

1. Entering into Zechariah's second burden, a couple of things are notable at the outset. The first is that, though the burden was directed toward *Israel*, Israel is never mentioned in it. Rather, the burden concerns itself with Jerusalem, Judah, and the house of David. This indicates that the term "Israel" should not be interpreted as the ten-tribe northern kingdom or even the Israelite nation per se, but as designating the Davidic kingdom with its capital at Jerusalem – the kingdom which represented, at the physical level, the realization of the kingdom promised to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant.

David brought together the twelve tribes under his rule (2 Samuel 5:1-5), but in the era following Solomon's reign, David's kingdom was reduced to the sub-kingdom of Judah which consisted of the two tribes of Judah (David's tribe) and Benjamin. The other ten tribes comprised the northern kingdom of Israel with its capital at Samaria, and this kingdom was, from the outset, regarded as an apostate entity severed from David's house and kingdom. The "Israel" of this burden is associated with David's house and kingdom (Judah) *and so, by implication, with the covenant Yahweh made with David.*

The second thing to note is the way Yahweh introduced Himself in the burden: not as the God of Israel, but as the God of all creation – the sovereign Lord of the entire created order including mankind (12:1). This self-description highlights two aspects of God's relationship with His creation: First, as Creator He exercises absolute sovereignty (authority, power and lordship) over His creation. But He didn't create as the mere exercise of His power and sovereignty, but as the outworking of His love; the Creator's sovereign rule is the exercise of His care and concern for His creation. Thus eschatology (which is the assertion of divine purpose in the creation) isn't a matter of sovereign decree (the exercise of divine prerogative) as much as *kind intention* – the Creator's sovereign work of love that secures blessedness and glory for His creation as it finds its identity and function in relation to Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:9-10; Colossians 1:15-20).

Thus Yahweh's self-description perfectly set the stage for the subsequent burden by which He articulated and affirmed His good purpose for His creation: His design that He should become King of all the earth – the divine Father-Lord who exercises His loving and gracious rule over His creation through image-sons who are the fullness of the singular Image-Son (Ephesians 1:18-23; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Hebrews 2:9-18).

- a. Again, the burden's initial concern was with Jerusalem and Judah – specifically as they were going to come under siege (12:2). This siege and the peoples involved in it aren't identified, but the impression given by some English renderings is that they represent all the Gentile peoples/nations (cf. NAS, ASV, ESV). However, the larger statement of 12:3 (along with verses 2 and 6) supports the concessive idea adopted by the KJV and NKJV: The burden wasn't indicating that every nation on earth was going to come against Jerusalem, but that, *were they to do so*, even then they would not be able to prevail. The broader passage emphasizes the invincibility of Jerusalem and Judah in the face of a coming siege and the concessive rendering of this clause best fits this emphasis. The issue, then, is not the identity of the besieging forces, but the fact of their inability to achieve victory. The burden employs three graphic images to make this point:

- 1) The first is that Jerusalem was to be made like a bowl filled with strong drink that produces heavy intoxication – disorientation, reeling and stumbling – for all who drink of it (12:2). And the fact that this container is represented as a large basin rather than a cup reinforces the contextual indication that many peoples were going to drink from it.
- 2) Similarly, Jerusalem was to become like a heavy stone that injures and even incapacitates men when they attempt to move it (12:3). The depiction is of a stone so massive that, even if all the people on earth gathered together to lift it as one man, they would be unable to. So far from being able to lift it, they would be seriously injured in the attempt.
- 3) The third image pertains directly to the adversaries rather than to Jerusalem. Here, Jerusalem’s triumph is associated with confusion, panic and madness arising in the minds of her attackers and their mounts (12:4). The Lord was going to strike the adversarial forces with the “blindness” of confusion and madness, even while His own eyes were wide open in watching over the house of Judah (cf. Exodus 14:1-25, esp. vv. 24-25).

In the case of the first two metaphors, it is Jerusalem’s resource/power that thwarts those who besiege her; in the third, it is the undoing of her adversaries. *But in each instance it is the Lord who secured Jerusalem’s triumph:* He was going to make His dwelling place a “cup of reeling” and a “heavy stone” and He would effect the confusion and madness of her assailants (consider Acts 9:1-21).

- b. And when the leaders of the people of Judah saw Yahweh’s hand raised on behalf of Jerusalem, they would recognize the source and mechanism of their own deliverance and security (12:5). If the Lord was committed to the defense of Jerusalem, this implied His commitment to the people of Judah. If He was concerned for the city of David (Jerusalem) as the throne of His kingdom, then He was concerned for the clans of Judah as the inhabitants of His kingdom.

Jerusalem’s deliverance implied Judah’s deliverance, and what was implied in the relationship between Judah and Jerusalem the Lord declared explicitly: In that day He was going to make the clans of Judah “*like a firepot among pieces of wood and a flaming torch among sheaves*” (12:6a). These parallel images are virtually synonymous and are intended to convey the same idea, namely that the Lord was going to empower David’s house and kingdom such that those who determine to come against them will effectively be consumed. Jerusalem’s deliverance would mean the deliverance of Judah, and so also Judah’s resulting security and well-being were to be shared by Jerusalem (12:6b).

- c. God was pledging Himself to the deliverance and preservation of Judah and Jerusalem, but in such a way that neither would be magnified above the other (12:7). The significance of this disposition and course of action may not be obvious to the contemporary reader, but it was to the original audience.

Jerusalem was the city of David – the capital of David’s kingdom. But David’s kingdom was *Yahweh’s* kingdom, making Jerusalem the seat of Yahweh’s throne and therefore His dwelling place (cf. 1 Chronicles 29:23 with Matthew 5:33-35; cf. also Ezekiel 5:5; Psalm 48:1-3, 78:52-72). For this reason the Jews naturally ascribed a kind of primacy and preeminence to Jerusalem’s inhabitants and David’s royal descendents appointed to reign on Yahweh’s behalf (cf. 4:6-10 with Haggai 2:21-23). But no such primacy exists in the Lord’s purpose and He was going to attest this by first saving the humble “tents” of Judah and then the inhabitants of Jerusalem and David’s royal house. So Keil: “*The promises which Jerusalem and the house of David have received will benefit Judah, i.e., the whole of the covenant nation, in like manner*” (ref. 1:14-17, 2:1-12, 8:1-15, 10:3-12).

- d. The first part of this second burden graphically depicts the Lord’s commitment to the well-being of Judah and Jerusalem and the passage reaches its climax with a superlative assertion of that commitment and the glorious outcome of it. Though in their triumph neither Jerusalem nor Judah would be magnified above the other, Yahweh was determined to magnify both with a transcendent glory (12:8).
- In that day, even the feeblest among Jerusalem’s inhabitants would be like *David himself* – the Lord’s elect, anointed leader who withstood all adversaries and triumphed to bring the kingdom of Israel to the apex of its extent, power, glory, peace and security (1 Samuel 17-18; 2 Samuel 7:1).
 - So David’s house – his royal dynasty – would be like *God* who ruled over the Abrahamic kingdom with all faithfulness, wisdom, goodness and love. Yahweh had shown Himself to be such a ruler in the person of His Angel when He brought Israel out of Egypt and carried the people to His sanctuary land (12:8b; cf. Exodus 23:20-23, 32:1-33:17); when the day of His great and final triumph came – the second Exodus and ingathering promised by His prophets (Isaiah 51-55), He would again show Himself such a ruler, but this time in the royal sons covenanted to David – sons who are faithful shepherds in the line of his singular Son (cf. Jeremiah 3:1-17, 33:14-22 with Acts 2:22-39; Ephesians 1:18-2:6; Colossians 3:1-4; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; 1 Peter 2:4-10 and Revelation 5:1-10, 20:1-6).
- e. From the lowliest to the greatest, the Lord proclaimed that the sons of the kingdom were appointed for triumphal glory and that glory would be theirs in the day He arose to destroy all the enemies of His dwelling place and kingdom (12:9). And everywhere the Scriptures associate that “day” with the *Christ event* – not a literal day, but *Yahweh’s Day*: the theophany of the “fullness of the times” when He appeared in David’s Branch to deliver His captive people and establish forever the house, throne and kingdom covenanted to David and Abraham. In their “seed” the Lord caused His jealousy for Zion and her children to triumph in conquest, liberation, purging, ingathering and reconciliation; in Him Yahweh has become a wall of fire around Zion (its “covering roundabout” – 12:8a) and the glory in her midst (2:1-12; cf. Galatians 3-4; Hebrews 12:18-24; Revelation 21:1-22:5).

Excursus: Reading Zechariah's Burden Christologically

From the lowliest to the greatest, the Lord proclaimed that the sons of the kingdom were appointed for triumphal glory, and that glory would be theirs in the day He arose to destroy all the enemies of His dwelling place and kingdom (12:9). And everywhere the Scriptures associate that “day” with the “Christ event” – not a literal day, but *Yahweh's Day: the theophany of the “fullness of the times” when the Lord came in the Servant-Branch to deliver His captive people and establish forever the house, throne and kingdom covenanted to David and Abraham.*

This kingdom – the long-awaited kingdom of God – has been established in Christ, but according to the principle of “already/not yet. This truth is evident from Jesus' teaching concerning the kingdom (cf. Matthew 3:1-4:17, 12:22-28 with 7:21-23 and 25:1-46; cf. also Mark 1:14-15 with 14:24-25 and Luke 10:1-11, 17:20-21 with 22:15-30) as well as the teaching of His witnesses.

The kingdom held forth as the centerpiece of Old Testament promise and prefiguration has been inaugurated in Jesus and is attested by His enthronement and work of creational renewal through the outpouring of His Spirit and the building of God's everlasting sanctuary. The New Testament everywhere witnesses to this truth and it provides the grid through which to read Zechariah's burden concerning Jerusalem and Judah.

1. And the place to begin in discerning the christocentricity of the burden is with *Jerusalem* and its significance in the Scriptures and in God's purpose for His creation.
 - a. In terms of Zechariah's prophecy, Jerusalem signifies Yahweh's dwelling place and so the place where He gathers men to himself (ref. 1:14-2:13, 8:1-8, 14:8-21).
 - b. This same conception of Jerusalem characterizes the broader prophetic witness, but Isaiah, in particular, associates this sanctuary place of ingathering with the messianic Branch (cf. Isaiah 2:1-4 with 11:1-12 and 49:1-13; ref. also Zechariah 4 and 6:9-15). Moreover, the prophets proclaimed the enlargement of Zion as the Lord's sanctuary/gathering place to encompass the whole earth, *even as it embraces all of the earth's nations and peoples* (cf. Isaiah 11:1-9, 54:1ff; Micah 4:1-8; Daniel 2:35, 44-45).
 - c. And being Yahweh's dwelling place, *Jerusalem represents the place of conjunction between heaven and earth*, epitomized in the Holy of Holies and the mercy seat (cf. Psalm 80:1, 99:1; 1 Chronicles 28:1-2 with Isaiah 37:15-16 and 66:1).
 - d. With respect to the New Testament, however, it is critical to note that it nowhere treats the physical city of Jerusalem as the place to which Yahweh returns and gathers all men to Himself. *To the contrary, Jerusalem is treated as an unclean and apostate entity marked out for destruction* (cf. Luke 13:34-35, 19:28-44, 21:20ff with Revelation 11:8).

It is *New Jerusalem* that the New Testament treats as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophetic promises regarding Jerusalem (cf. Galatians 4; Hebrews 12:18-24, 13:10-14; Revelation 3:12, 21-22). And importantly, New Jerusalem isn't a restored version of the earthly Jerusalem, but a heavenly abode which exists in *contradistinction* to it.

And the Hebrews writer, in particular, associated this heavenly Jerusalem – the Jerusalem which is “free” and is Yahweh’s true and everlasting habitation and the place of ingathering in His new creation – with the messianic Branch and His enthronement as king-priest (cf. 8:1-9:12, 12:18-24 with 6:9-15).

The New Testament treats the city of Jerusalem as an apostate entity, but also as the *hub of the Church* which constitutes the present form of the eschatological, new-creational kingdom promised by all the prophets (ref. Acts 1-2). And as the hub of the Lord’s kingdom – the kingdom represented in Zechariah’s prophecy under the images of Jerusalem, Judah and Zion, *Jerusalem was the focal point in the assault of the “surrounding peoples” against that kingdom, just as Zechariah’s burden foretold* (cf. Luke 19:41-48 with Acts 4:1-31, 6:8-8:4, 9:1-2, 21:7-13, etc.).

So also the New Testament indicates that Jerusalem – as it represents Yahweh’s dwelling and throne – *has obtained its essential fulfillment in Jesus* (cf. John 1-4, esp. 4:19-24, with the correlation between Isaiah 2:1-4 and 11:1-12 which shows that coming to “Mount Zion” is coming to the Branch of David). Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s sanctuary, *but as its cornerstone*. This means that Zion as Yahweh’s dwelling place isn’t confined to Jesus, but expands out from Him to encompass the new humanity in Him (cf. again Zechariah 4 and 6:9-15 and 14:9 with Isaiah 54-55; Daniel 2; Ephesians 2:11-22).

Jerusalem played a key role in the salvation history as it advanced toward the Christ event. It, too, anticipated its own fulfillment, and that fulfillment has come in the New Jerusalem in Christ which is the true conjunction of heaven and earth and so the consummative sanctuary that reaches out to encompass the whole creation (Revelation 21-22).

2. In the Branch, Yahweh has arisen to establish and secure Zion and her children (New Jerusalem) against their enemies (John 12:12-32). With respect to Zechariah’s burden, that work is associated with the particular time he denoted as “*that day*,” for this first part of the prophecy assigns that designation to the time when the enemies of Yahweh’s dwelling place and kingdom would be rendered impotent (12:2-4, 6, 8-9) and unable to prevail against them.
 - a. Zechariah’s imagery is reminiscent of the Exodus deliverance, suggesting that the “day” he referred to should also be associated with the *second Exodus* promised by Isaiah (ref. 51:1-11) which the first Exodus prefigured (cf. 12:2-4 with Exodus 6-11, 14:24-25).
 - b. And through this divine intervention – this second Exodus – the Lord at last established His true and everlasting kingdom and its peace and security under His anointed King, the True David. The liberation and ingathering in Christ accomplished what the first Exodus and the release from Babylon only held out in hope (cf. 2:6-13 and Isaiah 51:12-16).
 - c. And the sanctuary which was the focal point of liberation and ingathering (Exodus 25; Isaiah 44) – the sanctuary which made Jerusalem *Zion* and which David longed to erect as a permanent dwelling – is now being built by David’s Son. *This is the sanctuary promised by the prophets which gathers in all the families of the earth* (cf. 6:9-15 with 2:10-13) *and fulfills the Lord’s design to be King over all the earth* (9:7-10, 14:8-11).