERS’ DEN.”  
(Mark 11:17)

In Jesus's day, the sons of Annas held a high priestly dynasty. They apparently created a dedicated currency to be used at the temple, and extracted from their “flock” of temple worshippers through the use of “money changers” (John 2:14). No doubt the exchange rate created a large flow of cash into the priestly pocket.

This is probably part of what caused Jesus to refer to the temple as having been turned into a “den of thieves” (Matthew 21:13, 23:14). The temple of Jesus's day had become corrupted to the point that it was called “The Bazaar of the Sons of Annas” (Annas being the man who created a

high priestly ). In the new future era where righteousness dwells, there will be no such corruption. What is common will be holy and what is holy will be uncorrupted.

To read more about Annas in our article on Jesus' trial, [click here](#).

Isaiah speaks of this era not only as one bringing peace and harmony among people, where the world will no longer fill with violence (Isaiah 2:4). It will also bring peace and harmony in nature, as lions will be at peace with lambs (Isaiah 65:25).

Jesus has already had all authority given to Him (Matthew 28:18). However, Jesus has not yet asserted His authority on earth to take up His reign in a physical manner. He currently has delegated His authority to His followers to make disciples of the nations (Matthew 28:18-20).

He will, however, return to earth and throw Satan into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:10) and assume physical reign over the earth (Revelation 19:6). Those believers who overcame temptation and rejection as Jesus overcame will join Him in reigning (Revelation 3:21, 5:10, 20:6). Those who join Jesus to reign with Him will be those most fulfilled in the age that is to come. Jesus described this as entering into “the joy of your master” in His “Parable of the Talents” (Matthew 25:21). This makes sense because the original design for humans was for us to have dominion over the earth, reigning in harmony with God, nature, and one another (Hebrews 2:5-10).

[Click here to read our commentary on Hebrews 2:9.](#)

The book of Zechariah is the longest among the collection of the twelve Minor Prophets. It anticipates the worship of God by Jews and Gentiles alike in the Messianic Kingdom that is to come (Revelation 20:4-6). In this book, the prophet urges the postexilic community of Jews who returned to Judah from the Babylonian exile to repent and do good because God intends to bless them.

He also predicts a day when the Gentile nations will join hands to attack Jerusalem and cause severe damage to her residents. Nevertheless, when all hope seems gone, the LORD will intervene to subdue the nations and rescue Jerusalem. He will elevate her to prominence and make her the center of His universal reign. Every knee will bow before God in adoration and praise. Everyone will recognize Him as the only true and living God. The nations will become servants of the LORD as well, and come to Jerusalem to worship Him. The LORD will usher in a reign where righteousness dwells upon the earth.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>16</sup> Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. <sup>17</sup> And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. <sup>18</sup> If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no *rain will fall* on them; it will be the plague with which the Lord smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. <sup>19</sup> This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. <sup>20</sup> In that day there will *be***

*inscribed* on the bells of the horses, “**HOLY TO THE LORD.**” And the cooking pots in the Lord’s house will be like the bowls before the altar.<sup>21</sup> Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the LORD of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts in that day.