

**MISCELLANEOUS
BIBLICAL STUDIES**

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

**RECOVERING
THE WORDPLAY IN
ZECHARIAH 2:5-9
[MT 2:9–13]**

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RECOVERING THE WORDPLAY IN
ZECHARIAH 2:4–9 [MT 2:8–13]

ZECH 2:8–13 [MT]

8 רץ דבר אל-הנער הלז לאמר פרוזות תשב
ירושלם מרב אדם ובהמה בתוכה:
9 ואני אתיהללה נאסיהוה חומת אש סביב
ולכבוד איהיה בתוכה:
10 הוי הוי ונסו מארץ צפון נאסיהוה
כי פארבע רוחות השמים
פרשתי אתכם נאסיהוה:
11 הוי ציון המלטי יושבת בתדבבל:
12 כי כה אמר יהוה צבאות
אחר כבוד שלחני אל-הגוים השללים אתכם
כי הנגע בכם נגע בבבת עינו:
13 כי הנני מניף אתידי עליהם והיו שלל
לעבדיהם וידעתם כי-יהוה צבאות שלחני:

KING JAMES VERSION 2:5–9

4 Run, speak to this young man [Zechariah], saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited *as* towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: 5 For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her. 6 Ho, ho, *come forth*, and flee from the land of the north, saith the LORD: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the LORD. 7 Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest *with* the daughter of Babylon. 8 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye. 9 For, behold, I will shake mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and

ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me.

Originally the phrase in the MT of 2:9, **וְלִכְבוֹד אֱהִיָּהּ** and for glory I will be in her midst.” would have been written without vowels and vowel letters as **ולכבר אהיה** בתוכה. The phrase **אֶחָר כְּבוֹד שְׁלַחֲנִי** “after glory he sent me,” in 2:12 would have been written as **אחר כבר שלחני**. When these texts were vocalized with vowel letters the **כבר** in 2:12 was equated with the **כבר** in 2:9. Both nouns became **כבוד** “glory” and the wordplay between **כבר**, stem I “glory, honor, and **כבר**, stem II “difficulty, distress, struggle,” disappeared.¹

Hebrew **כבר**, stem II, is the cognate of the Arabic **كَبَد** (*kabad^{un}*) “difficulty, distress”; **كَبَد** (*kabada*) III, “to struggle with difficulties, to suffer” (Lane 1885: 2584; Wehr 1979: 947).² This **כבר**, stem II, appears in Isaiah 21:15³

כִּי־מִפְּנֵי חַרְבוֹת נָדְדוּ מִפְּנֵי חֶרֶב נְטוּשָׁה
וּמִפְּנֵי קִשְׁתֵּי דְרוּכָה וּמִפְּנֵי כְּבֵד מִלְחָמָה:

For they fled from the swords, from the drawn sword,
and from the bent bow, and from the distress of war.⁴

If the MT **כָּבֵד** “distress, struggling” were spelled with vowel letters it would appear as **כוֹבֵד**, which could easily have been misread as **כְּבוֹד**. Once the wordplay involving **כָּבֵד** / **כְּבוֹד** “glory” and **כָּבֵד** / **כוֹבֵד** “struggle” disappeared the three words **אֶחָר כְּבוֹד שְׁלַחֲנִי** in 2:8 (MT 2:12) became a stumbling block for translators and commentators.

One hundred years ago H. G. T. Mitchell (1912: 141–142) noted with reference to Zech 2: 8 (MT 2:12) that:

The speaker next proceeds, as if about to give a reason for the summons he has issued, but interrupts himself, or is interrupted, by a parenthetical statement that has never been satisfactorily explained. It reads, literally, *after glory he sent me*. The subject is evidently Yahweh. The object, who is undoubtedly the same as in vv. 13/9 and 15/11, must be the prophet. There is great difficulty with the phrase *after glory*.

Mitchell translated the אַחַר כְּבוֹד שְׁלַחְנִי as “*After the glory (vision) he sent me.*”

Decades later Ralph Smith (1984: 196) noted that the phrase אַחַר כְּבוֹד שְׁלַחְנִי, “after glory he sent me” is still the “most puzzling clause in the book [of Zechariah],” and David Petersen (1984: 173) agreed noting that this phrase “is extremely difficult.” Here are other translations and paraphrases of the two puzzling words אַחַר כְּבוֹד.

- ὀπίσω δόξης (LXX)
- *post gloriam* (VUL)
- after glory (ASV, NKJ, JPS, NAS, NAU)
- after honour (NLT)
- after the glory (KJV, WEB, DRA)
- after his glory (RSV, NRS)
- after this glory (GNV)
- since the Glory (NJB)
- after he has honored me (NIV, NIB)
- that for his own glory (NET)
- after a period of glory (NLT)
- after he had already (NAB)
- on a glorious mission (way) [אַחַר to אַרְחָ] (NEB).

Some commentators focused their attention on the אַחַר, hoping to find a more contextually suitable definition than “after” or “since.” Herbert Leupold (1956) and Thomas Mc Comiskey (1998) translated the אַחַר as “in pursuit of,” a

translation which is followed by Phillips (2007: 53).⁵ Joyce Baldwin (1972) translated אַחַר כְּבוֹד שְׁלַחֲנִי “with insistence he sent me”; and D. W. Thomas (IB 1066) emended the אַחַר to אֲשֶׁר and translated “whose glory sent me.”⁶ Carola Kloos (1975: 734) argued that אַחַר meaning “behind” can be extended to include the meaning “in order to reach, to obtain, to bring about.” She concluded that “as far as Zech. ii 12 is concerned the consequence must be that ‘*kabod*’ is the purpose of the mission,” i.e., “for the sake of [his] honour, Yahweh sent me among the nations.”

Other commentators focused their attention on the כְּבוֹד “glory,” trying to find a logical basis for כְּבוֹד to be the subject of the verb שְׁלַחֲנִי “it sent me.” Carol and Eric Meyers (1987: 166) concluded that “Glory” is probably elliptical for “Glory of Yahweh,” therefore “Glory” and “Yahweh of Hosts” can be equated.

Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer (2004: 361) proposed to regard כְּבוֹד as an abstract quality, referring to God’s glory, but nevertheless not to be identified with God on a grammatical level. As such, it ‘sends’ or rather ‘commissions’ God אֵל הַגּוֹיִם.

For Tiemeyer the כְּבוֹד is the subject of the verb שְׁלַח and the object suffix נִי- “me” of the שְׁלַחֲנִי is God. She concluded:

The idea that “honour” commissioned God against the nations (אֵל הַגּוֹיִם) concerns the issue of God’s reputation being at stake after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. . . . My proposition is to see the whole clause as a metaphorical expression where God is sent by (His) honour to proclaim punishment for the nations. (2004: 370–371)

She offered the following translation of Zech.2: 11–15, which reflects her reading the MT עֵינּוֹ “his eye” as עֵינִי “my eye”

and reading the MT אֶל- “to” as if were עַל- “against.”

Up, oh Zion, flee, you who dwell in fair Babylon! Because thus says the Lord of Hosts: “Afterwards, honour will send me against the nations who are spoiling you, because whoever touches you touches the pupil of my eye.”

Michael Stead (2009: 115) followed Tiemeyer’s approach and offered his slightly different translation of Zech 2:12–13,

Because thus says Yahweh of Hosts: “Afterwards, [my] honour will send me against the nations who are spoiling you, because whoever touches you touches the pupil of my eye. And behold I am stretching out my arm against them, and they will become spoil to their servants” [and you will know that Yahweh of Hosts has sent me].

It is of interest that the commentators who focused their attention on the noun כְּבוֹד considered only כְּבֹד, stem I, “glory,” seemingly unaware of כָּבַד, stem II, “distress, struggle” and the כָּבַד in Isaiah 21:15, noted above.

A misplaced phrase in the Hebrew text may have contributed to this oversight. The phrase כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת, “thus says Yahweh of Hosts,” found now in 2:8a (MT 2:12a) needs to be moved to 2:9a (MT 2:13a). Once this phrase is moved the oracles and words of Yahweh in 2:5–9 (which contain the wordplay on כְּבוֹד and כָּבַד) can be accurately identified as follows (with Yahweh’s words in italics, the transposed phrase in small caps, and the ambiguous pronouns clarified by bracketed nouns):

For I will be to her a wall of fire round about, THE ORACLE OF YAHWEH, and I will be the GLORY within her. 6 Ho! Ho! Flee from the land of the north, THE ORACLE OF YAHWEH; for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens, THE ORACLE OF YAHWEH. 7 Ho! Escape to

Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon. 8 Indeed [. . .] after a STRUGGLE he [Yahweh] commissioned me [Zechariah] to the nations who plundered you [Zion], for he [anyone] who touches you [Zion] touches the apple of his [Yahweh's] eye. 9a THUS SAID YAHWEH OF HOSTS, “Behold, I will shake my hand over them [Babylonians], and they shall become plunder for those who served them.” 9b Then you [Zion] will know that Yahweh of Hosts commissioned me [Zechariah].

The devouring fires which destroyed Jerusalem will be replaced by fires which will protect Zion. Zechariah's *struggling* (כָּבַד / כּוֹבֵד) will be replaced by Yahweh's *glory* (כְּבוֹד).

The clue to the nature of Zechariah's *struggling* can be found in the universalism attested in Zech 2:11a (MT 2:15a):

וְנִלְווּ גוֹיִם רַבִּים אֶל־יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא
וְהָיוּ לִי לְעָם וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכָם

And many nations shall join themselves to Yahweh
in that day, and shall be my people;
and I will dwell in the midst of you.

If Zechariah's mission had been simply to proclaim Yahweh's promise to destroy Babylon (as stated in 2:9 [MT 2:13], “Behold, I will shake my hand over them, and they shall become plunder for those who served them”) there would have been no struggle for him. But Zechariah's struggle was profoundly theological. It involved the ethnocentric versus the universalistic components which he was commissioned to deliver. He struggled with his options: should he become a disobedient ethnic purist defending the the *הַקֹּדֶשׁ*, “holy race” (Ezra 9:2) or an obedient universalist? The struggle ended when he became the obedient universalist who would prophesy:

Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek Yahweh of Hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favor of Yahweh.

Thus says Yahweh of Hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.” (Zech 8:22–23)

CONCLUSION

The phrase **אַחַר כְּבוֹד שְׁלַחְנִי**, “after glory he sent me,” in Zech 2:8 (MT2:12) has been consistently identified as the most difficult phrase to understand in the book of Zechariah. Simply by changing two vowels and transposing the **א** vowel letter so that **כְּבוֹד** “glory” became **כוֹבֵד** “struggle, distress, difficulty” the phrase is readily translated as “after a struggle he sent me.” This **כוֹבֵד** is *scriptio plene* for the **כָּבֵד** attested in Isaiah 21:15, where the **כָּבֵד מִלְחָמָה** can be translated as “the struggle/distress of war.” Once Yahweh restored Zion it would be filled with his **כְּבוֹד** “glory.” This promise of God’s *glory* (**כְּבוֹד**) being restored in Zion surely influenced Zechariah who was *struggling* (**כוֹבֵד**) with the idea that **גוֹיִם רַבִּים** “many nations” would become “the people of Yahweh.” In English *glory* and *struggle* can never produce a wordplay; but in the original Hebrew of Zech 2:5 and 2:8 the **כְּבוֹד** “glory” and the **כוֹבֵד** “struggle” were an obvious wordplay. Once the original **כוֹבֵד** “struggle” was misread as **כְּבוֹד** “glory” it mistakenly attracted to itself the phrase in 2:9 (MT 2:13) **כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת** “thus said Yahweh of Host.”

With all of the evidence presented above the MT phrase **אַחַר כְּבוֹד שְׁלַחְנִי**, “after glory he sent me,” when vocalized as **אַחַר כּוֹבֵד שְׁלַחְנִי** becomes one of the easiest phrases in the book of Zechariah to translate. It means “After a struggle he

[Yahweh] sent me [Zechariah].

NOTES

1. T. J. Finley (1988: 337–338) recognized in Zechariah’s **בַּת עֵינוֹ** “gate of his eye” an ironic pun that highlighted the pride of Babylon which call herself (*bābilt*) “gateway to god.” When Babylon (**בַּת אֵל**) laid her finger on Judah she should have realized that she had poked at the pupil (**בַּה**) of Yahweh’s very own eye. Finley concluded “the prophet alludes to both the arrogance of Babylon as well as to Yahweh’s abiding presence with his people.”

2. The Arabic **كَبَد** (*kabad^{um}*) “difficulty, distress” and **كَبَد** (*kabada*) III, “to struggle with difficulties” are noted in BDB (457) and KBS (II: 455) but are not designated as being the cognate of a Hebrew **כָּבַד** stem II. There is no Arabic cognate for **כְּבוֹד**, stem I, “glory, honor.” The Arabic word for “glory/glorious” is **مَجِيد / مَجْد** (*majd^{um} / majîd*) (click here), and for “honorable” it is **كَرِيم** (*karîm*) (click here).

3. Other translations of the **כָּבַד מִלְחָמָה** include the Septuagint’s **πεπτωκότων ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ** “the ones fallen-to-ruin in the battle,” and the following English translations:

- the grievousness of war (KJV, ASV, WEB, YLT)
- the heat of battle (NIB, NIV)
- the press of battle (NAS, NAU, RSV, NJB)
- the stress of battle (NRS)
- the distress of battle (NKJ)
- the terrors of war (NLT).

4. A. A. van Hoonacker (1908: 602–603) appealed to this verse to justify his translation of Zech 2:11–12 as

“Sion! Sauve-toi, qui habites chez la fille de babel! Car ainsi parle Jahvé des Armées: Après [*le temps de*] souffrance, il m’a envoyé vers les nations qui vous ont dépouillés; car qui vous touche, touche la pupille de son œil!”

His commentary included this statement:

Nous proposons de comprendre כבוד non pas au sens de *gloire*, mais à celui de *charge*, au moral *malheur*, en lisant si l’on veut כָּבֹד (*Is.* xxi, 15; — comp. l’emploi du verbe כָּבַד, *qal* et *hiph.*): *après la tribulation*, il m’a envoyé. . . ; c’est-à-dire : vos tribulations ayant pris fin, il m’a envoyé aux nations qui vous ont dépouillés; savoir, comme le contexte l’explique aussitôt, pour tirer vengeance des mauvais traitements qu’elles vous ont infligés.

5. Cited by Richard Phillips (2007: 53).

6. Cited by Ralph Smith (1984: 196).

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