



Type: Magazine Article

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## Zechariah: Prophet to a New Generation

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Source: *The Instructor*, Vol. 98, No. 2 (February 1963)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): center insert

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the prophet Zechariah.

# ZECHARIAH

## Prophet to a New Generation

*. . . Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye unto me, Saith the Lord of hosts.  
Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying,  
Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your  
evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the Lord.  
Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?*

— Zechariah 1:3-5.

**Z**echariah lived in the generation of people of Judah who had returned to the Holy Land from exile in Babylon where they had been freed by Cyrus the Persian. The problems of Zechariah's generation were the same that Haggai confronted and combated. It was undoubtedly difficult for these heirs of the desolated land of their fathers to discern glorious goals of the future, occupied as they were with the miseries of the moment. It was problem enough to get daily sustenance and security, and to do so they had bent all efforts to the building of homes and the raising of food. Then the prophets came again.

Haggai urged them to build the temple, that communication with the Lord might be facilitated and perpetuated. He assured them that the spiritual boon of it would bring better temporal conditions. But even he apparently spent little time trying to guide or motivate them by talk about ultimate things.

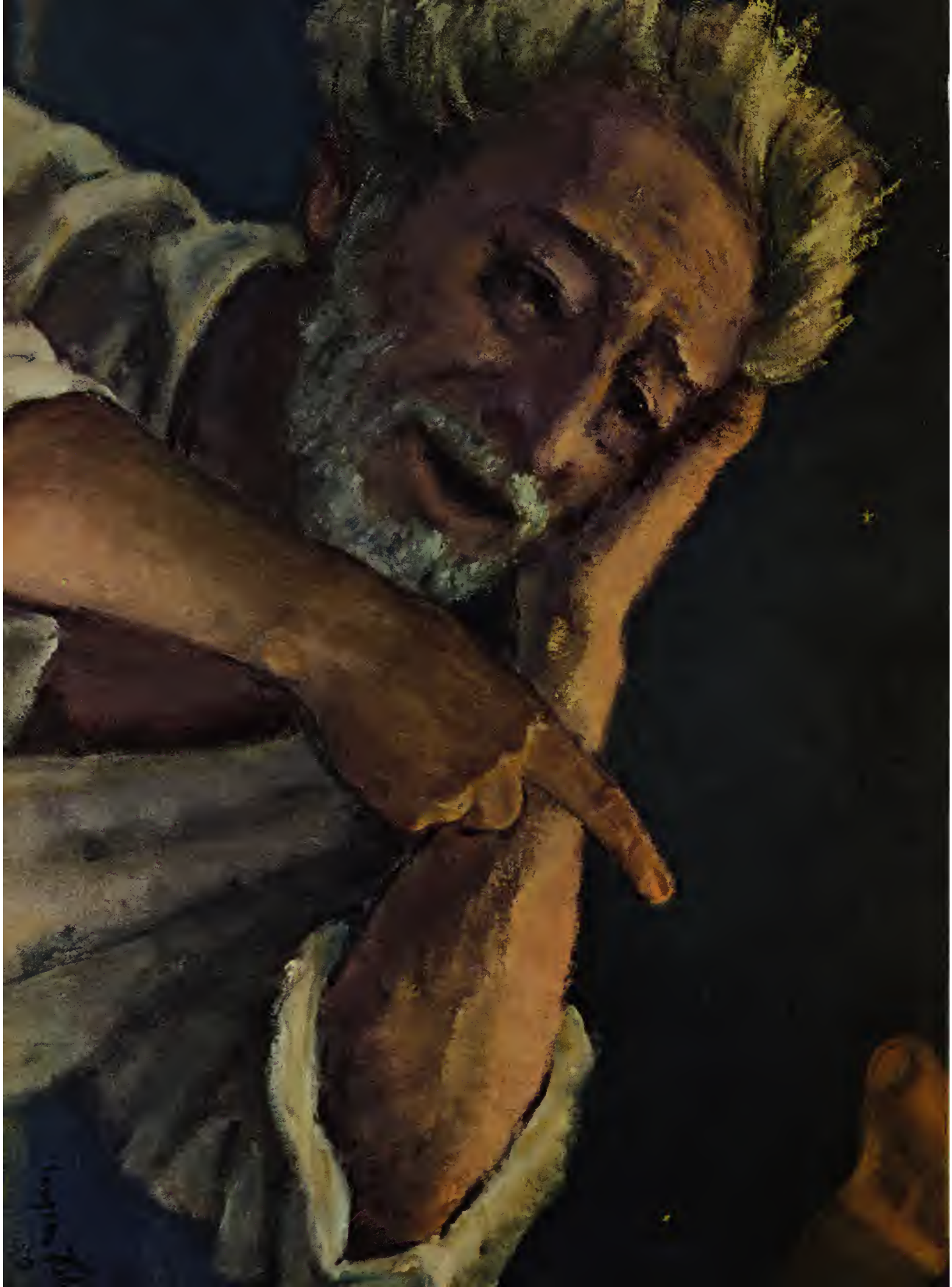
Zechariah was different. He was the son of a priestly family, that of Berechiah, the son of Iddo.<sup>1</sup> His prophecies gave purpose to the times only so far as they pointed minds and spirits to the mission of God's people in the establishment of the Kingdom of the Lord.

With ruins still around about them, he dramatically invited them to hearken to the Lord's pleas and not to emulate the fathers who went their willful way despite warnings and were brought to ruin.<sup>2</sup> He cited their sad confession: ". . . Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us."<sup>3</sup>

It may be that the people of Zechariah's day were humbled enough to heed the call, needful as they were of the help of Providence. About two months before Zechariah's first message to the people, the prophet Haggai told them that the Lord was displeased and was withholding His blessings from them because they had been so dilatory in their work on the temple. The following month he spoke again, urging them to better accomplishments. The next month came Zechariah's call to repentance; and a month after that Haggai had another message for them, urging them to purify themselves within so that their outward works might not be wasted.<sup>4</sup> Two months later, on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month of the second year of Darius, a series of eight visions were revealed to Zechariah concerning the whole scope of Israel's career. These covered events from the scattering to the gathering, the removal of wickedness, the punishment of the enemies of God's work, and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom.<sup>5</sup>

How effective was the guidance gained from the eight visions we are not told; but progress on the temple must have been made. Reflecting on it, the people brought a practical question to the prophet after two more years of work: Would it be necessary to continue the fasts and mourning in the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months to lament, respectively, the first breach of the walls of Jerusalem, the burning of the temple, the assassination of Gedaliah, and the final major siege of Jerusalem?

It was a reasonable question, and the happy answer was that those fast days of mourning could be turned into feasts of joy. But there were some qualifications. The fasts themselves had not always been kept with real intent "unto the Lord." If they were ended, the people should turn to the Lord in other ways. They must be just; show mercy



and compassion to the widow and fatherless, the stranger, and the poor. It was because their fathers refused to hearken and do these things that they were scattered and their land laid desolate. In ten short edicts, each introduced by the authoritative stamp, "Thus saith the Lord," the divine concern for Jerusalem and God's intent to make it His dwelling place in His Kingdom are reiterated.

The establishment of the Kingdom is the theme that occupies most of the remainder of Zechariah's book.<sup>6</sup> Some details of the picture as he foretold it in dramatic terms and unmatched by any of the other prophets is found therein. He saw the Messianic King, for instance, coming into Jerusalem not upon the war horse of a conqueror but upon a little animal which for them was the symbol of peace:

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.*<sup>7</sup>

His salvation is to extend to the "prisoners in the pit" who are to be freed by reason of the "blood of the covenant."<sup>8</sup>

In preparation for the setting up of His Kingdom, Judah and Ephraim are once again to be united and strengthened by the Lord to establish peace in the land.<sup>9</sup> Ephraim, who had already before Zechariah's day been sown among the people far from Judah, shall according to the prophet remember the Lord in far countries and be brought out with attendant miraculous phenomena.<sup>10</sup>

The account of the millennial prelude is interrupted at this point, while a resume of Israel's undulative career as God's servant-people is presented. Under the figure of forests of goodly trees ruined, the decimation of the noble is lamented. Then in a figure of shepherds (probably referring to kings) and their flocks, both the good shepherds who tried to preserve the flock and the bad ones who abhorred the Lord and were, indeed, abhorred by Him, are depicted.<sup>11</sup>

The staff of a good shepherd is broken, showing the breach of the pleasant relationship of God and Israel. The shepherd asks his "price" and is given the paltry price of a slave — thirty pieces of silver. The Lord tells him to cast it to the potter. Matthew,<sup>12</sup> in the New Testament, identifies the shepherd as Jeremiah, and notes the parallel in the price accepted by Judas Iscariot to rid Israel of his time of the Good Shepherd. A second staff, representing the bond of brotherhood between Judah and the northern tribes of Israel, is broken; and foolish, incapacitated shepherds, whose own doom is decreed, then take over.

As the subject of the coming of the Messiah is resumed, the battle against foes from many nations attacking gathered Israel is foretold,<sup>13</sup> followed by the Son's appearance at Jerusalem:

*. . . And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness [sorrow] for his firstborn.*

Later, without pertinent context, comes another significant sentence:

*And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.*<sup>14</sup>

Reiteration and elucidation of the prophecy in modern Scripture supplies the context and makes evident the identity of Him who is to appear, as it is foretold that those at Jerusalem will look on Him and say:

*. . . What are these wounds in thine hands and in thy feet?*

*Then shall they know that I am the Lord; for I will say unto them: These wounds are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends. I am he who was lifted up. I am Jesus that was crucified. I am the Son of God.*

*And then shall they weep because of their iniquities; then shall they lament because they persecuted their king.*<sup>15</sup>

The remainder of the last two chapters of Zechariah's work outlines rather cataclysmic events, some of which are told by other prophets, such as the purifying fire which destroys the wicked and leaves the worthy remnant,<sup>16</sup> His appearance on the Mount of Olives attended by "all the saints,"<sup>17</sup> the cleavage of the mount and formation of a new valley of refuge,<sup>18</sup> the manifestation of special light for a day and a night,<sup>19</sup> the flow of living waters from Jerusalem,<sup>20</sup> the establishment of all things in His realm for "Holiness to the Lord";<sup>21</sup> "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one."<sup>22</sup>

Then at last all people can say with Israel:

*Shema' Yisrael, JHVH Eloheinu; JHVH echad —*

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*<sup>22</sup>

— Ellis T. Rasmussen,  
assistant professor of religious instruction,  
Brigham Young University.

1 See Zechariah 1:1. Iddo is mentioned in Nehemiah 12:4, 16 as the head of one of the priestly families that returned from exile.

2 See, for example, Jeremiah 26:4-24; 35:15; 38; 39; 43.

3 Zechariah 1:6.

4 It is impressive to see how precise the writer was in chronicling these revelations. Note Haggai 1:1, 2:1; 2:10; 2:20; Zechariah 1:1; 1:7; 7:1.

5 The eight visions are told from Zechariah 1:7 to 6:15.

6 That is, chapters 9-14, excepting chapter 11.

7 Zechariah 9:9. See also Matthew 21:1-5 and compare John 12:14, 15.

8 See Zechariah 9:11, 12; recall Isaiah 61:1-3 and Luke 4:18.

9 See Zechariah 9:13 and following verses; also see 10:5, 6.

10 See Zechariah 10:9, 10. Compare also Isaiah 51:9-11; 35:8-10; and Doctrine and Covenants 133:21-35.

11 See Zechariah 11.

12 See Zechariah 11:10-13; Matthew 27:9.

13 See Zechariah 12:1-9; compare Ezekiel 38, 39.

14 Zechariah 12:10; 13:6.

15 Doctrine and Covenants 45:51-53.

16 See Zechariah 13:7-9; compare Malachi 4:1.

17 See Zechariah 14:4 and following verses. This is the only time the "Mount of Olives" is mentioned in the Old Testament. On this appearance of the Lord, see also the harmonious Jewish interpretation and anticipation in *Views of the Biblical World*, published by International Pub. Co., Ltd., Jerusalem-Ramat Gan, Israel, 1960; Vol. III, page 294. This work excellent on Old Testament.

18 See Zechariah 14:4.

19 See Zechariah 14:6, 7.

20 See Zechariah 14:8.

21 See Zechariah 14:20.

22 Zechariah 14:9 and Deuteronomy 6:4, 5; recall also Jesus' appraisal of this principle and law, cited in Mark 12:28-30.

## THE PICTURE

One of Zechariah's brief visions occurred when he saw an angel and saw a "flying roll," which is portrayed here as artist Eugene Spiro imagines it. The angel interpreted this to mean a "curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth" against those who steal and those who swear falsely by His name.

If we were to see some of the activities of angels carrying out God's commands today, would we behave differently?

— *Virgil B. Smith.\**

(For Course 3, lesson of March 3, "Prophets Carried on the Work of God on Earth"; for Course 5, lesson of June 2, "God's Will Be Done"; for Course 13, lessons of April 21 and 28, "Repentance," and lesson of May 26, "Obedience"; for Course 9, lesson of May 26, "A Leader Is Obedient"; and of general interest.)  
Library File Reference: Zechariah.