

## **How to Interpret the Bible Correctly: Jerusalem, God & History Zechariah 12:3 & The Fight for Jerusalem**

When Jesus told His disciples and us about the future he built every word of it around one spot on earth (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). Jesus framed His words about the rest of the history of this planet by the sight of Jerusalem in all its earthly glory spread in front of Him.

Look again at Christ's very first words in Matthew 24:2. All that He says about His second coming is introduced by those words. He said keep your eye on Jerusalem. I am ascending from the Mount of Olives (the center of Jerusalem then and now) and I am returning to the Mount of Olives.

All of us here this evening live in a world inexorably drawn towards a climactic ending. It is not carbon emissions that will get us, it is not the rise of the seas—there is something bigger. The cataclysm that will end this world is focused upon one place, one people, and specifically, God says—one city called Jerusalem.

### **Jerusalem is the Trigger**

Jerusalem is the trigger that will set off the grand finale for planet earth.

Twenty-six hundred years ago God foretold that the fate of the entire planet earth would hinge upon one city.

The city God named was not in the fledgling Roman Empire of that day, nor in the great Empires of Greece, Babylon, or Egypt, nor in the great Empire of China or off in the New World...no, it was a city named Jerusalem.

Jerusalem at that moment 2,600 years ago, a backwoods, off-the-beaten-track town that had just suffered complete destruction at the hands of the king of Babylon; and whose charred and blackened ruins were a mute testimony to the impossibility of what God's Word was saying.

- Jerusalem would become the focus of the entire world.
- Jerusalem will be a cup that intoxicates the world, and for which the whole world

will quake.

- In our generation, Jerusalem, mentioned over 800x in the Bible (and never once in the Koran) has become the cup that makes the world tremble.

The Fight for Jerusalem, and all the events leading up to that fight, is the spot in the news that you should keep your eyes riveted—if you want to know what God has planned for this world.

Why? Because this topic is one of the greatest reasons that I trust the Bible.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel has promised that He is the only True God; and that He alone can predict the future and have it come to pass exactly as He said it would. This realm of the Bible is called fulfilled prophecy

## **Tomorrow's Headlines**

For a moment let me read tomorrow's headlines, listen as I read from the book that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel wrote called the Scriptures or the Holy Bible.

Zechariah 12:1-3 The burden of the word of the Lord against Israel. Thus says the Lord, who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him: 2 "Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. 3 And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it.

Now what I just read will someday be watched around the world on cell phone web TV receivers, homes, businesses and on the ground by everyone in the Middle East. Why did the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel write such things? To prove He is the One True and Living God of the Universe!

The Lord declares the future in His Word because He "watches over His Word to perform it!"

P Jeremiah 1:12 Then the Lord said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching over My word to perform it." NASB

What is the simplest and yet most profound evidence the Bible offers concerning God's reality?

It is prophecy fulfilled--the irrefutable verification reserved to the Scriptures alone.

## **Bible Prophecy = God's Calling Card**

Prophecy is the missing element in all other sacred scriptures of the world's religions; it is not to be found in the Koran, the Hindu Vedas, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Book of Mormon, the sayings of Buddha, the writings of Mary Baker Eddy (Christian Science).

Geography is very important to Bible study and interpretation. Everything happened somewhere; and if God repeatedly uses a special place, we should take note.

That brings us to the "most mentioned" place in God's Word: Jerusalem.

The New Testament records only seven visits by our Lord Jesus to Jerusalem. At the height of its beauty in Herod's era Jesus wept over this city because He saw the poverty of their devotion to the truth and the horror of the judgment for their back sliding apostasy (Mat. 23:37-39)

## **JERUSALEM'S HISTORY**

"No city has been coveted and fought over as much as Jerusalem, the City of Peace. Babylonians, Macedonians, Ptolemies, Selucids, Romans, Byzantines, Persians, Arabs, Seljuks, Crusaders, Mongols, Mamelukes, Turks, British and Jordanians are only some of the conquerors whose names have fluttered across the pages of its bloody and anguished past. Jerusalem is a sacred city - a city that has played a role in history out of all proportion to its economic importance or size!"<sup>1</sup>

Here, briefly, are five periods<sup>2</sup> In Jerusalem's fascinating history.

### **PERIOD-1: FIRST TEMPLE PERIOD (1000 B.C.-586 B.C.)**

First, there is the **FIRST TEMPLE PERIOD (1000 B.C.-586 B.C.)**. Solomon, David's son, built a beautiful temple In Jerusalem. We can only imagine what it looked like.

Its glory was greater than anything that had ever been built in the ancient world. Arid we read, "And it came about when the priests came from the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister

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<sup>1</sup> This is Jerusalem, Bishko.

<sup>2</sup> Parts of the following adapted from Lutzer, God and the City, p. 27-31.

because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord' (1 Kings 8: 10, 11).

But after Solomon's death the kingdom was split; Samaria became the capitol of the northern tribes. This city succumbed to the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

In 586 B.C. the Babylonians captured Jerusalem, the southern kingdom. After three sieges, Solomon's beautiful temple was totally destroyed. Many Jews were carried off to Babylon where they lived for seventy years. When the Persians in turn overthrew Babylon, the Jews were allowed to return to their homeland.

## **PERIOD-2: THE SECOND TEMPLE FROM 538 B.C. TO A.D. 70**

The second period is that of **THE SECOND TEMPLE FROM 538 B.C. TO A.D. 70**. When the Jews returned from Babylon, a small temple was constructed where Solomon's beautiful edifice once stood. Zechariah the prophet encouraged them by saying, 'Do not despise the day of small things.' Incredibly, this smaller temple served the Jews for nearly five centuries.

In 19 B.C. the Roman ruler, King Herod, proposed the idea of reconstructing a beautiful temple in Jerusalem. He promised the Jews that he would not tear down Zerubbabel's temple but build a new one over it. In effect the building of the new one and the tearing down of the smaller one would happen simultaneously. Worship would not be interrupted. He also trained one thousand priests as masons so that no Gentiles would have to work in the sacred areas.

This beautiful structure was not yet finished when Jesus Christ was on earth. 'After cleansing the temple, the Jews asked that He give them a sign and Jesus answered, 'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews therefore said, 'it took forty years to build this temple and you will raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body (John 2:19-21). This temple had been under construction for forty-six years and was not yet completed. Though Herod was long since dead, work on the temple continued.

One day Jesus and the disciples were on the Mount of Olives overlooking the temple area. They noticed 'that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts. And then He said, 'As for these things which you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down' (Luke 21:5,6). Thus Christ predicted that the second temple would be totally destroyed, and destroyed it was.

In A.D. 70 the Emperor Titus came to put down a revolt in Jerusalem, so he surrounded the city of Jerusalem and captured it. Titus starved the city. And when people would sneak out at night to find food or water, they were crucified until rows and rows of crosses stood around the city. Jerusalem was totally destroyed and the temple taken apart stone by stone. Christ's prophecy was meticulously fulfilled.

## **PERIOD-3: GENTILE PERIOD FROM A.D. 70 TO 1948**

The third era in Jerusalem's history is the **GENTILE PERIOD FROM A.D. 70 TO 1948**. Recall that Christ said, ... And they will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive into all of the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled, (Luke 21:24). Let's take a tour of this Gentile period noting the different eras that span nineteen centuries.

1. The **ROMAN PERIOD** (AD 70 - 33) The Romans brought their own people to repopulate the city.
2. The **BYZANTINE PERIOD** (330 - 638) This is the period after Constantine. By the way, his mother, Helena, made a trip to the holy land and established the various traditional sites regarding the life and ministry of Christ. Even today her identification of places such as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher are considered by some to be authentic. Various churches and fortifications can be seen dating back to the Byzantine Period with its unique architecture.
3. The **FIRST MUSLIM PERIOD** (638 - 1099) Mohammed began the religion of Islam and conquered the city of Jerusalem with the sword. Today, Jerusalem is the third most holy site for this religion after Mecca and Medina. During this era, the Dome of the Rock was built, believed to be the place where Mohammed ascended into heaven. Just think, this beautiful building was constructed 1300 years ago and is still an architectural wonder.
4. The **CRUSADER PERIOD** (1099 - 1187) Pope Urban 2 issued a decree saying that anyone who was willing to go to the holy land to liberate it from the Muslims would be forgiven all sins, and if unable to go, the same benefits would extend to those who contributed financially to send a substitute. Hordes of Europeans went to Jerusalem after the initial liberation. Today, crusader churches and walls still can be found throughout the land, all of them nearly a thousand years old.
5. The **LATER MUSLIM PERIOD** (1187 - 1517) Once again, the Muslims dominated the

land of Israel for four long centuries.

6. The **TURKISH PERIOD** (1517 - 1917) The Ottoman Turks defeated the Muslims, and Suleiman ruled from Constantinople over the Eastern wing of the Roman Empire. Under his reign, the present walls of the city of Jerusalem were built nearly four hundred years ago.
7. The **BRITISH PERIOD** (1917 - 1948) The British asked the United Nations to resolve the conflict surrounding the city and the land was given to the Jews in 1948. Jerusalem was divided up into four sectors - Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Armenian.
8. **Current period from A.D. 1948 to the Tribulation.** But in the war of 1967, the city fell to Israeli hands and the territory all the way to the Jordan River (known as the West Bank) became a part of the Israeli state. Many people believe that this ended the domination of the Gentiles which Christ spoke about. Recall that He said, 'Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Luke 21:24). This explains why some people think that Christ's return may be near.

#### **PERIOD-4: TRIBULATION PERIOD JERUSALEM.**

The fourth period is still future. The battle of Armageddon will spill over to Jerusalem.

Zechariah writes, 'For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city' (Zechariah 14:2).

This then marks the great sorrow that will yet come to the city of Jerusalem as all the nations of the earth turn against the Jews. After Armageddon, Jerusalem will experience exaltation.

"Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as when He fights on the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem...' (14:3,4).

Christ will come and defend His people; the Jews living at that time will look upon their Redeemer and recognize Him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God.

## PERIOD-5: Millennial Kingdom Jerusalem

The fifth major era is when Jerusalem will enter what is known as the **Millennial Kingdom**, "The law will go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war (Isaiah 2:2-4). After judgment, comes blessing.

### Events in Jerusalem During the Millennium

Beginning of the Millennium	Course of the Millennium	End of the Millennium
Resurrection of Tribulation saints (Revelation 20:4)	Descent and Presence of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10—22:5)	Satan Loosed from Bondage (Revelation 20:7)
Son of Man on Throne of David (Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 14:9; Matthew 25:31)	Restoration of Israel's Promised land and of the Natural Order (Ezekiel 37:25; Isaiah 11:6-16; 66:18-23)	Final "Gog and Magog" War (Revelation 20:8-10)
Judgment of Jewish Rebels and Gentile Nations (Ezekiel 20:33-38; Matthew 25:32-46)	Sacrificial Services at Millennial Temple by Jews and Gentiles (Isaiah 56:7; Zechariah 14:16-20; Ezekiel 40-48)	Resurrection of Unbelieving Dead (Revelation 20:5,13)
Messiah Builds Millennial Temple (Zechariah 6:12-15; Ezekiel 37:26-27)	Exaltation of Jerusalem and Instruction of Gentile Nations by Restored Jewish Nations (Isaiah 2:2-4; Zechariah 8:1-23; Habakkuk 2:14)	Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15)

## FINALLY: NEW (HEAVENLY) JERUSALEM

The final era is when the earthly Jerusalem gives way to **THE NEW JERUSALEM** that comes from God out of heaven. This heavenly city is not so much an extension of the old, as it is a new substitute for all that has ever been known here on earth.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21)

In light of the momentous events which still must take place before our Lord's return, we can only pray, "Even so come Lord Jesus.

But finally, the Bible ends with the last picture on the canvas of Jerusalem. For Jerusalem

becomes a **CITY OF HEAVENLY HOPE !**

First, in Rev. 3:12, Jerusalem is written on the hearts of every truly born again Christian as their destination. We are address to our place prepared for us in New Jerusalem.

Revelation 3:12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. (KJV).

Second in Rev 21:1 it is the gleaming, eternal reminder of Christ's promise to make all things new. It is new because the old is passing away. The old world of sin, tears and death. The NEW is coming. Hope from God.

Finally, Jerusalem a city of glorious hope because those who are going to heaven are Citizens of Heaven. And all born again Christians are to LOOK FOR THE CITY. Why?

**BECAUSE ITS A SECURE CITY:** Hebrews 11:10,13 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker [is] God.

**BECAUSE ITS A TRANSFORMING CITY:** Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced [them] and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (NKJV)

**BECAUSE ITS A AN UNSHAKABLE CITY:** Hebrews 12:28-29 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God [is] a consuming fire. (NKJV)