

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

Lesson 31, Chapter 14

Christians have traditionally looked primarily to the Book of Revelation for their guide on End Times matters and information about the return of Messiah. In addition, we find other New Testament books like Matthew, Luke, John, and Thessalonians, which seem to provide additional, but sparse, reference to that event.

The reality is that most of what is reported there was already spoken of in a few of the 12 Minor Prophets as well as a couple of the Major Prophets. And, a further reality is that, despite the many books that have been written about the End Times and about Revelation, and about the Messiah's return, with most claiming to be authoritative and scholarly, the vast majority of what is written is based on speculation, opinion, some older and newer denominational Church doctrines, and just plain imagination. The various beliefs and opinions about these subjects have morphed over time, often appearing starkly different in a matter of 50 years or less. And then, there are the books such as Tim LaHaye's entertaining and wildly popular Left Behind series that are fictional novels bearing little resemblance to biblical truth (and to Tim's credit, saying upfront that this book series is a fictional novel series).

My point is this: prophecy is inherently fuzzy and has always been. While it points us to certain dramatic events and helps us to envision God's path of Redemption as it plays out, its fulfillment is only realized in hindsight. For instance, we can look back at the coming of Yeshua, and His path to the Cross, and to some of the things that happened later, but until it all happened, and people had the chance to put the pieces together, they couldn't have imagined it all playing out as it did. Ironically, once played out, the fit with prophecy was perfect. In fact, it turned out more literal in most cases than what anyone thought possible, because the circumstances necessary for it to happen so literally had not yet manifested. We face exactly the same thing concerning our long-awaited hope of Yeshua's return. That it will happen is certain; how, when, and what it will look like is anything but certain.

Despite various denominations and book authors coming up with timelines, names, places, and some even attempting dates, these are so speculative and depend on inserting meaning into biblical passages that are doubtful, at best, that we must be careful not to give them too much credence. One of the reasons this happens is that human beings hate uncertainty. And the more modern the times, the more precision is demanded. So, authors and Church governments attempt to satisfy that demand. This same thing happened in Jewish history, and the result was that when Messiah first came, He didn't meet their widely accepted but speculative assumptions and so the vast majority of Jews refused to accept who Yeshua was.

Especially as we read the final chapter of Zechariah, the things that have been assumed for a very long time especially in the Evangelical branches of the Church about Messiah's return become greatly questionable, if not outright proved incorrect. The thing is, that doesn't necessarily mean that as satisfying of a substitute answer can be supplied. Rather, I'm sorry to say we're probably going to add more mystery to the matter rather than solving some. But, it is better to know as much as we can know and to leave it there, than it is to fill in the blanks with doctrines, opinions, and our imaginations. I cannot begin to tell you the number of conversations I have with folks who seem to be more interested in End Times matters than just about anything else in their faith walk, but biblically the return of Messiah and many other End Times concerns offer the least amount of discernable information. So, they tend to come up with some pretty creative solutions.

Biblically, we indeed are offered some important milestones, and some "trouble ahead" signposts, but details are frustratingly lacking. We are going to stick with what God's Word actually says. And you are today going to find out that when read literally, and taken from the original Hebrew, much of Zechariah 14 is going to throw a monkey wrench into the works of some of the most accepted Christian doctrine on the subject of Messiah's return. I may offer an opinion, but when that happens I will tell you it is opinion and not fact (and I don't intend to do much of that). So, let's get on with it. Open your Bibles to Zechariah chapter 14. We'll re-read it all.

RE-READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 14 all

As I stated in our previous lesson, Zechariah 14 is about the final battle for Jerusalem. It will be another David versus Goliath scenario, with Israel alone fighting the governments of the entire planet. In other sense, we must see this as gentiles versus Hebrews, even though no doubt some gentiles will be Pro-Israel... but they, we, shall be the exception. Nonetheless, even we shall suffer the fates of the nations that results.

I realize that some Evangelical Christian doctrines believe that the so-called Rapture will occur prior to this battle, and so Believers will not have to suffer the collateral damage of the World War against Israel. Although I accept the concept of the Rapture, nothing I read says we will no longer be here to avoid the troubles and death that leads up to what is often called The Great Tribulation. It is true that at some point, after what is called tribulation (there is no such thing in the Bible as "The Tribulation"), which is essentially mankind's evil gone viral more than ever before, then God's wrath will begin (I think it is at the opening of the 6th seal of the Seal Judgments when that happens, but that is my opinion). I further think that very shortly (even hours?) before God's wrath begins, the Rapture of Believers will happen for those of us who remain alive (and while that is my opinion, I'm a bit stronger on it than I am about exactly at what point of the so-called 21 Judgments that the tribulations end and God's wrath begins).

The war against Jerusalem and Israel depicted here is The War of Armageddon. I will add that many Church denominations believe that what we're reading has already occurred, and it was when Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem early in the 6th century B.C. What we know from the Bible about the prosecution of that war and its aftermath bears little resemblance to what is depicted here in Zechariah. Here, in the War of Armageddon, is what is called The Day of Yehoveh, or Judgment Day, and the passages specifically say so. That was not the case of Babylon attacking Jerusalem so very long ago. So, what is prophesied here has yet to happen.

An interesting feature of this attack of the nations on Jerusalem is that they will win; or at least, it appears so for a while. And, if you were the nations you would think the same. We are told that by the conclusions of the war fully two-thirds of residents of Jerusalem are killed (which I think probably means

Israel, here, as Jerusalem often stands for the entire country), Jerusalem is ransacked, much of it destroyed, and so the enemy starts to divide up the spoils of war. This false confidence might seem merited to them at the time, but suddenly Yehoveh Himself intervenes, turns the tables, and Israel is the victor.

The reality that it is God who has intervened will be so obvious, that the people of Israel will acknowledge it, as will their leaders, and weep and mourn bitterly that they had been so rebellious towards God for so many centuries. Will the nations also realize it? It seems that some will, and some won't.

Verse 2 explains that many atrocities will be visited upon the Israelis, and especially so for the women. They will be sexually violated. Some scholars have argued that this language of wholesale rape is merely language that is wrapped up in ancient warfare in which these sexual assaults were the norm. But, that today, we should probably discount that. Wrong. All one has to do is listen to the Jewish victims and hostages of the October 7, 2023 Hamas and Gaza attack on Israel about what happened to women and female children as young as 5 or 6 years old and as elderly as their mid-80's to know that these brutal sexual assaults will indeed be part of what this future war will involve, just as prophesied.

The damage to Jerusalem will be so extensive that one-half of the people who live in some unnamed section of the city will be captured and hauled off. But, somehow the other half will be spared. But then, begins verse 3, the entire direction of the war changes. Virtually every English Bible says that suddenly The Lord will go forth and do direct battle with the nations. That is factually incorrect as the original Hebrew says it is Yehoveh that will go forth and do direct battle to aid Israel. It is critical that we understand that this insistence on using the term The Lord has an ulterior motive, which I shall get to shortly. Please note: what I am telling you about the Hebrew actually saying Yehoveh and not Adonai is in no way disputed by Bible or language scholars.

So Yehoveh is here depicted as a warrior God. It emphasizes this point when the verse continues by saying that He will go out to fight as on the day of battle. What does that mean? It has not been satisfactorily explained by

academics, since it is rarely used in the Scriptures. It is my opinion that The Day of Battle is essentially but yet another name for Day of Yehoveh, Judgment Day, The Day, and a few others used to describe this final war. That is, we ought to just add The Day of Battle to the list as appropriate because the day has arrived and His personally going to fight for Israel is the action God is described as taking on Judgment Day. But now comes one of the most talked about, exciting, dramatic events ever recorded regarding the End: God standing upon the Mt. of Olives and it splitting in two.

But, here we have a shock awaiting us. Verse 4 says this:

CJB Zechariah 14:4 *On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies to the east of Yerushalayim; and the Mount of Olives will be split in half from east to west, to make a huge valley. Half of the mountain will move toward the north, and half of it toward the south.*

Awesome! So, whose feet will stand on the Mt. of Olives? The Church says it is the returned Jesus! The problem is, that is not what the Scriptures say. Obviously the word "his" refers to the previous verse where every English Bible says "The Lord". And who does the Church say The Lord refers to? Jesus, of course. But, we just saw that verse 3 is Yehoveh. So, it is Yehoveh's feet that will stand on the Mt. of Olives, causing it to split. Is Yehoveh who is always described in the Bible as God the Father also actually Yeshua? Christianity says it is.

How are we to understand this? Because it is a long-held Church doctrine that any mention of God interacting with humans in any physical corporeal manner must be Jesus, then it is no problem for them to simply insert Jesus here. Yet, is that legitimate? The first thing to discern is if this idea of God actually standing on the Mt. of Olives is meant literally. Or is it somewhat like the statement from Isaiah 66 that reads:

CJB Isaiah 66:1 *"Heaven is my throne," says Yehoveh "and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house could you build for me? What sort of place could you devise for my rest?"*

Does Heaven actually have a throne that God actually sits on, and does Yehoveh actually have feet that actually use the planet earth as a footstool while seated on His throne? Most Bible scholars would readily admit that this is but an expression, not to be taken fully literally. So, can we also, then, apply the same to Zechariah 14:4? That is, that God depicted as physically standing on the mountain is but an expression of His overwhelming presence? My answer is: I don't know. I can make a case that it might be Messiah, but an even better case that it is God the Father. Yet, when deciding it is God the Father, then we also cannot think of it in terms of Him having actual anatomical feet that has Him virtually standing on a mountain. In the end, the better solution is to know that the Mt. of Olives splitting will happen at God's direction and intervention. How, exactly, God manifests Himself when He does that is simply not known. Thus, we just need to leave that part as mystery.

The Temple Mount in the city of Jerusalem is separated from the Mt. of Olives by the Kidron Valley. Both the Mt. of Olives and the Kidron are situated geographically on a north-south line. Thus, when the mountain is split in half, then the split is also along an east-west fissure, thus when the split opens wide, the gap itself is caused by a north-south movement. When this happens, Yehoveh's intervention cannot, and will not, be doubted.

The ravine that is created won't be a mere crack; it will become a gaping valley. The purpose for this event is not merely a show of unworldly power and violence by Yehoveh, it is to provide an escape path for the surrounded Israelites to flee. This is where the half of the nation (or, at least, half the people of Jerusalem) will escape in order to survive. But, we get another mystery when we are told that the split will reach to Atzel. What is Atzel? There is no consensus about this.

For starters, most Bible academics agree that the word is probably Azel and not Atzel. Agreement doesn't make it correct, but as of this point in history it is probably our best estimation. Very likely it is a place name, because we do read of something similar in the Book of Micah.

CJB Micah 1:11 *Inhabitants of Shafir, pass on your way in nakedness and shame. The inhabitants of Tza'anan have not left yet. The wailing of Beit-Ha'etzel will remove from you their support.*

Reading this Hebrew word **Beit-Ha'etzel** more literally would be House of The Etzel. Although we find the word here pronounced the "E" vowel sound, it is a guess and could just as easily have been an "A" sound (**Atzel**). This is hardly proof, but I think it offers sufficient evidence to believe that this obvious place name is the same as being referred to in Micah. One more clouded piece of evidence exists. It is that there is a family name within the Tribe of Benjamin that is Azel (although not Atzel). Again, the difference between these phonetic spellings has to do with exactly how one pronounces a word, and so it could be that both pronunciations are speaking to the same place. All this is about the best we can do.

Verse 5 continues with, "You will flee as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uziah king of Judah." Interestingly, when English translations come from the Hebrew Masoretic texts, we indeed find "flee, fled". But, when the translations come from the Greek texts (the Septuagint), it is rendered block/blocked. Pretty much the opposite. I'll spend just a couple of minutes explaining why the Greek can at times be so different than the Hebrew.

The first thing to realize is that all Scripture is Hebrew in nature and thought, nearly exclusively in its writers, and yet the Septuagint that is a Greek translation of the Hebrew causes errors to be introduced. There are a few reasons why. To begin, languages reflect their cultures. Therefore, it is most common that there are words in one language that have no direct equivalent in another language, and there are some instances that the attempt of Greek to translate Hebrew runs into this problem.

The next issue is that when Greek is used, Greek has a similar characteristic as Hebrew in that while Hebrew has its own modern-day dialect and meaning, there is also a more ancient dialect and meaning that is not equivalent to modern Hebrew. It is the more ancient that we find in the Old Testament. Thus, when in more ancient times a language scholar attempted to tie a Greek word to a Hebrew word, he may have arrived at a pretty accurate solution.

But, most Greek speakers did not speak this higher academic brand of Greek. Thus, the same Greek word could have one meaning in the Septuagint but a bit different meaning in the more commonly used Greek.

In the first century, by far the most commonly available Bible was the Septuagint, created in the middle part of the 3rd century B.C. The Greek world was totally dominant. Thus, the privileged people who had a Bible saw it's words not in the light of it's higher Greek meanings, but rather in it's more common everyday meanings. And, especially when the New Testament was created early in the 3rd century A.D., which itself is composed of around 50% Old Testament quotes, then when Greek speakers began to read the new Greek Bible along with the so-called New Testament, they read those Greek words in ways that some of those words were not intended. The same thing happens today with Hebrew, when people will diligently study Hebrew, but then understand what they read in the Hebrew Scriptures in the sense of modern Hebrew and not ancient *biblical* Hebrew. 21st century English speakers ought to perfectly understand this problem. If we attempt to read English language documents from the 14th century and onward, the words they use sound strange, foreign, and out of place. They are even spelled differently. And, I assure you, even if they used the same English words we use today, what they meant is often quite different from how we use those words. Just try reading William Bradford's In Plimoth Plantation from early in the 17th century, and you will immediately run into this.

A fine example of this issue is right here in verse 5. The Bibles that are taken from the Greek Septuagint take the Greek word used to translate the Hebrew word so as to come up with the meaning, "You will be blocked as you were blocked before the earthquake in the days of Uziyah...". But, when going from the Hebrew directly to English, it comes out, "You will flee as you fled...". The Greek misunderstands the intent. That's all I want to say about it for now, but this is how some of these strangely divergent readings of the same Scripture passage can happen in different Bible versions. Without doubt, the proper reading is flee/fled because it works within the context of the entire scene, whereas block/blocked doesn't.

So, the idea is that this earthquake during the time that the King of Judah named Uziah reigned was so terrifying that it had become a permanent part of Israelite historical memory. The Prophet Amos specifically mentions it, and probably so does Isaiah although not by name. Apparently, the damage to Jerusalem was so bad and the situation so dire, that a large part of Jerusalem's population left the city in a big hurry. This next time (in the End Times), no doubt there will be an earthquake, but instead of natural causes, it will be at God's order, and it will include the splitting of the massive Mt. of Olives into two halves. It is through this ravine that is created that many Hebrew survivors of the War of Armageddon will use to get out of the city and out of the grip of the nations' armies that have overrun Israel. Exactly what that looks like, and exactly how that ravine provides the cover for their escape, is not given to us.

Something we need to keep in mind is that the ravine is NOT going to be a hiding place; it is only a road to get out of the city to go somewhere else... perhaps to the place called Azel. The verse ends with:

CJB Zechariah 14:5 ... then Yehoveh my Elohim will come to you with all the holy ones.

That's right... whereas Christianity says that this is referring to Jesus the Messiah that will come, that in no way is what the passage says. Yeshua is not referred to as Yehoveh, nor as Elohim, even though some denominational leaders seem to think that it does. Those names are never synonymous in the Bible and so it seems out of the question that it is otherwise here in Zechariah. Is it impossible that it could be? No. That can never be said. However, choosing the "not entirely impossible" answer as the solution is never a good approach. So, how exactly to mentally picture this is tough to do, I grant you. It is best we leave this mystery a mystery for now and not get hung up on it.

Next mystery: who are these Holy Ones? In the Hebrew, this is translating the word **qodeshim**, and Holy Ones is probably as close to the original meaning as we're going to get. Biblically, this term can refer to people, but, at other times it can refer to heavenly beings, likely to angels. Some commentators say this passage is speaking of both people (redeemed people) **and** angels that

are coming back to earth from Heaven as the Holy Ones. Perhaps. The older commentators that are sort of the pre-Evangelical Church representatives as we think of it today, say that the Holy Ones are angels and not people. They equate the more typical Heavenly Hosts that God uses for battle with this term "Holy Ones", and sees them as more or less synonymous. It seems to be a more modern phenomenon since the enormous interest in the End Times aroused by such people as Hal Lindsey, when we find the idea that these Holy Ones are not angels at all, but rather martyred saints coming back to earth with Jesus from their place in Heaven. I'm not saying that this cannot possibly be the case, but neither does it seem entirely likely. I lean towards agreeing with the older commentators, that this is more probably speaking of heavenly angels or maybe some other category of divine beings. For now, another mystery best left as a mystery unless and until more revelation comes forth.

Verse 6 explains that with this coming of God and the Holy Ones, there will at some point also be visible cosmic changes happening of a very dramatic nature. This is actually par for the course, because whenever we read of God making an appearance on earth, also known as a theophany, (other perhaps than the very private appearances that happened within the Tent Tabernacle and later the Temple), there were shakings, thunder and lightning, trumpets sounding, and all sorts of scary things that happened in the heavens. Again, we get the End Times signature phrase of "On that day", to begin this verse, so there is no doubt that we are continuing with what is going to happen as the events of the End Times do nothing but increase in their awesomeness and intensity.

The CJB does a good job of expressing how this verse is best translated to English from the earliest Hebrew version of it that we have of it, which is the Masoretic Text of around 1000 A.D. Although we do find much of Zechariah in the much older Dead Sea Scrolls, no fragment of what we call chapter 14 has survived. And, what we find is this reading:

CJB Zechariah 14:6 *On that day, there will be neither bright light nor thick darkness.*

The issue is this; the CJB clearly is relying on what the next verse, verse 7, says and is one of those translations that have attempted to solve what many Bible scholars have, for a long time, been troubled with this wording. To show you what I mean, here is the nearly universal translation we'll find that is actually more literally true to the Masoretic text.

YLT Zechariah 14:6 *And it hath come to pass, in that day, The precious light is not, it is dense darkness,*

So, the more traditional, but indeed most literal, translation of the only Hebrew text we have to translate from, says that all light will be gone, and it will be only dense darkness. Yet, when we read verse 7 it says:

CJB Zechariah 14:7 *and one day, known to Yehoveh, will be neither day nor night, although by evening there will be light.*

Scholars say that verse 7 has no discernable issues with it, so we can more rely on it than we can verse 6. After the part that says, "there will be neither" or "there will not be", we find the Hebrew word **owr**, which does mean light. However, the next verse says that there will not be light or darkness. So, the way we have it almost makes it sound like something in between day and night, such as the light of dusk, is what is going to become a condition for a while. So, which is right? A long-term dusk, or complete darkness? What is the solution?

A very good approach is to return to verse 6 and assume that this is the problem verse. There is another and different Hebrew word, **od**, which more or less means "there will no longer be". **Owr** is spelled with a reysh, and **od** is spelled with a dalet. These two Hebrew letters are almost identical in appearance and are regularly mistaken for one another when Bible transcripts are copied by hand, as they were so many centuries ago. If we can make the judgment that this accidental transposition is what has happened here, then we have the passage read: "then there will no longer be only darkness. This makes more sense and it agrees much better with the next verse.

So, verse 7 is traditionally taken as claiming there will be this strange condition that will not be like a typical day or night. And, when this says it is known to Yehoveh, it seems to have the notion that 1) only He knows it, and/or 2) He knows this in the sense that only He has full divine omniscience of every condition of the future.

I suspect that this happening can be tied to what we read in the Prophet Joel.

CJB Joel 2:1-2 ***"Blow the shofar in Tziyon! Sound an alarm on my holy mountain!" Let all living in the land tremble, for the Day of ADONAI is coming! It's upon us!- ² a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick fog; a great and mighty horde is spreading like blackness over the mountains. There has never been anything like it, nor will there ever be again, not even after the years of many generations.***

The several Prophets that do speak of the End Times are in harmony about many of the events that will happen, even though they might use different terms from different perspectives of how these happens will look.

What is really interesting is how after this time when there will be neither day nor night, when evening arrives, there will be light. So, I want to present an alternative way that we might consider the combined meanings of verses 6 and 7. It is this: day and night used together typically is speaking about one day... one 24-hour period. Here's what makes me suspicious of understanding this in the more traditional way: although these 2 verses have spoken of light and darkness, now this changes course and speaks of day and night. The typical Hebrew word for daytime is used: **yom**. And the typical Hebrew word for nighttime is coupled with it: **layil**. And, this verse begins by speaking about "one day". So, it seems to me the likelihood is that this is denoting the matter of a day and night cycle that has been present and a constant since a certain point in God's original creation efforts.

Prior to Creation, the entire Universe was in one stable state that didn't change: darkness. No light. And, perhaps this verse is looking to a time when the pre-creation dynamic of no cycling between light and darkness will again happen. However, after this period of transition that Zechariah is speaking

about (neither light nor darkness), there will be only light. No cycling between light and dark, daytime and nighttime. In fact, the entire definition of light or daytime will change.

CJB Revelation 22:5 *Night will no longer exist, so they will need neither the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because Yehoveh, God, will shine upon them. And they will reign as kings forever and ever.*

This Revelation event, however, is not an End Times event (at least as we think of what the End Times era means) nor is it even present during the Millennial reign of Yeshua. Rather, this is speaking of the time when an entirely different dynamic will be at play, and we read about that in Revelation 21.

CJB Revelation 21:1 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had passed away, and the sea was no longer there.*

That is, beginning at Revelation chapter 21 verse 1, all that follows to the end of the book concerns a re-creation. The old earth and heavens are gone, and a re-created earth and heavens are brought into existence. And, one of the several new elements of it is that no longer will a bright, burning Sun be necessary to light the earth. Instead, God Himself is going to provide light, and there will never be a period of darkness. The cycle of day and night will be obsolete. And, according to Yeshua, this is the moment that the Torah and all Covenants of God finally end, as there will no longer be any need for them.

CJB Matthew 5:17-18 ¹⁷ *"Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete."* ¹⁸ *Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened.*

So, as vague as Zechariah 14:7 is when looked at closely, when it says that there will be neither day nor night, but in the evening there will be light, I lean

towards thinking that “evening” is a prophetic symbol in this use of referring to a time AFTER the End Times, that actually brings the End Times to a close (just as evening is the final moments of a Hebrew day that brings it to a close), and ushers us into the new and eternally permanent heavens and earth of absolute sinless perfection. But, that’s just me.

We will continue next time at verse 8.