RECOVERING

THE WORDPLAY IN

ZECHARIAH 2:5-9

[MT 2:9–13]

BY

THOMAS F. McDANIEL, Ph.D.

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ZECHARIAH 2:4–9 [MT 2:8–13]

ZECH 2:8–13 [MT]

8 רָץ דַּבֵּר אֶל־הַנַּעַר הַלָּז לֵאמֹר פְּרָזוֹת תֵּשֵׁב
יְרוּשָׁלַ͏ִם מֵרֹב אָדָם וּבְהֵמָה בְּתוֹכָהּ:
9 וַאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה־לָּהּ נְאֻם־יְהוָה חוֹמַת אֵשׁ סָבִיב
וּלְכָבוֹד אֶהְיֶה בְתוֹכָהּ:
10 הוֹי הוֹי וְנֻסוּ מֵאֶרֶץ צָפוֹן נְאֻם־יְהוָה
כִּי כְּאַרְבַּע רוּחוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם
פֵּרַשְׂתִּי אֶתְכֶם נְאֻם־יְהוָה:
11 הוֹי צִיּוֹן הִמָּלְטִי יוֹשֶׁבֶת בַּת־בָּבֶל:
12 כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
אַחַר כָּבוֹד שְׁלָחַנִי אֶל־הַגּוֹיִם הַשֹּׁלְלִים אֶתְכֶם
כִּי הַנֹּגֵעַ בָּכֶם נֹגֵעַ בְּבָבַת עֵינוֹ:
13 כִּי הִנְנִי מֵנִיף אֶת־יָדִי עֲלֵיהֶם וְהָיוּ שָׁלָל
לְעַבְדֵיהֶם וִידַעְתֶּם כִּי־יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁלָחָנִי:

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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, וּלְכָבוֹד אֶהְיֶה בְתוֹכָהּ "and for glory I will be in her midst." would have been written without vowels and vowel letters as ולכבד אהיה בתכה. The phrase אַחַר כָּבוֹד שְׁלָחַנִי "after glory he sent me," in 2:12 would have been written as אחר כבד שלחני. When these texts were vocalized with vowel letters the כבד in 2:12 was equated with the כבד in 2:9. Both nouns became כבוד "glory" and the wordplay between כבד, stem I "glory, honor, and כבד, stem II "difficulty, distress, struggle," disappeared.[1]

Hebrew כבד, stem II, is the cognate of the Arabic كبد (*kabad*[un]) "difficulty, distress"; كبد (*kabada*) III, "to struggle with difficulties, to suffer" (Lane 1885: 2584; Wehr 1979: 947).[2] This כבד, stem II, appears in Isaiah 21:15 [3]

כִּי־מִפְּנֵי חֲרָבוֹת נָדָדוּ מִפְּנֵי חֶרֶב נְטוּשָׁה
וּמִפְּנֵי קֶשֶׁת דְּרוּכָה וּמִפְּנֵי כֹּבֶד 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 כֹּבֶד "distress, struggling" were spelled with vowel letters it would appear as כובד, which could easily have been misread as כבוד. Once the wordplay involving כָּבֹד / כֹּבֶד "glory" and כּוֹבֶד / כֹּבֶד "struggle" disappeared the three words אַחַר כָּבוֹד שְׁלָחַנִי 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 כָּבוֹד שְׁלָחַנִי as "*After the glory* (vision) *he sent me*."

Decades later Ralph Smith (1984: 196) noted that the phrase אַחַר כָּבוֹד שְׁלָחַנִי, "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 כָּבוֹד.

- 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) [אחר to ארח] (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 אחר as "in pursuit of," a translation which is followed by Phillips (2007: 53).[5] Joyce

Baldwin (1972) translated שְׁלָחַנִי כָּבוֹד אַחַר "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 כָּבוֹד "glory," trying to find a logical basis for כָּבוֹד to be the subject of the verb שְׁלָחַנִי "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 "כבוד 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 אל הגוים." For Tiemeyer the כָּבוֹד is the subject of the verb שָׁלַח and the object suffix -נִי "me" of the שְׁלָחַנִי is God. She concluded:

> the idea that "honour" commissioned God against the nations (אל הגוים) 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 עֵינוֹ "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 כָּבוֹד considered only כבד, stem I, "glory," seemingly unaware of כבד, stem II, "distress, struggle" and the כֹּבֶד in Isaiah 21:15, noted above.

A misplaced phrase in the Hebrew text may have contributed to this oversight. The phrase כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, "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 כָּבוֹד and כֹּבֶד) 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] commis-

sioned 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* (כָּבֵד / כּוֹבֵד) will be replaced by Yahweh's *glory* (כָּבוֹד).

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

$$\text{וְנִלְווּ גוֹיִם רַבִּים אֶל־יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא}$$
$$\text{וְהָיוּ לִי לְעָם וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכֵךְ}$$

> 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 זֶרַע 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 כָּבוֹד שְׁלָחַנִי, "after glory he sent me," in Zech 2:8 (MT 2:12) has been consistently identified as the most difficult phrase to understand in the book of Zechariah. Simply by changing two vowels and transposing the וֹ vowel letter so that כָּבוֹד "glory" became כּוֹבֶד "struggle, distress, difficulty" the phrase is readily translated as "after a struggle he sent me." This כּוֹבֶד is *scriptio plene* for the כֹּבֶד attested in Isaiah 21:15, where the כֹּבֶד מִלְחָמָה can be translated as "the struggle / distress of war." Once Yahweh restored Zion it would be filled with his כָּבוֹד "glory." This promise of God's *glory* (כָּבוֹד) being restored in Zion surely influenced Zechariah who was *struggling* (כּוֹבֶד) 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 כָּבוֹד "*glory*" and the כּוֹבֶד "*struggle*" were an obvious wordplay. Once the original כּוֹבד/כבד "*struggle*" was misread as כבוד/כבד "*glory*" it mistakenly attracted to itself the phrase in 2:9 (MT 2:13) כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת "thus said Yahweh of Host."

With all of the evidence presented above the MT phrase אַחַר כָּבוֹד שְׁלָחַנִי, "after glory he sent me," when vocalized as אַחַר כּוֹבֶד שְׁלָחַנִי 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 בְּבַת עֵינוֹ "gate of his eye" an ironic pun that highlighted the pride of Babylon which call herself (*bābilt*) "gateway to god." When Babylon (בבת אל) laid her finger on Judah she should have realized that she had poked at the pupil (בבה) 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 كبد (*kabad^{un}*) "difficulty, distress" and كبد (*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 כָּבֵד stem II. There is no Arabic cognate for כָּבוֹד, stem I, "glory, honor." The Arabic word for "glory / glorious" is مجيد / مجد (*majd^{un}* / *majîd*) (click here), and for "honorable" it is كريم (*karîm*) (click here).

3.   Other translations of the כֹּבֶד מִלְחָמָה include the Septu-agint'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 *glorie*, mais à celui de *charge*, au moral *malheur*, en lisant si l'on veut כֵּבֶד (*Is*. xxi, 15; — comp. l'emploi du verbe כבד, *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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