

# OpenTheo

## Zechariah 14:1 - 14:5



### Zechariah - Steve Gregg

Zechariah 14:1-5 is a cryptic chapter that speaks of the end times and the second coming of Christ. The prophecy describes the pouring of the Holy Spirit onto Jerusalem's inhabitants and the remnant that remains after the physical city's destruction. Steve Gregg advises against taking everything in the book of Zechariah literally and explains the use of metaphor and imagery throughout the passage.

### Transcript

We have only one chapter left in Zechariah, and it's the hardest by most estimates. I don't find it as hard as I used to to understand it, but it must be very hard because commentators seem to not understand it. This whole section, chapters 12 through 14, the last oracle in the book, seemed to be applied popularly by most commentators to the end of the world, whereas I'm not seeing any indication in the book at all that that is what it's about.

In fact, there are indicators in the New Testament to tell us that it is about something very different than the end of the world, and so we're going to do our best to establish what that is. I want to say, too, perhaps no one in this room, but people who may see this video or hear this lecture at some time, may be committed to a different view of this. And I find that people who are sometimes may be offended or threatened or something by the suggestion that this isn't about the end of the world, which gives you the impression they have some stake in their interpretation that I can't quite fathom.

I'm not sure why it would matter whether this is about the end of the world or not. The main concern would be to understand what it is about. If it turned out to be about something different than we once thought, as I believe it has turned out to be about something different than I once thought, I don't know why that would be a problem to us unless just changing our mind is a crisis.

But remember, our task in studying the Scripture is not to prove a point. I'm not going to try to prove necessarily that somebody else's view is wrong, but I do want to prove as best I can what it is talking about from comparing Scripture with Scripture. So that's my

task.

And this chapter more than the others in Zechariah is one that people are very fond of, certain images from it, and they do identify it with the Second Coming of Christ and surrounding events. Now let's read the whole chapter just so we get the big picture here. This is not the beginning of the prophecy.

It began in chapter 12 with the statement that this is the burden of the word of the Lord against Israel. So we should expect something to do with the judgment of Israel is in this prophecy since that's what it says. And we saw in chapter 12 that it's likely that that chapter was talking to a large extent about the protection of Jerusalem from hostile powers, probably during the Maccabean period.

Those forces that tried to unseat Jerusalem from its place were like trying to move a large stone which actually defeated them and hurt them badly. And that's what it says will be the case. Certainly Antiochus Epiphanes and his armies smarted severely for their efforts to stamp out the worship in Jerusalem of the true God and defiling the temple and all of that.

And I think chapter 12 is largely about that till we got to verse 10, which I believe is about Pentecost. After all, it is the pouring out of the Spirit on the inhabitants of Jerusalem. What would be the most obvious fulfillment of that? But that may be that time when he did that, which happened as recorded in Acts chapter 2. And besides which we know that chapter 13, which is only continuing the same prophecy, was fulfilled in the first century in the first coming of Christ because it says in verse 7, Awake, O sword against my shepherd, against the man who is my companion, says the Lord of hosts, strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

And of course Christ quoted that in Matthew 26, 31 and said, this will be fulfilled tonight. All of you will be offended because of me tonight that it might be fulfilled. Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

So Christ quoted this verse as if its fulfillment was that very night. And therefore we see that the events in chapter 12 are most likely, except for the Pentecost passage, leading up to the time of Christ, his first coming. Pentecost and the opening of a fountain for forgiveness of sins in chapter 13, verse 1, would be associated with Christ's death, resurrection, and giving of the Holy Spirit.

And verse 7 is mentioned as the striking of the shepherd because it precipitates God turning his hand against his flock. Because the shepherd is stricken, the sheep are scattered and God will turn his hand against Israel. Now we should have expected that to be coming up here in the prophecy since the prophecy began in chapter 12, verse 1 saying this is the burden of the word of the Lord against Israel.

Yet we have not yet read a description of a judgment against Israel. We've read of God protecting Israel in the Maccabean period. We've read of the outpouring of the Spirit and an opening of a fountain for sin and uncleanness, which is no doubt the blood of Christ at the cross.

But why and when do we begin to talk about the judgment on Israel in this prophecy? Well, it's because they struck the shepherd. And when is now? He says in chapter 13, verse 8, It shall come to pass in all the land, says the Lord, that two-thirds of it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it. And I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested.

They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, This is my people, and each one will say, The Lord is my God. So a judgment is coming on Israel because of the striking of the shepherd.

It will result in the majority of the Jewish people coming under harsh judgment, even death. This happened historically, of course, not very long after Jesus died. And that was when the Romans came and absolutely destroyed the Jewish state.

There was a remnant that survived it, which is described as one-third, that are brought through it safely, and God refines them as gold is refined. Something that Peter, for example, in 1 Peter 1, verse 7, says, is the experience of the church. The first century Christians are refined as gold is refined, even as predicted here would happen to that remnant that are saved.

But what is chapter 14 about? Well, in my opinion, it's about the same thing. And therefore, I'm going to see it as fulfilled, at least the beginning part of it, in AD 70. There is going to be a call for attentiveness, though, as we read through this chapter, because Jerusalem seems to change hats from time to time.

In the prophetic scriptures, not just Zechariah, but throughout the prophetic Old Testament scriptures, Jerusalem sometimes refers to the apostate city of Jerusalem under God's judgment, and sometimes to the remnant of Jerusalem, which continue to exist as a spiritual Jerusalem, as a heavenly Jerusalem, citizens of heaven, people whose names are written in heaven, as citizens of God's spiritual city of Jerusalem. We have seen this in previous lectures. We don't need to go over all those scriptures again, but the main scripture, perhaps, that would be helpful in pointing this out is in Hebrews 12, where it is made very plain by the writer of Hebrews that he considers Jerusalem, at least the heavenly Jerusalem, to be a reference to the church.

He says in Hebrews 12, 22, We are part of the general assembly in the church of Christ, the firstborn, and we are registered in heaven, that is, as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. We are Zion. We are the city of God.

Jesus said to his disciples, You are the light of the world, a city set on a hill, cannot be hid. You are that city. You are the city of God.

You are the spiritual, heavenly Jerusalem. You are the general assembly and church of the firstborn, registered in heaven. This is us, and the writer of Hebrews, of course, throughout his book is alluding to Old Testament stuff.

Now, when he says that we have come to Jerusalem, he doesn't say what passage he is alluding to, or come to Mount Zion. There is a good chance he is alluding to Isaiah 2 and Micah 4, where it talks about all the nations shall flow into Mount Zion and receive instruction from the Lord and walk in His ways. Certainly, ever since Christ has come, there have been Gentiles coming in from all nations into the church from Mount Zion and receiving instruction and walking in God's ways.

And that was, of course, predicted also earlier in the end of chapter 8, I think it was, of Zechariah. Here we have, sometimes it's physical Jerusalem, sometimes it's spiritual Jerusalem, and it's not really that disjointed. It may seem like it.

You say, well, why do you say this Jerusalem is earthly and this one over here is spiritual? Because in the mind of the prophets, Jerusalem, earthly and spiritual, are not entirely two different things. The spiritual Jerusalem is the continuation of the original Jerusalem in its remnant. The apostate of the city of Jerusalem and its political structure is destroyed in judgment.

The living remnant, the third, that it says are not cut off from the city, they remain part of it. It says that in chapter 13, verse 8, that two-thirds in it, that is in Jerusalem, shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it. The remnant remains in Jerusalem, but not in the city.

The city is destroyed. They remain the Jerusalem, the spiritual, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God. They are part of the church.

And therefore, the passage before us will talk about judgment of Jerusalem and blessing of Jerusalem. And it's obvious the judgment parts are applying to that two-thirds that would be destroyed. And the blessing part is on the one-third that is taken through the fire.

Both are Jerusalem. And it's simply that the ones that survive and are the church are the continuing existence of the Jerusalem that is above, which is the mother of us all, as Paul says in Galatians 4. Let me read the whole chapter. It will be problematic.

I did say it's one of the hardest chapters in the Bible. But I think it can be made easier as we see not only what I just pointed out, but how the prophecy runs up to it and places us right at the time that we would expect the destruction of Jerusalem. We've seen God's blessing on Jerusalem before Pentecost, before the cross.

And now we've seen the cross. And we've seen that because the shepherds scattered, God's going to judge his flock. And now we expect to see that judgment, and we do.

Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem. The city shall be taken, the houses rifled, the women shall be ravaged.

Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnants of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Again, the one third who remain in it are remaining in the spiritual Jerusalem after the physical city certainly is destroyed. Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as he fights in a day of battle.

And in that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall split in two from the east to the west, making a very large valley. Half of the mountain shall move toward the north, and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through my mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal.

Yes, you shall flee, as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah. Thus the Lord my God will come and all the saints with you. It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light.

The lights will diminish. It shall be one day, which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but at evening time it shall happen that it will be light. And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea, half of them toward the western sea.

In both summer and winter it shall occur. And the Lord shall be king over all the earth. In that day it shall be, the Lord is one, and his name one.

All the land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be raised up and inhabited in her place from Benjamin's gate to the place of the first gate, and the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananiel to the king's wine presses. The people shall dwell in it and no longer shall there be utter destruction, but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.

And this shall be the plague with which the Lord shall strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem. Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet. Their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths.

It shall come to pass that day that a great panic from the Lord will be among them. Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbor and raise his hand against his neighbor's hand. Judah also shall fight at Jerusalem, and the wealth of all the surrounding nations shall be gathered together, gold, silver, and apparel in great abundance.

Such also shall be the plague on the horse and the mule, on the camel and the donkey, and on all the cattle that will be in those camps, so shall this plague be. And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, on them there will be no rain.

If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain. They shall receive the plague with which the Lord strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

In that day, holiness to the Lord shall be engraved on the bells of the horses. The pots in the Lord's house will be like the bowls before the altar. Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness to the Lord of hosts.

Everyone who sacrifices shall come and take them and cook in them. In that day, there shall no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts. And some translations say there will no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts.

Now, what a bizarre chapter that is. And as with many of the chapters in Zechariah, it's difficult, perhaps even impossible, to assign precise, sensible meanings to every phrase and every word. I mean, I don't know how Zechariah is choosing his words or how the Holy Spirit is choosing his words for him, but many of the phrases simply... The impression I have is they're there to give an impression.

They're impressionistic. They're poetic. Much of this is written in poetry.

And therefore, we have to say, okay, some of this may be really hard or impossible to assign precise associations with anything known either past, present, or future. And I don't know any teacher or commentary that does associate every detail that way. What we do, both I and other teachers, is find the clues in key verses.

If we find a key verse that says, oh, that orientates me. There's a verse I know what that's about. Then we say, okay, then this whole section must be somehow associated with that.

The details, hard to work out. But at least we have some connectors. And that was true in chapter 13 when we saw, strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

Well, there's a very clear indicator that can't be missed because Jesus quoted it and said when it was fulfilled. So we get sort of a time frame. Now, the dispensationalist actually believes that when we are in chapter 12 and 13 and 14, we are talking about the end of the world.

That we're talking about the great tribulation. We're talking about the end of Christ coming against Jerusalem. We're talking about the second coming of Christ and the millennial reign after Jesus comes back.

So they've got all of this transported to the end of the world. I was actually just to remind myself what dispensationalists say because it's been so long since I was one of them. I pulled out a dispensational commentary last night and I was looking at what he said about chapter 13, verse 7. About strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

He said that clearly is referring to Jesus being betrayed and so forth. He couldn't deny what it was. But he said the next line, I will turn my hand against the little ones, leaps forward to the end of the world.

So we have a reference to Jesus being killed 2,000 years ago. But the rest of the same sentence is about the end of the world 2,000 years later. Now I'm not against jumping around a bit, as you know.

I believe that sometimes a reference to God delivering people historically from Alexander the Great or from Antiochus Epiphanes in the prophet's mind immediately reminds him of the future deliverance which was accomplished in Christ at his first coming. And so that we have, for example, in chapter 9, verses 1 through 8, Alexander's conquest of the regions north of Jerusalem and God's deliverance of Jerusalem and the house of God from that destruction which actually historically God did prevent Alexander from destroying the temple. And the very next words are talking about Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.

We clearly have a jump from Alexander's day to Jesus' day, a jump of 300 years. But not difficult to explain why. We know the riding of the Messiah on the donkey is because the New Testament identifies the fulfillment.

We can see Alexander's conquest clearly enough in the first eight verses and we see Jesus coming on a donkey clearly enough in verse 9. So we know there are times when the prophetic vision leaps over a few centuries especially if he's leaping to the time of Christ. From almost any time, hundreds of years before Christ, if there is the prophecy of the deliverance of God's people by God, the prophet leaps forward also and talks about Christ coming to deliver the people ultimately as their king and savior. As we see, of course, in chapter 9, verse 9. Now, therefore, if the dispensationalist wants to say we have the crucifixion of Christ in chapter 13, verse 7 and before the sentence is done, it leaps forward to the second coming of Christ.

Well, this is not an impossibility. This is something that could possibly be justified if it can be justified. The point here is we are not able to postulate such large leaps without having some kind of a marker, some kind of indicator that tells us that we're now looking at an entirely different time frame.

When we're reading about Alexander and then we read a clear reference to Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, it's unmistakably there's been a leap. But where is the indicator that there's a leap here? Especially in view of the fact that historically, after Christ was crucified, there was a judgment that came upon Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It fits very well the description of the opening verses of chapter 14.

Why should we assume that that is not what's being discussed and assume instead that there must be a repeat of that some 2,000 years later? There might be, but wouldn't we be expected for God to say so if it was so? And if He doesn't say so, why should we assume it? And the reason is given simply that chapter 14 can't be talking about A.D. 70 for various reasons. First of all, they say after A.D. 70, verse 3 says the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as He fights in the day of battle, presumably those nations that destroyed Jerusalem. So, what happened to Roman Empire? Did God go out and fight against them right after He killed the Jews and destroyed Jerusalem? Well, not immediately, although, of course, they did fall eventually.

So, I mean, God may have had a prolonged battle against them, the Roman Empire, until it fell. It could be, or it could even be a spiritual battle because God did conquer the Roman Empire through the Gospel. The New Testament writers saw themselves engaged in a spiritual warfare against the kingdom of darkness and that is God's war.

That is God's battle and the Church of Jesus Christ conquered Rome. The very people who destroyed the city of Jerusalem were conquered by the Gospel and became Christian. So, I mean, it is not impossible to see that as associated with, but then there is this other business which we have come to associate with the Second Coming of Christ.

That is verses 4 and 5 especially. It says, In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from the east to the west, making a very large valley.

Half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half toward the south, which of course makes a valley that runs east-west through what was once a mountain. It is now a split mountain. Half have gone north, half south, and there is a lateral valley going from the from Jerusalem really on the west toward the east, toward the Jordan.

Now, many people are of the opinion that this is literally going to happen. In fact, many people will tell you Jesus is going to come back to the Mount of Olives and it is going to split in two. And if that is true, then this would be talking about that.

But how do we know He is going to? This is the only verse that is ever used to say so. There is no other verse in the Bible that speaks of Jesus returning to the Mount of Olives or of the Mount of Olives split. This is the whole verse, the whole scriptural case.

And the question can be asked, is this speaking about that? And we will examine that in



a moment. We won't do it right now. But I dare say that when we compare scripture to scripture, we will see that this is not likely talking about a literal splitting of the Mount of Olives in the future at all.

It does talk about creating an east-west valley and it talks about God's people fleeing to the east from Jerusalem through that valley. As He says in verse 5, Then you will flee through my mountain valley. But, note, when it says His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, it doesn't say whose, but it is assuming that it is somebody who has been mentioned previously.

Has Jesus been mentioned previously? Well, I guess way back in chapter 13 verse 7, it could be going back so far, but more recently there has been discussion of Yahweh. In the Hebrew, Yahweh, it just says the Lord in our passage. And the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, it is about Yahweh.

And His feet stand on the Mount of Olives. But what does that signify? That is not something we have to be left guessing about because we have another instance in the Bible of Yahweh standing on the Mount of Olives. And we will look at that in a moment.

And it is in significance the same as the significance here. And there are other weird things that people say could not possibly be associated with the 70 AD. After all, verse 8 says living waters are going to flow out of Jerusalem.

Apparently through that valley. Toward the eastern sea some of them, that would be probably through the valley of the split mountain, and half toward the western sea, which would be the Mediterranean. And this would be not a seasonal creek.

This would be summer and winter. And the Lord will be king over all the earth. So, many people feel like this can't be said to have happened.

And therefore, it must be in the future. More than that, verse 12 talks about what happens to those people who fought against Jerusalem. It says their flesh dissolves while they stand on their feet.

Their eyes dissolve in their sockets and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths. Many dispensations feel like this is some kind of a special supernatural plague. Others say maybe this is a result of a nuclear warfare that causes people's eyeballs to melt and things like that.

Although why this would be restricted simply to those who fought Jerusalem and not the good people too is not stated. But the point here is, has there ever been a time where this actually happened? Well, the question then becomes how literal is this supposed to be taken? And how would we defend the suggestion that it's literal? Dispensationalists, who are our favorite teachers, of course, in many cases, the ones who write the most books and have the most radio shows and have the most the biggest churches, they tell

us the reason for this is you must take it literally. I guess we're not supposed to ask why should we take it literally? Because there's not an obvious reason.

Well, because that's how we do things. That's just how we take them literally. Is that how we take everything? Is that how we've been taking everything throughout the book of Zechariah, literally? In these visions, a little woman in an ephah basket named Wickedness who's carried off by two women with stork wings into Babylon, is that a literal description of actual women with wings and a little woman that fits in a five-gallon tank? Let's face it, there are many things in Zechariah that everybody knows are not literal.

And some of these things we might expect could be, we could ask, why should we take this literally, especially if a symbolic meaning is strongly suggested? Think about this section we've just gone through, chapters 12 through 14, how much non-literal things there are. In chapter 12, verse 2, Jerusalem is described as a cup of drunkenness. Is the city a cup that people drink from and get literally drunk? No, that's a figure.

That's a figure of speech. It's not literal. It's a metaphor.

Jerusalem's not a cup. It's not full of wine. People never got drunk drinking from Jerusalem.

It is also called in chapter 12, verse 3, a stone. A burdensome stone. And people cut themselves to pieces by trying to move it.

Is Jerusalem literally a stone? No, that's a metaphor also, isn't it? It talks many times about all peoples, all nations, every horse and rider throughout. In many cases, in chapter 12 and elsewhere, it's really just, that's hyperbole. I pointed out yesterday that in Acts chapter 2 and verse 5, Luke, who's not even writing in poetry, says that at Pentecost, there were people gathered in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven.

Certainly, that's not literal. There weren't Jews from every nation under heaven. But, this kind of hyperbole is not uncommon in Scripture.

Even more so in prophecy and poetry than in literal historical narrative like Luke usually gives us. But, Luke even uses this hyperbole. It would be surprising if someone like Zechariah didn't.

And, if we want to assume that he did, it seems like the burden of proof would be upon us to show that he, unlike other writers of Scripture, must be speaking in literal terms against all appearances. It talks about horses being struck blind in chapter 12, verse 4. A plague of rotting flesh and eyes and tongues as we saw in chapter 14, verse 12. Also, chapter 11, verse 17 talked about the shepherds of Israel, the ones that crucified Jesus, that their sword will come against their arm and their eyeball and destroy them.

These are poetic, impressionistic things. The people who crucified Jesus, probably none of them really had their eyes gouged out with swords or their arms cut off with swords. Some of them might have been dismembered by Romans if they survived so long after the crucifixion of Christ, but this is certainly not the fate of all of them.

And yet, it's spoken as if that is because they were bad shepherds. Well, even shepherds is symbolic. Leaders aren't really shepherds.

Shepherds are people who watch actual sheep. Israel is not literal sheep. It's a metaphor.

The prophecies are full of metaphors. We simply ignore that fact most of the time. And then, when we're called on to take something metaphorical that we're wanting to take literal, we'll say, no, we're supposed to take the prophecy literally.

In chapter 12, verse 6, the clans of Judah are called a fire pan in the woodpile and a torch among sheaves. The clans of Judah are not a fire pan. That's a figure.

That's a metaphor. They're not a torch. There might be ways to compare them to that, but that's just the point.

That's what a metaphor does. It makes a comparison in principle. But it isn't literal.

In chapter 13, verse 1, it talks about a fountain opened, which, if literal, would be like a spring coming out of the ground of water. But this is a fountain for the cleansing of sin and uncleanness. It's obviously metaphorical.

It's no doubt referring to Christ's blood. There's a fountain of blood that cleanses sin. The reference to Christ perishing by the sword in chapter 13, verse 7, awake, O sword against my shepherd.

This is talking about Christ being killed. He wasn't slain with a sword. He wasn't even literally a shepherd.

He was a carpenter at one time, but he never was a literal shepherd, and he was not killed with a literal sword. But he was killed by Romans, and Romans typically, the sword of Rome is considered to be their exercise of capital punishment. Remember when Paul said in Romans 13, you should obey the authorities, the Roman authorities, because they do not bear the sword for nothing.

The sword simply means the ability to execute criminals. But it's figurative. Jesus wasn't killed with a sword.

He wasn't literally a shepherd either. The reference to two-thirds and one-third that we just read earlier in chapter 13 is no doubt round numbers, or not even round numbers, probably simply a symbolism for a majority and a minority. And I do believe there's other instances of those fractions being used that way in Scripture we won't look for right now.

He talks about people being refined like gold through fire. Now Christians don't literally, generally speaking, go through literal fire. We would burn up.

Gold doesn't burn up. It's refined. God puts us through trials.

Fire is figurative. The refinement, like gold, is a metaphor. We're so accustomed to some of these metaphors that we forgot that they're not literal.

They are metaphors. And the whole prophecy is full of metaphors all the way through. When it says the Lord will go forth and fight, in chapter 14, verse 3, this is perhaps the first part of this chapter that seems to point to the second coming of Jesus, because we anticipate Jesus coming back to fight His enemies.

And when it says the Lord will go forth to fight, it sounds like this is the second coming of Christ. But we know very well, if we're acquainted with the Old Testament, that the prophets often speak of God being the one who's fighting against a nation when in fact that nation succumbs to a rival political army from another nation. God comes and fights.

In Isaiah 19, an example I often give, because it's such a good one, Isaiah 19, 1, is predicting the Assyrians coming and defeating Egypt. Something that happened in the 8th century B.C. And the prophecy about Egypt's defeat by Assyria, because it is seen as an act of God's judgment, is worded this way in Isaiah 19, 1. It says, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and will come to Egypt. And all the idols of Egypt will tremble because of him.

If we take that literally, God literally was riding on a cloud and actually literally came to Egypt. However, as you read the prophecy, it's very clear it's referring not to God personally coming, but the Assyrian armies at his behest coming. This is typical of the prophetic way.

When an army comes and it is the judgment of God on the invaded people, this is often said to be God coming. So when it says the Lord will go forth and fight, this is not something that would by default in the Old Testament prophet be taken to be a literal coming of God or Jesus Christ. Most of the times in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, they talk about the Lord coming, are not referring to the second coming of Christ.

And unless there's other reasons to believe that this is, there's no basic reason to assume that this is an exception. The Lord going forth to fight would normally mean armies are coming as agents of God's judgment against somebody. In this case, it's clearly Jerusalem.

It says it's against Jerusalem. This whole oracle beginning in chapter 12 and verse 1 is said to be against Israel. So God is fighting against Israel.

Now, we might just take a moment here to look at a few things in the New Testament that might bring clarity to this, even this language. In Matthew chapter 21, we have famously the story of the vineyard and the tenants that Jesus told. The vineyard is Israel.

The tenants are the leaders of Israel, the very shepherds that are despised in Zechariah 11 and elsewhere. And they're despised because they're unfaithful to God. They're supposed to be producing the fruit.

They're supposed to be taking care of the vineyard and making it produce fruit for the owner. The fruit he's looking for is justice and righteousness. We know that because Isaiah 5-7 tells us that the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is Judah and Israel.

And the fruit he's looking for is justice and righteousness. So here's a nation he's looking to get justice and righteousness from and he's got leaders there supposed to be bringing forth that fruit for him. They don't do it.

They're corrupt leaders. And so he sends his prophets to them. In the parable, we see that the owner sends his messengers to these people.

And instead, they abuse the messengers. As we see in Matthew 21, for example, verse 35, the vinedressers, or the tenants, took his servants and beat one, killed one, stoned another, and he sent again other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. These servants of God are the prophets coming to Israel throughout the Old Testament history saying, God is looking for fruit from Israel.

He's looking for justice. He's looking for righteousness. When are you people going to start being just and righteous? And they get themselves killed.

The whole history of the prophets in the Old Testament is in Matthew 21 verses 35 and 36. Then verse 37, last of all, he sent his son to them saying, they will respect my son. So here, after all the prophets of the Old Testament, we have the last messengers God sends them, the last one of all.

They'll have no more. And that is the son. And they say, this is the son, let's kill him.

And we can keep his inheritance. So they kill him. They caught him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Notice verse 40. Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine dressers? The answer is he will destroy those wicked men miserably and lease the vineyard to other vine dressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons. So when the owner comes, what's he going to do? He's going to destroy those wicked men.

This is the judgment on Jerusalem in AD 70. And then he leased out the vineyard to

others. Who? Jesus said to his disciples, I'm the true vine, you're the branches, you're going to bring forth fruit if you abide in me.

You're the new fruit bearers here. You're the new ones replacing the old ones. In fact, Jesus said it that way in verse 43.

Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God is taken from you, that is Israel, and given to another nation, not Israel, that bears the fruits of it. That's the church, of course. The church is a holy nation, Peter said in 1 Peter 2 9. And so the nation that now has the kingdom given to it is the church.

Jesus said to the disciples, I think it was in the 12th chapter of Luke, he said, do not fear little flock. It's your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. So the kingdom has been taken from the apostate Israel and given to the remnant Israel, the disciples, the church.

And so this happened when? When the owner of the vineyard came. It happened in 70 AD, but that was the coming of the owner of the vineyard. That's just a figure of speech, of course.

It wasn't the second coming. But in the same figure of language that the prophets used, the judgment that came upon them was the coming of the owner against them. Of course it happened through the Romans, just as the judgment God coming on Egypt was through the Assyrians.

In this case, the coming against these wicked men was through the Romans. And then look at chapter 22. Matthew 22.

Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said, the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged the marriage for his son. Any mystery about who the king and the son are? And he sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding and they were not willing to come. Again he sent out other servants, again the prophets, again and again saying, come into the kingdom of God.

And what did they do? Same thing as in the previous parable. It says in verse 5 they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm another to his business and the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully and killed them. Now in this case I don't believe it's the prophets but the apostles.

When God set his son up to call for his bride when the wedding began, the apostles got to invite people into the kingdom. And they get treated the same way the prophets did in the previous parable. So what happens in verse 7? Then the king heard about, he was furious and he sent out his armies and destroyed those murderers and burned up their city.

Who are these murderers? Who stoned Stephen the first Christian martyr? Who had Jesus crucified? Who persecuted the church so it had to flee from Jerusalem? It was the Jewish establishment and God sent out his armies, this would be the Roman armies, God's armies and they burned up the city. And then he sent his messengers out to the Gentiles far and wide to the highways and byways to bring in people. So the first people invited were the ones close at hand to God, his covenant people Israel.

They didn't come. They abused his servants just like they did before Jesus came. They abused the servants after Jesus came and so God said this is it.

I'm sending my armies to burn down your city and he did. This judgment upon Jerusalem is twice in the parables of Jesus here referred to as the judgment that came upon them because of their rejection of the son and of his messengers. What Israel did to Jesus brought upon them the judgment of the king's armies, the Roman armies, God's armies in that instance because he was employing them.

If you look at Luke chapter 19 we don't have time to survey all the New Testament information about this but these are a few things to help get us thinking in biblical categories. Luke 19 as Jesus was approaching Jerusalem. Verse 41 it says, Now as he drew near he saw the city and he wept over it saying, If you had known even you especially in this your day the things that make for your peace but now they are hidden from your eyes.

For the days will come upon you when your enemies this would be the Romans, will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side and level you and your children within you to the ground. They will not leave in you one stone upon another because you did not know the time of your visitation. You didn't recognize the Messiah when he came and that rejection of him has bringing this judgment upon you.

Not one stone will be left on top of another. Two chapters later in chapter 21 of Luke verse 5 and 6 it says, Then as some spoke of the temple and how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, Jesus said As for these things which you see, the days will come in which not one stone will be left upon another that shall not be thrown down. The destruction of the temple, A.D. 70 The disciples came to him, verse 7 and said, Teacher, when will these things be? That is, the stones be cast down and the temples be destroyed.

When is that going to happen? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place? Give us a clue. Before the temple is destroyed exactly what's the time frame for that and what sign will there be? Well, the time frame is given when he says this generation will not pass until all these things are fulfilled. He says that in verse 32.

The time frame of the destruction of Jerusalem is in that generation. He also tells them what the sign is. They say, what sign will there be that's about to happen? Luke 21 20

When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, that'd be Roman armies, then know that its desolation is near.

Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem by its enemies, the destruction of the temple by its enemies. He said, this is because you didn't recognize me. Or in his parables, because you didn't come to the wedding when you were invited.

Or because you abused the prophets and killed me, the Master is going to come and he's going to kill you. The destruction of Jerusalem is a main theme of the New Testament and the Old. How do I know it is of the Old? Well, look at Matthew 21 and look at these verses.

We looked at verse 20. When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

That's going to happen when that split mountain is discussed in Zechariah 14. They're going to flee. Let those who are in the midst of her depart, let not those who are in the country enter her, for these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

But woe to those who are pregnant and those with nursing babies in those days, there will be great distress in the land, that's Israel, and wrath upon this people, the Jews. And they will fall by the edge of the sword. They did.

They will be led away captive into all nations. They were. And Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles.

It has been. This has happened, as Jesus said, in that generation. He said, this generation will not pass before these things happen.

But notice what he says there in verse 22. These are the days of vengeance, that all things that are written. Written where? Well, not in the New Testament, because it wasn't written yet.

Certainly the Old Testament. The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by the Romans, he said, this is going to happen so that all things that are written, presumably in the prophets of the Old Testament, will be fulfilled. Would that include, perhaps, Zechariah 14? Is that written in the Old Testament? Once I saw this particular verse without lenses, and just saw what Jesus said many years ago, I began to realize, wow, Jesus is suggesting that the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 is the subject of much Old Testament prophecy.

And I began to see that much of what I had been thinking was about the end of the world was about the end of Jerusalem in the Old Testament. And I'm persuaded that we cannot reasonably see Zechariah 14 differently. Let me tell you why.



Verse 4, Zechariah 14 4 says, In that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And, consequently, it will split in two and make a valley going eastward, or west and east. East of Jerusalem is the across the Kidron Valley, is the Mount of Olives.

It would block any flight east. If someone was going directly east from Jerusalem, the mountain would be in the way. There is discussion of the mountain splitting that is removing the obstacle to flight so that people in Jerusalem, God's people in Jerusalem, could flee to the east from the city and get away.

From what? Certainly not from the end of the world. How would you get away from the end of the world? By going through a valley from Jerusalem past Mount of Olives. By the way, in any modern disaster, people fleeing through a valley, presumably on foot, would not be necessarily guaranteed safety.

If they have enemies fighting them, they are going to be under satellite surveillance. Planes are going to be flying over them. You do not escape by going through a valley to the other side of a mountain.

Not in modern days. In ancient times, you might have a chance, unless you are being pursued by people who are as fast as you are. But the point is, in a modern day situation, a valley is not going to be much help to people who are being hunted down to be killed or who are in danger of falling with the city.

A valley to flee through? This is not, in my opinion, a literal valley. First of all, because the imagery is not to be taken literally. How do I know that? Well, topographical changes like mountain splitting or mountains melting or mountains being removed are not uncommon in the Old Testament prophets.

Even in Zechariah, earlier in chapter 4, talking about the obstacles facing Zerubbabel in the rebuilding of the city and of the temple. It says in verse 7, Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel, you shall become a plain. What's that talking about? What mountain was removed in the days of Zerubbabel? A mountain of difficulty, no doubt.

An obstacle to progress and success. Moving mountains has always been an emblem for the removal of that which stands in the way. Because in ancient times, not so much now, mountains were a serious obstacle to travel.

Not a problem today. We fly or we can even drive cars over mountains. But when people were on foot or on horseback and without paved roads through them, they were a considerable obstacle.

And so, this mountain of difficulty standing before Zerubbabel, we were already told it was going to be removed and become a plain. Well, in chapter 14, we read of a plain being formed too. All the mountains around Jerusalem become a plain.

And this mountain splits in two. This is very commonplace in the prophets to speak of mountains and changes in mountains in a figurative way. Look at Micah chapter 1. Another poetic and non-literal prophecy.

It says in verse 3, Micah 1.3 For behold, the Lord is coming out of His place. Again, this is not the second coming of Christ. This is a judgment coming in the days of Hezekiah in Old Testament times.

Behold, the Lord is coming out of His place. He will come down, tread upon the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under Him.

The valleys will split like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place. Now, this is not exactly the same imagery we have in Zechariah, but it's equally non-literal. God is coming in judgment.

When He steps on the mountains, they're going to melt like wax. That's not the same thing as having an earthquake that splits them into a valley. But it's equally destructive.

It's equally earth-changing. Topographical changes like this are typical symbols in the prophets for earth-changing events that God is doing. Now, setting His foot on the Mount of Olives, what does that mean? Many people, because they're assuming this is fairly literal, have actually felt that Jesus is going to come back and set His foot on the Mount of Olives.

This verse is all they have. Now, sometimes they cross-reference it with Acts 1, where when Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives, the angel said to the disciples, this same Jesus, whom you've seen go into heaven, will return again in like manner as you saw Him go. And the preacher says, He left from the Mount of Olives.

He'll come back to the Mount of Olives. Well, you wouldn't have gotten that strictly from, He will come back in like manner, because that's talking about the manner, not the place. He will come back visibly, personally, as He left visibly and personally.

That's the way He left. Where He left from may also be the place He comes to, but that's not suggested specifically in the statement that He'll come back in the same way. The reason they say, well, He'll come back to the Mount of Olives is not because of Acts 1. It doesn't say that in Acts 1. It's because of this verse here in Zechariah.

His foot shall stand on the Mount of Olives. But He is not said to be the Messiah. He is not said to be Jesus at all.

It is Yahweh. It is the Lord who stands on the Mount of Olives. And what does that mean? We don't have to wonder, because in Ezekiel chapter 11, we have the same thing happening, but with different results.

I mean, we don't have the same apocalyptic imagery associated with it. But in Ezekiel chapters 8 through 11, there's a vision of all the abominations that were being done in Jerusalem in Ezekiel's day. And, of course, his prophecy is that Jerusalem is going down.

Jerusalem has offended God sufficiently. He's going to send the Babylonians and destroy them. He's going to destroy Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

This happened, of course, in 586 BC. Now, that's what Ezekiel's context is. That's what Ezekiel's talking about.

And throughout this section of chapters 8 through 11, he sees the glory of the Lord, especially in chapter 10, like the Shekinah glory, representing God's presence. And first it's in the temple. But at a certain stage, it leaves the temple, and it goes outside the temple.

And then, at the very end of the vision, the glory of the Lord leaves Jerusalem entirely, goes out the East Gate, and stands, lo and behold, on the Mount of Olives. Because once you go out the East Gate, you're going to be on the Mount of Olives. The imagery is saying that God has left Jerusalem.

And if He has left, they've got to fend for themselves against the Babylonians. If God was in Jerusalem, He'd defend it. If it was His city, if it was His home, the Babylonians wouldn't have a chance, just like the Assyrians, who tried to take it in the days of Hezekiah, didn't have a chance.

An angel of the Lord struck 185,000 of them while he slept. That was the end of that. But now, it's a different day, a different condition.

The nation is full of abominations. God's given them over to the Babylonians. And given them over means He's left the city.

He's not far away. He went over to the Mount of Olives, close enough to watch their doom. But He's standing outside the city, and the city is unprotected from its enemies.

God's standing on the Mount of Olives means He's left Jerusalem. And we see this happening in the last verses of Ezekiel 11, verse 23, The glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, Jerusalem, and stood on the mountain, which is on the east side of the city. That's the Mount of Olives.

That's the only verse you have to read right there, because then Ezekiel is carried back away in Babylon. But what happens at the end of this vision is God leaves Jerusalem. And where is He last seen? Standing on Mount Olives.

Why? Because He's not in Jerusalem anymore, which means Jerusalem is unprotected. They don't have God with them anymore. He's not in their midst anymore.

Their enemies will destroy them, and they did. Ezekiel, of course, prophesied the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians, and this vision is saying it's because God is left. When you see God on the Mount of Olives, that's not where you want Him if you're in Jerusalem.

You want Him in the city. You want Him in the temple. You want Him to be owning Jerusalem as His home, so He'll protect it from invaders.

He's not doing that anymore. He's gone. Just like when Jesus walked out of the temple in Matthew 23, He said, Your house, not my father's house, your house is left to you desolate.

I'm gone. So we have in Ezekiel, God is standing on Mount of Olives, meaning He's giving them up to the Babylonians. Zechariah is writing after that time.

God gave them up. Zechariah's predecessors have gone into Babylon and been there 70 years. They've come back.

Jerusalem has been rebuilt. The temple's rebuilt, but He's looking now to the end of that. Remember this prophecy is the burden of the word of the Lord against Israel.

This is when He will no longer protect Israel. He has left Israel as He left them, that is, He's left Jerusalem as He left them in Ezekiel's day. The threat then was the Babylonians, but the time frame after Messiah's death is the threat was the Romans.

In other words, this is a replay. As God gave Jerusalem over to the Babylonians to destroy, He has now given them over to their present enemies, the Romans, to destroy. God is standing on the Mount of Olives.

It doesn't say Jesus comes back from Heaven and stands on the Mount of Olives. That's what's being read into it without warrant by popular prophecy teachers. This is a repeat of something that has happened before, namely God's abandoning Jerusalem to its enemies.

That's what it means when it says His, that is, Yahweh's feet stand on the Mount of Olives. That's not where you want God to be if you're in the city under attack. And so it's saying God has left the city, it's going down.

But part of the vision is but God at the same time that He abandons the city provides a way of escape for His people, the remnant. As He stands on the Mount of Olives, it actually splits the mountain, not literally of course, the mountain never did split, but it makes a valley. That is, He removes the obstacle just like He made the mountain in front of Zerubbabel into a plain removed His difficulties, His obstacles.

So God removes the obstacles of His people to flee. It's as if the mountain splits before

them and they have an opportunity to get away. The Christians in Jerusalem did as we've mentioned a number of times before.

According to Eusebius, the church in Jerusalem got a prophecy from Christ saying to leave the city before it was besieged. They did. They fled to the east as it turns out across the Jordan to Pella.

This is historically what happened so that God's judgment, His abandonment of Jerusalem did not leave His people stranded there to suffer the same judgment as the wicked. Instead He provided a way of escape and it's eastward from Jerusalem. That's the direction they went.

That's the way the valley goes. Now, of course, making a literal valley isn't what happened nor is it necessary. He gave them advance notice and they fled to the east.

It's symbolic. It's like He made a way for them to get away eastward. In association with His judging Jerusalem, He spared His people the remnant.

And so the church fled. And this business about making a large valley and you shall flee through the valley, this is, in my opinion, poetic imagery. What's being said here is that the church is spared when the city is destroyed.

And that's exactly what did happen.