

Without Walls & A Wall of Fire: God's Vision for His People

Abstract

A theological reading of Zechariah 2:5-17 reveals that the return of the *golah* and rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple are not merely steps toward political independence and religious power, but the means through which Yahweh will fulfil his vision for his remnant and the nations. In the visionary scenes and oracles of Zechariah we encounter an atmosphere of inclusivity and exclusivity, not as counter realities but as two facets of the divine mission. Yahweh's zeal for Zion moves him to be a wall of fire around her yet his protective boundary is concurrently inviting. Jerusalem's inhabitants are not to be permanently isolated from the nations but will be used to draw them into covenant with the Lord. It is the continual presence and glory of Yahweh which will be the transformative force behind Jerusalem as a cultic-political and missional centre. The prophecy of Zechariah 2:5-17, and references to the nations elsewhere in the book, indicate the centrality of mission in the vision of Yahweh.

Persian Yehud

Zechariah begins his prophetic ministry in Persian Yehud, shortly after Haggai, in the second year of Darius, 520 B.C. Zechariah's prophetic mission is rooted in the past and this continuity with prophetic tradition is evident in his call for the remnant's repentance.¹ It is the *golah's* repentance of sin which will once again move God to restore their fortunes. As punishment for the sins of the forefathers, Yahweh had exiled his covenant people to Babylon. The sting of deportation was worsened by the knowledge that Yahweh had departed from his temple because of its repeated defilement (Ezek 10). Zechariah's message of restoration extends beyond the completion of the Second Temple, as is the case in Haggai, and looks to a restoration of the city, which is local and cosmic all at once.

This local yet cosmic scope of Jerusalem's restoration is introduced through the night visions of the Prophet. The series of eight night visions occur on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month (*Shebat*) in the second year of Darius, 15th February 519 BC.² Five months earlier on this same day the community, inspired by the oracle through Haggai, resumed the temple rebuilding (Hag 1:14-15).³ With the New Year about to be ushered in it is fitting that Yahweh should send a vision of the *golah's* future in the temple-city.⁴

Yet, the envisioned Jerusalem both settles and surprises the reality and identity of the *golah*. Yahweh's vision is simultaneously one of exclusivity and inclusivity. In order to better see this movement between exclusivity and inclusivity we must see the relationship between the first two visions and the third vision.

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¹ Interestingly, Zechariah is the only one within the Book of the Twelve who places the direct call to repentance piece at the beginning of the prophecy, for the others is usually found in the middle of the book. Isaiah is an example of this within the classical prophets.

² Concerning the specification as to the time of the visions, Mason suggests that Zechariah draws on the imagery of night as a period of distress and uncertainty, a period of waiting for salvation at the dawning of the day of Yahweh (Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 30-31).

³ 21st September, 520 B.C.

⁴ Halpern, *The Ritual Background of Zechariah's Temple Song*, 169.

The first vision, the horsemen's patrol of the earth, sets forth two concerns regarding Yahweh's relationship with Zion. The angel's lament "how long" (Zech 1:12) elicits a comforting response from Yahweh; he is zealous for Zion⁵ and angry at the nations who went "over the top" in their role in his judgement (Zech 1:14-15).

In visions two and three Yahweh addresses the concerns of the first vision.⁶ The second vision, the four horns, addresses the issue of the nations' abuse of Judah. Those who exploited Judah will be terrified and cast down (Zech 2:4). Following this the third vision emphasises Yahweh's zeal for Zion and his return to dwell in her midst. The oracle attached to the third vision emphasises these two matters: the judgement of the nations and God's zeal for Zion. The remnant should flee the land of the north because of the pending judgment and return to Zion because of Yahweh's imminent return to be her protection and glory. Yahweh is exclusively on the side of his remnant to the detriment of the foreign nations.

The Vision of Zion

The third vision is distinct in its tenor (Zech 2:5–17).⁷ Zechariah "lifts up his eyes and behold" he sees a man with a surveyor's line in hand (Zech 2:5). As the stranger⁸ is on the move Zechariah queries his destination, "where are you going?" The man replies that he intends to go and measure the width and length of Jerusalem. The measuring rope *הַקֶּלֶב מִדָּה* is a standard instrument used in construction; it is used to mark out the length and width of territory, whether individual or tribal inheritance.⁹

At this point the interpreting angel begins to leave and another unidentified angel meets him and urges him to run after the young man who intends to measure Jerusalem. That the young man is in haste is evident since the angel is given the imperative to "run" after him in order to deliver the message. The message is that "Jerusalem will be inhabited without walls because of the multitude of men and cattle within it. 'For I,' declares Yahweh, 'will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in her midst'" (Zech 2:8–9).

An abrupt switch is made from vision to oracle as Yahweh urges the remnant to flee and escape the land of the North. An affectionate reference to the remnant being the apple of his eye is followed by a promise to punish the plunderers. The prophet also indicates that the occurrence of these events will serve as confirmation of his call. Zion is commanded to celebrate and all people to hush because Yahweh has roused himself from his holy dwelling.

⁵ Zion not only refers to the people but also to the land promised to them. The land was inextricably linked to the covenant and this is why Yahweh unequivocally pronounces his zeal for Jerusalem. He is not just speaking of zeal for the people but also for the land itself (Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 143–150).

⁶ "They should be understood as a unit in which visions two and three elaborate on topics of the first vision" (Wenzel, *Reading Zechariah with Zechariah 1:1-6 as the Introduction to the Entire Book*, 88).

⁷ Zechariah 2:1-13 [English].

⁸ The identity of the man holding the measuring line is debated. Sweeney states that it "clearly refers to Zechariah" (Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 585). Barker agrees (Barker, "Zechariah," 747) while Curtis equates the man with the angel (Curtis, *Up the Steep and Stony Road*, 133). Achtemeier suggests that the young man is "a visionary symbol for human expectations...who never glimpses the dimensions of God's Kingdom that is coming" (Achtemeier, *Nahum-Malachi*, 116). For further discussion as to the identity of the young surveyor see Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 1–8*, 153–154.

⁹ Boda, *Zechariah*, 222; and Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 584–585.

The vision, however, which begins with Yahweh's zeal as the protective force of his remnant ends with the inclusion of the nations. The nations who scattered will be the ones which are embraced. Hence this third vision embodies and anticipates the constant tension and fluctuation between the exclusion and inclusion, the judgement and joining of the nations with the remnant. In the third vision we encounter an atmosphere of inclusivity and exclusivity, not as counter realities but as two facets of the divine mission. This surprise is woven throughout the book of Zechariah.

A Vision to Reshape Remnant Identity

Life in Persian Yehud was relatively peaceful yet not necessarily fulfilling. The benefit of *pax Persica* was that the *golah* were not seen as a threat but rather an asset. The rebuilding of the Yehud community was believed to be advantageous to the Empire.¹⁰ However, the difficult reality of re-establishing physical property as well as national identity was taking its toll. Once again, the Diaspora experience had brought about the erosion and re-shaping of national identity and memory. The returnees are rebuilding the Temple not only as a physical cultic edifice but as a symbol of their national identity. In the midst of the rebuilding project, comes this strange vision which is far removed from their reality. It is to creatively reshape the identity and purpose of the inhabitants of Persian Yehud that the prophecies of Zechariah come.¹¹

Scholars have not always agreed on the extent or nature of the restoration programme of Zechariah. Is it restoration of the temple, Jerusalem or the entire cosmos?¹² Haggai had emphasised the Second Temple as a medium of restoration and Yahweh's promise was that its glory would exceed that of the first because he himself would fill it with glory (Hag 2:7, 9). Certainly, Zechariah does not forget the cult but his focus is on the regeneration of Jerusalem.¹³ In this way Zechariah's prophecy extends beyond that of Haggai as the glory of God spans the whole boundless city, which is the centre of his cosmic rule and sovereignty.¹⁴

The intended extent of restoration is the reason why the surveyor's measuring is discouraged. Of course, the present reality of Yehud would suggest that the surveyor was sensible and practical. The promise that the measuring line would again be stretched over Jerusalem had already been announced (Zech 1:16).¹⁵ In fact, it seems in line with the prophetic

¹⁰ In this way prophetic and Persian priorities converged (Kessler, "Reconstructing Haggai's Jerusalem," 157-158). Watts further asserts that more than being a temple-city Jerusalem was favoured by Persia because it could also be used as a strategic military post near Egypt's border (Watts, "Jerusalem: An Example of War in a Walled City," 212).

¹¹ Zechariah's work may be classified as proto-apocalyptic. Others interpret the nature of visions and ambiguous imagery to be signs of the beginnings of apocalypticism in the Second Temple period (Finitsis, *Visions and Eschatology*, 102).

¹² House, *The Unity of The Twelve*, 100.

¹³ House, *The Unity of The Twelve*, 102.

¹⁴ "The heart of the renewal discussed by Zechariah lies the renaissance of Jerusalem...Yahweh's care for the city serves as a pledge of care for Israel as a whole" (House, *The Unity of The Twelve*, 154).

¹⁵ The idea that a measuring line will be stretched over Jerusalem is in Stead's opinion a reversal of negative measuring in Lamentations 2:8, not an allusion to Jeremiah 31:38-39 or Ezekiel 40:2. "Zechariah 1 is deliberately echoing the phraseology of the negative measuring in order to stress that a great reversal is about to take place, signalling that Yahweh is about to undo the destruction of 586 BCE" (Stead, "Sustained Allusion in Zechariah 1-2," 149).

expectation put forth by Ezekiel.¹⁶ The city at this time is sparsely populated and resembles nothing of the majestic Zion portrayed in the Psalms.¹⁷ This is what makes the third vision so shocking! The *golah* have hardly finished the temple reconstruction much less thinking of a large city. Propheying such a reality for the indefinite future would have been surprising to the inhabitants of Yehud and the remnant still in Diaspora.¹⁸ The intent to measure is seen as restrictive, for Jerusalem must remain unwalled to accommodate the multitude of people and animals which will inhabit it (Zech 2:8).

The fundamental purpose of a wall in the ancient Near East was fortification.¹⁹ Jerusalem, until its siege by the Babylonians, was known for her fortified walls. During its Canaanite era in the Middle Bronze age Jerusalem, formerly Jebus, was a thriving city. Its wall, built around 1900 to 1800 B.C. measured approximately eight feet in width.²⁰ Through the monarchic period Jerusalem's walls underwent several expansion and rebuilding projects (2 Chron 26:9; 26:15; 32:5). Yet, now Yahweh envisions Zion without walls. A city without walls is hardly a city, or is it?

There was one contemporary case of a city without walls. The royal city of Pasargadae was built without walls but instead was surrounded by sacred fire holders.²¹ The lack of walls and sacred fire were not only a tribute to Ahura Mazda, the Persian deity, but also a display of the invincibility of the Empire. However, using this contemporary example would not have eliminated the shock of the vision. It is one thing for the World Empire to have a wall-less city but quite another for a remnant coming back from the Diaspora. Still, Yahweh harnesses this contemporary city to envision Zion as a symbol of "the divine sovereignty of YHWH over the cosmos and the human world."²²

A city without walls lacks a boundary and this is exactly the point. The former boundary lines of the city will be extended necessarily because of its numerous inhabitants. This evokes the promise given to the Patriarchs that their descendents would be too many to count.²³ Here the mention of numerous people and cattle serves as a merism, emphasising the totality and the extent of the Jerusalem's future habitation. The remnant can be assured of Yahweh's ability to care for them. This vision of Jerusalem unwalled is not one which just goes along with the Persian status quo²⁴ but one that disturbs it.

¹⁶ Boda, *Zechariah*, 222. *Contra* Petersen who sees little connection here between Ezekiel and Zechariah's prophecy when he states that "Zechariah could not differ more from Ezekiel's notion of the restored Jerusalem" (Petersen, "Zechariah's Visions: A Theological Perspective," 203).

¹⁷ Kessler, "Reconstructing Haggai's Jerusalem," 151. Drawing on relevant archeological data from Persian I, Kessler advances an estimation of 750 to 1,500 inhabitants (Kessler, "Reconstructing Haggai's Jerusalem," 147).

¹⁸ Boda, *Zechariah*, 223.

¹⁹ The walls were the most important part of urban constructions for "their size and arrangement were a testimony to the importance and strength of the city. In Mesopotamia, these carefully maintained walls were placed under the protection of the deities" (Frick, *The City in Ancient Israel*, 82–83).

²⁰ DeVries, *Cities of the Biblical World*, 201.

²¹ Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8*, 171.

²² Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 586.

²³ To Abraham (Gen 12:2; 15:5; 22:17); to Isaac (Gen 26:4, 24) and to Jacob (Gen 28:14).

²⁴ That Zechariah does not openly denounce Persian power has been seen as a sign of satisfaction with the status quo (Phinney, "Life Writing in Ezekiel and First Zechariah," 99–100).

Zeal: The Fuel for Yahweh's Fire

The plan for Jerusalem to be without walls however does not mean Yahweh will leave her unprotected and unfortified. Yahweh promises to be a wall of fire round about Jerusalem (Zech 2:9).²⁵ This glorious image offers a comforting contrast from the present reality. The wall of fire is reminiscent of the Exodus when Yahweh enshrouded himself within a pillar of fire at night so as to lead the way for the sojourning Israelites (Ex 13:20–22). The pillar of fire which guided the emancipated people out of Egypt has now become a wall of fire for the recently liberated remnant. The fire is not only Yahweh's protection or guidance but his very presence among his people.²⁶

The connection of Yahweh with fire spans much of Israelite history,²⁷ from Abram until the present Yehud context. Fire is present when Yahweh makes a covenant with Abram (Gen 15). During a deep sleep induced by God Abram witnesses a mysterious smoking oven and a fiery torch pass between the heifer, goat and ram which he had cut into halves. This ritual has been linked to ANE covenant. Covenants could be ratified by a ceremony in which a calf was cut into half and then the vassal one on whom it is incumbent to keep the stipulations would walk between the two halves (cf. Jer 34:18). Hasel does not see exact correlation between the Gen 15 account and Jer 34:18 because the idea of a self-imprecation by Yahweh is improbable, he rather prefers it to be called a "covenant ratification rite in which Yahweh binds himself in a promise to the patriarch."²⁸ Either way the centrality of covenant comes to the fore, with the imagery of fire.

We may also turn to the commissioning narrative of Moses. Moses saw a burning bush which was not being consumed and God called to him from within flames of fire (Ex 3:1–4).²⁹ Subsequently, when giving the Ten Words at Sinai, Yahweh descends again in fire (Ex 19:18). Moses enters the glory-cloud of Yahweh yet it appears as a consuming fire to the Israelites below (Ex 24:17) and engenders great fear (Deut 5:5). When the moveable tabernacle had been built the fire would appear in the cloud at night (Ex 40:38). In the Exodus narrative the fire of Yahweh and his glory are closely linked if not synonymous (Ex 40:34–38).³⁰ Apparently this phenomenon of a god in fire guiding his people was unique to the Israelites.³¹

²⁵ Watts sees this fire as "a metaphor for the experiences of Jerusalem with the trials of a walled city during the powerful changes (political, social, and economic) of the eighth to sixth centuries" (Watts, "Jerusalem: An Example of War in A Walled City," 215).

²⁶ Perhaps the pillar of fire also served the practical purpose of providing warmth during the cool desert nights and the pillar of cloud provided sun-shield during the scorching daylight

²⁷ "The imagery of 'fire' here recalls other places in the Hebrew Bible in which a messenger/the divine presence is associated with fire" (Conrad, *Zechariah*, 81).

²⁸ Hasel, "The Meaning of the Animal Rite in Gen 15," 69. Both Kapelrud and Wenham agree with Hasel's assertion that what we find here is not a self-imprecation but a divine promise of the irrevocability of his covenant with Abram (Kapelrud, "The Interpretation of Jer 34:18ff," 138–140; and Wenham, "The Symbolism of the Animal Rite in Genesis 15," 136).

²⁹ Here the Angel of the Lord who is the one in the flames of fire within the bush is identified with God who calls Moses from within the bush. Later in the narrative of Manoah and his wife, the Angel of the Lord ascends in the fiery flame of their sacrifice (Judg 13:20). The couple realize that the angelic messenger is Yahweh himself (Judg 13:21).

³⁰ Conrad agrees that the glory of God is often connected with his fiery theophany at Sinai (Conrad, *Zechariah*, 81).

³¹ "Has any other people heard the voice of a god speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived?" Deuteronomy 4:33.

Several centuries later, Solomon finishes the dedicatory prayer at the Temple and fire comes from heaven to consume the sacrifices and the glory of God fills and stays above the temple. The priests cannot enter because of the glory and at the sight of this fiery theophany the worshippers kneel, bow their heads to the ground and recite “he is good his love endures forever” (2 Chron 7:1–3).

Yahweh is said to be a consuming fire (Deut 9:3), and it is connected with his zeal (Deut 4:24; Is 66:15). His tongue is like a consuming fire (Is 30:27). Yahweh as *El Qanna'* is the foundation of Nahum's oracle against Nineveh; his fiery zeal will avenge those who have been persecuted by Assyria. An Isaianic prophecy states that once again there will be in Zion a cloud during the daytime and a flaming fire during night-time, this is described as a canopy of glory (Is 4:5–6).

In reviewing this tradition of Yahweh's fire, it is evident that it is not only a protective element but Yahweh's very presence. The image of Jerusalem's fiery wall is a comforting dream at a time of traumatic reality.³² While the temple was eventually finished and consecrated in 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:13-15), the walls, which took only fifty-two days to construct, were not completed until 445 B.C. during Nehemiah's leadership (Neh 6:15).³³ God offers protection, not in the form of a human or architectural shield but in the divine shield himself. This divine declaration is more than encouragement, it is the appearance once again of the fuel behind Yahweh's fire; his zeal. The residents of Yehud have a hope; the fire of Yahweh as security and his glory in their midst for beauty.

The Oracle: Exclusive & Inclusive

In a sharp switch Zechariah's vision ends and the oracle proper begins. A divine urge is made to the remnant to flee from the land of the North and return to Zion (Zech 2:9). The use of *hōy*, usually used in oracles of woe, underscores the urgency of the call.³⁴ The designations “Daughter of Babylon” and “land of the North” represent nations including Assyria which have subjugated Israel.³⁵ The focus has moved from the remnant in Yehud to those still in Diaspora, they have become too comfortable and established.

The oracle's language is difficult in verse 12. The NASB translates “After glory he has sent me against the nations which plunder you, for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye.” The challenge arises in translating *ʾaḥar* with *kābōd* and the verb “to send.” Variations have been suggested: “with glory he sent me,”³⁶ “in pursuit of glory,”³⁷ or “after the glory sent me.”³⁸ The phrase “after glory” may mean that “after God's punishment of Judah, he then sent the prophet against the nations who have plundered them.”³⁹ This reading is seen to be in line

³² Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 586.

³³ Petersen asserts that Zechariah was “hard-headedly realistic” (Petersen, “Zechariah's Visions: A Theological Perspective,” 201). Stuhlmüller agrees calling Zechariah's vision “practical realism” (Stuhlmüller, *Haggai & Zechariah*, 75).

³⁴ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 587. Also, Baldwin adds further nuance that this is “an exhortation touched with a note of sympathy and pity” (Baldwin, *Zechariah*, 108).

³⁵ Boda, “Terrifying the Horns,” 26. Also, Baldwin, *Zechariah*, 108.

³⁶ Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 109.

³⁷ McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets*, 1060.

³⁸ Petersen, *Zechariah 1–8*, 172–173

³⁹ Boda, “Hoy, Hoy: The Prophetic Origins of the Babylonian Tradition in Zechariah 2:10–17,” 176.

with the Ezekielian tradition which uses glory to refer to God's discipline of Judah.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Sweeney believes the problematic Zech 2:12^a is not a corruption in the MT and thus we do not need to go to the LXX reading (after his glory sent me). Rather, we may interpret Yahweh being called "the back of glory" alluding then to Yahweh's self-revelation to Moses. Meyers and Meyers also see an equation here between Yahweh and glory and so translate Glory as the divine title.⁴¹ In continuity with the tradition of God's zealous fire in connection with his glory it is not unlikely that here glory is synonymous with God himself.⁴² In the fire and manifest glory Zion has the promised presence of Yahweh.

The pending plundering of the nations is sure for they have hurt the delicate part of God. Literally, the "daughter" of his eye, is an idiom which is suitably translated as the "apple" of his eye.⁴³ We see God's zeal not only in the fiery wall around Zion but also in connecting her with a delicate and intricate part of himself. His exclusive care for his remnant incites God to waive his hand against the nations so that they will now become vulnerable to their victims. Note that it is Yahweh's initial action which will allow this reversal of the plundered becoming plunderers. Daughter of Zion is called to sing loudly and rejoice because the presence of Yahweh in her midst implies the judgment of her abusers (Zech 2:14).

Zechariah's prophetic confirmation formula "then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me"⁴⁴ (Zech 2:13, 15) is a nuance of the Ezekielian recognition formula "you will know that I am the Lord."⁴⁵ Also the allusion to Moses' saying (Num 16:28) is also made by Zechariah to legitimise his prophetic call.⁴⁶ Interestingly, Zechariah's confirmation as a messenger of God is tied to two tangible activities: first, the plundering of the plunderers and second, the joining of the nations with Yahweh when he dwells in Zion's midst. The use of הוּל in the Niphal to describe the joining of the nations underscores that this is a covenantal action (Zech 2:15).⁴⁷ The prophet's call will be confirmed with an action taken *against* the nations and an action *for* the

⁴⁰ Boda, "Hoy, Hoy: The Prophetic Origins of the Babylonian Tradition in Zechariah 2:10-17," 176. Also, McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets*, 1060.

⁴¹ Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 1-8*, 165. Mason also sees this as a possibility (Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 43).

⁴² Mason, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 43.

⁴³ Boda, *Zechariah*, 236.

⁴⁴ There are some who determine that the Angel of the Lord is the referent of the sending (Barker, "Zechariah," 749; and McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets*, 1060). If so it is puzzling as to why the Angel of the Lord employs the prophetic recognition formula. Since the Angel of the Lord is closely identified with Yahweh himself it is unlikely that he is the referent. Furthermore, the usage of the prophetic recognition formula elsewhere suggests that the referent is the Prophet, Zechariah (Zech 4:9; 6:15). It is more probable here that Zechariah is the referent (Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 109-110; Boda, *Zechariah*, 236; Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 1-8*, 165; and Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 43).

⁴⁵ "The shift in Zech 1-6 of the wording of the phrase from Ezekiel, however, moves the focus from the people knowing something about YHWH (Ezekiel) to them knowing something about Yahweh's prophet. The influence of Ezekiel, however, is evident" (Boda, "Hoy, Hoy: The Prophetic Origins of the Babylonian Tradition in Zechariah 2:10-17," 176).

⁴⁶ Boda, *Zechariah*, 234-235.

⁴⁷ See, Gen 29:34 in Leah's birth of her son Levi she hopes that Jacob will be truly joined with her. Also in Numbers 18:4 the Levites are to join together to carry out the ordinances of the sanctuary. Also, "when the LORD will have compassion on Jacob and again choose Israel, and settle them in their own land, then strangers will join them and attach themselves to the house of Jacob" (Is 14:1); "They will ask for the way to Zion, turning their faces in its direction; they will come that they may join themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten" (Jer 50:5). For further usage see Esther 9:27; Isaiah 56:3; 56:6.

nations. Here again we see the atmosphere of inclusivity and exclusivity; judgement upon and joining with the nations.

An interjection ends the oracle when “all flesh” are told to be silent because Yahweh has roused himself from his holy dwelling (Zech 2:17).⁴⁸ Reverence for the presence of God⁴⁹ is not only in view here, this silence is the active anticipation of his judgment. Here the foreign nations are included with the remnant as they wait on Yahweh. Similar calls to silence are found in Habakkuk 2:20 and Zephaniah 1:7. Recalling the image of Yahweh’s gradual departure from the first temple some decades before in the visions of Ezekiel, the remnant receives the hope of restoration. Yahweh will vacate his holy habitation in order to take up residence with his people. The nations will get their just deserts and the grace of inclusion too. Such divine actions necessitate human silence.

The Future of Zion

Ancient Near Eastern conceptions of cities were symbolic, emblematic and mythological and these can be seen in the representation of Jerusalem throughout the OT.⁵⁰ We understand from archaeological and sociological findings that ancient cities, unlike modern western ones, took on a cultic, as well as political character.⁵¹ Not merely a physical location, Zion had developed into a symbol of the centre of God’s cosmos. Yahweh’s kingship and dwelling in Zion was the delight of Israel.⁵² This is reflected in the Songs of Zion in which “Zion is first of all a symbol of security- security grounded in the presence of Yahweh in her midst.”⁵³ The picture of Zion in the third vision and throughout Zechariah is one which offers a fresh perspective for the remnant.⁵⁴ The vision of Jerusalem is local yet cosmic, and this because she is simultaneously exclusive and inclusive.

The vision of Jerusalem transformed shows Yahweh not only as a deity of the temple but one of Yehud, and in fact the entire cosmos.⁵⁵ As the centre of his cosmos,⁵⁶ Yahweh envisions

⁴⁸ Here an interjection (Boda, *Zechariah*, 239) not imperative (Conrad, *Zechariah*, 85) however there seems to be an imperatival sense or at least urgent warning as with *hōy* in Zech 2:10–11.

⁴⁹ Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 1–8*, 171.

⁵⁰ Nissinen, “City as Lofty as Heaven: Arbela and Other Cities in Neo-Assyrian Prophecy,” 173.

⁵¹ Grabbe, “Sup-urbs or Only Hyp-urbs: Prophets and Populations in Ancient Israel and Socio-historical Method,” 112. Also, Andreasen notes that the restoration (post-exilic) oracles (Ezek. 40:48; Zech. 9:1ff., 14) emphasise the royal-political and sacral nature of Zion (Andreasen, “Town and Country in the Old Testament,” 273).

⁵² Ollenburger, *Zion The City of The Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult*, 58.

⁵³ Ollenburger, *Zion The City of The Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult*, 567. The three Psalms within the Zion tradition to which Ollenburger refers are 46, 48 and 76. Also, Bedford points to these and the *Yahweh malak* Psalms (47, 93, 96–99) as being an important background for the promotion of the Jerusalem cult in Haggai-Zechariah. The residence of Yahweh in Zion meant “the repatriation of the exiles, the blessing of Yahweh’s people and land, the destruction of enemies, the acknowledgement by the nations of Yahweh’s sovereignty, the re-establishment of the kingship of David, and the reunification of Judah and Israel” (Bedford “Discerning the Time,” 84–85).

⁵⁴ Petersen describes the portrayal of Jerusalem as a “utopian vision of renewal” (Petersen, “Zechariah’s Visions: A Theological Perspective,” 198). Also, Finitsis suggests that the fantastical depiction is intentional so “that one expects to see what can be described as a wonder of the eschaton operative in the present” (Finitsis, *Visions and Eschatology*, 129).

⁵⁵ Petersen stresses the cosmic scope of Zechariah’s prophecy as opposed to Haggai’s. Yahweh’s search begins from Jerusalem and goes to the ends of the earth but then his focus comes right back to Jerusalem (Petersen, “Zechariah’s Visions: A Theological Perspective,” 203).

that Jerusalem will be “the City of Truth” and “the Holy Mountain” (Zech 8:3). Furthermore, citizenship within the boundless city will be dependent on the fulfilment of several explicit criteria (Zech 8:16-17): speaking truth to one another; judging with truth; ensuring judgments which produce peace; not devising evil in their hearts against others; and not loving perjury. The motivation for citizens’ behaviour⁵⁷ is a regard for Yahweh (Zech 8:17).

If the people cherish their citizenship they will prosper in several ways. In terms of agriculture they will see their produce grow because of favourable climate conditions (Zech 8:12). Their physical wellbeing will be ensured. The young men and women will flourish because of the new wine and grain (Zech 9:17). Old men will need canes because of their advanced age and will join old women to sit in the city square (Zech 8:4). Furthermore, the city square will teem with boys and girls playing (Zech 8:5). These images of young and old act as a merism showing a complete and functional society with age-diverse population. Politically, Jerusalem will be respected and elevated.⁵⁸

It appears that the remnant who received the third vision of Jerusalem thought that an unwallled city so full and secure was near impossible (Zech 8:7). As to the possibility of creating such a city Yahweh counters “if it is too difficult in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, will it also be difficult in my sight?”⁵⁹

City of Mission to the Nations

Through the third vision Yahweh reminds the remnant of the purpose of this sacral-political centre called Jerusalem: a dwelling place of cosmic proportions for all who will enter into covenant with him. This vision is reminiscent of Yahweh’s exhortation to Moses, “let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them” (Ex 25:8). The remnant, which was once a curse among the nations, will be saved to become a blessing to others (Zech 8:13). In Zion’s future ten foreign men will grasp the garment of one Jew insisting to be taken to Jerusalem (Zech 8:23). The ten to one ratio emphasises the extent of God’s mission to reaching the nations. The nations will be compelled to go up to the exalted city of Jerusalem in order to celebrate the Feast of Sukkoth (Zech 14:16).⁶⁰ The inclusive nature of God’s rule is indicated here and “thus the vision of all peoples making an annual Sukkoth pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh involves a diminishing of boundaries between Israel and those perceived as other.”⁶¹ If Jerusalem is without walls it does not need guards who will monitor the entrance or exiting of people. Ultimately, Yahweh is the door in and out of the kingdom and entrance into or exit out of his covenant is through him.

⁵⁶ Meyers and Meyers point out that in the eschatological development of Zion in Second Zechariah, “there is also a clear sense of Israel becoming central in all the world” (Meyers and Meyers, “The Future Fortunes of the House of David,” 216).

⁵⁷ These are comparable to what the former prophets urged the forefathers to do: dispense justice; practise kindness and compassion to others; not oppressing the vulnerable (widow, orphan, foreigner or poor); and not devising evil in their hearts (Zech 7:8–12).

⁵⁸ Even physical elevation of the city (Barker, “Zechariah,” 829).

⁵⁹ Zechariah 8:8

⁶⁰ The Feast of Sukkoth was the last great celebration of the Jewish year. It marked the sojourn of the ancestors in the wilderness after they had been liberated from Egypt. This is why Egypt as a nation is explicitly mentioned (Zech 14:18-19).

⁶¹ Meyers and Meyers, “The Future Fortunes of the House of David,” 221.

Conclusion

In order to restore on local and cosmic levels, Yahweh must destroy as well as build. He must exclude, that is execute judgement, as well as include by extending covenant to the repentant among the foreign nations. Reading the third vision we surmise that the return of the *golah* and rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple are not merely steps towards political independence and religious power. Yahweh's zeal for Zion moves him to be a wall of fire around her. The fiery wall which evokes the tradition of fire theophany sets the hearers up for a surprise reversal; this protective boundary is concurrently inviting to the nations. Yahweh has a vision to fulfil for his remnant and the foreign nations. While the beginning of the vision appears to promote Yahweh's exclusive care for Yehud, the end jolts the hearer with the realisation that Yahweh has an inclusive vision for the foreign nations. Jerusalem's inhabitants are not to be permanently isolated from the nations but will be used to draw them into covenant with the Lord. It is the continual presence and glory of Yahweh which will be the transformative force behind Jerusalem as a cultic-political and missional centre.

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