

- But there was another even greater reason why Jerusalem was to be an unwalled city, and that was the reason of *security*. The city would need no walls for Yahweh *Himself* was going to be a *wall of fire* around it. The Lord God of Israel, not a wall, was Jerusalem's security. And the city would know that security when He returned to once again dwell in His sanctuary in the midst of His people. The God who was to be Jerusalem's wall of fire would also be the *glory in her midst*.

Thus an accurate assessment of Jerusalem in its future restoration had nothing to do with physical features or parameters. One could not "measure" the restored city and thereby determine its true state. Jerusalem's bona fide restoration – the one promised by the Lord through His prophets – meant one thing: *the return of Yahweh to His people as their deliverer, king and protector and their return to Him in truth and sincerity* (ref. again Micah 4:1-8; cf. Isaiah 54; Ezekiel 40-43).

4. The Lord was going to return to Jerusalem and Zion (2:4-5; ref. again 1:14-17) and His return would mean the realization of His good purpose first pledged in Eden and then reaffirmed to Abraham, Israel, and David. His oath concerning Jerusalem's restoration thus embodied vastly more than the city's physical reconstruction. The pre-exile prophets had indicated as much, but the post-exilic prophets sent to the recovered remnant were adamant about this lest those Israelites lose sight of Yahweh's true design and misinterpret their return to Judea and the rebuilding of the temple and city. Yes, Jerusalem would be rebuilt just as surely as the temple which stood at its center, but those accomplishments, as necessary and important as they were, would not signal (let alone secure) Yahweh's return and the restoration of David's kingdom. Indeed, they *could* not, for those fulfillments depended upon Israel's return to Yahweh. And Abraham's children yet remained in exile from the God of their fathers (ref. again 1:1-3):

*The physical relocation of a remnant to the covenant land no more ended Israel's captivity and exile from Yahweh than their reconstruction of the covenant house and city would bring about His return and the establishment of His kingdom.*

These recovered exiles (along with all the Jews who would later return to Judea) must not misjudge the meaning of their presence back in the covenant land and their labors in rebuilding Yahweh's sanctuary and city. They had been *physically* liberated and *physically* recovered to their homeland, yet they remained in captivity. They were no longer physically in Babylon *and yet Yahweh insisted that they flee from it* (2:6-7). These exiles could hardly miss the significance of the Lord's directive:

- Abraham's children remained in exile and bondage in Babylon because they remained estranged from their God. Just as their exile actually began at the moment Yahweh departed from them (Ezekiel 10-11), so it would not end until He returned and again dwelled in His sanctuary in their midst (2:4-5). The exile was defined by *Ichabod* – "no glory" and the exile would finally come to an end when Yahweh was again the "glory in the midst" of His people.

- And until Yahweh returned to them, they could not regard themselves as having returned to Him; just as *exile* meant His separation from them, it also meant their separation from Him. The end of exile meant the full reconciliation of covenant Father and covenant son (ref. 8:1-8; cf. Isaiah 60:1-22; Hosea 1-2; cf. also Ezekiel 36:16-38, 37:1-28 with Jeremiah 31:31-34).

And so the Lord's call to flee from the north – to flee from Babylon – amounted to His call to return to Him (1:3-6). Several things about this call are important to note.

- a. The first is that Yahweh issued His directive in two parallel exhortations. Parallelism is a common means of emphasis in Hebrew and is accomplished by setting two statements or ideas in a particular relation to one another. Thus one encounters *synonymous* (Psalm 24:1), *synthetic* (Psalm 92:1-4), *antithetic* (Psalm 1:6), *climactic* (Psalm 29:1, 123:1) and *emblematic* parallelism (Proverbs 11:22) in the Old Testament text. In this instance the parallelism is roughly synonymous: “Fleeing from the north” amounted to escaping from Babylon and the Lord's call to Zion was His call to the exiled children of Israel.
- b. Secondly, the call to flee from *Babylon* indicates that Babylon represented the subjugating world power – that which opposes Yahweh, His kingdom, His people and His purpose. (Consider again the preceding treatment of the vision of the four horns and four artisans.) “Babylon” clearly cannot mean the Babylonian imperial power as such for that empire had already been conquered by Cyrus nearly two decades earlier. Moreover, the Lord's word came to Israelites who were *in Judea*; they were no longer residing in Babylon (2:7) and yet Yahweh called them to escape from it (cf. also Revelation 14:8, 16:19, 17:1-5, 18:1-21).

McComiskey's observation is helpful: “*The use of ‘the north’ imparts to it [this phrase] a higher level of cognition, divorcing it from its original identity [that is, as denoting the Assyrian and Babylonian imperial powers] but preserving its historical significance [i.e., its role as the subjugating power behind Israel's exile and captivity] and allowing that significance to have an application unlimited by time and historical particularity.*” In a word, Babylon here symbolizes human and earthly powers which array themselves against and subjugate the Lord's people and so oppose Him and His purposes.

- c. This understanding of Babylon, in turn, provides insight into Yahweh's call to flee from it. First of all, it reiterates from a different vantage point that the Lord wasn't speaking about a physical migration from Mesopotamia. The exiles with Zechariah had already made this journey. But secondly, it highlights the goal God had in mind: He wasn't calling Zion to leave a place, *but to return to Him*, just as His design in the first Exodus wasn't Israel's liberation from Egypt but their regathering to Him so as to be with Him in His dwelling place (Exodus 15:17; cf. 4:22-23). So it was here (cf. 2:5, 10-11), evident as well in the two presuppositions of the larger context: Zion's future restoration and Yahweh's judgment and destruction of the subjugating “horns” (cf. 2:8-9 with 1:15, 21).

- d. Another important consideration is the two-fold explanation/reason the Lord gave for His call to Zion. Yahweh issued His call in two parallel parts and He attached an explanation to each part (2:6b, 8). Both of these explanations pose interpretive challenges and each must be considered in turn.

In the case of the first one, the difficulty is centered in the question of whether the explanation should be treated as present or future. That is, was the Lord referring to Israel's *scattering* among the nations at that time or the future *expansive distribution* of His people when Zion enjoyed her restoration? Most English versions seem to suggest the former interpretation, although the second fits the context equally well and arguably does better justice to the Hebrew construction. Specifically, the Hebrew verb indicates the *opening, enlargement* or *spreading out* of something rather than a *scattering* as in 1:21. So also Yahweh stated that this outward spreading was *like* the distribution of the four winds, not a scattering *to* the four winds (cf. Jeremiah 49:32-36; Ezekiel 5:1-12, 12:8-14, 17:11-21).

However, if the first interpretation is correct, then the emphasis of Yahweh's call is the regathering and reunification of the scattered exiles: "*I scattered you among the nations but now I am calling you to flee from the north and return to Me*" (cf. Jeremiah 9:1-16; Nehemiah 1:1-9). But if the second is correct, the emphasis in Yahweh's call is the glorious future that awaits Zion: "*Flee from the north and return to Me, for I will make Zion a fertile mother whose children will spread far beyond the historical confines of Jerusalem.*" In the end, both interpretations are true to the scriptural text and God's dealings with Israel, but the second one is more closely aligned with the emphasis of the present vision (ref. again 2:4, 11).

The second explanation attached to the second call (2:8) is more difficult and is arguably the most challenging passage in the entire book. The focal point of the difficulty is the clause, "*after glory He has sent me,*" with the concerns being the phrase, "after glory" and the antecedents (referents) of the pronouns *he* and *me*.

With respect to the phrase, "after glory," two possible meanings are most plausible. The first is that this sending against the nations was *for the sake of* and *unto the realization of* glory. In this case, "glory" is the stated goal of the sending and it consists specifically in the Lord's triumph over the nations through which He will realize His purposes for Zion and Jerusalem. The second possibility is that "glory" denotes that which accompanies the Lord of Hosts in His going out against the nations. The phrase is then rendered, "*with glory He has sent me,*" where glory can refer to either the Lord's intrinsic glory or His manifest glory in His Spirit (cf. Isaiah 48:12-20, esp. v. 16). The first view seems preferable.

The other consideration is the pronouns *he* and *me* ("he has sent me..."). There are two ways to approach this issue: One is to take the statement as a direct quotation and the other as an indirect one. In the case of the former, it is the Lord of Hosts who was speaking, which makes Him the antecedent of the pronoun *me* and therefore the One whom someone else ("he") was sending against the nations.

But if this statement is treated as an indirect quotation, then the speaker was citing what the Lord of Hosts had said. It then follows that this individual is the antecedent of the pronoun *me* and so also the one Yahweh (who is the “he”) was sending. The statement would then be rendered something like this: “*The Lord of Hosts has said that unto glory He has sent me against the nations...*”

Those who hold that the second, instructing angel (2:3-4) was the preincarnate Christ tend to embrace the first view since it treats this angel as the Lord of Hosts whom Yahweh was going to send against the nations. Under this view, then, verses 4-7 contain Yahweh’s words as recounted by the second angel, whereas it is the angel himself – “Yahweh of Hosts” – who is speaking on His own behalf in verses 8-9 (and also 2:11). This creates a somewhat confusing scenario in which two figures identified as “Yahweh” (v. 5, 6, 8) were both speaking.

The second interpretation is more plausible. It treats *Yahweh* and *Yahweh of Hosts* as the same individual: the God of Israel whose message for the “young man” (and Zechariah and Zion) is recorded in verses 4-13. Perhaps the strongest argument for it are the declarations in verses 9 and 11 in which the “me” who is sent acknowledges that the Lord of Hosts was sending him (ref. also 2:3-5).

It is also important to note that this interpretation doesn’t in any way preclude the possibility that the second angel was the preincarnate Christ (Angel of Yahweh). For this to be the case it’s not necessary that this angel take the title “Lord of Hosts”; the mere fact that Yahweh was sending him as the instrument of His glory – glory in vanquishing His enemies, gathering in the vast multitude of His people and in enthroning Himself in their midst – allows for this conclusion. It is also reinforced by the close connection between this individual and Yahweh, not only in 2:8-9 but also in 2:11. For, in one possible reading of that verse, those who join themselves to *Yahweh* are described as the people of *the one whom Yahweh has sent* to them and *he* dwells in their midst (cf. 2:5, 10, 11).

- e. One final thing to note is the two-fold nature of the sending mission. The emphasis in verses 8-9 is on Yahweh sending this individual to throw down the nations who’ve plundered Zion (Jerusalem and the covenant nation) because Zion is the “apple of His eye” and He is jealous for the realization of His good purpose in her and for her (ref. again the first vision, esp. 1:14-17).

But Yahweh’s ultimate goal was ingathering and restoration, not destruction. One need only study the recurrent Old Testament theme of the *Day of the Lord* to recognize this. But Zechariah’s present vision makes the point in explicit fashion: Yahweh’s sending of this angelic servant was to effect Zion’s liberation and restoration and give her an abundance of children. But more than that, *it was to give Himself to Zion*: By sending His servant, Yahweh was sending Himself. In this way He would return to Zion (1:16, 2:5-11; cf. Isaiah 59), thereby fulfilling the ancient promise He’d made to Abraham to be the God of his descendents and take them as His people (cf. 2:11 with Genesis 17:1-7; Exodus 3:1-10, 6:1-8).

5. Zechariah's third vision brought into sharp focus the Lord's purpose for Zion and Jerusalem. Though Jerusalem was yet in ruins and the children of Abraham remained in exile under the subjugating power of the nations, Yahweh had not forgotten His oath to Abraham and David; He would arise and throw down the enemies of His people and His kingdom – not for the sake of retribution, but *reconciliation*: He was going to send His ambassador to accomplish what He promised from the very beginning. This servant would vanquish the opposing powers, liberate the captives and recover the exiles to their Lord and His habitation. And in a mysterious way not fully revealed in the vision, Yahweh's sending of His servant-ambassador would amount to His own return to Zion: This one's coming somehow meant that Zion's children would become Yahweh's people and He – in connection with the servant himself (cf. 1:16, 2:5, 10) – would henceforth dwell in their midst. For this reason, when they saw all of these things come to pass, the children of Zion were to know that Yahweh – the God who'd long ago pledged Himself to this outcome – had sent this servant-ambassador to them (2:8-11).

Thus the capstone of Yahweh's instruction in the vision was His call to rejoice with exceeding gladness. Only a great doxology of adoration, praise and exultation was an appropriate response to the Lord's glorious affirmations (2:10-13):

- a. Despite His past indignation and rejection of Zion and her children, Yahweh remained jealous for them and for the purpose for which He'd bound Himself to them. Yes, Zion was desolate and her children were few and scattered among the nations; yes, those nations wielded seemingly invincible power and the continuing subjugation of the covenant house appeared to be a foregone conclusion. David's house, throne and kingdom were cast down and Yahweh remained distant, and yet the sons of Israel must know and believe that their sense of hopelessness and impossibility was unfounded; they must know and believe that Yahweh remained faithful and committed to His oath and He would arise and fulfill it (2:12-13).
- b. And that oath, which was centered in the people of Israel, wasn't limited to them or their future destiny. For Yahweh's promise to Abraham was that, in his seed, *all the families of the earth* would be blessed (cf. Genesis 12:1-3 and 18:17-18 with 22:15-18, 26:1-4, 28:10-15). The centrality of Israel in God's purpose and program was precisely the nation's identity and role as the Abrahamic seed: Israel was Yahweh's elect *son* – the covenant community that, through their authentic conformity to their Father-Lord, would cause the nations to behold the living God and so return to Him. As Abraham's covenant seed, Israel was the mediator of Yahweh's blessing to the estranged world – the son and servant through whom Israel's God would become the God of all men and restore all things to Himself.

Thus the divine affirmation which was to incite in the exiles exultant joy and gladness included the promise of the *ingathering of the nations* (2:11). This surely must have stunned those who learned of the vision: Hadn't the Lord promised to overthrow the oppressors? *How did throwing them down accord with gathering them in as His people?* Yet this outcome was pledged to the fathers and affirmed by His prophets (cf. Isaiah 11:1-12, 19:18-25; Amos 9:11-15; etc.). Though yet veiled in mystery, Yahweh would overcome His enemies by destroying their enmity.