

2. Desolation of Zion in the Typological Kingdom

Because Zion – as the seat of the Israelite kingdom and site of the Lord’s sanctuary – represented the covenant relationship between Yahweh and His chosen “son,” the continuance of Zion depended upon the continuing integrity of the covenant; any violation of the covenant relationship constituted a defiling assault on Zion. And inasmuch as God was ever a faithful Father and Husband to Israel, it was Israel’s conformity to the covenant that would determine Zion’s fate. Moses was emphatic in this regard before the sons of Israel had even entered the promised land of Canaan. Covenant fidelity would yield enduring prosperity and blessing in Yahweh’s sanctuary-land; unfaithfulness, on the other hand, would result in desolation and exile. If Israel despised the covenant, Yahweh would drive them from His presence (Deuteronomy 28).

The centuries following Israel’s inheritance of Canaan saw the covenant nation giving itself to perpetual violation of the covenant. For His part, the Lord responded by sending Israel a stream of prophetic messengers calling for repentance and reiterating Moses’ warning about punishment and captivity (Jeremiah 7:25-26). But His patient entreaty was to no avail (Jeremiah 3:1-10). Yahweh’s covenant son had hardened himself against the Father, and the day of His patience and mercy finally came to an end. The day had come for Zion to be stripped of her glory and privilege (cf. Jeremiah 4:5-13, 6:1-2, 22-26).

- a. The covenantal concept of Zion had its origin in David’s conquest of Jerusalem and his subsequent appointment of the city as the site of the central sanctuary. Thus it was fitting that God should provide the first firm indication of Zion’s demise in the *severing of David’s royal line* (Jeremiah 22:24-30). Even as it was the site of Yahweh’s throne, Zion was the royal seat of David’s dynasty (cf. 2 Samuel 5:5 with 1 Chronicles 29:23), so that the destruction of David’s dynastic house signaled the same for the seat of his kingdom. David’s kingship was the foundation for Zion’s existence; the demise of his dynasty heralded Zion’s end.
- b. The covenant at Sinai had formalized the relationship between God and Israel, and His enthronement in the sanctuary on Mount Zion in the midst of His people had epitomized their mutual communion. For centuries Israel had effectively denied that communion by its disregard and idolatry, and now it was Yahweh’s turn to testify to the hopelessly fractured relationship. The covenant son had long since departed from the Father; the Father was now going to abandon His son.

Thus Zion’s destruction – signified first by the severing of David’s dynasty – found its most poignant sign in the *departure of Yahweh’s Shekinah* from the Holy of Holies. As promised, David’s son had built a house for Him, and the Lord had filled Solomon’s temple with His glory-presence (1 Kings 8:1-11). Now, that sanctuary was *ichabod*: The glory had departed from Israel. Appropriately, it was to His faithful priest Ezekiel – himself already exiled to Babylon – that the Lord first made His departure known (10:1-11:23). Ezekiel beheld Yahweh’s departure in a vision and he understood what it implied: *However long Jerusalem and its temple may continue to stand, Zion had been made desolate.*

- c. Shortly after God severed David's line He removed His glory-presence from the sanctuary in Jerusalem. Those two events signaled the end of David's kingdom, and within a decade the two primary physical embodiments of the concept of Zion – the city of Jerusalem and its temple – were destroyed by the Babylonians. Zion spoke of the covenant relationship between Father and son, and the departure of the Father's glory-presence was followed by His *banishment of His son from His sanctuary-land*. Zion – the unfaithful covenant wife who had born only adulterous children for Yahweh – was now stripped of her children and made barren (cf. Isaiah 50:1-3; Lamentations 1:1-15, 2:18-22; Ezekiel 5:1-17; Hosea 2:1-6; etc.).

3. Restoration of Zion in the Fulfilled Kingdom

The prophetic pronouncement of Zion's desolation was everywhere accompanied by the Lord's promise of future restoration. That promise had its first historical referent in the return to Jerusalem of three contingents of Judean exiles during the reigns of Cyrus and Artaxerxes (ref. Ezra 1:1ff, 7:1-7 and Nehemiah 1:1-2:11). The recovery of the Judean remnant had been openly predicted by the pre-exilic prophets, but their prophecies also importantly indicated that that recovery wouldn't fulfill the promise of Zion's restoration.

- If the earlier prophets weren't sufficiently clear about that, the prophets of the Judean restoration left no doubt. Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people to rebuild the temple, but Zechariah, in particular, was careful to emphasize that the true restoration of Zion – being inseparable from the promises of the Davidic Covenant – awaited the coming of the Davidic Branch (cf. 4:1-10 with 6:9-15).
- So also Nehemiah later presided over the reconstruction of Jerusalem's walls, but under much opposition and only as a grant from the governing Medo-Persian authority. The city's walls symbolized her sovereign power and security under Yahweh, and so, like the newly-constructed temple, Jerusalem's restoration spoke only of promise for the future; Israel remained a vassal state under Gentile rule.

The city and its temple may have been restored, but that wasn't the case for the theocratic kingdom as expressed by the concept of Zion. No son of David sat on the throne of Israel, and – much more than that – the Lord's Shekinah remained absent from Zerubbabel's temple. Yahweh's glory-presence would indeed return to His sanctuary, but only in connection with the coming of the messianic messenger of the covenant (cf. Malachi 3:1 with Isaiah 48:16; also Isaiah 42:1 with John 1:14-18, 29-34, 2:18-19 and Luke 4:14-19). The absence of a Davidic king and the empty Holy of Holies in the new temple were sufficient in themselves to indicate that the restoration of Zion remained a future hope, but that truth was reinforced by the way the prophets described Zion's rebirth.

- a. Zion's recovery awaited the coming of the Son of David, but the reason for His coming and the work He was to accomplish showed that her recovery was to be *cataclysmic, comprehensive, transformational, and ultimate*. The restoration of Zion indicated, not the reinstatement of the former kingdom, but the inauguration of a whole new order; Zion's rebirth meant a new *genesis* – a new beginning.

This is evident across the prophetic record, but it is arguably most pronounced in Isaiah's prophecy. Zion would be restored by virtue of the redemptive work of David's Branch (ref. 52:1-54:17), and that restoration would usher in an everlasting, unbounded kingdom characterized by consummate rest and peace (9:7, 32:9-20, 52:1-10, 54:1-17). The reason is that Branch's redemption would deliver the whole creation from the curse and effect its complete renewal (11:1-9, 35:1-10; cf. also 55:1-13 with Genesis 3:17-19). Most importantly, this work would extend to the creature *man*: Being God's image-son, man's redemption would bring reconciliation between him and his Creator-Father. Thus, in the day of Zion's restoration, Yahweh would once again be in her midst (12:1-5, 60:1-14).

- b. The scriptures of the Old Testament are adamant that Zion's restoration would be nothing less than the full and everlasting renewal of the entire created order. This transformation was to occur in conjunction with the coming of David's promised Seed and His redemptive work; thus one would expect the New Testament to present Jesus of Nazareth and describe His saving work in these terms.

The New Testament scriptures meet this expectation, and do so most broadly in terms of the concept of a *new creation* (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:12-15). This comprehensive "newness" speaks of a new *age* embracing a new *humanity* related to God through a new *covenant* (cf. Luke 5:30-39, 22:20; Ephesians 2:1-16, 4:17-24; Colossians 3:1-11; etc.). At the same time, this renewal is characterized by the overarching fulfillment principle of "already but not yet." That is to say, every aspect of the new creation was inaugurated by Christ in its essential *substance*, but everything yet awaits the *fullness* of its transformation.

The curse has been overturned and its infernal architect conquered and constrained (cf. Matthew 12:22-29; John 12:23-31, 16:1-11; Colossians 2:13-15; Hebrews 2:14-15; Revelation 12:1-11). Nevertheless, Satan is still the "prince of the power of the air," seeking to devour men as a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8; cf. also 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, 4:1-4; Ephesians 2:1-3; James 4:1-7; 1 John 4:4).

Likewise, God's image-son has been recreated in the likeness of the divine Son and Last Adam (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:1-16, 4:17-24, 5:6-10; Colossians 3:1-11; etc.). And yet, "it has not presently appeared what we shall be" (1 John 3:1-2). Moreover, the "not yet" of our present renewal embraces both our spiritual and physical humanity (ref. esp. Romans 8:18-25; cf. also 1 Corinthians 15:1-28; 2 Corinthians 4:1-18; Philippians 1:6, 3:1-21; Colossians 3:1-4).

So also, God has restored His glory-presence to His sanctuary (Ezekiel 43:1-5). However, His dwelling place is no longer a physical structure but the souls of men (cf. John 14:16-17 with Acts 2:1-18; also 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:17-20; Ephesians 2:11-22). In the age of promise Zion represented both God's dwelling place and His relationship with His people; now, in Christ – the fulfilled sanctuary – those representations have converged. Zion has been restored as a living, spiritual house, though it, too, awaits the fullness to come (Revelation 21:1-22:5).