

Zechariah 2:1-5

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In his third vision, Zechariah sees a surveyor who is about to mark out the boundaries of Jerusalem to prepare for rebuilding the city's walls. However, an angel runs after the surveyor and tells him not to take measurements because in the future Jerusalem will be an unwalled city, protected by God. Then, the LORD announces that He will be a wall of fire around the city boundaries to protect it from the enemy.

In the previous chapter, Zechariah had two visions. In the first, he saw a man mounted on a red horse leading a patrol of heavenly horse riders. Through this vision, the LORD expressed zeal and compassion for Jerusalem but anger and judgment for the Gentile nations that had oppressed His people.

In the second vision, Zechariah saw four horns (foreign nations) that scattered Judah and four blacksmiths (different nations) that came to terrify the horns. Through this vision, the LORD explained that successive nations would defeat the nations that had oppressed Judah. The present chapter contains Zechariah's third vision, followed by words of exhortation.

In describing his vision, the prophet began by saying, *Then I lifted up my eyes and looked* (vs 1). This idiomatic expression indicates that Zechariah focused on all the images of the previous vision until another one caught his attention. This expression thus marks the beginning of a new unit in the narrative. And as the prophet *looked up, behold, there was a man with a measuring line in his hand* (vs 1).

In the ancient Near East, people often used a *measuring line* to survey construction sites and prepare them before beginning the actual work. It was the first step in the construction process (Jeremiah 31:39). Thus, once Zechariah saw the surveyor, he knew immediately that a building project would soon be underway. But he did not know where that would be. So, he addressed the surveyor and *said, Where are you going?* And the surveyor *said to him, To measure Jerusalem, to see how wide it is and how long it is* (vs 2).

The city *Jerusalem* was the capital of Judah, the southern kingdom. It is the site of God's presence (Psalm 9:11; Zechariah 8:3). In Isaiah, it is called "the holy city" (Isaiah 52:1). It is a city that God will establish forever (Psalm 48:8; Revelation 21:10-11) and protect (Psalm 46:4-5). Unfortunately, the disobedience of the Judeans led God to discipline them through a foreign army. Thus, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Chaldea) and his army destroyed the city of Jerusalem in 586 BC,

"All the army of the Chaldeans who *were with* the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. Then the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon and the rest of the people, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away into exile." (2 Kings 25:10-11)

Since the Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem some seventy years prior, the returned exilic community needed to rebuild it (Ezra 2:1). Thus, in his vision, Zechariah learned that a young man was ready to survey *Jerusalem to see how wide it is and how long it is* (vs 2). The survey would help the Judeans to make the appropriate decision as they planned to rebuild the city.

But before the man began his survey, he received an important message. Zechariah explained, *Behold, the angel who was speaking with me was going out* (vs 3). The text tells us that Zechariah was interacting with an *angel*. In Bible times, angels not only delivered messages from God but explained their meaning and answered questions about them. An example of this phenomenon is in the book of Daniel, where the angel Gabriel interpreted a vision for him (Daniel 8:16). Here also in Zechariah, an *angel* would interpret the vision for the prophet.

While Zechariah's interpreting *angel was going out, another angel was coming out to meet him* (vs 3). The second *angel* had an urgent message to disclose. Thus, he spoke to Zechariah's interpreting *angel and said to him, Run, speak to that young man* who was about to survey Jerusalem (vs 4).

The Hebrew verb translated as *run* is "rûṣ." It denotes a rapid and purposeful movement with an urgent motivation. Here in Zechariah, the interpreting *angel* was to *run* after *the young man* to deliver the message to him without delay. He was to tell him not to bother taking measurements because *Jerusalem will be inhabited without walls* (vs 4). This would infer that the *young man* was measuring the walls of Jerusalem, perhaps in order to assess what would be needed to repair its *walls* which had been destroyed by the Babylonians.

In ancient times, people would build *walls* around a city to protect it from outsiders (Deuteronomy 28:52). These *walls* would be as much as 33 feet thick at their foundations, which might even reach bedrock, when possible. Their height was about the same, also about thirty feet.

Thus, *walls* provided security and a sense of well-being to the dwellers in an environment that was frequently hostile and threatening (2 Samuel 5:6; Psalm 48:12–13). That is why the city of David could boast of having such a strong *wall* that even the blind and lame could defend it (2 Samuel 5:6). Conversely, a city without *walls* would be vulnerable to enemy attacks, as the book of Ezekiel shows (Ezekiel 38:11).

In our passage, we learn that *Jerusalem* would one day be secure enough that it will be like an open country. There will be no *walls* around it *because of the multitude of men and cattle within it* (vs 4). That is, the city's population would be so numerous that it would not fit within a walled city.

God would pour out His abundant blessings on the city, causing it to overflow its boundaries. But the citizens of Jerusalem in Zechariah's day could still ask, "How can we protect the city from outsiders?" The prophet used the first-person pronoun to report the LORD's answer, informing the people that even though in this future time *Jerusalem* would not have a wall, it would still have abundant protection: *For I, declares the LORD, will be a wall of fire around her* (vs 5).

The pronoun *I* in the phrase *I, declares the LORD* is emphatic in the Hebrew text. Its use here demonstrates that the LORD is unique because He possesses all knowledge, wisdom, and power (Deuteronomy 32:39). His presence would be sufficient to protect Jerusalem. While human builders would deploy efforts to build the city's walls, *the LORD* declared that He would watch over it and would be a *wall of fire* around it.

In the Old Testament, the term *fire* often portrays God's presence. For instance, God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush (Exodus 3). Similarly, He appeared before Israel as a consuming *fire* at the top of Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:17). Scripture describes God as Himself being a "consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). The phrase *wall of fire* is thus a metaphor symbolizing God's presence and protection.

The returned exilic community would someday live peacefully because *the LORD* would protect them. As a *wall of fire, the LORD* would consume Jerusalem's enemies before they could hurt the city because He is invincible. This truth reminds the reader of the statement in the Psalter, "Unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain" (Psalm 127:1b). We might see a future manifestation of this depicted scene in Revelation when Jesus returns to defeat the armies of the nations who are apparently descending upon Jerusalem to destroy it (Revelation 19:11-20).

The Babylonians were able to destroy Jerusalem and its walls in 586 BC because God had withdrawn His shielding presence (Ezekiel 10:18–19). But in the future, God promises that He will dwell amid Jerusalem, protecting the city from any would-be invaders. Furthermore, God will manifest His presence and majesty among them. As He stated, *I will be the glory in her midst*. The word *glory* here likely refers to the mighty manifestation of the immediate presence of the LORD. It seems that this prophetic prediction looks forward to the time when God will prepare a new heaven and new earth upon which He will dwell in person, with unveiled glory. Speaking of this new earth, the Apostle John writes:

“I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.”
(Revelation 21:22-23)

Since the “glory of God” will be fully present in the new earth, and will light up the earth, it seems that this would fit Zechariah’s vision in this chapter.

This third vision of Zechariah, presented in this section, pictures the future blessings of the covenant people of God. It could also be that these prophecies take place in whole or in part during the thousand-year reign of Jesus upon the earth (Revelation 20:4-6).

God will one day bless His people, causing them to dwell in peace and security. He will dwell among them and take care of them. At that time, enemies will no longer pose any threat to them. Therefore, they will have no fear. They will enjoy the presence of their covenant God forever and ever. Amen.

Biblical Text

¹Then I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, *there was* a man with a measuring line in his hand. ²So I said, “Where are you going?” And he said to me, “To measure Jerusalem, to see how wide it is and how long it is.” ³And behold, the angel who was speaking with me was going out, and another angel was coming out to meet him, ⁴and said to him, “Run, speak to that young man, saying, ‘Jerusalem will be inhabited without walls because of the multitude of men and cattle within it. ⁵For I,’ declares the LORD, ‘will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.’”