

Key Themes in Zechariah 1-8

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ABSTRACT

The discussion of key themes or the message of Zechariah 1-8 is neglected in commentaries that were published during the past five years. This article focuses on this neglected part of Zechariah research and investigates the following key themes: YHWH’s divine presence and the rebuilding of the temple in Zion; The lordship and sovereignty of YHWH; Sin and punishment/judgment; Turn to YHWH (repentance) and obedience; YHWH’s return, grace, love and forgiveness; Realized eschatology and future hope; Israel and the nations; and Leadership. One cannot really say that there are any unique themes in Zechariah 1-8 or that the author/s had one central theme in mind. There are many similarities with other books in the OT, especially the post-exilic prophetic books. However, we must acknowledge that Zechariah 1-8 places more emphasis on certain themes and discusses them in a unique way.

KEYWORDS: Themes; Message; Zechariah 1-8.

A INTRODUCTION

Several new commentaries on the book of Zechariah have appeared during the past few years.¹ In these commentaries the socio-historical background and literary history are discussed in detail, but the discussion of key themes or the message is neglected. Wolters² has no discussion of key themes³ in his “Introduction” while Petterson⁴ and Boda⁵ allocated only a few pages to

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¹ I made a selection of English commentaries that were published by well-known academic publishers in the last 5 years (2013-2018).

² Al Wolters, *Zechariah*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2014).

³ The term “key themes” will be used in this article but there are many other synonyms used by scholars: message; theological message/theme/analysis/motif; main themes; key concepts; etc. A possible definition for the term “key theme” is “an essential theme or idea that occurs throughout a biblical book and is of vital importance for the understanding of the book.”

⁴ Anthony R. Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi*, AOTC (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015), 99-101.

⁵ Mark J. Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 41-44.

“Message” or “Key themes.” The aim of this article is to give more attention to this neglected area of Zechariah research, especially the first eight chapters.

B BRIEF REMARKS ON THE LITERARY- AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS OF ZECHARIAH 1-8

The book of Zechariah is the longest of the Book of the Twelve Prophets (Hos-Mal). Most scholars divide the book in two main sections, Zechariah 1-8 and Zechariah 9-14.⁶ This article will focus on the first eight chapters that are also referred to as Proto-Zechariah or First-Zechariah. Zechariah 1-8 may be divided into three literary units: 1:1-6 (Summons to repentance); 1:7-6:15 (Eight visions interspersed with oracles) 7:1-8:23 (Features of the time of salvation).

The text of Zechariah 1-8 places its historical setting between the second and the fourth year of Darius I, the Persian king (520-518 B.C.E.).⁷ Darius the Great ascended the Persian throne by means of a coup d’état after a period of upheaval following the death of Cyrus (530 B.C.E.) and Cambyses (522 B.C.E.). Darius’s task in the beginning of his reign was to consolidate his position and establish peace in the Persian Empire.⁸

During the reign of Darius I (522-486 B.C.E.) the Persian Empire comprised territories from the Aral Sea and the western edge of the Himalayas to the Sahara, and from the Indus River Valley to the Danube.⁹ Darius organized his Persian empire in different protectorates or satrapies which included smaller provinces. Judah (Yehud in Aramaic) was part of the fifth satrapy called Abar Nahara. Yehud was ruled by a governor and consisted of a greatly reduced territory comprising Jerusalem and its environments.¹⁰ According to Kessler¹¹ it

⁶ There are also other divisions suggested by prominent scholars: Zech 1-8, 9-11 and 12-14 or Zech 1-6, 7-8 and 9-14 or Zech 1-6 and 7-14. Cf. discussion of Petterson, “*Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi*,” 96-98; Al Wolters, “Zechariah, Book of,” *Dictionary of Old Testament Prophets*: 890.

⁷ Cf. Zech 1:1, 7; 7:1. Julia M. O’Brien, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, AOTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 164-165.

⁸ John Goldingay and Pamela J. Scalise, *Minor Prophets II*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 140, 180-181.

⁹ Matt Waters, *Ancient Persia: A Concise History of the Achaemenid Empire, 550-330 BCE* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 82.

¹⁰ Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, AB 25B (New York: Doubleday, 1987), xxxii.

¹¹ John Kessler, “Reconstructing Haggai’s Jerusalem: Demographic and Sociological Considerations and the Search for an Adequate Methodological Point of Departure,” in *‘Every City shall be Forsaken’: Urbanism and Prophecy in Ancient Israel and the Near East*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Robert D. Haak, JSOTSupp 330 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 138-145.

was probably a sparsely populated province especially when compared to Judah before the Babylonian exile.

The specific circumstances of the Jerusalem community are difficult to tell. We can accept that the economic situation of the community was bleak and spiritually they experienced apathy and feelings of hopelessness. During this time YHWH¹² called the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to initiate the physical rebuilding and the spiritual renewal of post-exilic Jerusalem.¹³

C KEY THEMES IN ZECHARIAH 1-8

It is difficult to identify the key themes. There are themes that appear in Zechariah 1-8, but which are more prominent in Zechariah 9-14 (e.g. The day of the Lord¹⁴; Messianism; Universal Kingship of YHWH; etc.). These themes cannot be described as “key themes” in Zechariah 1-8 and should rather be discussed in an article focusing on Zechariah 9-14. It is also difficult to make a sharp distinction among the different key themes and we must acknowledge that there are several similarities between the different themes.¹⁵ However, the following section is an attempt to discuss them separately.

1. YHWH’s Divine Presence and the Rebuilding of the Temple in Zion

The theme of the temple and YHWH’s presence plays a central role in Zechariah 1-8 although we find relatively few direct references to the temple (cf. Zech 1:16; 4:6-10; 6:9-15; 8:9). Zechariah stands in the midst of the Zion tradition. YHWH is in a special way present in his temple in Zion/Jerusalem and through this presence his Lordship is confirmed. The rebuilding of the temple was not viewed as a pre-condition for the time of salvation, but rather as a sign.

Zechariah’s first vision begins with a declaration by YHWH that his house will be rebuilt (1:16) and that his mighty presence will be in Zion (2:9, 17

¹² This article will mostly refer to the divine name of YHWH but the names “Lord” and “God” will also be used as synonyms.

¹³ Andrew E. Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, TOTC 28 (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 106-107.

¹⁴ There are only two references to the “Day of the Lord” in Zech 1-8 and at least 19 references in Zech 9-14.

¹⁵ A scholar like Redditt discusses several of the identified key themes in this article under the on heading of “Restoration.” Cf. Paul Redditt, “Themes in Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi,” *Int* 61/2 (2007): 188.

[2:5, 13]).¹⁶ In Zechariah 3:7 we hear that Joshua will be appointed as high priest and most important official in the temple before its completion.¹⁷

The priority of the temple in Zion underlies most of the chapters in Zechariah 1-8 but the fifth vision in chapter 4 deserves special attention. Several symbols, objects and metaphors mentioned in Zech 4 emphasise YHWH’s divine presence. This vision paints a detailed picture of a golden lampstand with seven lamps and seven lips on it that represent YHWH’s illuminating presence in the temple. The symbolism of the flames that burned perpetually with oil drawn from the two surrounding olive trees further emphasises YHWH’s presence.¹⁸ Zechariah 4:12 describes gold (NRSV oil) pouring out from the branches of the olive trees. If the flow of the golden oil is related to YHWH’s presence through his “trees”, then that flow symbolises the continuous presence of God.¹⁹

In Zechariah 6:12-15 the promises for the temple are confirmed and the completion of the temple becomes a sign of the authority of the prophet’s message (“and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you”).²⁰ The temple and the cult were viewed as one of the most important building blocks for the establishment of a new community, even more important than the monarchy and the Torah.

Haggai encouraged the people themselves to complete the building process. In comparison to that Zechariah emphasised the divine role in the building process. YHWH proclaims in Zech 1:16 “my house shall be built in it” but the text does not say who will do it. Zechariah 6:15 expects “those who are far off” to help with the project, but nowhere in Zechariah 1-8 do we read where they are called to help. The rebuilding of the temple is considered as a sign of YHWH’s love that will return to Jerusalem. The completed temple and YHWH’s presence signify that the time of judgment is over and that the time of salvation is at hand.²¹ Graigie²² summarises the importance of the temple and temple building as follows:

The temple was a symbol of God’s presence among his people; the temple rebuilding, however, somehow symbolized, and perhaps even

¹⁶ The order of the Hebrew Text (BHS) will be placed first and the NRSV of the Bible in brackets.

¹⁷ Louis C. H. Fourie, “Die Struktuur en Kerugma van Sagaria 1-8.” (DTh thesis Stellenbosch University, 1991), 299.

¹⁸ George L. Klein, *Zechariah*, NAC (Nashville, Tennessee: B &H Publishing Group, 2008), 69.

¹⁹ Meyers & Meyers, *Zechariah 1-8*, 262-263.

²⁰ All citations in this article are taken from the NRSV of the Bible.

²¹ Paul L. Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*. NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995): 43-44; O’Brien, *Zechariah*, 166-167.

²² Peter C. Graigie, *Twelve Prophets: Vol. 2*, The Daily Study Bible (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), 157.

inaugurated in some mysterious fashion, God’s renewal of his chosen people beyond that immediate time and place.

Lastly one must acknowledge that the divine presence of YHWH encompasses more than the physical building of the temple. The remnant that returned to their land, the resurgence of agricultural production, the leadership of Joshua and Zerubbabel, the words of the prophet and a spiritually restored Israel also point to the presence of YHWH in Zion.²³

2. The Lordship and Sovereignty of YHWH

The prophet Zechariah consistently refers to the sovereign God as יהוה צבאות. This epithet occurs 44 times in Zechariah 1-8 while all variant forms of the epithet occur 284 times in the OT. The meaning of יהוה צבאות may refer to (a) earthly armies; (b) heavenly hosts; (c) all creatures and powers in heaven and in earth.²⁴ It is difficult to translate the epithet and English Bibles translate the epithet in a variety of ways: Yahweh Sabaoth (JB); Lord of Hosts (KJV; NASV; NEB; NRSV; RSV); and Lord Almighty (NIV; TEV). I suggest the translation “YHWH of all powers” or “Lord of all powers.” The word “powers” can be understood as an all-inclusive word referring to all powers and hosts in heaven and on earth.²⁵

The use of יהוה צבאות in Zechariah 1-8 describes the diverse character of YHWH: God as king of the nations (Zech 2:15 [2:11]; 8:20-23); Almighty and omnipresent God (Zech 89:6); God as Spirit (Zech 4:6); God who blesses (Zech 8:4, 12); God as judge (Zech 7:12-13); God’s grace, love and forgiveness (Zech 1:16-17; 3:9-10; 8:7); et cetera.²⁶

Judah/Yehud was a very small province in contrast to the might of the Persian Empire. The prophet Zechariah reminds the people that יהוה צבאות is the One who is really in control. YHWH is the true king of the earth, more powerful than the Persian king. YHWH will judge enemy nations (1:21; 2:9 [13]; 6:8), save his people and also those who seek him (2:11; 8:20). Zechariah 1-8 emphasises that YHWH’s people have a significant role to play in the rebuilding phase of their history, but it is ultimately the work of their sovereign God (cf. 4:6)²⁷

²³ Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 117; Robert Foster, “Undoing the Future: The Theology of the Book of Zechariah.” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 34 (2012): 71-72.

²⁴ Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, “YAHWEH ZEBAOth,” *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 920-924.

²⁵ Daniel F. O’Kennedy, “The Use of the Epithet יהוה צבאות in Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.” *JNSL* 33/1 (2007): 94-97.

²⁶ O’Kennedy, “The Use of the Epithet,” 86-91.

²⁷ Pettersen, *Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi*, 100.

3. Sin and Punishment/Judgment

In the first few verses of the book (1:1-6) the prophet takes a historical retrospective view on sin and punishment. YHWH’s people had disobeyed his commandments and YHWH was justified to allow them to reap the consequences of their disobedience. The prophet summons the people to return from their “evil ways” and “evil deeds” (1:4), but the nature of the sin is not discussed. The focus of the book until chapter 5 is largely on the promises of YHWH to his people. However, we have a few references to the sins of the nations (Babylon) in the first four chapters (1:15; 2:1-4 (1:18-21); 2:12-13 [8-9]). Zechariah 5 mentions two key “sins” among YHWH’s people that he wants to remove. Verses 1-4 point to the injustice of swearing falsely in court and verses 5-11 refers to idolatry. The first of these sins reappears in Zechariah 7-8 (7:9-10; 8:16-17) while the second sin is a key concern in Zechariah 9-14. These two sins undermine the foundation of the Torah to love YHWH with all one’s heart, soul and might and to love one’s neighbour as oneself.²⁸ The prophet Zechariah warns the people not to repeat the sins of their forefathers, because such covenant violations led to the Babylonian exile (7:11-14).²⁹

Zechariah 7:9-14 and 8:16-17 rounds off the theme of Zechariah 1:1-6, but Proto-Zechariah does not end with the theme of sin and punishment. Zechariah 8:18-23 closes with a promise of a new day beyond punishment.³⁰

4. Turn to YHWH (repentance) and obedience

In the previous section (C.3) I mentioned the proclamation that the disobedience of the past was the reason for the people’s suffering (Zech 1:4-6; 7:7-14). Therefore, it is important that the people will turn to YHWH and follow his stipulations. Zechariah 1:3 plays a prominent role to introduce this theme of repentance: “Therefore say to them, Thus says the LORD of hosts: Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.” Foster³¹ argues that this basic two-part relationship between YHWH and his people reveals the structure of the entire book, not merely Proto-Zechariah: 1:1-7 Return to me (Summons); 1:8-6:15 Because I am turning to you (Promise); 7-8 Return to me (Specific command); 9:1-11:3 Because I am turning to you (Modified Promise); 11:4-17 (Failure to keep the command); 12-14 (Because I am turning to you (Faithful promise). One can differ over the specific structure, but the fact is that this theme of “turn” (שׁוּב) plays a significant role in Zechariah. The question may still be posed: What does it mean for the people to return to YHWH? Zechariah 1:4 emphasises another key word namely שָׁמַע (listen). Returning to YHWH means “listening” to YHWH in a way that differs

²⁸ Redditt, “Themes,” 194-195; Boda, *The book of Zechariah*, 43.

²⁹ Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 117.

³⁰ Redditt, “Themes,” 195.

³¹ Foster, “Undoing the Future,” 52-53.

significantly from the generations before. If there is a real active “listening” the deeds of obedience and justice will follow. Chapter 7:9-11 provides a summary of this true justice: show mercy and compassion to others, especially the widows, orphans, aliens and the poor.³²

It is not merely the people who are summoned to repentance; even the high priest is called to repentance and cleansing (3:4-7). In the vision of the woman in the basket it is described how wickedness is removed from the land (5:5-11). Israel had to confess their sins before they could receive the salvation of YHWH. Days of fasting and lamenting are of no use, because it leads to self-glorification. According to Zechariah a whole-hearted conversion was important (Zech 8:16-17).³³ The prophet summoned the people to repentance and conversion because his concern was for a right relationship with YHWH, a renewal of the covenant established between YHWH and Israel at Mount Sinai.³⁴

5. YHWH’s return, grace, love and forgiveness³⁵

O’Brein³⁶ wrote the following: “The primary message of First Zechariah is that of Yahweh’s care for Jerusalem and Yahweh’s intention to restore Jerusalem.” YHWH is presented in Zech 1-8 as a God longing for a covenant relationship with his people. He promises that He will be a God of grace, love and forgiveness. Zechariah 1-8 does not merely speak about the repentance of the people but also emphasises the return of YHWH to dwell among his people (cf. 1:3, 16; 2:5, 10-22 [2:9, 14-15]; 4:9-10; 8:3).³⁷

YHWH was so angry with his people that He nearly destroyed them (1:2), but fortunately his love, grace and forgiveness surpassed his anger. There are at least three passages that refer directly to YHWH’s forgiveness (Zech 1:16; 3:4, 9). In Zechariah 1:3 we hear the conditional words of YHWH: “Return to me and I will return to you.” According to Zech 1:16 YHWH’s return will be an unconditional return; a return because there is compassion (רַחֲמִים) in his heart. YHWH’s compassion and forgiveness will not merely be empty words. He will return to his people and to the city of Jerusalem to build His house (or temple) as a symbol of his presence, grace and forgiveness. One can say that YHWH “demonstrates” his forgiveness by the rebuilding of the temple. The phrase “and

³² Foster, “Undoing the Future,” 63-65.

³³ Daniel F. O’Kennedy, “Sagaria 1-8: ‘n Algemene oorsig,” *NGTT* 49/1&2 (2008): 76.

³⁴ Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 117.

³⁵ It is difficult to make a distinction between the following words: love, compassion, care, grace, forgiveness and even hope. These words are from the same semantic field and often used as synonyms.

³⁶ O’Brein, *Zechariah*, 166.

³⁷ Ben C. Ollenburger, “The Book of Zechariah,” *NIDB* 7, 739; Pettersen, *Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi*, 99.

the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem” (1:16b) signifies that the city too will be rebuilt. Grace and forgiveness form the starting point of the new post-exilic community and can even lead to socio-economic stability and prosperity (cf. 1:17; 8:12).³⁸

Zechariah 3:1-10 describes a remarkable vision in which Joshua the high priest was clothed in filthy garments to experience the cleansing and forgiveness that only YHWH could grant. Joshua’s guilt was taken away and he was clothed in festal apparel (3:4). The implication of this vision goes beyond the holy requirements for leaders, extending the promised cleansing and forgiveness to all the people of the land (3:9).³⁹ The intensity of the forgiveness rises in this vision: from the taking away (עבר) of Joshua’s guilt (3:4) to the immediate removal (מזיח) of the guilt of the whole land (3:9).⁴⁰

There are a few passages in Zechariah 1-8 that directly refer to grace and forgiveness. However, the theme of grace and forgiveness appears in more passages. The underlying expectations of the last two chapters (Zech 7-8) presume that Israel stands at a pivotal point in its history. Things have really begun to change on a physical and spiritual level. The people will experience the grace, forgiveness and hope.⁴¹ Zechariah 8:12 says the following:

For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.

In section C3 and above I discussed both the themes of punishment/judgment and grace/forgiveness. The question may be posed: Which theme is dominant in Zechariah 1-8? According to Wolters⁴² YHWH’s grace is the dominant note in the book of Zechariah. It is not only manifested in the present but also promised for the future. Zechariah may also be described as a prophet of hope. His hope does not depend on the obedience of the people but the sheer grace of YHWH.⁴³

6. Realized Eschatology and Future Hope

Zechariah 1-8 proclaims a realized eschatology. The future expectations are realized in the present, the future salvation becomes a reality in the present time

³⁸ Daniel F. O’Kennedy, “The Theological Portrayal of Forgiveness in Zechariah 1-8,” *Scriptura* 84 (2003), 412-414.

³⁹ Klein, *Zechariah*, 77.

⁴⁰ O’Kennedy, “Forgiveness,” 421.

⁴¹ James D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Micah-Malachi*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2011), 817.

⁴² Wolters, “Zechariah, Book of,” 897.

⁴³ Rex A. Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 73.

through specific people and institutions. Zechariah emphasizes that unparalleled salvation will come with the rebuilding of the temple. Two leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, are described as instruments through which YHWH realizes the salvation. According to Haggai Zerubbabel will be the signet ring of YHWH who will rule over everyone (Hag 2:23). Zechariah 1-8 builds on this idea and emphasises that Joshua will be the co-leader.⁴⁴ The immediate manifestation of YHWH’s presence is realized through the rebuilt temple and leaders, but also through a spiritually restored Israel and the resurgence of the agricultural production (Zech 1:17; 4:8-9; 6:15).⁴⁵

Zechariah continues to proclaim the hope of the earlier prophets for a future Davidic king who is central in YHWH’s restoration process. In Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12 this figure is called *קִנְיָ* (shoot or branch), picking up on the terminology of Jeremiah (Jer 23:5; 33:15) and the imagery of Isaiah and Ezekiel (Isa 11:1; Ezek 17). This king will serve as a priest (Zech 6:13) by cleansing sin and reversing its consequences (Zech 3:9). According to Pettersen⁴⁶ it is significant that neither of the passages identifies Zerubbabel as a shoot or a branch. Instead, a shoot is a Davidic king beyond Zerubbabel and beyond the time of Zechariah. Although the text does not directly relate *קִנְיָ* with Zerubbabel, many scholars believe that the title refers to him.⁴⁷ Redditt⁴⁸ says the following “There can be no doubt that Zechariah saw Zerubbabel as the new David, the messiah in the typical Old Testament sense of the anointed king.” This hypothesis may be correct, but unfortunately we do not have enough evidence to prove it. Although we are uncertain about the exact nature of the *קִנְיָ* it still expresses the hope in a Davidic figure.

7. Israel and the Other Nations

The Hebrew term *גוֹיִם* (nations) occurs eight times in Proto-Zechariah: Zech 1:15; 2:4 (1:21), 2:12 (2:8), 2:15 (2:11), 7:14; 8:13, 22, 23.⁴⁹ Most of these are references to God’s judgment and anger against the nations. Four of the eight

⁴⁴ Daniel F. O’Kennedy, “Sagaria 1-8: ‘n Algemene oorsig,” *NGTT* 49/1&2 (2008): 76.

⁴⁵ Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 117.

⁴⁶ Pettersen, *Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi*, 100-101.

⁴⁷ Cf. the following scholars for a detailed discussion of the different viewpoints; Wolter H. Rose, *Zemah and Zerubbabel. Messianic Expectations in the Early Postexilic Period* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 248-249; Wolters, *Zechariah*, 193-196.

⁴⁸ Redditt, *Zechariah*, 44.

⁴⁹ The plural form *גוֹיִם* (people) occurs twice in Proto-Zechariah (8:20, 22). In most instances the singular form refers to the “people of Israel and Judah” while the plural form refers to the surrounding nations. In Zechariah 8:20-23 the words “nations” and “peoples” are used as synonyms or as a word pair to emphasise that they will come to entreat the favour of YHWH (“many peoples and strong nations”).

references describe a positive attitude towards the nations. Zechariah 8:13 indicates that the house of Israel and Judah was a curse to the nations but will become a blessing. Zechariah 2:15 (11), 8:22 and 23 describes how Israel and Judah will be a blessing.⁵⁰ There is at least one other passage in Proto-Zechariah that does not use the term *goyim* (nations) but also refers to the inclusion of the nations or gentiles among the people of God. Zechariah 6:15 mentions that “those who are far off” will come and help to build the temple of the Lord.⁵¹

According to Zech 2:15 (11) many nations shall come to YHWH and He will dwell in their midst. This passage does not address the nations in the first place, but focuses on the special role for YHWH’s people in the future. Judah and Zion have a special place in YHWH’s plan which has now become a plan for all nations.⁵²

Zechariah 8:20-23 forms the last literary unit of Proto-Zechariah and depicts the ultimate response of the community to the summons of YHWH (1:3). Their obedience will introduce a new era in which Jerusalem will fulfil its original purpose as the place of divine presence on earth. God’s rule will extend over the cosmos and all nations will worship Him. The Judeans or the people of Israel will play a special role in the witness to the nations.⁵³

8. Leadership

Passages in Proto-Zechariah that focus on leadership form a central position in the structure of the book. Zechariah 3-4 emphasises YHWH’s renewal of the priestly, political and prophetic leadership roles within the post-exilic community. Zechariah envisions a renewal of the priestly office represented by Joshua from the Zadokite priesthood.⁵⁴

YHWH’s actions in purifying Joshua and clothing him with clean and holy apparel accentuate the necessity of purity and holiness for the leaders of YHWH’s people (Zech 3:4-5). Obedience to YHWH’s law is a prerequisite for religious leaders:

Thus says the Lord of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you shall rule my house and have charge of

⁵⁰ Daniel F. O’Kennedy, “Perspectives on Mission in the Book of Zechariah.” *Missionalia* 41/3 (2013): 226-227.

⁵¹ Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 1017.

⁵² Klein, *Zechariah*, 127.

⁵³ Mark, J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*. NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 397-398.

⁵⁴ Boda, *The book of Zechariah*, 42.

my courts, and I will give you the right of access amongst those who are standing here (Zech 3:7).⁵⁵

The prophet Zechariah affirms an enduring role for the prophetic voice, revealing that prophets will assist both priestly and political leadership figures by accessing divine revelation that will bring the presence of YHWH on earth. In Zechariah 1-8 there is shift in tone towards the leaders. Zechariah 3 begins in subtle ways to “criticise” the priests but in chapters 7-8 the prophet reproaches the priests for their lack of attention to social justice.⁵⁶

Zechariah 1-8 supports a concept of diarchic leadership in post-exilic Jerusalem that consisted of the religious leader Joshua and the political leader Zerubbabel. Joshua’s father Jehozadak was a high priest; therefore, Joshua was a Zadokite high priest and true descendant of Aaron. Zerubbabel the governor was officially appointed by the Persian Empire to be responsible for administrative matters in a specific geographic area. Zerubbabel’s real significance is that he was regarded as a Davidic descendant because he was the grandson of the Davidic king Jehoiachin.

The biblical text does not mention that one of these leaders was more influential than the other. Zechariah 1-8 sketches a picture of a harmonious relationship and a balance of power, two leaders working together in the temple building process (cf. Zech 4:14; 6:9-15). One can assume that there was some degree of conflict between various groups in the post-exilic community.⁵⁷ However, the text of chapters 1-8 does not indicate major conflict between Joshua and Zerubbabel.⁵⁸ It is difficult to determine the duration of the diarchic leadership model. There is a possibility that this leadership model lasted for some time after 538 B.C.E. until the completion of the temple in 515 B.C.E.

Proto-Zechariah also emphasises the close relationship between YHWH and the earthly leaders. In the fifth vision (Zech 4) the lampstand symbolizes the divine presence and the two trees symbolize Joshua and Zerubbabel (4:2-3). There is a relationship of interdependence between the trees and the lampstand. The post-exilic community could not exist without interaction between YHWH and human leaders. According to this vision these leaders are standing next to

⁵⁵ Klein, *Zechariah*, 78.

⁵⁶ Boda, *The book of Zechariah*, 42.

⁵⁷ Daniel F. O’Kennedy, “Haggai and Zechariah 1-8: Diarchic Model of Leadership in a Rebuilding Phase,” *Scriptura* 102 (2009): 583-589.

⁵⁸ Levin argues that there was major conflict between “an ambitiously militant Zerubbabel and a more spiritually actuated Joshua.” There is, however, not enough evidence to support his hypothesis (cf. Schneir Levin, “Zerubbabel: A Riddle,” *JBQ* 24/1 (1996): 14-17).

YHWH, not isolated from him (cf. 4:14 “These are the two sons of oil who stand by the Lord of the whole earth”).⁵⁹

D CONCLUDING REMARKS

Two questions may be posed at the end of the above discussion: (1) Are there any unique themes in Zechariah 1-8? (2) Can we say that the author/s had a central theme in mind? One cannot declare that there are any unique themes in Zechariah 1-8. There are similarities with many other books in the OT, especially the post-exilic prophetic books. The discussion of key themes in Zechariah 1-8 emphasises the fact that there is a definite relationship with Haggai, Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi.⁶⁰ One can indicate that Zech 1-8 places more emphasis on certain themes or discuss them in a special way, but they are not unique in the strict sense of the word. I can mention two examples:

- Leadership is an important theme in both Proto- and Deutero-Zechariah. In Zechariah 1-8 one finds references to specific leaders like Joshua and Zerubbabel. Zechariah 9-14 has no reference to a specific leader but rather uses the shepherd image as a reference to leaders (cf. 11: 8, 15-17; 13:7-9).⁶¹
- The themes of YHWH’s return, grace, love and forgiveness occur in the entire book of Zechariah. However, in Proto-Zechariah there is a unique emphasis on the forgiveness of the high priest Joshua as a representative of the community (Zech 3:1-10).

Can we say that the author/s had a central theme in mind? In a book like Haggai one can conclude that the central theme is the physical rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, but Zechariah 1-8 encompasses more than that. Foster⁶² argues that the book of Zechariah hinges on the words found in 6:15:

Those who are far away will come and help to build the temple of the LORD, and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently obey the LORD your God.

We can agree with Foster that the return of YHWH to Zion and the obedience of the people play a prominent role in Zechariah 1-8. However, the above discussion of the different themes in Zechariah 1-8 indicates that there is

⁵⁹ O’Kennedy, “Diarchic Model of Leadership,” 590.

⁶⁰ Some scholars will even discuss the theology or themes of the post-exilic prophetic books together. Cf. Redditt, “Themes,” 184-197; Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 36-40.

⁶¹ Daniel F. O’Kennedy, “The Shepherd Imagery in Zechariah 9-14,” *OTE* 22/2 (2009), 404.

⁶² Foster, “Undoing the Future,” 71-72.

not one central theme. The real strength of Proto-Zechariah’s message lies in the rich diversity of themes.

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