

Cat.9 #4 Two spiritual structures, opposed to each other: Babylon and Zion

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Introduction

From before the foundation of the world the Lord God has chosen people to belong to what He in the new Testament calls His Bride. When the Lord had created Adam and Eve He gave them a perfect mate, and a perfect place to live. He did not suggest to them that they were living in, say, in a utopia. Evil had already started to exist since iniquity had entered the heart of the angel who later was called Satan, (Ezekiel 28: 15). And Adam and Eve needed to be aware of it. And to be on guard. But they needed to follow the Lord's warning and instructions, not as a robot, but out of free choice. That was God's desire for His Bride: voluntary, loving obedience. But they had to make that choice themselves. He warned them NOT to eat from the tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden. The couple however choose to follow their own desires. And submitted to the deceptive words of the enemy. That was a decision they made themselves. With that they lost their innocence, and the unspoiled relationship with their Creator. They then had to face the terrible consequences of their choice to act independent of what their Creator had warned them for. From there on the couple, and all of their descendants were living in a world that is marked by sin and brokenness. With an enemy who tries to rob, kill and destroy.

It is important for us to realize what kind of decision this was: what did God say, what is what He wants me to do? What do I want? What am I going to do? And all through history people have been confronted, we are being confronted, with this kind of decision. It has become the foundational question in the two spiritual structures that are opposed to each other.

Through the centuries God has called and has been preparing a people for Himself, a people set apart for Him. Who also had to make decisions. They, at a point in their lives decided to seek the living God and follow Him.

And through the centuries the enemy has tried to oppose Gods plan and to tempt people to make the wrong kind of decisions.

The spiritual infrastructure called Babylon.

After the flood the Lord told the descendants of Noah to multiply and fill the earth, Genesis 9: 1. The story of the building of Babel in Genesis does not give much information about it, but I think we may assume that it took some time before they started to build. The sons of Noah got families, for them to grow and try to make a kind of living and have their families, that took time. It is not clear (to me) if all the descendants of the sons of Noah, so also of Japheth and Sem, went in the direction of Sinear. Because the Genesis report mentions the location of the territories of Japheth and Sem at least later, in other regions, but maybe they only travelled there later. It seems (to me) possible that it were only the descendants of Ham that decided to settle in Sinear and to start building a city that became Babel. The report in Genesis focusses on those who did go to Sinear.

The wandering, from the mountains of Ararat, before they came to Sinear and decided to settle there, must have taken time, maybe some centuries. (Sinear is the region where Mesopotamia was/is situated). But the Scriptures tell that the people, that had already started to increase, decided to build a city, and united *so that they could stay together*. That meant that they *decided to make* a decision against God's instructions. Rebellion is: in obstinate independency determine yourself what you will do, and *not* listen to the good instructions and guidelines of the Lord. We will see that over time the increase of this characteristic became the distinguishing mark of what the Scriptures call Babylonian.

Nimrud, a grandchild of Ham, started his kingdom with the building of the city of Babel and several other cities in Sinear. The name "Nimrud" comes from a root that means: to rebel, to resist. So "Nimrud" is understood to mean: let us rebel. I think that it meant that Nimrud decided to behave independent towards the God who had saved people out of the flood that had been over the world. That he did not care about Gods instructions. For us it is important to realize what spiritually happened in those times. In the chapters of Genesis that inform us about the attempt to build that city we read about several characteristics that became part of the foundations of what the Scriptures describe as "Babylonian". We need to know what it is that is called "Babylonian", as it is an attitude/ structure that will exist till the time that Jesus will return. And then it will be judged completely.

According to Biblical chronology about 1600 years passed between the time Adam and Eve were chased out of the Garden of Eden and the moment the Lord brought the flood over the earth. In 1600 years much can happen. From the condensed information the Bible gives about that time we understand that idolatry took place on a widespread scale. Paul explains in Romans 1:18-25 the process by which mankind became (and still becomes) idolaters. Since the creation of the world God had made His eternal power and divine nature plain to mankind. People had come to know Him. But they did not glorify nor thank God for who He was. And they started to worship futile self-made images.

After the fall people were confronted continually with events of birth, death, harvest or crop failures, wild animals, change of seasons, catastrophes. When we do not thank God for who He is, and then do not ask for Gods care life becomes unsafe. And people start to try to influence everything in order to control it. And life and death, sowing and harvesting, the rise up and going down of the sun have been theme's in the life of humanity through all the seasons and centuries. With the desire to control those processes came superstition that they had power with witchcraft, "magic", magic rituals to accomplish changes. Idolatry and witchcraft is the religion of the pagans, everywhere and throughout the whole of history. It still is. From excavations we know that during the years between the flood and the building of Babel the peoples already had begun to worship other gods.

In Isaiah 14: 13,14 we read about Satan who wants to be worshipped as god: I will be like the most High. That is pride, iniquity. After the flood in which all the peoples on the earth, beside the Noah family, had drowned, the enemy was looking for concentrations of humans that he could hold in bondage to him, Satan. As he had done with eventually all the people before the flood, so that the Lord was grieved to have created humanity and decided to destroy man and beast from the face of the earth. And now, he tried it again. He let people worship him, also when they gave him the name of an idol. (Not the name of the idol is the most important issue, the worship is). From archaeological findings from that time we know that there was much idolatry in the areas that were part of Sinear. (Derek Prince once said/wrote: When people do not seek the Lord, the alternative is *always* idolatry).

Nimrud became known as a "mighty hunter before the Lord". I think that it is possible that Nimrud was using people for his rebellious plans and that he chased or killed people who did not submit to him. (Otherwise it is difficult to understand the addition "mighty hunter before the Lord" as he was a rebellious and not an obedient man before the Lord).

In the centuries between the building of Babel and the times that Isaiah and Jeremiah lived a development took place in Babylon. The city of Babel has gone through several stages. First it was a city, with a (planned) tower, then it grew to a state, and then it became a world-power. And with it also the hardening of the hearts became worse and worse.

In the Bible we read several times the prophetic call to leave Babel/ Babylon.

Isaiah 48:20 Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians.

Jeremiah 50:8 Flee out of Babylon, leave the land of the Babylonians

Jeremiah 51:6-9 Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives! Do not be destroyed because of her sins.

Jeremiah 51:45 Come out of her (=Babylon, see vs.41-44) Come out of her, my people, run for your lives. Run from the fierce anger of the Lord.

And, in Revelation 18:4 Come out of her, my people, so that ...

In the time of Isaiah and Jeremiah was Babel a world-power. In 539 B.C. it was captivated by the Persians, and its power came to an end. The prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah were partly fulfilled. Several elements in their prophecies were not fulfilled, and they seem to point to another time, a time that is reflected in elements of the book Revelation. These elements are parts of visions that the apostle John saw about the time before Jesus comes back.

We need also to realize, Eph. 6, that with the structures in the visible world there are spiritual structures that support and strengthen the sinful developments on earth. Spiritual structures, serving the enemy. Motivated by obstinacy, united in disobedience and united in power-politics with abuse of power. The spiritual developments developed, idolatrous, occult, immoral, cruel. In Jeremiah 50:21 the Lord characterizes Babylon as Merathaim. I have understood that that word meant: double rebellion. The disobedience of Adam and Eve was a terrible sin, but it was different from the "double rebellion", mentioned in Jeremiah. And, many centuries after Adam and Eve, in Jeremiah 51:1 the Lord announced a destroying wind against Babylon, against "those who dwell in Leb Kamal". The literal meaning of that name is "the midst of those who rise up against Me". That means that "Babylon" became the characteristic name for all those who *on purpose* resist the Lord and oppose Him. (Therefore we need to ask the Lord to show us whether there is this kind of rebellion in our heart. Do I in obstinacy decide to do what I want, also when I know that it grieves the Lord?)

We read in Genesis that the people in Babel planned to build a tower that would reach to the heavens. That meant, as far as we understand it that it was not just to be a high tower, but it was meant to be a tower from where *the gods* would influence what was going to happen on the earth. The Lord interfered, but on other towers, comparable to the one that the people had started, ziggurats, the sun, the moon (e.g. In Ur), the stars and planets were to be worshipped at the different levels of the tower. On the top a temple was going to be built where the chief god was to be worshipped. Who could he be other than the one who was intensely hungry, desiring for being worshipped? In Isaiah 14:12 he is called the "oppressor of the nations". When we see, apart from all the wars and misery in the centuries behind us, all the misery in this time in the huge refugee camps in so many places in the world, with all its sicknesses, hunger, and hopelessness, and when we notice the undermining of the fear of the Lord, of morality, respect, love in the last seventy- eighty years it is not difficult to believe that this oppressor came to rob, to steal and to destroy, also till in our time.

From excavations it is learned that at the time of the building of the tower, Marduk was the chief god to be worshipped, and so we may assume that in the temple on the ziggurat, Satan, under the name of Marduk, was going to be worshipped. Marduk was a sun-god, a fertility god, that had to bless the vegetables, the trees, the grass etc. They did not ask the Lord for his blessing, and therefore they had to turn to idols. And whom you worship whose slave you are, says the Scriptures. This idol also worked undercover, also in Babel. There were more gods that were worshipped in Babel. The meaning of that name, Babel, is: gate for the gods. The gods could enter in this world in Babel/Babylon. One of the "undercovers" has been/is the female demonic power that was worshipped in Babylon, and whose worship we can find over the whole world under many names: Ishtar, also a fertility goddess, Isis, Astarte the "queen of heaven", Venus, Aphrodite, Minerva, Nehellenia, Artemis, Diana, Gaia-mother earth, etc. etc. and from about the 2nd century after Christ, also "Mary" (that is NOT the mother of Jesus, but an idol!) started to be worshipped.

A powerful strategy Satan uses is temptation and seduction. Temptation to power, to finances, and especially through and to immoral sexual seduction. The many goddesses have been, and are being used always through these attempts, all over the world. Though the same pagan gods/idols have been "Christianised", and the old pagan name was replaced by a "Christian" name, like many Mary's, Maria's, Peter's, Michael's etc, yet often

the pagan worship continued in the nations in the world. The worship in Babel was evil, and very immoral, and through the centuries the idolatry became worse and worse, also when it is interpreted in our times as religious. Always also violence followed. And the leader was to take part in it.

In the temples on those towers the chief god was to descend and have intercourse with the priestesses, who in turn would have intercourse with the king. In that way the king(s) would, they believed, receive divinity. (It is remarkable that this was/is(?) in some ways still the procedure for the emperor of Japan to receive "divinity".)

The people did not want to be scattered over the face of the whole earth. So, they *decided* to stay together. I already mentioned that this *was* rebellion.

They wanted to make a name for themselves. That is also a common desire of fallen mankind, and we can recognize it. This was/is a strong characteristic of what in the course of the ages became the terrible characteristic of the meaning of "Babylonian". And when we see the spiritual *decision* to accomplish the fame of their (our?) name we also see a hardening of the heart, unless the Lord opens our eyes for this sin.

The Scriptures tell us that the Lord descended to see the city and the tower that they were building. The Lord looked at it and knew what the results would be (Of course, the Lord already knew that, but we, the people who live after that and we, the later readers, must know that too): And He said: they form one people and they have one language. This is the beginning of what they are going to do, and now nothing will be impossible for them. In this short description in Genesis 11, we see prophesied the development of humanity till the time of the end. Then He confused their languages. They stopped the building of the city and the tower and started to spread out in many directions.

The disobedience of Adam and Eve was a terrible sin. But what happened in Babylon with the peoples who started to worship Satan, alias Marduk, that was rejecting the Lord and submitting to Satan. Here we learn what centuries later the prophet Samuel told king Saul: "...rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.". Rebellion has its root in witchcraft.

We understand that the peoples, people groups, who came out of Babylon when the Lord confused their language had a different attitude than the people who walked down from Ararat, when the Ark had landed there. The people who left Babylon were angry, stubborn, bitter, aggressive, idolatrous, immoral and ... demonized. By the choice of the people to worship Marduk and the idols, the other "gods", and not God, the Creator, the people became demonized. When the Lord scattered them, they went demonized over the whole earth.

In the centuries between the building of Babel and the times that Isaiah and Jeremiah lived the city of Babel went through several stages. First it was a city, with a (planned) tower, then it grew to a state, and then it became a world-power. The hardening of the hearts became worse and worse.

After several rulers from other nations the Babylonians were overruled by the Persians, in 539 B.C. Babel was not going to be restored any more.

I already mentioned that we read in the Bible several times the prophetic call to leave Babel/ Babylon.

And, in Revelation 18:4 Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues, for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.

When the voice from heaven, that John hears again calls in Revelation His people to come out of Babylon is Babylon no more the city that was taken by the Persians. It was ruined. It is also not the structure that Saddam Hussein unsuccessfully tried to rebuild. In the days that Revelation refers to is Babylon, as I understand it, no

more a real physical city with that name. (Though it may be a city with that name, I do not believe it, but we don't know) because of a mocking population (as people have built a shopping centre in The Hague, (The Netherlands) with the name New Babylon, a couple of years ago.) But as I understand it now (2018) it indicates a spiritual construction/structure, built on rebellion, with global trading, global politics with a global culture, and a global religion (dedicated to Lucifer). I already mentioned that a strategy that Satan uses is temptation and seduction. Temptation to power, to finances, to rebellion, and especially through and to immoral sexual seduction.

From the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, we learn that with these decisions many other decisions are added. Pride, arrogance, blaming others, immorality, self-centeredness, seeking and following the occult.

In 2 Timothy 3:1-7 Paul prophesies that there will be terrible times in the last days: People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.

As the Lord called through his prophets his people to leave Babylon, He also told them, as we can read in many Scriptures, where to go in these flights: go to Zion. For example: Joel 2: 32 says: "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls".

Though over the centuries people who may have read/heard this Scripture, may have wondered when that would be. I believe that the last days, that Paul mentions, are the days that Revelation describes. With the urgent call to get out of Babylon. When we let this description sink in we realize these days indeed will be terrifying. And we have already seen events in our times that fit these descriptions rather well.

The name of the first city became Babel, in Greek: Babylon. That meant: gate for the gods. And Babel became in Scripture as no other town the symbol for the increase of spiritual disobedience of humanity. We have also seen, realized, in the last seventy, eighty years the terrible increase of these characteristics, often on purpose. More than in other times of history, in the western world. We notice the attacks on God's institutions, the deconstruction of fatherhood, mothers, family, marriage, moral values, leadership. But also, the denial of the difference between boys and girls, men and women. There is the denial of the value of human beings, just conceived or grown old and handicapped.

There is a war on the sexes, and behind this is the war on covenant. In the western world it is an aggressive, nihilistic attack. I doubt that this war will stop at continental borders.

I do not want to ignore the terrible times of wars, of dictators, of famines, of oppression, in almost every part of the world. The kingdom of darkness was /is torturing the earth.

In the western world, and the many, many nations that are strongly influenced by the western world, among others because of the pressure of the United Nations, is a Babylonian development of deep, deep abandonment of the Judeo-Christian influence. And God calls us to get out of it, so that we may not take part in its sins, and not receive any of her plagues.

As in the past people may have asked: where can we go to, also in our times people may ask: who has to run and leave this Babylonian structure? And: where do we go to?

The answer is the same: Zion! That is where the only holy, righteous, God dwells. And He longs for and welcomes the people who hunger for Him, and who, through many fires have been set apart for Him.

And God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, (and also not through these plagues) but have eternal life.

The spiritual infrastructure called Zion

In the first part of this study I wrote about the system/structure that the Scriptures called Babylonian. That evil, hostile structure is opposed to Zion. I wrote that before/since the foundation of the world the Lord God has chosen people to belong to what He in the new Testament calls His Bride (Eph.1:4; 2Peter 2:9; Rev. 21:9; 22:17). And that through the centuries God has called and has been preparing a people for Himself, a people set apart for Him. Who longed and decided to seek the living God and follow Him. (Important to know is that everyone who longs to know God is invited and welcomed!). Although the Scriptures inform us that the Lord called the people who were to be set apart for Him before the beginning of the world. We can look to Abram to understand more about people set apart for the lord, but also to understand: what is Zion?

Abram, later called Abraham, was a descendent of Shem, a son of Noah. In the line of descendants from Shem Abram was the son of Terah. He lived in Ur, of the Chaldeans. In Ur was much idolatry, especially with the moon-god (and moon-goddess), Sin. There was a high tower, a kind of ziggurat, on the top of which the idol Sin was worshipped. (I saw the tower in 2001, and then it still seemed to happen). But also the wider idolatry from Babylon was practiced in Ur. The archaeologists have tried to construct the history of Sinear, Mesopotamia, Akkad and many more, and the succession of the nations, their priests, their kings and the gods of the nations over long stretches of time. We can only more or less recognize small parts of the history that they paint as information, that we also find in the Bible. When I talk about Abram I refer to the information of the Scriptures. I cannot compare those two different approaches, but I do believe that what the Spirit wants us to know through the Scriptures is reliable. While still in Ur the Lord called Abram to leave his country, his people and his father's household. With his son Abram, daughter in law Sarai and grandson (Lot) Terah moved to Canaan. But on the way to Canaan they settled in Haran. The Bible gives no information about how Abram felt when he realized that in Haran, also, the moon-god was worshipped.

Abram had left Ur when they moved towards Canaan and settled in Haran. What that may have meant for him, and also for his wife we don't know. But it is good for us to try to understand that, as far as it is possible. We also, in a certain way, will have to go, spiritually, through a process of "leaving" our country, if we will walk with the Lord. Of course, our situations are very different, but the spiritual process may yet be comparable. According to Biblical information Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran (Gen.12:4). When there is idolatry it pervades the spiritual atmosphere of a country. It influences the values the people hold, how they practice their worship, what kind of sacrifices they bring and the way people live, how they live with another. And that also influences you, also when you do not take part in their lives and rituals. One has to make the decision to live a different kind of life, and to realize that you are "not at home" in this world. You may be ridiculed, or persecuted, and isolated.

How important was it for Abram to submit himself to the Lord, and to an uncertain future? The Lord had told him, Genesis 12:1, that He was going to lead Abram to a land that He was going to show him. Abram did not know what land it would be. He, and his family, had as a kind of "immigrant", started to live in Haran. But in contrast to what Adam and Eve did in the garden of Eden, and to the decisions Nimrud and the people who built Babel did, responded Abram not rebellious. He decided to do what the Lord told him to do. And to obey the command that the God he had come to know had given him. He also had to leave his people. That was a different aspect of leaving the city Haran. Were there living more people in Haran with whom he had become familiar? People that he had come to know, with whom he had worked, traded with?. Maybe he had made friends there. We may recognize the pattern that people with the same kind of background who have "emigrated" to another area, nation, try to meet another. There are patterns of behaviour that can bind us to a

certain area because of the friends we have there. It takes courage to cut the strings that bind us there, and certainly when you already have left a previous city before. We may have heard of family members or/and friends who in the past emigrated to, for us, then, distant nations. And how they struggled to adjust to the new situation. Leaving his "new" country may have been difficult for Abram. Maybe it was hurting. Yet, he did it. Because the Lord had told him to do this. Also, that was a sign of his obedience. And Sarai and Lot went with him. And the people who had become his servants. It was a walk with the Lord that was a process, of making one decision after another, to follow the calling, the instructions of God whom Abram had come to know and to trust. After the decision to leave his country came the point to decide to leave the people. But then he also had to say goodbye to his father, Terah, who stayed in Haran. And leaving his father's household may, till that moment, have been the most difficult decision. With the possibility that this was going to be a definite farewell. He may have had emotions, but all the others may also have had strong emotions. In a "culture" where family ties are important people may have clung to the group that was going to leave. And these emotions may have had strong spiritual ties. We have often seen that, when a (young) man leaves his parents and becomes an independent being, and he comes home for a visit, even in our second-millennium cultures, suddenly and often unnoticed for himself he is again "mother's boy". And then it is a process to become no longer "mother's boy", and to indeed become independent (in the right way) and the husband of his wife. I do not suggest that Abram still was "mother's boy", but we need to realize that leaving his father's household was maybe/ probably a difficult step for Abram to take. All the three decisions were not just emotional or social decisions. It were in the first place spiritual decisions: Will I do what the Lord told me to do?

They left Haran, I suppose because he realized that Haran was not the place the Lord had intended. Genesis (12:5) tells that they set out for Canaan, and that they arrived there.

That also was hostile territory with many idols Canaan was a descendant of Cham. The Lord appeared there to Abram and gave him the promise to give that land to Abram's offspring. Then Abram built there an altar to the Lord.

After Abram had left his land, his people and his father's house he was not an aimless wandering Bedouin. He lived in faith and made his "home" (tent) in the promised land as a stranger in a foreign country, as also did Isaac and Jacob after him. In faith "he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God", Hebrews 11: 9-10. My late husband, Pieter Bos, referred in his book *The City Called* to an important study on the Bible book Hebrews, by Prof. Bill Lane. Lane interprets that the writer of Hebrews gives, through inspiration, the interpretation of Abraham's living in tents. Abraham, a man living in faith, was a man oriented toward the future. That is why he did not build a house/houses for himself and his family. Living in tents was like a statement over his/our, temporary, stay on earth. Abraham had understood that the land that the Lord promised to him was for him not the (physical) inheritance itself, but the place where he had to learn to expect the real inheritance. The real inheritance is the "city of God with foundations". And he expected during his wanderings that "city, whose architect and builder is God!" This is so special, as we live in cities and nations with, through sin, broken foundations. (Addition by Helene Bos: there are, nevertheless, also quite a number of references where the Lord himself reminds His people of the inheritance that He had promised to them IF they would walk with Him faithfully. Therefore, I think that we may believe that it was (at least: also) the physical inheritance for the descendants of Abraham.)

I do believe that we also should grow in this attitude that we are not at home in the world in which we live but have this hunger in our hearts for that other City.

Abram and his family travelled through the land Canaan, till Shechem. And there the Lord appeared to Abram and told him that *this* was the land that he was going to give to the offspring of Abram. Abram built an altar there. Maybe a sign of faith and gratitude. In that time were the Canaanites in the land, it was a hostile territory. They travelled further, and also there (close to the place later called Bethel) Abram built an altar for the Lord. His journey to Egypt, because there was a famine in the land, was however, not what God had told him. Please read the chapters in Genesis till CH. 17.

When Abram was 99 years old, that is 24 years after he had left Haran(!), the Lord appeared to him another time and promised him a son of his own, but the Lord told him to walk before him and to be blameless. He confirmed His covenant with Abram and gave him beautiful and amazing promises regarding his offspring and regarding the land. Then He renamed Abram to Abraham. The Lord instructed him to circumcise himself, and the males in his family. (Ismael, the son born to Hagar was also included in this). There came years of traveling, testing through famines, separating with Lot, and fighting enemies. He met Melchizedek the king of Salem, who was, I believe, a kind of prototype of the Son of God. These years were not relaxed and easy years. The Lord tested his reliability, his commitment. It was after these many things happened that the Lord promised Abraham and Sara that the son of the promise was going to be born in the following year. Right after the visit where the Lord gave him the promise of his own son the Lord shared with Abraham his plans regarding Sodom and Gomorrah. And Abraham interceded, and interceded. He stood, as it were, between the righteous in those full of evil cities and the Lord. The cities were destroyed. Abraham moved on, because of another famine, to Gerar. The king of that region, Abimelech, took Sara in his palace but did not touch her. When the Lord appeared to the king the Lord told him in a dream to release Sara and to ask Abraham to pray for him, the king, "for he is a prophet". This is the first time in the Bible that the Lord called somebody a prophet. (And therefore, Abraham is in the Old Testament the example of what a prophet is). Maybe Abraham did not even know that the Lord saw him thus. Then Isaac was born, but then with the joy over the birth of Isaac came new tests. After a couple of years came a moment that Abraham had to make a painful decision: sending away Hagar with her son, because Ismael was mocking over Isaac. Abraham loved Ismael, but he did what the Lord told him to do.

Then "some time later", Gen. 22, the Lord was again going to test Abraham. Abraham had walked through the land, lived in many places, where he had also seen the idolatry in those places. He had lived with his own family, with his (gradually many) servants, and with many animals. He had been in battles and had met the king of Salem. But this new test was going to be the most severe. He had to take his son Isaac and go the region of Moriah. When we read this chapter in Abraham's life, it is, again, an example for us. Yes, but what is touching much and much deeper: Abraham here is a type of the Lord God Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth himself. Who will give many centuries later His son as a ransom for the disobedience of all of us, and for the redemption of the defiled creation.

Abraham and his son Isaac had to go to the region of Moriah. On their journey to that region Abraham must have done a lot of thinking. The command to sacrifice his dear son was, I assume, extremely difficult. Child sacrifice was a terrible part of many pagan nations but not a part of Abraham's life. And to sacrifice the son that he and Sara had hoped for those many years, and about whom the Lord had given them such beautiful, amazing promises... How could he understand this command? In Hebrews 11v19 we read that Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead. Till then nobody had been raised from death, as far as the Scriptures report. (And certainly, none of the pagans had been raised from death). It was, I believe, a thought that the Holy Spirit laid in his heart. He told the servants when he saw the assigned place, that they had to wait till he and his son would return. This was a statement of faith. Isaac asked where the lamb was, that was going to be sacrificed. That meant that he had not informed the son about what was going to happen. He told that the Lord would provide the lamb. That also was a statement of faith. And Abraham arranged the altar. The Scriptures tell that he bound Isaac on the altar. We don't read about his emotions at that moment, but I think we may assume that it was a heart-rending time. It was a very, very severe test. Abraham was at the point of killing his son when the Lord interfered from heaven, telling him not to harm the boy. And, the Lord said: "now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son". Then in the thickets behind him was a ram. That was the burnt offering that the Lord provided. And Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide". The writer adds that therefore it is said "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided".

Here, we may believe that the Lord has for everyone who comes to the Lord in repentance and asks for forgiveness provided, on the mountain Moriah, the grace for that forgiveness. Jesus, the Son of God, did give His life as a sacrifice for our guilt, as reconciliation for a fallen creation, to the holy Lord Almighty, centuries later on that same spot. There the Lord provided forgiveness through the blood of Jesus, because without blood-shedding there is no forgiveness. And everyone who appeals to that blood-shedding may receive the new life of Jesus.

Abraham went to the utmost in obedience when he did not withhold his son from God. More people have lost a child, maybe even seen that his/her child was killed before their eyes. Terrible as that is, it is not the same as being willing to kill the child of your heart, and of the promise, because the Lord asked that. Abraham had believed the promise of a son that the Lord would give to him and Sara. And he had waited. He had obeyed the three commissions to leave his country, his people and his father's house, not knowing where the Lord was leading him. And now he had passed this severe test. So, he has become the example of a man that had not adjusted to the world around him. He indeed was a man set apart for the Lord. After him, says the letter to the Hebrews, there have grown "many others" who have confessed that they were strangers on earth and on the way to a better and heavenly fatherland. So, through the ages there was a calling to people to be set apart for the Lord. That call was there in the first place for the descendants of Abraham, Israel.

Just before Yahweh made a covenant with Israel on the mountain Sinai He tells them of the calling He has for them: "...you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation...". Holy also means: set apart. A holy nation set apart in an unholy world. Many centuries later applies the apostle Peter, in 1Peter 2:9, this calling to the followers of Christ (you can say: Israel internationalised): "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God..."

In John 17 prays Jesus for his followers: "...They are not of the world, any more, even as I am not of it." vs. 16.

In the beginning had the calling of Abraham to do with situations in the world around him. Moving to another country, another culture, leaving the land, the people and his father's house. But the decision to submit to the Lord's assignment and do what the Lord told him to do was a spiritual decision. Which led to different kinds of decisions than people "normally" make. Here Abraham walked "apart" from the people in the world. I am certain that Melchizedek recognized that. And how Abraham obeyed the sacrifice the Lord asked him to bring showed that it indeed "set him apart".

In our walking with the Lord we also need to make decisions, in order to get free; from the "country" where we live or from an area in our nation that binds us through customs. Free from the fallen identity and culture of our nation, from the people we are a part of. That can also mean that we need to become free from the church we are part of but that binds us through social bonding, and some kind of rituals, instead of bonding us to the Lord Jesus. And also free from the ties of family, dear family, that do not understand the calling the Lord has placed on our hearts. In growing in obedience so that we can hear what the Lord asks us to do and then deciding to do it is a process of spiritual growth. We may desire to be a part of people set apart for the Lord but becoming that is a process that may take years of our life. And at times it probably will be a difficult (but also a joyful way) It was a walk with the Lord that was a process, of making one decision after another, to follow the calling, the instructions of God whom Abram had come to know and to trust

The life-story of Abraham does not mention the name Zion. But in the story of Israel is the mountain Moriah clearly connected to the name Zion. We will touch on that. The Lord knew that all the time. He is the perfect master-planner.

We skip here the, long, history of the descendants of Isaac and Jakob. They did not know the name of Zion. After David was anointed as king by the prophet Samuel, the then ruling king Saul persecuted David. King Saul died. (Please read from the book 2 Samuel). Men from the tribe of Judah anointed David as their king in Hebron. After 7 years all the tribes of Israel came to David and they also anointed David as their king. Now he was king over the united tribes of Israel. But he was still battling the enemies. And then David went to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites who lived there. When Joshua led Israel in the conquest of Canaan they did not conquer the city of Jerusalem. Later the tribe of Judah did conquer Jerusalem, and partly destroyed it. But the Jebusites still stayed there. They did not belong to any other people. They still lived there when David decided to attack the city Jebus. Jebus was built on *a rock, high on a hill called Zion...* 2 Sam. 5: 6. The Jebusites challenged David and his men by declaring that David would not be able to conquer Jebus and enter into the city. And they hatefully told that even his enemies, the blind and the lame, would prevent David to take the city. The Jebusites were convinced of that. And it was indeed, for that time, quite a big city. But, I believe also,

that the resistance in this city was a stronghold of the enemy against the man who was anointed by the Lord to be the king over His people that he had promised to Abraham and had brought there. The Scriptures give not much information about the strategy of how David planned to take it. It is assumed that revealing his plans would have helped the enemy to resist these plans. David and his men decided to attack the city, which was strategically and politically a clever decision, but to contest the Jebusite claim was also a spiritual statement of faith. I believe that the hateful mockery of the Jebusites led David to the spiritual victorious decision to make it his residence and rename it into the City of David. With God one can do the impossible.

Abraham prophesied, so many centuries before, that the Lord was going to provide the sacrifice for humanity (and for the whole of creation) on that mountain. And that sacrifice was: "The seed of Abraham". The Jebusites had no understanding of the battle in the heavenlies and the hostile declaration of God's enemy that the Lord was not able to overcome the opposition from His enemy, Satan. But the sacrifice on mount Moriah, centuries later, was also going to be, in the last days, the king on the throne of David. We don't know if David already did comprehend all this. Though his prophetic songs/psalms indicate that his spirit understood this. And the victory of David led him to make this city his residence. He renamed it and called the place The City of David. And it is special that many Scriptures, for instance in the Psalms, indicate that the fortress in Jebus, the stronghold of resistance, with the name Zion, seems to be chosen and declared by the Lord Almighty to be His holy hill, to be the special dwelling place where He will live, and where He has installed his King, and from where He will reign. From then on is Zion a symbol of the Lord to express, when the enemy pretends that he is more powerful than God, that for Him nothing is impossible.

In the city of David is, so many centuries later, the Lord Jesus judged. And outside of the city, He is, rejected and scorned, crucified. On the mount Moriah! Abraham had prophesied that on the mountain of the Lord "the Lord would provide". Jesus was the seed of Abraham, He also was the promised "king of Israel" for the descendants of Abraham, and the Israelites. He also was the provision for everybody who wanted to belong to the Lord. The prophet Hosea prophesied over the descendants of Israel that, after many centuries of falling away, idolatry, immorality, and rebellion against the Lord, and loss of strength and brokenness 'they will come to "David their king", trembling, in the last days. (Hosea 3:5)."

We are told in the Scriptures what the Lord feels/thinks over Zion, especially in the Psalms and the prophets. In Psalm 2 we read about the nations and the kings and rulers in the earth that conspire against the Lord and against His anointed one. "Let us break their chains and throw off their fetters", they say. It is the language of the people in Babel. We see here as it were, Babylon opposite the King of Zion.

Then the Lord rebukes them. He says: I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill. In this psalm the Son shares that His Father encouraged Him to ask the Father the nations. For then the Father (=The Lord God) will make the nations the inheritance, of the Son. And the ends of the earth will become the possession, of the Son.

The Lord has desired Zion for his dwelling place, it is his resting place for ever. "Here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it", psalm 132: 13, 14. And He loves it. See Psalm 132: 13-18. He will provide for it and take care of the poor. When the daughters of Zion behave in a way that grieves the Lord He is strict for the inhabitants of Zion and admonishes them severely. But He will forgive them when they repent of their pride, their haughtiness, for their neglect of the poor. And the Lord invites the people who are suffering, broken. He will bless His people from Zion. When that place goes through hard times, the Lord will have compassion and rebuild it. Ps. 102: 13-17. In Ps. 102: 12 we may read, I believe, a complaint of the suffering Messiah. This psalm is written on the level of the heavenly realm. It was written for Gods people in the time of David, but the Lord also applies it to a future generation. In Revelation 18 we read that "Babylon the great" is fallen. "She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit", for unclean and detestable birds, v.1 "for all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries", vs 3. That is completely opposed to Zion, the mark of which is holiness, justice. Ps.102:18 "that a people not yet created may praise the Lord". Vs.19- 22 gives an image of the time when the Kingdom of God will have come on earth.

We may understand from this that Zion is here not just meant as the city that David captured, it is more. It is the place where the Lord sits enthroned, it is His sanctuary on high, vs. 19. That implies that we also, believers in the third millennium after Christ, as part of the peoples who assemble to worship the Lord, may direct our prayers and our hopes and expectations to the Lord in Zion. Revelation describes the characteristics of Babylon as great, with great, but unclean wealth. But the mark of Zion is: holiness, righteousness, justice. Was Zion a physical place when David conquered it, from the beginning the Lord also attached a new meaning to it. And it grew to a place that has become a holy place in the people of Israel, but also in the Body of Christ.

The followers of Christ who are alive in our time cannot all go to the place in Jerusalem that was conquered by David and his men. But Zion is for them, for us, now the place where Jesus is. Where He can forgive us, deliver us, comfort us, heal us, admonish us, give us discernment, where we can hide under His wings, and also where He will bless us. Where we can praise, adore Him.

The Scriptures share also of how the Lord uses Zion. He will send the rod of the strength of His son out of Zion, ps. 110. The Lord places a precious cornerstone for the scornful people who made a covenant with death, Isaiah 28: 14- 19. There He reinstates Justice. The law will go forth from Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem, Isaiah 2:3. N.B. we, in our time, may be strengthened by the promise that when the kingdom of God comes His, Gods, law will go out from Zion. The law will not go out from the UN in New York. The UN has written on its wall in New York that the nations will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. In the UN-way typically ignoring that *The Lord* will judge between the nations and settle disputes for many nations. Pretending that this Scripture applies to them the UN shows that it is a Babylonian institute.

The Lord recognizes the people who have set their hearts on pilgrimage, they go from strength to strength till each appears before God in Zion. Here stands Zion for the descendants of Abraham who dearly love the Lord and are willing to walk with Him. But also, others are recognized by the Lord. Of Rahab and also (I guess repenting) Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, Cush (Ps. 87) will be said that they are born in Zion. The Lord writes them in His register. This is so special, new kingdom language. Zion will be/is the birthplace for the followers of Jesus from different other nations, Psalm 87, who have been willing, or grown to become willing, to be set apart. Who were in the world, but not of the world, and who are not at home in the world.

The question for all of us is where will we go to, when we want to be freed from Babylon, and we will not partake in her sins? When we have chosen to leave Babylon, when that place has escalated in full evil, there is only one place: Zion.

In Zacharia 2:7 there is a call as in Revelation 18 (short before or after the fall off Babel, directed to the people who still live in Babel: Come, o Zion, Escape, you who live in the Daughter of Babylon! This prophetic calling has an end-time aspect as the Lord says: Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you, declares the Lord. Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and become my people. I will live among you. Zach.2:10-11a.

When we leave Babylon, there is the safe, safest, place where we may run to: Zion!

Hallelujah!
