

May 2009

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Recommended Citation

Ice, Thomas D., "Preterism and Zechariah 12-14" (2009). *Article Archives*. Paper 68.
http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/pretrib_arch/68

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PRETERISM AND ZECHARIAH 12—14

by Thomas Ice

In January of this year I taught a course on Eschatology (Bible Prophecy) in Orange, California at Chafer Theological Seminary. Since preterist Ken Gentry lives only a few miles from Chafer Seminary, I invited him to come and speak to our class. Even though Chafer Seminary is dispensational, I thought it healthy to expose our students to the exact opposite of our views with Dr. Gentry's visit. Dr. Gentry was gracious enough to come in and give a presentation of his preterist views on the Book of Revelation to our class. Even though I just completed a long series on Preterism in *Pre-Trib Perspectives*, I want to revisit the issue at least once more.

During a time of questions I ask Dr. Gentry about Zechariah 12—14 and preterism. I first asked him if he believed, as a preterist, that Zechariah 12—14 was a parallel passage to the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24—25; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-36). He answered, "Yes." I agree! I then noted that Zechariah speaks of "all the peoples" (12:2), "all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it (Jerusalem)" (12:3), and "I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle" (14:2). "This does not sound like the Romans in A.D. 70," I said. Further, Zechariah goes on to say, "In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (12:8) and "Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle" (14:3). I concluded that this does not fit with what happened to Jerusalem in A.D. 70 when the Romans conquered Israel. Finally, it says that the Lord will rescue Israel, in that day (14:3), whereas, in A.D. 70 the Lord judged Israel as Luke 21:20-24 notes. "How does a preterist say that Zechariah speaks of A.D. 70 when the Lord is rescuing His people in that passage," I asked Dr. Gentry?

Now keep in mind that Dr. Gentry is one of foremost preterist spokesmen on the planet. His answer, in essence, was to say that the Church had replaced Israel. This is similar to what the late David Chilton had said in his preterist commentary on Revelation:

Another passage parallel to this is Zechariah 12, which pictures Jerusalem as a cup of drunkenness to the nations (Zech. 12:2; cf. Rev. 14:8–9), a laver of fire that will consume the heathen (Zech. 12:6; Rev. 15:2). The irony of Revelation, as we have seen repeatedly, is that first-century Israel herself has taken the place of the heathen nations in the prophecies: She is consumed in the fiery laver—the Lake of Fire—while the Church, having passed through the holocaust, inherits salvation.¹

I then told Dr. Gentry that his answer was nothing more than theologizing. He had merely stated his theological conclusion on the matter, but failed to give a textual interpretation. I asked his point blank, "Could you give a textual interpretation of this passage in Zechariah?" He responded, "No."

¹David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), pp. 385-86.

A preterist cannot give a textual interpretation of Zechariah 12–14 because they believe it is to be equated with God's judgment at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70 upon Israel—error number one. Greg Beale notes that, "Zechariah 12 does not prophecy Israel's judgment but Israel's redemption."² Zechariah 12–14 clearly speaks of a time when Israel is rescued by the Lord from an attack by "all the nations of the earth," not just the Romans—error number two. In this context, Israel must refer to Israel. Since that it true, then the event of Zechariah 12–14 has not yet happened in history. This means that it is a future event. Dr. Beale makes a comment about Daniel that applies to Zechariah as well:

the burden of proof rests on these preterists to provide an exegetical rationale both for exchanging a pagan nation with Israel as the primary object of Daniel's final judgment and for limiting the last judgment mainly to Israel and not applying it universally.³

Preterists and Futurist, like myself, both agree that Luke 21:20-24 prophesied the A.D. 70 Roman destruction of Jerusalem. Using Luke 21:20-24 as a baseline, notice the contrasts between it and Zechariah 12–14, as observed by Randall Price.

Contrasts Between Luke 21:20–24 and Zechariah 12–14

² G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 26.

³ Beale, *Revelation*, p. 45.

Luke 21:20–24

- Past fulfillment—“led captive to all nations (vs 24)
- Day of the desolation of Jerusalem (vs. 20)
- Day of vengeance against Jerusalem (vs. 22)
- Day of wrath against Jewish nation (vs. 23)
- Jerusalem trampled by Gentiles (vs. 24)
- Time of Gentile dominion over Jerusalem (vs. 24)
- Great distress upon the Land (vs. 23)
- Nations bring the sword to Jerusalem (vs. 24)
- Jerusalem destroyed (A.D. 70) “in order that all things which are written (concerning the Jewish People) may be fulfilled” (in the future), (vs. 22)
- Jerusalem’s desolation is given a time limit: “until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (vs. 24). This implies that a time of restoration for Jerusalem will then follow.
- The Messiah comes in power and glory to be seen by the Jewish People only *after* “these things”—the events of vs. 25–28—which are yet future to the events of vs. 20–24.

Zechariah 12–14

- Eschatological fulfillment—“in that day” (12:3–4,6,8,11; 13:1–12; 14:1,4,6–9)
- Day of deliverance of Jerusalem (12:7–8)
- Day of victory for Jerusalem (12:4–6)
- Day of wrath against Gentile nations (12:9; 14:3,12)
- Jerusalem transformed by God (14:4–10)
- Time of Gentile submission in Jerusalem (14:16–19)
- Great deliverance for the Land (13:2)
- Nations bring their wealth to Jerusalem (14:14)
- Jerusalem rescued *and redeemed* that *all things* written (concerning Jewish People) may be fulfilled (13:1–9); cf. Rom. 11:25–27)
- The attack on Jerusalem is the occasion for the final defeat of Israel’s enemies, thus ending the “times of the Gentiles” (14:2–3,11)
- The Messiah comes in power and glory *during* the events of the battle (14:4–5)⁴

Because of the differences between the above contrasted passages, it is impossible to harmonize with events that have already taken place. Impossible as long as two plus two continues to equal four. But some of the best minds that preterism has to offer attempt to place round pegs into square holes.

Preterist Gary DeMar recently attempted an interpretation of Zechariah 14.⁵ Predictably, he says that Zechariah 14 “describes events leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.”⁶ DeMar cannot show from the text of Zechariah the destruction of Jerusalem. DeMar approached the passage in what I would call a thematic approach. He hopped-skipped-and-jumped around the passage, denuding it

⁴Randall Price, *Charting the Future* (San Marcos, Tex.: privately published charts, n.d.), n.p.

⁵Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Atlanta, American Vision: 4th edition, 1999), pp. 437–43.

⁶DeMar, *Madness*, p. 437.

of its context. Worse, he repackaged it into a false context. Dealing only with chapter 14, DeMar fails to produce any evidence that God is judging Israel, as is clearly used in Luke 21:20-24. In fact, the Lord is judging the nations for the text says, "I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem" (12:9), and "I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle . . . the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations" (14:2-3). Instead, the Lord is defending (12:8) and rescuing (14:3) Israel from those nations. Just as in Matthew 24, no where does the text speak of the Lord coming in judgment against His people. Both Zechariah and Matthew speak of Israel's rescue (cf. Matt. 24:31) and this is why the prophecy of both passages are yet future.

CONCLUSION

The only way that preterists can attempt to deal with Zechariah 12—14 is not by taking the words and phrases of the passage in its literary context, but by simply declaring—as done by Chilton and Gentry—that the church replaces Israel. The text of Scripture is supposed to be the basis upon which we develop sound theology. Instead, preterists have to impose their false theological beliefs upon God's inerrant Word. Walt Kaiser is on the mark in commenting on this passage the following:

In no other chapter of the Bible is the interpretation of the name "Israel" more important than in Zechariah 14. To say that "Israel" means the "Church," as many have done, would lead to a most confusing picture in this chapter and in the end of chapter 13. For example, 13:8-9 affirms that two-thirds of the land (Israel) will die, but few would be willing to say two-thirds of the Church will be slaughtered in the final day. Clearly "Israel" refers to that geo-political unit known today as the nation of Israel.⁷

God's Word wants His Church to be forward looking to a secure and certain future of victory. Such a perspective enables a believer to live faithfully in the present because of the future. The past is equally important. However, a false view of the past will rob a believer in the present of the hope needed to live boldly for our Lord. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, *The Communicator's Commentary: Micah—Malachi* (Dallas: Word, 1992), p. 417.