

## Lesson 23

When we ended last week, we had started Zechariah 14, which some say is the single most difficult chapter in the Bible to understand. But we were able to figure out the first three verses pretty easily by keeping the preceding context and the timeframe in mind.

We then started looking at verses 4 and 5, and we reviewed the prophecies in Matthew 24 that Jesus made to tell his followers about the signs that would allow them to escape the destruction of Jerusalem about 40 years later.

Those signs were the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, and Jerusalem surrounded by armies. And we saw how both of those signs came to pass a few years prior to AD 70 when Cestius Gallus surrounded the city and then retreated, and when the Zealots began the desecration of the temple (which the Romans ended in AD 70).

Now, let's go back to the text of verses 4 and 5 to see how Zechariah describes these same events.

**Verse 4:** *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.*

Verse 4 uses vivid apocalyptic language to describe the great escape route created by Jesus to allow his people to escape the doomed city. Jesus splits a mountain in half to create a valley through which his people can flee. Did Jesus really split a great mountain in half to create a valley of escape? Absolutely! He split the Roman forces between the armies of Gallus and the armies of Vespasian, and his people were given an opportunity to flee the city in between.

How do we know this language is apocalyptic and not literal? For starters, there is no statement anywhere in the New Testament saying that Jesus will ever set foot on this earth again, and in fact there is an opposite indication in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. If Jesus were going to come back to this earth and walk around, I don't think that Zechariah 14 is the only place where we would be reading about it in the Bible.

Second, any time you see mountains being split in half you should be on the lookout for apocalyptic language. Mountains frequently appear in such figurative images. Mountains are mentioned, for

example, seven times in Revelation, five times in Daniel (including Daniel 2:44-45), and 43 times in Ezekiel. We even see them in Jesus' warning instructions - "Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains" (Matthew 24:16). In fact, that particular warning from Jesus is almost identical to the beginning of verse 5, which is confirmation that we are on the right track here.

**Verse 5:** *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.*

Verse 5 looks like it was lifted straight out of Matthew 24, which means that Jesus almost certainly was referring back to this prophecy from Zechariah 14 when he gave his prophecy in Matthew 24.

Verse 5 says that the people will flee to the valley of the mountains. Matthew 24:16 says, "Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains."

Verse 5 says that the people will flee quickly, as they fled from before an earthquake. Matthew 24:17-20 says, "Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes."

Verse 5 says that the Lord shall come, and all the saints with thee. Matthew 24:30-31 says, "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. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

But that's the end of the world, right? Wrong! Matthew 24:34 places the fulfillment of those prophecies firmly in the first century: "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." And they were fulfilled when the Romans marched on Jerusalem and when the people inside the city turned against each other.

The signs of the end in Matthew 24 are signs of the end of Jerusalem in AD 70, not signs of the end of the world. How do we know that? Many reasons. First, Matthew 24:34 tells us that signs relate to the first century. Second, the context tells us the signs relate to Jerusalem. Third, history tells us that the signs happened in the first century with the fall of Jerusalem. And fourth, there will be no signs of the end of the world because it will come as a thief in the night, which means it will come without warning.

Verses 4 and 5 are describing the same events as Matthew 24:4-34, and they are doing so using the same vivid apocalyptic language that Jesus used in Matthew 24. That vivid description continues in verses 6 and 7.

## **Zechariah 14:6-7**

**6 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: 7 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 that day." The time frame has not changed; we are still in the first century. (That time frame will be confirmed yet again later with verse 8.)

So whatever is being discussed here in verses 6 and 7, it is **not** God turning off the sun at the end of time. Instead, it is exactly the same thing that Jesus was talking about in Matthew 24:29 -

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."

And Matthew 24:34 tells us that Matthew 24:29 occurred in the first century.

Matthew 24:29 and Zechariah 14:6-7 are using vivid language to describe the same thing - a complete upheaval! They are both describing a situation in which everything is turned upside down. It is as if everything had been put in a box and shaken up. Light is not light anymore. At evening time, it is light. The sun and moon are darkened. The stars fall from heaven. It seems that nothing is as it should be.

What does this mean? Let's let Haggai and the author of Hebrews answer that question. In Haggai 2, we read:

**Haggai 2:6-7** - For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.

And then turn to Hebrews 12.

**Hebrews 12:26-29** - Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which

cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.

What is this "shaking" in Haggai 2 and Hebrews 12 describing? Turn back to Matthew 24 once again:

**Matthew 24:29** - Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.

The great **shaking** in Matthew 24:29, in Haggai 2:6-7, in Hebrews 12:26-29, and in Zechariah 14:6-7 are all describing the same great event - the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem in AD 70.

And what replaced that destroyed temple? Hebrews 12:28 just told us - "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved." Hebrews 12:27 tells us that the church cannot be shaken. That immovable unshakable kingdom of Hebrews 12 is the indestructible kingdom of Daniel 2.

**Daniel 2:44** - And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

We have already talked about the rebuilding of the physical temple after the exile. That rebuilt temple was never intended to be permanent, but rather Haggai prophesied that it would one day be replaced by something that was permanent and indestructible and immovable - the church of Christ. There is no other way to read Hebrews 12. The church was established in Acts 2, and the Jewish temple was destroyed about forty years later in AD 70, just as Jesus had described in Matthew 24.

One more question about verses 6-7: what is meant in verse 7 by the phrase, "But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night"?

It is a difficult phrase, but in context I think it is simply saying that God would determine the timing of these events, and when they occurred it would figuratively be as if the sun and moon were no longer shining - meaning that one could not tell whether it was day or night. That is exactly how Jesus described this same event in Matthew 24:29.

## Zechariah 14:8

**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.**

"In that day." First century or end of the world? Well, when did living waters go out from Jerusalem?

**John 4:10** - Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and **he would have given thee living water.**

**Luke 24:47** - And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, **beginning at Jerusalem.**

**Isaiah 2:3** - And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, **and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.**

**John 7:38-39** - 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.)

Living waters went out from Jerusalem in the first century, whether we view that Jerusalem as physical Jerusalem or we view it as spiritual Jerusalem, the church. Verse 8 confirms that we are on the right track with regard to the first century time frame.

What does the rest of verse 8 mean? "Half of them [half of the living waters] toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be."

When the faithful people of God fled the city of Jerusalem, what did they do? Where did they go? They went everywhere proclaiming the word of God and preaching the gospel. Verse 8 says that they would preach everywhere and they would preach at all times. And what was the result of their proclamation of the gospel? Keep reading.

## Zechariah 14:9

**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 over all creation, but verse 9 is talking specifically about Jesus' reign over the church, the eternal kingdom of Daniel 2 - what we sometimes call the kingdom (the church) within a kingdom (the universe).

As the gospel spreads everywhere in verse 8, it follows that the eternal kingdom spreads to all corners of the earth in verse 9. That view is reinforced by the emphasis upon the oneness of the Lord and the oneness of his name in verse 9.

**John 10:16** - And there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

**Ephesians 4:4-6** - There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

The mountain of Rome was split, and the people inside the city of Jerusalem were split. But not so with the kingdom of Christ. They have *one* Lord, and they are themselves *one* body, with Christ as their *one* king.

Once again we are reminded of something we have seen over and over in this book - there is one church. Christ's kingdom is one unified people (both Jew and Gentile) led by one shepherd.

## **Zechariah 14:10-11**

**10 All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place, from Benjamin's gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananeel unto the king's winepresses. 11 And men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.**

Once again, as we saw between Chapters 11 and 12, there is a transition here (and possibly even earlier in verse 8) between *physical* Jerusalem and *spiritual* Jerusalem. How do we know that?

We know that from the description in these verses. Verse 11 says that "Jerusalem shall be safely

inhabited." That could not be said about physical Jerusalem after its destruction in AD 70. In fact, Jesus had told his followers to flee the city because Jerusalem could *not* be safely inhabited!

What do the descriptions in verses 10-11 mean? These two verses tell us three things about spiritual Jerusalem, the church.

First, verse 10 tells us that spiritual Jerusalem would be accessible. "All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up."

The Jordan valley is 1388 feet below sea level, making it the deepest depression on the face of the earth. The idea expressed here is that those valleys around Jerusalem would be lifted up and flattened, making the city easily accessible. That is true of the church - entry is available to all who will obey the gospel of Christ. They don't have to climb mountains. Instead, God has done all of the hard work for them already. All they must do is obey the gospel. That's the same point that Paul made in Romans 10.

**Romans 10:6-9** - But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

We don't have to travel up to heaven to bring Christ down to save us - God has already done that. We don't have to descend into the deep to raise Christ from the dead - God has already done that. All we must do is obey the gospel. God has made the eternal kingdom accessible to all, and that is something Zechariah prophesied would happen here in verse 10.

Second, verse 10 tells us that spiritual Jerusalem would be an inhabited city.

In fact, we are told that the city would once again occupy her ancient limits, which are given here by five geographical landmarks:

- The "Benjamin gate" was in the northern wall.
- The "first gate" was in the eastern wall.

- The "corner gate" was west of the Benjamin gate.
- "The tower of Hananeel" was the northeast corner of the wall.
- The "winepresses of the king" were probably near "the king's garden" at the southeast corner of the city.

Physical Jerusalem was in shambles, but not so with spiritual Jerusalem - it is inhabited, it is well-ordered, and it has enough space to hold everyone who would enter. That is all certainly true of the church. It has enough room for all who would obey the gospel, despite what the Calvinists and the premillennialists say.

Third, spiritual Jerusalem would not just be inhabited, but it would be *safely* inhabited. "And men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited."

In the days of Zechariah, the population in Jerusalem was sparse, and those few who lived in the city did not live there in safety. In the first century, the city was destroyed, and no one lived there in safety.

But the church is very different. It is *safely* inhabited. There is no judgment of "utter destruction" for sin because those in the church have been cleansed of their sin by the blood of Christ. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). And, unlike *physical* Jerusalem, *spiritual* Jerusalem will never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44)! Verses 10-11 are a beautiful description of the church!

With the next verse, God will once again turn his attention back to the enemies of God's people.

## Zechariah 14:12

**12 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.**

Zechariah 14:12 is famous among the "end-is-near" premillennial commentators. They call it the "Nuclear Prophecy," and the slightly more imaginative among them call it the "Neutron Bomb



Prophecy."

What's wrong with that view? After all, doesn't verse 12 look somewhat like what one might experience in a nuclear blast? Perhaps, but to find a nuclear bomb in this verse, one would first have to rip the verse completely out of its context in Chapter 14 and out of its context in the entire book of Zechariah. And, I might add, one would have to toss his or her common sense out the window right along with the word of God.

When read in context, there is no reason to believe that Zechariah has suddenly jumped thousands of years into the future to describe the effects of a nuclear bomb. What would such a prophecy have to do with anything that he has been describing in this book?

When someone somehow finds an atomic bomb in these verses, the only thing that has been atomized is the text! There are 211 verses in Zechariah. If our view of Zechariah 14:12 doesn't make sense when we read the other 210 verses, then our view is wrong. The surest way to misinterpret the Bible is to consider each verse in a vacuum without any thought for the verses that precede it and follow it.

A second problem - at least for the premillennial crowd - is that verse 12 itself describes what is causing these symptoms, and it is a *plague* rather than a bomb. Why is that a particular problem for the premillennial crowd? Because they in particular like to brag that they alone take every word in the Bible literally. What about the word "plague"? Are they taking that word literally when they tell you about the so-called neutron bomb prophecy?

A third problem is a common problem - arrogance. Every generation of mankind likes to think that they are special and that the end of the world will surely come in their own generation. The signs are here! The end is near! The sky is falling!

Yes, Jesus could appear again in the next five minutes, but he could also appear again 10,000 years from now - and each is equally likely from our perspective. There are no signs. We cannot tell by looking around us whether Jesus is more likely or less likely to appear again now as opposed to 10,000 years from now. The only thing that causes some people to think that Jesus' appearance is more likely now is their collective arrogance - the view that our own generation is somehow unique and special - along with their flawed understanding of the Bible.

So what is verse 12 talking about? Let's begin with the same two questions that have carried us through this entire book. What is the context? What is the time frame?

The context is that Jerusalem has just been destroyed, and the people of God living in that city have escaped that destruction by heeding the warnings that Jesus gave them in Matthew 24. Rome, which just destroyed Jerusalem, continues to persecute Christians as it had under Nero prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

And the time frame? The context that we just described is all happening in the first century. The Messianic prophecies we have seen in these closing chapters were all fulfilled in the first century. The prophecies about the church that we have seen in these closing chapters were all fulfilled in the first century. Our time frame has not changed. We are looking here at the first century.

So with that context and that time frame in mind, what is verse 12 talking about? Rome.

Verse 12 is describing the judgment of Rome, the fourth kingdom made of iron and clay in Daniel 2. Daniel had written in Daniel 2:44 that the church would destroy Rome, and here we see that destruction.

Rome is "the people that have fought against Jerusalem" in verse 12. Verse 12 figuratively shows Rome's judgment and destruction using the figure of an unspecified wasting disease that will destroy their armies. The focus on the eyes and on the tongue is particularly apt for the Romans. They *boasted* loudly of all they could see in their surrounding empire, and they *slandered* the people of God.

Verse 12 is a glimpse of what we see in the New Testament in the book of Revelation. The word "plague" occurs twelve times in the book of Revelation. That's twice more than in any other book of the Bible except for Leviticus and Numbers. Here is one example:

**Revelation 18:8-10** - Therefore shall her **plagues** come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.

Those verses from Revelation 18 are describing the judgment of Rome as is verse 12 here in Zechariah 14 using the same figure.

## Zechariah 14:13

**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.**

With verse 13, we are still "in that day," which means we are still in the first century. That phrase ("in that day") is found twenty times in the book of Zechariah - sixteen of which occur in these final three chapters, with seven of those sixteen occurrences found here in Chapter 14! Do you think the inspired text is trying to tell us something important with the repetition of the phrase "in that day"? I do.

It is almost as if God knew we might be tempted to lift these verses out of their proper context and apply them to situations where they don't belong! Why else does God keep reminding us that these prophecies pertain to events "in that day" and then repeatedly tell us in the New Testament when that day was - the first century - by referring back to prophecies in this book and telling us when they were fulfilled?

Verse 13 presents yet another problem for the rigid literalist. The "them" in verse 13 are those who just had their flesh, eyes, and tongues rotted away by a plague. If that was a *literal* plague, then how are these same people now creating a great tumult in this verse? Wouldn't they all just be radioactive dust?

So what is going on in verse 13? Verse 13 is describing yet another aspect of God's judgment against Rome - God would create **internal strife** within Rome. Neighbor would turn against neighbor. We saw this earlier in the judgment of Jerusalem, and we are seeing it here in the judgment of Rome.

Was internal strife a problem for Rome? Definitely. In fact, the siege of Jerusalem was an example of internal strife in Rome. In AD 70, Jerusalem was located in a Roman province. Jerusalem's people were under Roman rule. As they themselves had said, they had no king but Caesar. The Jewish rebellion against Rome was an example of internal strife in Rome.

But the internal strife did not end there. Perhaps the most famous set of books ever written about the fall of Rome is *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon. In that lengthy history, Gibbon gives four primary reasons for the fall of Rome: external invasion, inner decadence, **inner strife**, and injury of time and nature. Daniel 2 also described the inner weakness of the Roman empire:

**Daniel 2:41-43** - And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, **the kingdom shall be divided**; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, **so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken**. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: **but they shall not cleave one to another**, even as iron is not mixed with clay.

That description from Daniel 2 agrees with Gibbon's theory as to why Rome fell - the crucial difference being that Gibbon wrote centuries *after* the fall of Rome while Daniel wrote centuries *before* the fall of Rome! Yes, Rome fell in part because of internal strife, just as Daniel and Zechariah had said it would.

#Zechariah