

- c. If 14:1-2 points to a future invasion of Jerusalem at the end of the present age, there is no problem in treating verse 14:4a literally: It refers to the Parousia when Jesus will appear bodily to preside over the judgment of the world and the renewal of the material creation (ref. Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 19-20; etc.). But such is not the case if the Roman assault on Jerusalem is the referent of verses 1-2. In this instance, there are only two options for treating 14:4a literally:
- 1) The first is that this passage is referring to the Christ event as a whole. In this scenario, the Lord's bodily presence (in the person of Jesus) on the Mount of Olives can be linked together with the Roman invasion: Jerusalem's rejection of her Messiah had a focal point in Jesus' arrest in Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives, and this rejection incurred the destruction wrought by the Romans in 70 A.D. While conceivable, the obvious difficulty with this view is that the prophecy has the Lord standing on Olivet when He comes to fight against the nations that have besieged Jerusalem – He stands on Olivet *after* the siege, not before it.
 - 2) The other reasonable option is to view the Roman siege as the *first*, but not the sole, referent of verses 1-2. Thus it serves as a prototype and prophetic prefiguration of another conflict to come at the time of the Parousia. This is not implausible since this pattern characterized the salvation history. Indeed, the entire Israelite history recorded in the Old Testament functions in this way, prefiguring and preparing for God's accomplishment of His purpose for His creation in Jesus Christ. The singular proof of this is Jesus' own insistence that all of the Scriptures testify of Him.

The other alternative is to interpret verse 14:4a metaphorically. From this perspective, it's no problem to associate this theophany with the Roman siege. For it's indisputable that the Lord instigated and presided over the Roman desolation of Jerusalem and Judea and He also provided the way of escape for His believing remnant (ref. again Matthew 24:15-22; Luke 21:20-22). One variation of the metaphorical approach is mentioned fairly often and so is worth noting here. It is summarized by the following commentary:

“Citing the *Midrash* [a formal collection of Jewish doctrinal and homiletical writings expositing the Hebrew scriptures], Ernest L. Martin in his book, *Secrets of Golgotha: The Forgotten History of Christ's Crucifixion*, claims that a rabbi named Jonathan witnessed the departure of the *Shekinah* Glory Cloud from the Temple in A.D. 66. The *Shekinah* is the presence of God. And the Glory Cloud is the visible manifestation of God's presence. After leaving the Temple, the *Shekinah* or Glory Cloud then allegedly sat atop the Mount of Olives for three and a half years before rising up to heaven several months prior to the arrival of Titus and his army at Jerusalem in A.D. 70.”

Though some regard this as proof of the literal fulfillment of 14:4a in connection with the Roman siege, a vision is not the same as the Lord's tangible presence.

However one interprets the idea of Yahweh standing on the Mount of Olives, there are numerous other difficulties associated with limiting the prophecy to the Roman siege. One of those is that the prophecy has Yahweh arising against those forces which He brings against Jerusalem to crush and desolate her (14:3). Rome certainly was the Lord's "war club" which He wielded against unbelieving Jerusalem and Judea. But nothing in that circumstance indicated that Yahweh then turned to fight against Rome. Rome triumphed when Jerusalem and its temple were burned to the ground; indeed Titus' arch in Rome commemorates this great victory. The most appealing solution to this dilemma is to separate in time Yahweh's two actions of *bringing* the Romans against Jerusalem and *fighting against* them: That is, He brought the Roman army against Judea in 66 A.D., but only turned His wrath upon Rome 400 years later when the city was sacked in the fifth century. (Some maintain that the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 A.D. fulfilled this divine retribution – cf. 14:3 with 14:12-13, but this event had minimal affect on *Rome* as the imperial power which desolated Jerusalem.)

- d. The dynamics of 14:1-4a present significant challenges to the Roman siege interpretation, but the same is true of the elaboration which follows in verses 4b-8. Perhaps the most obvious is that the Lord's presence on the Mount of Olives is said to split the mountain into two parts, and that for the purpose of providing a way of escape for those under siege (14:4-5). Once again, there have been various attempts to explain this phenomenon in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The following is one such proposed explanation: "*The Mount of Olives was, in fact, split down the middle by a Roman road that formed a valley through the middle of the mountain in the first century. According to the early church historian Eusebius, 'the members of the Jerusalem church, by means of an oracle given by revelation to acceptable persons there, were ordered to leave the city before the war began and settle in a town in Peraea called Pella.' Fleeing the imminent war, Jewish Christians sought refuge in the city of Pella. Sympathetic to Rome, Pella was a perfect hiding place. Did Jewish Christians pass through the Mt. of Olives east of Jerusalem on their way east to Pella?*"

This Roman road explanation seems plausible at first glance, but it doesn't do justice to the prophecy. In the first place, it is Yahweh's presence on the Mount of Olives that causes it to split in two, not a road passing over it. Moreover, Zechariah depicted this in terms of the mountain splitting from top to bottom such that a huge (Hebrew – *exceedingly great*) valley running east to west is produced between the two halves (thence called "my mountains" – v. 5a); a road over the existing mountain topography doesn't satisfy this imagery. And finally, this bifurcation results in the two parts of the mountain moving in opposite directions (14:4c) – something that clearly didn't happen with the construction of a road.

Taken together, these images call to mind a massive earthquake, and the text itself provides some suggestion of this. For Zechariah observed that this episode of people fleeing from Jerusalem will resemble the flight that took place when Israel experienced a great earthquake during Uzziah's reign (14:5b; cf. Amos 1:1).

The problem here is that history records no such earthquake in Israel at the time of the Jerusalem siege. Thus the easiest way to reconcile this imagery with the 70 A.D. episode is to treat it metaphorically. As noted previously, the Scripture commonly speaks of God's presence in anthropomorphic terms (ref. again Psalm 10:1; Isaiah 3:13; Ezekiel 3:23). So also the Scripture associates His presence with mighty disturbances in the natural order (cf. Exodus 19:16-20; Psalm 68:1-8; Isaiah 64:1-3; Micah 1:3-4; Nahum 1:1-5; Habakkuk 3:3-10; etc.). Indeed, given this scriptural pattern for depicting the Lord's presence, it seems that the most natural way to interpret 14:4-5 is symbolically rather than literally. Of course, a future fulfillment of the prophecy at Christ's Parousia leaves open the possibility that the Mount of Olives will be split in two exactly as depicted.

- e. Another thing to consider (especially if verses 4-5 are to be interpreted metaphorically rather than literally) is the reason for this theophany taking place on the Mount of Olives. Once again, scholars and commentators are divided. But there are two considerations that seem to be most relevant.

The *first* is the fact that the Mount of Olives was the site of both Jesus' denunciation of Jerusalem for its unbelief and rejection (Luke 19:28-44; cf. Matthew 24:1ff) and His subsequent betrayal by Judas Iscariot (Luke 22:39-48). (The Garden of Gethsemane is at the base of the mountain and faces Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley; cf. John 18:1-5.) Thus Israel's rejection of Jesus – and so Yahweh's judgment against them – had a focal point in the Mount of Olives. This mountain, then, symbolizes Israel's rejection and murder of its Messiah and the Lord's retribution through His Roman "war club" – the retribution which punctuated the end of the preparatory, Israelite age and the inauguration of the new age of the new creation in Jesus Christ. Gary Demar comments:

"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." Tertullian was alluding to the fact that the Olivet prophecy set the stage for the judgment-coming of Christ that would once for all break down the Jewish/Gentile division."

Matthew Henry followed the same line of reasoning, but enlarged upon it: *"He will stand by upon the Mount of Olives; this was literally fulfilled when our Lord Jesus was often upon this mountain, especially when thence he ascended up into heaven, Acts i. 12. It was the last place on which his feet stood on this earth, the place from which he took rise. 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, Eph. ii. 14."*

The *second* consideration is that the Mount of Olives appears to have been the site of Jesus' ascension after His resurrection. Luke recorded in his gospel account that this took place near Bethany (24:50-51), but in Acts he placed Jesus' ascension at Olivet (1:9-12; cf. Luke 19:29). So also, as Jesus was taken up out of their sight, the angelic witnesses told the watching disciples that their Lord was going to return "in the same manner" as He departed. The same *manner* doesn't necessarily imply the same *location*, but this conclusion finds support in Zechariah's statement in 14:4 if indeed it is referring to Jesus' Parousia.

Adam Clarke pulls both of the above ideas together: "*It was from this mountain that our Lord beheld Jerusalem and predicted its future destruction (Matthew 24:33; Luke 19:41); and it was from this mountain that he ascended to heaven, (Acts 1:12), utterly leaving an ungrateful and condemned city.*"

- f. Another difficulty is presented by the final statement in verse 5. There are two primary aspects to this: The first is the meaning of the statement itself and the second is its relation to the counterpart in verse 3. Regarding the first matter, Zechariah announced that the Lord was going to come with His *holy ones*. This Hebrew term is ambiguous, referring in the Old Testament to God Himself as well as His heavenly hosts (the Hebrew text often employs a different term for *angels* as they are Yahweh's servant-messengers) and consecrated ("holy") human beings (*saints* in the New Testament vernacular). Dispensationalists typically assume the latter sense and use this passage (and others – cf. Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13; Jude 14) to support their doctrine of the Rapture of the Church and the saints' return with Jesus at the close of the tribulation period. Others interpret this term as referring to angelic beings who serve as Yahweh's attendants (ref. Matthew 13:47-50, 16:27, 25:31; Mark 8:38; Revelation 19:14).

Two considerations point toward the second interpretation: First, the Hebrew scriptures nowhere speak of human beings attending the Lord in a theophanic event. And this accords with the relative silence of the Old Testament respecting the state of God's "holy ones" following their death. It indicates that men's spirits, in some sense, return to the Lord (Psalm 73:23-24; Ecclesiastes 12:7); at the same time, the realm of the dead (*Sheol* – the abode of all men after death) is described as a place of darkness, isolation and loneliness which disallows even the praise of God (cf. Psalm 6:4-5, 88:10-12; Ecclesiastes 9:10; Isaiah 38:17-19).

The second point of difficulty is the relationship of this statement to the one in verse 3. Some English versions add to the confusion by using the adverb, *then*, suggesting that this theophany occurs *after* the splitting of the Mount of Olives and the remnant's escape. But the text seems to indicate that it is the Lord's presence on it that causes the mountain to split (14:4). Rather than two theophanies, the second declaration of Yahweh's coming enlarges the first one: The Lord would come and fight the adversaries and liberate His remnant, but unto a greater goal; He was coming to restore Zion, His holy habitation, and forever dwell with her children as King of the whole earth (cf. 1:12-2:13, 3:9-10, 8:1-23).