

What did Zekharia see?

כֹּה אָמַר ה ' צְבָאוֹת : עֹד יֵשְׁבוּ זְקֵנִים וּזְקֵנוֹת
בִּרְחֹבוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָם , וְאִישׁ מִשְׁעַנְתּוֹ בְּיָדוֹ מֵרֹב
יָמִים . וּרְחֹבוֹת הָעִיר יִמָּלְאוּ יְלָדִים וִילָדוֹת
מְשַׂחֲקִים בִּרְחֹבֹתֶיהָ

זכריה ח ' 5-4

Look closely at this picture. Do you see anything special? Just children playing in a square. Right? Well, not so fast…

This is the Old City of Jerusalem. Some children are playing in a square (and a street) called Bate-Mahase. This is a very important place in the Old city. The two-story building with arches that you see was built in 1871 with funds provided by Baron Wolf Rothschild of Frankfurt to house poor families. The Rothschild family coat of arms is still at the top of the building. Today, it houses the offices of the Jewish Quarter Municipality. In this courtyard, you see a very familiar scene: children running and playing. This happens every day because there are two schools close to this courtyard: The No’am Talmud Tora and the Sylberstein Yeshiva.

What you don’t see in the picture is another familiar view: elders, old men, and women sitting on the benches of the

square. Elders love the sight of children, and many times after school hours, grandparents would come to this square to play with their grandchildren.

There is something else in this place. Look at the following picture.



There is a scripture carved in stone. It’s a quote from the prophet Zekhariah, 8:4-5. Zekhariah was a child when the Jews lived in the Babylonian exile 2500 years ago. Without their own land and without the Bet HaMiqdash, the future of the Jewish people looked very grim. They were hopeless. In normal circumstances, Jews would have naturally integrated (assimilated) into the Babylonian population and disappeared. But a miracle happened. Cyrus, the Persian emperor, was moved by HaShem (as he explicitly declared) and encouraged the Jews to come back to Israel and rebuild Jerusalem. Although the majority of the Jews chose to remain in Babel (the first but not last “voluntary exile”), thousands came back.

Zekhariah was among them. They found a completely destroyed city. Everything was ruins, ashes, and desolation. There was not even a wall to protect the city, which made living in the city a mission impossible (imagine living in a house without one of its outside walls).

But from the midst of this desolation, Zekhariah had a prophetic vision, a very unlikely scenario to happen, given

the terrible conditions of Yerushalayim in his days.

This prophecy, engraved on that stone, is in Chapter 8, verses 4-5:

כֹּה אָמַר ה’ צְבָאוֹת: עֹד יֵשְׁבוּ זְקֵנִים וּזְקֵנוֹת
בִּרְחֹבוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָם, וְאִישׁ מִשְׁעַנְתּוֹ בְּיָדוֹ מֵרֹב
יָמִים. וּרְחֹבוֹת הָעִיר יִמָּלְאוּ יְלָדִים וִילָדוֹת
מְשַׂחֲקִים בִּרְחֹבֹתֶיהָ (זכריה ח’ 4-5)

“And now, HaShem says: I will return to Mount Zion, and I will dwell in Yerushalayim…. And once again, old men and women will walk Jerusalem’s streets with their canes and will sit together in the city squares. And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in it.”

Let us now see the whole picture: you are in Bate Mahase, reading this extraordinary verse engraved on the stone in front of you. On any given day, elders sit on a bench and children play in the street. Then you realize that you have the incredible merit of being a living witness to the fulfillment of Zekhariah’s prophetic words. You also understand that you are not just a witness of Zekhariah’s prophecy but rather the embodiment of that prophecy. You get the feeling that 2500 years ago, in his incredible vision, Zekhariah saw you.