

## **Are all of Zechariah's prophecies literal?**

by Douglas E. Cox

Some Old Testament prophecies seem to have been fulfilled in a literal manner, but others clearly have to be interpreted. Why are some literal, and others not? In prophecy, things of a spiritual nature are represented by symbols.

Here are some prophecies of Zechariah that are said to have been *literally* fulfilled by Jesus.

The Messiah will come humbly, riding on a donkey (9:9)

He will be hailed as a king (9:9)

He will be betrayed by a friend (13:6)

He will be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (11:12)

The betrayal money will be used to purchase a potter's field (11:13)

The Messiah will be forsaken by His disciples (13:7)

The Messiah will be pierced (12:10 & 13:6).

In a post entitled "The Abuse of Prophecy: By Spiritualizers and Fanatics," dispensationalist David R. Reagan of Lamb & Lion Ministries claimed that since these prophecies were fulfilled literally, other prophecies of Zechariah must also be understood literally. For example, the prophecy in Zechariah 14:4 that his feet will stand upon the mount of Olives. But, like the prophecies listed above, that one was also fulfilled during the ministry of Jesus. His feet stood upon the mount of Olives when he gave the Olivet Discourse to his disciples.

But, the mount of Olives did not literally cleave in the midst; neither did half of the mountain move towards the north, and the other half towards the south.

Reagan took issue with an interpretation of Zechariah 14:4 proposed by Loraine Boettner. Reagan wrote:

Boettner totally destroyed the plain sense meaning of this passage by cleverly spiritualizing it to mean something else. He argued that the Mount of Olives is a symbol of the human heart. Thus, the enemy forces surrounding Jerusalem represent the evil in the world that surrounds the human heart. When a person receives Jesus as his Lord and Savior, his heart (the Mount of Olives) breaks in contrition, and on that day, Jesus becomes the king of his life. So, the passage has nothing to do with the Second Coming of Jesus. Instead, it is a passage about individual salvation!

Other prophecies were not literally fulfilled, but have a spiritual fulfillment. Isaiah 2:1-3 is an example. After Jesus rose up from his grave, and ascended to heaven, Jerusalem and mount Zion were also raised up, in a spiritual sense. Isaiah said the mountain of the Lord's house would be established in the top of the mountains, above the hills. Jesus, who is called the only begotten Son of God, (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18) is represented by the mountain of the Lord's house. He is the promised Savior and King. His kingdom is represented by this holy mountain. His throne was established in heaven. The New Testament shows both Jerusalem and mount Zion are now heavenly. [Hebrews 12:22] Therefore, after Jesus ascended to heaven, prophecies that refer to Zion and Jerusalem apply to the heavenly, spiritual mount Zion, and the heavenly city, (each representing the Church), not the earthly city.

Zechariah's prophecies about Zion and Jerusalem apply to the Church in the present age.

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy;" (1:14) "I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies;" (1:16) "the Lord shall yet comfort Zion;" (1:17) . . . Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon. For thus saith the Lord of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye;" (2:7-8) "the Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land; (2:12) "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." (3:9)

None of these prophecies apply to the earthly city, which was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. God did not fight for it or defend it. The Jerusalem of Zechariah's prophecies is the heavenly one.

Zechariah spoke of living waters flowing from Jerusalem, a prophecy that applies to the heavenly city, not the earthly one.

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.

Jesus spoke of living water that he would give those who come to him, referring to the Spirit. He was teaching in the temple at Jerusalem during the feast of tabernacles.

John 7:37-39

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

Rivers of living water, the message of the Gospel, flow from the Church during the present era. The New Testament is an example. Zechariah wrote:

#### Zechariah 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.

This prophecy also applies to the present age of the church. The message of the Church is not entirely free of error; often it is a mix of biblical truth with tradition, superstition, and ignorance. Some Christians support a preterist interpretation of the Olivet discourse, others promote a futurist interpretation. Zechariah describes the Church's light in the present age as "neither clear, nor dark." This depicts the spiritual light of the Church when prophecy is only partly understood. But at the end of the age, it becomes light.

Mountains in prophecy represent promises, and prophecies, and revelations. In Galatians 4:24-25, mount Sinai represents the Mosaic legislation. The mount of Olives in Zechariah 14:4 represents the Olivet Discourse, in which Jesus gave a synopsis of prophecy that applies to the present age. The mountain being cleaved in the midst, and half moving north and half moving south may represent the two major schools of interpretation of prophecy, preterism and futurism or dispensationalism, theories that displace Jesus' prophecy by applying it either to Jews in the first century, or to Jews in a future seven year tribulation. Those who promote those interpretations are among the nations mentioned in 14:1-3 which come against Jerusalem, who take people captive, and divide up the spoil. Zechariah said:

#### Zechariah 14:3

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

A great valley is formed between the two halves of the mount of Olives, to which Zechariah said we should flee. I suggest that the figurative valley created as the two sections of the mount of Olives separate represents the present age of the Church. The prophecy shows the true interpretation of the Olivet Discourse applies its teachings to the saints in the present age, rather than to Jews in the first century, or to Jews in a future seven-year tribulation. Zechariah wrote:

Zechariah 14:9

And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one.

Jesus is king already, but many dispensationalists deny that Jesus is king during the present age.

Zechariah 9:9

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

Most dispensationalists interpret the ass in this prophecy *literally*, but many deny that Jesus reigns as king in the heavenly Jerusalem, among his saints, on David's throne.

Zechariah said men of all nations will come up to Jerusalem to keep the feast of tabernacles. The prophecy does not mean Christians will one day observe Jewish feasts, but points to the spiritual reality that those holy days represent and foreshadow. In the feast of tabernacles the people dwelt in tents or booths, representing God's people as tabernacles or dwelling places of the holy Spirit.

Eventually, everyone will understand that Jesus reigns as king.

Zechariah 14:16-17

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. 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.

Isaiah 55:10-11 shows that rain represents God's word. Beware of those who deny Jesus Christ is now reigning as king. Being "made Christ" implies that he is the promised king who reigns both now and forever.