

Zion, beautiful city of God – Zion theology in the book of Jeremiah

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ABSTRACT

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From the time of king David, Zion (Jerusalem) became not only a focal point in the history of Israel, but a key component in the theological thinking of Judah. The importance of Zion and in particular the theological mindset surrounding this city became a crucial issue in prophetic discourses, never so crucial as in the time of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah's ministry took place in the final years of the existence of the southern kingdom Judah. The circumstances which lead to the fall of Jerusalem and the resulting exile in Babel had a strong impact on Jeremiah's life and ministry. In this period in history the importance of Zion surfaced as a dominating issue affecting the actions, reasoning and theology of the leadership in Judah. This view on Zion was linked to a very definite interpretation of Davidic kingship and the centralisation of worship at the temple in Jerusalem. This resulted in a distinct theological interpretation of Zion and its importance with regards to Judah's relationship with Yahweh.

Zion played an important role in the proclamation of the prophet Jeremiah. Several passages testify to this (eg Jr 3:14ff; 6:2-6; 8:18-23; 31:2-14). The purpose of this article is to determine whether Jeremiah regarded the theology developed around Zion as a false theology or as a misinterpretation of the role of Zion in the history and theology of the people of Judah. Attention will be given to the growth of Zion theology as a dominating theological tradition.

1 INTRODUCTION

The sentiments surrounding Zion has been captured in the well-know song 'We're marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion...'. For many years Christians have been singing this song to express their longing to be with God in a perfect place, the heavenly Zion. I suppose this expresses something of what Zion, the Old Testament city became for Old Testament believers in times when they longed to return to the place where once Yahweh revealed Himself to his

chosen people. Zion became the idealized place where Yahweh resided amongst his people. One day they would return to this city and they would experience peace and prosperity. An excellent example of such an idealized view is expressed in Micah 4:1-5. As the song and also some passages in the Old Testament portray, Zion became much more than a city. It became a symbol of freedom, peace and security.

It is no secret when reading the prophets of the Old Testament, to find Zion as a prominent feature in their proclamation. This is also true of Jeremiah, which is the focus of this article. The importance of Zion and in particular the theological mindset surrounding this city became a crucial issue in prophetic discourses, never as vital as in the time of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah's ministry took place in the final years of the existence of the southern kingdom Judah. The circumstances which lead to the fall of Jerusalem and the resulting exile in Babel had a strong impact on Jeremiah's life and ministry. In this period in history the importance of Zion surfaced as a dominating issue affecting the actions, reasoning and theology of the leadership in Judah. This view on Zion was linked to a very definite interpretation of Davidic kingship and the centralisation of worship at the temple in Jerusalem. It resulted in a distinct theological interpretation of Zion and its importance with regards to Judah's relationship with Yahweh. The purpose of this article is to establish how Zion was regarded in the book of Jeremiah, the theological nature of the views about Zion and how perceptions about Zion developed. The intention is further to determine whether Jeremiah regarded the theology surrounding Zion as a false theology or as a misinterpretation of the role of Zion in the history and theology of the people of Judah. Attention will be given to the growth of Zion theology as a dominating theological tradition.

2 ZION AND ZION THEOLOGY

2.1 Introductory comments on Zion and Zion theology

Zion was originally a fortress built on a plateau between the Kidron and Tyropoean valleys. This provided the location for the Jebusite city of Jerusalem. According to 2 Samuel 5:6-10 king David later invaded the 'stronghold of Zion' and it became synonymous with the 'City of David'. At some later stage the old city Jerusalem expanded to include the temple palace and the area became known as 'Mount Zion', Yahweh's abode (cf Scheepers and Scheffler 2000:139-142).

It seems that the name Zion was used to emphasise the religious significance of the city (Baskin 1991:768). Over time, tradition developed around Zion and it gained symbolic meaning. For many years intensive research was done in search of the origin of the Zion tradition. This has been well documented by Roberts (2002:313-330) who has convincingly argued that the *Sitz im Leben* for the Zion tradition is to be found in the era of the Davidic-Solomonic empire (Roberts 2002:324, 330, 343-347). Roberts also discusses the major components of the Zion tradition. These include Yahweh as the great king and Jerusalem as his dwelling place. The position of the inhabitants is also important to note, since they will share in the blessings of Yahweh's presence. However it is required of the people to be worthy to live in his presence. The people, and in particular the king had the obligation of building the city (Roberts 2002:332, 342). As Roberts (2002:343) says, '...these inhabitants who are fit to live with God will rejoice in the security and abundant life that Yahweh's presence will bring.'

There are some indications that a much older Canaanite tradition once existed around Jerusalem (Zion), associated with the god El. However, the Old Testament tradition which associates Yahweh with Zion, is linked to king David's occupation of the Jebusite stronghold (cf 2 Sm 5:6-10). Zion was a neutral site as far as the tribes were concerned. David made this his political, commercial, military and religious centre. By bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Zion, he established Yahweh's presence in Zion. He had the vision of the building the temple, which Solomon eventually erected. In the Psalms (Pss 2 and 110) Zion's authority was described as reaching the ends of the earth. These Psalms apply creation motifs and thus involve Zion with the creation. But these Psalms also tie Zion to the tradition of inviolability (Humphreys 1990:69). When David established his seat of governance in Zion, a major change set in. From a former tribal federation, David founded a monarchy with his centralization policy. For this major change to be effective, the king needed divine sanction to establish his authority. The Zion tradition was the vehicle to render this divine sanction. With Zion well established in the tradition as the point of contact between heaven and earth, the link with the Davidic monarchy meant relating it with the cosmos as well. Zion was the point where divine kingship then met with earthly kingship. As Humphreys (1990:70) puts it '...Zion is what scholars of religion

call the *axis mundi*, the link joining heaven and earth. It was the creative centre from which flowed the life-giving powers that sustain the created cosmos'. In future the Royal-Zion traditions would determine the history of Judah. In 2 Samuel 7 an unconditional promise was made that the kingship of David would be eternal. The relationship between Yahweh and the king was depicted as a 'parental' relationship of a father to a son (cf 2 Sm 7:14-15). This relationship had a huge impact on the history of the people of God. The king was supposed to act as a vassal of Yahweh. Eventually as mentioned, the royal ideology served the purpose of legitimating the rule of a human king as the chosen representative of the divine king (Roberts 2002:374-375). Part of the obligations of the king was to protect his people and to promote and protect justice. These obligations were greatly neglected by the kings and caused the prophets to criticise them. Jeremiah in particular was in conflict with the kings of Judah because of the neglect of their God-given obligations. This will be discussed in more detail later in the article.

The idea of Yahweh's unconditional support therefore applied to Zion, kingship and the temple. Zion became much more than an earthly location, it received symbolic meaning. This made it possible for later interpreters of the Zion tradition to elaborate on this and to draw Zion into idealised notions of the place. For example, the New Testament's idea expressed in the book of Revelation of a new heavenly Jerusalem (Zion) to be established on earth, most probably emanated from this way of thinking about Zion.

To summarise, it is clear that the Zion theology formed the core of the Southern Kingdom theology (Deist & le Roux 1987:104-106; Sisson 1986:429, 437-439). Emphasis was on Zion as the seat of Yahweh, his permanent dwelling. This was where the temple of Yahweh was located and where the Davidic king sat on the throne. Ollenburger (1987:59-64) emphasises the fact that the Zion tradition and the Davidic tradition had two different origins and that the royal ideology employed the Zion tradition for purposes of legitimacy, succession and hegemony (cf 1987:62, 64-66). He states, and I quote '...the tradition of David's election derives from the theological notion of Yahweh's dwelling in Zion and David's loyalty to this notion' (Ollenburger 1987:62). The temple, palace and Davidic king on the throne became symbols of the presence of Yahweh in Zion (cf Bigger 1989:66). As long as these symbols were present, they felt

secure and in control (Schreiner 1987:12-14). They felt safe and content.

In time Zion developed strong symbolic characteristics. According to Luker (1990:986) the following symbolic aspects can be distinguished: Zion as the symbol of Yahweh's rule, as the centre of government, as embodiment of the people of God, as symbol for the eschatological Kingdom of God on earth and finally by Christians as symbol of the heavenly Zion. In the New Testament several passages about Jesus Christ are linked to Zion. In the book of Hebrews chapters 11 and 12 the heavenly Jerusalem on Mount Zion is described as the goal of the Christian pilgrimage. In the book of Revelation (chs 21-22:5) the heavenly Zion is regarded as the place where God will rule with his people forever (cf Baskin 1991:772). It is to this New Testament development of the meaning of Zion that believers have latched on to express their hope and faith, the goal of their Christian calling.

3 ZION AND ZION THEOLOGY IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

As with the other prophets, Zion played a crucial role in the society of Jeremiah and the proclamations in the book of Jeremiah. From the research which I have done on the book of Jeremiah, it seems that the most appropriate way of getting an understanding of Jeremiah's take on Zion, was from occasions where he had conflict with leaders in the society. The book however also reflects the role Zion played in the broader scheme of Jeremiah's convictions and views. I will first of all focus on the passages of conflict with leaders and then secondly propose Jeremiah's contribution to an understanding of Zion which would benefit Yahweh's people.

3.1 Leaders in conflict

For the purpose of this article I will select one text corpus and refer to two more passages which reflect conflict between Jeremiah and other leaders. For an understanding of Zion and Zion theology in the book of Jeremiah, it is essential to understand his view on the kings and kingship. Kingship however also concerns the priesthood and the prophets operating in the society. The chosen text corpus for discussion is Jeremiah 21:1-23:8 which reflects his conflict with the kings. Other good examples which illustrate a particular view on Zion and the theology which developed around Zion are Jeremiah 20:1-6 and Jeremiah 28. Within the limitations of this article it is not

possible to engage these passages as well. Jeremiah 20:1-6 portrays Jeremiah in conflict with the priest Pashhur. The prophet's proclamation that the people of Judah will end up in exile because of their unfaithfulness to the God of the covenant, is rejected. The message was delivered at the temple, one of the pillars of the idea of the inviolability of Zion. Jeremiah 28 supports the same ideas. The passage clearly illustrates Jeremiah's conflict with the prophet Hananiah with regards to the looming Babylonian exile. Jeremiah is dismissed as a false prophet for proclaiming the downfall of Zion. It seems that the perception of the impregnability of Zion is also underlying Hananiah's conviction as reflected in his clash with the prophet.

3.1.1 Historical context of the kings in book of Jeremiah

Before entering into a brief discussion of Jeremiah 21:-23:8, it is perhaps necessary to present a brief overview of the history that forms the backdrop of kingship cycle. Jeremiah's activities overlap with the reigns of five kings, namely Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. These kings are chronologically addressed in the above mentioned cycle of kings (21:1-23:8). During Josiah's reign the Assyrians were still the dominating world power. However, Judah eventually gained independence from their domination. With Assyria's power weakening, Josiah aimed not only to lead his people to independence, but he also attempted reforms. Meanwhile Egypt and Babylonia became the two new powers to reckon with on the international scene. In 609 BCE, Josiah unfortunately died at Megiddo at the hand of Necho II from Egypt. His son Jehoahaz (Shallum) succeeded him, but was taken prisoner by Necho of Egypt after only three months in power. It became clear that in future the course of Judah's history would be determined by Egypt and Babylonia. The society in Judah was divided amongst themselves as to which of these two powerful states would best ensure their future. After Jehoahaz was taken prisoner, Egypt placed Jehoiakim on the throne in Judah. This caused dissatisfaction amongst the anti-Egypt sympathizers who wanted to uphold king Josiah's policies and reforms. In exchange for the privilege to be king, Jehoiakim had to pay tribute to Egypt. For him to be able to pay his dues to Egypt, he had to abuse his subjects. In so doing, Jehoiakim moved ever further away from Josiah's reforms and his actions thus played into the hands of those who were against Josiah's whole approach. In 605 BCE, Babylon defeated Egypt at Carchemish and it became clear

that, from then on, Babylon would become the power to deal with. When Babylon began operating on the plains of Philistia in 604 BCE, Judah got a fright and Jehoiakim submitted himself to Babylon. In the meanwhile, Jehoiakim hoped that Egypt would come to Judah's rescue. In 601 BCE Babylon suffered defeat at the hands of Egypt on the Egyptian border and this weakened Babylon's prestige considerably. Jehoiakim saw this as an ideal opportunity to rebel, but in December 605 BCE the armies of Babylon advanced against Judah. Jehoiakim died in the same month. It has been suggested that he was probably murdered by people who were inclined to be pro-Babylonian, the motive being that if Judah were to be occupied by the Babylonians, she would get off more lightly. Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, was only in power for three months before he was carried off into exile with his mother, the officials and the leaders in the community in 597 BCE. Like his father, Jehoiachin was not acceptable to the Babylonians, but the people in Judah regarded him as king even though he was in exile. They eagerly awaited his return. Thus, broadly speaking, we could refer to pro-Babylonian and pro-Egyptian groups in the society. Within these broad categories, there may have been other groupings connected with the practical applications of the policies of the different rulers. The Babylonians replaced Jehoiachin with his uncle and gave him the throne name of Zedekiah (2 Ki 24:17-18). He remained loyal to the Babylonians for ten years, after which he decided to join the ranks of a pro-Egyptian section of his court. He withheld tribute from the Babylonians and plotted with Egypt, with the result that the Babylonians once more advanced against Judah.

Party politics were brought to a head in Zedekiah's time, when the Babylonians marched against Jerusalem. It then became important to determine who was pro-Babylonian and who pro-Egyptian. During the siege of Jerusalem, some of the people suggested that Egypt would come to their rescue, while others were of the opinion that it would be best to surrender to Babylonia (cf Jr 27; 37:7-11; 38:17-20). After the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, the Babylonians once again put someone of their own choice in charge of Judah, namely Gedaliah. After being in office for five years, Gedaliah was murdered and, out of fear of the Babylonians, some of the Jews fled to Egypt and forced Jeremiah to go with them. Jeremiah died in Egypt at the hand of his own people (cf Stulman 2005:2-3; Gowan 1998: 98-99).

It is possible to gain insightful knowledge from the study of Jeremiah's background and religious and political commitments. He was born about 650 BCE and was probably himself a priest, that is, if Jeremiah 1:1 is thus understood. He was from Anathoth, which was situated about five kilometers northeast of Jerusalem. Due to the fact that Jeremiah grew up close to Jerusalem, one assumes that he had knowledge of the political and religious climate in the capital. News from Jerusalem, the religious, cultural and trade center must certainly have reached the people in Anathoth. Jeremiah was called by Yahweh to announce judgment against the people of Judah and their leadership in Jerusalem and also against the nations.

3.1.2 Conflict with the kings of Judah

Over the period of the monarchy the prophets of Israel had different kinds of relationships with the kings. At times they were quite close to the king and even formed part of his administration. In these instances they occupied a central position and advised the kings in many of his decisions. However there were also times when prophets kept their distance from the kings and acted in a more individualistic fashion and took a more critical stance towards him. In this regard they functioned more on the periphery of society and occasionally approached the kings with admonitions, warnings and even with good council (cf Wilson 1980:1-20). In many instances the relationships between kings and prophets were quite tense.

Jeremiah was a peripheral prophet and at times a severe critic of the kings. This often led to conflict with the kings as is clear from the book of Jeremiah. The prophet often challenged the powers of his day and criticised their leadership practices, their decisions, their international relationships and alliances and the underlying ideology on which they based their kingship. As with modern-day leaders, the kings of Jeremiah's time held positions of power and wanted to maintain their positions. This they did using everything they had at their disposal. The biggest motivating factor was the belief that they were descendants of king David and therefore heirs of the promise of Yahweh that this line of kingship was eternal (cf 2 Sm 7). They had religious backing for their claims to remain in power and were therefore not open to any criticism that might threaten their positions. One could add to this claim the personal ambition of the kings to remain in power. The book of Jeremiah testifies to the prophet's conflict with the governing powers of his day and age. For

a view on Jeremiah's criticism of the kings, the collection of prophecies in Jeremiah 21:1-23:8 serves the purpose the best.

Jeremiah 21:1-23:8 deals with the kings and kingship in the last days of the state of Judah before it fell in the hands of the Babylonian empire in 586/7 BCE. As mentioned above, we find a chronological account of prophecies in this cycle directed at the last kings before the Babylonian exile came about. In the course of time these prophecies were linked together in a chronological order to form a cycle about kings. All of these kings are viewed negatively, except king Josiah who is contrasted with his son Jehoiakim. From research it seemed that the oracles showed a mounting tendency of frustration with the kings, with a climax in the passage Jeremiah 22:24-30. This last judgment oracle announced that there would be no descendants for king Jehoiachin to continue the dynasty of king David. The kings have failed (cf Collins 2004:339-340). The kingship cycle ends with a negative word play on the name of king Zedekiah, to once again emphasise the failure of the leadership. Jeremiah 23:1-6 makes it clear that in future Yahweh will appoint a new leadership which will rule in justice and righteousness, unlike the kings mentioned in the kingship cycle.

For the purpose of the discussion it is important to attempt a reconstruction or construction of the prophet Jeremiah's view on leadership in Judah in the years before the trauma of 586/7. Jeremiah 21:1-23:8 could be read as representative of the prevailing frustrations with the failing leadership not only within this cycle but also within the larger framework of the book of Jeremiah. It would be foolish to deny the possibility of other interpretations of Jeremiah 21:1-23:8, but this collection of prophecies seems to explain best why the kingship in Judah had failed.

Jeremiah functioned as prophet in the Southern Kingdom. But although this was the case, traces of Northern Kingdom traditions with regard to the kings are noticeable. He conviction was that Yahweh should appoint the king (cf Dt 17:14f; Hs 8:4). Yahweh's representative the king is responsible for the maintaining of justice in society. In contrast to the southern view, Jeremiah regards Yahweh's presence in the midst of his people as conditional. In reaction to his loving-kindness, they should act in a like manner. Jeremiah, not a court prophet himself, criticised the temple proceedings and the palace in the same manner of the prophetic

tradition of the Northern Kingdom. While he is not anti-temple in his attitude, he does emphasise a personal relationship with Yahweh which results in correct ethical behaviour. Social justice should be practised in accountability to Yahweh. It seems that Jeremiah is not anti-Zion, but does resist the view of the inviolability of Zion and the false sense of security this view creates (cf Diamond 2003:573-574). Jeremiah's critique on the kingship resembles that of Deuteronomy 17:14-20 (cf Stulman 2005:219-221). Although Jeremiah's view on kingship was based on concepts inherent to the Southern Kingdom, it borrowed other qualities from a Deuteronomic ethical framework (cf Stulman 2005:20; Brueggemann 1998:4-5). This framework allowed Jeremiah to regard the kingship in the south as a fallible and failing leadership. Their socio-political attitude, based on particular interpretation of the Royal-Zion theology, seemed from the book of Jeremiah to be a misguided interpretation.

3.1.3 A summary of Jeremiah's critique on the kingship in Judah

From a detailed analysis of the cycle of kings in Jeremiah 21:1-23:8 (cf Wessels 1985:142-143), the following observations, taking the whole of the book into account, were made. It seems that Jeremiah's critique of the Judean kings is based on three aspects.

Research has shown that the ideal of a united Israel was a crucial issue for Jeremiah. This view is supported by Lalleman-de Winkel (2000:208). The ideal of a united kingdom results from the exegesis of Jeremiah 23:3 and 6 where reference is made to the gathering of the flock (Judah and Israel) from all countries of exile. This assumption is supported by passages such as Jeremiah 3:6-18; (cf Weiser 1969:26; however cf Albertz 1982:45), 30:18-21; 31:2-6, 7-9 and 10-14 which probably date from the early period of Jeremiah's ministry (cf Thompson 1980:562, 572; Rudolph 1968:207; Lohfink 1982:115). Although Jeremiah was in favour of the idea of a united kingdom when Josiah endeavoured to restore the boundaries of the old Davidic kingdom, his emphasis was primarily the restoration of the believing community. After Josiah's death and under the rule of his successors, the realisation of Jeremiah's ideal became virtually impossible. The behaviour of the kings, especially Jehoiakim, frustrated the prophet immensely. This explains the exaggerated language used in his attacks on the kings (cf Jr 22:18-19; 22:30).

A second observation of importance is the role which Northern Kingdom and/or Deuteronomic ethical ideas played in Jeremiah's critique on the kings of Judah (cf Huey 1993:32-33; Brueggemann 1998:3-7; Petersen 2002:132-133). This is evident from passages such as Jeremiah 2:2-13; 3:1-5 and 30:18-21. These passages contain references to northern traditions, Deuteronomic ethical conceptions on marriage, and the relationship between the northern prophet Hosea and the preaching of Jeremiah (cf Deissler 1982:61-75; Granild 1962:140; Thompson 1980:81-87; Lalleman-de Winkel 2000:208; Blenkinsopp 1996:139-140, 145). Humphrey (1990:165-167) has argued that in the book Jeremiah the Moses-Sinai story and the David-Zion story clashed. Jeremiah with his emphasis on the covenant and its obligations could not buy into the unconditional promise to Zion and the people. Influenced by the northern Moses-Sinai tradition, he demanded of the leadership and the people to obey Yahweh's covenant stipulations. The relationship with Yahweh was conditional. It was determined that Jeremiah's concept of kingship contained features of the traditions of the Northern Kingdom. Besides demanding obedience to the covenant and loyalty to the Yahweh alone, his conviction was that Yahweh should choose the king (cf Jr 23:5-6; also Dt 17:14f and Hs 8:4).

A third observation concerns wisdom teachings, possibly of southern origin. As far as the maintenance of social justice by the king is concerned, Jeremiah seems to rely on the practical wisdom, wisdom gained from experience. His idea of social justice is based on an impersonal perspective of justice (possibly of Southern Kingdom origin), which originates from practical wisdom. This conception is interlaced with Deuteronomic ethical ideas based on a more personal view of justice (Deist and Vorster 1985:187-193).

All three these observations played a crucial role in Jeremiah's view of Zion and Zion theology. It was the failure to adhere to these ethical demands and the arrogance to continue to claim Yahweh's unconditional presence in Zion in spite of their disregard of the covenantal obligations, which evoked Jeremiah's fierce criticism.

3.1.4 A flawed theology

One of the basic problems underlying the attitude of the leadership, according to the book of Jeremiah, is a wrong theology. This is evident from Jeremiah's conflict with the kings, but also from his clashes with the priest Pashhur, a state official presiding over the

temple and the prophet Hananiah, supporting the governing leadership.

From his profile in the book of Jeremiah, the prophet did not form part of the establishment. In fact, according to chapter 1 Jeremiah was called as prophet to proclaim judgement on his own people (Judah) as well as on foreign peoples. As a marginal figure who often had to flee from his own people, his own family as well as from kings who did not agree with his utterances, Jeremiah is portrayed as an unpopular person (*persona non grata*) in the community (cf Jones 1992:355). As an outsider his controversial announcements (for instance that Nebuchadnezzar acted as servant of the Lord and that the people of God should subject themselves to the godless king of Babel) were intended as a motivation for the people to change. His rejection is, therefore, understandable (cf Huey 1993:243). Confronted by a formidable system with established opinions and structures, as well as people appointed to watch over these matters, Jeremiah was faced with a very difficult task of challenging the existing Royal-Zion paradigm in the Judean society.

From Jeremiah's clashes with the leadership it became clear that Zion in Jeremiah's mind was not as invincible as his opponents wished to believe. This is further substantiated by two more passages worth mentioning. The first is Jeremiah 6:1-8 and the second Jeremiah 8:18-23.

Jeremiah 6:1-8 most probably dates from the time of king Josiah (Schmidt 1982:241). It concerns a threat to Zion by a foe from the north. This caused the city to be an unsafe place to live in. Zion is described as beautiful and delicate, but acts like a well which constantly brings forth violence and destruction. Zion's condition is sick. Yahweh therefore warns the city and its people that he will judge them and destroy them (cf McKane 1986:141-143). This implied that Zion and its people could not claim a privileged position, because they were required to act in accordance to Yahweh's ethical demands (cf Stulman 2005:75-76).

The second passage is Jeremiah 8:18-23. This passage is in the form of a lament and probably dates from the time of the invasion in 597 BCE. Biddle (1996:28-31) regards this passage as a dialogue between the people and Yahweh. It depicts a time of grieving and confusion because of bad conditions in the society in Judah. The people were asking many questions about what was happening.

These questions reveal important information for the present study. It is clear that the people were stunned, because they were experiencing conditions which created the impression that their king was no longer in Zion. From their point of view they argued, if the king is in on his throne in Zion, they should not experience bad times. What they experienced was Yahweh's abandonment of Zion. The people were disappointed by his unresponsiveness (Biddle 1996:31). From the reaction of the people, one can gather that they thought Zion and the king would safeguard their existence. Clearly a wrong view as far as Jeremiah was concerned (cf Stulman 2005:98-100).

The royal-Zion theology made the leadership and people of Judah self-assured and content. Because of this, they developed an indifferent attitude towards Yahweh with regards to their moral and religious obligations to him. They became a self-secured and self-satisfied community, neglecting their religious and social responsibilities (cf Brandscheidt 1989:63-65). Jeremiah wanted them to understand that the security in Zion was conditional and required faith and trust in Yahweh (cf Ollenburger 1987:148; cf Dutcher-Walls 1991:91-92; Stulman 2005:205-206). Jeremiah opposed the self-assured attitude of the leadership and the society, resulting in conflict.

From the discussion of Jeremiah's conflict with the leaders in his society, it became clear that the Zion theology actually became an ideology. The leaders and people believed in the unconditional presence of Yahweh in the midst of the people. This belief became an ideology in this society. The emphasis on Zion (Jerusalem), and with that the temple as the abode of Yahweh in Zion, resulted in the belief that Yahweh would protect them and that they would experience peace. This created a false sense of security and a serious neglect of Yahweh's demands. One could say their attitude reflected an arrogance towards Yahweh, claiming his protection and goodwill but disobeying his instructions (cf also Jr 7:1-15). Albertz (1994: 172) says in this regard: '... the cult of Jerusalem gave the upper classes a certainty of salvation which made them totally insensitive to the injustice which was emanating from them'. All this resulted in Zion theology becoming an ideology. It is referred to as the Zion/temple ideology.

Brueggemann (1992:273-276) refers to this ideology as the Davidic-royal tradition which is in tension with the Mosaic-covenantal tradition, a tradition to which Micah would feel more attracted to. The Davidic-royal tradition favoured the establishment, a settled world with a king and regime in place, managing or perhaps one should say controlling resources. To all these aspects, religious legitimacy was given and it favoured those who were in power. It became a closed system opposing changes which might threaten the establishment.

A concept or a belief or an idea can take on ideological features in the negative sense of the word, when it becomes a driving force or an overriding principle in society. Such an idea can become a blinding force exercising power over people. It can dominate the mindset of people, becoming the factor which determines thinking and planning. It can become so forceful that everything has to serve that idea; everything is adapted to fit into it and has to strengthen it. It can be a dangerous tool through which people, driving the ideological idea, the ideologists, can manipulate people's thought-patterns and actions. In this sense an ideology is an excellent means to exercise power over people.

Zion theology undoubtedly became ideological in nature by dominating the mindset of the people of Judah not to see the danger of their way of living. It suited the leaders of this society that this was the case, because through the power of this ideology the people supported the establishment and its practices considering them to be God-given. No critical thinking existed or was tolerated. This is clear from the fact that prophetic figures such as Micah and later Jeremiah were unpopular in society and were constantly in conflict with others, normally the leadership. They became marginalised people.

As Brueggemann (1988:13) states 'The book of Jeremiah is nearly unambiguous in its conviction that the Jerusalem ideology is a mistaken, fraudulent notion of public life which can only lead to death'. They misinterpreted the symbols of their religious traditions with disastrous consequences.

3.2 Positive aspects of Jeremiah's view on Zion

From the study of passages which differ from those discussed above, Jeremiah had further contributed ideas emphasising the importance of Zion. Whereas up to now his ideas seemed negative, these newly expressed views of Zion seemed constructive and aimed at bene-

fitting Yahweh's people. What was learned this far from Jeremiah's view on the Zion and Zion theology, was deduced from his interaction with societal leaders. Jeremiah's religious convictions had political, historical and religious implications and lead to conflict with leadership. However besides this rather negative, confrontational way of learning about the role of Zion, there were also passages which contributed in a more positive way to the thinking about Zion.

3.2.1 Jeremiah 3:14-18

The first of these passages is Jeremiah 3:14-18. This discussion revolves around the mentioned aspect of Jeremiah's thinking that in future the Northern and Southern Kingdoms would again be a united kingdom as in the days of king David.

In verse 14 a call is made to the apostate people of Israel to return to Yahweh, because He is their Lord (ba'al ; Weiser 1969:30). This is notably a word play on the fact that Yahweh is the true ba'al and not the god Baal (Thompson 1980:201). According to the passage, Yahweh would return a remnant of the people of the Northern Kingdom to Zion (Jerusalem) (cf McKane 1986:77). Zion served as a symbol of the state and the cult. If they returned to Zion, the whole of Israel would then again be united as a faith community (Thompson 1980:202). Verse 15 indicates that Yahweh would appoint leaders who would govern according to his will with wisdom and insight (cf Jr 23:1-4; Ezk 34:23; 37:24). The kings were to be blamed that the people of God worshiped idols. Therefore in future Yahweh would appoint the leaders who would enact his will (cf Dt 17:14-20).

Whereas verse 14 addresses the re-establishment of the covenant relationship and verse 15 the appointment of reliable leaders, verse 16 shifts the focus to Yahweh's presence (cf mention of the Ark in v 16) to Zion as the throne of Yahweh. Verse 18 completes the ideal scenario by speaking of the return of people of the Judah and Israel from exile to the land of their inheritance (cf Brueggemann 1998:45-47). The time reference 'in those days' indicates the futuristic nature of the proclamation. The picture painted reminds one of Micah 4:1-5 (Is 2:1-4). It remains a debating point how the reference to the exile should be interpreted (cf Weiser 1969:31), but it seems to tie in with Jeremiah's vision of a future in which Zion, a king and the covenant people back in the land of their

inheritance, were all in place. In this regard Zion should be understood as a symbol of hope for the future, a future in which there would be unity between state and cult. Zion therefore plays a positive role in the expectations.

3.2.2 Jeremiah 30-33

The book of Jeremiah consists of a collection of salvation prophecies grouped together in chapters 30-33. It is referred to as the 'Little book of Comfort' (Schmidt 1982:239) or 'The book of Consolation' (Stulman 2005:257). It is very difficult to date the collection contained in these chapters, but it is possible that it came from a period in the early days of Jeremiah's ministry when king Josiah was busy expanding his territory to include some of the land previously occupied by the Northern Kingdom (Thompson 1980:552; Rudolph 1968:188). Views on this section of the book of Jeremiah often differ. Some say it is from the prophet Jeremiah while others regard it as secondary (Carroll 1986:568-570). The argument of this article is that whoever was responsible for the collection and composition of the book of Jeremiah, thought to relate this collection to the prophet Jeremiah. Three passages from this collection with regard to the discussion on Zion need attention. The first is Jeremiah 30:18-22.

3.2.2.1 Jeremiah 30:18-22

This passage contains the promise of the rebuilding not only of Zion, but also the palace. It would bring great joy to the people and their children would prosper as in the days of king David. Yahweh would also appoint a new ruler from the midst of their own community (cf Stulman 2005:265). The promise ends with a renewal of the covenant relationship: 'You will be my people, and I will be your God' (30:22). Zion will be the location of the renewed relationship with the faith community of the covenant (cf Brueggemann 1998:278-279).

3.2.2.2 Jeremiah 31:2-6

The second passage, 31:2-6, is very similar to the first one. This section deals with the restoration of Israel and emphasises that Yahweh would restore his people because of his love for them. In the process of restoration Yahweh would enable them to cultivate the land again. Agricultural activities would be restored to the joy of his people. They would express their joy by playing instruments and with dance. It is interesting to note that the restoration concerns the

Northern Kingdom. This is evident from the mention of Samaria in verse 5 and Ephraim in verse 6 (Lohfink 1982:360). The theme of unity is once again addressed by the announcement in verse 6 where the people in Samaria were shouting ‘Come, let us go up to Zion to worship the Lord our God’ (cf Holladay 1989:168). Zion will once again be the place of worship (Brueggemann 1998:283). Rudolph (1968:195) thinks this passage probably dates from the time of king Josiah, revealing Jeremiah’s support for his reform endeavours. Again Jeremiah sees Zion as the place where the united Israel will worship as a community of faith.

3.2.2.3 Jeremiah 31:10-14

The third section, 31:10-14, concerns a message to the nations of the world. They should take note that Yahweh would bring his people in exile back to their country. He would take care of them like a shepherd to the flock. This states that Yahweh would be main agent in the restoration of his people and the new era that would come. Israel would return to Zion and join in the joy and the prosperity which Yahweh would provide for young and old. This new era’s weeping would be changed into joy. It would be a time of celebration. Verse 14 again emphasises the abundance Yahweh would give, even in the cult. As Holladay (1989:185) states ‘...clearly then one has here to do with the ideology of Zion, by which the prosperity of Jerusalem is tied in to the glory of the temple on Zion’. Zion would play a key role in the time of abundance and prosperity (cf Stulman 2005:268-269).

From these three passages it again seems that Jeremiah did not hold a negative view on Zion *per se*. He however did not share the view of the invincibility of Zion. The city and its people had experienced Yahweh’s judgement, therefore the need for recovery and restoration. Zion represented to him the symbol of the religious unification of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel in the new age Yahweh will initiate.

4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

A very rich tradition of significance developed around the city Zion. The link with the temple as Yahweh’s earthly abode and also kingship dynasty of David made it a dominant notion in the history of Israel and in particular Judah. A geographical setting linked with religious and political spheres of life, gave it a totally new meaning. Religious interpretations of Yahweh’s presence in Zion in the temple

and a distinct understanding of the kingship tradition of David as an unconditional promise, made it much more significant than a mere geographical location. It reached symbolic status.

From the discussion it became clear that for the leadership in Judah Zion's idealized stature had detrimental consequences. According to Jeremiah this wrong theological interpretation had political and historical implications and caused the downfall of the royal leadership in Judah. In this regard it became a misplaced symbol.

Jeremiah's own idea about Zion was much more positive. As indicated Zion became a symbol to him of the unification of the former kingdoms of Israel and Judah. It became the symbol of the restoration of the community of faith, which were Yahweh's covenant people. Jeremiah expressed the view that the future leaders would once again be appointed by Yahweh and not by the people. This new leadership would rule in justice and fairness (Jr 23:1-6).

Symbols play an important role in the church and have a very important function. The symbolic importance of our sacraments testifies to this. It serves the purpose of re-enacting rich religious truths. It can however also serve the purpose of keeping hope alive. This happened to Zion in the preaching of the prophets. The longing for a day when Zion would be restored and would again be the place where Yahweh would reveal his presence and his king would rule, kept hope alive for the future as a covenant people of God. In a similar vein, the heavenly Zion is a place where people of faith long to be. This hope persisted in times of desperation and hardship. 'One day we will reach beautiful Zion, the city where God is and where we will meet with him', is the thinking.

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