

# Torah Table Talk

## Who are the Guardians of of Jerusalem?

Parshat Nitzavim  
Deuteronomy 29:1 – 30:20 / Isaiah 61:10 – 63:9



*Dedicated by Frances and Buddy Brandt  
in memory of their grandson, Oren Jacob Brandt-Rauf.  
"He was the perfect child."*

This is the seventh of seven Haftorot of consolation which are read between Tisha B'av and Rosh Hashanah. Chanted only days before the New Year, it contains the culmination and the climax of these weekly passages. The prophet celebrates as Jerusalem is rebuilt and bedecked like 'a groom with a turban' or 'a bride in beautiful jewelry.' Isaiah promises to never remain silent until Jerusalem is safe and is 'renamed' by God. During her exile Zion was named "forsaken" and "desolate." Now she will be called *Heftziva*, "I will delight in her" and *Biulah*, "I will espouse her." During her exile, Zion was divorced from God but as God now embraces Zion again her names reflect God's love. God appears and promises to participate in the deliverance of Jerusalem and the punishment of Zion's enemies.

### **Isaiah 62:1**

For the sake of Zion I will not be silent, for the sake of Jerusalem I will not be still, till her victory emerges resplendent and her triumph like a flaming torch...

### **Isaiah 62:6 – 7**

Upon your walls O Jerusalem I have set watchmen who shall never be silent by day or by night. O you the Lord's remembrancers take no rest, and give no rest to Him until He establishes Jerusalem and makes her renowned upon the earth

### **Isaiah 52:8 - 9**

Hark! Your watchmen raise their voices, as one they shout for joy; for every eye shall behold the Lord's return to Zion. Raise a shout together, O ruin of Jerusalem! For the Lord will comfort his people, will redeem Jerusalem.

### **Babylonian Talmud Menachot 87a (before the sixth century)**

What did they (the watchmen) say? Rava Bar Rav Sheila said "[The watchmen say,] 'You shall rise up and have compassion on Zion' (Psalm 102:14). Rabbi Nachman bar Isaac said, [The watchmen say,] 'The Lord builds up Jerusalem' (Psalm 147:2). And what did they say before the destruction of the city? Raba son of Shela said" [The watchmen used to say,] "For the Lord has chosen Zion, he has desired it for His habitation" (Psalm 132:13).

### **Rashi - Rabbi Shlomo Ben Isaac (1040 – 1105)**

Our sages explain it literally. (The watchmen) are the angels who remind God of the destruction so that He will rebuild Jerusalem. What did they say? 'You shall rise up and have compassion on Zion' (Psalm 102:14). "The Lord builds up Jerusalem," (Psalm 132:13). According to the Targum (Aramaic translation of Jonathan) the walls refers to the forefathers who watch over us like a wall.

### **Radak – Rabbi David Kimchi (1160 – 1235)**

The homiletical explanation is that the guardians are angels who continuously pray to God to rebuild and re-inhabit Jerusalem. There is an explanation that the guardians are those who mourn for Jerusalem, and yet another explanation that it refers to all of the Jewish people in exile who watch over and pray for the

rebuilding of Jerusalem. They mention God the builder of Jerusalem day and night in the prayers and blessings...

### **John McKenzie, Second Isaiah: a New Translation, Introduction and Commentary**

The watchmen here not the watchmen in Isaiah 52:8, who, by a paradox, were posted on the walls of an abandoned city to announce the return of its inhabitants. The watchmen here have no duty except perpetual prayer for there can be no danger of which they should give warning.

### **From the web site of the Neturei Karta**

Neturei-Karta is the Aramaic term for "Guardians of the City. The name Neturei-Karta originates from an incident in which R. Yehudah Ha-Nassi (Rabbi Judah the Prince) sent R. Hiyya and R. Ashi on a pastoral tour of inspection. In one town they asked to see the "guardians of the city" and the city guard was paraded before them. They said that these were not the guardians of the city but its destroyers, which prompted the citizens to ask who, then, could be considered the guardians. The rabbis answered, "The scribes and the scholars," referring them to Tehillim (Psalms) Chap. 127. (Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Hagiga. 76c).

### **Questions to Ponder**

1. Who are the watchmen mention Isaiah, 62:6? How are they different from the watchmen in Isaiah 52? What role do the watchmen play in each of these verses?
2. What do the angels say as they watch over the walls of Jerusalem? Why are the angels chanting these particular verses? What is the relationship of the angels to God and to the people of Israel?
3. Radak quotes the opinion of Rashi and the Talmud but then goes on to offer at least two other interpretations of who the watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem are. Why doesn't he simply accept Rashi's interpretation? What are the two other points of view that offered here?
4. The new JPS translation uses the word "Remembrancers" in this translation for the Hebrew, *Hamazkirim*. *This is clumsy English at best*. What does this word mean? In other translations we find "You who remind the Lord, take no rest for yourselves;" (New American Standard Bible,) "Ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence," (King James) and "You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest," (New International Version). What are they reminding God about? Who is the text speaking about?
5. The Neturei Karta has gained a great deal of notoriety in the contemporary Jewish community. This term refers to a small but vocal group in the orthodox world who refuse to recognize the political state of Israel as long as the Messiah has not yet come. Neturei Karta is Aramaic for the guardians of the city. Do you think there is any connection between watchmen in Isaiah and the term Neturei Karta?

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