

# HAGGAI; ZECHARIAH

## 1–3; 7–14

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### Historical Context

The people of Judah were exiled in waves in 597 and 587 BC. When Babylon was overcome by the Persians in 539 BC, the king of Persia was Cyrus, a man open to other faiths and religions.<sup>1</sup> The Cyrus Cylinder, housed in the British Museum, recounts how Cyrus allowed the captives in Babylon to return to their gods and temples.<sup>2</sup> According to the book of Ezra, Cyrus declared, “[Jehovah] God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah” (Ezra 1:2). Years after the first group of Jews had returned to Judah, both Haggai and Zechariah went to support the building of the city walls and the temple (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). These prophets spoke to the people’s lackadaisical efforts to rebuild Jerusalem to its previous glory.

### Haggai 1

#### 1:1–6

When King Cyrus died in 522 BC, there was a power struggle in Persia until Darius began to put down the rebellions. Darius was the son-in-law of Cyrus and came to the throne on September 29, 522 BC.<sup>3</sup> Verse 1 is datable to August 29, 520 BC.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Although we have no direct indication of Cyrus’s religion, his successors were clearly Zoroastrian. See Mario Liverani, *Israel’s History and the History of Israel* (London, UK: Equinox, 2007), 252–253.

<sup>2</sup> See “Cylinder,” British Museum, [https://britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W\\_1880-0617-1941](https://britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1880-0617-1941).

<sup>3</sup> See John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentario del contexto cultural de la Biblia: Antiguo Testamento* (El Paso, TX: Editorial Mundo Hispano, 2005), 910.

<sup>4</sup> See J. Scott Duval and J. Daniel Hays, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 680.

Zerubbabel, whose name means “seed of Babylon,” was the grandson of one of the previous kings, Jehoiachin (see 1 Chronicles 3:16–19). Joshua, the high priest, was likely related to Seraiah, the priest before the exile (see 2 Kings 25:18–21).

The returnees had sinned by delaying their efforts to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem (Haggai 1:2). As a response and throughout the book of Haggai, the Lord invited the people to “consider your ways,” or to reflect on their decisions and behaviors (verse 5). On the one hand, the people were saying that it wasn’t time to build the temple, but on the other, they had constructed their own dwelling places. They had forgotten that the Lord provides for the temporal needs of those who are obedient (2 Nephi 1:20). What follows is practically the opposite of the tithing blessings stated in Malachi 3. If the people did take thought to reconstruct the temple, they would not prosper. In reference to the temple tithe, the Lord through Malachi would later declare, “And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 3:11). If the Israelites paid their temple tithes, their harvest would not be devoured. Here in Haggai, the Lord taught that without a temple, their harvest, water consumption, clothes, and wages would not be sufficient for their needs (Haggai 1:6).

### **1:7–11**

The word in Hebrew translated as “consider” more appropriately conveys the idea of “to set, direct, or establish.” The Lord was instructing the people to set their lives in order by getting to work, going to the mountains for wood (in the north), and building the house of God. Repeating the message from the previous verses, the people had sought to have an abundance of goods but had been left with little because they had not tended to the Lord’s house.

### **1:12–15**

After hearing the word of the Lord through His prophet Haggai, the leaders of the people (Zerubbabel and Joshua) obeyed, unlike the leaders in Isaiah and Jeremiah’s day. Seeing the example of their leaders, “the remnant of the people” also obeyed. There is often a struggle for obedience when leaders and followers do not work together. However, leaders carry the most weight. Strong leaders have a great influence on a people’s righteousness or wickedness.

Some of the greatest words of encouragement that the Lord can give are given in this section: “I am with you” (Haggai 1:13). He would say the same to His disciples in the meridian of time (see Matthew 28:20). With the Lord’s presence and the aid of the Spirit, all members of the community came to work on the temple.

Verse 15 can be dated to September 21, 520 BC.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See J. Scott Duval and J. Daniel Hays, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI:

## **Haggai 2**

### **2:1–9**

On October 17, 520 BC,<sup>6</sup> the Lord asked if anyone had seen the temple before it was destroyed. What had been left of the temple and was not being reconstructed did not compare to its previous beauty and glory. Therefore, He commanded the political and religious leaders to be strong because He was with them. To express that having a temple would bring cosmic changes (in the ancient world view), the Lord proceeded to describe the coming glory of the temple in cataclysmic terms: heaven and earth would shake. The words “heaven” and “earth” related to the blessing of the temple. When Jesus was speaking to Peter, He told him he would receive the keys to the kingdom of heaven to bind on earth and in heaven (Matthew 16:19). This binding seal is performed in temples. Certainly the universe shook when these sealing keys were restored.

### **2:10–19**

On December 18, 520 BC,<sup>7</sup> the Lord reminded the people that nothing becomes holy by simply touching a holy object that has been consecrated and set apart for God. Neither were the people holy simply because they were working on the temple. The Lord Jesus Christ taught that the greatest commandments are to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength” and “love thy neighbour as thyself” (Mark 12:30–31). The people may not have been serving each other as true disciples. It is possible that they had not seen the blessings of their harvest because their lives were not consecrated to serving God’s people.

### **2:20–23**

The heavens and earth would shake again (Haggai 2:21; see verse 6), but this time the temple would not be involved. Wars and rumors of war would be the cause of commotion (verse 22). In the year 522 BC, rebellion broke out in Persia after the death of certain political officials and was not quelled until 517 BC.<sup>8</sup> Soon after came the Greco-Persian Wars (499–449 BC). Haggai may have been describing this political turmoil.

Perhaps representing the people as a whole, Zerubbabel would receive a sealing signet ring from the Lord. These seals were used to authorize and endorse communications given by the king.<sup>9</sup> This action

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Baker Books, 2020), 682.

6 See J. Scott Duval and J. Daniel Hays, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 682.

7 See J. Scott Duval and J. Daniel Hays, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 682.

8 See J. Scott Duval and J. Daniel Hays, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 683.

9 See 1 Kings 21:8; Esther 8:8–10; Jeremiah 22:24.

may have been foreshadowing the apostle Peter’s receiving of sealing powers from the true Messiah king and the future restoration in modern times of this same authority.<sup>10</sup>

## **Zechariah 1**

### **1:1–6**

According to the dates offered in the text, the book of Zechariah begins in November 520 BC.<sup>11</sup> Fitting for a book that discusses the Lord’s covenants with His people, the prophet’s name means “Jehovah remembers.” His father’s name (Iddo) appears in other texts. If Zechariah’s father is the same Iddo as in Nehemiah 12:4, the prophet may have belonged to a priestly family.

The command to turn, especially from evil, is the Old Testament way of speaking of repentance (verse 3). The Book of Mormon utilizes the verbs *turn* and *repent* synonymously: “Turn, all ye Gentiles, from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doings” (3 Nephi 30:2). If the people would repent, the Lord would turn toward His people (Zechariah 1:3). Repentance is often thought of as a unidirectional movement closer to God. Apparently, it is bidirectional. The Lord told Zechariah that during the repentance process, as the disciple turns to God, God simultaneously draws closer, bridging the gap. Unfortunately, the people did not have a good track record. Their fathers had not obeyed and had not turned or returned to the Lord. Fortunately, the people openly acknowledged that the Lord was true to His word. Their previous disobedience came with its consequences as prophesied.

### **1:7–11**

Verse 7 is dated to February 15, 529 BC.<sup>12</sup> At this point in Persia’s history, the empire was sending its cavalry to fight Egypt, hence the many horses mentioned in verse 8.<sup>13</sup> These contextual circumstances create an atmosphere comparable to that of the last days, when there will be wars and rumors of wars (see Matthew 24:6). In apocalyptic fashion, a messenger aided the prophet in understanding the meaning of the visions.<sup>14</sup> As seers, prophets have the ability to see (Zechariah 1:8; Moses 1:8), but interpretation and understanding come with divine help (Moses 1:30; 7:67). Describing the vision Zechariah was receiving, the angel said that these riders travel the land under the Lord’s command. All nations are under the Lord’s

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<sup>10</sup> See Matthew 16:19; Doctrine and Covenants 132:7, 19–20.

<sup>11</sup> See J. Scott Duval and J. Daniel Hays, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 686.

<sup>12</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentario del contexto cultural de la Biblia: Antiguo Testamento* (El Paso, TX: Editorial Mundo Hispano, 2005), 912.

<sup>13</sup> J. Scott Duval and J. Daniel Hays, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 686.

<sup>14</sup> Zechariah 1:10; compare Revelation 7:13–14; 1 Nephi 13:2–3.

jurisdiction. In other words, despite the Jews' belief of their singular chosen status (see, for example, Ezra 9:2), all people are participating in bringing about the Lord's desires.<sup>15</sup>

### **1:12–17**

The seventy-year calculation originates from Jeremiah 25:9–13. Although the captivity did not last exactly seventy years (though one may count starting at an earlier time or consider the construction of the temple to be when the captivity ended), the number seventy came to symbolize the exile, no matter the exact duration.

When the Lord spoke to Zechariah through the angel (Zechariah 1:12–13), He was displeased with the reconstruction of the temple. According to Ezra 4:24, the work on the temple had ceased, perhaps because Persia's military campaign had passed through the land.<sup>16</sup> If this is the reason the work stopped, then the people were more hypocritical than expected. According to Haggai 1:2–4, the people had constructed their own homes. The war was an excuse to stop construction on the temple but ironically was not a valid reason to cease construction on their houses.

### **1:18–21**

Because the kings of Mesopotamia (as those of medieval Europe) had horns on their crown, horns were a symbol of power.<sup>17</sup> It is not clear why there were four, but they may represent the four corners of the known earth that Persia governed at this time. These four horns (a nation) were responsible for the scattering of Israel. As a response, the four carpenters were to battle the gentile horns. These carpenters (artisans) may have been the temple builders. In other words, the Lord will combat the gentile nations by returning temple worship to His people. This is another reason why constructing the temple was so urgent. The message of the temple would bring peace and end war. Isaiah had said in his day that the people “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks” (Isaiah 2:4). Perhaps in Zechariah's day, they beat their swords into hammers and their spears into chisels to work on the temple.

## **Zechariah 2**

### **2:1–5**

Here, the messenger communicated to Zechariah the Lord's original plan after the exile. Consistent with the blessing and responsibility offered to Abraham (see Genesis 12:3) and Isaiah's prophecy regarding the

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<sup>15</sup> Compare Amos 9:7. See “Statement of the First Presidency Regarding God's Love for All Mankind” February 15, 1978, <https://emp.byui.edu/SATTERFIELD/Talks/Feb%2015%2019798%20First%20Presidency%20Gods%20Love%20for%20all%20mankind.html>.

<sup>16</sup> J. Scott Duval and J. Daniel Hays, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 686. See Zechariah 1:8–10.

<sup>17</sup> This representation most likely originated from the force and power of a horned bull or ox.

blessings of the temple (see Isaiah 56:3–7), Zechariah learned that Jerusalem would not have a wall because of the multitude of people who would inhabit it. Abraham had been told that all the families of earth would be blessed. Isaiah wrote that all nations would come to the temple. There would be no city wall because the Lord’s glorious fire would take its place. However, consistent with accounts in the other prophetic books of the Old Testament, the politicians did not always see eye-to-eye with the prophets. Upon his arrival, Nehemiah cried, “Let us build up the wall of Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 2:17). Nehemiah’s wall lasted for centuries. Even among God’s people, leaders and prophets do not always have the same “vision.”

### **2:6–9**

The land to the north was Mesopotamia, which was governed by Persia at the time. Since it was the present governing power, Zechariah may have purposely avoided mentioning Persia by name.<sup>18</sup> In apocalyptic literature, the countries mentioned are represented with imagery, not names, out of fear of reprisal. This practice of avoiding the name of an empire can be seen throughout this section.

Whether these are God’s exact words or were modified by the prophet, the land was called “the daughter of Babylon” (Zechariah 2:7). Although Babylon was no longer in existence (it had been defeated), the people understood that the prophet was speaking of the “daughter” of Persia. Prophetic literature or statements often called the inhabitants of a city “daughter” (see 2 Kings 19:21; Isaiah 37:11). Whatever the case, the people were called to leave this land to the north and return home.

### **2:10–13**

Complementary to the prophecy of a Jerusalem with no walls (see Zechariah 2:4), the Lord repeated the words from previous scriptures that “many nations shall be joined to the Lord” (verse 11). In Nephi’s words, “[He] inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile” (2 Nephi 26:33). In Paul’s words: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

## **Zechariah 3**

### **3:1–10**

The vision turns to a court scene where all the players are present. Joshua the high priest is on trial. The Lord is the judge, with the angel of the Lord on the defense and satan as the prosecutor. However, in Hebrew, *satan* (*s-t-n*) is not a name but a title with the article *the* before it. *Satan* literally means “accuser,”

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<sup>18</sup> The book of Revelation speaks clearly about Roman culture, politics, and politicians without directly calling them by name.

and its Hebrew root is repeated in verse 1 in the verb translated by the King James Version as “resist.”<sup>19</sup> Whatever the accusation was, the Lord defended Joshua because of the priest’s hardship “out of fire” (Zechariah 3:2). The text is not clear as to the meaning of Joshua’s fiery experience, and it can be literal, symbolic, or both.<sup>20</sup> The text states that Joshua’s experience left him with filthy clothes.

In verse 4, the Lord spoke to Joshua’s companions, who were to aid in clothing him with clean priestly attire, which symbolizes the forgiveness of his sins (compare Exodus 28:36–39). Those who participate in any ordinance in which a change of clothes is customary (be it baptism or something else), the physical outward expression represents the blessings of Christ’s Atonement from above. “For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified” (Moses 6:60). When John the Revelator asked what the white robes meant, the angel replied, “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14).

Joshua (and Zechariah) learned that forgiveness is the springboard for discipleship. Forgiveness is not the end of the road. Joshua and his companions could exercise authority if they followed the Lord’s path: “The rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:36).

The ultimate fulfillment of the branch prophecy (Zechariah 3:8) would be Jesus Christ. Jeremiah used similar language for the house of David (Jeremiah 23:5).<sup>21</sup> However, many in Zechariah’s day may have hoped for a branch fulfillment in Joshua (Zechariah 6:11–12).

Stones with eyes were placed before temples in the ancient Near East to identify the donors or person in charge.<sup>22</sup> Notice how the stone here was placed before Joshua, the high priest. Zerubabel is not mentioned. The number seven may imply a full, complete, or all-encompassing vision. An all-seeing stone by the temple may cause some to recall the fifteen questions asked in temple recommend interviews, when disciples are to examine their own life.

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19 James D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve Micah-Malachi* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 846.

20 For example, in 1 Peter 1:7, being “tried with fire” may be a reference to the burning of Rome and Emperor Nero’s subsequent killing of Christians.

21 Although Isaiah 11:1 also speaks of a promised branch from the “stem of Jesse” (David’s father), the word is different in Hebrew.

22 See John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentario del contexto cultural de la Biblia: Antiguo Testamento* (El Paso, TX: Editorial Mundo Hispano, 2005), 915.

## **Zechariah 7**

### **7:1–3**

This section took place on December 7, 518 BC, in Bethel (“house of God”) in the upper northern extremity of the Persian province named Yehud.<sup>23</sup> It is possible that the people had instituted a fast in remembrance of the destruction of the temple (“separating myself [from food]”).<sup>24</sup> Therefore, Sherezer and Regem-melech may have been asking the priests of Jerusalem if the fast was to continue with the temple being reconstructed. Stories like these help us see the opportunity to implement changes or sustain practices. For example, during the influenza outbreak in the early twentieth century, the Church slowly changed from using one sacrament cup that everyone used to individual cups.<sup>25</sup> Questions such as these often arise in times when they need attention.

### **7:4–7**

The fast that had lasted for seventy years was more than a fast from food. The fast was to remind the people of the words and teachings of the former prophets. The temple had been destroyed because they had not listened to the word of the Lord. In fasting and other devotional practices today, the deeper underlying meanings inspire love and devotion.

### **7:8–14**

Through His prophet, the Lord rehearsed the people’s disobedience. He had commanded the people to minister to each other, but they had not listened and were swept away like in a whirlwind. When we stop concentrating on the message of the gospel and our obedience becomes a disengaged process or peters out, our lives can also be lost, swept away in a whirlwind.

## **Zechariah 8**

### **8:1–8**

To the people returning from Mesopotamia and the many remaining there, the declaration of truth was that the Lord Himself had returned and would remain in Jerusalem with its inhabitants. The blessings of the Lord would be witnessed all around. The older population would live longer because the city would be safe. The children would be happy because they would have food, and sickness would not overcome them. This is the Old Testament view of redemption, peace, and harmony. In the modern Church, the Doctrine and Covenants drew from this ancient view: “But learn that he who doeth the works of righteousness

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<sup>23</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentario del contexto cultural de la Biblia: Antiguo Testamento* (El Paso, TX: Editorial Mundo Hispano, 2005), 918–919.

<sup>24</sup> The English Standard Version and the New Revised Standard Version translate the verb as “abstain,” not “separate.”

<sup>25</sup> Justin R. Bray, “The Lord’s Supper during the Progressive Era, 1890–1930,” *Journal of Mormon History* 38, no. 4 (2012): 88–104.



shall receive his reward, *even peace in this world*, and eternal life in the world to come” (Doctrine and Covenants 59:23; emphasis added). Historically, peace was never achieved. Jerusalem would suffer more attacks and subjugation by the Greeks and the Romans. Therefore, the fulfillment of this promise is for the spiritual Zion. When we allow the Lord to be part of our lives, He helps us see beyond the temporal trials and enjoy the spiritual blessings.

### **8:9–15**

The Lord stated that He had “set all men every one against his neighbour” (Zechariah 8:10). This is similar language to what Jesus would say during His earthly ministry: “Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division. . . . The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law” (Luke 12:51, 53). Certainly, the Lord is not the cause of strife in homes and in neighborhoods. Perhaps these obscure phrases are in fact foreshadowing the Atonement of Jesus Christ. In other words, the Lord takes the blame, placing our sin on His shoulders and offering restitution to His people. Perhaps the Lord was taking the responsibility for the general strife found throughout Israel. “Fear not,” says the Lord, because after repentance come temporal and spiritual blessings.

### **8:16–17**

In verse 3 the Lord said that Jerusalem would be a city of truth. With such a title comes responsibility. The people would have to make it a city full of truth and not just rely on its name to show this. Therefore, the Lord commanded the people to speak truth (personal obedience) and execute true judgment among the people (institutional obedience). Obedience at all levels makes a people true. “For unto such hath God promised his Spirit. And they who worship him, must worship in spirit and in truth” (Joseph Smith Translation, John 4:24).

### **8:18–23**

The fasts of mourning that had dotted the Jewish calendar would now be celebrations of “joy and gladness” (Zechariah 8:19). In fact, people from many cities would also come and seek the Lord. Isaiah had said that “all nations shall flow unto” the mountain of the Lord’s house (Isaiah 2:2). Today we see the fulfillment of this prophecy in the temples and general conference attendance. People “out of all languages of the nations” come to pray and seek the Lord, rejoicing with gladness (Zechariah 8:23).

In verse 23 of this section, Zechariah mentioned a Jewish representative of God’s people who had survived the previously mentioned calamity. The Jews in the promised land were the only people of Israel who Zechariah knew of. The Jews would take the people to hear the word of God. In today’s context, the

passage can be updated with a modern understanding of the people of God. In other words, people will take hold of a missionary or a Latter-day Saint, saying “we have heard that God is with you” (verse 23). Latter-day Saints, like the ancient Jews, need to be prepared to help bring God’s children unto Christ.

## **Zechariah 9**

### **9:1–8**

The cities mentioned in this passage border the land of Israel. Damascus (Syria) would be at rest, or would cause no threat. Tyrus and Zidon (Phoenicia) would lose its strength and wealth. Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod (Philistia) would fear their doom, being left without a king and defeated like the Jebusites (see 2 Samuel 5:6–10). The Lord would protect His house. In today’s circumstances, this passage can be applied to the trials we may face. Whether those trials be in the north, south, east, or west, the Lord will be by our side if we listen and obey.

### **9:9–11**

With the surrounding nation-states defeated and the Lord’s army at the temple as depicted in the previous verses, the king of Jerusalem was prepared to return to the city. Zechariah painted the picture. Horses were symbols of war (see Zechariah 9:10; see also Haggai 2:22), but royalty and high officials rode on donkeys.<sup>26</sup> When Zechariah described the king as “lowly,” it does not mean that the donkey was a sign of humility. The donkey was a sign of kingship. The king would know that he was the rightful heir to the throne, but the text does not imply that he would be humble about it. In the New Testament, Jesus did not ride a donkey in Jerusalem after all the surrounding nations were defeated. Rome was very much still in control. The promise of the kingdom of God on earth would be fulfilled later. When Jesus came to Jerusalem riding on a donkey, the true king had arrived. The Jews had no doubt that Jesus was declaring Himself to be the rightful king. As expected, He went straight to the temple (Matthew 21:1–12). Today we do not need all evil to be defeated to have Jesus Christ reign in our lives.

### **9:12–17**

The vision returns to the battle scene, showing that the Lord will fight on the people’s behalf. The Lord will free the captives and fight alongside His armies. A clear indication that this is either a later text or was updated to reflect a future time is the reference to Greece.<sup>27</sup> The Greeks would not rule over the Jews until 333 BC. This passage (or the entire vision) may reflect the desires of the people during the Maccabean Revolt in the 160s BC (like the book of Daniel does).

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<sup>26</sup> See Judges 12:14; 2 Samuel 16:2; 1 Kings 1:33.

<sup>27</sup> In Hebrew, the *Yanan*; compare to the name Ionians.

## **Zechariah 10**

### **10:1–4**

Here Zechariah describes the two opposite responses that the people can give: drawing near to the Lord or to idols. If the Lord is asked for rain,<sup>28</sup> He will provide clouds, rain, and green grass. The Lord is true to His covenants. However, idols and diviners can only speak lies. There is no truth to their message. The world and its philosophy offer no lasting peace without the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The leaders who should have led the people in righteousness had kindled the Lord's anger. Whereas the wicked goats would be punished, from the flock of Judah would come the war horse (warriors), the corner stones (infrastructure), the tent pegs (homes), the battle bows (weapons), and the rulers (translated "oppressor"). The flock of the Lord would prosper. It would be strong and be able to survive with the help of the Lord. As the Latter-day Saint hymn expresses, "Who's on the Lord's side? Who? Now is the time to show."<sup>29</sup>

### **10:5–12**

Continuing from the previous verses, the people would overthrow their enemies because "the Lord is with them" (Zechariah 10:5). Both the house of Judah (representing the kingdom in the south) and the kingdom of Joseph (representing the kingdom of Ephraim in the north) would return to their lands of inheritances. In other words, old divisions would be healed and all would return home. To say the people would be brought "again" from Egypt is to say that that the people would be brought out of captivity again (9:11) and brought to the land of promise. However, there was a group who had fled to Egypt in the wake of Babylonian destruction (see Jeremiah 43). The book of Ezekiel has a similar covenantal fulfillment: the unity of both the house of Judah and that of Joseph. Ezekiel states that Israel will be made one with the help of uniting two sticks, representing both houses and two books of scripture, the Bible and the Book of Mormon (Ezekiel 37:15–17).

## **Zechariah 11**

### **11:1–2**

In the north, areas like Lebanon and Bashan were known for their trees. Judah on the other hand was a desert.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, trees were a symbol of the nations' pride and glory. Trees would have been a beautiful landscape compared to the arid rocks to the south. However, aesthetics do not tell the whole story. Fitting

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<sup>28</sup> For a brief explanation on the Lord's power over rain and storms in the Old Testament, see David L. Peterson, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 71.

<sup>29</sup> Hannah Last Cornaby, "Who's on the Lord's Side?," in *Hymns* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 260.

<sup>30</sup> The later olives of Gethsemane and elsewhere may have come after Roman irrigation systems were available. No garden or olive press is mentioned in the Old Testament.

here are the words Jesus said to the Pharisees: “For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27). The land of Lebanon may have been beautiful, but that was only a facade.

### **11:3–9**

This vision is not entirely clear. Apparently, there were shepherds east of Jerusalem by the Jordan River (Zechariah 11:3). They would have been temple shepherds, tending the sacrificial flocks.<sup>31</sup> Those who were slaughtering the flock in verse 5 could either have been the people who purchased the animal for their sacrifice (the “possessors”) or the priests who performed the sacrifice—or perhaps they were both groups. Whoever it was, their wickedness is made manifest. They claimed to be guiltless but were prideful in their temporal riches. Ultimately, neighbors will be against neighbors, and the king will punish them all.<sup>32</sup> This may be the king who had arrived in chapter 9.

As commanded in verse 4, Zechariah fed the flock in verse 7 with two staffs. One staff is called “Harmony” (beauty), and the other “Unity” (bands).<sup>33</sup> Perhaps this can be associated with Ezekiel’s vision of the two sticks (Ezekiel 37:17). The promise is that the people would be united in harmony.

Despite his obedience, Zechariah (whether in reality or in vision) had a conflict with three wicked shepherds and left the sheep to their own demise.

### **11:10–14**

As a representation of his decision to cease shepherding the flock, Zechariah broke one of his staffs. When he presented himself to be paid for his services as a shepherd, he was offered thirty pieces of silver. Some have tried to associate this price with the selling of slaves.<sup>34</sup> However, Zechariah was not a slave but had been working as a shepherd under the Lord’s command (Zechariah 11:4, 7). In the Sumerian language, to say something was worth thirty pieces of silver meant that it had little value.<sup>35</sup>

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31 See John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentario del contexto cultural de la Biblia: Antiguo Testamento* (El Paso, TX: Editorial Mundo Hispano, 2005), 922.

32 Zechariah 11:6. For an attempt to make sense of this obscure pericope, see James D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve Micah-Malachi* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 930–931.

33 James D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve Micah-Malachi* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), 929.

34 See J. Scott Duval and J. Daniel Hays, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 691. Compare Exodus 21:32; Leviticus 27:4.

35 See John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentario del contexto cultural de la Biblia: Antiguo Testamento* (El Paso, TX: Editorial Mundo Hispano, 2005), 922.

In the New Testament, Matthew wrote that Judas received thirty pieces of silver from the chief priests and elders to betray Jesus, and he mentioned that the price is found in the book of Jeremiah (Matthew 27:9). However, there is no passage in Jeremiah today that would fit Matthew's description. Zechariah's words have some similarities—but also differences—with Matthew's words. We may not ever know Matthew's original source.

### **11:15–17**

The Lord promised to raise a warrior-shepherd who would not search out the lost and wounded sheep but would eat of the fat of the land. In hopes of a violent overthrowing of the foreign oppression, the authors often wrote messianic prophecies in light of their own current desires.

## **Zechariah 12**

### **12:1–2**

The word “burden” should be translated as “oracle,” giving a different meaning to the passage. “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly” (Articles of Faith 1:8). The oracle stated that Jerusalem would be the cup of wine that would cause the enemies to stagger. When the people arrived to attack Jerusalem, there would be no battle; they would simply tremble in drunken stupor. The truth often has an obscure effect on those who reject the message. When speaking of the Jews and the Gentiles, Paul gave a comparable description: “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). Whether it were a stumbling block, foolishness, or other sins that caused them to tremble like a drunk, the people would receive no blessing until they opened their hearts.

### **12:3–5**

Continuing with the imagery of war (and the demise of the cavalry), the Lord declared that Jerusalem would be a “burdensome stone” (Zechariah 12:3). As the place of the Lord's Crucifixion, the city here may be foreshadowing the Atonement of Christ. Paul would instruct the Corinthians using similar language, saying that the Crucifixion is a stumbling block for many (1 Corinthians 1:23). Jerusalem would become a burdensome stone, a stumbling block that the people would have to face. The obstacle will have to be overcome once we find ourselves outside of the kingdom of God. The prophet Joseph Smith described the process: “It is one thing to see the kingdom of God, and another thing to enter into it, we must have a change of heart to see the kingdom of God, and subscribe the articles of adoption, to enter therein.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See “History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844],” p. 1755, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/127>.

### **12:6–8**

Like a fire, the leaders of Judah will consume their enemies. In Deuteronomy, fire is a description of God’s power: “For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire” (Deuteronomy 4:24; see also 9:3). In other words, God shares this divine attribute with His people. Verse 8 of this chapter states that the Lord will “defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem,” thus giving Him the glory. In other words, this will be a shared task to accomplish the Lord’s will. Although the people will participate, the Lord will be the victor. In fact, to understand the point, “fire” can substitute “light” in the following passage: “Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up” (3 Nephi 18:24).

### **12:9–14**

During or after the destruction of the wicked nations, the Lord would pour out His spirit upon His people. As a result, Zechariah says, they would behold He whom they had pierced. Their eyes were opened to understanding only after they received a witness by the Spirit. There is a similar story in Luke about the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The two disciples had walked and talked with Jesus but did not recognize Him until after He broke bread (language used to describe the sacrament). “And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:31–32). Therefore, it is by the Spirit that disciples can find Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:3). Although Zechariah spoke in the context of the war, Jesus Christ is the final fulfillment of the prophecy.

## **Zechariah 13**

### **13:1**

The term “fountain” implies a source of running, naturally flowing water. This was what is called “living water” in the Bible.<sup>37</sup> Places with flowing water were ideal for baptism and the washing of sin and uncleanness (compare Mark 1:4–5).

### **13:2–6**

The Lord rid the land of false worship, idols, and deceitful prophets. So righteous would be the people that they would reject their own family members who would preach lies. They would stand up against a counterfeit gospel, no matter who the communicator was. “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (Matthew 5:29). This kind of rejection by his own family would cause the false prophet to admit that he was only a husbandman (with no divine calling).

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<sup>37</sup> Jeremiah 17:13; John 4:10; Revelation 7:17.

The word for “wounded” in verse 6 is the same root translated as “pierce” in Zechariah 12:10. Somehow, the one pierced in chapter 12 may be the same one who was now pierced “in the house of [his] friends” (Zechariah 13:6). Although this vision will culminate with Jesus Christ, here the people as a whole witnessed and were suffering the effects of their own disobedience. They were the members of the household who pierced this man. In Isaiah’s language, “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

### **13:7–9**

These verses fit with the imagery of the wounded individual as the people of God. They would suffer the consequences of their own actions. Both the shepherd (leaders) and the people (disciples) would be punished for their wickedness. Two-thirds would be lost, and the surviving third would be tried and refined until they acknowledged God as their Lord. Everyone has the opportunity to be refined, but many find the wide gate and the broad road much too appealing (see Matthew 7:13).

## **Zechariah 14**

### **14:1–3**

Jerusalem’s history has been difficult throughout the ages—it was governed by Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Therefore, this description of violence and ravage can be applied to many moments in the city’s history. However, the blessing remains the same for Jerusalem and all people: if the people are true to their covenants, “the Lord [shall] go forth, and fight against those nations” (Zechariah 14:3).

### **14:4–11**

After protecting Jerusalem as described in the previous verses, the Lord would stand to the east of the city (on the Mount of Olives). When Joshua brought the people into the promised land, they had crossed the Jordan from the east (see Joshua 3:1; 4:1). A great valley would be created that extended from east to west. Azal is found behind the Mount of Olives, but with the creation of this valley the mount will not block a direct path to Jerusalem. All “the saints” would be able to draw near to the city of truth with no obstruction, accompanied by the Lord.

Zechariah includes representations found in other scriptural books as well. With this newly created valley, extending from Dead Sea in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west, a river of flowing (living) water would reach both extremities (Zechariah 14:8; compare Ezekiel 47:1–12). This river may flow from the fountain mentioned in Zechariah 13:1. In Ezekiel’s vision, this river flowing from the temple would bring life to the desert. In Isaiah’s words: “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose” (Isaiah 35:1).

Geba is to the north and Rimmon to the south. Zechariah was saying that all the hilly country between them (including Jerusalem) would be made flat. “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain” (Isaiah 40:4). Then Jerusalem itself will be lifted up (Zechariah 14:10), perhaps to reflect Isaiah’s picture of the Lord’s house “established in the top of the mountains” (Isaiah 2:2). Spiritually, the new Jerusalem would be a source of peace and blessing to its inhabitants.

#### **14:12–15**

The plague is death, described in a way that contrasts with Ezekiel’s vision of resurrection. Zechariah here painted the idea of flesh being consumed. On the other hand, Ezekiel described flesh returning bit by bit to the dry bones: “And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord” (Ezekiel 37:6). Life and death are covenantal concepts: “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

In terms of war, Judah would be left with the spoils to benefit the land. This makes one think of Abram’s battle for Lot in Genesis: “And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people” (Genesis 14:16). Abram did not keep the spoils for himself but returned them to the people: “That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich” (Genesis 14:23). Zechariah did not say what Judah would do with the spoils of war, but Abram’s example is noteworthy.

#### **14:16–19**

Zechariah 2:4 said that Jerusalem would not have walls because of the multitude of people. Here we see the reason. The survivors from other nations would come to worship and keep the feast of tabernacles. These people were from other nations but certainly accepted the gospel. Those who did not accept the gospel or go to Jerusalem would not receive rain, which is covenantal language (Deuteronomy 28:12, 24). The gospel brings unimaginable peace and blessing for those who live its message.

See the note regarding the plague in Zechariah 14:12–15.

#### **14:20–21**

All would be as holy as the vessels of the temple—the war horses included. They would have the same symbolism as the priest’s mitre, indicating “Holiness to the Lord” (Exodus 28:36–37). The regular temple pots would be as sacred as those used for the sacrifices. In fact, all the pots of the land of Judah would be just as sacred. The nation and its land would be sanctified. “And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord



am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine” (Leviticus 20:26). Without outside influence like that from the Canaanites (a representation of wickedness), the entire country and its inhabitants would be holy, temple holy. “And thus ye shall become instructed in the law of my church, and be sanctified by that which ye have received, and ye shall bind yourselves to act in all holiness before me” (Doctrine and Covenants 43:9).

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