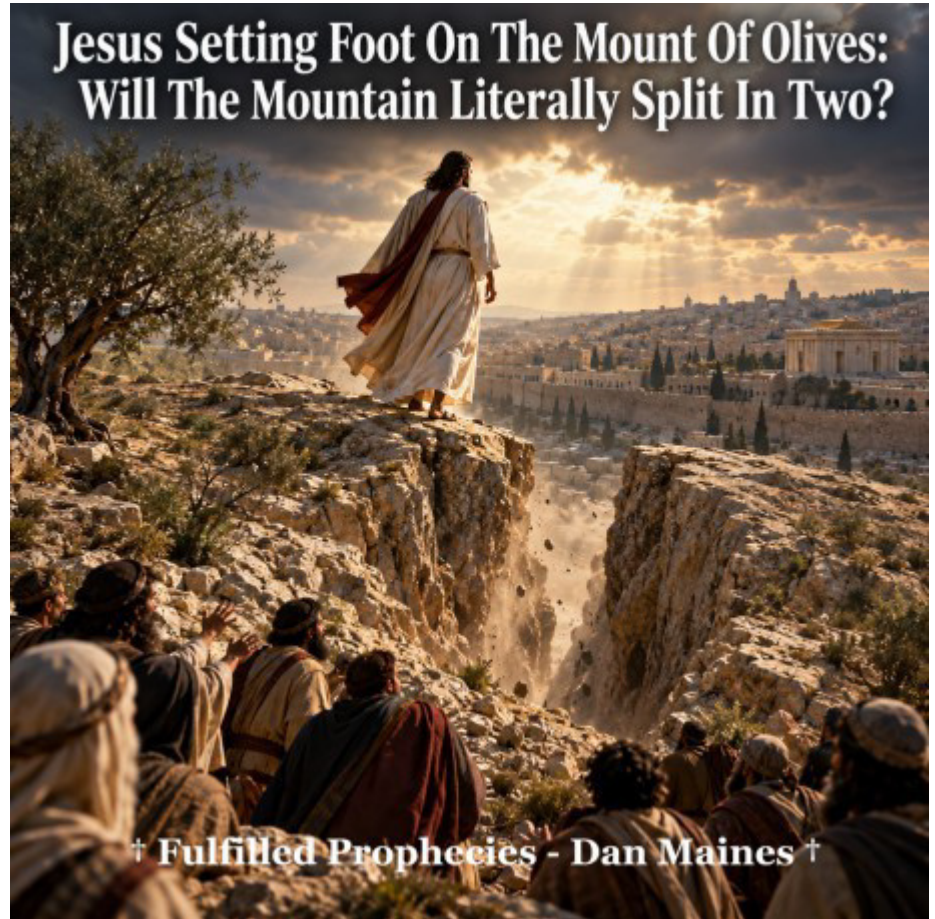


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Zechariah - Jesus Setting Foot On The Mount Of Olives: Will The Mountain Literally Split In Two?



By Dan Maines

Jesus Setting Foot On The Mount Of Olives: Will The Mountain Literally Split In Two?

Introduction

† One of the most common arguments for a future physical Second Coming is Zechariah 14:4. Many are taught that Jesus must someday physically descend from heaven, place His literal feet upon the Mount of Olives, and cause the mountain to split in two.

† The problem isn't what Zechariah says, but the assumption that prophetic language must be interpreted as a literal

description of a future geological event. The Old Testament repeatedly describes God's judgments with language about His coming, His feet, mountains melting, valleys splitting, heavens shaking, and the earth trembling, without requiring God to physically stand on the ground (Micah 1:3-4; Psalm 18:7-15; Isaiah 64:1-3).

† Zechariah 14 must first be interpreted in its own prophetic context. Jerusalem is under judgment, the nations surround the city, the Lord comes against His enemies, an escape is provided, and the chapter uses the familiar language of Old Testament judgment and deliverance.

† Acts 1 is also important, but it never says Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives and physically place His feet upon it. The angels said He would come in the same manner as the disciples had seen Him go into heaven. We shouldn't add words to the passage that aren't there.

Zechariah 14:1-2

Behold, a day is coming for the Lord when the spoils taken from you will be divided among you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be taken, the houses plundered, the women [ravished], and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be eliminated from the city.

† The setting is Jerusalem under judgment. Zechariah doesn't begin with a peaceful future world. He begins with Jerusalem surrounded, invaded, and judged.

† Jesus described the same basic setting when He warned His own generation that Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies and that its desolation was near (Luke 21:20-22).

† Jesus specifically called those events days of vengeance in which all things written would be fulfilled. That statement gives us a powerful inspired framework for understanding Old Testament judgment prophecies concerning Jerusalem (Luke 21:22).

† Jerusalem was surrounded and destroyed by Roman forces in AD 70. This provides a first-century historical setting that

shouldn't be ignored when interpreting Zechariah's prophecy.

Zechariah 14:3-5

Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west forming a very large valley. Half of the mountain will move toward the north, and the other half toward the south. And you will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him!

† This is the passage most often used to teach that Jesus must physically stand on the Mount of Olives in our future. Yet Zechariah is speaking in the prophetic vocabulary already established throughout the Old Testament.

† God's feet standing upon a place signifies His presence, authority, judgment, and intervention. Scripture doesn't require us to picture God's physical feet whenever this language appears (Nahum 1:3-5; Micah 1:3-4).

† Mountains splitting, melting, shaking, and moving are common prophetic images for God's judgment and the removal of obstacles before Him (Micah 1:3-4; Isaiah 64:1-3).

† Notice also that the splitting of the mountain creates a way of escape. Jesus likewise warned His first-century disciples that when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies, those in Judea were to flee to the mountains (Luke 21:20-21).

† The focus isn't a future geological spectacle for modern observers. The prophecy concerns judgment upon Jerusalem and God's provision for His people during that judgment.

Micah 1:3-4

For behold, the Lord is coming forth from His place. He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under Him And the valleys will be split, Like wax before the fire, Like water poured down a steep place.

† Micah gives us an excellent biblical comparison. God comes down, treads upon the high places, mountains melt beneath Him, and valleys split.

† We don't interpret Micah as teaching that God literally descended with physical feet and melted geographical mountains beneath His body. This is prophetic judgment language.

† Micah immediately identifies the historical objects of that judgment as Samaria and Jerusalem (Micah 1:5). The language is dramatic because God's judgment is dramatic, not because every image must describe a literal geological event.

† If we recognize prophetic imagery in Micah, we should allow Zechariah to use the same prophetic vocabulary.

Acts 1:9-12

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were watching, and a cloud took Him up, out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, then behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them, and they said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mountain called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

† Notice carefully what the angels actually said. Jesus would come in like manner as the disciples saw Him go. They didn't say He would return to that exact geographical spot, touch the mountain with physical feet, or split the Mount of Olives in half.

† The Mount of Olives is mentioned after the promise because that's where the disciples were when Jesus ascended. Turning the location of the ascension into a specific prediction about the geographical location of His coming adds something the angels didn't say.

† The cloud is significant. Throughout Scripture, clouds are associated with God's presence and judgment (Psalm 18:9-12; Isaiah 19:1; Daniel 7:13).

† Jesus Himself said the Son of Man would come on the clouds, and He placed that coming within the lifetime of the generation standing before Him (Matthew 24:30, 34).

Matthew 24:30, 34

And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

† Jesus didn't leave the timing of His coming open-ended. After describing His coming on the clouds, He said this generation wouldn't pass away until all these things were accomplished.

† The cloud-coming language connects directly with Old Testament descriptions of divine judgment. Isaiah described the LORD as riding on a swift cloud when announcing judgment against Egypt (Isaiah 19:1).

† Jesus wasn't teaching His disciples to expect a fulfillment thousands of years beyond their generation. His time statement identifies the generation that would experience the fulfillment.

† This is why Zechariah 14 shouldn't be removed from the first-century judgment context and turned into a future event simply because the prophecy uses vivid language about God's feet and a splitting mountain.

Luke 21:20-22

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are inside the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of punishment, so that all things which have been written will be fulfilled.

† Jesus gave His disciples an observable sign. When they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies, they were to understand that its desolation had drawn near.

† He then told those living in Judea to flee. This is striking when compared with Zechariah 14, where judgment comes upon

Jerusalem and a way of escape is described.

† Most importantly, Jesus said these were days of vengeance so that all things written would be fulfilled. Zechariah was part of what had been written.

† The burden of proof therefore falls upon anyone who removes Zechariah 14 from the fulfillment framework Jesus gave and places it thousands of years into the future.

Zechariah 14:8-9

And on that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter. And the Lord will be King over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one.

† The chapter itself moves from judgment into kingdom imagery. Living waters flow from Jerusalem, and the Lord is King.

† Jesus used living-water language for the work of the Holy Spirit, not for a future river produced by a geological earthquake (John 7:37-39).

† The New Testament announces Christ's kingship as a present reality. Christ was raised and seated at God's right hand, ruling in fulfillment of God's promises (Acts 2:30-36; Ephesians 1:20-22).

† Zechariah's imagery therefore fits the transition from the old covenant world centered in earthly Jerusalem to the established kingdom and New Covenant reality in Christ.

Hebrews 12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

† The New Testament directs believers toward heavenly Zion

and heavenly Jerusalem, not toward waiting for a future earthly Jerusalem to become the center of God's kingdom.

† The writer didn't tell his readers that someday they would come to this mountain and city. He said they had come to them.

† Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant. The fulfillment centers on Christ and His kingdom, not the physical geography of a mountain outside Jerusalem.

† Reading Zechariah through the New Testament keeps our attention where the apostles placed it, on Christ, the New Covenant, heavenly Jerusalem, and the kingdom that can't be shaken (Hebrews 12:22-28).

Ezekiel's Earlier Vision Of God's Glory On The Mount Of Olives

Ezekiel 11:22-23

Then the cherubim lifted up their wings with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them. The glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is east of the city.

† This passage is extremely important when interpreting Zechariah 14:4. Long before Zechariah wrote about the LORD's feet standing on the Mount of Olives, Ezekiel described the glory of God leaving Jerusalem and standing on the mountain east of the city.

† Ezekiel's vision gives us an important biblical precedent. God's glory stood on the mountain east of Jerusalem, yet the passage isn't describing God as a physical man whose literal feet were standing on the ground.

† God's presence on the mountain was expressed through His glory. This helps us understand how prophetic Scripture can describe the LORD as standing on a mountain without requiring a future physical appearance of Jesus standing there.

† Zechariah's language should therefore be understood within the prophetic language already established in Scripture. The prophets described the LORD coming down, walking on the high places, mountains melting beneath Him, and valleys

splitting apart when describing His judgment and divine intervention (Micah 1:3-4).

† Jesus did physically stand on the Mount of Olives during His earthly ministry, and Acts records His ascension from the Mount called Olivet (Acts 1:9-12). However, Acts doesn't say that Jesus standing there fulfilled Zechariah 14:4, nor does it say that He must physically return to that exact location and split the mountain.

† We shouldn't add something to Acts 1 that the passage itself doesn't say. The angels promised that Jesus would come in the same manner as the disciples had watched Him go into heaven, but they didn't say that He would return to the same geographical location.

† The stronger biblical connection is Ezekiel's vision. God's glory departed from Jerusalem and stood on the mountain east of the city. Zechariah later described the LORD's feet standing on the Mount of Olives during Jerusalem's judgment. These passages share the prophetic imagery of God's presence, judgment, and departure from Jerusalem.

Historical Connection

† Eusebius specifically connected Ezekiel's vision with the Mount of Olives. He understood the glory of the LORD as departing from Jerusalem and moving to the Mount of Olives.

† Josephus provides another important historical connection. When Titus and the Roman armies approached Jerusalem in AD 70, Josephus records that the Roman Tenth Legion came through Jericho and camped on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley.

† This doesn't mean that the Roman army itself was the LORD standing on the Mount of Olives. It does show that the Mount of Olives was directly involved in the historical events surrounding God's judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70.

† We don't need to claim that a visible Glory Cloud remained on the Mount of Olives for exactly three and a half years because the available historical evidence doesn't establish that clearly enough to state it as fact.

† We also don't need to claim that a Roman road literally split the Mount of Olives or that modern aerial photographs prove Zechariah 14:4 was physically fulfilled. The evidence isn't strong enough to make those claims.

† The biblical evidence is stronger without those uncertain arguments. Ezekiel gives us the prophetic background, Zechariah uses similar imagery concerning Jerusalem's judgment, Jesus placed Jerusalem's judgment within His generation, and the historical record confirms that the Mount of Olives was directly involved in the events surrounding Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70.

Historical References

† Josephus, writing about the Jewish-Roman War, records the terrible siege, famine, warfare, destruction, and fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. His account demonstrates how completely Jerusalem experienced the kind of covenant judgment Jesus had warned was coming upon that generation.

† Eusebius later reported that believers in Jerusalem were instructed to leave the city before the war and went to Pella. Whatever questions remain about the precise details and chronology of that tradition, it reflects an early Christian understanding that believers escaped Jerusalem before its destruction.

† These historical witnesses don't prove the interpretation by themselves. Scripture establishes the framework, while the historical record shows that Jerusalem experienced the catastrophic judgment and flight that Jesus had foretold.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't need to watch the Mount of Olives waiting for Jesus to physically place His feet upon it and split it into two pieces.

† We should interpret prophetic language by comparing Scripture with Scripture. When the prophets describe God coming down, mountains melting, valleys splitting, clouds carrying Him, and the earth shaking, we shouldn't automatically force those images into wooden literalism.

† Jesus gave the first-century disciples the timing and signs they needed. Jerusalem would be surrounded, they were to flee, the days of vengeance would arrive, and all things written concerning that judgment would be fulfilled (Luke 21:20-22).

† Acts 1 promises that Christ would come as He had gone, but it doesn't say that He would physically return to the Mount of Olives, put His feet on the ground, and split the mountain.

† Zechariah 14 uses the language of the prophets to describe God's judgment, deliverance, kingship, and covenantal transformation. We shouldn't add a future physical scenario that the New Testament doesn't require.

† Our hope isn't centered upon waiting for a mountain in Israel to split. Our hope is centered upon Jesus Christ, His accomplished work, His established kingdom, His New Covenant, and the heavenly Jerusalem to which God's people have come.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Doesn't Zechariah 14:4 plainly say His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives?

A: Yes, that's exactly what the prophecy says. The question is whether prophetic references to God's feet must always describe literal physical feet. Micah uses the same type of language when God comes down, treads upon the high places, melts mountains, and splits valleys (Micah 1:3-4). Scripture itself teaches us how prophetic judgment language functions.

Q: Doesn't Acts 1 prove Jesus must return to the Mount of Olives?

A: Acts 1:9-12 says Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives and would come in like manner. It doesn't say He would return to that exact location or physically place His feet upon that mountain.

Q: What does the splitting of the Mount of Olives represent?

A: Within Zechariah's prophecy, the splitting creates a way of escape during Jerusalem's judgment. Mountains moving and

valleys splitting are established prophetic images connected with God's intervention and judgment (Micah 1:3-4; Isaiah 64:1-3).

Q: Did Jesus connect Jerusalem's destruction with fulfilled prophecy?

A: Yes. Jesus said that when Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, its desolation was near, His followers were to flee, and these were days of vengeance in which all things written would be fulfilled (Luke 21:20-22).

Q: When did Jesus say His cloud-coming would occur?

A: Jesus described the Son of Man coming on the clouds with power and great glory and then said, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished (Matthew 24:30, 34).

Q: Should Christians today be waiting for Jesus to physically split the Mount of Olives?

A: From the fulfilled perspective, no. Zechariah's prophecy belongs within the biblical language of Jerusalem's judgment, deliverance, and the establishment of Christ's kingdom. The New Testament directs believers to Christ, the New Covenant, and heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Zechariah 14:1-5, 8-9; Micah 1:3-4; Ezekiel 11:22-23; Acts 1:9-12; Matthew 24:30, 34; Luke 21:20-22; Hebrews 12:22-24

† Josephus, The Wars of the Jews; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

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