

Jerusalem in the Old Testament

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I. Introduction

The purpose of the present paper is to consider the topic of Jerusalem in the Old Testament both in its own terms and from the perspective of Christian interpretation. Such a task is somewhat daunting because of its huge importance in the lives of many people. For many, Christian as well as Jewish, the Old Testament promises about Jerusalem have been gloriously vindicated in events of the present century in modern Israel, while for others, the same events seem to threaten their very existence. Many of the latter are also Christians, and therefore also understand themselves in relation to the biblical revelation. These very different self-understandings imply, naturally, different interpretations of the Old Testament on the subject of the ancient 'promised land' in general, and on Jerusalem in particular. The topic well illustrates the close connection between interpretation and total personal commitment. The interpreter who meddles with these things must know that he deals with aspirations and emotions which are at the heart of people's sense of identity, and with issues which can literally have life and death implications.

For that very reason, however, it is imperative to attempt the task. Though interpretation inevitably begins and ends in some committed stance, and is quite properly passionate, there is a sense too in which it must be disciplined and detached, in order that the passion might not be blind. We shall therefore have to reckon with all the ordinary hermeneutical questions that are faced in the study of ancient texts in general, as well the special ones which arise when Christians read the Old Testament.¹

The task is not a simple one. There can be no 'proof-texting' solution to this problem of interpretation, because disagreements originate at a more fundamental level. The

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reading of individual texts is only a part of a whole reading of Scripture, and for Christians it belongs within the wider endeavour of Christian biblical theology. This puts a question-mark against the idea that texts have an obvious, plain sense, an idea which can carry the implication that to opt for any sense other than the 'literal' is to undermine the authority of Scripture. There is a confusion in this line of thought, for we have in fact no choice but to understand the part, as best we can, in terms of the whole. The present paper is an attempt to do that. In it we will consider in turn the major sections of the Old Testament which are relevant to the topic; it proceeds in this way-rather than by looking at a series of potential prooftexts-for the reason (already given) that context must always be respected. Only at a later stage do we turn to the question of those texts which speak directly about a return of God's people to the 'promised land'.

¹ See J. Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation* (Leicester, Apollos 1990), and *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1987).

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Finally it needs to be said at the outset that there is no single Old Testament view of the significance of Jerusalem. In the long history of Israel and the diverse writings that emerge from it, Jerusalem is indeed one of the great, ever-present data of the story of her encounter with God. Yet it does not come to us in a coherent or univocal guise. On this topic, as on others, the Old Testament confronts us in its diversity, not to say its elusiveness. We are therefore compelled to sift and compare, and perhaps in the end to make choices-choices which are inevitably made in the context of our own interests.

II. Jerusalem in Israel's History

The history of Jerusalem in ancient Israel may be sketched briefly.² As the Canaanite city of Jebus, it was one of those not taken by Joshua in the conquest (Josh. 15:63; Jdg. 1:21). It remained in Canaanite hands until it finally fell to David in the course of the victories which at last enabled Israel to enjoy that 'rest' from their enemies which had been entailed in the promise of land (2 Sam. 5:6-10; cf. Deut. 12:10; 2 Sam. 7:1). More than a mopping up operation, it is normally regarded by students of the Old Testament as a central plank in David's

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internal political platform.³ Israel, apparently, was never a naturally coherent entity which took readily to centralized power or institutions. The persistent disaffection of a Benjaminite-Saulite faction, after the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (see *e.g.* 2 Sam. 20:1Q, illustrates the strains within Israel which were only temporarily eclipsed by the brilliance of David's star within the oriental world. David not only captured Jerusalem, but made it his capital. The choice was intended to unite an Israel that might at any time be pulled apart by the Judean-Benjaminite rift. Jerusalem, on the borders of the two tribal territories, and without any significant patriarchal or ancient Israelite traditions which might have marked it as the real property of a faction, was perfect for the purpose. Jerusalem's symbolic power at its entry into Israelite history was not plucked from the past, but forged in the new event. The city was to be synonymous with Israelite unity.

David's coup, however, could not permanently overcome Israel's centrifugal tendency. When the nation divided into two kingdoms after Solomon's death, Jeroboam strove to legitimate his new northern kingdom by appealing to a more ancient tribal and patriarchal concept of Israel (1 Kgs. 12:16). This view of Israel limited David to his own 'house' (Judah). By the same token, Jerusalem was cast as a mere local sanctuary, and Jeroboam's own establishment of Dan and Bethel as the official worship-centres of his kingdom ensured that the point was not missed.⁴

Jerusalem continued as the capital of the southern kingdom until its fall in 587 BC. In the four centuries from David to Nebuchadnezzar it knew times of prosperity, if none to match that of Solomon, as well as straitened circumstances. Its prestige was particularly enhanced, however, by

² For a brief account see J. Rogerson, *The New Atlas of the Bible* (London, Macdonald 1985) 174-189; also D. Bahat, *Carta's Historical Atlas of the Bible* (Jerusalem, Carta 1976).

³ D. Payne, *Kingdoms of the LORD* (Exeter, Paternoster 1981) 43; J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (London, SCM 1972) 195.

⁴ For evidence of David's difficulty in keeping Israel united, see 1 Sam. 2-3; *cf.* Jdg. 20, Josh. 22.

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an event which arose out of one such moment of great distress, namely the siege laid to it by Sennacherib in 701 BC, as part of that king's subjugation of Judah, which, under Hezekiah, was involved in an anti-Assyrian coalition led by Egypt. The miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the besieging army (2 Kgs. 19:35-37) lent credence to the belief that God would

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defend it come what may. Having survived that siege, it continued as the capital of the vassal-state of Judah for a further century, subject first to Assyria and then to the new power Babylon. The submission to Babylon, however, was preceded by a temporary resurgence under King Josiah, in the years of transition between Assyria's decline and Babylon's rise.⁵ The latter, under Nebuchadnezzar, finally found it expedient to raze the city and its Temple, and exile its people (2 Kgs. 25; Jer. 52).

The restoration of at least some of the next generation of exiled Jews by the Persian Cyrus after his accession in 539 BC is remarkable enough as a historical event, though quite in line, apparently, with that king's policy regarding subject peoples (see Ezra 1, and the so-called 'Cyrus Cylinder').⁶ This return to Jerusalem is hailed as a fulfilment of prophecy in 2 Chronicles 36:22 (*cf.* Ezra 1:1), with a reference to Jeremiah's prediction of a seventy-year exile (see Jer. 25:12; 29:10). Its Temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel (Ezra 6), and subsequently its walls by Nehemiah (Neh. 1-6). The city thus became the religious centre of Judaism-despite a growing and vigorous Diaspora-until its destruction by the Romans in 70 AD. Undoubtedly the rebuilding of the Temple, and the degree of security won for it by the successful completion of the walls, played a crucial role in the survival of the Jewish religion. Once again the symbolic power of Jerusalem cannot be overestimated-as seen, for example, in the gloom of Nehemiah on learning of the dilapidation of the distant citadel (Neh. 1). The fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy, however, is not the last word in the story, and as we shall see, the status of the city as the centre of a small religious community in a large Empire, was capable of different theological constructions.

This sketch of Jerusalem's history suggests in itself its evocative power. Yet already something of its ambivalence emerges: at the inception of the kingdom, it was a force for

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unity, yet almost by the same token a catalyst of division; when God's power to deliver was in doubt, it could answer with a triumphant affirmative, yet also rephrase the question with a wholly new acuteness; when the Temple stood once more upon its Mount, it could speak of promises fulfilled, and yet point to a goal not yet reached (Neh. 9:32-36).

⁵ For Hezekiah's tribute to Assyria, see 2 Kgs. 18:14f. Manasseh subsequently adopted a thoroughgoing Assyrian policy (2 Kgs. 21:1-9); see J. Bright, *op. cit.*, 309-12.

⁶ For the text of the 'Cyrus Cylinder', see J.B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton, Princeton University Press 1969); for an account of its meaning and importance, D.J. Wiseman, ed., *Peoples of Old Testament Times* (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1973) 315-20.

III. Jerusalem in Israel's Religion

As has been observed above, at the time of David, Jerusalem lacked a pedigree in Israel. While David could exploit this, it also posed a theological problem: how could Jerusalem be accepted as a centre of Yahwism? David's answer was to bring the Ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6). The immediate effect of this was to claim for Jerusalem the centrality and primacy in Israel which had been enjoyed in the days of the judges by Shiloh, by virtue of the residence of the Ark in that place (cf. Josh. 18:1; Jdg. 18:31; 1 Sam. 1:3). The importance of Shiloh, however, was only intermediate, since the real significance of the Ark was its associations with Sinai.⁷

In the Sinai pericope (Exod. 19-34), we meet the Ark as the footstool of God, who is enthroned above it, and who from that place speaks to the people through Moses (Exod. 25:22). In Deuteronomy's account of the remaking of the Tables of the Law, we find the Ark as the place where these are kept (Deut. 10:5; cf. 31:9). The bearing of the Ark to Jerusalem, therefore, marked it as the place where the Sinai covenant was remembered and cultivated. Thus, Jerusalem succeeds Sinai as a symbol of Israel's status as the special people of God. It seems likely that the first procession of the Ark to Jerusalem was subsequently remembered in the Temple liturgy, in which it is depicted precisely as a march from Sinai to Zion (Ps. 68, esp. vv. 8,17).⁸ Furthermore, Psalm 50 pictures a theophany of God

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in the Zion sanctuary (v. 2), in terms that are reminiscent of Sinai by virtue both of the imagery of fire and tempest (v. 3; cf. Exod. 19:6, 18) and of the allusion to a covenant made by sacrifice (v. 5; cf. Exod. 24:3-8). Perhaps most important in this connection, Psalm 132 pictures the arrival of the Ark in Jerusalem as God's election of Zion (v. 13—an extension of the idea formerly applied to the patriarchs and the whole people in Gen. 12:1-3 and Exod. 19:50, and as his own achievement of 'rest' (v. 14, c f. Deut. 12:10). In the Biblical story of God's election of a people for himself—a vital element in the history of salvation—it has a crucial place. Properly understood, the ark symbolizes nothing less than God's grace in his dealings with mankind.

With the forging of a link between Sinai and Zion, and the extension of the election idea to the latter, Jerusalem is assimilated to the ancient covenantal theology. The picture is then completed with the theology of the election of David. The narrative account of the origin of this election is that of the promise to David of a dynasty through Nathan the prophet (2

⁷ For the centralizing significance of the Ark, see J. Bright, *op. cit.*, 161f., 196; G.W. Anderson, 'Israel: Amphictyony: 'AM, KAHAL, EDAH', in H.T. Frank and W.L. Reed, edd., *Essays in Honor of H.G. May* (Nashville, Abingdon 1970) 135-51.

⁸ The name 'Zion' probably originally referred to the hill located between the Tyropoeon and Kidron valleys which was the site first of the Jebusite stronghold and then of David's city. Jerusalem may have been the name for the city-state broadly understood. In time the former term came also to apply to the Temple-mount, perhaps because of the transfer of the ark thither; indeed in many Biblical writings there is virtual synonymity between 'Zion' and 'Jerusalem'.

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Sam. 7:4-17). However, the connection between the elections of king and Zion is most clearly established by certain Psalms, notably Psalms 2 (v.6) and 110 (1f.).

The election of Zion, therefore, becomes part of the Biblical story of election. That story, of course, is always moving forward, and there are frequent admonitions in the Bible against inferring permanence from election. The historic monarchy, after all, disappeared. The conditionality of the election of David is evident from 1 Kgs. 2:2-4 (more so here than in 2 Sam. 7). Indeed, election in the Old Testament cannot become self-serving; rather, it is purposeful, always pointing forward to something new (as with the promise to Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3, which would have as its ultimate outcome the 'blessing of all nations'), and imposing obligations (this is, for example, the basis of Amos' critique of Israel in Amos 3:2).

In this way, Jerusalem enters the very heart of Israel's self-understanding and piety. With all its colourful fabric and procedures it occupies a far more prominent place in Israelite religion than the pages of our Old Testaments, read through modern European eyes, reveal at first glance. In Israel, piety

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can hardly be separated from the material side of worship.⁹ The Temple is the place where God is met; it is awe-inspiring, because he is holy, yet it is also a place of rejoicing, because it is good to be near God.¹⁰ Something of its place in the Israelite psyche may be gleaned from the so-called 'pilgrimage Psalms' (such as 84, 122) with their expressions of longing to be in Jerusalem; others have simply been called 'Zion Psalms', because they celebrate the presence of God there with his people (*e.g.* 46, 48, 76, 78:68ff.). This divine presence proves to be the most important factor, and not the place itself: this is the crucial point that was adumbrated in 2 Sam. 7:5-7, and it will become evident again as we continue to examine the texts of the Old Testament.

IV. A 'Zion-Tradition'?

On the basis of material of this sort, it has become customary to speak of a distinct 'Zion-tradition' within the Old Testament, that is, a particular theological tradition which gives special prominence to Jerusalem in its understanding of the relationship between God and Israel. The elements in such a tradition, according to G. von Rad, are:

- i) Yahweh takes up his abode on Mt. Zion;
- ii) Zion thus becomes the throne of Yahweh and his chosen king;

⁹ Hence, for example, the difficulty of deciding between 'thanksgiving' and 'thank-offering' as a translation of the Hebrew תְּהִלָּה: compare RSV and NIV on the heading of Ps. 100).

¹⁰ Notice the stress on 'rejoicing' in Deut. 12; cf. Neh. 12:43.

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iii) Yahweh wins a victory over an alliance of nations opposed to him and his king, with the battle and victory being couched in mythological terms.¹¹

The main evidence for such a theological stream is found in the Psalms and in the Book of Isaiah. Its crucial assertion is that *Yahweh protects Zion, his dwelling-place, permanently and unreservedly*. At issue, therefore, is the nature of God's self-

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revelation; in what sense can he be said to be interested in places?

If such a view of the relationship between Yahweh and his people really were advocated by any book or block of material in the Old Testament, it would be a major ingredient in an argument for the permanence of Jerusalem in God's purposes and therefore into the present day. Hence we must investigate this in some detail. Our conclusion, however, will be that, if a 'Zion-tradition' (as thus defined) ever actually existed, it was never in fact openly propounded or advocated either in the Psalms or in Isaiah, or indeed anywhere in the Old Testament.

The association of Zion with Sinai (noted earlier) already sets a question-mark against it; for if Zion embraces the theology of the covenant made at Sinai (with its ethical and conditional character), then by definition it will be understood that God's dwelling there is contingent upon Israel's faithfulness to the covenant.¹² But other considerations tell against it also. This will emerge best from a consideration of the major literary-theological blocks in the Old Testament in which Jerusalem/Zion plays a role (Psalms, Isaiah and the other major prophets). One of our central concerns, therefore, in the following, will be to see how the Old Testament interacts with this alleged 'Zion-tradition'.

V. An Old Testament Theology of Zion/Jerusalem: Initial Hesitations?

Before considering the reflection on Zion in the Psalms and prophets, it is important to notice a certain hesitation, in the traditions concerning the election of Jerusalem itself, about the building of a Temple there. This hesitation is registered in

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¹¹ G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology I* (Oliver & Boyd, London & Edinburgh, 1962) 46f. The three elements mentioned can all be found in Ps. 2; note also Jerusalem in the 'far north' (Ps. 48:2) and the 'river' flowing through it (Ps. 46:7). For other treatments of the Zion-or Jerusalem-cult-tradition, see R.E. Clements, 'Deuteronomy and the Jerusalem Cult Tradition', *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965) 300-12; E.W. Nicholson, 'The Centralization of the Cult in Deuteronomy', *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963) 380-9.

¹² In taking the view that Zion takes over from Sinai a conditional covenantal theology I leave aside the contentious question of the historical development of covenantal theology in Israel; see E.W. Nicholson, *God and His People* (Oxford, Clarendon 1986) for a recent defence of the view that covenant is a relatively late arrival, the first scent of which may be detected only with Hosea. For a contrary understanding see J. Day, 'Pre-Deuteronomistic Allusions to the Covenant in Hosea and Psalm lxxviii', *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986) 112. A number of Psalms clearly bring together the language of covenant and of law (e.g. 50; 78; 81).

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Nathan's oracle to David in which the king is promised a lasting dynasty: in response to David's declared intention to build a 'house' for Yahweh, Yahweh deters him from this, saying that, on the contrary, he will build David a 'house' (now understood as a dynasty); David's project is deprecated on the grounds that Yahweh has never lived in a permanent construction (2 Sam. 7:5-7). It is true, of course, that in the end a Temple is indeed built, by Solomon, with Yahweh's express permission and guidance (cf. 2 Sam. 24). Yet there is a certain parallel between the reluctance that yields to permission in this case and that reluctance, also yielding to permission, in the case of the institution of kingship itself. The debate on that subject is found in 1 Sam. 8-12; its ultimate outcome was the exalted king who reigned on Yahweh's holy hill.¹³ The debate had begun, however, with the clear implication that the demand for such a ruler impugned the kingship of Yahweh in Israel, and that the thing demanded was not properly Israelite, but Canaanite.

There are reasons for thinking that a similar concern underlies the hesitation about a Temple expressed in 2 Sam. 7:5-7. The idea of a god who dwells on a holy hill, and thus guarantees the security of the people who worship him there within their borders, is entirely at home in Canaan, and a religious system at whose heart stands a manipulative cult. The Canaanite view of the world, like the Mesopotamian, has frequently been contrasted with that historical understanding of God and creation which is expressed in Biblical covenant theology. The contrast can be too crudely drawn. Yet it is salutary, at the beginning of a discussion of the 'Zion-tradition', to notice the hint of its conflict in principle with the idea of Yahweh's kingship (1 Sam. 8:7, cf. Deut. 33:5).

The hesitations about Jerusalem and its Temple in the passages quoted find their theoretical basis in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is, in my view, cool in its attitude to dynastic kingship (17:14-20), and conspicuously reticent about the identity of the place of worship which it directs the conquering tribes to establish (12:5, 14 etc.). While some treatments of Deuteronomy have seen in the altar-law a veiled promotion of

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the primacy of Jerusalem in Israel's worship, it seems to me that the concern of Deuteronomy lies elsewhere: on the one hand in its insistence on the exclusive rights of Yahweh as opposed to other gods; on the other in its so-called 'name-theology', by which it expresses the 'real presence' of God on earth while guarding against any attempt to encapsulate him there (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:27). Indeed, though the altar-law clearly came at a certain point to be interpreted of Jerusalem (e.g. 2 Kgs. 21:7), it was, in my view, not always so (see Jer. 7:12). Deuteronomy, therefore, has a theology of Zion/Jerusalem only in the sense that it carries warnings against the attachment of undue importance to any place of worship in itself. This is also true of the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua to Kings).¹⁴

¹³ For the unity of that narrative (in contrast to the older critical idea of contrary accounts woven together) see R.P. Gordon, *1 and 2 Samuel* (Exeter, Paternoster 1986) 105-30.

¹⁴ The view that Deut. 12 has little interest in the 'place' of worship as such is argued in detail in my *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy* (Sheffield, JSOT 1984) 21-38; cf. G.J. Wenham, 'Deuteronomy and the Central Sanctuary', *Tyndale Bulletin* 22 (1971) 103-18. For the contrary view, see M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford, Clarendon 1972) and R.E. Clements, *Deuteronomy* (Sheffield, JSOT 1989) 27-30, who think that Deuteronomy promotes Jerusalem. I have also argued elsewhere against the idea of a first pro-Zion/David edition of the Deuteronomistic History in the reign of King Josiah, as advocated by F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press 1973) 274-89, in Narrative and Meaning in the

VI. Zion/Jerusalem in the Psalms

It is time to ask whether the observations we have already made about Zion in the Psalms are a sufficient guide to its understanding there. We have seen how on the one hand it becomes the successor of Sinai, and on the other how the ancient election theology is extended to embrace Zion and David together. If, however, a selection of Zion-Psalms celebrate the dwelling of Yahweh there, the Book of Psalms as a whole does not present us with that perspective in an unqualified way. One question-mark, for example, against von Rad's understanding of Zion in the Psalms comes from within the Zion-tradition itself, namely from Ps. 87, with its roll-call of nations 'who know me' (v.4); here is a clear hint that the

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theology of Zion will not finally be exclusive. Yet there is an even more important consideration.

If we put the Psalms' message about Zion in a 'canonical' light (in the sense advocated by Brevard Childs), the Zion tradition appears quite differently.¹⁵ This is because the locus of the Psalter's formation is not the cult of the First Temple, but a setting after the exile, an event which the Zion-tradition could not pass through and emerge in anything like the form in which von Rad found it. For the exile witnessed the destruction of the Temple, and indeed was defined by this (1 Kgs. 25; Ezra 1), while the monarchy was destroyed permanently.

There are signs, indeed, that the Zion-tradition is actually experienced as a problem in the Psalms. Most significantly, Psalm 89 first portrays it in an eloquent hymn on the faithfulness of Yahweh, in which the permanence and security of Jerusalem and its king are celebrated at length. The extravagant, unqualified terms of vv. 1-37, however, become highly uncomfortable in the light of the closing sections of the Psalm (vv. 38-52), in which the familiar tones of the Psalm of Lament arise specifically from the anguish not only because of the loss of the city, but because the event has laid a certain understanding of God's promise about Jerusalem in ruins.

Psalm 89 stands in a crucial position in the Psalter, at the end of Book 3. Book 2 of the Psalms had ended with the editorial comment: 'The Prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended' (72:20). Davidic superscriptions do not exactly disappear from the Psalter at this point (see 101, 103, 108-110, 124, 131, 138-145). However, they do not appear anywhere in Book 3. Indeed, the contents of Book 3 (Pss. 73-89) make it look like a kind of response to the role of David which had been implied in Books 1 and 2 (partly by means of the editorial arrangement of superscriptions there, and partly by content, for example the prominence of Psalm 2). Book 3 opens with Psalm 73, that searching examination of Yahweh's justice; it contains at least one, probably two, Psalms (other than 89) which reflect directly on the destruction of Jerusalem (74, 79); and it closes with the Psalm in question, with its sustained and terrible protest at the dismantling of a way of looking at the

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Books of Kings', *Biblica* 70 (1989) 31-49. For a discussion of the influence of Canaanite Temple imagery on the Old Testament, see R.E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Oxford, Blackwells 1965).

¹⁵ B.S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London, SCM 1979) 14.

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nature of covenantal faithfulness which had become axiomatic. If the Psalms furnish evidence of a Zion-tradition in something like von Rad's terms, a tradition which provided the axioms of Psalm 89:1-37, the Psalter itself questions it in a devastating way.¹⁶

Nor does it do so only with the bewildered petitions of that Psalm. It is surely no accident that Book 4 switches the perspective at the outset from David and Zion. Psalm 90 is 'A Prayer of Moses'. Its opening verses lead the thoughts to the whole scope of Israel's history with God, and to an affirmation of God's endurance that is grounded, not in the covenant with David and Zion, but in creation-theology. The meditation on the brevity of human life (a Wisdom theme) sets the expression of faith in God on a broad canvas, that no longer seems to depend on a restoration of Zion. Indeed, the language of 'dwelling' and 'refuge', both here and in Psalm 91 (90:1; 91:1, 2, 4, 9), are reminiscent of Psalm 46 (one of the great 'Zion Psalms')—yet here without any allusion to Zion. Furthermore, Psalms 93, 96-99, emphasise the kingship of God, again grounded in creation, and again responding apparently to the deep doubts raised by the question posed in Psalm 89. Here too, the affirmations of Yahweh's kingship are removed from a context in Zion-theology.¹⁷

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The Book of Psalms as a whole reflects the movement in Judaism from a religion of Temple and cult to one of synagogue and Torah.¹⁸ That movement is not simple, and of course Temple worship continued in Judaism until AD 70. Nevertheless, the Psalter confirms that the concept of Yahweh's dwelling with his people could not be the same after the exile as before. If there was a Zion-tradition in Israel, it cannot be said that the Psalms teach it. Paradoxically, the Book of Psalms, though perhaps more intimately associated with Jerusalem and its Temple than any other book, ultimately shows that their significance is only relative.

¹⁶ Notice also A. Weiser's belief that Ps. 76 (a classic 'Zion Psalm') may be eschatological in character: *The Psalms* (London, SCM 1962) 526-528. On the present form of the Book of Psalms as indicating a coming to terms with the loss of the Temple, see G.H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chicago, Scholars' Press 1985).

¹⁷ Oddly enough, it is these very Psalms which led Mowinckel to his idea of an Enthronement festival in which the kingship of Yahweh was represented by a dramatized enthronement of the Davidic king: S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship I* (Oxford, Blackwell 1962). His general theory, however, and his reading of these Psalms, is generally not followed now. For criticism of his views, and pointers to recent research on the Psalms, see P.C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (Waco, Texas, Word 1983) 43-48. Incidentally, Ps. 110 may appear to spoil the picture offered above of the retreat of David from 'kingship Psalms' following Book 2. It may, however, be the exception that proves the rule, because of the comparison of the Davidic king with Melchizedek, the 'priest for ever'. With the allusion to the priest-king of Canaanite Salem (Gen. 14:17-24), the Zion-tradition is lifted out of the history of the Israelite monarchy and may strike an eschatological note (*cf.* the use of Melchizedek in Heb. 7).

¹⁸ The marks of Torah are indelible on the Psalter: Ps 1 is a superscription to the whole; the arrangement is in five Books; the longest Psalm (119) is a meditation on the Torah.

VII. Zion/Jerusalem in the Book of Isaiah

The prophet Isaiah is often held to be the other great exponent of the Zion-tradition. He is familiar with both court and Temple: his decisive experience of vocation comes in the context of a vision in the former (Isa. 6); and much of his ministry seems to unfold in the environs of the latter, in which he evidently has ready access to the king (Ahaz, Isa. 7; Hezekiah, Isa. 37:21-39:8, cf. 2 Kgs 19:20). His language, furthermore, owes much to that set of concepts which we found in the 'Zion Psalms': Zion is Yahweh's holy hill, the place where he dwells (4:5f.; 8:18; 10:12; 12:5f.; 14:32; 24:23; 30:19; 31:4f., 9), and specific oracles promise that he will defend the city (31:4Q. One of the book's great climaxes, indeed, is the discomfiture of the army of Sennacherib in its siege of the city (37:33-38). This account might be seen as the vindication of the book's theme of the inviolability of Zion because of Yahweh's dwelling there.¹⁹

Just as with the Psalms, however, the individual statements have to be interpreted within the framework of the whole book. As is well known, a distinction is normally made between the words of Isaiah of Jerusalem and the book as a whole, which is said to represent the deposit of several

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generations' additions and theologizing. In particular, Isaiah 40-55 and 56-66 are normally regarded as having quite separate origins, in Babylon and after the restoration to Palestine respectively. The question of authorship need not trouble us unduly. It is plain that the Book of Isaiah is at least intended for consumption in and beyond the exile, and one of our key texts (Isa. 2:1-4) is often attributed to Isaiah of Jerusalem (cf. Mic. 4:1-4).

However, the parts of the Book of Isaiah are not meaninglessly juxtaposed. As with the Psalms, there are signs of careful composition. Once again, the book should be interpreted 'canonically'. This means that the oracles suggesting Jerusalem's inviolability are qualified by the thrust of the whole. And that, patently, allows little quarter to the idea that Jerusalem would enjoy unlimited and unqualified protection. The call-narrative itself prepares prophet and reader for a hardness of the people to the message, and consequent judgment (Isa. 6:9-13). Isaiah, in his exhortation to King Ahaz not to put his trust in an alliance with Assyria, but rather in Yahweh (Isa. 7), requires him to believe in order that he might 'be established' (7:9b). On a broader canvas, the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian threat (37) turns out to be only a secondary climax in the composition of the book; for its sequel in chapters 38f. is of crucial importance. Hezekiah, having become ill, is told first that he will die (38:1), then in response to his prayer for healing, that his life will be spared for a further fifteen years (vv. 2-6). This temporary reprieve for Hezekiah is an echo of the temporariness of the reprieve for Judah following its deliverance from Assyria.²⁰ Isaiah 39 relates the embassy from Babylon, which, to Isaiah, is so clear a harbinger of the

¹⁹ See R. E. Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem* (Sheffield, JSOT 1980) for his argument for a Josianic edition of the book of Isaiah, which emphasised the inviolability of the city; cf. *idem*, *Isaiah 1-39* (London, Marshall, Morgan and Scott 1982) 5f.

²⁰ The link between Hezekiah's lengthened span and the term put upon Judah's existence as a nation is made in v. 8.

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coming fall of the city to that power (39:5-7). At the beginning of Isaiah 40, the fall of the city is already history.

This is not to say that the Book of Isaiah thus finishes with Jerusalem. On the contrary, the new beginning at Isaiah 40 declares precisely that her 'warfare is ended' (40:1), and the deliverance from Babylon becomes a dominant theme of the lyrics that ensue (eg 43-6; 46:1f.; 47:1-4). The message of deliverance is addressed to 'Jerusalem' (40:1); it is

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Jerusalem/Zion that shakes itself free from captivity, and in which Yahweh shall again dwell with his people (52:1f.; cf. 59:20; 62:1, 6f., 11; 66:13). Nevertheless, the new thing that is thus envisaged is not a mere 'turning back of the clock'. As in the Psalms, the events of 587 BC have altered things irreversibly; there can be no such thing as an inviolable Jerusalem, capital of the kingdom of Judah, with its Davidic dynasty intact.

The language of Isaiah 40-66 makes this clear. The deliverance from Babylon is a real historical event indeed; yet it is depicted in highly symbolic terms. It is a New Exodus, recalling the first deliverance of Israel, namely from Egypt (43:16f.), and at the same time a New Creation (43:15; cf. 43:10). Yahweh is doing a completely new thing (43:18f.). Furthermore, although the prophecy undoubtedly expects a return to Jerusalem, the city in Palestine (44:26-28), the names 'Jerusalem' and 'Zion' can have a certain ambiguity about them. 'Jerusalem' often stands for the people themselves (40:2; 41:27; 49:14; 51:17). Sometimes, indeed, there is a fine line between literal and metaphorical uses of the name, as in 52:7: the return to 'Zion' is a token before the world that the God of Israel reigns.

In parallel to this extended understanding of Zion is a reinterpretation of the dynastic oracle to David, that covenant with him which promised him royal descendants 'for ever' (2 Sam. 7:12-17). The terms of this promise are plainly adopted in Isaiah 55:3, in which it is now addressed to all those (the verb is plural) who will hear the message of deliverance. The Davidic covenant is 'democratized'; the union of David and Zion which was essential to the Zion-tradition can no longer be understood in its original sense. This fits entirely with Isaiah 2:1-4, an oracle situated in a significantly prominent place in the book. Here the Zion-tradition has been drastically revised: Jerusalem is indeed the divine dwelling-place, but the Holy War imagery of Psalm 2 has disappeared, as has the Davidic king.

All this raises the question, what kind of Israel is being created as a new thing in the earth? Who are the real addressees of the oracles in Isaiah 40-55? In the previous paragraph a definition was offered, namely 'all those who will hear the message of deliverance' (a definition gleaned from Isa. 55:1, 6); the Zion that is restored, then, is presumed to be a

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faithful Zion. This emerges from certain passages which are reminiscent of the classical prophets (e.g. 43:22-24; 48:3-5). This note is struck rather more strongly in parts of Isaiah 56-66 (e.g. ch. 58). Furthermore, the theology of 'servanthood' is relevant to the discussion. For Israel, in its truest fulfilment of its mission, is a servant (note the identification of the servant with Israel,

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49:3), and supremely a suffering servant (52:12-53:12). The theology of Zion in Isaiah 40-55 in particular is thus no mere declaration of imminent events, but much more a vocation to the people who are redeemed.

The denouement of the Book of Isaiah in chapters 56-66 confirms this interpretation. Parts of this section are simply reminiscent of the tone of 40-55 (*e.g.* 60-62). Other parts strike the sombre note which we find in chapter 58, apparently in recognition that the restored community would not yet achieve that final ending of her 'warfare', in spite of the oracle of Isaiah 40:2. The righteous and the poor suffer at others' hands (57:1; 58:60; there is division and alienation in the community (63:16-19); Zion is again a 'wilderness' (64:10); and the ideal of 'servanthood' is embodied only in a minority (64:13f.). Correspondingly, the image of Zion begins to take on the tones of apocalyptic and eschatology. In other words, its redemption is now put on a plane which seems less in imminent history than in a great culmination of it. Yahweh is not now merely doing a new thing, but creating new heavens and a new earth (65:17), a new creation which is in parallel with a creation of Jerusalem. Moreover, 'heaven [and not the city in Palestine] is my throne, and the earth is my footstool' (66:1; contrast Ps. 132:7, 13). Notice also the apocalyptic tendencies in 60:17-20, and in the development of 2:2-4 in 66:18-21. By the end of Isaiah, Zion is understood as God's glorified people in a new creation which is at the end of time and on a cosmic scale.²¹

In regard to the Book of Isaiah, therefore, as with the Psalms, the impression that there is an unquestioning promotion of the historical Jerusalem as the place of God's special favour is superficial. More important is the idea of

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God's presence with his people, albeit depicted in 'Jerusalem' language.

VIII. Zion/Jerusalem in the Book of Jeremiah

Regarding the place of Jerusalem and its Temple in Israel's life, Jeremiah is in a sense at the other end of the spectrum from Isaiah. The burden of his message, far from promising Yahweh's defence of the city, is its forthcoming destruction, because of the persistent sin of the people. As in Isaiah, the Zion terminology is capable of both literal and extended usage (notice the address to the 'daughter of Zion', 4:31; 6:2, 23). The context of such terminology, however, is the portrayal of desolation and grief that will accompany the fall of the city. That the Zion-tradition itself forms the backcloth of such preaching is clearest in 8:19, where the prophet echoes, rhetorically, a cry of the people:

'Is the LORD not in Zion?
Is her King not in her?'

²¹ For accounts of the theology of Isa. 40-55, see B.S. Childs, *op. cit.*, 316-38 (in the context of his treatment of the whole book); G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology II* (London, SCM 1975) 238-62; C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (London, SCM 1969) 8-21.

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The perplexity of this anguished utterance is explicable only in terms of the Zion-tradition with the assumption of Yahweh's dwelling on his holy hill, and the idea of his kingship there.²²

Jeremiah's consistent burden, indeed, could be called the insecurity of Zion. The point is made with great force in one of the most famous incidents in the book, the so-called Temple-sermon, which occurs twice, in longer and shorter versions, at 7:1-15 and 26:1-6. Its message is that, contrary to the people's evident expectation, Yahweh's commitment to Jerusalem and its people is not a blind guarantee, nor can it be cultivated by an attention, however fastidious, to ritual worship alone. The mere intoning 'This is the Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD' (v. 4) avails nothing if the weightier matters of the law are neglected. Jeremiah insists on the point in terms reminiscent of Deuteronomy's conditional understanding of covenant (vv. 5-7; cf. Deut. 4-5). The example of Shiloh, formerly the place which enjoyed the privileges now Jerusalem's, but which had disappeared from history, is appealed to as sombre evidence of the truth of Jeremiah's words (vv. 12-15).

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Jeremiah's announcement of Jerusalem's doom is the hallmark of his prophetic work. His inversion of the Zion-tradition is so complete that he can even use the language of 'holy war'-typical of that tradition-in reverse: far from his fighting for Jerusalem to defend it (recall Isa. 31:4f), God is now its resolute enemy, ready to bring destruction on his own heritage because of its treachery (21:4-7). His chosen instrument would be Babylon, and Jeremiah's charge was to show that the way of faithfulness was acceptance of the chastisement: there was a future for those who bowed to the yoke, but not for those who resisted (Jer. 24). The writing was on the wall not only for the city and population but also for the Davidic dynasty. Jeremiah has little but scorn for its last representatives before the fall of Judah (ch. 22), with the exception of Josiah, though even for him his praise is fainter than one might have expected from the Deuteronomic portrayal of him in 2 Kings 22f. (cf. Jer. 22:15f.). Of King Jehoiachin (Coniah), borne off to Babylon in 597 BC, Jeremiah says:

Write this man down as childless
for none of his offspring shall succeed
in sitting on the throne of David,
and ruling again in Judah' (22:30).

His message, therefore, can be regarded as a sustained attack on the Zion-tradition. It is hardly surprising that, for his adherence to that message, he could be regarded as a traitor (37:11-15).

Hitherto, however, we have considered only the main theme of the 'prophet of doom'. Contained in it, however, was a pointer to the future salvation of the people, precisely through the purging of exile (ch. 24). The exile would last just seventy years, after which Babylon in turn would fall (25:12-14) and the exiles would return to their land (29:10). Jeremiah too had a Gospel to proclaim, most celebrated in his announcement of Yahweh's New Covenant with Israel and Judah (31:31-34). That well-known passage is embedded, in fact, in a more sustained collection of sayings on the theme of salvation, known as the 'Book of Consolation' (chs. 30-33). Briefly, this section looks

²² As defined above, n. 11.

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beyond the judgment of exile to a marvellous restoration. And most interestingly for our present purposes, it seems to revive those very things which the main thrust of

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Jeremiah's preaching appeared to have laid firmly in the dust of the Babylonian depredations. The immediate implication of the New Covenant is that Jerusalem will again be inhabited; concrete topographical parameters are indicated (31:38-40). Furthermore, old, false conceptions of permanency are replaced with new promises which proclaim, in the most emphatic terms, a new and permanent Davidic covenant (33:12-26), in which Jerusalem shall again be for Yahweh 'a praise and a glory before all the nations' (33:9).²³

Paradoxically, therefore, the prophet who was undoubtedly, for the greater part of his ministry, the most hard-bitten opponent of the Zion-tradition, leaves us a book which, taken as a whole, holds out a far more specific hope for the restoration of the city than the Book of Isaiah had done—though superficially the latter appeared more sympathetic to the tradition.

In this connection the promises of re-possession of land in Jer. 30-33 should be noticed. This indeed is the central focus of these chapters: Jeremiah's purchase of a field from his cousin (told at length in 32:6-15) serves as a guarantee that 'houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land' (*i.e.* that the exile would end and the people would return). A passage like 32:36-41 has therefore been an important text for those who consider that certain biblical prophecies either have been fulfilled in events of the present century, or still await fulfilment.²⁴

Two brief points need to be made in response to this approach. First, the logical and theological movement within the book of Jeremiah is rather complex. It is true of this great block of material, as it was of the Psalms and Isaiah, that the exile has altered things irrevocably. The hopeful statements in the book are not simply promises of a return to the former status quo. Rather, they occur in the context of the New Covenant theology, at whose heart is the affirmation that Yahweh's future relationship with his people will be precisely

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not as it was hitherto. The promises of restored, and permanent, institutions are in the context of a new kind of covenant, in which Israel's faithfulness will, in some mysterious new way, be possible, where in the past her hardness of heart had frustrated it (31:33; 32:40-41). In Jeremiah, therefore, the future of Jerusalem is inseparable from its possession by a faithful people.²⁵ This consideration must always be a crucial qualification of the promises of return to the land.

²³ Jer. 33:14-26 is absent from the LXX. The essence of its thought, however, is present elsewhere in the Book of Consolation; *cf. e.g.* Jer. 32:37.

²⁴ For a defence of the view that Biblical prophecy *is* still being fulfilled in events in the Middle East today, see *e.g.* D. Prince, *The Last Word on the Middle East* (Eastbourne, Kingsway 1982). Contrast C. Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?* (Tring, Lion 1982).

²⁵ The theology of the Book of Jeremiah *is* examined in greater detail in my forthcoming study: *Judgment and Promise: Interpreting the book of Jeremiah* (Leicester, Apollos 1993).

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The second parting comment about Jeremiah is that, on the broader canvas of the Old Testament, the book cannot be taken in isolation. This is because his prophecy of a seventy-year exile followed by a return is taken up in subsequent literature, namely in Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, which will put a distinct slant upon it, to which we must shortly turn.

IX. Zion/Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel

Though the name 'Zion' does not occur in the Book of Ezekiel, the Zion-tradition is central to its message. The opening vision, as is well known, depicts Yahweh enthroned over Babylon, using symbolism (the Ark's chariot-wheels, cherubim) drawn from Tabernacle and Temple;²⁶ the inference is often drawn that Ezekiel breaks away from traditional concepts to an understanding of the universal reign of God. However, this conclusion can be too hastily drawn. For the whole structure of the prophecy is built on the idea of a temporary withdrawal of Yahweh from Jerusalem, in expression of his wrath over a corrupt people, to be followed in due course by his triumphant return: chapters 8-11 relate the departure of the Glory of Yahweh from the Temple (10:18; 11:2), whilst the return of his Glory is described in 43:1-5. In the meantime, Yahweh himself has been 'a sanctuary to them [the exiles] for a little while in the countries where they have gone' (11:16). Thus, the subject of the whole book may be said to be the presence of Yahweh with his people, conceived in terms of the Temple. The great closing vision of Yahweh dwelling among his people in a new Temple

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(chs. 41-48) is the climax of this theme. The rationale of such a restoration is not dissimilar to that in the Book of Jeremiah; the language of New Covenant (without the term itself) reappears as the basis of the expectation that the future relationship between Yahweh and his people will be viable, while it had not been so hitherto (11:19f.).

On the face of it, therefore, the Zion-tradition receives strong affirmation from Ezekiel. The impression gains strength from closer scrutiny. The promise of the exiles' return to the 'high mountain of Israel' (Ezekiel's typical way of referring to Jerusalem) is associated with the expectation of a renewed Davidic monarchy. In 17:22-24, such a scenario follows upon the fall of Babylon. In 20:40, it is seen as Yahweh's measure to preserve the people from falling into idolatry among the nations (cf. 20:32), and thus to vindicate himself both in their eyes and in those of the nations (20:41b, 42). The Davidic Messianic promise gains its own elaboration; David will be Yahweh's 'shepherd' (under Yahweh himself, the Shepherd, 34:23f.); he will rule over a unified nation, a 'prince for ever', Yahweh's sanctuary being in the midst of the people (37:22-26). The echoes of the dynastic promise to David (2 Sam. 7) are unmistakable. The message of Ezekiel seems clear: Yahweh will vindicate himself among the nations by delivering the exiles from Babylon, and by dwelling among them in Jerusalem, with a Davidic king on the throne (see also Ezk. 36:24, 33-38). Like that of Jeremiah, therefore, Ezekiel's prophecy has an important place for the literal restoration of God's people to the historic land, and therefore to Jerusalem.

²⁶ Cf. 1 Sam. 6:7f. (for evidence of the ark being borne on a wheeled vehicle) and Exod. 25:21f.

However, this picture requires some qualification. The manner of allusion to Jerusalem throughout is worthy of comment. As already noted, the term 'Zion' is never used. The language which is typically used, furthermore, has certain mythological overtones. The phrase 'the high mountain of Israel', especially because it appears to be co-extensive with the whole land (20:40a), calls to mind the Canaanite conception whereby Temple-mount and land are one and the same.²⁷ This mythological language is easily adapted to the rather eschatologized hope with which the Book of Ezekiel ends. The

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war of Yahweh on behalf of his people in chapters 38f. is based on their deliverance from Babylon (39:28a), yet also suggests, anticipating aspects of apocalyptic literature, a grander and final conflict (see *e.g.* 38:5f., 15f., 20). In this context, the imagery of cultic feasting is appropriated to a vision of eschatologized Holy War, in which the sacrificial flesh and blood is that of the enemies of Yahweh and his people (39:17-20). The conflict takes place, indeed, on the 'mountains of Israel' (38:8); yet the Zion-tradition (which of course incorporates the Holy War) has been expanded to depict something that transcends it.²⁸

There is also a distinctive development of the tradition, furthermore, in chapters 40-48. There too the Davidic promise, though not absent, is muted (the 'prince' apparently playing 'second fiddle' to the Zadokite priests).²⁹ More interestingly, the vision of the new Temple is highly stylized, and located in a land with stylized boundaries. The extravagant vision of life and fruitfulness in the land (47:1-12) involves a highly poetic portrayal of the Temple as the source of it. The water issuing from beneath the threshold belongs (like the Holy War of 38f.) to the Zion-tradition (cf. Ps. 46:4), but the motif is derived in turn from mythological ideas, according to which the mountain of the gods was a place from which rivers flowed (cf. also Gen. 2:10-14). The life-giving properties of the Temple revitalize even the Dead Sea, in a bold portrayal of creative power. The image is a prelude to the stylized fixing of tribal boundaries, according to its traditional ultimate limits (47:15-20). Jerusalem is to be a separate territory in the midst of the tribal allotments, 'a portion set apart for the LORD' (48:9). The tribal allotments are a succession, from north to south, of equally proportioned bands of land running across the country. The city is itself a thirteenth such territory (eighth in the series that begins in the north, vv. 8-22), and is conceived, in a twist on the traditional allocation of cities within the tribal lands to the Levites, as a *הַרְוֵזָה* an offering to Yahweh (v. 10). Finally, the city is named 'The LORD is There' (48:35); the ordinary name of Jerusalem is replaced by an expression which conveys the essential character and destiny of the city, but which, in Hebrew, hints at

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the literal name, by virtue of its sound (Yahweh Shammah; Cf Yerushelaim).

²⁷ The plural form of the phrase also appears in Ezk. 34:14, perhaps heightening the identification of a mythic mount and the whole land (cf. 6:2; 37:22; 39:2, 4).

²⁸ Note, incidentally, that the Davidic aspect of that tradition finds no place here.

²⁹ Notice also the criticism of kings in Ezk. 43:7-9.

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The interpretation of Ezekiel's use of the Zion-tradition is complicated. On the one hand, it can be seen as a ringing affirmation of the main elements in that tradition (so Zimmerli).³⁰ The poetic use of the mythological language which had already found a home there can be regarded as a free restatement of it; the idealized picture of a new Temple, if it is not a literal blueprint, at least depends for its force on the actual re-building of a Temple in the ancient city; moreover, the explicit hope of a new Davidic dynasty (in 34:23f.) is in keeping with this view.

Against it, on the other hand, stands the fact that Ezekiel nowhere uses the name 'Zion'. Similarly, the eschatological note struck in chapters 38f. may be thought to set the context for the picture in chapters 40-48, which, with its own poetic imagery and stylized re-presentation of the traditions of election and settlement, avoids promising a mere return to conditions that prevailed before the exile. In chapters 40-48, moreover, 'David' is reduced to a 'prince', who plays a minor role (44:3). The essence of the final vision is simply that Yahweh will again dwell among his people. Bringing the wider context of the book to bear, that people is one which can be expected to be faithful because of the theology of New Covenant.³¹

In favour of the second of these approaches to Ezekiel is our point that the Jerusalem of the final vision is portrayed according to its true character and destiny. Ezekiel no doubt holds out the hope of an imminent return of the exiles to the land, and probably the task of reconstructing the Temple. But, like Jeremiah, he knows that the idea of a mere restoration is misguided. He looks for a decisive and new act of God in the history not only of Judah but of the nations.

X. Hope for Zion/Jerusalem after the Exile

Our study of some of the major blocks of Old Testament literature has shown that Jerusalem's fall in 587 BC and the exile that ensued had a massive impact upon Israel's thinking

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about itself and its destiny. In each of them, in different ways, the Zion-tradition is in the centre of the theological reflection; the loss of Jerusalem, in the light of the promise made to David, compelled new ways of conceptualizing the nation's hope in its God. What more may be said about Old Testament views of Jerusalem after the exile?

The Book of Jeremiah, it will be recalled, held out specific hopes of a return, even giving a timetable. In seventy years Babylon would lie in ruins and Jerusalem and the cities of Judah would be repopulated.³² Jeremiah's prediction is specifically taken up in the largest single

³⁰ W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel I* (Philadelphia, Fortress 1979) 41.

³¹ See above on Jeremiah; *cf.* also Ezk. 11:16-21.

³² The 'seventy years' can be reckoned in either of two different ways: as from c. 605 BC (the time of Nebuchadnezzar's first raids on Jerusalem, when, according to Dan. 1:1-7, the first deportations of Jewish people to Babylon took place) to c. 535 BC (shortly after the decree of the Persian King Cyrus permitting the exiles to return to their own land, Ezra 1:1ff.); or from 587 BC (the date of the destruction of the Temple) to its

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block of Old Testament post-exilic literature, namely Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah. The Books of Chronicles date from c. 400 BC;³³ they re-tell the story of Israel from the beginning (actually from the beginning of the world) to the restoration of the exiles at the hand of Cyrus. This restoration is seen as the fulfilment of the prophecy of Jeremiah (2 Chr. 36:21). An almost verbatim repetition of the last two verses of Chronicles in Ezra 1:1f. shows that Ezra-Nehemiah (which continue the story from the point at which Chronicles left it, into the restoration period) proceed from the same starting-point.³⁴ Does it follow that Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah see the restoration under Cyrus as the definitive fulfilment of the prophets' promises of a redemption that will follow the judgment of exile? If so, it would raise questions about any simple application of those promises to present-day events.

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The answer is complicated, first of all, by the question whether Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah is a literary and theological unity (which we cannot discuss in detail here).³⁵ On the face of it, it would seem that Chronicles takes a highly positive view of the return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple there, since that is where the book ends. Its theological message (briefly, that God is always ready to turn again in favour to those who return humbly to him, e.g. 2 Chr. 7:14) makes such a view of its final position quite plausible. The likelihood that 2 Chr. 36 is in some sense a finishing point is suggested by the nature of the linkage between it and Ezra 1, which looks editorial. It is necessary, therefore, to ask whether Ezra-Nehemiah take the view of the return to Jerusalem which seems to be present in Chronicles.

In my view, Ezra-Nehemiah are somewhat guarded in their praise of the restoration and its aftermath.³⁶ There are definite indications that both books express dissatisfaction with the circumstances in which they find themselves. First, the returned exiles still toil under foreign domination;³⁷ secondly, the laying of the foundations of the new Temple has a decidedly mixed reception from those who had seen that of Solomon (Ezra 3:10-13); thirdly, the sin in the community (*i.e.* the mixed marriages) directly throws the fulfilment of prophetic promise into question.³⁸ It is no accident that both Ezra and Nehemiah finish with the story of mixed

rebuilding in 516 BC. In each case the figure is approximate. The latter is to be favoured because of the significance attached to the loss of the Temple and its furnishings in 2 Chr. 36:18f. and Ezra 1.

³³ H.G.M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (London, Marshall, Morgan and Scott 1982) 15f. dates Chronicles in the mid-fourth century BC, though allowing that precise dating is speculative.

³⁴ There are other evidences of Ezra-Nehemiah's dependence on Jeremiah, especially in its use of the term גֵּרִים : ('exiles'. This word is found several times in Jer. 29 (vv. 1, 4, 16, 20, 31), in the same context as the prediction of the seventy-year exile (v. 10). It then appears, for example, in Ezra 1:11, 2:1,4:1 etc.; cf. Ezk. 1:1; 3:11,15 etc.

³⁵ The contention that Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah form a theological and compositional unity is a commonplace of Old Testament criticism, represented, for example, by M. Noth, *The Chronicler's History* (Sheffield, JSOT 1987). The recent challenge by H.G.M. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles* (Cambridge, CUP 1977), has been influential, but the case for unity has been defended again by D.J.A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (London, Marshall, Morgan and Scott 1984) 9-14.

³⁶ For fuller argument, see my 'Ezra-Nehemiah and the Fulfilment of Prophecy', *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986) 205-24.

³⁷ Notice the allusion to the Persian overlord as the King of Assyria (6:22) and the prayers of Ezra (Ezra 9, Neh. 9, esp. vv. 32-6) where the inhabitants of Jerusalem are spoken of as 'slaves'.

³⁸ Note Isa. 40:2: 'your warfare (מִלְחָמָה) is ended'; but it is precisely the exiles' גֵּרִים , still alive and well in the community, that causes Ezra's horrified reaction in Ezra 9: see v. 13.

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marriages, and therefore the apparently irresolvable problem of recurring sin, and hence ongoing slavery.

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This does not mean that Ezra-Nehemiah do not think that prophecy has been fulfilled by the return from Babylon. On the contrary, they incorporate a highly sophisticated reading of certain prophecies (especially Jer. 31 and Isa. 40), such that Ezra's act of repentance actually functions as a prerequisite of the realization of the New Covenant.³⁹ It does mean, however, that in their view what has happened in their time is only a beginning.

This consideration of Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah poses a question: if there are actually two views here (*i.e.* in Chronicles: prophecy fulfilled; in Ezra-Nehemiah: prophecy only *begun* to to be fulfilled), which does the Old Testament affirm? We return to this question in a moment.

A word is necessary first, however, about other post-exilic literature. The period has been the subject of considerable speculation about the shape of its theological development, because of large gaps in our knowledge of its history, and because the texts often tell us less than we would wish. It has become common, however, to suppose that the post-exilic community became sharply divided. On one side stood a group that supported the official religion, centred on Jerusalem, and believed that in all essentials prophecy was fulfilled in the restoration and the reconstituted cult (Chronicles represents this view; Haggai and Zechariah 1-8 could also be counted here). On the other was a group that was critical of the cultic establishment, and looked for the salvation of the faithful elsewhere. This group found its voice in apocalyptic literature in particular.⁴⁰

The polarization of these reconstructed groups is probably exaggerated; there is an obvious danger of reading back into the restoration period some of the tensions known to have existed around the turn of the eras. Nevertheless, it is true that there is literature in which Jerusalem forms at best a small part of the hope that is expressed. This includes Daniel, which in general builds but little on covenantal theology, and therefore on the Zion-tradition, though Daniel 9 forms an important exception. In Esther, the fate of the people of God

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seems to be played out at the centre of the Persian Empire; here the 'exile' continues, and the obligation laid upon the faithful to return to the holy city in Ezra-Nehemiah is unknown.⁴¹ For completeness, mention should be made of the whole Wisdom stream in the Old Testament, in which covenantal theology plays, at most, a very minor role. The fictitious setting of Ecclesiastes

³⁹ J. G. McConville, *op. cit.*, 213-223.

⁴⁰ See P.D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia, Fortress 1979); O. Ploger, *Theocracy and Eschatology* (Richmond, John Knox 1968).

⁴¹ See S.B. Berg, 'After the Exile: God and History in the Books of Chronicles and Esther', in J.L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel, ed., *The Divine Helmsman* (New York, KTAV 1980).

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in the mouth of a king in Jerusalem is far from an affirmation of the Zion-tradition, but rather a device which serves the theme of the futility of all things.⁴²

There is, therefore, no unified view of the significance of Jerusalem in the post-exilic literature. Rather, the watershed of 587 BC produced different responses. Where 'Zion' imagery is retained in expressions of hope for the future, it is rarely (if ever) in the form of a simple return to the *status quo ante*. The shared prophetic vision of a restored Israel is of an entity that is qualitatively different; in the terms of the New Covenant, this is based in turn on an act of God that is qualitatively different. It is not easy to turn such prophecies into a vision for the historical city of Jerusalem. This is the more true of that literature in which hopes for Jerusalem introduce an eschatological element, removing it from the ordinary historical plane. Jerusalem becomes, in the prophetic vision, a symbol of God's final work of salvation for all the nations, who unite in their knowledge and worship of him. In all this Jerusalem—the historical city—recedes into the background. Just as it was not in evidence at the beginning of the Old Testament story (not even in tribal Israel—according to some, the 'truest' manifestation of the people of God in the Old Testament), so it is not essentially (or at least uniformly) there at the end.

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Nevertheless, a problem of interpretation remains. At the outset we noted that the story of Jerusalem in the Old Testament inevitably presents the interpreter with choices, the nature of which by now should be clearer. Christian interpreters already stand in a tradition of choice-making on the subject that goes back as far as the form of the Old Testament canon which we find in the Christian Bible. The contrast between the order of the books there and in the Hebrew Bible is interesting in regard to this issue. In the Christian Bible (based on the LXX), Chronicles - Ezra-Nehemiah immediately follow the other historical books, with which they have much content in common (namely Samuel-Kings). This is so in spite of the fact that they come from a later and wholly different period in Israel's history, and have a quite different message. The effect of placing them after Samuel-Kings is to make them a kind of repository of additional information about the history of Israel (as actually implied by the LXX's name for Chronicles-Παραλειπόμενα or 'Things Left Out'). Consequently, Chronicles has not, by and large, occupied a prominent place in Christian biblical interpretation. The Christian form of the Old Testament closes rather with the prophets. This is in accordance with the emphasis on promise and fulfilment in an approach to the Old Testament which takes its starting-point in the New Testament. There is, therefore, in the arrangement of the Christian Old Testament, an interpretative bias towards an open, expectant Old Testament. The nature of that expectation, for Christian interpretation, is controlled by the New Testament.

The Hebrew Bible makes an equally revealing choice. In it, Chronicles is in the final position, aligned not with other history-books (the Former Prophets in Jewish understanding), but with the Writings, in the third division of the Hebrew canon. That this is not a relegation of Chronicles to a low position appears from the fact that the natural order of Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah (*i.e.* the

⁴² The Wisdom literature is not, of course, all post-exilic. It is important, however, to notice this whole dimension of the Old Testament. Ecclesiastes shows that it was still flourishing in the late Old Testament period, in a form which was posing sharp questions to covenantal theology. See G. von Rad, *Wisdom in the Old Testament* (London, SCM 1972); and for a statement of sharp contrast between the wisdom and covenantal strains in Old Testament theology, J.L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: an Introduction* (London, SCM 1982).

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chronological order retained in the Christian Bible) has been reversed. In this way, Chronicles, rather than the somewhat pessimistic Ezra-Nehemiah, occupies what is in fact the climactic final position. The last word in the Hebrew Bible is about the restoration to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple there. Future development of the relationship between God and his people,

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in Jewish interpretation, should happen within that framework; the interpretative choice made in the order of books chosen by the canonizers of the Hebrew Bible prescribes it.⁴³

We have seen above that the diversity of usage regarding Jerusalem in the Old Testament, particularly in postexilic literature, allows for diverse evaluations of its significance. It should also be clear that strikingly different evaluations have actually occurred and entered the traditions of the two main religions that have an interest in the Old Testament. By laying its accent on the prophets, Christian expectation regarding Jerusalem is governed by the sorts of considerations we outlined in our treatment of the main prophetic corpora. The language of the Zion-tradition was used, but as the vehicle of a hope for something qualitatively new. The Old Testament does not promise mere repossession of land and restoration of institutions.

It is in the light of this conclusion that one must, in the end, evaluate those passages which seem so unequivocally to speak of a return to the land and to the city of Jerusalem (*e.g.* Ezk. 36:22-38; 40-48), and which have been taken by many to find their fulfilment in the modern immigrations of Jews to Israel. I have argued from a study of the Old Testament books themselves that passages like these cannot be interpreted 'literally', as fixed promises concerning a remote future. On a symbolic level, of course, they remain to be fulfilled at the end of the Old Testament period, as is suggested by the conviction in Ezra-Nehemiah that they were incompletely fulfilled in their time.

There is, however, a further reason why it is difficult for Christians to read them thus. This has to do with Christian theology more broadly understood, and the re-focussing of Christian hope upon Christ himself, who has rendered hope in the institutions of the 'Old Covenant' obsolete.⁴⁴ This happens most explicitly in the Letter to the Hebrews, but also in the

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Gospels and in Paul.⁴⁵ Such a recognition releases us from the need to try to interpret literally a passage like Ezekiel 40-48, which in my view was never meant to be taken so (its use of figurative language seems clear in ch. 47), but whose essence is a promise of God's presence (Ezk. 48:35b). For Christians, this translates very well into the presence of God with his people the Church in Christ.

⁴³ W.J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel* (Leicester, Apollos 1989), is an interesting treatment of the books of the Old Testament, by a Christian writer, according to the order of the Hebrew canon.

⁴⁴ We have observed above in Section III that talk of Jerusalem in the Old Testament is impossible apart from talk of the cultic institutions of the Mosaic covenant.

⁴⁵ Such a position is outlined in greater detail in ch. 3 below.

XI. The Old Testament and Modern Jerusalem

As noted at the beginning, the interpretation of biblical texts about Jerusalem inevitably inspires great passions. If the foregoing seems to suggest that the Old Testament has little or nothing to say to us about the living, historical city of Jerusalem, this is hardly a satisfying conclusion of our study in itself. It is true that the Old Testament attaches no importance to Jerusalem in the simple sense of a geographical location; there is no basis in a Christian reading of the Old Testament for a continuing idea of 'sacred space'. The idea of some necessary, special significance of a place leans more towards Canaan than biblical theology (which, as we have now seen, nowhere simply adopts what we have called the 'Zion-tradition'). Yet Jerusalem remains symbolically very powerful in the Old Testament, even if the so-called Zion-tradition is criticized and finally transformed there. Moreover, as this whole volume makes abundantly clear, the city of Jerusalem remains powerful for those who live there (or who would like to live there!) and who still require to bring their theological traditions to bear upon it.

Jerusalem evokes a number of ideas in the Old Testament. David saw its potential as a unifying force; it is associated with the kingship of God over all the earth; it is the place of true worship. From the perspective of the New Testament, none of these things need—or can—any longer be posited of Jerusalem alone. Nevertheless, they may be helpful as we try to think what Jerusalem, that modern meeting-point of the faiths, and branches of them, might be. We saw in our study how an understanding of Jerusalem (the 'Zion-tradition') came gradually to be transformed. A key text was Isaiah 2:2-4, in which the rather inward-looking focus of election was

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turned outward, so that Jerusalem became the place to which the nations made pilgrimage, and from which the law (Torah, or knowledge of God) went forth. This might become our text for a view of modern Jerusalem—a city rejoicing in its international and inter-denominational character and in which (and from which) the Church bears a clear witness to the God who Christians believe dwells uniquely in Christ.

Such a view can be no more than sentimental wishful thinking, however, without the recognition that this demands a certain kind of attitude on the part of the various interested groups, especially, for our present purposes, Christian groups. Two points need to be made in closing.

First, those who desire 'reconciliation' should not be content to spiritualize it, as if our belonging together in Christ automatically did away with our practical difficulties. This is patently not the case. On the contrary, different groups of Christians can be strongly committed to courses of action which inevitably lead to collision. Reconciliation of the legitimate interests of different groups is inescapably political, and requires action, especially to alleviate the suffering of the weak. This is where the Old Testament prophets most directly confront those interested in Jerusalem and Israel today.

Secondly, there is in Christianity (and even in certain Old Testament laws, *e.g.* Deut. 24:19-22) an imperative to be ready to relinquish that to which one appears to have a perfect right. The

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situation in modern Jerusalem, and in the land of which it is part, is one of those in which different groups seem to have clear rights, yet these rights exactly contradict each other. In such a situation it is strictly speaking impossible to think of a 'solution'. Kenneth Cragg has spoken in this connection of a need to 'relativize our legitimate particularities'—though he acknowledges the enormity of such a demand. This 'relativizing' is not spoken of allegiance to Christ in itself; it evokes, rather, the vision of a Church which, though diverse, proclaims the reality of love, self-sacrifice and reconciliation. This is the essential condition of witness to Christ in Jerusalem and a truly Christian contribution to the peace of that city.

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