

ZECHARIAH 14 AND THE COMING OF CHRIST
'Last Days Madness'
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p. 437-443

In the premillennial view of Bible prophecy, the events depicted in Zechariah 14 are most often interpreted as depicting the second coming of Christ when Jesus will descend from heaven and stand on the Mount of Olives and from there set up His millennial kingdom. The chronology outlined in Zechariah, however, does not fit this scenario. Events actually begin in chapter thirteen where it is prophesied that the Shepherd, Jesus, will be struck and the sheep will be scattered (Zech. 13:7). This was fulfilled when Jesus says, "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP SHALL BE SCATTERED'" (Mark 14:27). What follows describes events leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. God will act as Judge of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. As the king, He will send "his armies" and destroy "those murderers, and set their city on fire" (Matt. 22:7).

For I will gather all the nations [the Roman armies] against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered [Matt. 24:17], the women ravished [Luke 17:35], and half the city exiled [Matt. 24:16], but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city [Matt 24:16]" (Zech. 14:2).

This happened when the Roman armies, made up of soldiers from the nations it conquered, went to war against Jerusalem. Rome was an empire consisting of all the known nations of the world (see Luke 2:1). The Roman Empire "extended roughly two thousand miles from Scotland south to the headwaters of the Nile and about three thousand miles from the Pillars of Hercules eastward to the sands of Persia. Its citizens and subject peoples numbered perhaps eighty million."⁽¹⁾ Rome was raised up, like Assyria, to be the "rod of [God's] anger" (Isa. 10:5). "So completely shall the city be taken that the enemy shall sit down in the midst of her to divide the spoil. *All nations* (2), generally speaking were represented in the invading army, for Rome was the mistress of many lands."⁽²⁾ Thomas Scott, using supporting references from older commentators and cross references to other biblical books, writes that Zechariah is describing the events surrounding Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70.

The time when the Romans marched their armies, composed of many nations, to besiege Jerusalem, was "the day of the Lord" Jesus, on which he came to "destroy those that would not that he should reign over them" [Matt. 22:1-10; 24:3, 23-35; Luke 19:11-27, 41-44]. When the Romans had taken the city, all the outrages were committed, and the miseries endured, which are here predicted [Luke 21:20-24]. A very large proportion of the inhabitants were destroyed, or taken captives, and sold for slaves; and multitudes were driven away to be pursued by various perils and miseries: numbers also, having been converted to Christianity, became citizens of "the heavenly Jerusalem" and thus were "not cut off from the city" of God [Gal 4:21-31; Heb. 12:22-25].⁽³⁾

Forcing these series of descriptive judgments to leap over the historical realities of Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70 so as to fit a future judgment scenario is contrived and unnecessary. A proximate fulfillment is more logical and consistent with basic hermeneutical principles.

Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle (14:3).

After using Rome as His rod to smite Jerusalem, God turns on Rome in judgment. Once again, Assyria is the model: "I send it against a godless nation and commission it against the people of My fury to capture booty and to seize plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, He will say, 'I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness'" (Isa. 10:5-6, 12-13). "It is significant that the decline of the Roman Empire dates from the fall of Jerusalem."⁽⁴⁾ Thomas Scott concurs: "It is also observable, that the Romans after having been thus made the executioners of divine vengeance on the Jewish nation, never prospered as they had done before; but the Lord evidently fought against them, and all the nations which composed their overgrown empire; till at last it was subverted, and their fairest cities and provinces were ravaged by barbarous invaders."⁽⁵⁾

And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south (Zech. 14:4).

It is this passage that dispensationalists use to support the view that Jesus will touch down on planet earth and set up His millennial kingdom. Of course, one of the problems in making Zechariah 14:4 refer to Christ's second coming is the absence of any reference to Him coming down. But let's assume that Jesus' coming is *implied*. How else would Jehovah be able to "stand on the Mount of Olives"? Numerous times in the Bible we read of Jehovah "coming down" to meet with His people. In most instances His coming is one of judgment. In no case was He physically present. Mountains, like sun, moon, and stars, are often used to represent tribes, nations, and kingdoms. For example, Israel is depicted as a mountain (Amos 4:1; Zech. 4:7; John 4:21; Rev. 8:8; 21:10).

The symbolic nature of mountains comes from the Apostle John's Jewish heritage. John was a Jew, and the book of Revelation must be interpreted with one eye on the Old Testament: "The Book of Revelation is the most thoroughly Jewish in its language and imagery of any New Testament book. This book speaks not the language of Paul, but of the Old Testament Prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel."(6)

In the Old Testament, a mountain was often a symbolic reference to a kingdom or national power. The prophet Isaiah wrote of a time when "the mountain of the LORD'S temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it" (Isaiah 2:2). In Jeremiah 51:25, God issued a stern warning to the nation of Babylon: "'I am against you, O destroying mountain, you who destroy the whole earth,' declares the LORD, 'I will stretch out my hand against you, roll you off the cliffs, and make you a burned-out mountain.'

The prophet Daniel saw a vision in which "the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:35). What did the mountain symbolize? "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever" (2:44). The Old Testament uses the figure of a mountain to refer to a kingdom.

Jesus describes Israel's judgment in terms of a mountain being "taken up and cast into the sea" (Matt. 21:21; Mark 11:23). Jesus delivered His judgment discourse concerning the destruction of the temple from the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24-25). Notice how many times God's coming is associated with mountains.

- "So I have *come down* to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey. . . (Ex. 3:8).
- "Then Thou didst *come down* on Mount Sinai, and didst speak with them from heaven. . . (Neh. 9:13a).
- "Bow Thy heavens, O LORD, and *come down*; touch the mountains, that they may smoke" (Psalm 144:5).
- "For thus says the LORD to me, 'As the lion or the young lion growls over his prey, against which a band of shepherds is called out, will not be terrified at their voice, nor disturbed at their noise, so will the LORD of hosts *come down* to wage war on Mount Zion and on its hill'" (Isa. 31:4).
- "Oh, that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and *come down*, that the mountains might quake at Thy presence— (Isa. 64:1).
- "When Thou didst awesome things which we did not expect, Thou didst *come down*, the mountains quaked at Thy presence" (Isa. 64:3).

In Micah 1:3 we are told that God "is coming forth from His place" to "*come down* and tread on the high places of the earth." How is this descriptive language different from the Lord standing on the Mount of Olives with the result that it will split? Micah says "the mountains will melt under Him, and *the valleys will be split*, like wax before the fire, like water poured down a steep place" (1:4). "It was not uncommon for prophets to use figurative expressions about the Lord 'coming' down, mountains trembling, being scattered, and hills bowing (Hab. 3:6, 10); mountains flowing down at his presence (Isaiah 64:1, 3); or mountains and hills singing and the trees clapping their hands (Isaiah 55:12)." (8)

Isaiah 40:4 is descriptive of earth-moving events that did not literally take place.

Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley.

The New Testament specifies how we should interpret these verses by applying them to the coming of Christ. Christ's coming is preceded by "every mountain and hill" being brought "low" (Luke 3:5). Was there a major realignment of the topography of Judea when Jesus came on the scene after the announcement of John the Baptist? Was *any* mountain or hill "made low"? And yet, the prophecy was fulfilled in the first century.

What is the Bible trying to teach us with this descriptive language of the Mount of Olives "split in its middle"? The earliest Christian writers applied Zechariah 14:4 to the work of Christ *in His day*. Tertullian (A.D. 145-220) wrote: "But at night He went out to the Mount of Olives.' For thus had Zechariah pointed out: And His feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives' [Zech. xiv. 4]." (9) Tertullian was alluding to the fact that the Olivet prophecy set the stage for the judgment coming of Christ that would once for all break down the Jewish/Gentile division. Matthew Henry explains the theology behind the prophecy in this way:

The partition-wall between Jew and Gentiles shall be taken away. The mountains about Jerusalem, and particularly this, signified it to be an enclosure, and that it stood in the way of those who would approach to it. Between the Gentiles and Jerusalem this *mountain of Bether, of division*, stood, Cant. ii. 17. But by the destruction of Jerusalem this mountain shall be made to *cleave in the midst*, and so the Jewish pale shall be taken down, and the church laid in common with the Gentiles, who were made one with the Jews by the breaking down of this *middle wall of partition*, Eph. ii. 14. (10)

You will notice that there is no mention of a thousand year reign following the presence of Jehovah on the Mount of Olives. While we are told that "the LORD will be king over all the earth" (14:9), this does not mandate an earthly millennial reign of Christ. This language is neither new or forward looking. "For the LORD

Most High is to be feared, a great King over all the earth. He subdues peoples under us, and nations under our feet" (Psalm 47:2, 3). This is exactly what happened with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Notes

1. Otto Friedrich, *The End of the World: A History* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1982), 28.
2. G. N. M. Collins, "Zechariah," *The New Bible Commentary*, F. Davidson, ed., 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954), 761.
3. Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, According to the Authorised Version; with Explanatory notes, Practical Observations, and Copious Marginal References*, 3 vols. (New York: Collins and Hannay, 1832), 2:955
4. Collins, "Zechariah," 761.
5. Scott, *The Holy Bible*, etc., 956.
6. Ferrel Jenkins, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 22.
7. Charles H. Dyer, *World News and Bible Prophecy* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1993), 150-51.
8. Ralph Woodrow, *His Truth is Marching On: Advanced Studies on Prophecy in the Light of History* (Riverside, CA: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1977), 110.
9. "Tertullian Against Marcion," Book 4, chapter XL, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:417.
10. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), 4:1468.