

THE WALL AS METAPHOR IN BIBLICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: BETWEEN ORDER, IDENTITY, AND COMMUNION

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the metaphor of the wall in the Hebrew Bible as a complex theological and anthropological symbol, deeply rooted in the cultural framework of the ancient Near East. Walls are not merely defensive structures, but markers of sacred space, social identity, moral boundaries, and divine presence. Drawing on key biblical texts such as Joshua 6, Nehemiah 2-6, Isaiah 26, Ezekiel 13, and Zechariah 2, the paper explores how walls function both as instruments of divine protection and as expressions of judgment, exclusion, and false security. Particular attention is given to the dialectic between physical and spiritual walls, culminating in the prophetic promise of inner transformation (Ezekiel 36:26) and eschatological communion (Rev 21). The metaphor is also examined through the lens of Orthodox Christian experience, especially during the communist persecution in Romania, where prison walls paradoxically became spaces of spiritual resistance and divine encounter. By integrating biblical exegesis, theological symbolism, and anthropological categories, such as liminality, sacred/profane space, and social cohesion, this study argues that the wall metaphor articulates a foundational vision of the human condition in relation to God, community, and the sacred order. Ultimately, it shows that the fall, rebuilding, and spiritualization of walls constitute a narrative arc of judgment, repentance, and restored communion in biblical anthropology.

Keywords: biblical anthropology, wall metaphor, sacred space, divine protection, Old Testament theology

INTRODUCTION

Walls, whether as concrete realities or as symbols, occupy a central place in a vast register of meanings. In Antiquity, city walls were forms of authority and power, which expressed, first and foremost, the idea of physical protection.

In the culture of the Ancient Near East, walls had a fundamental significance in the context of the Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Canaanite civilizations. In these cultures, city walls had both a practical role, defending against invasions, and a religious one. For example, the walls of the city of Babylon were perceived as a manifestation of the divine power of the god Marduk. The massive circuit walls of Neo-Babylon, extending over twelve kilometers and topped by the Ishtar Gate, were more than fortifications – they embodied the cosmic authority of Marduk. Adorned with glazed reliefs of the *mušḫuššu* (divine dragon) and aurochs bulls, these structures visually linked the city's physical boundaries with divine protection and power [1]. King Nebuchadnezzar's dedication inscriptions explicitly frame Babylon's walls and gates as constructed by his authority but ordained under the will of Marduk – the patron deity of the city.