

Jesus and the Mount of Olives

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70 A.D. and the desolation of Jerusalem

Jesus likely alluded to Zechariah's prophecies, when he said, "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." [Luke 21:20]

He continued, "Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled."

Many suppose he was referring to events of 70 A.D. when Jerusalem was destroyed after the Romans besieged the city. Perhaps he meant that those events would signal the spiritual desolation of the heavenly Jerusalem, which followed, after the apostolic era. The desolation has continued throughout the whole age of the church.

Zechariah wrote:

Zechariah 12:3

And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.

This could hardly apply to 70 A.D. as the "invaders," the Roman armies, were not "cut in pieces." The burdensome stone must be the heavenly Jerusalem, not the earthly one. See Daniel 2:35, where Christ's kingdom is represented by a "stone cut out without hands."

Zechariah 14:3

Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

Neither could this prophecy apply to the events of 70 A.D., as Jesus did not fight against the Romans, or send awful plagues on them, and on their horses, mules, asses, and camels. Neither did these armies fight against each other.

Zechariah 14:13

And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great tumult from the Lord shall be among them; and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbour.

On the other hand these prophecies do not apply to armies in the modern era. Horses, mules, asses, and camels would not be employed in any modern invasion of Palestine. They are very vulnerable to modern weapons. And what would be the point of “all the people of the earth” gathering against the earthly Jerusalem? Think of the problems involved in feeding them, and the sanitation problems it would cause—water is already scarce in that country.

Aside from all this, there is the question of the mount of Olives being cleaved in the midst, and half of it moving north, and half of it moving south. This did not happen in 70 A.D. The dispensationalists say it will happen when Jesus returns. But what would be the point?

One of the reasons for prophecy is to reveal how Jesus is reigning, and fulfilling all the things that he foretold, and has been doing so since he ascended to heaven in the first century. This is partly what is meant by his feet standing upon the mount of Olives. The things he foretold in the Olivet Discourse outline the future, from that time to the present.

The *Jerusalem* to which the prophecies and promises apply, after Jesus ascended to heaven, is not the earthly city, but the heavenly one, the church. The invasion he spoke of was already evident in the time of the apostles. “Gentiles” have trampled the holy city in all ages of the church. Paul said, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” [Eph. 6:12]

Christ fights against those who come against his holy city, by smiting his enemies with spiritual plagues. “In that day, saith the Lord, I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness: and I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah, and will smite every horse of the people with blindness.” [Zech. 12:4]

“Madness” and “blindness” allude to plagues of a spiritual kind. Those who mistake the Jerusalem of prophecy for the earthly city, are examples of this blindness; they don’t “see” or understand that Isaiah 2:2 was fulfilled, when Jesus ascended to heaven, and to the throne of his Father, and since then, the Jerusalem to which prophecy applies is the heavenly one. The apostles understood this. When Peter said Jesus had been “made Christ,” he knew that this meant that Jesus had received an eternal throne, the throne of David, and it meant ruling over the 12 tribes of Israel from Jerusalem. All that was implied by saying he had been “made Christ.” And those Jews who did not believe in him were *cut off from Israel*, and from the promises. [Acts 3:23] Paul said they were branches broken off their tree. [Rom. 11:17] Both preterists and dispensationalists are *blind* to this.

Horses in Zechariah’s prophecy probably mean people with no understand-

ing. [Psa. 32:9] When Saul was travelling to Damascus to attack the church, Christ spoke to him from heaven and said to him, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." [Acts 9:5] He implied that Saul was behaving like a horse or a mule. He was *made blind* for three days. This was an obvious fulfilment of Zechariah 12:4. The "horses" in Zechariah's prophecy are not literal horses. The "Jerusalem" is not the earthly city. Christ fought to defend his saints, the heavenly Jerusalem.

But in 70 A.D. Jesus did not fight to defend the Jews in the earthly Jerusalem. The New Testament shows that "Jerusalem" is the heavenly city where Christ is king.

Preterism and dispensationalism deny that the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24-25 applies to the church in the present age. They say the Jerusalem to which prophecy applies is the earthly one, and deny that prophecy, for the most part, applies to the church during the present age. They remove it to either the past, or the future. But that position is clearly distorted, and biased. They apply the prophecies about the saints, and Christians, to ethnic Jews who deny that Jesus is the Christ. Zechariah 14:4 depicts those flawed interpretations as the two halves of the mount of Olives moving apart in opposite directions. Preterism, perhaps, is the half that moves north, and dispensationalism is the half that is displaced to the south, and there is a valley between, which represents the present age.

Zechariah said, flee to the "valley of the mountains," an invisible valley between the two displaced portions of the mountain. The phrase "valley of the mountains" seems to conflate a valley with mountains. Mountains represent promises, and a great promise is given to those who follow Zechariah's advice, and abandon preterism and dispensationalism: "the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee." The valley between the two displaced sections of the mount of Olives is a place where Christians are brought together in unity. They are united with Christ, and not among his enemies.

Zechariah 14:4-5 points to a middle course, between those two extremes: apply the Olivet Discourse to the present age, not Jews in the first century, and not to Jews in a future seven year tribulation.

Zechariah 14:6-7

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.

The spiritual gloominess and darkness described in these verses is char-

acteristic of the present age.

Zechariah 14:8-9

And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one.

The living waters of the gospel flow from the heavenly Jerusalem, the church. Jesus reigns as king over his saints, on the throne of David, and he also rules over all things in heaven and earth. He said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." [Matt. 28:18] The Jerusalem where he reigns is in heaven. Paul said those who believe in Christ are raised up together, and "sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." [Eph. 2:6]

When Jesus ascended to heaven, and to the throne of his Father, Jerusalem was raised up, and was "established in the top of the mountains," and was "exalted above the hills" as foretold in Isaiah 2:2. That is when it became the heavenly city, the Jerusalem above. [Gal. 4:26]

Paul identified Hagar the bondwoman who was cast out of Abraham's house with "the Jerusalem which now is," that is, the earthly one. [Gal. 4:26, 30] After Jesus ascended to heaven, prophecies about Jerusalem apply to the heavenly city, where Christ is king. So in Zechariah 14:16, the nations who come up to Jerusalem to worship Christ have to come to the heavenly city, not the earthly one.

Zechariah 14:16

And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.

This is also what Jesus said in John 4:21-23. People will no longer go to the earthly city, but will worship God in spirit and in truth.

The feast of tabernacles has a spiritual significance, and pictures God dwelling with man, as the tabernacle of God was present with the Israelites in the wilderness. The prophecy applies to the present age of the church.

Zechariah 14:17-18

And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts,

even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the Lord will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

Normally, Egypt receives very little rain. Taken literally, it would be quite meaningless, to say Egypt would have no rain. But this prophecy speaks of rain in a metaphorical sense; it represents God's word. [Isa. 55:10-11]

Paul said, "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." [2 Cor. 3:6]

The Sign of His Coming

When the disciples came to Jesus, and asked about the sign of his coming, he related the prophecy called the Olivet discourse. The name alludes to the fact that when he gave it to them, they were on the Mount of Olives, a hill on the east of Jerusalem, from where one had a fine view of the temple area.

The questions asked by the disciples show they were aware of Old Testament prophecies about the desolation of Jerusalem, such as Zechariah 12, 14:1-5, Daniel 9:26-27, and 11:21-12:1. No doubt Jesus' comments reminded them of those prophecies. Were they about to be fulfilled? Was the destruction of the temple imminent? They evidently thought those events were to occur at the end of the world, but that is not how things worked out. When Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD, it was not the end of the world. Matthew says:

Matthew 24:1-3

And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

Matthew's account of the prophecy lists several events, including a time called the great tribulation. Verse 30 says the "sign" of the son of man will appear in heaven, and then "all the tribes of the earth will mourn." A trumpet sounds, and angels are sent out to gather God's elect. However, the nature of the "sign" that the disciples sought is not easily identified.

Mark's account is similar. Mark also stated that the disciples requested a "sign." He wrote:

Mark 13:3-4

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?

In Mark's list of the events, there is no obvious "sign." Luke includes a similar account, but he does not say that it was given on the Mount of Olives. Luke stated that Jesus abode on the Mount of Olives. He taught in the temple during the day, and dwelt upon the Mount of Olives at night.

Luke 21:37

And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives.

The disciples often went there to be with him.

Luke 22:39

And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.

The Mount of Olives is prominent in Zechariah 14:4, and when the disciples asked Jesus about the sign of his coming, they must have been aware of that prophecy. They were sitting on the mountain that Zechariah had named. But strangely, Jesus made no reference to Zechariah's prophecy. Zechariah wrote:

Zechariah 14:3-5

Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.

Dispensationalism says the prophecies of the scripture are always to be understood literally; the Mount of Olives in Zechariah's prophecy must refer to the literal Mount of Olives near Jerusalem, and its splitting into two parts must be understood as a literal geological event. But the trend of the main tectonic features (faults) in that area are oriented N-S, not E-W, so the earth movements described by Zechariah are not in accord with the known facts, as tectonic movements tend to occur along *existing* faults. Also, for movement to occur toward both directions, both towards the north and towards the south, seems strange, and rather unlikely from the point of view of tectonics. An earthquake with significant horizontal displacement, as would be required for the formation of a wide valley in the middle of the Mount of Olives, would cause widespread destruction, yet Zechariah tells people to flee *towards* the valley generated by the event. One would expect that the warning ought to say flee *before* the earthquake occurs, and get far away from the area, not to flee *after* the event, and go *towards* the site of the earth movements!

What is it that people should flee from? The prophecy does not say. Preterism offers a figurative interpretation, and some say that the mountain being split means that a way was opened for Gentiles to come into the Church. Preterism and Dispensationalism both claim the prophecy does not apply today. The Preterist interpretation says almost all Bible prophecy was fulfilled in the first century AD, especially when the temple was destroyed in 70 AD. In the traditional Dispensationalist view the prophecy applies to the Jews in a future age, after the Church has been 'raptured'.

So what was Zechariah referring to? Is it a literal event, or could the Mount of Olives be symbolic, or a metaphor? How would one flee to that valley, unless he was in Jerusalem when it formed? Will it be a major fault zone? Why would anyone flee towards a geologically unstable area? And why flee after the event?

Often, revelations are associated with the places where they were given. The Mosaic legislation given at Sinai is connected with that mountain, for example in Galatians 4:24-26. In Zechariah's prophecy, the Mount of Olives may be associated with a revelation.

Perhaps the Mount of Olives represents the Olivet discourse that Jesus gave to his disciples, and the mountain cleaving in the midst, and the two parts moving in opposite directions, represents the two opposing interpretations of the Olivet discourse. Preterism is the half that goes north, and Dispensationalism is the half that goes south. Zechariah says "flee to the valley of the mountains", or abandon the flawed explanations offered by Preterism and Dispensationalism, and go to the valley between those two mountains. Prophecies such as the Olivet Discourse and the prophecies of Zechariah apply to the Church today; in fact, most Bible prophecy applies

to the Church in the present age. The claims that prophecy is either fulfilled already, or applies to a future age, are flawed.

Zechariah's prophecy warns us to flee from Preterism and Dispensationalism, which deny that many Bible prophecies apply to the Church today. They are the two halves of the Mount of Olives in Zechariah's prophecy, and the wide valley between them is where we should go, and it is where we can find the truth about prophecy. And that explains why Zechariah says to flee; all the flawed interpretations of prophecy that dominate Christians today are "chaff" for the fire. [Matt. 3:12]

How does this help identify the sign the disciples asked about? Perhaps it is prophecy itself! As prophecy is understood, we are nearing the time Jesus spoke about. Let's understand, and forsake old, flawed interpretations.

Mount of Olives

Matthew chapters 24 & 25 contain one of the key prophecies of the Bible, the "Olivet Discourse," the prophecy Jesus gave to his disciples when they were on the mount of Olives, a ridge on the eastern side of the city of Jerusalem, which would then have provided an excellent view of the temple on the opposite side of the Kidron valley.

The disciples had asked Jesus about the signs of his coming, and of Christ's kingdom. Jesus warned them about false teachers, and mentioned a time called the "great tribulation." Symbols that Jesus employed in the Olivet Prophecy include mountains, seasons, clothes, clouds, fig trees, virgins, a wedding, and the mysterious "abomination of desolation."

Was the Olivet Discourse intended only for first century Jews? That's what the Preterists claim. Or was it intended for Jews in the future? That is the premise of Dispensationalism. A third possibility is that it pertains to Christians today. The temple of God, that stood in plain view from the top of the mount of Olives, was a type, or figure, that represents the Church, and the Olivet Discourse of Jesus provides an overview of the future of the spiritual temple, the Church, and the kingdom of God.

The mount of Olives itself was a very significant location for Jesus to give this prophecy. The mount of Olives is featured in the book of Zechariah, which said the Lord's feet would stand upon it. Jesus was on the mountain while giving the prophecy to his disciples. Zachariah said the mountain would be split into two parts, half moving to the north, and half moving to the south, forming a valley in between. Of course that has not happened, in a literal sense. However, Zechariah's prophecy may point out to us the proper way to interpret the Olivet prophecy of Jesus.

Zechariah said the mount of Olives would be cleaved in the midst, and a wide valley would be formed between the two halves of the mountain. He said to flee to the "valley of the mountains." Zechariah's prophecy describes Jerusalem as a city invaded by the heathen. Half its inhabitants are taken into captivity. Jerusalem was a type of the church, so perhaps this represents Christians who have been taken "captive" by those who promote flawed interpretations of scripture, and by creeds, and by denominations, that separate Christians from one another.

The stones of the temple were broken down, and the temple was burned to ashes, and the ruins were taken apart by Roman soldiers, after 70 AD when the city of Jerusalem was taken. History shows that the church too was overcome, and destroyed, and the saints were scattered.

Zechariah 14:2

For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

The stones of the temple were used in other buildings. And during the history of the church, many believers were taken captive in different sects, and even in other religions. This is what was portrayed in Zechariah's prophecy.

Zechariah 14:4-5

And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.

Zechariah said to flee to the valley formed between the two halves of the mount of Olives when it divides into two parts. Interpreting this, the two halves of the mount of Olives represent the theories of Preterism and Dispensationalism, which displace the Olivet prophecy of Jesus from its true application. The implication is that the prophecy applies, not to Jews in the future, or to the Jews in the first century, but to Christians today!

The mountains of Israel are prominent parts of the promised land, so they represent the promises given to Abraham, that in his seed, all nations will be blessed. When Jesus said to “flee to the mountains,” perhaps he means we should seek those promises, and the kingdom of God, which is called a great mountain, that fills the entire earth, in Daniel 2:35.

In the story of Lot and his family, they were told by the angel to “Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.” [Genesis 19:17] The city of Sodom was about to be destroyed. Jesus said: “Remember Lot’s wife.” [Luke 17:32]

The clouds mentioned in the Olivet prophecy are also symbolic. They picture a time of confusion, and controversy. “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” [Matthew 24:30]

Zechariah said the day of the Lord will be a time that is “not clear, nor dark.” But in the evening, it will be light, so eventually, the truth prevails.

Zechariah 14:6-7

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.

Ezekiel called the day of the Lord a “cloudy” day, “For the day is near, even the day of the LORD is near, a cloudy day; it shall be the time of the heathen.” [Ezekiel 30:3]

In this cloudy day, Christ delivers his saints. “As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.” [Ezekiel 34:12]

During a time of confusion, Christ seeks his sheep, and leads them to the truth. The prophet Joel refers to it as “a day of clouds and thick darkness.”

Joel 2:1-2

Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.

The prophet Zephaniah also describes it as a day of clouds and spiritual darkness. "The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers." [Zephaniah 1:14-16]

In the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus warns believers not to return for our old clothes; "Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes." [Matthew 24:18]

Who are the ones "in the field"? Perhaps they are the labourers who Jesus mentioned here: "Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest." [Luke 10:2]

In Luke's account, Jesus said, "In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back." [Luke 17:31]

When Jesus teaches us something from his word, he warns us not to return to our old opinions. Paul speaks of being clothed with truth and righteousness. "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness." [Ephesians 6:14]

The clothes Jesus refers to in the Olivet Prophecy are symbolic, and they picture the truth, and brand new understanding, that Jesus gives to his saints.

The church is the woman "clothed with the sun" in Revelation 12:1. The sun which clothes her represents the gospel.

The prophet Joel said the sun will be turned to darkness, before the day of the Lord comes. This pictures the gospel being obscured by false teaching. Joel's prophecy was quoted by Peter: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come:" [Acts 2:20]

Everything that offends, and the false teachings sown by the devil, that obscure the truth of the gospel, are to be burned up at the end time.

Matthew 13:43

The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let

him hear.

Jesus said, “And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!” [Matthew 24:19] What does this mean?

Paul wrote to the Christian converts in Galatia, in Galatians 4:19-20: “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.” So Paul pictured these believers as unborn fetuses! And he referred to himself as their spiritual mother! And similarly, those teaching the gospel are the spiritual parents of their followers.

The apostle Peter refers to believers as “babes”, and the word of God as “milk.” He wrote, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” [1 Peter 2:2]

Perhaps Jesus means those who teach the word of God to others, when he refers to “them that give suck,” and was not referring to mothers and pregnant girls being in special danger, or their suffering physical discomfort. Why would Jesus pronounce woe to the preachers and teachers of the word? Because the spirit of Christ exposes all the false teachings that have made the Church desolate!

Jesus said, “Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.” [Matthew 24:32-33]

Summer pictures a time of opportunity, when crops become fruitful, and grow. In the same chapter Jesus said, “Pray that your flight is not in the winter.” [Matthew 24:20]

In the context of the Olivet Discourse, where Jesus refers to summer and winter, the “summer” and “winter” are contrasting seasons. What comes between is the fall, the time of harvest. There are many references to the resurrection of the saints as a “harvest.” For example in the parable of the tares and the wheat, Jesus said, “The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.” [Matthew 13:38-40]

Winter is the season that follows the season of the harvest, so Jesus said, “pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:” [Matthew 24:20] Winter is a figure of the judgment. The judgment is called a time of “great tribulation,” in Revelation 7:14.

And the sabbath day also represents God's rest, that the saints labour to enter, in Hebrews 4:3-11.

To have to flee in the "winter" or on the "sabbath" means one has been "left behind" when the harvest of the righteous occurs. For them, the prophecy of Jeremiah will come true: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." [Jeremiah 8:20]

The harvest occurs in the fall, and it is the hope of all Christians, to be included the resurrection of the saints.

Jesus compared himself with a bridegroom, and his disciples with a bride. [Matthew 9:15] In Revelation the church is described as a bride preparing for a wedding, where Christ is the bridegroom. [Revelation 19:7]

In a parable, Jesus compared his followers to ten virgins, waiting for the bridegroom. The wise ones brought oil for their lamps, but the foolish virgins did not. When their lamps went out, the foolish virgins went to buy oil. While they went to buy, the door opened and those who were ready went in to the marriage, but the five foolish virgins missed out, and the door was shut to them. [Matthew 25:10]

From the mount of Olives, the view of the temple across the valley dominated the scenery. Jesus must have been aware of the symbolism of the temple when he foretold its destruction. On other occasions Jesus referred to himself as the temple of God.

John 2:18-21

Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body.

In the New Testament, the temple of God represents the church. [Ephesians 2:19-21] In the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus indicated the temple was to be destroyed, and not one stone would remain on top of another. This came to pass when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. The Romans, it is said, burned the temple, and so they melted the gold, which ran down onto the stones, and afterwards the gold was recovered from the stones.

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus referred to the abomination of desolation as in the future, and since the temple of God in the New Testament represents the church, Daniel's prophecy applies to the church. As in the time of Antiochus IV, the temple of God was made into a Zeus temple, the church has also become desolate, due to idolatry, and false teachings, as the reform-

ers recognized. The saints are scattered, and the light of the gospel does not shine as clearly as it should. But at the end time, Christ will be revealed in his church!

Armies around Jerusalem

Jesus said that Jerusalem, the holy city, will be surrounded by armies, and that when it occurs, its desolation is near. "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." [Luke 21:20] What sort of armies did Jesus refer to?

If the "Jerusalem" he meant is not the earthly one, but the church, which Paul called "the Jerusalem which is above" [Galatians 4:26], and which Jesus referred to as "the city of the great King" [Matthew 5:35], its members are scattered in thousands of sects and denominations, and distributed around the world. How could it be surrounded by armies?

In Revelation 11:1-2, John described the church as the temple of God, and he mentioned a court outside the temple, that was given to the Gentiles. The ones occupying the court outside the temple are not truly "in Christ"; they lack the "circumcision of the heart" that Paul referred to [Romans 2:29]. John was told not to measure the court outside the temple.

Could the folks who are only nominal Christians be called armies? They surround the saints of God, and dominate or "trample" them. The prophecy of Zechariah 14:2 says that in the day of the Lord, all nations gather against Jerusalem, and that the city is taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half the city is taken into captivity. Is this prophecy about the Church?

The description in Zechariah 14:4-5 of the Mount of Olives dividing, and half moving towards the north, and half towards the south pictures the two interpretations of the Olivet prophecy of Jesus that are prevalent amongst Christians, Preterism and Dispensationalism. These theories misinterpret the prophecy of Jesus. Their supporters deny that Bible prophecy applies to the church today!

In the book of Joel, a great army is described. The account is based upon an invasion by an army of locusts! The locust plague makes the land desolate, and it pictures conditions in the day of the Lord, that affect God's people.

What do the locusts represent? These invaders are strong, without number, and they have teeth like lions! Joel wrote: "For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion,

and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion. He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white." [Joel 1:6-7]

The "vine" and the "fig tree" that are destroyed picture God's people, and the lack of spiritual "fruit". Jesus referred to himself, and his disciples, as a vine, when he said "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." [John 15:5]

The invaders have teeth like lions, which picture the fierce, dominating attitude of those who are spiritually Gentiles, towards those who have faith!

The army that Joel describes devastates the land. The land of Israel, which is the territory that was promised to Abraham, represents the promises of the scriptures that belong to God's people.

Joel wrote, "Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vine dressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished." [Joel 1:11]

What harvest does this refer to? When Jesus sent his disciples out to preach the gospel, he referred to them as laborers in a harvest. Luke wrote: "After these things the LORD appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come. Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest." [Luke 10:1-2]

What a shame it is when the church's spiritual harvest fails. Joel said, "joy is withered away from the sons of men." Is that true today? Joel said the wheat and the barley harvest perishes (few are being turned to Christ); fruit trees wither (fruits of the spirit?); meat is cut off (true understanding of scripture?); there is no joy and gladness.

The seed rots under the clods; there is no pasture; the animals groan. What is the seed? In the parable of the sower Jesus said, "the seed is the word of God" [Luke 8:11]. The gospel that is being preached in the world rots in the ground, and does not produce its intended harvest.

Fire has devoured the pastures, and burned the trees. Why is it that those who believe in Christ don't find spiritual nourishment in the scriptures? Joel's prophecy shows why the day of the Lord is such a dark period. It is a day of darkness, confusion about the gospel, a day of gloominess and trouble, a time of controversy. The army he describes is great, and mighty, and it is a strong people, and they are unique in history.

A fire devours before them, and a flame burns behind them. What is the fire? The threat of infernal punishments after death, derived from pagan-

ism, has been used to extend the power of the church, and people have been burned at the stake for heresy!

The land before them is like a Garden of Eden, but behind them it is a desolate wilderness. The “land” which they have invaded represents the promised land, the covenants of God, and the scriptures, which their interpretations have turned into a wilderness.

Their appearance is like horses, and they run like horsemen. The creeds, and interpretations that guide them are like like horsemen riding upon horses.

Joel wrote, “like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap” [Joel 2:5]. The mountains are part of the land of Israel, the promised land, and so represent the promises of God in scripture. The members of this army claim for themselves the promises of God which belong to God’s saints.

They generate a lot of noise, like the noise of chariots. They are a people in battle array, they climb walls, they don’t break their ranks, and “when they fall on the sword they are not wounded”. The sword is God’s word, but in their duels, quoting scripture has little or no effect, because they consider themselves immune!

They enter into houses, and climb in at windows like a thief, but notice that Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.” [John 10:1] Christ is the door; many fail to come to Christ, relying instead on church membership, baptism as an infant, or other religious rites. Instead of climbing in through a window, they need to enter the sheepfold through Jesus Christ, who is the door. Jesus said, “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” [John 10:9]

Joel wrote, “The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining” [Joel 2:10].

The sun becoming dark pictures the truth of the gospel being darkened by false teaching. The sun represents the gospel, as it is called a great light in the creation account in Genesis 1, and the gospel of Jesus Christ is also called a great light. Isaiah wrote: “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.” [Isaiah 9:2]

In Matthew 4:12-17, Isaiah’s prophecy is applied to the gospel that Jesus brought. Who does not have to face death? This “great light” shines upon every person! It is the message that Jesus promises eternal life to those who acknowledge him as their Lord. Jesus was identified by John as

the true light, who enlightens every man. "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." [John 1:9]

The stars withdrawing their shining means the saints of God are silenced. But Daniel said, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the sun; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." [Daniel 12:3]

Joel wrote, "And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" [Joel 2:11]

Is Jerusalem the heavenly city?

The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. demonstrates that while some of the things in the 70 weeks of Daniel's 70 weeks prophecy apply to Jerusalem, and the temple, events included in the final half-week could apply to the heavenly Jerusalem, which is the church, rather than the earthly city. This may also apply to Zechariah's prophecies.

Preterists depend upon the account of the Jewish War Jewish historian Josephus, for interpreting Bible prophecy. But, Zechariah's prophecies don't fit very well into preterist constraints. Zechariah wrote of Jerusalem under a siege; he said: "And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it." [Zech. 12:3]

Daniel's interpretation of the dream of king Nebuchadnezzar mentioned a "stone cut without hands" that smote a great image, and destroyed it. Daniel identified the stone with the kingdom of God, which grew to be a mountain, and filled the earth. It is the heavenly Jerusalem which becomes a "burdensome stone for all people," and its light extends to the entire earth. However, preterists try to apply Zechariah's prophecies, and Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks, exclusively to the earthly city.

In the siege against Jerusalem in 70 A.D., four Roman legions surrounded Jerusalem. The 5th, 12th, and 15th legions were camped on the western side of the city, and the 10th on top of the Mount of Olives east of the city.

Zechariah's prophecy said: "In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem." [Zech. 12:8-9]

Jews living in Jerusalem in 70 A.D., reading Zechariah's words, must have thought their victory was assured, because these prophecies seemed to be coming to pass. How else can one understand their behavior?

But, as all now know, God did not fight on behalf of the Jews. Some preterists claim that Zechariah's prophecy about God fighting against Jerusalem's enemies was fulfilled by the decline of Rome, in the centuries following the Jewish war, but if God had "sought to destroy" the nation of Rome, it has not happened yet! The city still exists. The Roman legions were not "cut to pieces."

Consider Zechariah's prophecy in chapter 14: "Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle." [Zech. 14:1-3]

Jews in 70 AD may have thought this prophecy was coming to pass, when the Romans surrounded their city, camping on the hills west of the city and on the Mount of Olives. And then, the city was taken, and the temple was destroyed. Why didn't the Lord fight against the Romans?

Preterists point out that the decline of the Roman Empire began after the "Jewish war." But there was another Jewish war, the Bar-Kokhba Revolt, in 132-135 A.D. Hadrian's armies overcame the Jews, and the city of Jerusalem was plowed like a field; Jews were sold into slavery, and forbidden to live in the city, which was renamed *Aelia Capitolina*. None of this fits the description of Jerusalem's future given by Zechariah, who wrote: "And this shall be the plague wherewith the LORD will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth." [Zech. 14:12] None of this happened to the armies of the Romans, in their wars against the Jews.

Zechariah wrote: "And Judah also shall fight at Jerusalem; and the wealth of all the heathen round about shall be gathered together, gold, and silver, and apparel, in great abundance. And so shall be the plague of the horse, of the mule, of the camel, and of the ass, and of all the beasts that shall be in these tents, as this plague." [Zech. 14:13-14]

It would certainly have been noted in history, if such a plague had affected the Roman legions, and even their animals! But those prophecies describe *spiritual* armies, which come against the saints, and the church, misinterpreting prophecy; horses and mules stand as symbols of those having *no understanding*. David wrote: "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which

have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.” [Psa. 32:9]

Armies of Preterism have taken many Christians captive; those Christians who are *spoiled* and *seduced* by preterism lack understanding! They are the ones affected by the plague; the eyes of their spiritual understanding have been consumed away. Their tongue too; their words make no sense. They can't explain how Zechariah's prophecies were fulfilled, yet preterism claims all these prophecies were fulfilled in the first century!

Zechariah said: “And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.” [Zech. 14:4-5]

The Mount of Olives has not been cleaved in the midst, as the doctrine of preterism says; but, Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives, when he gave the Olivet Discourse to his disciples. I suggest the Mount of Olives represents that prophecy of Jesus. *His prophecy* has been “cleaved in the midst,” and displaced to the north, and to the south, by the two opposite interpretations of his prophecy, represented by preterism and dispensationalism!

Zechariah said to flee to the valley between those two mountains. I take this to mean, apply Jesus' prophecy to the present age of the church, instead of to the Jews living in the first century, and instead of to Jews in a hypothetical future seven year tribulation. The church is the “Jerusalem” of Zechariah's prophecies, which God defends!

If there is anything that the history of the siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. should teach us, it is that the Jerusalem of prophecy is not necessarily the earthly Jerusalem. But, both preterism and dispensationalism apply most prophecies about Jerusalem to the earthly city. After Jesus ascended to heaven, the Jerusalem to which those prophecies apply is the *heavenly city*, the Church. This explains why the Jews of the first century were disappointed. Similarly, Christians who fail to learn the painful lesson their experience teaches, that those prophecies apply to the Church, are likely to be disappointed.

A day of neither light nor dark

In this chapter I discuss the significance of the curious darkness that characterizes the day of the Lord, described by Zechariah, that turns to light towards the evening.

Zechariah 14:6-7

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.

In his commentary, Wm. Lindsay Alexander remarked on the unnatural and strange “breaking forth of light at evening when, according to natural law, darkness should begin to assume the sway,” and he wrote:¹

Seasons of darkness and calamity might come, and amid the ominous gloom the face of heaven might be obscured, and it might seem as if God’s favour was withdrawn; but this should be only for a season; the dark day would in due time decline, and at the evening there should be light.

At evening time it shall be light.

At the evening of the day of the Lord, a time noted for darkness, the light increases. This is when the world is in darkness, but light shines for the church.

Several other scriptures tell of the spiritual darkness of the day of the Lord. Joel called the day of the Lord “A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness;” [Joel 2:2] Amos said “the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light.” [Amos 5:18]

And Isaiah also showed that in a time of great darkness, which is spiritual darkness, the light would illuminate the church.

Isaiah 60:1-3

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon

¹Wm. Lindsay Alexander. Zechariah: His Visions and Warnings. James Nesbet & Co., London, 1885.

<http://books.google.ca/books?id=jVMHAAAQAAJ>

thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

The sun turned to darkness

For spiritual darkness to cover the earth, the church's light must have grown very dim, but prophecy shows that it is upon the church that the light will shine. The sun clothes the woman in heaven which represents the church, in Revelation 12:1. The sun would be turned to darkness, Peter said on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit was given to the disciples. Peter quoted the prophecy of Joel.

Acts 2:20-21

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

The sun, which represents the gospel, was turned to darkness early in the church's history, when church fathers merged Plato's doctrine of an immortal soul with the teachings of Christ and the apostles. Later, Augustine established the pagan idea of unending infernal punishment of unbelievers as orthodox doctrine, a relic of his Manichean past.

War in heaven

Revelation 12 describes spiritual forces at war, the angels of Michael against the angels of the dragon who deceives the whole world. The armies of Michael are eventually victorious, and the dragon is cast out. This is at the very end of the age, because the dragon has great wrath, as "he knoweth that he hath but a short time." [Rev. 12:12]

That fits what Zechariah said in a remarkable way, as he wrote "at evening time it shall be light." Evening represents the end of one day, and the beginning of another. Evidently, towards the end of the present age, the saints will have light. Other scriptures support this.

Prophecy a light that shineth in a dark place

Peter described the church as being in darkness, and showed that prophecy was to be the light that guides the church. He wrote:

2 Peter 1:19

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.

Four schools of prophecy

In the modern church there are several rival schools of interpretation of prophecy. The main categories are called futurism, historicism, preterism, and idealism. Futurism includes all forms of dispensationalism. These each take a distinctive approach to interpreting the 70th week of the 70 weeks prophecy in Daniel 9.

Dispensationalism inserts a gap after the 69th week, and says the 70th week is future. The final week is usually considered as consisting of two parts, the last of which is identified with the "time, times and a half" of Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 12:14, and with the 1,260 days of Revelation 11:3 and 12:6, and with a literal three and a half years. Historicism identifies the 1,260 days with 1,260 years, that ended some time after the Reformation. Preterism claims the 70th week was fulfilled in the first century. Idealism views the time, times and a half as the last half a prophetic week, and symbolic of the entire age of the church.

Selecting the right path

For the light of prophecy to shine a selection between these rival approaches has to be made. Zechariah's prophecy of the Mount of Olives being cleaved points to the right path lying between the extremes of preterism and dispensationalism, both of which deny that prophecy applies to the church of today. If both preterists and dispensationalists would abandon their systems, represented by the two halves of the Mount of Olives displaced from their positions, they could meet in that wide valley through the Mount of Olives, where Zechariah says to flee.

The parable of the tares

The parable of the tares in Matthew 13 confirms that at the end of the age, the church's light is to shine. Jesus gave the interpretation.

Matthew 13:36-43

Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the

parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

The parable shows it is tares, representing flawed interpretations of scripture, that obscure the gospel, represented by the sun. Compare verse 43 above with the picture of the woman clothed with the sun in Revelation 12:1. The true gospel must be clearly revealed for this to be fulfilled. And this occurs at the end of the age, as verse 40 shows. So again, it supports Zechariah's statement, "at evening time it shall be light."

The fiery vengeance of God

The gathering and burning of the tares in the parable of Jesus was to occur at the end of the age. Let's not be found among the tares! Perhaps that is why Zechariah warns us to flee from the false interpretations "like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah." [Zech. 14:5] Otherwise, we might be the target of the fiery wrath and vengeance of God.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-9

Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

Antichrist is to be revealed

In his second epistle to the Thessalonians Paul explains about the man of sin who he said would be "revealed" sitting in the "temple of God," which

he identifies as the church in Ephesians 2:20. John identifies this as the Antichrist, which he referred to as a “spirit of antichrist” rather than an individual human. The fact that he is “revealed” implies that truth will expose the deceptions that have separated the saints, and scattered the church into about 38,000 sects and denominations, and obscured the gospel, turning the sun to darkness. This fits Zechariah’s prophecy that says of the day of the Lord, “at evening time it shall be light.”

2 Thessalonians 2:3-5

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

Fairbairn’s discussion of Ezekiel’s river

Zechariah 14 describes rivers of living water flowing from Jerusalem. Many commentators consider the rivers to be figurative, and they represent the gospel going out to the world from the church.

The prophet Ezekiel also described a river flowing from the temple, that causes everything to flourish on its banks on either side, and when it empties into the Dead Sea, the waters are healed. Below is Patrick Fairbairn’s commentary on the figurative river of Ezekiel 47.²

VISION OF THE TEMPLE-WATERS.

It is necessary to take the first part of this chapter apart from the second, which relates to a different subject, the new division of the land, and which ought to have formed part of chap. xlvi. The vision contained in the first twelve verses of this chapter is a thing by itself, although it stands in close connection with what precedes, and springs naturally out of it. The prophet has been exhibiting, by means of a variety of detailed representations, the blessed results to the Lord’s people of his re-occupying his temple. The way now stands open to them, for a free and elevating communion with the Lord; and the work proceeds, on their part, by the regular employment of all spiritual privileges

²Patrick Fairbairn. Ezekiel and the book of his prophecy: an exposition. pp. 489-495. http://books.google.ca/books?id=_uBJAAAAMAAJ

and the faithful discharge of holy ministrations; God is duly glorified in his people, and his people are blessed in the enjoyment of his gracious presence and the benefit of his fatherly administration. But what is to be the nature of the kingdom in this new form, in respect to the world without? Is it to be of a restrictive or expansive character? Is the good it discloses and provides for a regenerated people to be confined, as of old, to a select spot, or is it to spread forth and communicate itself abroad for the salvation of the world at large? In an earlier prophecy (chap. xvii.), when speaking of the future head of the Divine kingdom, under the image of a little twig, pluckt from the top of a cedar in Lebanon, and planted upon a lofty mountain in Israel, the prophet had represented this, not only as growing and taking root there, but as winning the regard of all the trees of the field, and gathering under its ample foliage beasts of every kind and birds of every wing. The kingdom of God, as thus exhibited, seemed to carry a benign and diffusive aspect toward the entire world. And should it be otherwise now, when presented under the different, but more detailed and variegated form of a spiritual house, with the living God himself for the glorious inhabitant, and a royal priesthood for its ministering servants? No; it is for humanity, mankind as a whole, that God was thus seen dwelling with men; and though everything presents itself, according to the relations then existing, as connected with a local habitation and circumscribed bounds, yet the good in store was to be confined within no such narrow limits; it was to flow forth with healthful and restorative energy, even upon the waste and dead places of the earth, and invest them with the freshness of life and beauty. This fine idea is presented by the prophet under a pleasing natural image. He is brought back by the angel from the outer court, where he was standing, to the door of the temple on the east; and there he sees a stream of water gushing from beneath the threshold, and running in the direction of south-east, so as to pass the altar on the south. He is then brought outside by the north gate, and carried round to where the waters appeared beyond the temple-grounds, that he might witness the measurements that were to be made of them, and the genial effects they produced. But let us take his own account of it.

Ver. 1. And he brought me back to the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued forth from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the front of the house is to the east; and the waters descended from below, from the right side of the house, on the south of the altar. 2. And he brought me forth by the way

of the north gate, and led me round by the way without to the outer gate, by the way that looks eastward; and, behold, waters were pouring forth on the right side. 3. And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits; and he made me pass through the waters—waters to the ankles. 4. Again, he measured a thousand, and made me pass through the waters—waters to the knees. Again, he measured a thousand, and brought me through waters to the loins. 5. Again, he measured a thousand, it was a river which I could not pass: for the waters were risen, waters for swimming, a river that could not be passed over. 6. And he said to me, Son of man, hast thou seen it? And he led me and brought me back to the brink of the river. 7. And when I came back, behold on the brink of the river, very many trees on the one side and the other. 8. And he said to me, These waters issue toward the eastern boundary, and descend upon the plain, and go toward the sea; in the sea are their outgoings, and the waters are healed. 9. And it comes to pass, that every living creature which creeps whithersoever the streams go, lives; and there is a great multitude of fish, because these waters go thither; and they shall be healed, and everything lives whithersoever the river goes. 10. And it comes to pass, that fishers shall stand upon it from Engedi, even unto En-eglaim; a spreading-place of nets shall they be; their fish shall be after their kind (i. e., of many sorts), like the fish of the great sea (the Mediterranean), very many. 11. Its marshes and its pits, which are not healed, are given for salt. 12. And by the river on each bank, there shall come up all trees for food, whose leaf shall not fade, nor shall their fruit fail; every month they bring forth afresh (literally, produce firstlings—in such undecaying vigour, that they are still, as it were, yielding their first fruit); for their waters proceed from the sanctuary itself; and their fruit is for food and their leaves for healing.

That the description given of this stream and its effects, must be understood in an ideal manner, not of any actual river, but like all the rest of the vision, of spiritual things shadowed forth under it, is so evident as scarcely to require any proof. The source of it alone (the summit of an elevated mountain), and the manner of its increase, should put this beyond a doubt with all who would not convert the Bible into a nursery of extravagance and credulity. For a natural river like this would of necessity be in contravention of the established laws of nature, and could only exist as a perpetual miracle. Supposing that by some new adjustment of the land, a stream might be made to rise on the

top of Mount Zion, yet a stream feeding itself as described in the vision, and growing with such rapid strides, is utterly at variance with the known laws of the material world. For, it is to be observed, the increase here comes from no extraneous and incidental sources; it is all along the temple-waters that form the river, and at last empty themselves into the sea; and yet from being at first but a small streamlet, these grow, by self-production, in the space of little more than a mile, into an unfordable river! To expect such a prodigy as this, on the outward territory of nature, is plainly to identify the natural with the miraculous, and confound the hopes of faith with the dreams of superstition. The Bible does teach us to look for things above nature, but never for merely natural things against the ascertained laws of nature.

Issuing as this stream does from the threshold of the temple, from the very foot of the throne of God (comp. Rev. xxii. 1), it must be, like all the special manifestations of God to his church, itself of a spiritual nature, and only in its effects productive of outward material good. It is just the efflux of that infinite fulness of life and blessing, which is treasured up in his spiritual temple, and continually pours itself forth as the operations of his grace proceed among men. It is emphatically a river of life. Wherever it is experienced, the barren soil of nature fructifies, the dead live again, the soul is replenished with joy and gladness. And instead of spending, like the streams of nature, as it advances through the moral deserts of the world, it still multiplies and grows; for it diffuses itself from heart to heart, from family to family. Every time recipient of grace becomes a channel and instrument of grace to those around him; so that the more who partake of the blessing, the more always does the region expand over which the kingdom develops its resources. And in proportion as these are developed, everything around wears a smiling and joyous aspect; the evils and disorders of nature are rectified; peace and order reign where before were the favourite haunts of wretchedness and crime; the very field of judgment becomes a region of life and blessing; until, at last, corruption itself is changed into incorruption, mortality is swallowed up in life, and the earth which God had cursed for men's sin, is transformed into the inheritance of the saints in light.

Such, we have no doubt, is the general import of the vision before us; and to this we must confine ourselves. It must be contemplated as a whole, and not broken up into fragments; as if we should inquire, what is to be understood specially by the fish, what by the fishers, what by the trees, and so on. A life-giving and ever-increasing stream of heavenly influence, proceeding

from the centre of the Divine kingdom, and diffusing itself far and wide among men, is what the prophet intends to exhibit to our mind; and to give this idea form and shape to our apprehension, he must fill up the picture with the appropriate signs and manifestations of life. But to take these up, one by one, and adapt them to particular things in the present or future dispensations, of God, can only be an exercise of fancy, as likely to mislead as to conduct to sound and legitimate conclusions. Let us rest in the great reality. Let us rejoice in the thought, that the Spirit of God should have coupled, with all the other exhibitions of the Divine kingdom given to the prophet, so encouraging a prospect of its vivifying, restorative, and expanding energies. And let it deepen the blessed conviction in our bosom, that the purpose of God in grace is fixed; and that mighty as the obstacles are, which everywhere present themselves to withstand its progress, it shall certainly not fail to make good its triumph over all the disorders and corruption of the world. We simply add, in regard to the relation of this prophecy to others in Scripture, that there is undoubtedly a reference, in the whole passage, to the description in Gen. ii. of the garden of Eden; although it seems rather pushing the allusion too far, when Hengstenberg, on Rev. xxii. 2, maintains, the trees here mentioned to be simply the tree of life. The mention of every kind of tree for food, in v. 12, and the prominence given also to the abundance of fish in the waters, show, that there is no servile copying of the description in Genesis; while still it is impossible not to see, that a kind of new paradise was evidently intended to be described by the prophet. Then, as he has, after his own manner, enlarged and amplified the thought which is contained in such passages as Joel iii. 18; Zech. xiv. 8, so his delineation is again taken up by the evangelist John, and in his peculiar manner accommodated to express the last grand issues of God's kingdom toward man: "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb.

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month (for which Ezekiel has all manner of fruit trees, bearing monthly); and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse (corresponding in Ezekiel to the beneficent change wrought on the doomed region of the Dead Sea); but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him," (Rev. xxii. 1-3).

Ezekiel's prophecy of the figurative river from the temple, picturing the Spirit and the gospel going from the church, also illustrates why we should flee to the amazing figurative valley, that forms between the two halves of the Mount of Olives. In the valley we can be nurtured by the river of living waters. Perhaps the saints may be represented by trees that align its banks, and fishermen casting nets for fish. Psalm 1:4 says the righteous are "like a tree planted by the rivers of water." The sea whose waters are healed represents the people of the world. [Rev. 17:15]

Joel's prophecy also describes a river flowing from the house of the Lord, corresponding to the river in Ezekiel 47 and the one described in Zechariah 14:8, and he says it will "water the valley of Shittim." The valley of Shittim was the valley, located east of the Jordan, north of the Dead Sea, where the Israelites committed whoredom with the daughters of Moab. [Num. 25:1] Again, it is a very unnatural course for the stream flowing from the temple to take, but this is no natural stream, but figurative. The significance of Joel's prophecy seems to be that the living waters of the Spirit represented by the prophetic river that flows from the temple will have a healing influence on Christians who have been seduced in a spiritual sense, as Paul alludes to in 2 Corinthians 11:3.

Zechariah 14 and 70 AD

Preterists insist upon "a first century fulfillment of all things written," because of their interpretation of the statement of Jesus, that his generation would not pass, till all be fulfilled. [Luke 21:32]

In the next verse Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away." [Luke 21:33]

Preterists fail to consider that since Jesus rose from the grave, his generation has not passed away, and therefore it is a unique generation. It will not pass away, ever!

Some say that heaven and earth have passed away, because that is one of the things included in "till all be fulfilled" in the previous verse. And some even insist that the resurrection has already occurred, a doctrine condemned in 2 Tim. 2:18.

What a sad predicament, to be captive to a "first century fulfillment" view of prophecy! That is the preterist view, in a nutshell. But surely it must be a delusion, because it takes such a limited view of things. God claims to be able to foretell the end of things from the beginning.

Isaiah 46:9-10

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

Prophecy was given by the spirit of Christ, Peter wrote.

2 Peter 1:21

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

The interpretation of prophecy is also a gift from God. Joseph said, “Do not interpretations belong to God?” [Gen. 40:8]

Let’s consider Zechariah’s prophecy of chapter 14. Does a “first century fulfillment” view work?

- “All nations” did not surround Jerusalem in 70 AD, they were Roman armies.
- Half of the city was not taken captive, but all of it.
- The Lord did not fight against the invaders, “as in the day of battle,” and deliver the Jews from their enemies.
- The mount of Olives did not cleave in its midst, forming a great valley, which the people could flee to, as if from an earthquake.
- Etc., etc.

Obviously, the events related in Zech. 14 did not occur in 70 AD, which presents a problem for the full preterists, who insist upon “a first century fulfillment of all things written.”

Some of these problems were discussed by Thomas Ice, in an article refuting Preterism.³

Ice reported on an exchange he had with Dr. Gentry, a preterist:

During a time of questions I ask Dr. Gentry about Zechariah 12-14 and preterism. I first asked him if he believed, as a preterist, that Zechariah 12-14 was a parallel passage to the

³Thomas Ice. Preterism and Zechariah 12-14.
<http://www.pre-trib.org/article-view.php?id=77>

Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-36). He answered, "Yes." I agree! I then noted that Zechariah speaks of "all the peoples" (12:2), "all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it (Jerusalem)" (12:3), and "I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle" (14:2). "This does not sound like the Romans in a.d. 70," I said. Further, Zechariah goes on to say, "In that day the Lord will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (12:8) and "Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle" (14:3). I concluded that this does not fit with what happened to Jerusalem in A.D. 70 when the Romans conquered Israel. Finally, it says that the Lord will rescue Israel, in that day (14:3), whereas, in A.D. 70 the Lord judged Israel as Luke 21:20-24 notes. "How does a preterist say that Zechariah speaks of A.D. 70 when the Lord is rescuing His people in that passage," I asked Dr. Gentry?

Now keep in mind that Dr. Gentry is one of the foremost preterist spokesmen on the planet. His answer, in essence, was to say that the Church had replaced Israel.

The dilemma of Zech. 14 for preterism was also discussed by Brian Simmons, who wrote:⁴

In Zechariah 14:4 Christ is described as standing on the Mount of Olives. "And His feet shall stand on that day upon the Mount of Olives." If the Holy Spirit had meant that Christ's coming would be providential and not personal, why did He use terminology which implies the exact opposite?

On the other hand, if He had meant a personal coming, could He have described it any better? For the planting of Divine feet upon a mountain certainly denotes a personal visitation. Therefore, accepting the language of Scripture as absolute and authoritative, we conclude that the coming of Christ as described in Zechariah 14 will definitely be personal, and will constitute the fulfillment of Acts 1:11, in which it was revealed by angelic sources that the Lord would return in "like manner" as the apostles saw Him ascend into heaven—that is, personally and bodily.

Knowing that this never occurred in A.D. 70, Preterists twist these verses out of their context, enforcing an allegorical and mystical meaning which robs language of any kind of signification. They tell us that Zechariah 14 was written in "symbolic

⁴Brian Simmons. Zechariah 14: Preteristic Or Pre-Millennial?
<http://antipreterist.wordpress.com/2008/11/01/zechariah-14-preteristic-or-pre-millennial/>

language;” but for some reason, they can’t explain to us what the symbols mean. The Hyper-Preterists are the main offenders in this department of eisegesis. But many partial preterists, knowing that their theology, too, is on the line, have agreed with the Hyper-Preterists in their assertions that Zechariah 14 is totally “past fulfillment.” Shame on them all.

The gospel accounts clearly show that Christ stood on the Mount of Olives during his ministry, which would fulfill the words of Zechariah, “And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east” in Zechariah 14:4.

Dispensationalists look for a future, literal fulfillment of the prophecy. For them, Jerusalem must be the earthly city, not the church, and the Mount of Olives must be literally divided by an earthquake. But why would people flee towards the zone of major earth movements? What would they flee from? That makes little sense.

A preterist explanation of Zech. 14 was attempted by Gary DeMar. He wrote:⁵

In Zechariah 14:2 says that God will gather “all the nations against Jerusalem to battle” (see Part 2), with the result that the city would be “captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, and half the city exiled” (Zech. 14:2). While dispensationalists apply this verse to a post-rapture great tribulation, and amillennialists apply it to the persecution of the church down through the ages, I contend that the passage refers to the domination of Israel by the Romans and Herodians in the period leading up to the Incarnation and ministry of Jesus.

In Part 3, DeMar wrote:⁶

Early 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].” Tertullian was alluding to the fact that the Olivet prophecy set the stage for the judgment coming of Christ that came with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70

⁵Gary DeMar. Zechariah 14 in History and Prophecy: Part 1
<http://www.preteristsite.com/docs/demarzechone.html>

⁶Gary DeMar. Zechariah 14 in History and Prophecy: Part 3
<http://www.preteristsite.com/docs/demarzechthree.html>

which would once for all break down the Jewish/Gentile division inherent in the Old Covenant.

Matthew Henry, while alluding to its symbolic meaning, interprets it in a preterist fashion in events leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. He wrote: "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, Ephesians ii. 14."

DeMar appealed to interpretations offered by Tertullian, Eusebius, and Matthew Henry. The significance of the Mount of Olives being split, they suggested, was similar to that of the removal of the partition separating Jewish and Gentile areas in the temple, which Paul related to the gospel going to Gentiles in Ephesians 2:14.

A problem with DeMar's suggestion is that the Mount of Olives is not a serious obstacle, for people wishing to travel to and from Jerusalem. And why didn't the apostle Paul, or other writers in the New Testament, notice, if such a major prophecy had been fulfilled in their time? The preterist interpretation seems far-fetched, inferior, and redundant, and fails to explain Zechariah's prophecy.

While the dispensationalist approach assumes the prophecy applies to the city of Jerusalem, the church is also called Jerusalem. It is the heavenly Jerusalem of Hebrews 12:22-23.

When Jesus called Jerusalem "the city of the great King" [Matt. 5:35] he referred not to the earthly city, as that description does not fit. It applies to the heavenly Jerusalem, the church, which is also called the bride of the Lamb. [Rev. 21:9]

In Zechariah 14:8, "living waters" flow from Jerusalem.

Zechariah 14:8

And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be.

Clearly these "living waters" represent the spirit of God and the gospel go-

ing forth from the church to the world. Only the church has been promised the holy spirit, represented by “living waters” as Jesus showed. [John 7:37-39]

In Zechariah 14:2, the church is pictured, under the figure of a city called Jerusalem, surrounded on all sides by its adversaries. It is similar to the “camp of the saints” and “the beloved city,” in Revelation 20, which is compassed about by hordes of people from all parts of the earth, deceived by Satan. [Rev. 20:8-9]

The adversaries of the saints include various rival systems of interpretation. The saints are in all parts of the earth, and many are captive in thousands of sects and denominations, which divide the spoil, the things that properly belong to the church, in our midst. Prophecy is one of the things included in the spoil.

The Lord stood on the Mount of Olives during his ministry, and especially when he gave the Olivet Discourse to his disciples. I suggest the mount of Olives represents Jesus’ prophecy in Zechariah 14:4.

The Mount of Olives dividing into two halves, and half moving to the north, and half to the south, may represent the two rival interpretations of the prophecy of Jesus, preterism and dispensationalism. Both these theories displace the prophecy from its proper application in time. Preterism insists upon a first century fulfillment. This is represented by half of the Mount of Olives being displaced towards the north, and dispensationalism, which insists on a literal, future fulfillment, is represented by the half of the mountain that is displaced towards the south. Zechariah says to flee to the wide valley between those two halves of the mountain.

Zechariah 14:4-5

And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.

And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.

Thus the Olivet Discourse is not about the Jews in the first century, or Jews in a future seven year tribulation, but about the church, during the entire period of its history. This is supported by W.M. Alexander’s commentary,

which applies the prophecy of Zechariah 14 to the church.⁷

At this point we may conveniently pause to inquire into the meaning and intent of the oracle, the signification of the language of which we have been engaged in investigating. As it is an expansion with fuller details of the prophecy in the close of the preceding chapter, we must start from the assumption that what is referred to here is not any one great historical event, or any series of events, but the kingdom of God in its experience and development and ultimate triumph, in the world. The highly figurative description of the prophet, couched in language which does not admit of a literal interpretation, of itself necessitates our resorting to a spiritual application of his utterance. The appearance of Jehovah on Mount Olivet, the sudden cleaving of that mountain by an earthquake, so as to cause a valley to stretch through its centre, the extinguishing of the heavenly luminaries, causing a darkness that might be felt to overspread the land, the breaking forth of light at evening when, according to natural law, darkness should begin to assume the sway, the sending forth of streams from one point in diametrically opposite directions, the making of the whole hilly region round Jerusalem into a plain like the Arabah, so as that Jerusalem should come to be elevated over the whole land—all that is so conspicuously figurative that a literal interpretation of it has never been seriously proposed by any one except some of the Rabbins. Figurative also is the representation of a gathering of all nations against Jerusalem; this at no time has been realised, nor could it be so at any time. But if all this be figurative, it cannot be of Jerusalem as the actual metropolis of Judea that the prophet here speaks; it must be to Jerusalem as to the centre of the kingdom of heaven upon earth, and as representing that kingdom that the oracle relates. Hence in the overthrow and ruin of Jerusalem here described we are to find the abolition of the ancient economy, the decaying and vanishing away of the former under which the kingdom had been established of old, an event which was brought about by the assault of the hostile heathen powers of the world. The kingdom itself, however, was not thereby averted; amid the general ruin a remnant was preserved, and that not by flight from the city but in it, there permanently to abide. Around this, the nucleus of the renovated kingdom, the protecting care of the Omnipotent should be vouchsafed; on the enemy His judgments should fall, and lest His

⁷Wm. Lindsay Alexander. *Op. Cit.*

people should be involved in these, a way of escape should be made for them, and they should flee and be in safety. Seasons of darkness and calamity might come, and amid the ominous gloom the face of heaven might be obscured, and it might seem as if God's favour was withdrawn; but this should be only for a season; the dark day would in due time decline, and at the evening there should be light. Ways should be made by which the kingdom, as it expanded, might extend over the earth—a path should be cut through the most obdurate obstacles, obstructions should be removed, and streams of blessing should flow in all directions over the earth. Then should Jehovah be recognised as King over all the earth, and be worshipped as the one and only God. Then should Jerusalem, "the new," "the heavenly Jerusalem," "Jerusalem the free," which is the mother of all the people of Christ (Rev. iii. 12,xxi. 2; Heb. xii. 22; Gal. iv. 26; comp. Phil. iii. 20), "the Church of the living God" (i Tim. iii. 15), be exalted, and be filled with inhabitants to the full extent of her proper boundaries. Then shall the saints inherit the earth; then shall the true people of God, being all righteous, be free from all calamity, injury or assault; perfect security shall be enjoyed and the calm of a great peace shall settle down on the world, so long troubled and vexed by the storms of evil. The ban which has rested on the race because of sin since the first transgression, shall then be for ever taken off; there will be no need to make men acknowledge God's supremacy by the judgments which He executes; a willing obedience shall be rendered to Him by all; His servants shall serve Him, they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.