

The Structure of Zechariah 8 and Its Meaning

ELIE ASSIS



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ELIE ASSIS,
BAR ILAN UNIVERSITY

Chapters 1–8 and 9–14 of Zechariah are considered by most scholars today to be two separate prophetic books; only chs. 1–8 are attributed to the post-exilic time of the beginning of the 5th century BCE¹ Most scholars believe that Zech 7–8 should be regarded as one unit. This conviction is based mainly on the fact that 8:19 is the prophet’s answer to the people’s question in 7:1–3 as to whether fasting for the destruction of the Temple should be continued even after its construction had begun.² This approach is based on two main arguments, the first of which is formal, and the second of which concerns content. The formal argument is that 7:1 opens with a new formula that includes a date, as do 1:1 and 1:7. The second argument is that the people’s question to the priests in 7:3 is answered in 8:19. However, these arguments are not decisive. First, the formal opening in 7:1 can relate to ch. 7 alone. Second, of all the diverse material of ch. 8, only one verse (v. 19) relates closely to ch. 7. Only in a limited way can all of ch. 8 be related to the topic of the fasts in ch. 7. It is probable that the topic of fasting in

¹ According to most scholars, Zech 9–14 and Zech 1–8 were composed by different authors at different times. Today there is an increasing tendency to see thematic connections between the two parts. For a detailed survey on this topic, see: M. J. Boda, “From Fasts to Feasts: A Literary Function of Zechariah 7–8,” *CBQ* 65 (2003), 390–407.

² See F. Horst, *Die Zwölf kleine Propheten* (HAT, Tübingen: Mohr, 1938), 232–233; J.G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; London: Tyndale Press, 1972), 85, 140; R. Hanhart, *Sacharja* (BKAT, XIV/7,6; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener 1975), 452–456; W. Rudolph, *Haggai-Sacharja 1–8 - Sacharja 9–14 - Maleachi* (KAT, 13; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1976), 62, 151; D. L. Petersen, *Haggai, and Zechariah 1–8, A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster), 1984, 122; M. Butterworth, *Structure and the Book of Zechariah* (JSOTSup, 130; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 70–72; M. H. Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, (Part 2; FOITL; Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), 412; Boda, “From Fasts to Feasts: A Literary Function of Zechariah 7–8,” 393–395.

ch. 7 received additional notice in 8:19 but the rest of the chapter does not deal with this topic. Moreover, 8:19 does not answer the question of the people in 7:3 as to whether they should continue to fast; it merely promises that in the future, the days of fasting will become days of feasts. It does not specify whether or not the people should now fast.³

I agree with those who understand that the question about continuing to observe the fast days in 7:1–3 is answered in 7:4–14.⁴ In a recent article I suggested that God is indifferent to the question of whether the people should continue to fast or not, instead God wants the people to pay attention to social justice, as the prophet spells out in 7:8–14. In that article I claimed that Zech 8 concludes the previous chapters of the book, and that its role is to summarize the main contents of the prophecies of chs. 1–7.⁵ Indeed, Zech 8 exhibits unique formal and thematic features.⁶

There are different opinions regarding the composition of ch. 8. Some argue that Zech 8 is a unified work,⁷ while others claim that it is a collection of different prophecies, perhaps even from

³ For a survey of the various opinions regarding the relationship between chs. 7 and 8, see E. Assis, “Zechariah 8 As Revision and Digest of Zechariah 1–7,” *JHS* 10 (2010), 1–26, article 15, esp. 1–8. http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/Articles/article_143.pdf, repr. in E. Ben Zvi (ed.), *Perspectives in Hebrew Scriptures VII: Comprising the Contents of Journal of Hebrew Scriptures, vol. 10* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 421–445.

⁴ With some variations the following scholars believe that answer to the question is given within ch. 7. See C. L. Meyers and E. M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1987), 389–394; M. A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets* (vol. 2; Berit Olam; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 642; and Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 144.

⁵ See Assis, “Zechariah 8 As Revision and Digest of Zechariah 1–7.”

⁶ According to Horst, ch. 8 is an independent unit that includes independent prophetic elements. See Horst, *Die Zwölf kleine Propheten*, 205.

⁷ This approach was proposed by A. Petitjean, *Les oracles du Proto-Zacharie: un programme de restauration pour la communauté juive après l'exil* (Études bibliques; Paris: Gabalda, 1969), 365–383. He believes that the time of the chapter is prior to 538 BCE. Others who believed that the chapter is a unified entity are R. A. Mason, “The Prophets of Restoration,” in R. Coggins, A. Phillips, and M. Knibb (eds.), *Israel's Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter R. Ackroyd* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 148–149; E. W. Conrad, *Zechariah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 131–150; and B. G. Curtis, *Up the Steep and Stony Road: The Book Zechariah in Social Location Trajectory Analysis* (SBLAB, 25; Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 151. Mittmann views 8:1–8 as one unit. See S. Mittmann, “Die Einheit von Sacharja 8:1–8,” in W. Claassen (ed.), *Text and Context: Old Testament and Semitic Studies for F. C. Fensham* (JSOTSup. 48; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 269–282.

different dates.⁸ Our task here concerns the order and structure of the prophecies of ch. 8. Is the chapter a collection of ten different prophecies, or are these prophecies part of a well planned composition? Is the order of the prophecies arbitrary or do the prophecies form a structure, in which their order is deliberate and meaningful?

Chapter 8 opens with a new introduction by way of formulaic phrase: “The word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying” (v. 1). This opening, with minor variations, appears several times in earlier chapters: 1:1, 4:8, 6:9, 7:4, and 8:1. Later in this chapter are ten short, separate prophecies, each of which opens with the formulaic phrase “Thus says the Lord of Hosts,” with the exception of the second prophecy in v. 3, which begins with an abbreviated version: “Thus says the Lord.”⁹ The ten prophecies are, therefore: 1) 8:2; 2) 8:3; 3) 8:4–5; 4) 8:6; 5) 8:7–8; 6) 8:9–13; 7) 8:14–17; 8) 8:19; 9) 8:20–22, and 10) 8:23.

The ten prophecies are divided into three parts by formulaic openings and closings. The seventh prophecy, in v. 17, concludes with “says the Lord,” after which v. 18 begins with an opening phrase corresponding to the beginning of the chapter (8:1): “And the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying.”¹⁰ The fourth prophecy, in v. 6, contains another concluding phrase: “says the Lord of hosts.”¹¹ These formulaic phrases demarcate the three

⁸ Horst, *Die Zwölf kleine Propheten*, 205, 233–237; W.A.M. Beuken, *Haggai – Sacharja 1–8, Studien zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der frühnachexilischen Prophetie* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1967), 156–183; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 14; Rudolph, *Haggai-Sacharja 1–8 - Sacharja 9–14 – Maleachi*, 143–152; Petersen, *Haggai, and Zechariah 1–8, A Commentary*, 297; Y. Hoffman, “The Issue of the Fasts in the Book of Zechariah (7:1–6; 8:19) and the Formation of National Memory,” in Z. Talshir, S. Yona, and D. Sivan (eds.), *Homage to Shmuel: Studies in the World of the Bible* (Jerusalem: Ben Gurion University Press and Mosad Bialik, 2001), 112–145; J. D. Nogalski, *Literary precursors to the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW, 217; Berlin, de Gruyter, 1993), 239–240; For a discussion on the composition of Zechariah 7–8, see Boda, “From Fasts to Feasts: A Literary Function of Zechariah 7–8,” 390–407.

⁹ This opinion is held by Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*, 428–433, 442–445; P. L. Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (New Century Bible; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 84.

¹⁰ This division into two is adopted by many, see e.g. Rudolph, *Haggai-Sacharja 1–8 - Sacharja 9–14 – Maleachi*, 150–151; Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*, 428–429; Petersen, *Haggai, and Zechariah 1–8, A Commentary*, 296–297; S. Amsler, A. Lacocque, R. Vuilleumier, *Aggee, Zacharie 1–8, Zacharie 9–14, Malachie* (CAT, 11; Genève: Labor et Fides, 1988), 121, 124; Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, vol. 2, 646, 653.

¹¹ For “says the Lord of hosts,” as a closing formula, see S. A. Meier, *Speaking of Speaking: Marking Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Bible* (VTsup, 46; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 225. This formula is found in v. 11 as well, but it is

main sections of the collection of prophecies. The first section contains the first four prophecies (vv. 2–6), the second contains the fifth, sixth, and seventh prophecies (vv. 7–17), and the third is comprised of the eighth, ninth, and tenth prophecies (vv. 18–23).¹²

THE PROPHECIES OF THE FIRST PART: THE FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, AND FOURTH PROPHECIES

THE FIRST PROPHECY (V. 2)

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת קִנְאָתִי לְצִיּוֹן קִנְאָה גְדוֹלָה וְחִמָּה גְדוֹלָה
קִנְאָתִי לָהּ:

“Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath.”

The first prophecy indicates God's great jealousy and anger towards the nations, and implies their punishment for their actions against Zion. Although the verse does not make explicit the object of God's anger, clearly His wrath is directed against the nations.¹³ This is also the case in the parallel verse in 1:14–15: “I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy; and I am very displeased with the nations that are at ease; for I was but a little displeased, and they helped for evil.”¹⁴

found in the middle of the prophecy, and should be regarded there as a quotation formula, that is, to emphasize that these are the words of the prophet. This conclusion stands against Clark's opinion that it should be regarded here as a closing formula. See D. J. Clark, “Discourse Structure in Zechariah 7:1–8:23,” *The Bible Translator*, 36 (1985), 329. Against Clark, see also Meier, *op. cit.*

¹² For dividing the chapter according to formal formulae, see Clark, “Discourse Structure in Zechariah 7:1–8:23,” 328–335. Mitchell offers the following division: 8:1–8, 9–17, 18–23; H. G. Mitchell, *Haggai, Zechariah* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912), 206–215. It should be noted that no explanation is provided for his decision.

¹³ Mitchell, *Haggai, Zechariah*, 206; Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*, 411; Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 84; Mason has raised doubts regarding the explanation of this verse, Mason, “The Prophets of Restoration,” 222.

¹⁴ For the correlations between the two sources, see Rudolph, *Haggai-Sacharja 1–8 - Sacharja 9–14 - Maleachi*, 147; Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*, 411; R. L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1984), 231; Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 84; R. Mason, *Preaching the Tradition: Homily and Hermeneutics After Exile* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 221–222.

THE SECOND PROPHECY (V. 3)

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה שְׁבִתִי אֶל־צִיּוֹן וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹךְ יְרוּשָׁלַם וְנִקְרְאָה
 יְרוּשָׁלַם עִיר־הָאֱמֶת וְהַר־יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת הַר הַקֹּדֶשׁ:

“Thus says the Lord: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city; and the mountain of the Lord of hosts shall be called the holy mountain.”

The second prophecy describes the return of the Lord to His dwelling place in Jerusalem. Following the establishment of God’s presence in Jerusalem, the city’s status changes and it is once again called the “faithful city,” while the mountain of God will be called the “holy mountain.” The appellation “holy mountain” for the house of God is found in many places, such as Isa 11:9, 27:13, 56:7, 57:13, 65:11, 66:20; Jer 31:22; Ezek 20:40; Joel 2:1 and 4:17; Obad 16; Zeph 3:14; Pss 2:6, 3:5, and others.¹⁵ The term “faithful city” for Jerusalem evokes Isaiah’s epithet—prostitute—after Jerusalem had been called the “faithful city” (Isa 1:21, 26).¹⁶ An analogous expression also appears in Jer 31:22: “Habitation of Righteousness” (נוה צדק). In referring to Jerusalem as the “faithful city,” the prophet maintains that those sins of the past that Isaiah had laid out before the people no longer exist, and that Jeremiah’s promises concerning Jerusalem’s transformation into the “Habitation of Righteousness” during the time of the redemption are still valid and will come to pass. The second prophecy continues the first: After God is jealous for Jerusalem and removes the nations from its midst, He can dwell within the city.

THE THIRD PROPHECY (VV. 4–5)

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת עַד יָשְׁבוּ זְקֵנִים וְזָקֵנוֹת בְּרַחְבוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם
 וְאִישׁ מִשְׁעֲנָתוֹ בִּידוֹ מַרְבֵּי יָמִים:
 וְרַחְבוֹת הָעִיר יִמְלְאוּ יְלָדִים וְיִלְדוֹת מִשְׁחָקִים בְּרַחְבֹּתֶיהָ:

“Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.”

¹⁵ For this term in Isaiah, see: W.A.M. Beuken, “Isa 56:9–57:13 – An Example of Isaianic Legacy of Trito-Isaiah,” in J.W. Van Henten, et al. (eds.), *Tradition and Reinterpretation in Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 48–64.

¹⁶ For the meaning of this term in Isaiah and Zechariah, see Mitchell, *Haggai, Zechariah*, 206–207.

The third prophecy describes the longevity of men and women in Jerusalem in the future and how the streets of the city will be filled with children at play.¹⁷ This prophecy is the result of the previous one. God's presence in Jerusalem symbolizes its transfer from the hands of its foreign conquerors to the Judeans. With God residing in the city, a blessing rests upon those people who returned to reside in the city after having been exiled from it.

THE FOURTH PROPHECY (V. 6)

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת כִּי יִפְלֵא בְּעֵינַי שְׂאֲרֵית הָעָם הַזֶּה בַּיָּמִים
הָהֵם גַּם־בְּעֵינַי יִפְלֵא נְאֻם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:

“Thus says the LORD of hosts: Even though it seems impossible to the remnant of this people in these days, should it also seem impossible to me, says the LORD of hosts?”

The fourth prophecy expresses the people's wonderment about the realization of the redemptive promises that were made in the first prophecies of the chapter. According to this verse, these promises were marvelous not only in the eyes of the people but also in the eyes of God.¹⁸ This prophecy, which concludes the first section, shows the people's lack of trust in the prophet's descriptions of the future. The prophet speaks these words of God in order to show that even though the promises are incredible, they will indeed occur. The verse also highlights the gap between the current reality and the promises predicted for the future. Its goal is to strengthen the people's faith in the validity of the prophet's promises, although they seem disconnected from reality.¹⁹

Thus we see thematic development between the first four prophecies of ch. 8: After the declaration of God's jealousy for Jerusalem, signifying the punishment of the nations and their removal from Jerusalem, God will come to dwell in Jerusalem.²⁰ When that happens, the lives of the people of Jerusalem will be long and happy.²¹ These messages are concluded with an expression of wonder at these promises that is designed to strengthen the people's trust in their fulfillment.

¹⁷ For an analysis of the pericope, see Y. Zakovitch, “A Garden of Eden in the Squares of Jerusalem: Zechariah 8:4–6,” *Gregorianum*, 87 (2006), 301–310.

¹⁸ See Ibn Ezra and NJPS translation.

¹⁹ Petersen, *Haggai, and Zechariah 1–8, A Commentary*, 301; Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 85.

²⁰ For a different connection between the first two prophecies, see Petersen, *Haggai, and Zechariah 1–8, A Commentary*, 299.

²¹ Petersen, *Haggai, and Zechariah 1–8, A Commentary*, 300.

**THE PROPHECIES OF THE THIRD SECTION:
THE EIGHTH, NINTH, AND TENTH
PROPHECIES AND THEIR CONTINUITY**

THE EIGHTH PROPHECY (v. 19)

כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת צוֹם הָרְבִיעִי וְצוֹם הַחֲמִישִׁי וְצוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
וְצוֹם הָעֲשִׂירִי יִהְיֶה לְבֵית־יְהוּדָה לְשִׂשׁוֹן וּלְשִׂמְחָה וּלְמַעֲדִים
טוֹבִים וְהָאֱמֶת וְהַשְּׁלוֹם אֶהְבּוּ:

“Thus says the LORD of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful festivals for the house of Judah: therefore love truth and peace.”

Zechariah predicts in the eighth prophecy that the days of fasting and mourning for the destruction of the Temple and the land will become days of happiness and holidays: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful festivals for the house of Judah; therefore love truth and peace” (v. 19). In this prophecy the prophet refers again to the subject of fasts raised in ch. 7, and again he does not directly answer the people’s question. There, instead of answering the question directly, he turns to the people with his own query: “When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh month these seventy years, did you at all fast for Me, even to Me? And when you eat, and when you drink, are you not they that eat, and they that drink?” (7:5–6). Later, the prophet admonishes the people, criticizing their societal relations (7:8–14), but his words still contain no direct answer to the question as to whether to fast or not. I am in agreement with those who believe that the prophet’s reproach to the people comprises his answer to their question.²² The prophet is dismayed that the people concern themselves with an external matter like fasting; he maintains that fasting is not the main issue with which they should be involved. Mourning the destruction of the Temple, Zechariah claims, is an area under the people’s jurisdiction, not God’s. What God expects from the people is that they focus on that which might have prevented the destruction in the first place: doing justice.²³ In 8:19, the prophet returns to the same topic, and, yet again, he does *not* address the question of whether to fast, notwithstanding the

²² Mitchell, *Haggai, Zechariah*, 199. Others, too, have adopted this interpretation with some variations. See, e.g. Mason, *Preaching the Tradition*, 215–218; Petersen, *Haggai, and Zechariah 1–8, A Commentary*, 288.

²³ Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, vol. 2, 642–643.

prevailing opinion of scholars to the contrary. Nonetheless, the prophet comes to strengthen the people, reminding them that in the future their days of mourning will be turned to days of joy.²⁴

THE NINTH PROPHECY (VV. 20–22)

20 כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת עַד אֲשֶׁר יָבֹאוּ עַמִּים וְיִשְׁבִּי עָרִים
רְבוֹת:

21 וְהָלְכוּ יִשְׁבִּי אֶחָת אֶל־אֶחָת לֵאמֹר נִלְכָּה הַלֹּדֶף לְחַלּוֹת אֶת־פְּנֵי
יְהוָה וּלְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי גַם־אֲנִי:

22 וּבָאוּ עַמִּים רַבִּים וְגוֹיִם עַצוּמִים לְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
בִּירוּשָׁלַם וּלְחַלּוֹת אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה:

²⁰“Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, the inhabitants of many cities; ²¹the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Come, let us go to entreat the favor of the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going. ²²Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favor of the LORD.”

In the ninth prophecy, Zechariah describes the nations’ intention to come to Jerusalem in order to seek favor with God. After he speaks in the eighth prophecy about the days of mourning becoming days of joy for Judah and for the people who dwell in Zion, the prophet then addresses the meaning of these events on the universal plane—how the redemption of Israel will also influence the nations to receive God as their Lord and will cause them to entreat His favor. It is possible that the fact that a Jerusalemite society embracing the values of loving truth and peace (8:19) is the reason why Jerusalem will eventually be the center of the nations.²⁵

²⁴ Many believe that 8:19 is the prophet’s answer to the people’s question in 7:3. See, e.g., Ibn Ezra; Horst, *Die Zwölf kleine Propheten*, 232–233; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 85; Rudolph, *Haggai-Sacharja 1–8 - Sacharja 9–14 - Malachi*, 151; Petersen, *Haggai, and Zechariah 1–8, A Commentary*, 312; Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*, 334–442; Butterworth, *Structure and the Book of Zechariah*, 70–71; Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 79; Conrad, *Zechariah*, 131–150; and Boda, “From Fasts to Feasts: A Literary Function of Zechariah 7–8,” 398–401.

²⁵ For the universalistic tendencies in these verses, see Mitchell, *Haggai, Zechariah*, 215–216; Mason, “The Prophets of Restoration,” 149.

THE TENTH PROPHECY (v. 23)

זֶה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת בַּיָּמִים הַהֵמָּה אֲשֶׁר יַחֲזִיקוּ עֲשָׂרָה אַנְשִׁים
 מִכָּל לְשׁוֹנוֹת הַגּוֹיִם וְהִחֲזִיקוּ בְּכִנְיָ אִישׁ יְהוּדִי לֵאמֹר גִּלְכָּה עִמָּכֶם
 כִּי שָׁמַעְנוּ אֱלֹהִים עִמָּכֶם:

“Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”

The tenth prophecy (v. 23) expands on the theme of the ninth. While in the ninth prophecy the nations aspire to seek God’s favor, their goal in the tenth is to join the Jews and accompany them to Jerusalem, galvanized by the recognition that God dwells in their midst. This aspiration is one part in the series of events in Jerusalem that were explicated in previous prophecies. Thus we can see a clear development between the three prophecies in the third part of the chapter.

**THE THREE FINAL PROPHECIES AS A REVERSE
 ANALOGY OF THE FIRST THREE**

The last three prophecies parallel the first three but in the reverse order: The eighth prophecy (8:19) parallels the third in 8:4–5. In the eighth prophecy, the prophet speaks about the days of mourning turning to days of joy. In the third prophecy, he speaks about how the streets of Jerusalem will be filled with children at “play,” which is comparable to “joy.” Indeed, the roots שִׂמְחָה (joy) and שָׂחָק (play) appear as synonyms elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, for example, in Prov 14:13 and Eccl 2:2 and 10:19.

The ninth prophecy (8:20–22) describes how foreigners will come to seek God in Jerusalem because they recognize His divinity: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: People shall yet come, the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying: ‘Let us go to entreat the favor of the Lord of hosts; I myself am going.’ Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favor of the Lord.” This prophecy corresponds to and contrasts with the second prophecy (8:3). On the foundation of the second prophecy’s mention of God’s return to Jerusalem, the ninth prophecy adds that the nations wish to come to Jerusalem to entreat the favor of God’s name.

The tenth prophecy (8:23) discusses the desire of the nations, who recognize that God dwells in the midst of Judah, to join those Jews who have returned to the land of Judah: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’” This prophecy corresponds to the first prophecy in 8:2, which declares the divine jealousy towards the nations that attacked

Jerusalem. The tenth prophecy depicts the reverse situation in which foreigners want to participate in the renewed Jewish ascent to Jerusalem.

These are the three themes of the first and last prophecies:

| First part | Third part |
|--|--|
| First prophecy: The nations' punishment from God's jealousy for Jerusalem. | Tenth prophecy: The nations join the Jews' ascent to Jerusalem |
| Second prophecy: The Divine presence in Jerusalem | Ninth prophecy: The nations' desire to entreat favor of God |
| Third prophecy: Increased lifespan, and the overflowing of Jerusalem with children at play | Eighth prophecy: The reversal of the days of fasting to days of joy and festivals. |

THE PROPHECIES OF THE SECOND PART: THE FIFTH, SIXTH, SEVENTH PROPHECIES, AND THEIR PROGRESSION

We will now turn to the middle part of the chapter, which includes the fifth, sixth, and seventh prophecies.

THE FIFTH PROPHECY (8:7–8)

7 כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת הַנְּנִי מוֹשִׁיעַ אֶת־עַמִּי מֵאֶרֶץ מִזְרַח
וּמֵאֶרֶץ מְבֹאֵה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ:

8 וְהִבֵּאתִי אֹתָם וְשָׁכְנוּ בְּתוֹךְ יְרוּשָׁלַם וְהָיִי־לִי לְעַם וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה
לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים בְּאֱמֶת וּבְצִדְקָה:

⁷“Thus says the LORD of hosts: I will save my people from the east country and from the west country; ⁸and I will bring them to live in Jerusalem. They shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.”

In the fifth prophecy, Zechariah describes the ingathering of the exiles of Judah, who come with God from the corners of the earth to Jerusalem. The prophecy is not only about the salvation of the people, but about the theological significance of the exiles' arrival in Jerusalem as well. The prophecy emphasizes that the people are the nation of God, and that God will bring them to Jerusalem, and with the renewal of their covenant with God: “They shall be My people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.”

THE SIXTH PROPHECY

9 כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת תְּחִזְקֶנָּה יְדֵיכֶם הַשְּׁמַעִים בְּיָמַי
הָאֵלֶּה אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה מִפִּי הַנְּבִיאִים אֲשֶׁר בְּיוֹם יוֹסֵד
בֵּית־יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת הֵחִיל לְהַבְנוֹת:

10 כִּי לִפְנֵי הַיָּמִים הָהֵם שָׂכַר הָאָדָם לֹא נָהִיָּה וּשְׂכַר הַבְּהֵמָה
אֵינָנָה וְלִיּוֹצֵא וּלְבָא אֵין־שְׁלוֹם מִן־הַצָּר וְאֲשַׁלַּח אֶת־כָּל־הָאָדָם
אִישׁ בְּרֵעֵהוּ:

11 וְעַתָּה לֹא כִיָּמִים הָרָאשֻׁנִים אֲנִי לְשֹׂאֲרֵית הָעָם הַזֶּה נָאִם יְהוָה
צְבָאוֹת:

12 כִּי־זָרַע הַשְּׁלוֹם הִגִּפֶּן תִּתֵּן פְּרִיָּה וְהָאָרֶץ תִּתֵּן אֶת־יְבוּלָהּ
וְהַשְּׂמִים יִתְּנוּ טֶלֶם וְהַנְּחֹלְתֵי אֶת־שֹׂאֲרֵית הָעָם הַזֶּה אֶת־כָּל־אֵלֶּה:

13 וְהָיָה כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיִיתֶם קְלָלָה בְּגוֹיִם בֵּית יְהוּדָה וּבֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל בֵּן
אוֹשִׁיעַ אֶתְכֶם וְהָיִיתֶם בְּרָכָה אֶל־תִּירְאוּ תְּחִזְקֶנָּה יְדֵיכֶם:

⁹“Thus says the LORD of hosts: Let your hands be strong—you that have recently been hearing these words from the mouths of the prophets who were present when the foundation was laid for the rebuilding of the temple, the house of the LORD of hosts. ¹⁰For before those days there were no wages for people or for animals, nor was there any safety from the foe for those who went out or came in, and I set them all against one other. ¹¹But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, says the LORD of hosts. ¹²For 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. ¹³Just as you have been a cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you and you shall be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.”

The sixth prophecy is the longest of the prophecies in this chapter.²⁶ Its purpose is to strengthen the listeners, as indicated by the words of encouragement—“Let your hands be strong”—that appear at the beginning and end of the section, thereby creating a framework.²⁷ The prophecy describes the economic situation after the founding of the Temple compared to how it was beforehand,

²⁶ Sweeney believes that this prophecy’s length is explained by the fact that it conveys the chapter’s main purpose, namely, the demand to build the Temple. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, vol. 2, 649. However, it should be noted that this text does not contain a demand to build the Temple. Rather, it assures the people that the economic situation will be improved once the Temple is built.

²⁷ See Petersen, *Haggai, and Zechariah 1–8, A Commentary*, 304; Amsler, *Aggee, Zacharie 1–8*, 122; Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 86.

when people could not earn a living, and when there was no peace—probably indicating a lack of economic security. This situation also led to unstable social relations: “for I set all men every one against his neighbor” (v. 10). God declares, however, that after the founding of the Temple, the land will release its harvest and the sky its rain (v. 12). This economic situation reflects God’s intention to bequeath to the people their land: “I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these things” (v. 12). The situation described here does not express the realization of all the longed-for predictions, and so the prophet assures the people in v. 13: “And it shall come to pass that, as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing; fear not, but let your hands be strong.” According to this verse, the future salvation has yet to occur. This prophecy reflects the people’s sense of fragility, and therefore the words of encouragement are repeated twice, at the beginning of the prophecy and at the end—“Let your hands be strong”—and the prophet further encourages the people, saying “Fear not” (v. 13).²⁸ The prophet maintains that the future will be good, and to bolster this claim, he points to the economic transformation between the time before the founding of the Temple and after it. This prophecy brings to mind the words of Haggai that the people’s difficult economic situation is the result of not building the Temple; the prophet promises that after construction of the Temple, the situation will be reversed. According to the reality that this prophecy describes, it seems that the Temple was established and Zechariah promises that Haggai’s words will be realized (1:7–11 and 2:15–19).²⁹

After the prophet speaks in the fifth prophecy about the return of the people to Jerusalem and of the renewal of covenantal relations between God and the people, the sixth prophecy (8: 9–13) takes those concepts as the basis for its own central idea and expands them. The construction of the Temple signifies the renewal of the relationship between people and God following the exile of the people and the destruction of the Temple. The improving economic situation is the result of this renewal, as we

²⁸ Similar words of encouragement are found in Haggai 2:4–5. For the people’s concerns and the prophet’s response see E. Assis, “To Build or Not to Build: A Dispute between Haggai and His People (Hag 1),” *ZAW*, 119 (2007), 514–527; E. Assis, “Composition, Rhetoric and Theology in Haggai 1:1–15,” *JHS*, 7 (2007) 1–14 http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/Articles/article_72.pdf.

²⁹ For the relationship between this prophecy and the work of Haggai, see e.g. Mitchell, *Haggai, Zechariah*, 210–211; J. E. Tollington, *Tradition and Innovation in Haggai and Zechariah 1–8* (JSOTSup, 150; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 30.

see in many sources that predicate the economic situation on the people's religious state (for example, Lev 26:3–5, Deut 7:12–16 and 11:13–17). Moreover, this prophecy, which promises a blessing to the people instead of the curse of being dispersed among the nations, augments the fifth prophecy's promise to gather in the people from the corners of the earth.

THE SEVENTH PROPHECY (VV. 14–17)

14 כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת כְּאֲשֶׁר זָמַמְתִּי לְהָרַע לָכֶם בְּהִקְצִיף
אֲבֹתֵיכֶם אֶתִּי אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת וְלֹא נָחַמְתִּי:

15 בְּן שְׁבַתִּי זָמַמְתִּי בַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה לְהִיטִיב אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַם וְאֶת־בַּיִת
יְהוּדָה אֶל־תִּירְאוּ:

16 אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּ דַבְּרוּ אִמְת אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ אִמְת
וּמִשְׁפַּט שְׁלוֹם שְׁפֹטוּ בְּשַׁעְרֵיכֶם:

17 וְאִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵת רֵעֵהוּ אֶל־תִּחְשְׁבוּ בְּלִבְבְּכֶם וּשְׁבַעַת שֶׁקֶר
אֶל־תִּאָּהֲבוּ כִּי אֶת־כָּל־אֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר שָׁנֵאתִי נֹאֵם־יְהוָה:

¹⁴“For thus says the LORD of hosts: Just as I purposed to bring disaster upon you, when your ancestors provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the LORD of hosts, ¹⁵so again I have purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; do not be afraid. ¹⁶These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, ¹⁷do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the LORD.”

The seventh prophecy advances the idea of the sixth prophecy, as is already made evident by the addition of the word “For” (כִּי) to the standard opening formula. Like the rest of the prophecies in this chapter, this one also opens with words of encouragement, vv. 14–15: “For thus says the Lord of hosts: As I purposed to bring disaster upon you, when your ancestors provoked Me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the Lord of hosts, so again have I purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; do not be afraid.” The people were living with the consequences of the destruction that God had brought on them, and the prophet affirms that just as God said He would punish them, so too would He do goodness to them as He promised. However, this prophecy presents the opposite idea to the former one, and is different from all other prophecies in the chapter. It begins by recalling the people's sin and God's angry response: “When your ancestors provoked Me to wrath” (v. 14). This threatening component continues to hover during the prophet's presentation of the conditions for the realization of all the promises for good that appear in the remaining prophecies: “These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, do not devise evil in

your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the Lord” (vv. 16–17). This prophecy stipulates the condition under which the favorable prophecies will be fulfilled: the rectification of social conduct. The prophet requires that people speak the truth to each other and make righteous judgments, and that they abstain from thinking evil of one another and from swearing false oaths. All these sins are hated by God. The contrast between this prophecy and the previous one is reflected in the opening and closing of the two prophecies. The sixth prophecy opens and closes with words of encouragement: “Let your hands be strong . . . Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.” Though the seventh prophecy also encourages, and also contains the formula of encouragement “do not be afraid” (v. 15), its threatening nuance is apparent in the harsh, negative words of its opening and closing phrases: “As I purposed to bring disaster upon you” (v. 14), and “All these are things that I hate” (v. 17).³⁰ This prophecy also constitutes a direct continuation of the previous prophecy. Although the seventh prophecy, unlike the sixth, introduces an element of threat, it shares with the previous prophecy the same role of encouragement, conveyed through the same expression: “do not be afraid” (vv. 13, 15). The continuity between the seventh and the sixth prophecies is also manifested in the common structure of the concluding sentence of the sixth prophecy and of the opening sentence of the seventh, which connote similar concepts in reverse forms: v 13 at the end of the sixth prophecy:

And it shall come to pass that, **as** you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel,

So will I save you, and you shall be a blessing; **do not be afraid**, but let your hands be strong.

and vv 14–15 in the seventh prophecy:

As I purposed to bring disaster upon you, when your ancestors provoked Me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the Lord of hosts,

So again I have purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; **do not be afraid**.

The structure of the second part of the chapter (the fifth, sixth, and seventh prophecies) is, therefore:

- Fifth prophecy: The people return to dwell in Jerusalem. The covenant between God and the people is renewed.

³⁰ Petersen, *Haggai, and Zechariah 1–8, A Commentary*, 309, 311–312.

- Sixth prophecy: The prophecy of peace, abundance, and blessing.
- Seventh prophecy: That good that God designated for the people in Jerusalem depends on their deeds in the social realm.

**PROPHECIES IN THE SECOND SECTION IN PARALLEL
TO THE FIRST AND THIRD SECTIONS**

In the fifth prophecy (8:7–8), Zechariah predicts the ingathering of the exiles of Judah and the arrival of the dispersed people in Jerusalem, and also the renewal of the covenant between the people and God. This prophecy corresponds to the first and second prophecies (in the first section) and the tenth and ninth prophecies (in the third section). The first prophecy recounts God’s jealousy for Jerusalem and the punishment of the nations, and the second describes the return of God to dwell in Jerusalem after His anger against the nations. Indeed, the verb “dwell” (שכן) appears both in the second and the fifth prophecies: In the second, the reference is to God, who will dwell in Jerusalem, and in the fifth it is the people who will return to dwell there. After depicting this return, the fifth prophecy discusses the renewal of covenantal relations between God and the people. The ninth prophecy expresses the desire of the nations to cling to God following their punishment at His hands, as is related in the first prophecy, and following the renewal of covenantal relations between God and the people in Jerusalem, as the fifth prophecy relates. These relations are, in turn, based on the concept of God entering Jerusalem, which is described in the second prophecy. In the tenth prophecy, the nations intend to align themselves with the Jews because God is in their midst, a concept that is based on the covenant between God and Judah described in the fifth prophecy.

The sixth prophecy (8:9–13) describes the amelioration of the economic situation following the establishment of the Temple.³¹ The prophet describes the produce of the land, in particular the yield of the vine and the dew of the heavens. This prophecy corresponds to the third and eighth prophecies, which speak of the days of joy and the increased longevity that are based on the sound economic situation described in the sixth prophecy. Indeed, associations between agricultural prosperity and joy are found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, such as the concept underlying the joy of the harvest festival (Lev 23:39–41) and the motif of joy at the time of eating in the Temple and the blessings of material

³¹ For the connection between the establishment of the Temple and economic abundance within the post-exilic prophecy, see Assis, “The Temple in the Book of Haggai,” 1–10.

prosperity that God gives in Deut 17:5–7 and Deut 26:11. This connection between economic prosperity and happiness is also apparent in the description of the idyllic days of Solomon’s reign in 1 Kgs 4:20: “Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and making merry.” This verse connects the various elements that appear in the third and sixth prophecies. The situation described in the days of Solomon refers to the increase in population, as did the third prophecy of Zechariah; eating and drinking are mentioned in the sixth and eighth prophecies, and joy is mentioned in the third and eighth. It seems, therefore, that the combination of ideas that arises in the third, sixth, and eighth prophecies are based on the archetypal description of the days of Solomon.³² For other sources that append economic prosperity to joy, see Isa 9:2, 16:10, 24:7, and Joel 1:16, 2:23. The establishment of peace in the eighth prophecy (v. 19) is based on the vision of peace described in the sixth prophecy (v. 12).

The seventh prophecy (8:14–17) is an extension of the sixth, but has no parallel in either the first or last parts of the chapter. It contains implicit warnings of the misfortune that may befall the people if they do not treat each other fairly.

The structure of the prophecies in the chapter as a whole is:

- A Prophecy 1 (8:2): Jealousy for Jerusalem—punishment for the nations.
- B Prophecy 2 (8:3): Dwelling of God in Jerusalem.
- C Prophecy 3 (8:4–5): Good life in Jerusalem.
- D Prophecy 4 (8:6): The wonder of the people and God about what the prophet prophesied above.
- A + B Prophecy 5 (8:7–8): The salvation of people, the ingathering of the exiles in Jerusalem, and the renewal of covenantal relations between God and the people.
- C Prophecy 6 (8:9–13): With the construction of the Temple, the promises of a good life and agricultural abundance in the land.
- D Prophecy 7 (8:14–17): The condition for good is the establishment of equitable social relations
- C Prophecy 8 (8:19): The days of mourning will become days of joy.
- B Prophecy 9 (8:20–22): The nations will desire to entreat God’s favor in Jerusalem.
- A Prophecy 10 (8:23): The nations’ participation in the Jews’ ascent to Jerusalem.

³² See Assis, *op. cit.*, 3.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this article I attempted to show that the arrangement of the collection of prophecies in Zechariah ch. 8 is not random but is a well-designed structure intended to be read as one meaningful sequence, notwithstanding the fact that each component has significance even when considered independent of the other prophecies. I based this claim on the internal structure of the arrangement of the prophecies, in which each prophecy is an additional tier of the one adjoining it, particularly within each one of the three main chapter sections.

The first part of the collection, which includes prophecies one through four, reflects the first stage of the process of redemption: the removal of the nations from Jerusalem, the return of God and the people to Jerusalem, and the length and quality of life in Jerusalem. The prophet assures the people of their longevity and of the many children who will play in Jerusalem's streets.

While the second section maintains the positive description, it places increased emphasis on the theological meaning of the redemption. After the description of the return of God and the people to Jerusalem, and of the good, ordinary life in the city, the second section turns in the fifth prophecy to the renewal of covenantal relations between God and the people. The sixth prophecy focuses on the theological realm as well, discussing first the founding of the Temple and then the economic good that will result from this. The seventh prophecy, the conclusion and climax of the second part, ends with a closing formula ("says the Lord"), immediately after which is a new opening phrase, similar to the opening of the entire chapter: "And the word of the Lord came to me, saying." The fact that this is the seventh prophecy also marks this prophecy as the culmination of the prophecies thus far. This prophecy also focuses on the theological aspects of the prophecies, and promises that the good conditions will continue as long as equitable social relations are maintained. This prophecy evokes past sins, and hints at the possibility of new punishments if the people return to their former sins. The prophet placed this prophecy, with its implicit warning to the people, as the climax of the theological section of the chapter.

But the prophet chose not to conclude this collection of prophecies with a threatening tone, and perhaps this is why three prophecies, all positive, follow the seventh. In this section, the prophet opens with a promise that the days of mourning will become days of joy, after which he turns to the universal aspect of the redemption, unmentioned until now. While in the first and second parts the prophet deals with the people, God, and Jerusalem, in the third part-- in the ninth and tenth prophecies--the prophet shows how the nations will express their faith in God, their recognition of the Jews as God's people, and their understanding that Jerusalem is a city in which they can join the Jews and seek God's favor. In the first prophecy, the nations are

the object of God's anger; in the ninth and tenth prophecies, the nations seek closeness with God.

We can thus see that the chapter contains two focal points. The first prophecies lead primarily to the first focal point of the seventh prophecy, a prophecy that hints at the dangerous possibility that the people will return to the sins of their ancestors. The second focal point is found at the conclusion of the entire collection. There, united together, are the central concepts of the connections between God, Judah, and Jerusalem, and the world's recognition of the status of the city, the people, and God.