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Jerusalem inhabited without walls. Peter's confession.

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Transcript

Zechariah chapter 2. 1 And I will be to her a wall of fire all around, declares the LORD, and I will be the glory in her midst. 2 Up, up, flee from the land of the north, declares the LORD. 3 For I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens, declares the LORD.

4 Up, escape to Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon. 5 For thus says the LORD of hosts, after his glory sent me to the nations who plundered you, for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye. 6 Behold, I will shake my hand over them, and they shall become plunder for those who serve them.

7 Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me. 8 Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion. 9 For behold, I come, and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD.

10 And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people, and I will dwell in your midst. 11 And you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. 12 And the LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.

13 Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling. Zechariah's night visions come in the earlier stages of the rebuilding of the temple after the return from exile, in a situation where the Jewish returnees seem beleaguered and pressured by their adversaries on various sides, and also dispirited by a sense of how much reduced the glory of the nation has been, and how much smaller the new restored temple is from the former one. Zechariah's messages bring divine encouragement and a sense of what God is doing in their time and through their work.

As James Jordan argues at length, it's important to recognize the connection between these visions and the rebuilding of the temple that's taking place. Zechariah's visions are directly addressing the situation in the nation at the time, when the people are re-establishing this building for the Lord's presence in their midst. He is giving them a divine perspective, helping them to recognize that as they are raising this symbol of God's throne on earth, the Lord is establishing his rule in a new way among the nations.

In the first chapter there were two key visions, the visions of the horses among the myrtle trees in the depths, and the second vision, the vision of the four horns and the four craftsmen. Both of these visions related to temple themes, and as we move into chapter two, temple themes continue in various ways. In scripture, sacred space is generally measured space.

We are given the dimensions of the tabernacle and also the temple. In the book of Ezekiel we are given a number of measurements concerning the visionary temple, in some passages that provide important parallels to this passage. In Ezekiel chapter 4 verses 2-3, In visions of God he brought me to the land of Israel, and set me down on a very high mountain, on which was a structure like a city to the south.

When he brought me there, behold there was a man whose appearance was like bronze, with a linen cord and a measuring reed in his hand, and he was standing in the gateway. There would seem to be some obvious parallels between this figure in Ezekiel chapter 40 and the figure that we encounter in Zechariah chapter 2. However, there are also some important differences. The figure in Ezekiel chapter 40 is measuring using a measuring rod, whose dimensions are given to us as six long cubits.

Here the measurement occurs through a measuring line. The measuring rod would usually be used for measuring buildings, a measuring line for measuring land. This, as James Jordan notes, is already an indication that what is being measured is not the architectural structures that are bounded by city walls, but larger tracts of open countryside in which people would dwell.

This would seem to support the view that the interaction between the angel and the young man in verse 4 might not be with the man that goes out to measure, who already has the instruments suited for the task, but with Zechariah himself. On the other hand, the fact that he is instructed to run to speak to the young man might suggest that he is

pursuing the man that has already gone out. The prophecy that he is given concerns a new way that Jerusalem will exist among the nations.

Jerusalem at that time was not fully fortified, it had some of the remaining wall around it, but the wall would still be rebuilt and wouldn't be rebuilt until the time of Nehemiah many years later. In the context of Nehemiah, the rebuilding of the wall is designed to give the people security and safety from their opposing enemies and to enable Jerusalem to enjoy greater independence and power. In that context, the lack of a full wall is a sign of weakness and vulnerability.

Here, however, the image of a city without walls is of a city that has confidence in its existence. It can spread out, the people are secure, they are not threatened by their enemies, so they don't need to be bounded by a wall to the same degree. They do, however, enjoy a defence.

It's the defence that the Lord himself provides. He is a wall of fire all around, and the glory in their midst. This, of course, is imagery that should remind us of the story of the Exodus.

The Lord guards and accompanies his people with the pillar of cloud and fire, and is the glory in their midst as his presence accompanies them in the tabernacle. Exodus themes are found elsewhere in this chapter, particularly in the spoils and plunder taken by former servants in verse 9, and a mixed multitude of other nations joining themselves to the Lord in verse 11. At the end of chapter 1, Zechariah had been shown the four horns that had scattered Judah, that is, Jerusalem and Israel.

Then the Lord showed him four craftsmen as a response to the horns, those who would build up the temple, establishing the throne of the Lord in the world, over against the powers of the nations that represented a sort of false altar. The world is going to be set up as a true altar once more. Perhaps a clue to the meaning of verse 6 is found in Revelation chapter 7 verse 1. After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.

In contrast to most commentators upon this text, Jordan suggests that there is a significance in the fact that the people have been spread abroad as the four winds of the heavens. This is different from saying that they have been scattered or divided to or toward the four winds of heaven. The possibility is raised that they are not being put into the power of the four winds of heaven, to divide and scatter them, but they are being set up like the powers of the four winds of heaven, spread out among the earth, but empowered by the Holy Spirits that they might act as the winds of God among the nations.

The call then in verses 6 and 7 to flee from the land of the north and to escape to Zion,

according to Jordan, is not so much a call to return back to the land of Israel, but rather a call for spiritual separation, something similar to what we see in the book of Revelation in Come out of her my people. Many of the Jews were in danger of fitting in a bit too much in the lands of their exile. They needed to flee from the land of the north and escape to Zion in the sense of disassociating themselves from cultures that they would easily become assimilated into in their pagan ways.

The new life of Jerusalem is not so much a city that is bounded by walls in the middle of the land of Israel, rather it is a larger confident city that is spread out among all of the nations like the winds of heaven, bounded not so much by physical fortifications, but by the protected power of the Lord. The Lord will act on behalf of his people. Anyone who threatens his people, he will act against them and prove his power over them.

The enemies of the Jews will become plunder for them. We might think here of the way that the Lord gave the Egyptians into the hands of his people so that they plundered the Egyptians as they left the land. Once again this fits in with various Exodus themes in the chapter.

We might also, as Jordan suggests, see a connection between this and the story of Esther. In Esther chapter 3 verse 8 for instance, Haman says to King Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. In that book Haman tries to destroy the Jews in a great genocide, but the Lord through Esther and Mordecai dramatically saves his people.

Such an event could then be seen as a fulfillment of part of what the prophecy here is speaking about. Israel's life is no longer focused very narrowly within the walls of Jerusalem. As a nation they are spread out throughout the whole world and it is God himself who surrounds them with protection.

This is a cause of rejoicing for Zion. The Lord has returned to dwell in the midst of her once more and as his presence is manifested among them, many nations will join themselves to the Lord in that day. Again we see some sort of fulfillment of this in Esther chapter 8 verse 17, And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews for fear of the Jews had fallen on them.

Such actions of the Lord on behalf of his people would demonstrate that they were his people and that he was their God. They were the Lord's special portion and Jerusalem was once more the site of his dwelling. This prophecy then would have been a source of great encouragement to the people rebuilding the temple.

It ends with a declaration that the Lord has roused himself from his holy dwelling. He is about to act in the earth to shake up the nations and to act on behalf of his people. Even as his people have been spread throughout the world, scattered to the four winds, they have become like the four winds and now empowered by the wind of his spirit, they

would affect his work among all of the nations.

While the new temple might look inglorious and small in comparison to the old Solomonic temple, it would be the site of the Lord's symbolic throne as he demonstrated his power in a new and more glorious way among all of the peoples. A question to consider. Enumerate the different Exodus motifs that you can see within this chapter.

How can they help us to understand what is taking place here? Matthew chapter 16 verses 13 to 28. Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, Who do people say that the Son of Man is? And they said, Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to them, But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter replied, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus answered him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.

But he turned and said to Peter, Get behind me, O Satan! You are a hindrance to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. Then Jesus told his disciples, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. In the second half of Matthew chapter 16 is one of the strongest declarations of Christ's identity within the Gospels, given by Peter as he confesses that Christ is the Son of God.

Jesus asks his disciples who men say that he is, and there are a list of prophets given in response, Elijah, or maybe John the Baptist who has come back, or maybe Jeremiah or some other of the prophets. The association with Elijah can be seen back in Malachi, at the end of Malachi that promise that Elijah will come before that great day of the Lord.

Maybe Jesus is that promise coming to pass.

Maybe John the Baptist was only the start of the mission and there needs to be another coming in the spirit and power of John the Baptist to complete it. Maybe in the same way as Elisha finishes the ministry of Elijah. And Christ could be that one.

Other prophets seem to be mentioned. No one seems to mention Moses here, which is interesting. He is the great prophet that is to come like Moses, but that is not mentioned at this point.

Why is Jeremiah mentioned? Jeremiah is a righteous sufferer and martyr. He's led as a lamb to the slaughter in Jeremiah chapter 11 verse 19. He's a prophet who preaches against the temple.

Maybe Christ is coming in that mould. When Peter declares Christ to be the son of the living God, Christ responds by giving a symmetrical statement. You are the Christ, the son of the living God.

You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church. There is a symmetry between those two statements. What does it mean that Christ declares Peter to be the rock? First of all, this is something that is not exclusive to the book of Matthew.

We find a similar statement in John chapter 1 verse 42. He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, you are Simon the son of John.

You shall be called Cephas, which means Peter. There are various theories about what it means for Christ to call Peter, Peter. Why is he called the rock? Why is he associated with this? Maybe we can look back at Isaiah chapter 51 verse 1 to 2 for some hint of what it could mean.

Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you.

For he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him. Abraham there is the rock. He's the rock from which Israel was drawn and hewn out as a nation.

In John the Baptist teaching in Matthew chapter 3 we've already seen what might be an allusion back to this. When John said that God could raise up from the stones children for Abraham, it was most likely that his hearers would think back to this chapter from Isaiah. Peter, like Abraham, is one who stands at the head of a people.

As Christ forms his church, he forms it with Peter as the leading one of the disciples. Christ is going to build a church. Now it's interesting seeing the interplay of the language of an assembly.

The church is not so much a building as an assembly of people like a military assembly. Christ is going to establish a new assembly but he's going to establish it as a building. It's a building and also an assembly of people.

We can think about a military assembly. We can think also about the building of a temple. And so these two things go alongside each other.

Within the epistles this interplay is explored in much more detail. We see the way that Paul on the one hand will talk about Christ building a body and on the other hand talking about him building a building or of the building being knit together as if by sinews. This language of the body, this language of the house and the way that the people are described as living stones or built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

We're building a house but we're also building a people, an assembly of people. Jeremiah uses some sort of language of building people in places like chapter 12 verse 16, 18 verse 9, 31 verse 4, 33 verse 7 and 42 verse 10. So this does have some sort of precedent in the Old Testament.

The military connotations of an assembly might also be worth looking into here. Maybe we're supposed to think back to Israel encamped around Sinai, God forming a people in that context. And there the tabernacle itself is supposed to represent Sinai and the people at Sinai and also a body.

The tabernacle is described in many ways that recall the formation of a body. Beyond this background I think there's a particular passage that may be especially important for understanding what Christ is declaring here to Peter. In the book of Jeremiah chapter 1, Jeremiah is called for his mission.

Reading from verse 9, Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Jeremiah, what do you see? And I said, I see an almond branch. Then the Lord said to me, You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it. The word of the Lord came to me a second time, saying, What do you see? And I said, I see a boiling pot facing away from the north.

Then the Lord said to me, Out of the north disaster shall be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land. For behold, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, declares the Lord. And they shall come, and every one shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around and against all the cities of Judah.

And I will declare my judgments against them, for all their evil in forsaking me. They

have made offerings to other gods and worshipped the works of their own hands. But you, dress yourself for work, arise and say to them everything I command you.

Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them. And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar and bronze walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you.

Paying attention to this passage we may be seen a number of the elements that we find in Matthew chapter 16. God promises to give to Jeremiah the power to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. It's similar to the power that is given to Peter to bind and to loose.

There's a similar pairing there and that's given to Jeremiah through God's placing of his words in his mouth so that Jeremiah might act with the authority of God's word as he bears God's word upon his mouth. Other things to notice. There are the references to gates, the gates that are threatened in the case of Jerusalem.

And then also all these people bringing themselves against the gates of Jerusalem, these various kings and rulers that are conspiring to break down those gates. And the way that Jeremiah himself is set up, set up like Peter is set up as a rock. Peter is set up as a rock.

Jeremiah is set up as a fortified city, an iron pillar and bronze walls. God declares that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church. Here he declares that they will fight against you but they shall not prevail against you for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you.

And I believe that paying attention to this it will help us to unlock the meaning in part of the statement that he can bind and loose. In its core meaning it's much the same as what's given to Jeremiah. And what Jeremiah is given is the power of God's words upon his lip.

It's not just a blank check of authority, rather it's God giving him his word, his revelation, so that with that revelation he can transform the world. And God has called Jeremiah, God calls Peter. And Peter is going to be the one who brings forth the word of God in the most powerful way.

He's going to be the one who preaches the sermon on the day of Pentecost. He's going to be the one who brings the word of God to the Gentiles. He's opening doors and he's closing doors as well.

The judgement upon Jerusalem, the judgement upon the Jews who reject Christ. Peter is the one who pioneers in both of those respects. And we should take the singular you seriously.

Peter is not just addressed as the spokesperson of the disciples at this point, although the other disciples later on have the same power given to them in chapter 18. No, the point is that he has an authority as the one who's at the head of them, as the one who's going to lead them in this new stage of the kingdom. The father has revealed the son to Peter.

It's usually the other way round, we usually speak about the son revealing the father. But Peter is the one who's going to bring forward this revelation to others. We might notice that Paul uses the paradigm of Peter's experience and the experience of Jeremiah in Galatians chapter 1. Galatians chapter 1 verse 11 following, For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached to me is not man's gospel, for I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

And then later on, But when he who had set me apart before I was born, referring back to the story of Jeremiah, and who called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone. And then in verses 7 to 9 of chapter 2, On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised, for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised, worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles. And when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.

Note there the parallel between Peter's experience and Paul's experience. Paul is seen as representing to the Gentiles what Peter represents to the circumcised. Peter is the one who has been explicitly commissioned with this ministry above all the other apostles.

He is the head of the apostles. He's the first among the apostles. He's the one that stands out, the most prominent apostle with this ministry.

And Paul is his counterpart to the Gentiles. And that relationship between them is expressed by expressing Paul's experience in the same sort of language as Peter's is, and also in the fact that Paul takes, as Peter does, the paradigm of Jeremiah as the paradigm for understanding his call. Further to this, we might note that this is the only place within Paul's letters that Peter is referred to as Peter.

Everywhere else he is called Cephas. And Peter being described as a pillar here connects with the language of rock. A pillar is something that holds up an edifice just as the rock of Peter is the rock upon which the church is built.

That initial building, that establishment, as Jeremiah is established as a fortified city, so Peter is established in a similar manner. The keys of the kingdom that are given should

bring our mind back to Isaiah chapter 22 verse 22 where similar language is used of Eliakim, the son of Hilkiyah, who is given authority over the household of David. The authority within David's house is something that is given to Peter.

The authority that he has is as a steward of the house of David. David, of course, being Christ. Now it's very easy to read this as an event that's focused upon Peter, but it's Christ who's going to build his church.

Peter is going to be the one who is the steward particularly. He's going to play a pivotal, redemptive, historical role, but Christ is the one who's going to establish his church. He's going to build this congregation of people.

The power of the keys can be connected with the power of teaching. It's the power that Jeremiah has, the power of the word of God to open things up, to open up the ministry to the Gentiles, to open up the ministry to the Samaritans, to open up the ministry of the day of Pentecost. That is the authority given to Peter.

And God gives him the keys by giving him his word. This is not some blank check of authority. It's not some ongoing Petrine office.

It's not the way that the Catholics have often understood this as the role of the Pope within the church that continues. Rather it's the ministry of Peter as a pivotal figure in redemptive history. He is the rock as Abraham is the rock.

He is the rock as Jeremiah is established as a fortified city, as one who has the power to open up a new period of redemptive history. We might also think of Matthew chapter 23 verse 13 where there are people who close up the kingdom of God to others. The scribes and the Pharisees, as they do not teach the people, they end up closing the kingdom.

Peter is the one who is going to be opening it up and he's going to be bringing judgment upon those who are unfaithful but he is going to be opening things up. He is exercising an authority here that is also ascribed to the church later on. In Matthew chapter 18 verse 17 following, if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

These are two places in the book of Matthew where we find the expression of binding and loosing. Also where the church is referred to. These are not common places in the book of Matthew.

But yet the church is used in different senses. In the story of chapter 16 in reference to

Peter it's the church universal. Here it's more the church in a particular context.

The building of the house upon the rock might also make us think about Christ as the Davidic Messiah. We've already had the key of the house of David and the way that that's related to Eliakim and then Peter has that key. He's the steward of the house of David.

He's the one under the king, the Messiah, who's going to open things up for the Messiah. That building of the house is something that's committed to the Messiah. It's something that the Messiah would do according to promise.

And now Christ is going to build that house. He is going to be the one who fulfills the promise of the Davidic Messiah. After this grand confession however they are instructed to keep these things quiet.

It is not yet the time for this secret to be generally known. In fact it will not be properly revealed until after the death and resurrection which reveal the true character of Christ as the Son of God. He is not the Son of God in the sense of a military leader, in the sense of a Davidic power who's going to rule over the nations without suffering.

Rather he is the suffering servant. He's the suffering king. He's the king like David during the coup of Absalom.

And perhaps in Christ's rebuke that follows to Peter we might recall that earlier event. As David rebukes Abishai who seeks to strike Shimei. David said, What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be as an adversary to me.

It's very much the similar expression that Christ gives to Peter. Peter is as Abishai. We see him doing that role later on as well as Christ has to prevent him from striking with the sword when Christ is challenged in the garden of Gethsemane.

Peter here is playing the role of Satan. He's not actually being possessed. Maybe Jesus is saying in part, Get back in line Peter.

Get behind me. Follow me. Don't try and lead me.

Peter's challenge here is also a challenge that recalls Satan's challenge in chapter 4 verse 10 when Christ says something very similar in his rebuke of Satan. The parallel there is between the promise of glory without suffering. And there it was from the mouth of Satan and here it's from the mouth of Peter and the similarity should be recognised.

We are reaching a transition point in the narrative. The earlier transition started with the ministry of John the Baptist and leading to the temptation of Christ in the wilderness after his baptism. And now we have a similar cluster of events.

We've had the death of John the Baptist. Now we've had the witness of Peter. And now

we have the temptation of Christ and soon we'll have the transfiguration which parallels with the baptism.

These are far more pronounced in the parallelism in the book of Luke. But it is also present in Matthew. Peter is as a stumbling stone.

Maybe we're supposed to think back to Isaiah chapter 8 verse 14. Christ is a stumbling stone for many people in Israel. But Peter can be as a stumbling stone to Christ the one who presents this temptation of glory without suffering.

Suffering is absolutely essential to Jesus' identity and his vocation as the Messiah. There is no glory without suffering. And Jesus summons his disciples to follow him into suffering.

They must take up their cross. Why the cross in particular? It's a symbol of, as it were, being living dead. You've taken that cross and there's no way back.

You're walking towards your execution. You must deny yourself. Peter will later on deny Christ but this is a denial of himself that he's called to.

All those things that tie you to pursuit of your own life and its own maximization, those things you must cut off. You must give those things up in order to find your life as you follow Christ. A question to consider.

Here we are called to take up our crosses and follow Christ. The cross is often seen as Christ's suffering for us in a way that can exclude the concept of our suffering with Christ. How can the teaching of Christ in Matthew about our taking up the cross fit in with his teaching about the fact that Christ is suffering for us, that he goes to the cross on our behalf?