

6. The first two verses of chapter 14 paint a horrific portrait of armed invasion, brutality, destruction and subjugation. But set immediately alongside that depiction is Zechariah's pledge that Yahweh would arise against those assailing powers and fight them as He had so many times in the history of His covenant people. Israel had seen the Lord go forth into battle on their behalf against their enemies – which enemies are also His enemies – and He would do so again.
- a. It is important to note that these adversaries Yahweh was promising to come against were the very nations He'd gathered together and brought against Jerusalem and her inhabitants. These destroying forces were doing His work according to His will, and yet He was going to set Himself against them; they were the chosen instrument of His wrath against His covenant people, but they would themselves endure His wrath as their just recompense.

In this way this episode hearkened back to the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests: *In both of those cases, the divinely-appointed destroyers became the rightful objects of divine destruction* (cf. Isaiah 10:5-19; Jeremiah 51:1-33, esp. vv. 20-26). But the correlation is more profound than what immediately meets the eye. For, understood in their larger context, these prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah respecting Assyria and Babylon speak to the Lord's ultimate, *eschatological* design, namely to deliver His people from their subjugation and regather and establish them in a state of perpetual peace, security and faithfulness.

- The Isaiah context immediately follows the Immanuel prophecy in which Yahweh pledged to preserve and establish the house of David and His covenant habitation by bringing in His messianic deliverer – the promised royal son of David (ref. Isaiah 7:1-9:7). In turn, the chapter 10 context is followed by an elaboration on the promise of the Davidic Branch and the purpose and outcome of His coming (11:1-12:6).

The concern in chapter 10 is Assyria's destruction after it had carried out the Lord's purpose, but central to that situation was the fact that Jerusalem and the house of David were going to stand as a remnant and not be destroyed by the Assyrian forces. Assyria was the Lord's weapon against Israel, but not the whole of it; He would preserve David's house and kingdom – the remnant of Israel – when the Assyrians marched into Canaan, and this promise was fulfilled during Hezekiah's reign (hence the historical parenthesis in chapters 36-39 of Isaiah's prophecy).

But Yahweh was going to come against Assyria, the “rod of His anger,” when His punishment of Israel was complete. And the “war club” of Babylon was the weapon He would use to devastate the Assyrian empire (606 B.C.). But through all of that, He would preserve Jerusalem and David's throne and kingdom (cf. again Isaiah 7:1-8:10 and 36:1-37:38). As Hezekiah – the Davidic king – was given an extension of life, so it would be with the kingdom and throne He represented (Isaiah 38:1-22).

- The Lord gave David's house and kingdom an extension of life by miraculously preserving them from Assyria's mighty forces, but it was only a short "stay of execution." Hezekiah was granted 15 more years of life; the kingdom of Judah he presided over as David's royal offspring was given 135 years after Israel's fall. But as Assyria was the Lord's weapon against the apostate northern kingdom of Israel, Babylon was His "war club" to be wielded in due time against Judah. Judah, like her apostate sister, departed from her covenant husband (ref. Ezekiel 16:1-59, 23:1-49), leading to the outcome prophesied by Hezekiah's own action: Hezekiah used his extension of life to symbolically deliver up David's kingdom to the Babylonians by displaying to them the kingdom's substance (Isaiah 39); that prophetic act saw the beginning of its fulfillment 120 years later when Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and made Jehoiakim his first Davidic vassal (cf. 2 Kings 24-25; 2 Chronicles 36:1-21).

Thus the Lord used Babylon as His weapon against David's house and kingdom, but with the promise that desolation and exile were not to be the final word. He'd delivered Judah from the Assyrian invaders and He later preserved them from total destruction at the hands of Babylon. He wielded the Babylonian battle club against Judah, but with an eye toward restoration: As He'd done with Assyria, Yahweh promised to arise against Babylon, and that for the sake of liberating and regathering the captive remnant of His people (Jeremiah 50:1-51:48; cf. Isaiah 46-48).

In both of these instances, the Lord made it clear that His ultimate goal was the recovery and reestablishment of David's house and kingdom. Zion (embodied in both houses of Israel) had forsaken her covenant Husband and she was deserving of the severest punishment. This punishment came in the form of destruction, desolation, exile and subjugation, first through Assyria and then Babylon. Yahweh rejected and sent away His unfaithful "wife," but not forever: His goal was purging, repentance and restoration, not divorce. Though made desolate, Zion would be healed and restored to her Husband (Isaiah 50-52; Hosea 1-2; cf. also Zechariah 1-2, 7-8) and, in her restoration, she would bear for Him an innumerable multitude of faithful sons and daughters (Isaiah 54-55).

Whatever their particular emphases, Israel's prophets were unanimous in proclaiming these truths. The pre-exile prophets emphasized that desolation and exile were coming to both houses of Israel, but with the promise of restoration; the prophets of the exilic period pointed to Israel's exile and reiterated its cause, significance, purpose and final outcome. All of the prophets carried the same message of desolation, purging and renewal; *most importantly, they grounded that message and its fulfillment in the promise of a coming deliverer.* Yahweh was coming to put all things right, but in the person of David's Branch. He was going to arise against the desolating and subjugating powers in order to destroy them, liberate His captive people, regather them to Himself and re-establish them in the place of His own habitation. Zion was destined for glory, not destruction.

This message is present in the Lord's pronouncements respecting Assyria's role and destiny; they were immersed in and conditioned by His promise of deliverance and restoration in David's seed (cf. Isaiah 10:5-19 with 7:1-9:6 and 9:20-12:5). The same is true of His word concerning Babylon (cf. Isaiah 46-47 with 40:1-45:25 and 48:1-55:13; also Jeremiah 29-33; Hosea 1-2 with 3:1-5).

*This framework is, importantly, the historical and prophetic backdrop for Zechariah's imagery in chapter 14. And chapter 14 is directly connected with this framework by its theme of Yahweh arising to overthrow the very nations he had arrayed against His covenant people and kingdom (14:3-4). Having recently experienced liberation from Babylon at the hand of the Persian king Cyrus (ref. Isaiah 44:24-46:13, esp. 44:24-45:7 and 46:8-13), and recalling all too well Assyria's desolation of their sister kingdom Israel, the exiles hearing Zechariah's words couldn't have helped but have their minds turn to the experience of Israel and Judah with Assyria and Babylon and the way the Lord had spoken about it.*

They knew their history – the fact that God brought the Assyrians against Israel in the north, but prevented them from laying hold of David's throne in Judah just as His prophets had predicted (Isaiah 8:5-10; cf. 7:1-16; cf. Hosea 1). They'd also experienced that Judah's deliverance was a temporary reprieve; after Israel's destruction the prophets railed against Judah, condemning her unfaithfulness as surpassing her sister Israel's and declaring that desolation and exile awaited her as well. Zechariah's generation had seen this judgment come to pass; indeed some of those with him in Judea may have been taken to Babylon as children. They had experienced desolation, exile and captivity; now they were waiting for the Lord to fulfill His promise to arise against the subjugating powers and liberate and restore Zion and her children. *Zechariah's prophecy drew upon this hope, but situated it in the framework of another incursion, desolation and exile that lay in the future.*

The Lord was promising yet another day when He would arise against the powers which had desolated His kingdom and subjugated His people. *But this time, the restoration promised in the prophecies concerning Assyria and Babylon would actually be realized.* This divine work was prefigured in Judah's preservation from the Assyrians and Cyrus' release of the Judean exiles, but not accomplished. For David's house and kingdom – Zion and her children – remained subject to the prevailing world power. Yahweh had not yet fulfilled what He had promised. This was evident in Judah and Israel's historical circumstance, *but also in the conspicuous absence of the Davidic deliverer/king whom the prophets had declared the Lord would send as His redeemer, restorer and ruler.*

The Lord's promised deliverance and restoration could not come until He sent David's Branch; the Judeans with Zechariah understood this, and so their hope – and the hope of succeeding generations – was fixed on the day of His appearing. And so, though not mentioned in this passage, Branch is its implied centerpiece (cf. again chapter 11 with its apex in vv. 9-10). The Lord would arise against the offending, destroying power, but in the person of His Servant-Redeemer.

- b. This context doesn't mention the Branch, but it does *suggest* Him. The preceding consideration shows that to be the case simply by the way the Lord's intervention is depicted in verses 2-3. But this Davidic figure is also suggested by Zechariah's overall prophecy which has Him as its focal point – *and specifically as His coming and work are set alongside Yahweh's promise to return and restore Zion and her children* (cf. again 1:1-17 and 2:1-13 with 3:1-10 and 6:9-15; also 8:1-23 with 9:9-10 and 10:3-12 with 11:12-13). But there is yet another way in which this passage suggests the Branch, and that is that it depicts Yahweh's theophany in terms of His feet standing on the Mount of Olives (14:4).

This imagery could be merely symbolic, intended only to emphasize the Lord's actual presence and commitment to Zion's deliverance and recovery (cf. Psalm 10:1; Isaiah 3:13; Ezekiel 3:23; etc.). That is to say, Yahweh wasn't going to pass judgment from a distance; He was going to enter the fray so as to personally fight for Zion. He was committed to this fight and its triumphal outcome; He would stand fast against the assailants, engaging them with His forces from His strategic high ground and refusing to retreat, having His feet firmly planted.

But another option – and arguably the one which the broader context best supports – is that this depiction of a *bodily* theophany points to Yahweh accomplishing His triumphal return to Zion and her deliverance and restoration in a person who represents Him. Zechariah's prophecy leaves only one option for this individual, and the witness of the other prophets points in the same direction. The previous discussion demonstrated that Israel's prophets associated Yahweh's victorious theophany (the Day of Yahweh expressed in judgment and deliverance) with the coming of His messianic Servant, the Branch of David, and there was an important reason for establishing this truth: It provides the corroborating backdrop for "reading" the Branch into the present context.

- The theme of Yahweh bringing nations against His people and habitation and then destroying those assailants when they've accomplished His will finds its most significant referents in Assyria and Babylon.
- And in each of those cases, the Lord's stated goal was purging unto liberation and restoration. Most importantly, He indicated that He was going to accomplish that work in connection with His messianic Servant, whom the prophets often identified with the Davidic *Branch*.
- Zechariah followed that same pattern in his prophecy, which is exactly what one would expect if he was indeed a true prophet of the Lord.

And so it is reasonable to find an allusion to the Branch in this passage declaring that Yahweh's theophany on behalf of Zion would involve His feet standing on the Mount of Olives. The Lord was indeed coming to judge, purge, deliver, gather and restore all things, and He would do so in His Servant, the One in whom He has put His name and Spirit (Isaiah 42:1-3, 59:1-21, 61:1-9 with Luke 4:14-21).