

Zechariah 2: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Zechariah chapter 2. And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then I said, Where are you going? And he said to me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its width and what is its length. And behold, the angel who talked with me came forward, and another angel came forward to meet him, and said to him, Run, say to that young man, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of people and livestock in it.

And I will be to her a wall of fire all around, declares the Lord, and I will be the glory in her midst. Up, up, flee from the land of the north, declares the Lord, for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens, declares the Lord. Up, escape to Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon. For thus says the Lord of hosts, After his glory sent me to the nations who plundered you, but he who touches you touches the apple of his eye. Behold, I will shake my hand over them, and they shall become plunder for those who serve them. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me. Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come, and I will dwell in your midst, declares the Lord. And many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people, and I will dwell in your midst. And you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. And the Lord will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.

Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling. Zechariah's night visions come in the earlier stages of the rebuilding of the temple after the return from exile, in a situation where the Jewish returnees seem beleaguered and pressured by their adversaries on various sides, and also dispirited by a sense of how much reduced the glory of the nation has been, and how much smaller the new restored temple is from the former one. Zechariah's messages bring divine encouragement, and a sense of what God is doing in their time, and through their work. As James Jordan argues at length, it's important to recognize the connection between these visions, and the rebuilding of the temple that's taking place. Zechariah's visions are directly addressing the situation in the nation at the time, when the people are re-establishing this building for the Lord's presence in their midst. He is giving them a divine perspective, helping them to recognize that as they are raising this symbol of God's throne on earth, the Lord is establishing his rule in a new way among the nations. In the first chapter, there were two key visions, the visions of the horses among the myrtle trees in the depths, and the second vision, the vision of the four horns and the four craftsmen. Both of these visions related to temple themes, and as we move into chapter 2, temple themes continue in various ways. In scripture, sacred space is generally measured space. We are given the dimensions of the tabernacle, and also the temple. In the book of Ezekiel, we are given a number of measurements concerning the visionary temple, in some passages that provide important parallels to this passage. In Ezekiel chapter 4 verses 2 to 3,

There would seem to be some obvious parallels between this figure in Ezekiel chapter 40, and the figure that we encounter in Zechariah chapter 2. However, there are also some important differences. The figure in Ezekiel chapter 40 is measuring using a measuring rod, whose dimensions are given to us as six long cubits. Here, the measurement occurs through a measuring line. The measuring rod would usually be used for measuring buildings, a measuring line for measuring land.

This, as James Jordan notes, is already an indication that what is being measured is not the architectural structures that are bounded by city walls, but larger tracts of open countryside in which people would dwell. This would seem to support the view that the interaction between the angel and the young man in verse 4 might not be with the man that goes out to measure, who already has the instrument suited for the task, but with Zechariah himself. On the other hand, the fact that he is instructed to run to speak to the young man might suggest that he is pursuing the man that has already gone out. The prophecy that he is given concerns a new way that Jerusalem will exist among the nations.

[4 : 27] Jerusalem at that time was not fully fortified. It had some of the remaining wall around it, but the wall was still to be rebuilt and wouldn't be rebuilt until the time of Nehemiah many years later.

In the context of Nehemiah, the rebuilding of the wall is designed to give the people security and safety from their opposing enemies and to enable Jerusalem to enjoy greater independence and power.

In that context, the lack of a full wall is a sign of weakness and vulnerability. Here, however, the image of a city without walls is of a city that has confidence in its existence. It can spread out that people are secure. They are not threatened by their enemies, so they don't need to be bounded by a wall to the same degree. They do, however, enjoy a defence. It's the defence that the Lord himself provides. He is a wall of fire all around and the glory in their midst. This, of course, is imagery that should remind us of the story of the Exodus. The Lord guards and accompanies his people with the pillar of cloud and fire and is the glory in their midst as his presence accompanies them in the tabernacle. Exodus themes are found elsewhere in this chapter, particularly in the spoils and plunder taken by former servants in verse 9, and a mixed multitude of other nations joining themselves to the Lord in verse 11. At the end of chapter 1, Zechariah had been shown the four horns that had scattered Judah, that is Jerusalem and Israel. Then the Lord showed him four craftsmen as a response to the horns, those who would build up the temple, establishing the throne of the Lord in the world, over against the powers of the nations that represented a sort of false altar. The world is going to be set up as a true altar once more. Perhaps a clue to the meaning of verse 6 is found in Revelation chapter 7 verse 1. After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. In contrast to most commentators upon this text, Jordan suggests that there is a significance in the fact that the people have been spread abroad as the four winds of the heavens. This is different from saying that they have been scattered or divided to or toward the four winds of heaven. The possibility is raised that they are not being put into the power of the four winds of heaven to divide and scatter them, but they are being set up like the powers of the four winds of heaven, spread out among the earth, but empowered by the Holy Spirit so that they might act as the winds of God among the nations.

The call then in verses 6 and 7 to flee from the land of the north and to escape to Zion, according to Jordan, is not so much a call to return back to the land of Israel, but rather a call for spiritual separation, something similar to what we see in the book of Revelation in Come Out of Her My People. Many of the Jews were in danger of fitting in a bit too much in the lands of their exile. They needed to flee from the land of the north and escape to Zion in the sense of disassociating themselves from cultures that they would easily become assimilated into in their pagan ways. The new life of Jerusalem is not so much a city that's bounded by walls in the middle of the land of Israel, rather it's a larger confident city that's spread out among all of the nations like the winds of heaven, bounded not so much by physical fortifications, but by the protective power of the Lord. The Lord will act on behalf of his people. Anyone who threatens his people, he will act against them and prove his power over them. The enemies of the Jews will become plunder for them. We might think here of the way that the Lord gave the Egyptians into the hands of his people, so that they plundered the Egyptians as they left the land. Once again, this fits in with various

Exodus themes in the chapter. We might also, as Jordan suggests, see a connection between this and the story of Esther. In Esther chapter 3 verse 8, for instance, Haman says to King Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. In that book, Haman tries to destroy the Jews in a great genocide, but the Lord, through Esther and Mordecai, dramatically saves his people. Such an event could then be seen as a fulfillment of part of what the prophecy here is speaking about. Israel's life is no longer focused very narrowly within the walls of Jerusalem. As a nation, they are spread out throughout the whole world, and it is God himself who surrounds them with protection. This is a cause of rejoicing for Zion. The Lord has returned to dwell in the midst of her once more, and as his presence is manifested among them, many nations will join themselves to the Lord in that day. Again we see some sort of fulfillment of this in Esther chapter 8 verse 17, And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them. Such actions of the Lord on behalf of his people would demonstrate that they were his people, and that he was their God. They were the Lord's special portion, and Jerusalem was once more the site of his dwelling. This prophecy then would have been a source of great encouragement to the people rebuilding the temple. It ends with a declaration that the Lord has roused himself from his holy dwelling. He is about to act in the earth to shake up the nations, and to act on behalf of his people.

[9 : 40] Even as his people have been spread throughout the world, scattered to the four winds, they have become like the four winds, and now empowered by the wind of his spirit, they would effect his work among all of the nations. While the new temple might look inglorious and small in comparison to the old Solomonic temple, it would be the site of the Lord's symbolic throne, as he demonstrated his power in a new and more glorious way among all of the peoples. A question to consider. Enumerate the different Exodus motifs that you can see within this chapter. How can they help us to understand what is taking place here?