

Zechariah 14

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ZECHARIAH SAYS “**A DAY is coming for the Lord**” to set this section apart from the “day” spoken of in the previous chapter (Zech 13:1), a chapter that focused on the events of the Maccabean Wars.¹ Zechariah’s prophecy spans the history of the Jewish people after the return from exile – beginning with the Persian period (chapters 1-11), on through to the Grecian period (chapters 12-13), and finally culminating in the Roman period (chapter 14). As such, chapter 14 finds its fulfillment in the first century AD.

The chapter opens with an introductory snapshot summary of the Roman-Jewish War, and verse 1 focuses on a major root cause for that war. Zechariah tells his Jewish audience that this coming day would be a day “**when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst.**” This is a picture-perfect description of the actions of Gessius Florus (Roman procurator of Judea from AD 64-66)² – actions which prompted the war, according to Josephus. As such, Josephus’s description of Gessius Florus’s atrocities reads like a commentary on Zechariah 14:1.

Whereas the former procurator (Albinus) “concealed his wickedness and was careful that it might not be discovered,” Gessius Florus behaved “as though he had been sent on purpose to show his crimes to everybody.”³ While Albinus “did the greatest part of his rogueries in private,” Gessius Florus “did his unjust actions to the harm of the nation after a pompous manner.” Rather than getting “money out of single persons,” Gessius Florus “spoiled whole cities” and did “publicly proclaim it all the country over.” “It was Florus who necessitated us,” Josephus continues, “to take up arms against the Romans.”⁴

Unlike robbers who normally sneak into homes in the dead of night and divide up their acquisitions in private, the spoil of Gessius’s unjust acts were **divided** in the Jews’ very **midst**. This very public plundering of the Jewish people and their possessions coincides with Zechariah’s portrayal of events.

“For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be taken, the houses plundered, and the women raped. Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city” (Zech 14:2 ESV).

Zechariah says that the Lord will “**gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle,**” and this leads some to conclude that it cannot be speaking of AD 70 since *all the nations* of the world did not participate in that war.⁵ In a context like this, however, a phrase like “**all the nations**” simply refers to the nations within proximity to the subject.

For example, 1 Chronicles 14:17 says that the Lord brought the fear of David upon “all nations.” Likewise, 2 Chronicles 32:23 says that Hezekiah, the king of Judah, was exalted in the sight of “all nations.” Speaking of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, Jeremiah 27:7 says that “all nations shall serve him.” In Psalm 118:10, David says, “All nations surrounded me.” In each case, the language is localized to the geographical subject matter and doesn’t refer to every nation from around the globe. Consequently, Zechariah would be saying that Jerusalem will be attacked by “**all the nations**” within the city’s geographical proximity.

This is exactly what happened in AD 70. As Ken Gentry writes, “Zechariah 14:1-2 pictures the Roman imperial forces joining the various client kings who engage the Jewish War AD 67-70. This war is conducted by an empire of ‘nations’ (v 2), consisting not only of the Romans but the lands of Syria, Asia Minor, Palestine, Gaul, Egypt, Britain, and others. Client kings, such as Antiochus, Agrippa, Sohemus, Malchus, and Alexander, provide auxiliary forces for Rome during the Jewish War.”⁶ Daniel Morais concurs, writing:

“In vs. 2, Zechariah predicts that the LORD will ‘gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it.’ The Roman army that attacked Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was not exclusively Roman. It consisted of a number of auxiliary cohorts. These auxiliary cohorts consisted of soldiers that were not Roman citizens and thus were comprised of a diverse array of ethnic groups.”⁷

During the siege, Zechariah says that “**the city will be taken, the houses plundered, and the women raped.**” Thus, the prophet highlights three key elements in conjunction with the coming judgment upon Jerusalem: **1)** the siege of the city, **2)** the reference to houses, and **3)** the mention of women. Jesus, in turn, echoes these words in precisely this order in the Olivet Discourse. He speaks of **1)** the siege of the city (Luke 21:20) and **2)** the urgency of evacuating one’s house (Luke 21:21; cf. Matt 24:17; Mark 13:15-16), and **3)** He shows a heightened concern for women during this time (Luke 21:23). As Jonathan Menn states, “The Olivet Discourse is a ‘retelling’ of Zechariah 14.”⁸

In turn, the words of both Zechariah and Jesus are again retold as the events of that era unfold. The city was in fact taken, the houses were in fact plundered, and the women were in fact raped. Roman temple images of the time portray the victims “desperately” trying “to protect their children” as they were assaulted,⁹ reflecting Jesus’ own words: “*Woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days*” (Luke 21:23). Zechariah’s three-fold emphasis (city, houses, women) was echoed by Jesus, and both of their voices were echoed in the sounds of the war.

The echoes of the prophecy continue to reverberate in history, as Zechariah says that “**half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city.**” The sound of Zechariah’s voice is again heard in Jesus’s own words, when He says, “*At that time there will be two men in*

the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left” (Matt 24:40). These are two different ways of saying the same thing, and their prophetic words can again be heard in the chorus of history.

As D. A. Carson notes, there was never “so high a percentage of a great city so thoroughly and painfully exterminated and enslaved as during the Fall of Jerusalem.”¹⁰ According to Josephus, 97,000 Jews were taken prisoner by the Romans.¹¹ They were taken prisoner because Titus’ soldiers had “grown weary” and were “quite tired” of killing them.¹² Josephus tells us that the soldiers had “hoped to get some money by sparing them” but ended up selling “the rest of the multitude, with their wives and children, at a very low price.”¹³

The low price was because those to be sold “were very many” but “the buyers were few.”¹⁴ Thus, they were “sold for little or nothing.”¹⁵ In short, they were sold “for a trifling price per head, as supply was far in excess of demand,” as Josephus puts it.¹⁶ At that point, it wasn’t even worth the Romans’ time to try and sell them anymore. In the end, the vast multitude of Jews remaining alive were simply put into bonds and taken to the mines of Egypt to work as free labor.¹⁷ The final fate of these first-century Jews is as tragic as it is heartbreaking, and it fulfills the words of both Zechariah and Jesus – as they were in fact taken and exiled.¹⁸

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

On the surface, this verse does not seem to fit the events of the Roman-Jewish War. After all, Zechariah says that ***“the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations”*** that attack Jerusalem. Rome’s consortium of nations was successful in their incursion on the city rather than vice versa. As George L. Klein points out, however:

“The statement that ‘the LORD will... fight against those nations’ contains a significant ambiguity that has the potential to alter the meaning of the verse dramatically.... The question turns on the meaning of the preposition *bē*. This preposition commonly means ‘in’ or ‘among’ (Zech 6:5). If this is the intended meaning of the preposition, it would mean that the Lord continues to fight with the nations against Jerusalem.”¹⁹

Consequently, the Septuagint renders the verse: ***“And the Lord shall go forth, and fight with those Gentiles as when he fought in the day of war.”***²⁰ Ironically, so does John Nelson Darby (the father of Dispensationalism): ***“And Jehovah will go forth and fight with those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle.”***²¹

Taken in this light, the meaning is that the Lord would fight *with* Rome and her allies as His tools to punish His people – just as He had done in the past. For example, God calls Assyria ***“the rod of My anger.***

And the staff in whose hands is My indignation, I send it against a godless nation. And commission it against the people of My fury. To capture spoils and to seize plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets” (Isa 10:5-6). Similarly, Babylon is the Lord’s sword that accomplishes His purposes against His own people in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek 21:1-19).

Just as the Lord fought “**as when He fights on a day of battle**” in the past, He would do so again. Just like God used the Assyrians and the Babylonians against His people in the Old Testament, He would do the same with the Romans and their allies in AD 70. The Lord fought *with* those nations in AD 70 just as He had fought “with” the nations, against His own disobedient people, in the Old Testament.

“On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward” (Zech 14:4).

For example, Psalm 98 opens with a call for God’s people to sing and shout to the Lord and praise Him with musical instruments (Ps 98:1-6). Literal. But then the Psalmist calls for the rivers to clap their hands, and for the mountains to sing together with joy (Ps 98:8). Not literal. Rivers can’t clap; they don’t have hands. And mountains can’t sing; they don’t have vocal cords.

Throughout the Bible, mountains tremble (Ps 18:7; 46:3) and depart (Isa 54:10). They melt like wax (Ps 97:5; Mic 1:4) and are crushed into dust (Isa 41:15). Mountains collapse and shatter (Hab 3:6). Mountains are laid to waste and moved into the sea (Isa 42:15; Ps 46:2). They are thrown down to the ground (Ezek 38:20). Mountains are made glad (Ps 48:11) and break forth into singing (Ps 98:8; Isa 44:23; 49:13; 55:12). God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the mountains of Israel (Ezek 36:1, 4, 6). And the Psalmist says, “*The mountains skipped like rams, and the hills skipped like lambs*” (Ps 114:4, 6).

Regarding passages like these, we can ask: Do mountains have emotions? Do they have vocal cords? Do mountains have ears? Do mountains have legs? Can they literally skip?²² Etc. The answer is obvious, and equally obvious is the strong usage of metaphor in these passages.

The melting, crushing, and movement of the mountains symbolizes God’s judgment in these passages. And the mountains being glad, breaking into joyous song, and hearing the words of a prophet, symbolize God’s people. The mountains, therefore, are used as metaphors to signify both God’s judgment and God’s people.

Zechariah’s imagery of the splitting mountain symbolized both 1) God’s judgment, and 2) God’s people. It makes perfect sense that this would represent the situation at the time of Christ. The first-century Jews would be forced to decide regarding the claims of Christ. The severance of the mountain characterized the severing effect that this decision would have upon all involved. The outcome of their individual choice would make all the difference for them in terms of the judgment coming down the road. Jesus was “the

stone which the builders rejected” (Matt 21:42) and that would crush those upon whom it fell (Matt 21:44). That’s the judgment. His message would divide father against son and mother against daughter (Lk 12:53). That’s the severing of the people. Zechariah captures it all through one vivid illustration.

Jesus’s powerful message would create a “great divide” among the people, and Zechariah portrays this through a picture of the **Mount of Olives** being “*split in two from east to west by a very wide valley.*” This coincides with the message of the Prophet Joel almost 300 years earlier:

“Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining” (Joel 3:14-15).

We know from the Apostle Peter that Joel’s prophecies found their ultimate fulfillment in the “last days” of the first century (Acts 2:16-21). Stephen M. Thurstan does a nice job tying Joel 3 in with Zechariah 14 as both prophets’ messages converged:

...a supernatural ‘highway’ is created by God wherein all natural obstacles are taken out of the way so that all peoples from all over the world can come to His holy mountain and city, the New Jerusalem from above that is also depicted for us in Zechariah chapter 14 and Joel chapter 3. None of these ideas being presented to us are to be taken literally, but are only natural ideas being used to convey a spiritual deliverance of God’s people using the analogies of past deliverances, animals or whatever, for illustrative purposes.²³

In other words, the prophets used vivid imagery, based on natural geography, to convey spiritual truth. Zechariah is following this tradition through his picture of the mountain splitting.

This east-to-west splitting of the mountain, in turn, results in “*one half of the Mount*” being “*moved northward, and the other half southward.*” For the ancient Israelite, north and south were far more than merely directional points on a map but carried “heavy mythic connotations.”²⁴ Generally speaking, the south was viewed in a positive light, being associated with Yahweh and faithfulness to Him – as God came to His people from the south (Deut 33:1-2; Judg 5:4-5; Hab 3:3). The north, on the other hand, had negative connotations and was associated with apostasy, rebellion and idolatry – as the influence of pagan religions stemmed heavily from the north (Ezek 8:3-18).

When an Israelite thought of the north in theological terms, he or she would have recalled apostasy from the Lord, while the south would have brought to mind faithfulness to Him. It is quite fitting then that the great divide among the people, created by Jesus’ stance on the Mount of Olives, would have been symbolized by the splitting mountain moving in northward and southward directions, specifically. This reinforces the correlation between these directional points and the theological messaging that they convey—the difference between spiritual adultery and covenant loyalty.

According to Stephen in Acts chapter seven, the first-century Jews who rejected their Messiah were doing just as their fathers had done (Acts 7:51) when they served the host of heaven and worshiped false gods (Acts 7:41-42). In other words, Stephen's message to them was that rejecting Jesus is equivalent to idolatry. Perhaps this is why Jesus told them, "*You are of your father, the devil*" (John 8:44). Just as their fathers had a choice to make between following the Lord, who came to them from the south, or following the false gods of the pagan nations to the north, Jesus was now the final ultimatum between loyalty and apostasy. Stephen laid out that ultimatum early on in Acts, and Zechariah symbolized it through the movements of the splitting mountain even earlier in 520 BC.

Recap

Verse 1

Zechariah foretells a coming time when Roman leaders would openly seize wealth and property from the Jewish people. This fits the public plundering of Judea by the Roman governor Gessius Florus, which helped trigger the war.

Verse 2

"All nations" refers to Rome and its nearby allies. Jerusalem would be attacked, homes looted, women abused, and many people taken away – events fulfilled during the Roman siege of AD 70 and echoed by Jesus' warnings.

Verse 3

God is not fighting against Rome but working *through* Rome. Just as God once used Assyria and Babylon, He used the Romans to judge His own disobedient people.

Verse 4

The Mount of Olives "splitting" is symbolic, not literal. It pictures the deep division caused by Jesus, between faithfulness and rebellion – as people had a choice to make regarding how they would respond to Him.

Takeaway

Zechariah reminds us that we all have a choice to make regarding the claims of Christ. In the first century, how people responded to Him determined their outcome. Today, the claims of Christ still divide, and how we respond to Him still matters. Though historically fulfilled in the past, this passage has ongoing implications that last. In principle, that same divide runs through every generation. When we're going through the valleys of decision in our own lives, let's make decisions that place us on the right side of that great divide. ✝

(For a more in-depth treatment of these verses, see: Gary DeMar and Robert Cruickshank, Jr., *Making Prophetic Sense of Zechariah 14* [The American Vision: 2026],

<https://store.americanvision.org/products/making-prophetic-sense-of-zechariah-14>.)

1. See: Robert E. Cruickshank, Jr., Zechariah 12 and the Victories of the Maccabees, <https://bit.ly/4jmavLj>; Zechariah 13: From the Resistance to the Remnant, <https://bit.ly/4qAwn8b>; Daniel Morais, Zechariah 13 Fulfilled in the Maccabean Wars: A Preterist Commentary | Revelation Revolution, <https://bit.ly/470VI8m>.
2. "Palestine: Hasmonean, Priest, Princes," *Britannica*, <https://bit.ly/3Dho5yX>
3. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.11.1, <https://bit.ly/3MWd76x>
4. Josephus, *Wars*, 2.14.2, <https://bit.ly/4shremX>
5. See Thomas Ice, "Preterism and Zechariah 12-14," The Pre-Trib Research Center, <https://bit.ly/4kkFG9Q>; Alex Dodson, "The Meaning of the Attacks on Jerusalem in Zechariah 12-14 (Part 2), Watchman Radio Hour with Alex Dodson, <https://bit.ly/4bpV5BC>.
6. Kenneth L. Gentry, "Zechariah 14 in Postmillennialism," (2) <https://tinyurl.com/ht8tursr>
7. Daniel Morais, Zechariah 14 Fulfilled: A Preterist Commentary, <https://tinyurl.com/yj2rxjvm>
8. Jonathan Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, [2013] 2018), 446.
9. Steve Mason, *A History of the Jewish War: AD 66-74* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 103; see also: Caryn A. Reeder, "Wartime Rape, the Romans, and the First Jewish Revolt," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 48.3 (2017), 370.
10. Quoted by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. in "Zechariah 14 in Postmillennialism (2)," Postmillennial Worldview, <https://bit.ly/3EYoxCF>
11. Josephus, *Wars*, 6.9.3
12. Josephus, *Wars*, 6.8.2
13. Josephus, *Wars*, 6.8.2
14. Josephus, *Wars*, 6.8.2
15. Flavius Josephus, *The War of the Jews and the Destruction of Jerusalem*, 484, note 28
16. Daniel Morais, Zechariah 14 Fulfilled: A Preterist Commentary, <https://bit.ly/3OE24NU>
17. Josephus, *Wars*, 6.9.2
18. On the fate of the Israelites returning to Egypt, see Deut 28:68; Hos 8:13.
19. George L. Klein, *Zechariah: The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), 402
20. Zechariah 14 Brenton's Septuagint Translation, <https://bit.ly/49f7isj>

21. Zechariah 14 (Darby's Translation), <https://bit.ly/43hllw8>
22. As Ralph Woodrow writes, "It was not uncommon for prophets to use figurative expressions about the Lord 'coming' down, mountains trembling, being scattered, and hills bowing (Hab. 3:6, 10); mountains flowing down at his presence (Isaiah 64:1, 3); or mountains and hills singing and the trees clapping their hands (Isaiah 55:12)" (Ralph Woodrow, *His Truth is Marching On: Advanced Studies on Prophecy in the Light of History* [Riverside, CA: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1977], 110). Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, <https://bit.ly/4ijFpSU>.
23. Stephen M. Thurstan, *Jesus Concerning Israel, the Land, the Temple, and the City* (Self-Published via Lulu, 2012), 9
24. Bernard Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1992), 159