

On That Day

Parts I-II of The Second Burden of Zechariah

- ¹ The **oracle** of the word of the LORD concerning Israel: Thus declares the LORD, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the spirit of man within him:
- ² "Behold, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of staggering to all the surrounding peoples. The siege of Jerusalem will also be against Judah.
- ³ **On that day** I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for **all the peoples**. All who lift it will surely hurt themselves. And **all the nations of the earth will gather against it**.
- ⁴ **On that day**, declares the LORD, I will strike every horse with panic, and its rider with madness. But for the sake of the house of Judah I will keep my eyes open, when I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness.
- ⁵ Then the clans of Judah shall say to themselves, 'The inhabitants of Jerusalem have strength through the LORD of hosts, their God.'
- ⁶ "**On that day** I will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot in the midst of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves. And they shall devour to the right and to the left all the surrounding peoples, while Jerusalem shall again be inhabited in its place, in Jerusalem.
- ⁷ "And the LORD will **give salvation to the tents of Judah first**, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may not surpass that of Judah.
- ⁸ **On that day** the LORD will **protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem**, so that the feeblest among them **on that day** shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, **like the angel of the LORD, going before them**.
- ⁹ And **on that day** I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.
- ¹⁰ "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem **a spirit of grace** and pleas for mercy, so that, when **they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him**, as one mourns for an

only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

¹¹ **On that day** the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.

¹² The land shall mourn, each family by itself: the family of the house of **David** by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of **Nathan** by itself, and their wives by themselves;

¹³ the family of the house of **Levi** by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the **Shimeites** by itself, and their wives by themselves;

¹⁴ and all the families that are left, each by itself, and their wives by themselves.

^{13:1} **"On that day** there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

² "And **on that day**, declares the LORD of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more. And also I will remove from the land the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness.

³ And if anyone again prophesies, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, 'You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the LORD.' And his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies.

⁴ **"On that day** every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies. He will not put on a hairy cloak in order to deceive,

⁵ but he will say, 'I am no prophet, I am a worker of the soil, for a man sold me in my youth.'

⁶ And if one asks him, 'What are these wounds on your back?' he will say, 'The wounds I received in the house of my friends.'

⁷ "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me," declares the LORD of hosts. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones.

⁸ In the whole land, declares the LORD, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive.

⁹ And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"

Zechariah 12:13-9

The Morality of Prophecy

SOMETIMES IS ISN'T SO MUCH WHAT WE LEARN, as it is learning how to best deal with what we learn. John Piper asks: “Can controversial teachings nurture Christlikeness?”¹ Notice the two parts of the quote: 1. Controversial teachings and 2. Christlikeness. Controversial teachings are *what we learn*. Christlikeness is *how we deal with* what we learn. He continues, “Before you answer this question, ask another one: Are there any significant biblical teachings that have not been controversial? I cannot think of even one, let alone the number we all need for the daily nurture of faith.”²

There is an old saying, often falsely attributed to Augustine, but having its source somewhere in the Lutheran and Reformed churches probably during the horrific Thirty Years War in the 1600s, which gives it a bit of perspective: “In essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity.”³ I did not used to like this

¹ John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God*, Rev. and expanded. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), 120.

² Ibid.

³ for a discussion see, “A Common Quotation from ‘Augustine?’” <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/quote.html>

proverb, and perhaps that says something about me. My main thinking was, “Well, who gets to decide what is what?” Piper is in fact correct. There isn’t a single doctrine in the history of the church that has been fully agreed upon. Even heretics call themselves Christians, all while they disagree with what we would consider essential doctrine.

In one of the earliest sources of this quote, a discussion is taken up about helping us decide what is what. It basically boils down to this. Is it something we need to know in order to be saved, is found clearly in the Bible, and has been decided publicly by the whole church (he refers to synods, but the ecumenical early church councils seem to me a better basis, as later synods do not represent the whole church and often vote on things that are no necessary for salvation). If so, then it is necessary and we must align ourselves to the teaching. Or, is it not found in the Bible, not common to all the Churches, a thing in which many have willingly disagreed, or is it a thing not tending to piety, charity, and edification? If so, then it is a non-essential.

Like I said, in some ways this begs the question, for who gets to decide? But the question still has to be asked, and each of us has to die on his own hills, I suppose. My question to you is, what hills are you not willing to die on? Enter our theme today: the doctrine of **eschatology**. Eschatology is the “**study of last-things.**” It is a huge, almost overwhelming subject. There are so many opinions on the subject, it would make your head spin (we will look at just a few in a moment). And yet, there is a kernel of eschatology that all orthodox Christians have agreed belongs to the category of “necessary,” since the very earliest creeds were penned.

Consider a tale of **two eschatological trajectories**. The first is contained in the **Apostle’s Creed**. Containing twelve statements (tradition ascribes one statement to each Apostle), the eleventh and twelfth say, “**I believe in ... the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.**” Strictly speaking, that is all it says about eschatology. Or consider the **Nicene Creed** (355 AD). The original said that after Christ ascended into heaven that “**then he shall return to judge the living and the dead.**” Later, the First Council of Constantinople (381) added back in the two statements

from the Apostles' Creed. But again, this is all that is said about eschatology, the way most of us understand that term. Finally, think about our own **Confession of Faith**. With 32 chapters, it devotes only 2 (6.25%) to eschatology. Of the approximately 160 paragraphs, chapters, 6 (3.75%) are about eschatology. These two chapters are really nothing more than an explanation of the last two points of the Apostle's Creed. I believe these three examples should make people pause if they think that everything about eschatology is a hill to die on, a necessary article of salvation.

On the other hand, consider a movement like **Dispensationalism**. This movement, or perhaps better—hermeneutic (way of reading Scripture), divides the Bible into seven periods of time called “dispensations.” According to most classic dispensationalists, the essentials of this movement are its strict adherence to a “literal” hermeneutic and its absolute distinction between the church and Israel. As almost anyone knows, both of these things are applied almost universally to its end times theology, because let's face it, that is what Dispensationalism is known for. And entire movement

known primarily for its eschatology. This is certainly different from what we have just seen.

After WWII, Dispensationalism, with its very pessimistic view of the future and its combining world events with the Return of Christ, was probably at its all time height. Into this, several Evangelical seminaries (including **Denver** in 1950, **Fuller** in 1947) made their professors sign pledges every year that they were of a particular eschatological bent, because in those days, if you weren't some sort of premillennialist, then you were a liberal heretic who must not be allowed to teach the Bible to new students. It was through these kinds of seminaries that the dominant view of eschatology to this day in Evangelicalism was perpetuated. Great stress was placed upon this.

Then again, other views of the end times have also treated all other views being viewed as heretical. The **Jehovah's Witnesses**, for all their Arianism, are actually at their root an eschatological movement. The 144,000, Jesus ruling as King since 1914, constant predictions that the end is near. That's eschatology. So is something called full-preterism, which teaches things like the resurrection of the

dead, the return of Jesus, the eternal state, and the day of the LORD are all things in our past. In both cases, if the theology does not fit the eschatological presupposition, it is the theology that must change. This is backwards and is not in line with 2,000 years of the churches treatment of this subject.

I wanted to give you this up front in order to prepare you for a quote from **Martin Luther** on our passage today. The passage is Zechariah 12-14 (we will look at 12-13 today), and it is all about prophecy and eschatology. As if throwing his pen against the wall in despair he writes, “**HERE, in this chapter, I give up. For I am not sure what the prophet is talking about.**”⁴ The good doctor does actually go on to try and uncover the meaning of the prophecy; he didn’t *really* give up. However, his uncertainty about the thing stands in line perhaps with the long tradition of the church, but against more recent felt-needs to make eschatology a major point of division, if not excommunication, between Christians.

⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 20: Minor Prophets III: Zechariah*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 20 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 337 (Zech 14:1-2).

Just here, I want to tell you a little about **my own journey** thus far in this topic of eschatology. I hope it will help you understand why I am preaching this passage today the way I am. I used to be of the very strong belief that Jesus had to return in my lifetime. I grew up in the Dispensational camp with Christian horror movies like *A Thief in the Night* that scared people into “making a decision for Christ” by convincing them through the power of motion pictures that the Antichrist would chop off their head in a guillotine, if they converted after the Tribulation started. If they didn’t convert, no worries, you will just go to hell. But for those watching the movie and being convicted, why not avoid both hell and having your head end up in a basket by very easily turning to Christ before the Rapture?

Well, I was convinced. How could I argue with a movie! I reinforced this theology my last year of High School with a wonderful Bible Study from a commentary on Revelation by the old Dispensationalist Clarence Larkin. A year later I found myself an all of three-week old Freshman at a Christian liberal arts college where almost everyone held this same basic End Times framework.

Suddenly, like another thief in the night, a book claiming *88 Reasons Why Jesus Will Return in 1988* scared us all senseless during the weekend of Rosh Hashanah. Jesus did not return. The guy made a ton of money. This was the beginning of a long journey of change for me regarding the End Times.

A year later, this same guy wrote another book: *89 Reasons Why Jesus Will Return in 1989*. He missed a single computation. His new book didn't sell as well. Jesus still did not come back. I wondered what went wrong, so I read John Walvoord's, *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis* to find out what. That book had me missing entire nights of sleep I was so wired and anxious. Next up it was *1994?*, a book by Harold Camping (who made headlines about 20 years later doing the same thing). Jesus did not come back, but this was all I knew, so I kept on looking.

A year later, on a chili November afternoon, I was having lunch with a youth pastor friend in downtown Denver. We walked by the newspaper stand and I exclaimed, "Look, Jesus' has to be coming back very soon." The headline that day was about *Yitzhak Rabin*, Prime

Minister of Israel, who had been assassinated over the weekend. His response was something I did not expect. “Seriously? You read the newspapers to do your eschatology?” That’s the first time anyone had ever asked me that. Of course I did! Doesn’t everyone? He gave me a book that introduced me to a completely different way of reading prophecy. It suggested that most of what I thought was to take place in the future was actually already fulfilled in the first century, just like Jesus said it would be.

Well, I didn’t listen. Two months later, I found myself teaching the youth group the Dispensational view of Revelation at their request. But, for the first time, there were chinks in the armor. “If Jesus does not come back by the end of the year, forget everything I’ve told you, and I’m giving up on this anxiety inducing theology for a while.” Why would I say that? Because according to Archbishop Ussher, God created the world in 4004 B.C. It was now 1996. That is exactly 6,000 years since the creation of the world. Using the logic of my upbringing, if Jesus didn’t return by the end of the year, there could be no Great Tribulation, for we would enter into the 1,000 Millennial bliss the next year (yes, I’m aware that there is

supposed to be a seven-year tribulation prior to the millennium and we clearly weren't in it yet, but I was desperate). There has to be exactly 7,000 years of history, not a year less or more.

Jesus didn't return. I shelved that eschatology. But of course, it has come up again and again: **Y2K, 2012**, and just this past week (**Sept 2015**), the blood moon end times scenario was supposed to see the end of all things according to John Hagee. There is no end to it. And since at least the turn of the first millennium, Christians have been duped by sincere and huckster alike, into setting dates about the end of the world.

In the intervening 20 or so years, my personal eschatology has changed rather dramatically, as I was introduced to a view called **amillennialism** that I never even knew existed previously. Growing up, I thought **the three views of the end times were pre-trib, post-trib, or mid-trib**. Little did I know that these were but three options within only one of several views of the Millennium itself. Those ideas deal only with the Rapture. They assume that there is a Rapture prior to a literal 1,000 year physical reign of Jesus Christ on earth in Jerusalem in a

rebuilt temple. These represent three views of what is called **Premillennialism**. Premillennialists believe that Jesus will return prior to a physical thousand year millennium on earth, which will then end in a great battle and usher end the new heavens and earth.

But there are **other views of the millennium**. **Postmillennialism** is like the happy twin of the grouchy pessimistic premillennialist. Postmillennialists also believe in a Golden Age millennium (many won't put a time frame on its length). But rather than Jesus having to come in a radical way to purify a completely evil earth, because of the power of the gospel and Holy Spirit's transformative power in the world the world will find itself just sort of in the millennium as everything gets better and better and better as more and more and more people become Christians.

Then there is the **amillennial** view. These other two views are basically a flat view of history where everything takes place on a physical level. Jesus will physically reign on earth just like he physically came to earth. The amillennialist believes in a more two-dimensional view of history where the physical earth and the spiritual world

overlap. The Kingdom of Christ is not viewed as a physical kingdom (until the new heavens and earth are created), but as a spiritual kingdom. It is real, it is literal, but it isn't first and foremost physical. Its power and citizenship is in the supernatural realm. Therefore, the idea is that the millennium is the present age of the church where Satan is being bound from deceiving the nations and many are coming to Christ, being taken out of the kingdom of Satan and transferred to the glorious king of Jesus Christ. Because it all seems to be uncertain, there is that fourth view of the millennium which is called **pan-millennialism** which teaches that it will all pan out in the end.

But these views of the millennium are but the tip of the iceberg. The millennium is but one of many doctrines that belong to the category of eschatology. Though I understand eschatology to encompass much more than prophecy, at the very least prophetic literature is eschatological, and so the question becomes, how do we understand it?

Into this we have several other views of how to read prophecy. Most today are what we would call "**futurists.**" A futurist believes that most of the prophecy of the NT is

in our future. Any OT prophecy that isn't unequivocally predicting the life, sufferings, death, and resurrection of Christ are almost certainly also still in our future (sadly, even some that are unequivocally predicting this are said to be the future). The opposite view of futurism is called **preterism** (from a word meaning "before"). Preterists that are orthodox rather than heretics believe that many, perhaps most of the prophecies that futurists think are in our future were actually already fulfilled in the past, particularly in 70 AD and the destruction of Jerusalem. Then there is the view called **historicism**. An historicist sees these same prophecies and sees them being fulfilled in various stages of church history. Finally, there is the **spiritualist**. Spiritualists are often chided as not being literal, but this is very unfair. For heaven is "literal," even though it isn't "physical." God is literal, even though he has no body like man. Spiritualists see many OT prophecies typologically, so that the type (say physical Jerusalem) has its antitype in the spiritual Jerusalem or the church. This is literal, it just isn't national or material or physical.

Of all the possible views on eschatology, I really know of only **two that I would deem as out of bounds** and

something I would warn you to stay far away from. These are **full-preterism**, as opposed to partial-preterism. The full preterist denies that there is a physical bodily resurrection from the dead, believes that Jesus has already returned in the Second Coming, and that we are living in the eternal state now. It is a patent denial of the ecumenical creeds. The other is **ultra-dispensationalism** of the kind that teaches that there are actually two different gospels: one for Jews and one for Gentiles. Both of these are tremendously dangerous because they touch very closely upon things that deal with salvation.

Other than these, my view is that these things do not touch on essentials of the faith. Christians have been disagreeing on things outside the Apostles and Nicene creeds since the very beginning in the Apostolic Fathers and the earliest Church Fathers. Therefore, to make these things your hill that you plant your little flag on, is not to develop Christlikeness, in my opinion. It is not to be charitable and loving where you should be. I'm not saying don't hold a view tenaciously. I'm saying, don't die on this hill. It makes disputable matters primary.

During Jesus' First Coming, there was all kinds of prophetic speculation. Messianic fulfillment was heavy in the air among all Jews. Even the disciples were caught up in it. Yet, none of them understood the prophecies that were before them. They were looking for glory, not suffering. Even the heavenly beings did not understand, and they are vastly more intelligent than you or I. And we know this, the Apostle says, because if they did, they would not have put the Lord of glory to death on a cross (1 Cor 2:8), for it was their undoing.

The Second Burden of Zechariah

With all of this, we do have to at some point get to our passage. What I want to do is **three-fold**. First, I will give us a basic outline for this passage. Then, I will share what I think may be going on. Finally, I will try to bring our attention to what I think matters most, and should matter most to you as you think about the end of Zechariah.

We will be looking at **Zechariah 12-13**, which falls into the broader section of 12-14, which together make up Zechariah's second "**burden**." Actually, it is the LORD's burden, or as it is sometimes translated: oracle. The LORD

has something he needs to “get off his chest” as it were. As a second burden, it follows, of course, from a first burden (**Zech 9-11**). To help us remember what that was about, here is a summary that looks a little different from how we described it. But it is still helpful:

In essence, these three chapters constitute a single word of promise: In days ahead, God will send the Messiah, a mighty warrior-king who will lead Israel— fully regathered to her homeland in a Second Exodus from all the nations where God had scattered them— to victory over her perennial foes, and then to the eternal enjoyment of his covenant promises and blessings (9: 1-10: 12). We observe, however, that this oracle concludes on a dark and mysterious note: Far from following their Messiah, it appears that Israel’s wicked leaders will actually reject their God-sent Shepherd-King, thereby annulling the Old Covenant, forfeiting God’s protection, and exposing the nation to destruction (11: 1ff)! And yet, in spite of all this, God will still have mercy upon a portion of his people,

whom Zechariah calls “the afflicted of the flock” (10: 2, 11: 7, 11,13: 7).⁵

It is important to remember here that the first oracle-burden concluded with a remarkable prophecy about the betrayal of Jesus at the hands of Judas, including all that the traitor did with his money. In other words, it finishes by drawing our attention to that the NT tells us is already fulfilled prophecy.

It is into this that the second burden begins with, what I believe, is an emphasis on both the inauguration and consummation of the The Day of the LORD. What do I mean by inauguration and consummation? Well, consider this. Some 17 times in these three chapters the phrase, “on that day” appears. “That day” is OT language for the Day of the LORD.

Isaiah says, “Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger” (Isa 13:9). Jeremiah calls it, “a day of vengeance, to avenge himself on his foes” (Jer 46:10). Amos says, “Woe to you who desire the day of

⁵ Davis, Dean (2014-03-10). *The High King of Heaven* (p. 380), Kindle Edition. The basic outline of 12-13 that follows is taken from this nice summary.

the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light” (Amos 5:18). Joel says, “The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes” (Joel 2:31). This is a terrible day of judgment.

We are used to thinking of this day as being completely in our own future. However, consider that Peter actually quotes this part of Joel in the great Pentecost sermon of Acts 2. The next verse reads, “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (Joel 2:32; cf. Acts 2:21). How strange that the language of salvation would accompany the language of the Last Day Judgment. How can we make sense of this?

We do it by understanding how eschatology works with regard to the Day of the LORD. There is a final, last day where all will be made right, men will be judged, and God and the Christ will be exalted in the eyes of everyone. But prior to that day, there are other typological days of the LORD. These days foreshadow the Coming Day which is sometimes likened to it. These days are real days in human history past. Often, Sodom and Gomorrah are the great example of the judgment day. However, the

Genesis 3 judgment upon Adam and Eve when God comes and they hide is really the first little “d” day of the LORD. Though, I’m not sure there was anything particularly “little” about it.

The prophets often say to wail, for the day of the LORD is *near*. Believe it or not, they meant it. They are often talking about the coming day of judgment upon the nation in terms of the coming exile, first for the Northern Kingdom, then for Judah when she went into Babylon. These were also little “d” days of the LORD. Meredith Kline coined the term “**intrusion**” for them. They are intrusions of the future upon our past. The events are themselves little prophecies of what is coming upon all people. They were epic foreshadowings of one colossal Final Judgment. Their purpose was to bring repentance before it is too late to repent.

If we think about little “d” days prior to the Great Day, it will help us make sense of our chapters, for what they seem to have in them is this strange mixture of what is to us both the future and the past (it would all have been future to Zechariah). The fact that this is so difficult to sort through is one of the reasons why you have smart

Christians disagreeing upon when the fulfillment takes place. Some want it all to fit into the Great Final Day. Others want to see a 70 AD-only fulfillment. Still others see some things being fulfilled in the times between the Testaments. And yet others see multiple fulfillments all pointing to one great fulfillment. This last option seems best to me, as I believe prophecy often works on multiple fulfillment layers. However, there are some fulfillments that are more in view than others, as far as I can tell.

Strong in the LORD (12:1-9)

There does seem to be a kind of shift in emphasis between chapters 13 and 14, and thus we will only look at 12-13 today. The first section is what someone calls the need to **be Strong in the LORD**. The phrase “**on that day**” appears six times in these nine verses (prior to this, it only appeared once in Zechariah, and that had nothing to do with the Day of the LORD).

It begins with helping us remember who it is that is talking here. This is Yahweh, “**who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the spirit of**

man within him” (Zech 12:1). If God is going to come and judge mankind, it needs to be clear that he has ever right to do so, seeing that he made heaven, earth, and all that is in them. It takes us back to Genesis 1:1-3, or even to John 1:1-3. He is the one who put the spirit of a man into him. He gives us breath and life and all things. As our creator, he stands above us in various capacities, depending on the relationship in mind: Father, King, Judge.

It is judgment in mind here, but the judgment now is no longer against Israel. It is against those who surround Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall become a cup of staggering to all the peoples (Zech 12:2). Why are the peoples around Jerusalem? Because they are laying siege to her (2). The scene is one of helplessness in the face of an advancing army. But the LORD will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for them. If they try to lift this stone, they will be harmed (3). Still, despite the warning, all the nations of the earth will gather against it.

What comes to your mind here? If you are a futurist, perhaps it is the Final Battle of Revelation: Armageddon. If you are a preterist and know your Josephus, the siege of Jerusalem in 70 absolutely comes to mind. The Romans

and other armies laid siege to the cities in one of the most bloody battles in human history. Jesus had warned his disciples about it. On the other hand, maybe you are a [spiritualist](#), and you think of the church being surrounded by the enemies of God at various times in her history. Why can't they all have truth to them? There is no inherent contradiction as to why that I can tell.

As for me, something else also comes to mind. Have you heard of the [Cornerstone](#) of the prophets, the [Rock](#) of offense? People stumble over it and are put to shame (cf. [Ps 118:22](#); [Isa 28:16](#)). Do you know what this Rock is? It is the LORD Jesus.

Something you have to understand is that there was a terrible Day of the LORD that already came upon the world. I'm not even talking about the destruction of Jerusalem now. It was the day that Jesus died. The sun turned black. There was an earthquake. The Son of God died. God's wrath was poured out. If this Day of Judgment did not occur, there would be no possibility of salvation that we have already seen is here in these chapters, and also that is coming. There would only be the looking forward to doom and the hands of an angry God. I bring this up

now, because I do not see Zechariah as just giving random snapshots of various points in history as some do,⁶ nor is it merely the final Day, nor merely the destruction of Jerusalem. They are all in mind, but the focal point of it all, the center of the hourglass through which all the prophetic sands stream, is the death of the LORD Jesus. That is why we will continue to see this point in his life appear in these chapters.

Continuing on now, **Zech 12:4** describes the **panic of the horse riders** who are attacking Jerusalem. Someone makes a very good point that I think is worth mentioning here, especially those who are more prone to reading prophecy “literally” (I really don’t like how that word is unfairly used), and find those who take prophecies about Jerusalem more “spiritually” as in it refers to the church. The point they make is if this refers to a still future event (I think it does, but not in a wooden literal way), what are riders on **horseback** doing here? This is the 12th century of highly advanced weapons and machines to carry them.

⁶ This is the view of the book whose outline I’m using. “In essence, it is a series of prophetic “snapshots,” most of which look ahead to one or another facet of the eschatological “Day” wherein God will bring his Kingdom purposes to complete fulfillment” Davis, Dean (2014-03-10). *The High King of Heaven* (p. 381). . Kindle Edition.

It isn't just horses. People are fighting with “swords” (13:7). Swords? Against people who live in “tents” (12:7). These people can still find their ancestry of David or Levi or Nathan or even a tribe of Shimeites (12-13). Yet, no Jew today knows anything like this. Similarly, there are no crazy prophets running around in “hairy robes” (13:4). In fact, there are a plethora of things like this that are simply not the way modern Israel or most of the rest of the world look at all today, including the return of the Canaanites (14:21), a people who actually became extinct centuries ago. This is simply the language of an old prophet using what he knows to describe events, some of which undoubtedly had these things in a physical-literal sense (i.e. 70 AD) and others that do not (i.e. the future Day).

That said, I also want to caution about being *too* spiritual. Some things here (as we will see in a moment) are taken quite literal-physically by the NT itself. This is why we must be humble towards one another as we develop our own personal eschatology and the way we think the Bible should be read in regards to this topic. Keep these things in mind as we continue on.

The theme of being strong in the LORD continues. God will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot in the fire, like a flaming torch among sheaves (**Zech 12:6**). She shall devour to the right and the left all the surrounding peoples. One could take this as referring to the work of the church fighting its spiritual warfare, thereby bringing many into the new Jerusalem through faith in Christ. Or, perhaps, it also refers to some kind of future of Jerusalem and biological Jews. Even Reformed Christians disagree upon this.

The point is, God is making the people strong. They are winning the war. Nothing can stop them, because he is on their side. Through this, he will bring “salvation” to the tents of Judah, and David, and Jerusalem (7). He will bring salvation by making his people strong against their enemies. Is this not a message for today and not just the future? Not that the church will fight against political enemies and become a state like the Vatican, but in the kingdom of Christ and against those we wage war on in heavenly places.

Just here, **the Angel of the LORD** appears (8). The Angel appears because he is the commander of the Armies

of the LORD, as we saw in the first vision. He fought for David, and through his strength, even the feeblest among the people will be mighty like David with Christ going before him. The feeblest? As in the poor, destitute, widows, and orphans? As in those Jesus came to work with? Is this not also profoundly relevant not only for today, but for what makes us Christians in the first place? In this way, anyone who comes against the holy city will be brought down (9).

Before Strength, Tears (12:10-14)

Into this, the next section begins. **Before the strength, there must be tears.** How can this be? Rebellious people, like wild horses, must be broken. It begins with probably the **most important verse** in this chapter, because we know with certainty when it takes place. “**And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace**” (10a). Does this sound like anything from the book of Acts? **Pentecost**, perhaps? Ah, but only after there are also pleas for mercy, so that, “**When they look on me, on whom who they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, and one weeps over a firstborn**” (10b). Here we have

the language of the Firstborn and of an Only-Begotten merging with weeping over someone who has been pierced and put to death. John tells us that this refers to the literal physical piercing of Jesus Christ on the cross. Therefore, what time frame is in mind here? I'm going to return to this verse at the very end in our conclusion today.

But as soon as we see the Savior dead on a tree, our minds are brought back to this terrible battle that is taking place in Jerusalem. But now we understand that it is a battle that has killed this man. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo (11). Megiddo reminds many of [Armageddon](#). Therefore, our modern minds race to the future. This is possible. John may allude to this in Revelation.

But the burden is actually calling our minds to the past. It refers to the day when [King Josiah was killed in battle in that place](#). A king is going to die, and this must refer to the death of Christ from the previous verse. This is the context. Josiah was a beloved king, and the people mourned greatly for him. How much more this future king who is to be pierced? Thus, it describes this mourning as

taking place in several houses. These appear to be the **kingly line** (David and his son Nathan) and the **priestly line** (Levi and his son Shimei). They are mourning because they come to recognize their part in the death of Messiah. But though they are specified, all the people (vs. 14) will mourn eventually. Indeed, the whole world will eventually mourn.

After Tears, Cleansing (13:1-6)

Taking these verses this way is helpful because the next verse which introduces the idea of **after tears, cleansing**, keeps our focus upon the death of this pierced one. “**On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness**” (13:1). This fountain is the opening up of the water of life, perhaps even as it poured out with the blood from Jesus’ pierced side.

In this way, when he dies, there is a great victory. “**On that day ... I will cut off the names of the idols from the land ... and also I will remove from the land the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness**” (2-6). This refers to the supernatural victory over the enemies of heaven itself.

Christ in his death was shown to be victorious over hell and he who reigns in this evil domain.

The language of **prophets** continues as the false prophets will cease from the land and people will no longer prophecy or have visions. As a Reformed Christian, I cannot help but see here the cutting off of the supernatural signs of the Apostles after their generation passed away (which also practically coincided with 70 AD). There is no need for more prophecy, because the Great Prophet has now come to fulfill all things.

This all culminates in another verse that the NT sees as being fulfilled in Jesus' death. “**Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,**’ declares the LORD of hosts. ‘**Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones**” (13:7). This is fulfilled in the **scattering of the disciples** on that night when Jesus was put on trial and led to his death (**Matt 26:31; Mark 14:27**).

And yet, we can't help but think about what is probably **still future things**. For though the false prophets will be put down, and though the Messiah is put to death, the language of **one third** and **two thirds** being left alive in

the land (8) or thrown into the fire and refined or tested also reminds us of the language of the thirds of Revelation where a third of all kinds of things is destroyed (especially **Rev 8**). Is this talking about the future. Quite possibly. Is it talking about Church history, where Christ refines his people to test their quality and conform them into his image? Probably. Do we have to decide between them? I don't think so.

The Pierced Shepherd

As you can see in this brief survey of what made Luther say, “**I have no idea what this is talking about,**” even in my own language goes back and forth on several different prophetic options (futurism, spiritualism, preterism, historicism). I do this intentionally, in order **to help you understand that this is not easy to discern.** I do it because I think they are not incompatible things. I do it because I really don't know myself.

But **one thing I do know.** In the midst of wondering about the various options, national Jew or church, 70 AD or the future, one thing I keep coming back to: Perhaps more than anything, this passage is about **the death of Jesus**

Christ. What is so remarkable to me about this is that it was predicted by Jesus himself. The language of the two verses quoted by the NT directly is stunning. In 12:10, the pronoun “me” is used. “They will look on me, on him whom they have pierced.”

The reason this may take you off guard is because you may not have heard it this way before. When John quotes this verse, he uses “him.” But this is because John is not Jesus. He makes it absolutely clear, however, that Jesus is the one being pierced. “But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water ... [as] another Scripture says, ‘They will look on him whom they have pierced’” (John 19:34, 37). But the “me” in Zechariah is unmistakable, even though many have no idea how to deal with it.

This is the LORD’s burden. The LORD is speaking to Zechariah. He is showing him what is to come. When he comes to the heart of it, the LORD’s heart has to be heavy, and I do not speak here of the Essence of God. I speak of the Person talking to the prophet. “They will look upon me,” Zechariah. Jesus is speaking to the prophet. Jesus knows what he is going to undergo in the future. No

wonder this is called a burden! No wonder everyone is mourning what they have done. There is great sadness here. What greater sadness has there ever been?

Similar language presents itself in the “striking the sheep” verse. This time, the Father is speaking about a “man” standing next to him. The word is actually “warrior” (*geber*). In dying, the warrior-man wins the greatest of all battles: The battle over sin, death, and the devil. Thus, salvation flows from his crimson, riven side. Truly, the Trinitarian God is present, for even the Spirit gets involved, as He is poured out upon the unsuspecting city in grace and supplication.

Beloved, what I want to leave you with today is simply this. Too many people fight about when prophecy will be fulfilled. Some focus on the past. Some on the future. But what I suspect most of us do in these quarrels is miss the most important and firm prophecies of all, those that we know have come true because the NT tells them to us. Oh, we might use those in apologetic arguments against unbelievers, but these things have been written for you.

The battles that we wage are never won if they are an end to themselves. I opened with the phrase about

essentials and non-essentials and charity. One of the earliest advocates of this, an unknown Lutheran living during the Thirty Years War, wrote about how too much controversy about the truth puts us in danger of losing the truth itself. Speaking not about prophecy, but about something else that took place that same night Jesus was betrayed, “**Many contend for the corporal presence of Christ who have not Christ in their hearts.**” There is no other way to unity than by rallying around the living Christ as the source of spiritual life.⁷ This is what Zechariah is showing you. This is what the Lord Jesus is showing you through the prophet. This is what the Spirit is calling you to see now.

Did you know that the Jews actually read this text Messianically? In fact, they even have a suffering Messiah figure named Messiah ben Joseph (Christ son of Joseph). But they think this is all going to happen in the future, because they do not believe the past. Surely then what we say each week is most true: the veil of the OT is only taken off in Jesus Christ. May the Holy Spirit lead you to him this day.

⁷ See footnote 3.