Zechariah 3-4: Core of Proto-Zechariah

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ABSTRACT
Proto-Zechariah (Zch 1-8) is a blend of visionary and oracular material. Both types of material are set in prose. These chapters have an optimistic undertone and describes Yahweh’s love for the post-exilic community in Jerusalem. This article will offer a possible answer to the following question: Which chapter/s can be described as the central part or core of Proto-Zechariah? Zechariah 3 and 4 may be seen as the literary and theological core on account of the following:
(1) Structurally the night visions (1:7-6:15) form a central part of Proto-Zechariah with chapters 3 and 4 as the centre of these visions;
(2) Most of the core theological concepts are discussed in these chapters, for example God’s grace and forgiveness; God’s presence through his temple; realised eschatology; diarchic model of leadership; etc; (3) One finds a concentration of all the important characters portrayed in these chapters, for example Yahweh, Zerubbabel, Joshua and the angel or messenger as interpreter of God’s message.

A INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
The study of the book of Zechariah received a new impetus during the last decade. New volumes on the book of Zechariah appeared in three prominent biblical commentary series: Das Alte Testament Deutsch (Reventlow 1993); The New Century Bible Commentary (Redditt 1995); and Biblischer Kommentar (Hanhart 1998). Most modern scholars argue that the book of Zechariah can be divided into two (1-8; 9-11) or three (1-8; 9-11; 12-14) distinct units (Willi-Plein 1998:540). Saebø (1999:668) summarises the interpretation of the book Zechariah and says the following: ‘Theologically and historically Zechariah 1-8 has to a great extent been overshadowed by Zechariah 9-14.’ In this article we

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2 Cf discussion of these commentaries by Floyd (1999:257).

3 A modern scholar like Floyd (1999:262) argues that chaps 1-14 must be investigated as a whole.
shall focus on Zechariah 1-8 (Proto-Zechariah)\(^4\) the ‘neglected’ part of the book Zechariah.

Proto-Zechariah, like the book Haggai, explicitly reflects the realities of the Persian period. Darius’s reign remains the historical setting, but now the time period is a bit broader (520-518 BCE) – still relatively early in Darius’s reign and before the rededication of the temple in 515 BCE (Petersen 2002:207).

There are different opinions on the relationship between the books Haggai and Proto-Zechariah.\(^5\) Haggai and Proto-Zechariah can be discussed as a whole (and as part of the Book of the Twelve) but it is also important to make a distinction. The author acknowledges the similarities and relationship between Haggai and Proto-Zechariah but will focus on Proto-Zechariah\(^6\). This article will offer a few possible answers to the following two questions: (1) Which chapters can be described as the core of Proto-Zechariah? (2) What is the theological message of Zechariah 3 and 4?

### B LITERARY STRUCTURE OF PROTO-ZECHARIAH

1 **Visions: Centre part of Proto-Zechariah**


- 1:1-6: Summons to repentance
- 1:7-6:15: Seven (or eight visions) interspersed with oracles
- 7:1-8:23: Features of the time of salvation

These three literary units may be divided into further sections\(^8\). The above structure shows that the visions form the centre part of Proto-Zechariah. One may pose a further question: Which specific vision/s form the centre of all the visions?

\(^4\) The terms Proto-Zechariah, First Zechariah and Zechariah 1-8 will be used as similes.

\(^5\) Some scholars think that these two books were originally a single book edited by the same final redactor or composer (Meyers & Meyers 1987:xliv-xlvi; Sykes 1997:124). Others believe that Proto-Zechariah was a response to Haggai and therefore written by different editors in different times (Petersen 1985:124).

\(^6\) Coggins (1987:40) mentions that apart from the editorial framework (1:1-6; 7:1-8:23) the contents of Proto-Zechariah differ strikingly from what is found in Haggai. Haggai remained in the tradition of the prophet as speaker while Proto-Zechariah stands in the tradition of the prophet as seer.

\(^7\) Smith (1984:181) believes that the symbolic crowning of Joshua (6:9-15) forms a separate unit or section.

\(^8\) Cf commentaries on Zechariah for detailed structure.
2 Composition and structure of the night visions (Zch 1:7-6:15)

We can say that the prophet Zechariah explains the core of his message in his night visions. The structure of the visions in Zechariah 1:7-6:15 has hardly been debated. Some scholars have focussed on the so-called cycle of visions that can supposedly be reconstructed by removing the oracular material from the visionary material (e.g. 1:14-17; 3:8-10; 4:6-10) and by disregarding the oracular units with no visionary elements (2:10-17 [6-13]; 6:9-15). We have at least three major interrelated units of oracular material in part two of Proto-Zechariah (3:8-10; 4:6b-10a; 6:9-15) (Meyers & Meyers 1987:265).

Most scholars accept the authenticity of all the visions but have divergent opinions concerning the place and composition of Zechariah 3. One can summarise these different viewpoints as follows: (a) Scholars that regard Zechariah 3 as one of the eight visions although they differ over the redaction process or structure (Beuken 1967:282-316; Petersen 1984:199; Le Roux 1987:302; Hanhart 1998:205-213; Delkurt 2000:141-194; Floyd 2000:326-327; Redditt 10 2000:1412; et al). Many of these scholars believe that this vision comes from Zechariah himself and forms part of the earliest material in Proto-Zechariah; (b) Scholars who believe that there are only seven visions and that this chapter may be a later addition (Reventlow 1993:52). This later addition descended from the prophet Zechariah or from another redactor; (c) Scholars who acknowledge Zechariah 3 as a vision but exclude it from the sequel numbering of the visions; therefore they refer to seven visions and an extra prophetic vision (Jeremias 12 1977:201-203; Meyers & Meyers 1992:1063; Willi-Plein 1998:540).

The visions in Zechariah 1:7-6:15 are interspersed with oracles or exhortations. We argue that the oracles belonged originally to the series of night visions and treat them as an integral part (Redditt 1995:42). There is no reason for excising the oracular material from the vision reports. The vision report genre

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9 Floyd (1999:261) discusses the latest Zechariah commentaries and makes the following statement: ‘Most of the commentators have some theory about the extent to which these two kinds of material can be distinguished and how they came to be combined, but they place more emphasis on how the visionary and non-visionary oracular elements now complement one another in the final redaction.’

10 It seems as if Redditt (1995:41, 62; 2000:1412) has two divergent viewpoints. In his discussion of the structure in his NCB Commentary (1995:41) he says that 3:1-10 does not belong to the original sequence of the visions, but in his article in the Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible (2000:1412) he refers to 3:1-10 as the fourth vision. We accept his latest article as his current viewpoint.

11 Reventlow (1993:52) believes that it does not act as a vision but rather as a ‘visionär geschauten Vorgänge im himmlischen Thronrat Jahwes’ that could be compared with Is 6, 1 Ki 22:19-23 and Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-6.

12 The exact viewpoint of Jeremias is difficult to place. Sometimes he refers to 3:1-7 as the fourth vision, but he also shows his uncertainty (1977:6, 201-203).
typically contains some explanation and this explanation frequently takes the form of an oracle (e.g., Am 8:1-3; 9:1-4; Jr 1:11-16; 24:1-10; Ezk 37:1-14; etc) (Floyd 2000:328).

We accept the fact that there are several differences between Zechariah 3 and the other visions. On the other hand, one can list at least five reasons supporting the viewpoint that Zechariah 3 has a definite relationship with the other seven visions: (a) The opening word בָּא (he showed me) continues a structure found in some of the other visions (cf Zch 2:1, 3, 5 [1:18, 20 and 2:1]); therefore the Hebrew text labels Zechariah 3 as a vision; (b) This vision compares to the other heavenly meetings (1:7-17; 6:1-8); (c) The angel speaks a clear explanatory word (3:4b); (d) The high priest Joshua stands in the centre of chapter 3 and constitutes an important role in the next vision (4:1-14); (e) The words of verse 7 explain the previous events (Jeremias 1977:201; Meyers & Meyers 1987:179).

In the light of the above discussion, we support the hypothesis that Zechariah 1:7-6:15 forms a ‘perfect number’ of seven visions with Zechariah 3 as an extra prophetic vision. One can structure the visions as follows:

• Vision 1: Red-horse rider amongst the myrtles (1:7-17)
• Vision 2: The four horns and the four craftsmen (2:1-4 [1:18-21])
• Vision 3: Surveyor and the measuring line (2:5-9 [2:1-5])
• Extra prophetic vision: Cleansing and crowning of Joshua (3:1-10)
• Vision 4: Golden lamp stand and two olive trees (4:1-14)
• Vision 5: Flying scroll (5:1-4)
• Vision 6: Woman in the basket (5:5-11)
• Vision 7: Four chariots (6:1-8)

The visions are carefully arranged with a number of characteristics. We have three visions in front, three visions at the end and two visions forming the centre. One finds a correlation between the first three visions and the last three. These connections include a common theme (e.g., the horses in visions 1 and 7); common stylistic features (e.g., two-part structure of vision 2 and 6 and direct inclusion of oracular material in visions 3 and 5). Meyers and Meyers (1992:1063) argue that the overall structure can be seen as a series of circles with 13 See Delkurt (2000:147) for a detailed discussion of the reasons why some scholars exclude Zch 3 from the rest of the visions or find it problematic. 14 In the Bible one finds several places where the important number of seven forms a perfect arrangement. One of the best illustrations is perhaps the seven petitions in the prayer of Solomon (1 Ki 8:22-53). The books of Haggai and Proto-Zechariah motivate the people for the rebuilding of the temple. In the prayer of Solomon we also have the temple as historical background. In Zch 3 and 4 the number seven is also very prominent. In 3:9 one hears of a single stone with seven facets and in 4:2 the reference to the seven lamps with seven lips on each of the lamps. The NRSV reference will be put in brackets if it differs from the MT. 15
Yahweh and the whole world as the largest circle (visions 1 and 7), and the
temple and the leadership of Yehud at the centre (vision 4). According to Meyers
and Meyers visions 2 and 6 deal with Judah/Yehud, and visions 3 and 5 with
Jerusalem.

The structure of these visions emphasises the importance of Zechariah 3
and 4 as the centre or core of the visions. The redactor(s) who was responsible
for the present shape of Proto-Zechariah had made a successful attempt at calling
attention to the visions of chapter 3 and 4 both, by the place where they have
been situated and by the special features given to them (VanderKam 1991:554).

C LITERARY STRUCTURE OF ZECHARIAH 3

Scholars have divergent opinions concerning the structure of Zechariah 3 and
many scholars see verses 8-10 as a supplementary oracle. There is a possibility
that the oracles in verses 8-10 are later additions, but one cannot ignore the
relationship between these verses. Visions in the Old Testament frequently
included oracles (Long 1971:359-364). In the visions of Zechariah the oracles are
incorporated in such a way that one could not separate the one from the other;
however, it seems, as if some may appear to be self-contained units (cf 2:10-17
[2:6-13]). We can probably structure Zechariah 3 as follows:

1 Dismissal of the charge against Joshua   3:1-2
   a Introductory description of the scene    3:1
   b Speech of Yahweh rebuking Satan   3:2
2 Purification of Joshua   3:3-5a
   a Introductory description of scene   3:3
   b Cleansing and forgiveness by Yahweh via messenger   3:4
   c Compliance of background figures with the prophet’s directive 3:5a
3 Joshua’s commission to head the restored temple cult   3:6-10
   a Preconditions for Joshua’s task   3:6-7
   b Divine promises for Joshua and friends:
      • Coming of servant, the branch   3:8
      • Stone will be engraved   3:9a
      • Forgiveness will be granted to the whole land   3:9b
      • Consequences for the people   3:10

The chapter begins in the first section with Yahweh showing the prophet a
certain vision. In the second section the angel is the speaker. This section may be

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16 Cf Eichrodt (1957:509); Le Roux (1987:303); Meyers & Meyers (1987:222);
Reventlow (1993:54); et al. Redditt’s (1995:62-63) viewpoint differs from the
previously mentioned scholars. According to Redditt vv 8 and 10 sound messianic
and he therefore treats these verses as additions. Petersen (1985:202) comes to the
conclusion that the vision report originally consisted of 3:1-5 and that there were
three additions: vv 6-7, 9 and vv 8 and 10.
labelled the core of this whole passage. In verse 6, the text portrays the angel proclaiming what Yahweh has spoken and the speaker never changes till the end of the chapter; therefore we do not agree with some scholars who separate verses 8-10 from verses 6-7. The expression ‘Yahweh of hosts’ is frequently used in these verses (vv 7, 9-10). There is also a direct relationship between verse 9 and verse 10 through the expression זָהַב־בְּשָׁמַיִם (day).

In verse 7 one reads a precondition for the right of access. The first clause is a typical Deuteronomic clause (if you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements). Most commentators and Bibles translate the particles א…א with ‘if…if’ and וַיֹּאמֶר…וַיֹּאמֶר with ‘and then’. Some scholars (Beuken 1967:290-293; Petersen 1984:203-206) argue that we have four if-clauses (protasis) and the last phrase as apodosis (‘then I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here’). This hypothesis makes sense but cannot be accepted on grammatical grounds. The connection of the pronoun with the particle וַיָּשֶׁר cannot be used in such a way; it must be understood as an antithesis (Hanhart 1998:173).

D  LITERARY STRUCTURE OF ZECHARIAH 4

In chapter 4 the interpreting angel or messenger, missing from 3:1-10 reappears and wakens Zechariah. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the royal and high priest office. In the centre of chapter 3 stands the spiritual office of the high priest Joshua and in the centre of the fourth chapter stands the governor Zerubbabel, the builder of the second temple (Hanhart 1998:254).

Most scholars argue that the original vision consisted of Zechariah 4:1-5 or 6a and 10b-14 (Delkurt; Petersen, Redditt, Reventlow; Rudolph, Willi-Plein; et al). Two separate oracles addressed to Zerubbabel (6b-7 and 8-10a) were inserted into the original vision (Willi-Plein 2002:61). A redactor, possibly Zechariah himself, added these parts. According to Redditt (1995:67, 71) the redactor applied the vision of the lamp stand to the rebuilding of the temple. The original version depicted bounty in the presence of Yahweh, and the new version tied the bounty to the reconstruction of the temple under Zerubbabel. Delkurt (2000:197) also believes that verse 12 has a secondary character, perhaps a redactional insertion.

The two oracles are worked into the vision in two different ways. The first one (vv 6b-7) has been incorporated into the angel’s reply to the prophet’s first question concerning the significance of the scene. This oracle stresses the divine power by which all opposition to the rebuilding of the temple will be removed and the rejoicing which will come at its completion. The second oracle (vv 8-10a) is introduced so as to interrupt the angel’s explanation altogether. The narrator abandons the report of the vision and addresses the audience directly.

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17 Floyd (1999:378-380) argues for the literary unity of this chapter.
with a non-visionary revelation. This oracle promises success to Zerubbabel (Smith 1984:204; Floyd 2000:381).

Scholars differ over the detailed structure of this chapter\(^{18}\). A possible division of chapter 4 may be as follows:

1. Introduction and description of vision 1-3
2. Prophet’s need of an explanation 4-6a
   Oracular insertion: Zerubbabel and the temple 6b-10a
   • Not by power but through God’s spirit 6b-7
   • The completion of the temple by Zerubbabel 8-10a
3. Explanation of the seven eyes 10b
4. Explanation of the two olive trees 11-14

**E CONTENT AND THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE OF ZECHARIAH 3 AND 4**

Zechariah 3 and 4 refer to the most important characters and names in Proto-Zechariah: Yahweh (or Yahweh of hosts\(^{19}\)), God of the post-exilic community; Zerubbabel; Joshua; the prophet Zechariah; the angel or messenger as interpreter of Yahweh’s message\(^{20}\); council of heavenly figures; and even the Satan as the

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\(^{18}\) 1-6a; 6b-7; 8-10a; 10b-14 (Petersen 1985:214-244; Meyers & Meyers 1987:227; Reventlow 1993:56-63); 1-3; 4-6a and 10b; 11 and 13-14 (Delkurt 2000:197-198); 4:1-5; 10b-14; 6-7; 8-10a (Willi-Plein 2002:61-69).

\(^{19}\) The meaning of the phrase אֲלֵצָתָ הָאָדָמִים has been greatly discussed. The NRSV translates it into ‘Lord of hosts’, so that it is associated with human or divine (angelic) armies. Fretheim (1997:1298) says the following: ‘Hosts has reference to any group, human or divine, called upon God to mediate a divine objective, which may or may not be military in nature.’ Willi-Plein (2002:59) opts for the transliteration of the Hebrew phrase (YHWH Zebaoth) instead of translating it. She believes that no translation can portray the true meaning of this Hebrew phrase. The phrase אֲלֵצָתָ הָאָדָמִים occurs 45 times in Proto-Zechariah. Prophtic language in Haggai to Malachi revitalises the language of divine presence in the sanctuary which is prominent in Proto-Isaiah and Jeremiah. By using the expression ‘Yahweh of hosts’ Proto-Zechariah asserts the fact of Yahweh’s return to Zion and the re-establishment of his mighty power. This phrase proclaims the ultimate authority of Yahweh, even over the Persian emperor or any other human ruler (Meyers & Meyers 1987:18-19).

\(^{20}\) It is difficult to determine the real speaker in chap 3. The following two examples will emphasise this difficulty: (1) Zeh 3:1 starts with the word יהוה (and he showed me). Who is the subject of this verb? Several possibilities are offered: Yahweh (LXX and Vulgate); the angel (Peshitta); interpreting angel (Baldwin 1972:113). The first possibility is probably the best one in the light of the literary context. E.g, chap 2:3 (1:20) directly states that Yahweh showed the prophet. Zechariah continues the tradition of the pre-exilic prophets where Yahweh speaks directly to the prophet; there is no need for a mediator (cf Am 7-8) (Meyers & Meyers
accuser of Yahweh and his people. Nowhere else in Proto-Zechariah do we find such a concentration of all the important characters. The role of some of these characters will be discussed under the different headings.

Ackroyd (1968:171-200) arranges the message of Proto-Zechariah around three themes: the temple, the new community and the new age, and the people’s response. All of these themes are important and present in chapters 3 and 4. Ackroyd’s arrangement is very useful but we shall order the following discussion in a different manner and elaborate on the above-mentioned themes.

1 Divine forgiveness: The beginning of a new community and new age

There is no direct reference to divine forgiveness in Zechariah 4; however, forgiveness is an important theological theme in chapter 3. The prominence of cleansing and forgiveness in Zechariah 3 may point to the significance of forgiveness for the post-exilic community in Jerusalem. One can say that the granting of forgiveness is an essential element in the new community and new age.

There is a lack of evidence pointing to a specific cultic ritual in chapter 3, but verse 4 refers to the removal of guilt or sin and therefore this can be seen as true forgiveness. The text does not convey the fact that Yahweh is the subject of the verb נאום (v 4) but rather the messenger or angel of Yahweh. One can argue that Yahweh granted the forgiveness and merely sent his messenger to deliver this important message. The only role of a messenger is to deliver the message from the one who sends him; he does not deliver his own message. In that sense the messenger delivered the forgiveness proclaimed by Yahweh. Although the Hebrew text does not use Yahweh as the subject of the verb, one can speak of true divine forgiveness. Zechariah 3:9 emphasises the power of Yahweh’s forgiveness. He can remove the guilt of the land in one day. In verse 4 the forgiveness is described in mild terms but in verse 9 we hear ‘stronger’ Hebrew
words: נַפְּס (taken away, let it pass by) compared to נָכַל (remove in one day); forgiveness of the individual high priest (v 5) compared to forgiveness of the whole land (v 9).

Verse 7 can be interpreted as a pre-condition for forgiveness; however, the text shows no relationship between the ‘if’ requirements in verse 7 and the granting of forgiveness in verse 9. The requirements in verse 7 have to do with the responsibility of Joshua as the high priest.

In Zechariah 3:3-5 the text refers to the contrast between the filthy and festal clothes of Joshua. Zechariah 3:1-10 portrays another sharp contrast, namely the contrast between Satan as accuser and Yahweh as the One who is granting forgiveness. The passage starts in verses 1-2 with Satan accusing the high priest as representative of the people and concludes with Yahweh granting forgiveness and a new future.

The gift of a stone for Joshua implies a new phase in the history of the people of Yahweh (vv 8-9). A new time with the coming of the branch (Zerubbabel). Verse 10 also continues to say that the time of the exile as a time of guilt imprisonment is over (Willi-Plein 2002:60). Forgiveness is more than a ritual or more than words. Divine forgiveness is something that every person can experience. That is why the description of the vine and the fig tree (v 10) fits well into the forgiveness references. The people did not experience God’s forgiveness during exile, but this vision gave them some hope. The technical term ‘on that day’ as well as the reference to the vine and the fig tree points to the new age of peace and prosperity. The new age is to be one of continual worship of God who established it (Ackroyd 1968:191).

2 Yahweh’s presence in and through the temple

The message of Proto-Zechariah echoed much of what Haggai said. Like Haggai, Zechariah clearly thought that Jerusalem (Zion) was God’s special place, and the rebuilding of the temple was important for entering the new age. Zechariah 3 does not directly refer to the rebuilding of the temple like as does chapter 4. However, one can say that the emphasis on the cleansing of the high priest supposes the background of a temple.

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24 Hanson (1975:254) believes that the accusations by Satan and the reference to the filthy clothes stem from the growing conflict between the so-called temple and prophetic parties. According to Hanson the prophetic or visionary party have accused the Zadokite candidate for high priest of being defiled. But Joshua is absolved completely. Satan, the real accuser is rebuked and Yahweh granted forgiveness to Joshua.

25 There are at least two important aspects of temples in the ancient world: the temple as the ‘house of God’ and the political importance of temples. In this section we shall concentrate on the temple as ‘house of God’ or symbol of Yahweh’s presence. Cf footnote 22.
a A single stone with seven eyes or facets (3:9)

Scholars have conflicting opinions over the meaning of the סְפִּירָת in 3:9 and VanderKam (1991:562-567) summarises the different approaches in two categories, the vestments approach and the temple building approach. There is one interesting hypothesis that tries to link divine forgiveness with divine presence. The stone with seven eyes contains an inscription and is placed before Joshua. The stone refers to the specific place where the priests conducted the atonement ritual. According to Jewish thought (Mishna Joma V 2) this stone was found a few centimetres above the temple ruins. For the Jews the stone took the place of the ark that disappeared in the time of the exile. Like the ark this stone symbolised the presence of Yahweh. The seven eyes on the stone pointed to the everlasting presence of Yahweh (Rudolph 1976:101-102; Le Roux 1987:303).

One can say that almost all the different hypotheses emphasise Yahweh’s presence through his high priest and/or in his temple. Smith (1984:201) even tries to link the vestment approach with the temple building approach. He argues that if the stone represents some precious jewel with seven facets on the turban the reflection of light by the seven facets could refer to the seven (complete number of perfection) eyes of Yahweh which would express Yahweh’s care for the completion of the temple.

b The lamp stand, bowl, lamps and seven lips (4:1-6a; 10b-14)

Zechariah 4 depicts God’s presence among his people, especially in his temple. Several symbols, objects and metaphors mentioned in chapter 4 emphasise this divine presence. At the heart of the night visions stands the vision of a lamp stand flanked by two olive trees. Although Zechariah nowhere identifies the lamp stand it probably symbolises Yahweh himself.

The fact that the lamp stand (טֵלָה) described in Zechariah 4 is ‘all of gold’ provides us with the first clue that this object is part of the interior of the temple. The descriptions in both the tabernacle texts of Exodus and the Salomonic temple passages specify that the lamp stand for God’s dwelling on earth was golden.

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27 Symbol of the temple, the people of Israel, the church, the kingdom of God, the Messiah or a white stone as symbol of the absolution of Joshua (cf Fourie 1991:94); linked to the high-priestly turban (Ackroyd 1968:191; Petersen 1985:211; Redditt 1995:65 Brown 1996:148); סְפִּירָת as reference to the temple stone (Baldwin 1972:117-118; Rudolph 1976:100-102); portraying two meanings, namely Priestly stone and building stone which the reigning monarch would be expected to set in place in the temple that legitimates his reign (Meyers & Meyers 1987:207); the dual noun סְפִּירָת (pairs of eyes) combined with the number seven refers to the 14 stones of remembrance (Ex 28) and the single stone corresponds to the single remaining tribe of Judah (VanderKam 1991:567-569).

28 The term סְפִּירָת is always used in the OT to refer to lamp stands created for ritual use (with the sole exception of 2 Ki 4:10) (Petersen 1985:217).
After the general statement verses 2-4 provide a more detailed description of its construction. There is a bowl or basin (הָגְלוֹ) on its top which presumably held the oil for the seven lamps (רֹזֶה) on top of it. Each of these lamps has seven lips or spouts (וֹתֵךְּלָמֶן) on top of it. Verse 3 describes two olive trees, one to the right and one to the left of the bowl. No function was ascribed to the trees in verse 3, but verse 12 says that they transmitted ‘golden oil’ (בָּחִיתָה) through pipes to the lamp stand. The details of the lamp stand described in these verses refers to its cultic identity (Van der Woude 1984:83-84; Petersen 1985:216-224; Meyers & Meyers 1987:263-264; Redditt 1995:67).

The golden lamp stand stands fixed in the centre of the prophet’s visionary field. It represents the presence of Yahweh himself and its immobility suggests the permanence and eternity of God’s existence on earth. This vision’s lack of movement conveys the absolute stability of the divine presence. On the other hand, God’s presence is not static. There is some movement within the vision. The difficult ending of verse 12 describes gold (NRSV oil) pouring out from the branches of the olive trees. If the flow of golden oil is related to Yahweh’s presence, through his ‘trees’, then that flow symbolises the continuous presence of God (Meyers & Meyers 1987:262).

The original vision which stops abruptly in verse 6a continues in verse 10b with the interpretation of the seven lamps. They are identified as the eyes of Yahweh which range through the world. Elliger (1959:110) refers to the influence of the Babylonian astrology, which knew of seven planets. Le Roux (1987:304) argues that it points to Yahweh’s presence amongst his people and that He will look after the temple building and his congregation. In the Old Testament one finds several passages that refer to Yahweh’s observance of all people on the earth (cf Job 34:21; Ps 11:4; 66:7; Am 9:3; Jr 16:17; 32:19; Pr 15:3; 5:21). In Zechariah we see that Yahweh’s eyes roam about in a positive sense (v 10b); not merely in the sense to judge (Jeremias 1977:188). We are uncertain about the exact meaning of the lamps and other symbols; however, we can agree that it symbolises Yahweh’s presence.

c Two oracles emphasising the importance of the temple building

i Not by power but through God’s spirit (4:6b-7)

The two oracles in verses 6b-10a provide a further description of the temple and

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29 The translation of the Hebrew word וֹתֵךְּלָמֶן is problematic. Some take the root to be כָּלָמ and theorise a nominal form that means ‘pipe’. Others take the root to be כֶּל (be narrow) and argue for a noun that means ‘a pinch’. Recent Bible translations translate the Hebrew into ‘lips’ (NRSV), ‘pipes’ (NEB; NKJV) or ‘wicks’ (TEV).

30 Two statements within Zch 4 supports this viewpoint: (1) The lamp stand has seven lamps (v 2) which are interpreted as the eyes of Yahweh (v 10); (2) The two olive trees were interpreted as the two ‘sons of oil’ that stand by the Lord of the whole earth (v 14).
its importance. This addition directed the vision towards the rebuilding of the temple under Zerubbabel. The first introductory statement in verse 6b is followed by a denial that human instrumentality was at work. Zechariah is not like Solomon commanding an army of workers (1 Ki 5:13-15) nor like Nehemiah with a corps of burden bearers (Neh 4:10). Instead, the temple building would be accomplished by the spirit of God (‘Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts’). While in the books of Joshua and Judges the Spirit of God enabled military leaders to be victorious in war (cf Jdg 3:10; 6:34; 7:2; 13:25; 14:6), here in Zechariah the Spirit of God has a gentle way of achieving results (Ackroyd 1968:173; Stuhlmueller 1988:87). God is present in and through his temple; therefore He will help them with his power to accomplish this. This same emphasis is laid by the Chronicler in Ezra 5 and 6.

The reassurance in verse 6b is followed by a strange question in verse 7: ‘What are you, O great mountain?’ There is a lack of scholarly consensus in identifying the mountain: Persian empire (Rost 1951:216-221); heap of rubble on the temple site or temple ruins (Sellin 1922:503; Galling 1961:84); opposition of the Samaritan authorities (Elliger 1959:126); difficulties or hurdles Zerubbabel will face in the rebuilding of the temple (Rudolph 1976:113); Joshua or the Samaritan governor Tattenai31 (Petersen 1985:239-240); the temple area to the north of the city that was higher than the rest of the city (Willi-Plein 2002:64, 68)32. Van der Woude (1984:88; 1988:240) translates it into a statement instead of a question: ‘Whatever you are great mountain’. This means that no obstacle could prevent the rebuilding of the temple, for example Zerubbabel’s enemies or the world powers or other problems. The precise meaning of this verse is uncertain but the hypotheses identifying the ‘mountain’ with the temple area or temple ruins makes more sense when one reads the reference to the hvarh !bah at the end of verse 7.

The first oracle concludes with the reference to the hvarh !bah and shouts of grace. There are several variant readings and interpretations of the phrase hvarh !bah because the phrase occurs only once in the Old Testament. Scholars understood it as a foundation stone, cornerstone, head stone or boundary stone. It has also been interpreted as a symbol of the Persian Empire. Meyers and Meyers (1987:246-249) and Petersen (1985:240-242) argue that the background for verse 7 is a ceremony in which a stone from the former temple was transferred to the new temple. They therefore translate this phrase into ‘premier

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31 Rudolph (1976:113) also sees Tattenai as a possibility.
32 Willi-Plein (2002:64) translates it into ‘Berg des Grossen’. According to Willi-Plein the phrase ‘you shall become a plain’ does not refer to the carrying away of the ‘mountain’ or ruins but to the creation or rebuilding of the temple and all its structures.
33 The LXX reads τὸν λίθον τῆς κληρονομίας (the stone of the inheritance); the Peshitta reads ‘the primary stone’; the Vulgate ‘the first stone’; etc.
stone’ or ‘former stone’. This hypothesis is probably incorrect if one takes the last words of verse 7 into consideration (‘Grace, grace to it!’)\textsuperscript{34}. The shouts of joy (v 7b) most likely refer to the completion or last stone of the temple building. This stone could be placed at the entrance or at the holy place (Baldwin 1972:121-122; Redditt 1995:69-70; Willi-Plein 2002:67).

ii The completion of the temple by Zerubbabel (4:8-10a)

The second oracle (8-10a) also refers to the building and like the first oracle ends with the completion of the temple and the accompanying joy of the people. The reference to לֶחֶם הַכְּשָׁר (v 10) is interpreted and translated in different ways. The NRSV translates it into ‘plummet’ but this translation is problematic if one takes the literary context into consideration. The context supposes the end of the temple building while a plummet would have been needed earlier in the construction. The different scholarly opinions\textsuperscript{35} can be reduced to two possibilities: (1) It may refer to an object made of tin, which Zerubbabel used in a ceremony, perhaps placing it in the wall of the temple; or (2) the term might have denoted the ‘completion stone’ mentioned in 4:7. Both these hypotheses suppose the completion of the temple and make sense within the literary context.

The purpose of the two oracles in verses 6b-10a is clear. They connect the vision of the lamp stand to the rebuilding of the temple. The vision in verses 1-6a portrays abundance in the presence of Yahweh and the oracles tie the abundance to the rebuilding of the temple under Zerubbabel (Redditt 1995:71).

3 Yahweh uses leaders: Diarchic model of leadership in the new community

One can pose the question: How did the prophet Zechariah or the author(s) of Proto-Zechariah visualise the ruling of the new community? Proto-Zechariah makes a remarkable contribution to the Old Testament’s theology of leadership. Zechariah 3-4 emphasise that God does not merely use a holy place but also people, especially leaders. Zechariah responds to the possible inadequacies of the contemporary leaders by emphasising God’s forgiveness to Joshua against satanic accusations and the effectiveness of his Spirit enabling Zerubbabel to complete the temple restoration. In Proto-Zechariah there is a heightened encouragement of leaders in comparison with the approach of earlier prophets (Selman 1997:1304). Zechariah is advocating a diarchic model of leadership in

\textsuperscript{34} The words used in the shouts of joy (דַּבָּר) can be understood as grace, favour or beauty.

\textsuperscript{35} Stone made of tin (LXX; Reventlow 1993:61; Willi-Plein 2002:69); stone of separation (Peshitta); tin object or tablet used in constituting new buildings (Meyers & Meyers 1987:253-254; Petersen 1985:243); the last ceremonial stone (Baldwin 1972:123; Rudolph 1976:114); designation of Zion as primeval stone, namely ‘Separation’ (Van der Woude 1984:92); plummet (Targum; Vulgate; Smith 1984:203).
which responsibilities are shared by a political and religious leader. Joshua, the high priest rules this post-exilic community together with the governor Zerubbabel, who represents the Davidic line.

a Joshua the high priest

According to the book of Ezra, Joshua was the leader of the first group that returned to Jerusalem (Ezr 2:2 = Neh 7:7). He was the son of Jozadak (Ezr 3:2), who was in turn the son of the last reigning high priest of the first temple (2 Ki 25:18; 1 Chr 6:15; Jr 52:24). The books of Ezra and Haggai refer several times to Joshua, but it is only from the visions and oracles of Zechariah that one gains a fuller impression about the duties of Joshua (3:1, 3, 6, 8, 9; 6:11) (VanderKam 1991:553-554).

The book of Zechariah suggests that the restoration of the priesthood after the exile begins with a specific high priest, Joshua. Chapter 3:1-10 depicts Yahweh ordaining or installing Joshua as high priest of Jerusalem, the representative of the post-exilic community in the face of God. His guilt is taken away and he is clothed with festal apparel and a clean turban. Joshua is cleansed and forgiven in a rite performed in the divine council, not in some standard purification ritual. As high priest Joshua is the one who connects the earthly human realm with the divine heavenly realm (Petersen 1984:204; Hanhart 1998:218; Floyd 2000:384).

There is still one question in connection with the role of Joshua: Does Zechariah refer to a group of priests together with Joshua? The reference in 3:8 (יְהוָה יִרְשַׁדָּר) may refer to colleagues of the high priest but Zechariah clearly states that there is a high priest with significant prerogatives, one whose purity enables the priestly system as a whole to function properly (Petersen 1984:204).

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36 Birch et al (1999:423-424) discuss the diverse ways in which Yahwists in the post-exilic community envisioned their future. Haggai, Ezekiel 40-48 and Proto-Zechariah present the most concrete options. Ezekiel’s restoration vision represents a belief that Israel should be a hierocracy, a nation ruled by priests. Haggai seems to believe in the restoration of the Davidic monarchy through Zerubbabel, a member of the Davidic house. Zechariah’s visions in Zch 3 and 4 present a diarchic model somewhere between the viewpoints of Ezekiel and Haggai.

37 This phrase may also refer to members of God’s court (cf Redditt 1995:66) or merely members of the community. The text clearly states that they are an omen (ירוחם) of things to come.
b Zerubbabel the governor

The reference to the Branch (柬��) in Zechariah 3:8 and the picture of messianic peace in 3:10 perhaps referred to Zerubbabel originally. But it is in the next chapter that one reads more about the role of Zerubbabel. In the two short oracles in Zechariah 4:6b-10a one finds direct references to Zerubbabel’s role in rebuilding the temple. In the visionary parts of chapter 4 there are no direct references to Zerubbabel but the symbolic language of the vision may refer indirectly to Zerubbabel. Verses 3 and 11 refer to the two olive trees and verse 12 to the two branches of the olive trees.

We know that it was not normal for a non-royal figure to play the part of a temple builder. There is an inner contradiction in what Zerubbabel is attempting because a sanctuary without a royal patron was not normal in the Ancient Near East. It is possible that the vision report was designed to address this problem (Floyd 2000:386). On the other hand one can say that the prophet viewed the Davidide, Zerubbabel as a royal figure, despite the fact that he was not crowned as a king. The shouts of joy and acclamation at the end of verse 7 (？？) emphasise that Zerubbabel has royal status. In Psalm 45:3 (2), a royal psalm, the king is described in the same language: ‘You are the most handsome of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever’ (Petersen 1985:242).

c Balance of leadership

In verse 14, the climax of chapter 4, the angel told Zechariah that the trees were

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38 Zerubbabel’s name is included among those who are said to have returned from Babylon after the exile (Ezr 2:2; Neh 7:7). These texts give the impression that he returned almost immediately after the decree of Cyrus. Mystery surrounds his origins as well as his end. Although most OT verses designate him as the son of Shealtiel (Ezr 3:2, 8; 5:2; Neh 12:1; Hg 1:1, 12, 14; 2:2, 3) 1 Chr 3:19 lists Pedaiah as Zerubbabel’s father. There is no OT reference after the description of his important role in the temple building. Three NT verses include him in the genealogy of Jesus (Mt 1:12, 13; Lk 3:27) but make no further comment about him. Zerubbabel’s real significance is that he was seen to be of Davidic descent, the grandson of the Davidic king Jehoiachin (1 Chr 3:16-19). Haggai described him as God’s servant and signet ring (Hg 2:23) (Beyer 1992:1084-1086; Mason 1997: 1312-1314).

39 This ‘plant’ term is used by some Israelite prophets describing Jerusalem or a Davidic ruler (Ezk, Is, Jr) (Petersen 1985:210). It is possible, though unlikely that the reference is to some future, unspecified person. Some commentators may think that it refers to the high priest Joshua (cf Redditt 1995:66). The most likely hypothesis is that柬验 refers to Zerubbabel. In 6:12 the term appears again where the text specifies that the Branch is to build the temple, a task reserved to Zerubbabel in 4:9.
The Hebrew word יִבְנֵי הָאֵשֶׁר (literally ‘sons of oil’)\(^{40}\). The NRSV translates this phrase into ‘anointed’ but Meyers and Meyers (1987:258) and Redditt (1995:68) argue that one cannot translate it into ‘anointed’ because of the particular nuances of the word יִבְנֵי הָאֵשֶׁר. The Hebrew word conveys the meaning of fresh new oil and is used in Haggai 1:11 (cf also Jr 31:12; Hs 2:10, 24 [8, 22]; Jl 2:19, 24). Fresh oil is associated with the blessing that comes from God as crops produce their full yield. The phrase יִבְנֵי הָאֵשֶׁר also designated the olive trees as ‘sons of fatness’, that is symbols of bounty. Bounty was associated with the presence of God. The parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5 is relevant for the understanding of this phrase in Zechariah 4:14. In Isaiah 5:1 ‘oil’ is preceded by בֶן (son) but the phrase actually means ‘very fertile’ or ‘very fruitful’ and not ‘son of oil’. The fresh, unprocessed oil (יִבְנֵי הָאֵשֶׁר) is different from the traditional oil of anointment (אֲלֵפְיָה הָאֵשֶׁר)\(^{41}\), whose detailed recipe can be found in the stipulations of Exodus 30:22-33 (Van der Woude 1984:95; Petersen 1985:230-321; Redditt 1995:68; Brown 1996:152).

The question still remains: Does the phrase יִבְנֵי הָאֵשֶׁר refer to the two leaders Joshua and Zerubbabel? Most scholars\(^{42}\) agree that it refers to the two leaders despite the fact that they have different opinions concerning the special meaning of the ‘sons of oil’. Floyd (2000:383) argues that the understanding of this phrase cannot be resolved on philological grounds alone but that the overall literary context must be taken into consideration. It is significant that the visions in 3:1-10 and 4:1-14 are related in a particular way. The scene in 3:1-10 is the court of Yahweh’s heavenly dwelling place and the scene in 4:1-14 refers to the temple, Yahweh’s earthly dwelling place. Within the context of chapters 3 and 4 two persons are explicitly identified as having the responsibility for the temple that is ascribed to the two ‘sons of oil’, Joshua and Zerubbabel.

The use of a particular Hebrew word יִבְנֵי הָאֵשֶׁר may also have another meaning besides that of bounty. Fresh oil represents a fresh beginning; consequently, leadership for the post-exilic community in Jerusalem is structured in a new way. Rather than the old form of royal dominance over the priesthood, a new model of leadership has emerged: Royal and priestly figures are on equal ground. Zechariah’s vision in chapter 4 provides a blueprint for the new community that is characterised by a balance of leadership and authority (Brown 1996:152).

d Interdependence between Yahweh and earthly leaders

We have argued that the lamp stand symbolises the divine presence and the two

\(^{40}\) The LXX and Peshitta read ‘sons of fathers’. The Targum translates it into ‘sons of princes’.

\(^{41}\) Cf Lv 8:30; 1 Sm 10:1; 16:1, 13; 2 Ki 9:3.

trees symbolise the priest Joshua and the governor Zerubbabel (4:2-3). Petersen (1985:234) poses the following question in his discussion of the vision in chapter 4: ‘Does this scene entail symbiosis at the level of divine-human relations?’ One can answer positively to this question. There is a relationship of interdependence between the trees or branches and the lamp stand. By itself, oil can do nothing. The lamp needs oil to function and God needs civil and religious leaders in order to have a community that honours him. One can also say that the trees need light to grow and the leaders need the support of God to carry out their work. The post-exilic community cannot exist without symbiosis between God and human leaders. According to this vision these leaders are close to Yahweh, not isolated from him (cf 4:14 ‘These are the two sons of oil who stand by the Lord of the whole earth’).

4 Realised eschatology

Zechariah (and Haggai) had a realised eschatology. The expectations for the future are realised in the present time through certain people and establishments. Both prophets proclaim that prosperity will arrive with the building of the temple. Two well-known leaders amongst them, Zerubbabel and Joshua, were considered as instruments through which God’s salvation would be realised. Haggai saw Zerubbabel as the leader of the whole world. Zechariah emphasises that Joshua will be the joined leader.

In the time of Jeremiah, Yahweh took the throne away from David, but Zechariah 3-4 emphasises that the throne will be given back to the house of David. The time of salvation is here and the priest and governor or ‘king’ is already in the midst of God’s chosen people (Hanson 1975:261-262; Fourie 1991:120).

F CONCLUSION

The above discussion has led the author to conclude that chapters 3 and 4 may be seen as the literary and theological core of proto-Zechariah. Three main reasons may be given supporting this viewpoint:

1 Most modern scholars accept the fact that the night visions form a central part of proto-Zechariah. If one accepts the hypothesis that there were originally seven visions interspersed with oracles, then vision 4 (Zch 4) forms structurally the centre of these visions with Zechariah 3 as an extra prophetic vision placed in the centre.

2 The theological emphasis portrayed in chapters 3 and 4 points to the centrality of these chapters. All the important theological concepts of Proto-Zechariah are discussed in these chapters: Yahweh’s grace and forgiveness as a turning point in the new community; Yahweh’s presence in his temple; realised eschatology; and a diarchic model of leadership. The above concepts are not
merely mentioned but Zechariah 3 and 4 elaborate on these concepts by means of visionary reports, symbols and special oracles.

3 One finds almost all the important characters of Zechariah portrayed in these chapters: Yahweh (or Yahweh of hosts), God of the post-exilic community; Zerubbabel; Joshua; the prophet Zechariah; the angel or messenger as interpreter of God’s message; council of heavenly figures; and even the Satan as the accuser of Yahweh and his people. Nowhere else in Proto-Zechariah do we find such a concentration of important characters.

There is no doubt that Zechariah 3 and 4 can be seen as the literary and theological core of Proto-Zechariah.

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