

Zechariah

Summary: *Zechariah 1 opens with a call to repentance dated to the eighth month of Darius's second year (October/November 520 BCE), then moves to the first of Zechariah's eight night visions — the horsemen among the myrtle trees. A rider on a red horse stands among myrtle trees in a ravine, accompanied by red, sorrel, and white horses. These are divine patrols who have surveyed the earth and found it at rest — but Israel remains in distress. The angel of the LORD intercedes, and God responds with jealous love for Jerusalem, anger at the complacent nations, and a promise to return to Jerusalem with compassion. The temple will be rebuilt and prosperity will overflow.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Zechariah's eight night visions (chapters 1-6) form one of the most elaborate visionary sequences in the Hebrew Bible, anticipating the apocalyptic visions of Daniel and Revelation. The myrtle tree vision introduces the pattern: Zechariah sees, asks an interpreting angel what it means, and receives an explanation. This angelus interpretes ('interpreting angel') model becomes standard in later apocalyptic literature. The divine patrollers who find the earth 'at rest' (shaqetah) create a bitter irony — the nations enjoy peace while Jerusalem suffers, and God's anger burns because they have been too comfortable while his people endure the consequences of exile.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew of verse 8 is notoriously difficult. The colors of the horses — adom ('red'), soruq ('sorrel/reddish-brown'), and lavan ('white') — may carry symbolic meaning, but the text does not explain them. We rendered soruq as 'sorrel' rather than the KJV's 'speckled' because the word refers to a reddish-brown color (cf. the vine description in Genesis 49:11). The relationship between 'the man riding on a red horse' (v. 8), 'the angel of the LORD' (v. 11-12), and 'the angel who was speaking with me' (v. 9) involves three potentially distinct figures, and we preserved the ambiguity rather than collapsing them into one. Note: The Hebrew versification differs from English. Hebrew 2:1-4 corresponds to English 1:18-21. We follow the English (KJV) chapter/verse numbering.*

Connections: *The call to repentance (vv. 2-6) echoes Jeremiah's warnings and establishes Zechariah in the prophetic succession. The divine patrol echoes the Satan figure who roams the earth in Job 1:7 and 2:2. The promise that the LORD will return to Jerusalem 'with compassion' (v. 16) connects to the Deutero-Isaianic promises (Isaiah 54:7-8). The measuring line for the temple (v. 16) anticipates the third vision (2:1-5). Revelation 6:1-8 transforms Zechariah's colored horses into the four horsemen of the apocalypse.*

¹In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, the prophet: ²The LORD was deeply angry with your ancestors. ³Say to them: This is what the LORD of Armies says — Return to me, declares the LORD of Armies, and I will return to you, says the LORD of Armies. ⁴Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the earlier prophets called out, saying: This is what the LORD of Armies says — Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds. But they did not listen or pay attention to me, declares the LORD. ⁵Your ancestors — where are they? And the prophets — do they live forever? ⁶But my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets — did they not overtake your ancestors? They turned back and said, 'Just as the LORD of Armies planned to do to us according to our ways and deeds, so he has done to us.' ⁷On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month — that is, the month of Shevat — in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, the prophet: ⁸I saw in the night — there was a man riding on a red horse, and he was standing among the myrtle trees in the ravine, and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses. ⁹I asked, "What are these, my lord?" The angel who was speaking with me said, "I will show you what these are." ¹⁰The man standing among the myrtle trees answered and said, "These are the ones the LORD has sent to patrol the earth." ¹¹They reported to the angel of the LORD standing among the myrtle trees, "We have patrolled the earth, and the whole earth is at rest and at peace." ¹²Then the angel of the LORD responded: "O LORD of Armies, how long will you withhold compassion from Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which you have been angry these seventy years?" ¹³The LORD answered the angel who was speaking with me — gracious words, comforting words. ¹⁴Then the angel who was speaking with me said, "Proclaim this: This is what the LORD of Armies says — I am deeply jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. ¹⁵And I am extremely angry with the nations that are at ease, for I was only a little angry, but they made the disaster worse. ¹⁶Therefore, this is what the LORD says: I have returned to Jerusalem with compassion. My house will be built in it — declares the LORD of Armies — and a measuring line will be stretched over Jerusalem. ¹⁷Proclaim further: This is what the LORD of Armies says — My cities will again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and will again choose Jerusalem. ¹⁸Then I raised my eyes and looked — there were four horns. ¹⁹I asked the angel who was speaking with me, "What are these?" He answered me, "These are the horns that scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem." ²⁰Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen. ²¹I asked, "What are these coming to do?" He said, "These are the horns that scattered Judah so that no one could raise his head. But these craftsmen have come to terrify them — to throw down the horns of the nations that raised their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The date falls between Haggai's second and third oracles (Haggai 2:1 and 2:10), placing Zechariah's ministry as overlapping with and supplementing Haggai's. Zechariah's genealogy through Berechiah to Iddo connects him to the priestly families who returned from exile (Nehemiah 12:4, 16). The title *hannavi* ('the prophet') may modify Zechariah or Iddo — grammatically ambiguous, though tradition applies it to Zechariah.
2. The cognate accusative construction *qatsaph YHWH... qatseph* intensifies the verb — literally 'the LORD angered an anger.' This is emphatic: not mild displeasure but deep, covenantal fury at the pre-exilic generation's rebellion. The word *avoteikhem* ('your ancestors') refers to the generation that provoked the exile through idolatry and covenant violation.
3. The threefold repetition of *YHWH Tsevaot* in a single verse is extraordinary emphasis. The reciprocal promise — 'return to me... I will return to you' — establishes repentance as a two-way movement. The verb *shuv* is the same root as *teshuvah* ('repentance/return'), emphasizing that biblical repentance is spatial and relational, not merely emotional.
4. The phrase *hanneviim harishonim* ('the earlier prophets') refers to the pre-exilic prophetic tradition — Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, and others. Zechariah positions himself in their succession while warning the current generation not to repeat their ancestors' failure. The paired verbs *lo shame'u velo hiqshivu* ('did not listen and did not pay attention') express total unresponsiveness — neither hearing nor heeding.
5. Two devastating rhetorical questions. The ancestors who refused to listen are dead. The prophets who warned them are also dead. But God's word endures beyond both (as verse 6 will make explicit). The brevity of these questions gives them enormous force — human life is transient, whether disobedient or faithful.
6. The verb *hissigu* ('overtook, caught up with') is a pursuit metaphor — God's words are not passive predictions but active agents that chase down and catch their targets. The ancestors eventually acknowledged that God's judgment matched his warning — the punishment fit the crime. Their belated confession validates the prophetic message: the exile was not arbitrary but precisely calibrated to their covenant violations.

7. The date is February 15, 519 BCE — three months after the opening oracle (v. 1). The month name Shevat is the Babylonian calendar name adopted during the exile, reflecting the cultural reality of the returnees. This date introduces all eight night visions, which appear to have been received in a single night.
8. The first night vision opens with ra'iti hallaylah ('I saw in the night'), establishing the visionary context. The myrtle trees (hadassim) are an evergreen shrub native to Israel, symbolically associated with restoration and beauty (cf. Isaiah 41:19; 55:13). The metsulah ('deep place, ravine') may symbolize Israel's lowly condition. The horse colors — adom ('red'), seruqim ('sorrel/reddish-brown'), and levanim ('white') — likely carry symbolic meaning (blood/war, mixed, victory/peace), though the text does not explain them. The KJV's 'speckled' for seruqim is imprecise; the word refers to a reddish-brown color.
9. This introduces the angelus interpretes ('interpreting angel') — the angel who explains the visions to Zechariah. The title adoni ('my lord') is a respectful address to the angel, not the divine name. The phrase hammal'akh haddover bi ('the angel who speaks with/in me') is unusual — the preposition bi can mean 'with me' or 'in me,' suggesting either conversation or internal revelation. We rendered 'with me' as the more natural reading.
10. The verb lehithallekh ('to walk about, to patrol') is the same verb used for God walking in the garden (Genesis 3:8) and for the Satan roaming the earth (Job 1:7; 2:2). The divine patrols function as God's surveillance network — they report back on the state of the world. The man among the myrtles appears to be the rider on the red horse from verse 8, possibly identified with the angel of the LORD in verse 11.
11. The patrol report — 'the whole earth is at rest and at peace' (yoshevet veshoqetet) — sounds positive but is actually the problem. The nations enjoy tranquility while Jerusalem lies in ruins. The term mal'akh YHWH ('angel of the LORD') appears here for the first time in the vision — this figure may be identified with or distinct from the rider on the red horse (v. 8). In many OT passages, the angel of the LORD functions as God's direct representative, sometimes indistinguishable from God himself.
12. The angel of the LORD intercedes — an extraordinary scene where a divine being pleads with God on Israel's behalf. The 'seventy years' connects to Jeremiah's prophecy (Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10) predicting seventy years of Babylonian domination. From the temple's destruction in 586 BCE to 519 BCE is sixty-seven years — close enough to fulfill the round number of the prophecy. The verb terachem ('have compassion') is from the root r-ch-m, related to rechem ('womb') — maternal, visceral compassion.
13. God's response is characterized before it is quoted: devarim tovim devarim nichumim ('good words, comforting words'). The word nichumim ('comforting') is from the same root as nacham ('to comfort'), echoing Isaiah 40:1: 'Comfort, comfort my people.' The post-exilic community now receives the comfort the prophets promised during the exile.
14. The verb qinneti ('I am jealous') uses the same root as qin'ah ('jealousy, zeal'). Divine jealousy in Hebrew is not petty envy but fierce, possessive love — the jealousy of a husband for his wife (cf. Exodus 20:5; 34:14). The cognate accusative qin'ah gedolah ('a great jealousy') intensifies the emotion. God's jealousy for Jerusalem is the driving force behind restoration.
15. The contrast is theologically crucial: God was qatsaphti me'at ('a little angry') — his discipline of Israel was measured and purposeful. But the nations azru lera'ah ('helped toward evil/disaster') — they exceeded their mandate, turning God's disciplinary correction into excessive destruction. The phrase haggoyim hash'a'ananim ('the nations at ease') connects back to the patrol report of verse 11 — their complacency is offensive because it rests on Israel's suffering.
16. The verb shavti ('I have returned') answers the call of verse 3 ('return to me and I will return to you') — God's return to Jerusalem is the divine half of the repentance covenant. The word rachamim ('compassion') is plural of intensity from the root r-ch-m ('womb'), suggesting deep, maternal tenderness. The measuring line (qav) indicates construction activity — the city will be rebuilt and expanded. This anticipates the third vision (2:1-5) where a man goes out to measure Jerusalem.
17. The word od ('again, still, yet') appears three times — emphasizing renewal and continuation. The verb tephutseinah ('will overflow, will spread') pictures prosperity so abundant it spills beyond the city walls. The threefold promise — prosperity, comfort, and renewed election — reverses the exile's threefold loss. God's choosing (bachar) of Jerusalem is not a one-time historical act but a renewed commitment — he chooses again.
18. The formula 'I raised my eyes and looked' introduces several of Zechariah's visions (cf. 5:1; 6:1). The four horns (qeranot) represent aggressive military power — horns are the weapons of powerful animals and symbolize national strength throughout the prophets (cf. Daniel 7:7-8; 8:3-9). The number four suggests comprehensive scope — enemies from every direction.
19. The threefold object — Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem — encompasses the entire people: the southern kingdom, the northern kingdom, and the capital city. All have been scattered by foreign aggression. The verb zeru ('scattered') evokes the diaspora — the dispersion of God's people among the nations. The identity of the four horns is debated: Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece, or simply a symbolic 'all four directions.'
20. The word charashim ('craftsmen, artisans, smiths') rather than 'carpenters' — these are metalworkers or general artisans, not woodworkers. The choice of craftsmen as agents of divine judgment is unexpected — they are builders, not warriors. The symmetry of four craftsmen to counter four horns suggests a divinely orchestrated balance: for every destructive power, God has prepared a constructive counter-force.
21. The phrase lo nasa rosho ('no one raised his head') describes total subjugation — the scattered people could not even look up. The verb lehacharid ('to terrify') suggests the craftsmen's approach will cause panic among the oppressing nations. The verb leyadot ('to throw down') is rare and forceful — the horns of national power will be violently displaced. The image reverses the power dynamic: those who scattered will themselves be scattered.

2

Summary: *Zechariah 2 contains the second and third night visions. The second vision (vv. 1-4, Hebrew 2:1-4) shows four horns representing the nations that scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem, followed by four craftsmen sent to terrify and cast down those horns. The third vision (vv. 5-13, Hebrew 2:5-17) shows a man with a measuring line going out to measure Jerusalem, but an angel declares the city will be inhabited without walls because of the multitude of people and livestock — God himself will be a wall of fire around it and the glory within it. The chapter closes with a call for exiles to flee Babylon and a promise that God will dwell in Zion's midst.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The English versification of Zechariah 2 differs from the Hebrew. English 2:1-13 corresponds to Hebrew 1:18-21 and 2:1-17. We follow the English versification. The vision of Jerusalem without walls (v. 4-5) is radical — in the ancient Near East, a city without walls was utterly vulnerable. But God reverses the equation: walls limit; his fire-presence expands. The promise 'I will be a wall of fire around her' (v. 5) transforms the vulnerability of an unwalled city into the invulnerability of divine protection. The call 'Flee from the land of the north!' (v. 6) reveals that many Jews remained in Babylon even after Cyrus's decree — the diaspora was already a reality.*

Translation Friction: *The versification issue requires care — English chapter 2 combines Hebrew 1:18-2:17. We follow English verse numbering throughout. The phrase 'apple of his eye' (v. 8) translates *bavat eno*, where *bavat* is a rare word related to 'gate' or 'pupil' — the most sensitive, protected part of the eye. The Hebrew of verse 8 contains a scribal note (*tiqqun sopherim*) indicating the original text may have read 'apple of my eye' (first person), softened to 'his eye' (third person) out of reverence.*

Connections: *The four horns and craftsmen vision connects to Daniel's four-kingdom schema (Daniel 2, 7). The wall-of-fire promise echoes the pillar of fire that protected Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22). The 'apple of his eye' language echoes Deuteronomy 32:10. The call to 'flee from the land of the north' parallels Jeremiah 51:6, 45. The promise 'many nations will join themselves to the LORD on that day' (v. 11) anticipates the universal vision of Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3.*

1 I raised my eyes and looked — there was a man with a measuring line in his hand. 2 I asked, "Where are you going?" He said, "To measure Jerusalem — to determine its width and its length." 3 Then the angel who was speaking with me went out, and another angel went out to meet him. 4 He said to him, "Run, tell that young man: Jerusalem will be inhabited as an open city, without walls, because of the multitude of people and livestock within it." 5 For I myself will be a wall of fire around her — declares the LORD — and I will be the glory within her. 6 Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north — declares the LORD — for I have scattered you like the four winds of heaven, declares the LORD. 7 Come, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon! 8 For this is what the LORD of Armies says — after glory, he sent me to the nations that plundered you, for whoever touches you touches the pupil of his eye. 9 For I am about to wave my hand against them, and they will become plunder for those who served them. Then you will know that the LORD of Armies has sent me. 10 Sing and rejoice, daughter of Zion, for I am coming, and I will dwell among you — declares the LORD. 11 Many nations will join themselves to the LORD on that day, and they will become my people. I will dwell among you, and you will know that the LORD of Armies has sent me to you. 12 The LORD will claim Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will choose Jerusalem once more. 13 Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The third night vision begins. The measuring line (*chevel middah*) indicates an intention to survey Jerusalem's dimensions — presumably for wall construction. This connects to the measuring line promised in 1:16. The man's identity is not specified; he may be an angel or a symbolic figure. The vision will subvert his purpose: Jerusalem's dimensions cannot be fixed because God's plans exceed human measurement.
2. The man intends to establish Jerusalem's dimensions — width (*rochbah*) and length (*orkah*). In the ancient world, measuring a city meant defining its defensive perimeter for walls. The next verses will reveal that this project is unnecessary — God has a radically different plan for Jerusalem's protection and expansion.

3. A second angel enters the scene, creating a chain of communication: the second angel tells the interpreting angel, who tells Zechariah. This layered mediation is characteristic of Zechariah's visionary style and anticipates the elaborate angelic hierarchies of later apocalyptic literature.
4. The urgency — 'Run!' (ruts) — means the measuring must be stopped immediately. The word perazot ('open towns, unwall settlements') describes villages that have no defensive walls. This is normally a sign of vulnerability, but here it signals abundance: the population will be so vast that walls cannot contain it. The young man (na'ar hallaz) may be the figure with the measuring line, or possibly Zechariah himself. The vision reverses the normal equation: walls = security; no walls = danger. In God's economy, no walls = unlimited expansion under divine protection.
5. This is one of the most powerful divine promises in the prophetic literature. The structure is chiasmic: external protection (wall of fire around) and internal presence (glory within). The word chomat esh ('wall of fire') evokes the pillar of fire in Exodus 13:21-22 and 14:24. The promise that God will be the kavod 'within her' (betokhah) anticipates Ezekiel's vision of the glory returning to the temple (Ezekiel 43:1-5). No human walls can improve on divine fire.
6. The double exclamation hoy hoy expresses urgent summons — not a woe oracle but a desperate call to action. The 'land of the north' (erets tsaphon) is Babylon — located to the northeast of Judah but approached from the north via the Fertile Crescent. The revelation that God scattered them (perasti) acknowledges divine responsibility for the exile, while the urgent call to flee implies that remaining in Babylon is now disobedience. Many Jews had settled comfortably in Babylon and chose not to return.
7. The direct address to Zion as a person — the people of God dwelling in Babylon — uses the imperative himmaltiy ('escape, deliver yourself'). The phrase bat-bavel ('daughter of Babylon') personifies Babylon as a woman, a common prophetic device (cf. Isaiah 47:1; Psalm 137:8). The call to escape implies coming judgment on Babylon — those who remain will be caught in it.
8. The phrase achar kavod ('after glory') is notoriously difficult. It may mean 'to pursue glory,' 'after the glory has departed,' or 'with a glorious purpose.' We rendered it literally and let the ambiguity stand. The expression bavat eno ('pupil of his eye') describes the most sensitive and protected part of the body — to touch Israel is to poke God in the eye. There is a scribal tradition (tiqqun sopherim) that the original text read 'my eye' (eni) rather than 'his eye' (eno), making the statement directly from God: 'whoever touches you touches the pupil of my eye.' The change may have been made to avoid anthropomorphic language about God.
9. The gesture of waving the hand (menif et-yadi) is a threatening motion that precedes a strike. The reversal of fortune — oppressors become plunder for their own former slaves — echoes the Exodus pattern where Egypt was plundered by departing Israel (Exodus 12:36). The validation formula 'then you will know that the LORD of Armies has sent me' establishes the prophetic word as verifiable — fulfillment will prove the message.
10. The double imperative ronni vesimchi ('sing and rejoice') marks a shift to jubilant promise. The verb shakhanti ('I will dwell/tabernacle') is from the root sh-k-n, the same root as Shekhinah — God's dwelling presence. The promise that God will personally dwell 'among you' (betokhekh) goes beyond temple reconstruction to divine indwelling. This echoes Exodus 25:8: 'Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.'
11. The verb nilvu ('will join themselves, will attach') describes voluntary association — the nations choose to align with the LORD. The covenant formula 'they will become my people' (vehayu li le'am), normally reserved for Israel, is now extended to 'many nations' (goyim rabbim). This is one of the most universalist statements in the Hebrew prophets — the covenant widens to embrace gentile peoples. The fulfillment phrase 'you will know that the LORD of Armies has sent me' is repeated from verse 13.
12. The verb nachal ('to inherit, to take as possession') reverses the usual relationship — typically Israel inherits the land from God, but here God inherits Judah as his own possession. The phrase admat haqqodesh ('the holy land') is one of only two occurrences of this exact phrase in the Hebrew Bible (also Daniel 11:41 uses 'the beautiful land'). The concept of the land itself being holy — not just the temple or the altar — is significant. The repeated uvachar od ('and will choose again') reaffirms the divine election.
13. The command has ('silence!') demands absolute stillness before divine action — cf. Habakkuk 2:20 and Zephaniah 1:7, where the same command precedes divine judgment. The metaphor ne'or ('he has roused himself, he has awakened') uses stirring-from-sleep language — God, who appeared to slumber during the exile (cf. Psalm 44:23), has now risen to act. The 'holy dwelling' (me'on qodsho) is heaven itself, not the earthly temple. God is moving from heaven toward earth — and all flesh must fall silent.

3

Summary: Zechariah 3 presents the fourth night vision — a heavenly courtroom scene where Joshua the high priest stands before the angel of the LORD, clothed in filthy garments, while the Satan stands at his right hand to accuse him. The LORD rebukes the accuser, declaring Joshua a brand plucked from the fire. Joshua's filthy garments are removed and replaced with clean robes and a turban, symbolizing the removal of the people's iniquity. The chapter concludes with the promise of the Branch (Tsemach) and a stone with seven eyes — on a single day, God will remove the iniquity of the land.

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is the only passage in Zechariah where ha-satan ('the adversary/accuser') appears, connecting this vision to the heavenly court scenes in Job 1-2. The filthy garments represent not Joshua's personal sin but the collective guilt of the post-exilic community — the high priest bears the nation's iniquity. The garment exchange is a vivid enactment of forgiveness: guilt is not merely pardoned but removed and replaced with righteousness. The mention of 'the Branch' (tsemach, v. 8) introduces one of the most important messianic titles in the prophets, linking to Isaiah 4:2, 11:1, Jeremiah 23:5, and 33:15. The stone with seven eyes (v. 9) has generated extensive interpretive debate — temple cornerstone, precious gem for the high priestly breastplate, or cosmic symbol.*

Translation Friction: *The word tso'im ('filthy') in verse 3 is extremely strong — it refers to excrement-stained garments, not merely soiled clothing. We rendered it as 'filthy' but note the force in the translator notes. The identity of ha-satan is debated: in pre-exilic usage, satan functions as a title ('the adversary/accuser') rather than a proper name. We retain the article and lowercase rendering 'the adversary' to reflect the Hebrew, while noting the development toward the later concept of Satan as a personal name. The stone with seven eyes (v. 9) defies easy interpretation — we preserve the image without forcing a single explanation.*

Connections: *The heavenly court scene parallels Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-7. The filthy-to-clean garment exchange anticipates Isaiah 61:10 ('he has clothed me with garments of salvation') and Revelation 7:14 (robes washed white). The Branch (tsemach) connects to Isaiah 4:2, 11:1, Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15, and Zechariah 6:12. The removal of iniquity 'in a single day' (v. 9) has been read as anticipating the Day of Atonement's ultimate fulfillment. The seven eyes appear again in Zechariah 4:10 and inform the imagery of Revelation 5:6 (the Lamb with seven eyes).*

¹Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, with the adversary standing at his right hand to accuse him. ²The LORD said to the adversary, "The LORD rebukes you, adversary! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebukes you! Is not this man a brand plucked from the fire?" ³Now Joshua was clothed in filthy garments as he stood before the angel. ⁴He answered and spoke to those standing before him, saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him." Then he said to Joshua, "See — I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you in splendid robes." ⁵Then I said, "Let them place a clean turban on his head." So they placed the clean turban on his head and clothed him in garments, while the angel of the LORD stood by. ⁶Then the angel of the LORD solemnly charged Joshua: ⁷This is what the LORD of Armies says: If you walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you will govern my house and oversee my courts, and I will give you access to walk among those standing here. ⁸Listen now, Joshua the high priest — you and your companions who sit before you, for they are men who serve as signs — for I am about to bring my servant, the Branch. ⁹For look — the stone that I have set before Joshua: on that single stone are seven eyes. I myself will engrave its inscription — declares the LORD of Armies — and I will remove the iniquity of that land in a single day. ¹⁰On that day — declares the LORD of Armies — you will invite one another to sit under the vine and under the fig tree.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The heavenly courtroom scene: Joshua stands as the defendant, the angel of the LORD as judge, and ha-satan ('the adversary') as prosecutor. The right hand is the position of accusation in a legal proceeding (cf. Psalm 109:6). The word satan with the definite article (ha-satan, 'the adversary') functions as a title/role, not a proper name — this figure's job is to accuse, to bring charges. The infinitive lesitno ('to accuse him') is from the same root as satan, creating a deliberate wordplay: the satan stands to satan.
2. The double rebuke is emphatic. God speaks of himself in the third person ('the LORD rebukes you') — a formal legal ruling rather than a personal outburst. The basis for the rebuke is God's election: 'the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem' — the accusation against Joshua (and the community he represents) is overridden by God's sovereign choice. The metaphor *ud mutsal me'esh* ('a brand plucked from the fire') means a partially burned stick rescued from destruction — Joshua and the remnant have survived the fire of exile, singed but alive. The same image appears in Amos 4:11.
3. The word *tso'im* ('filthy') is far stronger than modern English 'dirty' or 'soiled.' The root relates to excrement — these are garments stained with human waste, representing the most extreme form of ritual defilement. For a high priest, who was required to wear sacred vestments of linen and gold (Exodus 28), to stand in excrement-stained clothes before the divine court is devastating. Joshua's filthy garments represent not personal sin but the collective guilt and defilement of the community he serves as intercessor.
4. The garment exchange is a physical enactment of forgiveness. The verb *he'evarti* ('I have caused to pass away') means the iniquity is removed — not suppressed, not overlooked, but taken away. The *machalatsot* ('splendid robes,' 'festal garments') are robes of distinction and honor, far exceeding mere clean replacements. The scene moves from the worst possible defilement to the highest possible honor in a single divine command. This is

theology enacted as drama.

5. Zechariah himself speaks — an unusual interjection in which the prophet participates in the vision rather than merely observing. The *tsanif tavor* ('clean turban') is the priestly headpiece (cf. Exodus 28:36-38), on which the gold plate reading 'Holy to the LORD' was attached. By restoring the turban, Joshua is reinvested with full priestly authority. The note that the angel of the LORD 'stood by' (*omed*) suggests supervisory approval of the process.
6. The verb *vayya'ad* ('solemnly testified, charged') is a formal legal term — the angel delivers a binding declaration with conditions. What follows in verse 7 is a conditional covenant: obedience will lead to authority.
7. The conditional covenant has two requirements (walk in my ways, keep my charge) and three rewards (govern the house, oversee the courts, access to the heavenly court). The third reward — *mahlekchim* ('access, places to walk') among the standing angels — is extraordinary: Joshua the high priest will have the right to move among the angelic beings of the heavenly court. This elevates the priesthood beyond its earthly function to a mediating role between heaven and earth.
8. The word *mophet* ('sign, portent, wonder') means Joshua and his companions are living symbols pointing toward something greater. The title *tsemach* ('Branch') is a recognized messianic designation appearing in Isaiah 4:2 (where it refers to the LORD's branch), Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15 (a righteous branch for David), and Zechariah 6:12. Combined with *avdi* ('my servant'), it creates a dual-identity figure: Davidic king and divine servant. The phrase *hineni mevi* ('I am about to bring') indicates imminent divine action.
9. The stone (even) with seven eyes (*shiv'ah enayim*) is one of the most enigmatic images in the prophets. Interpretations include: (1) a temple foundation stone, (2) a precious gem for the high priestly breastplate or turban, (3) a cosmic symbol of God's all-seeing awareness, (4) a messianic symbol connected to the Branch. The seven eyes likely represent complete divine knowledge and oversight (cf. 4:10 — 'the eyes of the LORD that range through the whole earth'). The engraving (*pittuchah*) may refer to an inscription or a decorative carving. The climactic promise — removing *avon* ('iniquity') of the entire land *beyom echad* ('in a single day') — is breathtaking in scope. This connects to the Day of Atonement concept but transcends it: not annual covering but permanent removal.
10. The image of sitting 'under the vine and under the fig tree' is the quintessential picture of messianic peace in the Hebrew Bible, drawn from 1 Kings 4:25 (Solomon's golden age), Micah 4:4, and Isaiah 36:16. It represents agricultural abundance, personal security, and neighborly fellowship — each person enjoying the fruit of their own land without fear of invasion or oppression. The verb *tigre'u* ('you will invite, call') suggests active hospitality — sharing prosperity with neighbors.

4

Summary: Zechariah 4 presents the fifth night vision — a golden lampstand (menorah) flanked by two olive trees. The angel awakens Zechariah to show him this image, then delivers one of the most quoted lines in prophetic literature: 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of Armies.' The chapter addresses Zerubbabel's role in completing the temple, promising that the mountain of obstacles will become level ground before him, and that the hands that laid the foundation will also finish the work. The two olive trees are identified as 'the two anointed ones who stand beside the Lord of all the earth' — traditionally understood as the priestly and royal offices represented by Joshua and Zerubbabel.

What Makes This Remarkable: The central oracle — 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit' (v. 6) — is perhaps the most famous verse in Zechariah and one of the defining statements of biblical theology. It directly addresses the post-exilic community's despair at their political weakness: they have no army, no king, no independence. But God's work does not depend on human resources. The lampstand vision recalls the tabernacle menorah (Exodus 25:31-40) but adds features not found in the original — a bowl on top, seven pipes to each lamp (forty-nine total), and self-supplying olive trees. The lampstand is not merely decorative but functional: it represents God's ongoing, self-sustaining light in the world.

*Translation Friction: The chapter's literary structure is unusual — the vision (vv. 1-5) is interrupted by the oracle to Zerubbabel (vv. 6-10), then the vision resumes (vv. 11-14). This may reflect the composite nature of the text or deliberate literary framing. The phrase *bene hayyitshar* ('sons of oil/anointing,' v. 14) is unique — not the standard *mashiach* ('anointed one') but a distinct term suggesting freshly flowing oil rather than ceremonial anointing. We translated it as 'anointed ones' with notes on the unusual Hebrew. The technical description of the lampstand in verses 2-3 is difficult — the relationship between the bowl (*gullah*), pipes (*mutsaqot*), and lamps is debated among scholars.*

Connections: The lampstand connects to the tabernacle menorah (Exodus 25:31-40) and the ten lampstands in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7:49). The 'Not by might' oracle informs the theology of divine power through weakness that Paul develops in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. The two olive trees/anointed ones are reinterpreted in Revelation 11:4 as the 'two witnesses.' The seven eyes of the LORD (v. 10) connect to the seven eyes on the stone in 3:9 and to the seven spirits/eyes in Revelation 5:6.

¹The angel who was speaking with me returned and woke me, like a person roused from sleep. ²He asked me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see a lampstand made entirely of gold, with a bowl on top of it. On it are seven lamps, and there are seven channels to each of the lamps on top of it. ³And there are two olive trees beside it — one on the right side of the bowl and one on its left." ⁴I responded and asked the angel who was speaking with me, "What are these, my lord?" ⁵The angel who was speaking with me answered, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." ⁶He answered and said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of Armies. ⁷What are you, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground! He will bring out the capstone to shouts of 'Grace! Grace to it!'" ⁸Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁹The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of Armies has sent me to you. ¹⁰For who has despised the day of small things? They will rejoice when they see the plumb stone in Zerubbabel's hand. These seven are the eyes of the LORD — they range throughout the whole earth. ¹¹Then I asked him, "What are these two olive trees on the right side of the lampstand and on its left?" ¹²I asked a second time, "What are the two olive branches that pour out golden oil through the two golden pipes?" ¹³He said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." ¹⁴He said, "These are the two anointed ones who stand beside the Lord of all the earth."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The simile *ke'ish asher ye'or mishenato* ('like a person roused from sleep') may indicate that Zechariah was in a trance-like visionary state between visions, or simply that the visions came during the night when he was sleeping. The interpreting angel must actively wake the prophet to receive the next vision — the divine initiative in revelation is emphasized.
2. The menorah in this vision differs from the tabernacle menorah in several ways: it has a bowl (*gullah*) on top serving as a reservoir, and the phrase *shiv'ah veshiv'ah mutsaqot* ('seven and seven channels') likely means seven pipes per lamp — forty-nine total channels ensuring continuous oil supply. The *gullah* ('bowl') functions as a self-feeding reservoir, eliminating the need for human tending. This is not merely a temple furnishing but a symbol of God's self-sustaining provision of light and presence.
3. The two olive trees flanking the lampstand are positioned to feed oil directly into the bowl — a self-sustaining system of illumination. The olive trees are living, producing sources rather than stored reserves, representing an inexhaustible supply. Their identity will be revealed in verse 14. The symmetry — one right, one left — suggests two parallel but distinct sources of anointing.
4. Zechariah's repeated question — 'What are these?' — reflects genuine bewilderment, not literary convention. Each vision requires angelic interpretation. The respectful address *adoni* ('my lord') maintains the prophet's humble stance before the heavenly messenger.
5. The angel's question — 'Do you not know?' — may express surprise at the prophet's incomprehension or may serve a pedagogical function, drawing out the admission of ignorance before revelation. Zechariah's honest 'No' is notable: the prophet does not pretend to understand divine vision on his own. Understanding requires revelation.
6. This is the theological summit of the chapter and one of the most quoted verses in the Hebrew Bible. The negation is comprehensive: *lo bechayil* ('not by military might') *velo bekhoach* ('and not by human power'). The affirmation *ki im-beruchi* ('but rather by my Spirit') introduces the divine alternative. The word *ruach* here is clearly God's Spirit — the animating, empowering presence of God himself. The message directly addresses the post-exilic community's political helplessness: they are subjects of Persia, without an army, without a king, without resources. God says: that is exactly the right condition for my work.
7. The 'great mountain' (*har-haggadol*) symbolizes the obstacles facing the temple's completion — political opposition, economic hardship, community demoralization. The promise that it will become *lemishor* ('level ground') echoes Isaiah 40:4 — every mountain made low. The 'capstone' or 'headstone' (even *harosheh*) is the final stone placed to complete the building, signifying triumphant completion. The crowd's shout *chen chen lah* ('Grace, grace to it!') invokes divine favor upon the finished temple — the word *chen* means both 'grace' and 'beauty.'
8. A fresh prophetic reception formula introducing a specific promise about Zerubbabel's role in completing the temple.
9. The promise creates a symmetry between beginning and ending: the same hands that started the work will finish it. The verb *tebatsa'nah* ('will complete, will cut off/finish') carries the sense of decisive completion. The validation formula — 'then you will know that the LORD of Armies has sent me' — stakes prophetic credibility on a verifiable outcome: the temple's completion. Historically, the temple was completed in 516 BCE (Ezra 6:15),

vindicating the prophecy.

10. The rhetorical question rebukes those who looked at the modest rebuilding project with contempt (cf. Ezra 3:12; Haggai 2:3). The even habedil ('plumb stone' or 'tin/lead stone') is a construction tool used to ensure walls are straight — its presence in Zerubbabel's hand confirms active building. The 'seven' connects to the seven eyes on the stone in 3:9 and the seven lamps of the lampstand (4:2). The eyes of the LORD ranging through the earth express God's comprehensive awareness — nothing escapes his notice, and his purposes extend to every corner of creation.
11. Zechariah returns to his initial question about the olive trees (cf. v. 3). The question has been deferred through the Zerubbabel oracle (vv. 6-10), and now the prophet presses for an answer. The positioning — right and left of the menorah — emphasizes their function as sources of oil for the lampstand's light.
12. Zechariah refines his question with more specific detail: he now focuses on the shibbolei hazeitim ('olive branches/clusters') and the tsanterot hazzahav ('golden pipes/channels') through which oil flows. The word hamriqim ('pouring out, emptying') and the phrase hazzahav ('the gold/golden oil') describe oil so pure it appears golden. The self-emptying motion — oil flowing continuously without human pressing — reinforces the vision's message of divinely sustained provision.
13. The identical exchange from verse 5 is repeated — the angel's question and Zechariah's honest admission of ignorance. The repetition frames the central oracle (vv. 6-10) and creates anticipation for the final identification of the olive trees.
14. The phrase bene hayyitshar ('sons of oil/anointing') is unique in the Hebrew Bible. Unlike mashiach ('anointed one'), which refers to past ceremonial anointing, yitshar ('fresh oil') suggests ongoing, living supply. The title adon kol-ha'arets ('Lord of all the earth') for God emphasizes universal sovereignty — the God served by these two anointed ones is not a local deity but the ruler of the entire world. Revelation 11:4 reinterprets these two olive trees as 'the two witnesses,' extending the symbolism into eschatological context.

5

Summary: *Zechariah 5 contains the sixth and seventh night visions. The sixth vision (vv. 1-4) shows a flying scroll — enormous, twenty cubits by ten cubits — representing the curse that goes out over the entire land against thieves and those who swear falsely. The seventh vision (vv. 5-11) shows a woman called 'Wickedness' seated inside an ephah (a measuring container), sealed with a lead lid, and carried by two women with stork-like wings to the land of Shinar (Babylon), where a house will be built for it. Together these visions deal with the purging of sin from the restored community.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The flying scroll's dimensions — twenty cubits by ten cubits — exactly match the dimensions of Solomon's temple porch (1 Kings 6:3), suggesting that the covenant law which once resided in the temple now flies out as an active agent of judgment. The woman-in-the-ephah vision is one of the most surreal images in the Hebrew Bible, combining commercial imagery (the ephah was a standard measure for grain trade) with personified wickedness and a bizarre aerial deportation to Babylon. Sin is not merely forgiven but physically removed from the land and relocated — Babylon becomes the repository for Israel's expelled wickedness, a reversal of the exile: this time wickedness, not Israel, is exiled.*

Translation Friction: *The word ha'alah in verse 3 can mean 'the curse' or 'the oath' — both relate to covenant violation, but 'curse' better fits the context of automatic judgment. The phrase 'enter the house of the thief and the house of him who swears falsely' (v. 4) describes the curse as an active agent that invades homes and destroys them from within — we preserved this vivid personification. The word rish'ah ('wickedness,' v. 8) is feminine, matching the feminine figure, and the allegorical nature of the vision is clear. The destination 'land of Shinar' (v. 11) is the archaic name for Babylon used in Genesis 11:2 (Tower of Babel), deliberately linking the deportation of wickedness to the primal site of human rebellion.*

Connections: *The flying scroll echoes the curses of Deuteronomy 27-28 and Ezekiel's scroll (Ezekiel 2:9-3:3). The two sins highlighted — theft and false oaths — represent violations of duties to neighbor and to God respectively, summarizing the whole law. The land of Shinar connects to Genesis 10:10, 11:2 (Babel), and Daniel 1:2. The ephah as a commercial measure connects to Amos 8:5's critique of dishonest weights and measures. The removal of wickedness anticipates the Day of Atonement's scapegoat (Leviticus 16:21-22), where sin is physically sent away.*

1 I looked up again and saw a flying scroll. 2 He asked me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see a flying scroll. Its length is twenty cubits, and its width is ten cubits." 3 He said to me, "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land. For everyone who steals will be purged out according to what is written on one side, and everyone who swears falsely will be purged out according to what is written on the other side. 4 I have sent it out — declares the LORD of Armies — and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears falsely by my name. It will lodge within his house and consume it — timber and stones alike." 5 Then the angel who was speaking with me came forward and said to me, "Raise your eyes and see what this is that is going out." 6 I asked, "What is it?" He said, "This is an ephah going out." He added, "This is their iniquity throughout the whole land." 7 Then a lead cover was lifted, and there was a woman sitting inside the ephah. 8 He said, "This is Wickedness." Then he pushed her down into the ephah and threw the lead weight over its opening. 9 Then I raised my eyes and looked — two women were coming forward with wind in their wings. They had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted the ephah up between earth and sky. 10 I asked the angel who was speaking with me, "Where are they taking the ephah?" 11 He said to me, "To build a house for it in the land of Shinar. When it is prepared, she will be set down there on her own pedestal."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The megillah aphah ('flying scroll') is an extraordinary image — a written document soaring through the sky under its own power. Ancient scrolls were rolled, not folded, and this one is unfurled and airborne, making its text visible to all. The verb aphah ('flying') is the same used for birds, suggesting swift, purposeful movement across the land.
2. The dimensions — twenty cubits by ten cubits (approximately 30 by 15 feet, or 9 by 4.5 meters) — match the porch of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:3). This may be coincidental, but the parallel suggests that the covenant law, which was housed in the temple, now emerges from it as an active agent of judgment. A scroll this size would be overwhelming in the sky — the curse of the covenant is not hidden in fine print but displayed in massive, inescapable lettering.
3. The word ha'alah means 'the curse' — specifically a covenant curse, the automatic consequence of violating a sworn oath. The scroll has two sides, each addressing a different category of sin: theft (violation of neighbor's rights, the 'horizontal' dimension of the law) and false oaths (violation of God's name, the 'vertical' dimension). Together they represent the whole covenant obligation. The verb niqqah ('will be purged out, will be made clean/empty') suggests removal — the sinners will be cleared from the community.
4. The curse is personified as an agent that enters homes, takes up residence (lanet, 'to lodge overnight'), and then destroys them completely — timber and stones, the fundamental building materials. The destruction is total: not merely punishment of the person but demolition of everything they have built. The verb killatu ('will consume/destroy it') pictures the curse eating through the house like fire or rot. The phrase bishmi lashsheqer ('falsely by my name') specifies the violation: using God's name to validate lies, the most direct profanation of the divine identity.
5. The seventh vision begins. The angel's command to 'raise your eyes' indicates a new visual experience. The feminine participle hayyotset ('going out') creates suspense — Zechariah sees something emerging but does not yet know what it is.
6. The ephah was a standard dry measure for grain (approximately 22 liters or 5 gallons), making it a symbol of commerce and trade. The Hebrew einam ('their eye/appearance') is a textual difficulty — many Hebrew manuscripts and the LXX read avonam ('their iniquity'), which fits the context better and is likely the original reading (a scribal error of ayin/aleph). We follow the emended reading 'their iniquity' with this note. The ephah as a container for wickedness transforms a commercial instrument into a vessel of judgment.
7. The kikkar ophereth ('talent/disk of lead') serves as a heavy lid — lead is the densest common metal, ensuring the contents cannot escape. The woman inside the ephah is not a literal person but an allegorical figure representing wickedness (as verse 8 will identify). The image is claustrophobic and surreal: a woman crammed into a grain container, sealed with lead.
8. The identification is terse and absolute: zot harish'ah ('This is Wickedness'). The feminine noun rish'ah ('wickedness') personified as a woman is grammatically natural in Hebrew (abstract nouns are typically feminine). The angel's forceful actions — vayashlekh ('he threw/cast') appears twice — demonstrate violence against wickedness: she is shoved down and sealed in. The lead weight over the mouth (pi, 'opening') ensures permanent containment. Wickedness is not merely named but imprisoned.
9. The two winged women are among the most unusual figures in the Hebrew Bible. They are not identified as angels (the standard mal'akhim are masculine in Hebrew), and their stork-like wings create a strange hybrid image. The stork (chasideh) is an unclean bird in Leviticus 11:19, which may be significant — unclean carriers transport wickedness to its appropriate destination. Alternatively, the stork's name comes from chesed ('faithful love, loyalty'), and the irony may be intentional: faithfulness removes wickedness. The ephah is carried 'between earth and sky' — suspended in transit, neither in the holy land nor yet at its destination.
10. Zechariah's question is practical and direct — the vision demands an explanation of the destination. The verb molikhot ('taking, carrying, leading') suggests purposeful transport, not aimless flight.

11. The destination is erets Shin'ar ('the land of Shinar') — the archaic name for Babylonia used in Genesis 10:10 and 11:2 (the Tower of Babel). The choice of this ancient name rather than 'Babylon' connects wickedness to the primordial site of human rebellion against God. A 'house' (bayit) will be built for Wickedness — she will be enshrined, given a permanent dwelling, possibly a mock-temple. The word mekhunatah ('her pedestal/base') suggests a shrine-like installation. The vision is a theological reversal: Israel was exiled to Babylon, but now Wickedness itself is exiled there. The holy land is being purged.

6

Summary: *Zechariah 6 concludes the eight night visions with the eighth vision (vv. 1-8) — four chariots drawn by differently colored horses emerge from between two mountains of bronze, sent out as the four spirits of heaven to patrol the earth. The chapter then shifts to a symbolic act (vv. 9-15): Zechariah is commanded to take silver and gold from returned exiles, make a crown, and place it on the head of Joshua the high priest, declaring him 'the Branch' who will build the LORD's temple and rule from his throne. The crown will be placed in the temple as a memorial.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The eighth vision — chariots emerging from between two bronze mountains — forms an inclusio with the first vision (horsemen in chapter 1). Both feature colored horses patrolling the earth, but now they go out as agents of divine action, not merely reporters. The crowning of Joshua the high priest as 'the Branch' (v. 12) is extraordinary because the Branch is a royal/Davidic title — a priest receives a king's crown. This fusion of priestly and royal roles in a single figure anticipates the Melchizedek priesthood theme (Genesis 14; Psalm 110) and becomes central to Christian messianic theology. The Hebrew of verse 13 — 'he will be a priest on his throne, and counsel of peace will be between the two' — envisions a figure who unites kingship and priesthood in harmony.*

Translation Friction: *The crowning ceremony raises a major textual question: verse 11 says to crown 'Joshua' but the Branch title belongs to the Davidic/royal line, represented by Zerubbabel. Some scholars believe the original text read 'Zerubbabel' and was changed to 'Joshua' after Zerubbabel disappeared from history. We follow the Masoretic text (Joshua) while noting the debate. The phrase 'counsel of peace between the two' (v. 13) is ambiguous — between priest and king? between the Branch and the LORD? between the two offices united in one person? We preserve the ambiguity.*

Connections: *The four chariots parallel the four horsemen of Revelation 6:1-8. The bronze mountains may connect to the two bronze pillars of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7:15-22). The Branch (tsemach) continues from 3:8 and connects to Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15, and Isaiah 11:1. The crowning of a priest-king anticipates Psalm 110:4 ('You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek') and Hebrews 4-7. The memorial crown in the temple connects to the memorial stones tradition (Joshua 4:1-9).*

1I looked up again and saw four chariots coming out from between two mountains — and the mountains were mountains of bronze. 2The first chariot had red horses, the second chariot had black horses, 3the third chariot had white horses, and the fourth chariot had dappled horses — all of them strong. 4I asked the angel who was speaking with me, "What are these, my lord?" 5The angel answered me, "These are the four spirits of heaven, going out after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth." 6The chariot with black horses goes out toward the north country, and the white ones go out after them, and the dappled ones go out toward the south country. 7The strong ones went out, eager to go and patrol the earth. He said, "Go, patrol the earth." So they patrolled the earth. 8Then he called out to me and said, "See, those going toward the north country have set my Spirit at rest in the north country." 9The word of the LORD came to me: 10Take contributions from the exiles — from Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah — and go that same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah, where they have arrived from Babylon. 11Take silver and gold, make a crown, and set it on the head of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. 12Say to him: This is what the LORD of Armies says — Here is the man whose name is the Branch. He will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. 13It is he who will build the temple of the LORD. He will bear the honor, and will sit and rule on his throne. He will be a priest on his throne, and counsel of peace will be between the two of them. 14The crown will be a memorial in the temple of the LORD for Helem, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Hen son of Zephaniah. 15Those who are far away will come and build in the temple of the LORD. Then you will know that the LORD of Armies has sent me to you. This

will happen if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The eighth and final night vision. The four chariots (merkavot) are war vehicles — divine military forces, not ceremonial processions. The two mountains of bronze (harei nechoshet) are unique to this vision. Bronze mountains may represent the pillars of heaven, the cosmic gateway, or may connect to the two bronze pillars of Solomon's temple (Jachin and Boaz, 1 Kings 7:15-22), from which divine forces issue forth. The chariots emerge 'from between' the mountains — from the divine realm into the earthly.
2. The horse colors — red (adummim) and black (shchorim) — likely carry symbolic meaning: red for bloodshed/war, black for famine/death. The colors partially overlap with the first vision (1:8) but are not identical, and Revelation 6:1-8 will develop distinct symbolic meanings for each color.
3. White (levanim) horses may symbolize victory or purity. The fourth group — beruddim amutsim ('dappled, strong') — is described with two adjectives. The word beruddim ('dappled, spotted') appears only here and in Genesis 31:10, 12 (Jacob's flocks). The adjective amutsim ('strong, powerful') may modify all four teams rather than just the fourth, though its placement suggests it primarily describes the dappled horses.
4. The recurring question formula. After eight visions, Zechariah still requires angelic interpretation — the visions do not become self-evident through repetition.
5. The identification arba ruchot hashamayim ('four spirits/winds of heaven') is deliberately ambiguous — ruach can mean 'spirit' or 'wind.' As spirits, they are divine agents; as winds, they represent the four compass directions of divine sovereignty. The phrase mehityatsev al-adon kol-ha'arets ('from standing before the Lord of all the earth') echoes the heavenly court scene of Job 1:6 and 1 Kings 22:19-22. These agents have been in the divine presence receiving their commission before going out.
6. The directional assignments: black horses to the north (Babylon/Mesopotamia — the primary enemy territory), white horses follow them northward, and dappled horses go south (Egypt). The red horses are not assigned a direction here, leading to textual debate — some suggest they go east or west, or that verse 7 addresses them. The 'north country' (erets tsaphon) is the direction from which Babylon threatened Israel, making it the primary target of divine judgment.
7. The ha'amutsim ('the strong ones') are likely the red horses or a general designation for all the chariot teams. Their eagerness — vayevasu laleket ('they sought/were eager to go') — personifies the divine agents as zealous to fulfill their mission. The command-and-fulfillment pattern (Go... So they went) demonstrates immediate obedience to divine authority. The verb lehithallekh ('to patrol') is the same used in 1:10-11, creating an inclusio between the first and last visions.
8. The verb vayaz'eq ('he called out, he cried') suggests urgency and importance. The phrase henichu et-ruchi ('have set my Spirit at rest') is profoundly significant — God's Spirit, which was agitated by the injustice done to his people by the northern empire, is now calmed because divine justice has been executed. The 'north country' is Babylon, and the settling of God's Spirit indicates that the account has been balanced — the nations that exceeded their mandate in punishing Israel (cf. 1:15) have received their own judgment.
9. The standard prophetic reception formula marks the transition from the night visions to a symbolic prophetic act. The visions are complete; now comes a commanded action.
10. The three named exiles — Heldai ('worldly/enduring'), Tobijah ('the LORD is good'), and Jedaiah ('the LORD knows') — have come from Babylon, likely bearing gifts for the temple. Their names may carry symbolic significance. The house of Josiah son of Zephaniah serves as their host and the location for the symbolic ceremony. The instruction to go 'that same day' emphasizes urgency — the prophetic act must be performed immediately.
11. The word atarat is plural ('crowns'), but the verb veshamta ('and you shall set') is singular, and the crown is placed on one head. The plural may indicate a composite crown or a crown of multiple bands. The crowning of the high priest Joshua with a royal crown is the extraordinary center of this passage. The Branch title (v. 12) is Davidic/royal, not priestly, creating a deliberate fusion of the two offices. Some scholars argue the original text named Zerubbabel, the Davidic descendant, and was changed to Joshua after Zerubbabel disappeared from history. We follow the Masoretic text.
12. The wordplay — tsemach shemo umitachtav yitsmach ('Branch is his name, and from his place he will branch out') — is untranslatable without awkwardness, but we attempt to preserve it with 'the Branch... will branch out.' The promise that this figure will build the hekhal YHWH ('temple of the LORD') connects to Zerubbabel's temple-building role (4:9) but extends beyond it. The phrase umitachtav ('from beneath him, from his place') suggests humble origins — growing up from below, not descending from above.
13. The repetition 'he will build the temple of the LORD' from verse 12 adds emphasis. The word hod ('honor, majesty, splendor') is the royal attribute par excellence. The phrase vehayyah kohen al-kis'o ('he will be a priest on his throne') is the crux: a single figure exercises both royal and priestly authority simultaneously. The 'counsel of peace between the two of them' (atsat shalom... bein sheneihem) is grammatically ambiguous — 'the two' could refer to the priestly and royal offices, to the Branch and God, or to Joshua and Zerubbabel as representatives. We preserve the ambiguity.
14. After the crowning ceremony, the crown is placed in the temple as a zikkaron ('memorial') — a permanent testimony to the prophetic act and the promise it represents. The names differ slightly from verse 10: Heldai becomes Helem, and Josiah becomes Hen (meaning 'grace/favor'). These may be alternate forms of the same names or deliberate symbolic substitutions. The crown in the temple serves as a physical reminder of the coming priest-king until his arrival.

15. The promise that rechoqim ('those who are far away') will participate in building the temple extends the vision beyond the local community to distant peoples — either far-flung Jewish diaspora communities or, more radically, gentile nations (cf. 2:11). The validation formula appears again: fulfillment will confirm the prophetic word. The conditional clause — *im shamoa tishme'un* ('if you will diligently obey,' literally 'if hearing you will hear') — uses the emphatic infinitive absolute construction. The promise is conditioned on obedience, maintaining the covenantal framework: God's extraordinary promises require the people's covenantal faithfulness.

7

Summary: *Zechariah 7 transitions from the night visions to a prose prophetic discourse prompted by a practical question: a delegation from Bethel asks whether they should continue fasting in the fifth month to mourn the temple's destruction, now that reconstruction is underway. God responds not with a direct answer but with a penetrating counter-question: 'When you fasted and mourned, was it really for me?' The chapter then recalls the message of the earlier prophets — execute true justice, show faithful love and compassion, do not oppress the vulnerable — and indicts the ancestors for refusing to listen, resulting in the scattering of exile.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *God's response to a ritual question is characteristically prophetic: he ignores the liturgical issue and addresses the moral reality beneath it. The fasts commemorating the temple's fall (in the fifth month) and Gedaliah's assassination (in the seventh month) had become rote observances disconnected from genuine repentance. The phrase 'Was it really for me that you fasted?' (v. 5) cuts to the heart of all religious ritual: whose purposes does worship serve? The catalog of ethical demands in verse 9-10 echoes the prophetic tradition from Amos through Micah to Jeremiah — true religion is justice, not ceremony.*

Translation Friction: *The delegation's question in verses 2-3 is straightforward, but God's response sprawls across two chapters (7-8), making the literary structure complex. The word *chesed* appears in verse 9 within a catalog of social ethics — we rendered it as 'faithful love' consistent with project standards. The phrase 'they made their hearts like diamond' (v. 12) uses *shamir*, an extremely hard stone (possibly corundum or emery) — harder than flint, expressing absolute obstinacy.*

Connections: *The question about fasting connects to Isaiah 58:1-12, where God similarly redefines true fasting as justice and compassion. The ethical catalog in verses 9-10 echoes Micah 6:8, Isaiah 1:17, Jeremiah 22:3, and Amos 5:24. The scattering by whirlwind (v. 14) recalls Hosea 13:3. The 'pleasant land' made desolate (v. 14) reverses the promise of Deuteronomy 8:7-10.*

¹In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month — the month of Kislev. ²Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melech, along with their men, to seek the favor of the LORD ³and to ask the priests of the house of the LORD of Armies and the prophets, "Should I weep in the fifth month, fasting as I have done for so many years?" ⁴Then the word of the LORD of Armies came to me: ⁵Say to all the people of the land and to the priests: When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months these seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? ⁶And when you eat and when you drink, is it not you who eat and you who drink? ⁷Are these not the words that the LORD proclaimed through the earlier prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and at peace, with her surrounding cities, and when the Negev and the foothills were settled? ⁸The word of the LORD came to Zechariah: ⁹This is what the LORD of Armies says: Render true justice, and show faithful love and compassion to one another. ¹⁰Do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the foreigner, or the poor, and do not plot evil against one another in your hearts. ¹¹But they refused to pay attention. They turned a stubborn shoulder and made their ears too heavy to hear. ¹²They made their hearts like diamond, refusing to hear the law and the words that the LORD of Armies sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. Great wrath came from the LORD of Armies. ¹³Just as he called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen, says the LORD of Armies. ¹⁴I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations they had not known. The land was left desolate behind them, with no one passing through or returning. They turned the pleasant land into a wasteland.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The date is December 7, 518 BCE — nearly two years after the night visions of chapters 1-6. The Babylonian month name Kislev is preserved. The temple reconstruction is well underway, prompting the delegation's question about whether mourning fasts are still appropriate.
2. The names Sharezer ('protect the king') and Regem-Melech ('friend of the king') are Babylonian-style names, reflecting the cultural assimilation of the exile. The phrase *lechalot et-penei YHWH* ('to entreat the face of the LORD') means to seek God's favor through prayer and inquiry. Whether 'Bethel' is the town sending the delegation or part of the compound name 'Bethel-Sharezer' is debated — we read it as the town, following most translations.
3. The fifth month (Av) commemorated the destruction of Solomon's temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE (2 Kings 25:8-9). The verb *hinnazzer* ('separating, abstaining') refers to the discipline of fasting. The question is practical and sincere: with the temple being rebuilt, does the mourning fast still apply? The answer God gives will transcend the liturgical question entirely.
4. The prophetic reception formula introduces God's response, which will not directly answer the question until chapter 8:19.
5. God's counter-question is devastating: *hatzom tsamtuni ani* ('was it really for me — me! — that you fasted?'). The emphatic pronoun *ani* ('me') at the end doubles the force. The seventh month fast commemorated the assassination of Gedaliah, the governor appointed after the fall of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:25; Jeremiah 41:1-3). The 'seventy years' connects to Jeremiah's prophecy (Jeremiah 25:11-12). God challenges the motive behind the ritual: religious observance that serves human purposes rather than divine ones is not truly worship.
6. The parallel question extends the logic: just as eating and drinking serve your own needs, so your fasting has served your own purposes — comfort in grief, communal identity, religious routine — rather than genuine devotion to God. The rhetoric strips away the pretense of piety: both feasting and fasting have been self-referential.
7. God redirects attention from the fasting question to the prophetic message that preceded the disaster. The phrase *hanneviim harishonim* ('the earlier prophets') refers to the pre-exilic prophetic tradition. The description of Jerusalem 'inhabited and at peace' (*yoshevet ushelevah*) with the Negev and Shephelah (foothills) settled paints the prosperous condition that existed before the exile — the very condition the people failed to maintain through obedience.
8. A fresh reception formula introduces the ethical catalog that follows — the content of what the earlier prophets actually said.
9. This verse summarizes the entire prophetic ethical tradition in a single sentence. *Mishpat emet* ('true justice') is justice that corresponds to reality — not the perversion of justice through bribery or favoritism. The pairing of *chesed verachamim* ('faithful love and compassion') represents the relational dimension of covenant ethics. The phrase *ish et-achiv* ('each to his brother') extends the covenant obligation horizontally — what God shows to Israel, Israel must show to one another.
10. The four vulnerable categories — *almanah* ('widow'), *yatom* ('fatherless/orphan'), *ger* ('foreigner/resident alien'), and *ani* ('poor/afflicted') — represent those without social power or legal protection. These are the same groups protected by Exodus 22:21-24, Deuteronomy 10:18, and Psalm 146:9. The prohibition against plotting evil 'in your hearts' (*bilevavkhem*) extends the ethical demand from external action to internal disposition — even the intention to harm is prohibited.
11. Three vivid images of resistance: (1) refusal to listen (*vayema'anu lehaqshiv*), (2) turning a rebellious shoulder (*kateph soraret* — the image of a draft animal refusing the yoke), and (3) ears made heavy (*hikhbidu* — from the root *k-v-d*, 'heavy,' the same root as *kavod*). The irony is sharp: the *kavod* ('glory') of God should make their ears attentive, but instead they make their ears *kavod* ('heavy') to block out his word.
12. The word *shamir* ('diamond, adamant, corundum') refers to the hardest known substance in the ancient world — harder than flint (cf. Ezekiel 3:9, Jeremiah 17:1). A heart made like *shamir* is not merely stubborn but deliberately, permanently hardened against God's word. The phrase *berucho beyad hanneviim* ('by his Spirit through the prophets') establishes the prophetic word as Spirit-driven — the earlier prophets spoke not their own opinions but God's Spirit-empowered message. The result of this hardness: *qetseph gadol* ('great wrath') — comprehensive divine judgment.
13. The principle of reciprocal hearing: God called through the prophets and was ignored; now when they call to God, he reciprocates. The measure-for-measure justice (*middah keneged middah*) is precise and devastating. The verb *qara* ('called') applies to both parties — God called, they called — but the response is mirrored: refusal to hear answered by refusal to hear.
14. The verb *va'esa'arem* ('I scattered them with a whirlwind') uses storm imagery for the violence of exile — not a gradual displacement but a tornado-like removal. The 'nations they had not known' emphasizes the disorientation of exile — everything is foreign. The phrase *erets chemdah* ('pleasant/desirable land') is a title for the promised land (cf. Jeremiah 3:19; Psalm 106:24), echoing *chemdah* from Haggai 2:7. The irony is crushing: the land God gave as a gift, they turned to *shammah* ('desolation'). The chapter ends where it must — with the exile's devastation — setting up the restoration promises of chapter 8.

8

Summary: *Zechariah 8 concludes the first major section of the book with a cascade of ten divine oracles (each introduced by 'This is what the LORD of Armies says'), building from God's jealous love for Zion through images of restored Jerusalem — old men and women sitting in its streets, children playing in its squares — to economic blessing, the transformation of fasts into feasts, and the ultimate vision of all nations streaming to Jerusalem to seek the LORD. This chapter is the most concentrated expression of eschatological hope in the post-exilic prophets.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The image in verse 4-5 — elderly people sitting peacefully in Jerusalem's streets while children play around them — is one of the most tender pictures of messianic hope in the Hebrew Bible. In a city that had known siege, starvation, massacre, and deportation, the vision of grandparents aging peacefully and children playing safely represents the complete reversal of wartime horror. The closing oracle (vv. 20-23) envisions ten foreigners grasping the garment of a single Jew and saying 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you' — the ultimate fulfillment of Israel's missionary purpose: to be so visibly blessed that the nations seek Israel's God.*

Translation Friction: *The ten-oracle structure creates some repetition that is deliberate and cumulative, not redundant. Each 'This is what the LORD of Armies says' introduces a new facet of the same vision. The phrase 'Do not be afraid; let your hands be strong' (v. 13) is a standard encouragement formula, but here it functions as the pivot between remembrance of past judgment and confidence in future blessing. The final image — ten men from every nation grasping a Jew's garment — uses the number ten symbolically for completeness and the gesture of grasping for desperate eagerness.*

Connections: *The old and young in the streets (vv. 4-5) reverses the siege conditions of Lamentations 2:21 and 4:1-4. The covenant formula 'they will be my people and I will be their God' (v. 8) connects to Jeremiah 31:33 and Ezekiel 37:27. The fasts becoming feasts (v. 19) finally answers the question posed in 7:3. The nations seeking the LORD (vv. 20-23) fulfills Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3. The phrase 'God is with you' (v. 23) echoes Immanuel ('God with us,' Isaiah 7:14).*

¹The word of the LORD of Armies came: ²This is what the LORD of Armies says: I am deeply jealous for Zion — with great zeal and great fury I am jealous for her. ³This is what the LORD says: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be called the City of Faithfulness, and the mountain of the LORD of Armies will be called the Holy Mountain. ⁴This is what the LORD of Armies says: Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with a staff in hand because of their great age. ⁵And the streets of the city will be full of boys and girls playing in its open squares. ⁶This is what the LORD of Armies says: If it seems impossible in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also seem impossible in my eyes? declares the LORD of Armies. ⁷This is what the LORD of Armies says: I am about to save my people from the land of the east and from the land of the west. ⁸I will bring them, and they will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They will be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and righteousness. ⁹This is what the LORD of Armies says: Let your hands be strong, you who in these days are hearing these words from the mouths of the prophets who were present when the foundation of the house of the LORD of Armies was laid for the temple to be rebuilt. ¹⁰For before those days, there were no wages for people or wages for livestock. There was no safety for anyone coming or going because of the enemy, and I set everyone against their neighbor. ¹¹But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, declares the LORD of Armies. ¹²For there will be a sowing of peace: the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will yield its produce, and the heavens will give their dew. I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. ¹³Just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you, and you will become a blessing. Do not be afraid — let your hands be strong. ¹⁴For this is what the LORD of Armies says: Just as I resolved to bring disaster upon you when your ancestors provoked me to anger — says the LORD of Armies — and I did not relent, ¹⁵so now, in these days, I have resolved to do good to Jerusalem and the house of Judah. Do not be afraid. ¹⁶These are the things you must do: Speak truth to one another. Render verdicts of truth and peace in your gates. ¹⁷Do not plot evil against one another in your hearts, and do not love false oaths — for all these things I hate, declares the LORD. ¹⁸The word of the LORD of

Armies came to me: ¹⁹This is what the LORD of Armies says: The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth month, the fast of the seventh month, and the fast of the tenth month will become occasions of joy and gladness and cheerful festivals for the house of Judah. But love truth and peace. ²⁰This is what the LORD of Armies says: Peoples will yet come — the inhabitants of many cities. ²¹The inhabitants of one city will go to another, saying, 'Let us go at once to seek the favor of the LORD and to seek the LORD of Armies. I myself am going!' ²²Many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of Armies in Jerusalem and to seek the favor of the LORD. ²³This is what the LORD of Armies says: In those days, ten men from nations of every language will take hold — they will grasp the garment of a Judean, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The first of ten oracle introductions in this chapter. The compressed formula signals the beginning of a concentrated sequence of divine promises.
2. The oracle opens with the same jealousy language as 1:14, creating an inclusio framing the entire vision section. The cognate accusative qin'ah gedolah ('a great jealousy/zeal') is intensified by the addition of chemah gedolah ('great fury/heat'). God's jealousy is not petty but fierce — the heat (chemah) of a husband defending his wife. This passionate, possessive love drives the entire restoration program.
3. God's return to Zion (shavti el-tsiyyon) fulfills the promise of 1:16. The verb shakhanti ('I will dwell') is from the Shekhinah root — God's permanent, tangible dwelling presence. The renaming of Jerusalem as ir ha'emet ('City of Faithfulness/Truth') and the temple mount as har haqqodesh ('the Holy Mountain') indicates transformation of character, not just restoration of buildings. The city's new names reflect God's character dwelling within it.
4. This is one of the most moving images in prophetic literature. The presence of elderly people in the city streets — frail, leaning on staffs — is a sign of two things: peace (no siege, no violence) and longevity (people live to old age instead of dying in war or famine). The word rehov ('broad open place, plaza') was where community life happened. In a city that had been emptied by exile, the vision of crowded streets where the elderly sit safely is deeply emotional.
5. The companion image to verse 4: where the elderly sit peacefully, children play freely. Together they represent the full spectrum of age — the most vulnerable members of society — thriving in safety. Children playing in the streets means there is no fear, no danger, no reason to keep them hidden indoors. This reverses the horror of Lamentations 2:11-12, 19, where children collapsed from hunger in the city's open places.
6. The word yippale ('wonderful, impossible, beyond comprehension') is from the root p-l-' — the same root used for God's wonders in the Exodus (Exodus 15:11). God acknowledges that his promises may seem too good to be true to the struggling remnant, but the rhetorical question makes the point: human impossibility does not constrain divine ability. What staggers human imagination is normal for God.
7. The gathering from east and west — erets mizrach and erets mevo hashamesh ('land of the sunrise' and 'land of the setting sun') — represents complete ingathering from the entire diaspora. The verb moshia ('saving, delivering') is from the root y-sh-', the same root as yeshu'ah ('salvation') and the name Yeshua/Joshua/Jesus. God's salvation is not abstract but geographic — bringing people physically home.
8. The covenant formula — 'they will be my people and I will be their God' — reaches back to Exodus 6:7 and forward to Jeremiah 31:33 and Ezekiel 37:27. The additions be'emet uvitsedaqah ('in faithfulness and in righteousness') are significant: the renewed covenant relationship will be characterized by emet (trustworthiness, reliability) and tsedaqah (right relationship, justice). These qualities describe both God's character and the community's conduct.
9. The encouragement techezeqnah yedeikhem ('let your hands be strong') uses the same root (ch-z-q) as the three-fold 'be strong' in Haggai 2:4. Strong hands are working hands — the exhortation is to persevere in the construction. The 'prophets' present at the foundation-laying include Haggai and Zechariah himself (Ezra 5:1-2). The verse creates a bridge between the prophetic word and the physical labor of rebuilding.
10. God describes the pre-rebuilding conditions: economic collapse (no wages), insecurity (no shalom for travelers), and social breakdown (neighbor against neighbor). The startling admission va'ashallach ('and I set/sent') — God claims responsibility for the social discord. This is consistent with the prophetic understanding that covenant consequences, including community breakdown, are divinely orchestrated discipline.
11. The pivot word attah ('now') marks the transition from past judgment to present grace. God's relationship with the remnant changes — the era of discipline gives way to blessing. The phrase lo kayyamim harishonim ('not as in the former days') is a covenant reset.
12. The phrase zera hashshalom ('seed of peace') is evocative — 'peace will be sown' like grain, producing a harvest of blessing. The triad of vine, ground, and heavens giving their produce reverses the covenant curses of Haggai 1:6-11 and Deuteronomy 28:23-24. The verb vehinchalti ('I will cause to inherit/possess') uses inheritance language — God gives these blessings as permanent possession, not temporary relief.
13. The transformation is complete: from qelalah ('curse') among the nations to berakhah ('blessing'). To be a 'curse among the nations' means other peoples used Israel's name in curse formulas ('May you become like Israel!'). To become a 'blessing' means the opposite ('May you be blessed like Israel!'). This echoes the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 12:2-3: 'you will be a blessing... all the families of the earth will be blessed through you.' The double encouragement 'Do not fear, let your hands be strong' brackets the promise with courage.

14. The verb *zamamti* ('I resolved, I planned') indicates deliberate, purposeful intention — God's judgment was not impulsive but calculated. The phrase *velo nichamti* ('and I did not relent') uses *nacham*, which can mean 'repent, relent, change one's mind.' God's judgment was irreversible once his patience was exhausted. This establishes a basis for the promise in verse 15: just as the judgment was irrevocable, so the blessing will be irrevocable.
15. The parallel is deliberate: the same verb *zamamti* ('I resolved') used for judgment (v. 14) is now used for blessing. God's determination to bless is as unshakeable as his determination to punish was. The command *al-tira'u* ('do not be afraid') responds to the community's anxiety about whether God's favor is permanent.
16. The ethical demands match the blessings — God's favor requires covenant response. The phrase *mishpat shalom* ('verdicts of peace/wholeness') is an unusual pairing: justice that produces shalom, not merely correct legal rulings but restorative judgments that heal relationships. The 'gates' (*she'areikhem*) were where legal proceedings took place in ancient Israelite cities (cf. Ruth 4:1; Deuteronomy 22:15).
17. The prohibitions complement the commands of verse 16: positive ethics (speak truth, render justice) paired with negative prohibitions (do not plot evil, do not love false oaths). The phrase *asher saneti* ('which I hate') expresses divine revulsion — these are not merely violations of rules but offenses against God's character. The word *shevu'at sheqer* ('false oath') connects back to the flying scroll vision (5:3-4), where those who swear falsely are targeted by the covenant curse.
18. A fresh reception formula introduces the oracle that finally answers the original question from 7:3 about fasting.
19. Finally, the answer to the fasting question from 7:3 — and it goes far beyond what was asked. Not just the fifth-month fast but all four commemorative fasts will be transformed from mourning into celebration. The four fasts commemorated: (1) fourth month — breach of Jerusalem's walls (2 Kings 25:3-4), (2) fifth month — temple destruction, (3) seventh month — Gedaliah's assassination, (4) tenth month — beginning of the siege. God transforms every memory of disaster into a festival. The closing imperative — 'love truth and peace' (*ha'emet vehashalom ehavu*) — conditions the transformation on ethical commitment.
20. The vision now extends beyond Israel to the nations. The phrase *od asher* ('yet, it will still happen that') expresses confident expectation. The picture of peoples (*ammim*) and inhabitants of many cities streaming toward Jerusalem begins a universalist climax that will build through verse 23.
21. The urgency of the invitation — *nelekhah halokh* ('let us go, going!' — the infinitive absolute intensifies) — expresses eager, contagious enthusiasm. The response 'I myself am going!' (*elekhah gam-ani*) shows individuals making personal decisions to join the pilgrimage. The movement is spontaneous, voluntary, and spreading from city to city. The verb *levalles* ('to seek the favor,' literally 'to soften the face of') is the same used in 7:2 — now it is gentile nations, not Israelite delegations, seeking God.
22. The scale expands: not just scattered individuals but *ammim rabbim vegoyim atsumin* ('many peoples and mighty nations'). The word *atsumin* ('mighty, powerful') emphasizes that these are not weak, desperate peoples but strong nations voluntarily drawn to Jerusalem's God. This vision fulfills Isaiah 2:2-3 and Micah 4:1-2 — the nations streaming to Zion.
23. The final oracle is the most vivid image of universal attraction to Israel's God. Ten men (symbolic completeness) from *mikol leshonot haggoyim* ('from all the languages of the nations') seize a single Jew's garment — the gesture of desperate, eager appeal (cf. Isaiah 4:1). The phrase *Elohim immakhem* ('God is with you') is the Immanuel promise (Isaiah 7:14) applied to the whole people. Israel's ultimate calling is fulfilled: they become so visibly blessed, so clearly favored by God, that the nations cannot resist joining themselves to Israel's God. The vision does not describe conquest or coercion but attraction — the drawing power of visible divine presence.

9

Summary: Zechariah 9 opens the second major section of the book (often called 'Second Zechariah,' chapters 9-14) with an oracle against the surrounding nations — Damascus, Hamath, Tyre, Sidon, and the Philistine cities — followed by one of the most famous messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Bible: the king who comes to Jerusalem humble and riding on a donkey (v. 9). The chapter then promises the abolition of war chariots, the proclamation of peace to the nations, the release of prisoners from the waterless pit, and the restoration of Judah and Ephraim as God's weapons against Greece.

*What Makes This Remarkable: Verse 9 — 'Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey' — is quoted in Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15 as fulfilled in Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The Hebrew word *ani* ('humble, afflicted') describes a king who is the opposite of imperial power — he does not ride a war horse but a donkey, the mount of peace. Verse 10 extends the reversal: this king abolishes chariots and war bows and proclaims peace to the nations. The juxtaposition of military language (God wielding Judah as a bow and Ephraim as an arrow, vv. 13-14) with the peace-king creates deliberate theological tension.*

Translation Friction: The transition from judgment on surrounding nations (vv. 1-8) to the messianic king entry (v. 9) is abrupt, characteristic of Second Zechariah's literary style. The phrase nosha' in verse 9 is a niph'al participle: 'saved, delivered, having received salvation' — the king is not primarily a savior but one who has been saved/vindicated by God. We rendered it as 'delivered' to capture the passive sense. The 'blood of your covenant' (v. 11) is debated — does it refer to the Sinai covenant (Exodus 24:8) or a broader covenant concept? We preserved the ambiguity.

Connections: The oracle against Tyre (vv. 2-4) echoes Ezekiel 26-28. The messianic king on a donkey (v. 9) is quoted in Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15. The abolition of war implements (v. 10) connects to Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3. The 'blood of your covenant' (v. 11) echoes Exodus 24:8 and is invoked by Jesus at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:28). The 'prisoners of hope' (v. 12) and the 'waterless pit' connect to Joseph's story (Genesis 37:24) and Jeremiah's imprisonment (Jeremiah 38:6). The warfare against 'sons of Greece' (v. 13) is one of the few explicit references to Greece in prophetic literature.

¹An oracle: The word of the LORD against the land of Hadrach, with Damascus as its resting place — for the eyes of humanity and all the tribes of Israel are on the LORD — ²and also Hamath, which borders it, and Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise. ³Tyre has built herself a fortress and heaped up silver like dust and gold like mud in the streets. ⁴But look — the Lord will dispossess her and strike down her power in the sea, and she will be consumed by fire. ⁵Ashkelon will see it and be afraid. Gaza too will writhe in anguish, and Ekron — for her hope will be put to shame. The king will perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon will not be inhabited. ⁶A mixed people will settle in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines. ⁷I will remove the blood from their mouth and the detestable things from between their teeth. The one who remains will also belong to our God — he will be like a clan leader in Judah, and Ekron will be like the Jebusites. ⁸I will camp around my house as a guard, against those who come and go. No oppressor will march against them again, for now I am watching with my own eyes.

⁹Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, daughter of Jerusalem!
See — your king comes to you,
righteous and delivered,
humble, and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem.
The battle bow will be broken,
and he will proclaim peace to the nations.
His dominion will extend from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

¹¹As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, I have set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. ¹²Return to your stronghold, prisoners of hope! Even today I declare: I will restore double to you.

¹³For I have bent Judah as my bow
and loaded Ephraim as my arrow.
I will rouse your sons, Zion,
against your sons, Greece,
and wield you like a warrior's sword.

¹⁴The LORD will appear over them,
and his arrow will flash like lightning.
The Lord GOD will sound the trumpet

and march in the storm winds of the south.

¹⁵The LORD of Armies will shield them. They will devour and trample the sling stones. They will drink and roar like wine. They will be full like the sacrificial basin, drenched like the corners of the altar. ¹⁶The LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown. ¹⁷How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! Grain will make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word *massa* ('oracle, burden') introduces a weighty prophetic pronouncement. Hadrach is a region in Syria mentioned in Assyrian texts but not elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Damascus as *menuchato* ('its resting place') means the oracle settles on Damascus — the word of the LORD takes up residence there as a judgment. The difficult phrase *ein adam* ('eye of humanity/man') may mean God's eye is on humanity, or humanity's eyes are on God — the Hebrew is genuinely ambiguous. We follow the reading that humanity and Israel alike look to the LORD.
2. Hamath, Tyre, and Sidon are swept into the oracle's scope. Tyre's wisdom (*chokhmah*) refers to its commercial acumen and strategic prowess — Ezekiel 28:3-5 describes Tyre's wisdom in similar terms. The 'though' (*ki*) with the adjective acknowledges Tyre's famed cleverness while implying it will not save the city from divine judgment.
3. The wordplay *tsor/matsor* ('Tyre/fortress') is untranslatable — the city's name sounds like the Hebrew word for 'siege-work' or 'stronghold.' Tyre's legendary wealth is described with two comparisons: silver as common as dust, gold as plentiful as street mud. The very abundance that seems to guarantee security becomes evidence that material wealth cannot protect against divine judgment.
4. The title *Adonai* ('the Lord,' not YHWH) is used here. The verb *yorishannah* ('will dispossess her') means to take away her inheritance/possession — God strips Tyre of everything she has accumulated. The phrase 'her power in the sea' reflects Tyre's island fortress position. Alexander the Great fulfilled this prophetically in 332 BCE by building a causeway to the island city and burning it. The threefold judgment — dispossession, military defeat, fire — is comprehensive.
5. The Philistine cities react with terror to Tyre's fall, recognizing their own vulnerability. The verbs escalate: *tira* ('fear'), *tachil me'od* ('writhe greatly'), *hovish mabbatah* ('her hope is shamed'). Ekron's 'hope' (*mabbat*) was apparently pinned on Tyre's survival — when Tyre falls, Ekron's confidence collapses. The loss of Gaza's king and Ashkelon's depopulation represent total political and demographic devastation.
6. The word *mamzer* is traditionally rendered 'bastard' but more broadly means a person of mixed or illegitimate heritage — in this context, foreign settlers replacing the original population. The verb *vehikhрати* ('I will cut off') uses the covenant-curse language of *karath* ('to cut off from the community'). Philistine pride (*ge'on*) — their distinctive national identity — will be destroyed.
7. The bloody food and detestable things (*shiqquts*) refer to pagan sacrificial practices — eating blood and consuming food offered to idols. God will purge these from the Philistine survivors. The promise that the remnant will 'belong to our God' (*le'eloheinu*) is remarkable — Philistine survivors are incorporated into the covenant community. The comparison to a 'clan leader in Judah' (*alluph biyhudah*) elevates them, and 'Ekron like the Jebusites' means integration into Israel, as the Jebusites of Jerusalem were absorbed after David's conquest.
8. God stations himself as a military guard (*chaniti*, 'I will encamp') around 'my house' — either the temple or the land of Israel itself. The phrase *me'over umishav* ('from one passing through and returning') may describe armies marching back and forth through Israel's land, a persistent historical trauma. The declaration *ra'iti be'ainai* ('I have seen with my eyes') is deeply personal — God is no longer distant but actively watching and protecting.
9. This is one of the most quoted messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Bible, cited in Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15 for Jesus's entry into Jerusalem. The poetic structure uses synonymous parallelism: Zion/Jerusalem, rejoice/shout, donkey/colt. The word *nosha* is crucial — it is passive/reflexive (*niphal*), meaning 'saved, delivered, vindicated,' not active 'saving others.' The king is himself the recipient of divine salvation. The word *ani* ('humble, poor, afflicted') is the same word used for the righteous poor throughout the Psalms (Psalm 22:24; 34:6). The Hebrew poetry uses donkey/colt parallelism, not two separate animals — Matthew's literal reading of two animals reflects a misunderstanding of Hebrew poetic parallelism.
10. The abolition of war implements — chariot, horse, bow — is remarkable because it includes Israel's own weapons, not just the enemy's. The messianic king disarms his own nation before proclaiming peace to the nations. The universal scope — 'from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth' — echoes Psalm 72:8, a royal psalm attributed to Solomon. The 'River' (*nahar*) is the Euphrates, the traditional eastern boundary of the promised land (Genesis 15:18). The vision extends the messianic kingdom to the furthest reaches of the earth.
11. The 'blood of your covenant' (*dam beritakh*) is a direct allusion to Exodus 24:8, the covenant ratification ceremony at Sinai. Jesus quotes this phrase at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:28). The 'waterless pit' (*bor ein mayim*) is a cistern used as a prison — dark, deep, without water to sustain life. The prisoners (*asiraikh*) may represent the exiles in Babylon or, more broadly, all who are held captive by hopelessness. God's liberation is based on the covenant — the blood already shed creates an unbreakable obligation to rescue.
12. The phrase *asirei hatiqvah* ('prisoners of hope') is one of the most evocative in prophetic literature — they are captives, but captives who still hope. Their imprisonment has not destroyed their expectation of God's faithfulness. The 'stronghold' (*bitsaron*) may be Jerusalem or God himself as a place of refuge. The promise of *mishneh* ('double') restoration echoes Isaiah 61:7 — God does not merely restore what was lost but doubles it. The 'even today' (*gam hayyom*) creates urgency: the restoration begins now.

13. God himself becomes the warrior, using Judah as his bow and Ephraim as his arrow. The reunification of north (Ephraim) and south (Judah) as complementary weapons reverses the division of the monarchy. The explicit mention of Yavan ('Greece') is one of the most specific future references in prophetic literature — some scholars use it to date Second Zechariah to the Greek period (after Alexander), while others see it as genuine prophecy. The final image — God wielding Zion like a warrior's sword — pictures the people not as agents acting independently but as instruments in God's hand.
14. A theophany — God appears visibly (yera'eh) over his people as a divine warrior. The imagery combines meteorological phenomena with military language: arrows like lightning (baraq), trumpet blast (shophar), and storm winds (sa'arot). The 'south' (teman) may refer to the traditional direction of God's approach (cf. Habakkuk 3:3; Judges 5:4) — God comes from Sinai/the southern wilderness. The divine warrior motif reaches back to the Exodus (Exodus 15:3) and the conquest (Joshua 5:13-15).
15. The imagery is violent and ecstatic — the victorious warriors consume, trample, drink, and roar. The sling stones (avnei qela) are enemy projectiles that are rendered harmless — trampled underfoot. The comparison to the sacrificial basin (mizraq) and altar corners (zaviyyot mizbeach), which were splashed with blood during offerings, may suggest that the battle itself becomes a sacrifice. The verse combines warrior imagery with cultic imagery, making the military victory a sacred act.
16. The shift from violent warrior imagery to tender shepherd imagery — ketson ammo ('as the flock of his people') — is characteristic of the prophetic dialectic between God as warrior and God as shepherd. The final image transforms the people into avnei nezer ('crown stones, jewels') sparkling (mitnosot, 'lifting themselves up, glittering') over God's land. The people themselves become God's crown jewels — precious, visible, valued.
17. The chapter closes with an exclamation of wonder at God's goodness (tuvo) and beauty (yofyo). The agricultural abundance — grain for young men, new wine for young women — represents the full blessing of covenant faithfulness. The verb yenovev ('will cause to flourish, will make bud') connects agricultural fertility to human vitality — when the land flourishes, the people flourish.

10

Summary: *Zechariah 10 continues the restoration themes of Second Zechariah, opening with a call to ask the LORD for rain rather than seeking it from idols and diviners. God's anger burns against false shepherds (leaders) who have failed the flock, and he promises to transform the house of Judah from a neglected flock into a majestic war horse. The chapter envisions the restoration of both Judah and Joseph (Ephraim), their strengthening, the gathering of the diaspora from Egypt and Assyria, and their empowerment to walk in the LORD's name.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The chapter contains one of the strongest expressions of God's compassion for the northern kingdom (Ephraim/Joseph) in post-exilic literature. While most post-exilic prophecy focuses on Judah, Zechariah insists that God will also restore the northern tribes exiled by Assyria in 722 BCE. The pastoral metaphor dominates: the people are sheep without a proper shepherd, abused by worthless leaders ('he-goats'), but God himself will become their shepherd-warrior, transforming them from scattered victims into confident warriors. The whistle/signal imagery in verse 8 — 'I will whistle for them and gather them' — pictures God as a shepherd using a distinctive call to summon his flock home.*

Translation Friction: *The teraphim and diviners (v. 2) raise questions about the persistence of pagan practices in the post-exilic community. The shift from shepherd imagery to military imagery (cornerstone, tent peg, battle bow, v. 4) is abrupt — all four images come from Judah, suggesting Judah will produce comprehensive leadership. The 'whistle' (sharaq, v. 8) is literally a hiss or sharp whistle used by shepherds and beekeepers — we rendered it as 'whistle' for clarity.*

Connections: *The rain theology (v. 1) connects to Deuteronomy 11:13-14 and Joel 2:23. The false shepherds echo Ezekiel 34 and anticipate Zechariah 11. The cornerstone/tent peg/battle bow imagery (v. 4) connects to Isaiah 22:23-25 (Eliakim as the tent peg) and Isaiah 28:16 (the cornerstone in Zion). The gathering from Egypt and Assyria (vv. 10-11) echoes Isaiah 11:11-16. The sea passage and river drying (v. 11) reprise the Exodus and Jordan crossing.*

¹Ask the LORD for rain in the season of the spring rains. The LORD makes the storm clouds, and he gives showers of rain to them — vegetation in the field for everyone. ²For the household idols speak nonsense, and the diviners see lies. They tell false dreams and offer empty comfort. Therefore the people wander like sheep; they suffer because there is no shepherd. ³My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish the he-goats. For the LORD of Armies will attend to his flock, the house of Judah, and will make them like his majestic war horse in battle. ⁴From them will come the cornerstone, from them the

tent peg, from them the battle bow — from them every ruler together. ⁵They will be like warriors trampling the mud of the streets in battle. They will fight because the LORD is with them, and the horsemen will be put to shame. ⁶I will strengthen the house of Judah and save the house of Joseph. I will restore them because I have had compassion on them. They will be as though I had never rejected them, for I am the LORD their God, and I will answer them. ⁷Ephraim will be like a warrior, and their hearts will rejoice as with wine. Their children will see it and be glad — their hearts will exult in the LORD. ⁸I will whistle for them and gather them, for I have redeemed them. They will be as numerous as they once were. ⁹Though I scattered them among the peoples, in distant lands they will remember me. They will live, they and their children, and they will return. ¹⁰I will bring them back from the land of Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon, and there will not be enough room for them. ¹¹He will pass through the sea of distress and strike the waves of the sea; all the depths of the Nile will dry up. The pride of Assyria will be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt will depart. ¹²I will strengthen them in the LORD, and in his name they will walk, declares the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The malqosh ('latter/spring rain') was the critical late-season rainfall that brought the grain harvest to maturity (March-April). The emphasis is on asking the LORD rather than seeking rain from pagan sources (as verse 2 will contrast). The word chazizim ('storm clouds, lightning bolts') emphasizes God's power over weather — he is the source, not Baal (the Canaanite storm deity) or household idols.
2. The teraphim ('household idols') are small deity figurines used for divination — their persistence into the post-exilic period is a recurring prophetic concern. The catalog of deception — aven ('emptiness, evil'), sheqer ('lies'), chalomot hashav ('worthless dreams'), hevel ('vapor, futility') — systematically strips false religion of all credibility. The consequence: the people nas'u ('wander, journey') like sheep without a shepherd. The lack of a ro'eh ('shepherd') is both a spiritual diagnosis (no true divine guidance) and a political one (no legitimate leadership).
3. The ro'im ('shepherds') are the leaders, and the attudim ('he-goats') are the dominant animals who bully the flock — both metaphors for corrupt leadership. The verb paqad has a double meaning: God will 'punish' (paqad) the he-goats but 'attend to, visit' (paqad) his flock — the same verb carries opposite implications depending on the object. The transformation from sheep to sus hodo ('his majestic horse') is dramatic: the victimized flock becomes a powerful war horse under God's direct command.
4. Four leadership images emerge 'from them' (from Judah): pinnah ('cornerstone') — the foundational stone of a building (cf. Isaiah 28:16); yated ('tent peg') — the stabilizing anchor (cf. Isaiah 22:23-25, applied to Eliakim); qeset milchamah ('battle bow') — military leadership; and noges ('ruler/driver') — authoritative governance. Together they picture comprehensive leadership: structural foundation, domestic stability, military power, and administrative authority — all originating from Judah.
5. The formerly helpless sheep become gibborim ('warriors, mighty men'). The muddy street trampling is a vivid image of urban combat. The key theological statement: ki YHWH immam ('because the LORD is with them') — their transformation from victims to warriors is entirely due to divine presence, not human improvement. The enemy's horsemen (rokhevei susim) are shamed — their military superiority cannot overcome divine empowerment.
6. The pairing of 'house of Judah' and 'house of Joseph' reunites the divided kingdoms — south and north, both restored. The verb richamtim ('I have had compassion on them') is from the womb-root r-ch-m, expressing God's deep maternal tenderness. The most remarkable promise: vehayu ka'asher lo-zenachtim ('they will be as though I had never rejected them') — God does not merely forgive but erases the effects of rejection entirely. The covenant relationship is restored to its original state, as if exile never happened.
7. Ephraim's transformation mirrors Judah's (v. 5): from scattered sheep to gibborim ('warriors'). The joy is compared to wine — full-bodied, intoxicating, overwhelming. The generational dimension is important: uvneihem yir'u vesamchu ('their children will see and be glad') — the blessing extends to the next generation, reversing the generational curse of exile.
8. The verb 'eshreqah ('I will whistle/hiss') is the distinctive sound a shepherd uses to call his flock — sharp, piercing, immediately recognizable. It may also refer to the whistle used by beekeepers to call their swarms (cf. Isaiah 7:18). The verb peditim ('I have redeemed them') is from padah ('to ransom, to redeem by payment'), indicating God has paid the price to secure their release. The promise of numerical restoration — 'as numerous as they once were' — reverses the decimation of exile.
9. The verb ezra'em ('I sowed/scattered them') uses agricultural language for diaspora — God sowed them like seed among the nations. But scattered seed produces a harvest: they will 'remember me' (yizkeruni) and return. The verb zakhar ('remember') in covenantal contexts means more than mental recall — it means to act on the covenant, to re-engage with the relationship. The promise vehayu et-beneihem ('they will live, they and their children') guarantees generational survival in exile and eventual return.
10. Egypt and Assyria represent the two directions of exile — south and north. Gilead (Transjordan) and Lebanon (northern border) represent the full territorial extent of the promised land. The climactic promise — velo yimmatse lahem ('there will not be enough room for them') — pictures a population so vast that the land cannot contain them all, echoing the unwallied-city promise of 2:4.

11. The language reprises the Exodus: God strikes the sea, the waters part, the oppressing power is humbled. The 'sea of distress' (yam tsarah) is a compressed metaphor — the sea itself becomes the distress through which God leads his people. The drying of the Nile's depths attacks Egypt at its source of life and power. The parallel humbling of Assyria's pride (ge'on) and Egypt's scepter (shevet) represents the comprehensive overthrow of all oppressive powers. This is a new Exodus, greater than the first.
12. The chapter closes with a summary promise: gibbarti ('I will strengthen') echoes verse 6, and the phrase uvishmo yithallakhu ('in his name they will walk') describes a life lived entirely under divine authority and identity. The verb hithallekh ('to walk about, to conduct oneself') is the same used for Enoch and Noah 'walking with God' (Genesis 5:22; 6:9). The people's restored life will be a continuous walk in the LORD's name — bearing his identity into the world.

11

Summary: *Zechariah 11 is one of the most dramatic and disturbing chapters in the prophets. It opens with a devastating taunt song against Lebanon, Bashan, and the Jordan — their mighty trees are falling. The chapter then shifts to a prophetic sign-act: Zechariah is commanded to shepherd a flock destined for slaughter, representing the people exploited by their own leaders. He takes two staves named 'Favor' and 'Unity,' shepherds the flock, but the ungrateful people reject him. He breaks the staff 'Favor' (annulling God's covenant restraint on the nations), then asks for his wages and receives thirty pieces of silver — the price of a slave — which God commands him to throw to the potter in the temple. He breaks the second staff 'Unity' (ending the brotherhood between Judah and Israel). Finally, God commands him to take on the role of a worthless shepherd, pronouncing woe on the foolish shepherd who abandons the flock.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The thirty pieces of silver (v. 12-13) is one of the most striking prophetic connections to the New Testament: Matthew 27:3-10 quotes this passage in connection with Judas's betrayal payment, though Matthew attributes the quotation to Jeremiah (a long-standing textual puzzle). The phrase 'the lordly price at which I was valued by them' (v. 13) drips with divine sarcasm — thirty shekels was the legal compensation for a slave gored by an ox (Exodus 21:32). God is valued at slave-price. The two staves — No'am ('Favor/Grace') and Chovlim ('Unity/Bonds') — represent the two dimensions of covenant blessing: God's gracious protection and the unity of his people. Both are broken.*

Translation Friction: *The relationship between the prophetic sign-act and historical reality is complex. The shepherd figure shifts between Zechariah, God, and a messianic figure without clear transitions. The 'three shepherds' removed in one month (v. 8) is one of the most debated identities in the Hebrew Bible — over forty interpretations have been proposed, and no consensus exists. We note the interpretive difficulty without forcing a solution. The word yotser ('potter') in verse 13 may be a scribal variant for otsar ('treasury') — both make sense contextually. The MT reads 'potter,' but throwing silver to a potter in the temple is unusual.*

Connections: *The thirty pieces of silver is cited in Matthew 27:9-10 (attributed to Jeremiah). The shepherd imagery connects to Ezekiel 34 and John 10. The breaking of covenant echoes Leviticus 26:44-45. The worthless shepherd (v. 17) connects to Ezekiel 34:2-10 and anticipates the shepherd struck in 13:7. The 'lordly price' language echoes the slave valuation of Exodus 21:32.*

1Open your doors, Lebanon, so that fire may consume your cedars! 2Wail, cypress, for the cedar has fallen — the mighty ones are destroyed! Wail, oaks of Bashan, for the dense forest has been brought down! 3Listen — the wailing of the shepherds, for their glory is destroyed! Listen — the roaring of the young lions, for the thicket of the Jordan is ravaged! 4This is what the LORD my God says: Shepherd the flock marked for slaughter. 5Those who buy them slaughter them and feel no guilt. Those who sell them say, 'Blessed be the LORD, I am rich!' And their own shepherds have no compassion for them. 6For I will no longer have compassion on the inhabitants of the land — declares the LORD. I will hand each person over to his neighbor and to his king. They will crush the land, and I will not rescue anyone from their hand. 7So I shepherded the flock marked for slaughter — the afflicted of the flock. I took two staves; one I called Favor and the other I called Unity. And I shepherded the flock. 8I dismissed three shepherds in a single month. I grew impatient with them, and they also detested me. 9Then I said, "I will not shepherd you. Let the dying die, and the one perishing perish, and let those who remain devour one another's

flesh." ¹⁰I took my staff Favor and broke it, annulling my covenant that I had made with all the peoples. ¹¹It was annulled on that day, and the afflicted of the flock who were watching me recognized that it was the word of the LORD. ¹²I said to them, "If it seems right to you, give me my wages; if not, keep them." So they weighed out my wages — thirty pieces of silver. ¹³The LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter — that magnificent price at which they valued me!" So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the LORD. ¹⁴Then I broke my second staff, Unity, to annul the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. ¹⁵Then the LORD said to me, "Take for yourself the equipment of a foolish shepherd. ¹⁶For I am about to raise up a shepherd in the land who will not attend to the perishing, who will not seek the young, who will not heal the injured, who will not nourish the healthy. Instead, he will devour the flesh of the fat ones and tear off their hooves.

¹⁷Woe to the worthless shepherd who abandons the flock!
 A sword against his arm and against his right eye!
 His arm will wither completely,
 and his right eye will go totally blind.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The taunt song addresses Lebanon's famous cedars — symbols of pride, wealth, and strength throughout the prophets (cf. Isaiah 2:13; 10:34; Ezekiel 31). The command to 'open your doors' is sarcastic: Lebanon is invited to welcome its own destruction. Cedar was the premium building material of the ancient Near East, used in both Solomon's temple and palace. The cedars may symbolize the temple, the royal house, or powerful leaders.
2. A cascade of mourning: if the cedars (the greatest trees) have fallen, the cypresses (lesser trees) should wail because they are next. The 'oaks of Bashan' (the fertile plateau east of the Jordan) represent another tier of strength. The ya'ar habatsir ('dense/inaccessible forest') has been brought down — nothing is secure. The progression from Lebanon's cedars to Bashan's oaks to the impenetrable forest suggests comprehensive destruction from north to east.
3. The shepherds wail because their addartam ('their glory/majesty,' or 'their pasture' — the word is ambiguous) is destroyed. The young lions (kephirim) roar because the ge'on hayyarden ('pride/thicket of the Jordan') — the dense vegetation along the Jordan River valley — has been devastated. The Jordan thicket was famous for harboring lions (Jeremiah 49:19; 50:44). The taunt song moves from trees to shepherds to lions, encompassing all who depend on the land.
4. The prophetic sign-act begins. God commands Zechariah to shepherd a tson haharegah ('flock of slaughter') — sheep already destined to be killed. The phrase is horrifying: these are God's own people, treated as animals to be butchered by their own leaders. The genitive construction 'flock of slaughter' means slaughter is their defining characteristic — it is what they are destined for under current leadership.
5. Three levels of exploitation: buyers who kill without guilt (velo ye'shamu — they feel no moral weight), sellers who invoke God's name to celebrate their profit (the blasphemous barukh YHWH va'ashir, 'Blessed be the LORD, I am rich!'), and shepherds (their own leaders) who show no compassion (lo yachmol). The invocation of God's blessing over exploitative commerce is the ultimate profanation — using covenant language to sanctify injustice.
6. God withdraws compassion (lo echmol) — the divine restraint that has protected the people is removed. The consequences are neighbor-against-neighbor violence and royal oppression. The verb kitetu ('they will crush') is comprehensive devastation. The refusal to rescue (lo atsil miyyadam) is the most terrifying statement: God will not intervene. This is the theological equivalent of removing the hand from the tiller — the ship is left to the storm.
7. The prophet obeys and begins shepherding. The phrase aniyeyi hatson ('the afflicted/poor of the flock') specifies that his ministry is particularly to the vulnerable members. The two staffs are named symbolically: No'am ('Favor, Grace, Pleasantness') represents God's gracious covenant protection, and Chovlim ('Unity, Bonds, Ropes') represents the bond between Judah and Israel. Both names will become significant when the staffs are broken.
8. The identity of the 'three shepherds' is one of the most debated questions in Zechariah scholarship — over forty proposals exist, ranging from specific historical rulers to the three offices of prophet, priest, and king. No consensus has been reached, and we do not force an identification. The mutual antipathy — 'I grew impatient with them and they detested me' — describes a complete breakdown of the shepherd-flock relationship. The verb bachalu ('they detested, loathed') expresses visceral disgust.
9. The shepherd's resignation is total and devastating. The three fates are progressive: death, disappearance, and self-destruction (cannibalism). The phrase 'devour one another's flesh' (to'khalnah ishshsha et-besar re'utah) is not merely metaphorical — it echoes the siege cannibalism described in Lamentations 4:10 and Deuteronomy 28:53-57. When divine shepherding is withdrawn, the community consumes itself.
10. The breaking of the staff No'am ('Favor') symbolizes the annulment of God's covenant restraint on the nations — the agreement that had kept the surrounding peoples from overwhelming Israel. The word lehapher ('to annul, to break') is covenant-termination language. The phrase et kol-ha'ammim ('with all the peoples') refers to a restraining covenant with the nations, not the Sinai covenant with Israel. With this protective barrier removed, the nations are free to do their worst.

11. The 'afflicted of the flock' (aniyyei hatson) — the poor, vulnerable believers — are the ones who perceive the prophetic significance of the staff-breaking. The exploiters do not see; the humble do. The phrase *ki devar-YHWH hu* ('that it was the word of the LORD') indicates their recognition that the prophetic sign-act was divinely authorized, not mere performance.
12. The shepherd requests wages, but with an indifferent tone — '*ve'im-lo chadalu* ('if not, forget it'). The amount — *sheloshim kasef* ('thirty of silver,' thirty shekels) — is the legal compensation for a slave gored by an ox (Exodus 21:32). The insult is deliberate and precise: the divine shepherd is valued at slave-price. Matthew 27:9-10 quotes this passage in connection with Judas's betrayal payment, though he attributes the quotation to Jeremiah — possibly because Jeremiah was placed first in the prophetic scroll collection.
13. God's command drips with sarcasm: *eder hayyeqar* ('the magnificent price') is bitterly ironic — thirty shekels is anything but magnificent. The word *yotser* ('potter') may be a deliberate wordplay on *otsar* ('treasury'); some scholars read 'treasury' here, which would explain throwing money 'in the house of the LORD' more naturally. Matthew 27:5-7 combines both elements — Judas throws the silver into the temple, and the priests use it to buy a potter's field. We follow the MT reading while noting the possible variant.
14. The breaking of Chovlim ('Unity/Bonds') severs the bond between north and south — the hope of reunification expressed in 10:6 is now undermined. The word *achavah* ('brotherhood') is the relational term for the bond between the two kingdoms. Its annulment means not just political division but the dissolution of fraternal identity — they will no longer recognize each other as brothers.
15. A new prophetic sign-act: Zechariah must now embody a *ro'eh evili* ('foolish/worthless shepherd'). The word *evili* ('foolish') in Hebrew denotes moral, not intellectual, deficiency — a shepherd who is willfully negligent. The 'equipment' (*keli*) would include staff and bag, but notably NOT the tools of good shepherding — the worthless shepherd's equipment is for appearance only.
16. The worthless shepherd is described by four failures and two crimes: he neglects the perishing (*nikhchadot*), ignores the young (*na'ar*), refuses to heal the injured (*nishberet*), and does not sustain the healthy (*nitsavah*). Instead, he actively destroys: eating the fat ones' flesh and tearing off their hooves (parting/ripping their hooves — an image of butchery, not shepherding). This anti-shepherd is the dark mirror of the Good Shepherd described in Ezekiel 34:11-16. God raises this figure as judgment — the people who rejected the good shepherd will receive the shepherd they deserve.
17. The woe oracle against the *ro'i ha'elil* ('worthless/idol shepherd') pronounces a two-part curse: his arm (the instrument of strength/action) will wither (*yavosh tivash* — emphatic infinitive absolute for total drying), and his right eye (the organ of perception/leadership) will go blind (*kahoh tikheh* — total darkening). The shepherd who refused to use his arm to protect the flock will lose the arm; the one who refused to watch over them will lose his sight. The punishment fits the crime with precise measure-for-measure justice.

12

Summary: *Zechariah 12 opens the final oracle section of the book (chapters 12-14, introduced as 'the oracle of the word of the LORD concerning Israel'). The chapter envisions a climactic siege of Jerusalem by all the nations, but God transforms the city into 'a cup of staggering' and 'an immovable rock' that defeats every attacker. The leaders of Judah recognize God as their source of strength, and fire consumes the surrounding nations. The chapter culminates in one of the most poignant verses in all prophecy: 'They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only son' (v. 10) — a passage of intense messianic significance. The mourning is described as vast and comprehensive, clan by clan, family by family.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Verse 10 is one of the most theologically loaded verses in the Hebrew Bible. The first person — 'they will look on ME, the one they have pierced' — means God himself is the one who was pierced, yet the mourning is 'for HIM' (third person), creating a mysterious shift from divine first person to a third-person figure. This verse is quoted in John 19:37 at the crucifixion of Jesus and in Revelation 1:7. The Hebrew *daqaru* ('they pierced') is unambiguous — it means to thrust through with a weapon. The mourning described in verses 11-14 is compared to the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddo (v. 11), likely referring to the death of good King Josiah in battle there (2 Chronicles 35:22-25).*

Translation Friction: *The first-person-to-third-person shift in verse 10 ('look on ME... mourn for HIM') is the central interpretive challenge. Various explanations: (1) the pierced one is a representative of God, hence the shift; (2) the text has been altered; (3) the shift is deliberate theological mystery — God identifies with the pierced figure while maintaining distinction. We preserve the shift exactly as the Hebrew reads. The 'mourning of Hadad-rimmon' (v. 11) is debated — Hadad-rimmon may be a place name near Megiddo or a compound divine name (Hadad + Rimmon, both storm deities).*

Connections: The 'cup of staggering' echoes Isaiah 51:17, 22 and Jeremiah 25:15-17. The immovable rock connects to the stone imagery of Daniel 2:34-35 and Isaiah 28:16. The piercing and mourning (v. 10) is quoted in John 19:37 and Revelation 1:7. The mourning for Josiah at Megiddo connects to 2 Chronicles 35:22-25. The clan-by-clan mourning anticipates the purification in chapter 13. The spirit of grace and supplication (v. 10) connects to Joel 2:28-29 and the outpouring of the Spirit.

¹An oracle: The word of the LORD concerning Israel. This is the declaration of the LORD who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the human spirit within a person. ²I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of staggering for all the surrounding peoples. Judah will also be caught up in the siege against Jerusalem. ³On that day I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the peoples. All who try to lift it will be severely injured, even though all the nations of the earth gather against it. ⁴On that day — declares the LORD — I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness. I will keep my eyes open over the house of Judah, but I will strike every horse of the nations with blindness. ⁵Then the leaders of Judah will say in their hearts, 'The inhabitants of Jerusalem are our strength through the LORD of Armies, their God.' ⁶On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a fire pot among timber and like a flaming torch among sheaves. They will consume all the surrounding peoples to the right and to the left, while Jerusalem will again be inhabited in its own place — in Jerusalem. ⁷The LORD will save the tents of Judah first, so that the honor of the house of David and the honor of Jerusalem's inhabitants will not be exalted above Judah. ⁸On that day the LORD will shield the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the weakest among them on that day will be like David, and the house of David will be like God — like the angel of the LORD going before them. ⁹On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. ¹⁰I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me — the one they have pierced — and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. ¹¹On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. ¹²The land will mourn, clan by clan, each by itself: the clan of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the clan of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; ¹³the clan of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the clan of the Shimeites by itself, and their wives by themselves; ¹⁴All the remaining clans — each clan by itself, and their wives by themselves.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The second massa ('oracle/burden') in Second Zechariah (the first was 9:1). The divine credentials are cosmic: God stretches the heavens (creation), lays the earth's foundation (sustaining), and forms the human spirit (intimate personal creation). These three acts encompass the macro-cosmic and the micro-personal — the God who speaks here is both cosmic architect and intimate creator of each person's inner life. This introduction establishes the authority behind the eschatological visions that follow.
2. The image sap ra'al ('cup of staggering/reeling') pictures Jerusalem as a poisoned cup: the nations will drink (attack) but will stagger and collapse from the effects. The same image appears in Isaiah 51:17, 22 and Jeremiah 25:15-17, where the 'cup of God's wrath' makes nations reel. The note about Judah being caught in the siege suggests the surrounding region will be drawn into the conflict involuntarily.
3. The second image: even ma'amasah ('a stone of burden/lifting'). The picture is of a massive stone in a strongman contest — everyone who tries to lift it will injure themselves (sarot yissaretu, 'they will certainly be cut/lacerated'). The combination of the staggering cup and the immovable rock presents Jerusalem as simultaneously toxic and immovable — attacking it destroys the attacker. The phrase kol goyei ha'arets ('all the nations of the earth') establishes the universal scope of the final siege.
4. Three divine strikes against the attacking cavalry: timmahon ('panic/bewilderment'), shigga'on ('madness'), and ivvaron ('blindness'). These three plagues echo the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28:28 exactly — 'The LORD will strike you with madness, blindness, and bewilderment of heart.' The curse intended for disobedient Israel is redirected against the nations. Meanwhile, God 'opens his eyes' (ephqach et-einai) over Judah — watchful protection contrasted with the blinding of enemies.
5. The allufei Yehudah ('leaders/clan chiefs of Judah') recognize that Jerusalem's strength is not military but theological — it comes 'through the LORD of Armies.' The verb amsah ('strength/stronghold for me') acknowledges divine empowerment. The leaders from the surrounding countryside see the city's defense and attribute it correctly to God, not to walls or warriors.
6. Two fire images: kiyor esh be'etsim ('a fire pot among timber') and lappid esh be'amir ('a flaming torch among sheaves'). Both picture the same reality: Judah's leaders, empowered by God, will be irresistible against the surrounding nations. The phrase veyashvah Yerushalaim od tachteiha biYrushalaim ('Jerusalem will again dwell in its place, in Jerusalem') is emphatically redundant — the city will remain exactly where it belongs, unmoved by the siege.

7. God saves the vulnerable rural areas (ohalei Yehudah, 'tents of Judah') before saving the fortified capital, preventing urban arrogance. The phrase *tip'eret beit-David* ('the honor/glorious house of David') suggests the Davidic dynasty still has prestige even without political power. God deliberately structures the deliverance to prevent the city-dwellers from boasting over the countryside — a concern for social equity within the delivered community.
8. The transformation is hyperbolic and deliberate: the *hannikhshal* ('the stumbling one, the weakest') will be *kedavid* ('like David') — Israel's greatest warrior. And David's house will be *ke'lohim* ('like God, like a divine being') — specifically *kemal'akh YHWH* ('like the angel of the LORD') who goes before them as a vanguard. This represents the ultimate empowerment: human weakness becomes divine strength. The angel of the LORD 'before them' evokes the Exodus pillar of cloud and fire (Exodus 14:19).
9. The verb *avaqesh* ('I will seek, I will set out to') indicates deliberate, purposeful divine action — not reactive defense but proactive destruction of all nations that attack Jerusalem. The comprehensive 'all the nations' (*kol-haggoyim*) makes the scope universal.
10. The first-to-third person shift (*elai/alav*, 'on me/for him') is in the Hebrew text and should not be harmonized or smoothed over. The verb *daqaru* ('they pierced') is from *daqar* ('to thrust through, to pierce with a weapon') — it denotes a fatal wound. John 19:37 quotes this verse at the crucifixion: 'They will look on the one they have pierced.' Revelation 1:7 extends it: 'every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.' The mourning comparison — for an only child (*yachid*), for a firstborn (*bekhor*) — represents the most extreme grief in ancient culture. The outpouring of the Spirit enables the recognition and mourning — repentance is itself a divine gift.
11. The reference to *Hadad-rimmon* in the plain of Megiddo most likely refers to the mourning for King Josiah, who was killed in battle against Pharaoh Neco at Megiddo in 609 BCE (2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:22-25). Josiah's death was a national catastrophe — the last good king of Judah, cut down in his prime. The mourning for the pierced one will be equally devastating. *Hadad-rimmon* may be a place name near Megiddo or a compound reference to the storm deities *Hadad* and *Rimmon*, representing mourning rituals.
12. The mourning is described with meticulous detail — each clan separately, men and women separately. This is not public spectacle but deeply personal grief. The house of David represents the royal line. The house of Nathan may refer to David's son Nathan (2 Samuel 5:14) — an alternate branch of the Davidic dynasty — or the prophet Nathan. The separation of men and women intensifies the picture of individual, private mourning.
13. The house of Levi represents the priestly line — the second major division of Israel's leadership after the Davidic monarchy. The *Shimeites* are a sub-clan of Levi (Numbers 3:21). The pairing of David/Nathan (royal) with Levi/Shimei (priestly) means both major leadership structures — kings and priests — mourn privately and deeply. The fourfold repetition of *levad* ('by itself') in verses 12-13 emphasizes the isolation of grief.
14. The final verse extends the mourning to 'all the remaining clans' — no family is excluded. The universality of the grief matches the universality of the guilt: 'they pierced' is collective, and the mourning is collective. The repetition of 'by itself' (*levad*) throughout this section occurs twelve times in verses 12-14, emphasizing the deeply personal nature of this corporate repentance.

13

Summary: Zechariah 13 continues the eschatological vision of chapters 12-14, opening with a fountain for cleansing sin and impurity, then moving to the removal of idols and false prophets from the land. False prophets will be so thoroughly discredited that even their own parents will condemn them, and prophets themselves will deny their calling and claim to be farmers instead. The chapter culminates with the striking of the shepherd (v. 7) — quoted by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane — and the purification of a remnant through fire: two-thirds will be cut off, but one-third will be refined and will call on God's name.

*What Makes This Remarkable: Verse 7 — 'Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered' — is directly quoted by Jesus in Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27 on the night of his arrest, applying it to his own death and the scattering of the disciples. The Hebrew addresses the 'sword' as an agent of God against 'my shepherd' (*ro'i*) and 'the man who is my companion' (*gever amiti*) — an extraordinarily intimate title suggesting someone who stands as God's equal or partner. The refining-by-fire imagery (vv. 8-9) parallels Malachi 3:2-3 and Isaiah 48:10, presenting suffering not as punishment but as purification. The covenant renewal formula in verse 9 — 'I will say, They are my people; and they will say, The LORD is my God' — is the culmination of all covenant promises.*

*Translation Friction: The relationship of 13:7-9 to the preceding context is debated. Some scholars see the shepherd of verse 7 as the worthless shepherd of 11:17, but the intimate titles ('my shepherd,' 'the man who is my companion') suggest a good shepherd — one whose striking leads paradoxically to the purification of the remnant. The phrase *gever amiti* ('the man of my companionship/union') uses *amit*, which appears primarily in Leviticus for one's close associate or covenant partner. We preserve the ambiguity of the shepherd's identity while noting the christological reading.*

Connections: The cleansing fountain (v. 1) connects to Ezekiel 36:25 ('I will sprinkle clean water on you') and John 19:34 (water flowing from Christ's side). The struck shepherd (v. 7) is quoted in Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27. The refining by fire parallels Malachi 3:2-3, Isaiah 48:10, and 1 Peter 1:6-7. The covenant renewal formula (v. 9) echoes Hosea 2:23, Jeremiah 31:33, and Ezekiel 37:27. The two-thirds/one-third remnant echoes Ezekiel 5:1-4.

¹On that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity. ²On that day — declares the LORD of Armies — I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more. I will also remove the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. ³If anyone still prophesies, his own father and mother who bore him will say to him, 'You will not live, because you have spoken lies in the name of the LORD.' And his father and mother who bore him will pierce him when he prophesies. ⁴On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies. They will not put on the hairy cloak in order to deceive. ⁵Each will say, 'I am not a prophet. I am a farmer — the land has been my livelihood since my youth.' ⁶If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds between your arms?' he will say, 'These are wounds I received in the house of my friends.'

⁷"Awake, sword, against my shepherd,
against the man who is my companion!"
declares the LORD of Armies.
"Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered,
and I will turn my hand against the little ones."

⁸In the whole land — declares the LORD — two-thirds will be cut off and perish, but one-third will be left in it.

⁹I will bring the third through the fire
and refine them as silver is refined,
and test them as gold is tested.
They will call on my name,
and I will answer them.
I will say, 'They are my people,'
and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The maqor niphttach ('opened fountain') is a permanent, flowing source of cleansing — not a one-time event but an ongoing provision. The combination lechatat uuleniddah ('for sin and for impurity') covers both moral guilt (chatat, 'sin/missing the mark') and ritual defilement (niddah, 'impurity,' particularly menstrual impurity in Leviticus). Together they represent comprehensive cleansing — nothing is left uncovered. This fountain flows directly from the mourning and repentance described in 12:10-14.
2. Three things are purged: the names of idols (atsabbim, 'shaped images'), the false prophets, and the ruach hattum'ah ('spirit of impurity/uncleanness'). Cutting off the 'names' means erasing them from memory and language — the idols will not even be mentioned. The coupling of 'prophets' (without the qualifier 'false') with the 'spirit of impurity' is jarring — it suggests that prophetic activity itself has become so corrupted that the institution must be removed, not just reformed.
3. The severity is shocking: parents will condemn and even execute their own child for false prophecy. The verb udqaruhu ('they will pierce him') is the same verb (daqar) used in 12:10 for the pierced one — creating an intertextual connection between the two piercings. The law of Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 18:20 mandated death for false prophets; here, even parents enforce it. The repetition of 'his father and mother who bore him' emphasizes the intimacy of the relationship that is overridden by covenant loyalty.
4. The prophetic institution is so thoroughly discredited that prophets will be ashamed (yevoshu) of their own visions. The adderet se'ar ('hairy cloak') was the distinctive garment of prophets (cf. 2 Kings 1:8 for Elijah; Matthew 3:4 for John the Baptist). They will abandon even the outward sign of their calling. The phrase lema'an kachesh ('in order to deceive') reveals the motive behind their prophecy — they were never genuine.
5. The denial is complete: lo navi anokhi ('I am not a prophet') — a striking contrast to Amos 7:14, where the phrase carries different force. The claim to be ish oved adamah ('a man who works the soil') is a retreat into agricultural anonymity. The former false prophet now claims he has always been a farmer. The phrase adam hiqnani minne'urai ('a man/the ground acquired me from my youth') is difficult — it may mean 'someone made me a servant from youth' or 'the land has been my occupation from youth.' We follow the latter reading.

6. The 'wounds between your arms/hands' (makkot bein yadekha) may refer to self-laceration wounds from ecstatic prophetic practices (cf. 1 Kings 18:28, where the prophets of Baal cut themselves). The false prophet's excuse — 'I received them in the house of my friends' (beit me'ahavai) — is a transparent lie: he attributes cult-related wounds to a domestic incident. The phrase bein yadekha is literally 'between your hands,' likely meaning the chest/torso area between the arms. Christian tradition has sometimes read this christologically, but the context is clearly about exposed false prophets.
7. Jesus directly quotes this verse in Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27 on the night of his arrest, applying it to himself. The command is addressed to the 'sword' (cherev) as God's agent — personified and summoned to action. The shepherd is called ro'i ('my shepherd') — God's own shepherd — and gever amiti ('the man who is my companion'). The word amit is deeply intimate, denoting a close associate or covenant partner (Leviticus 6:2; 18:20; 19:11, 15, 17; 24:19; 25:14, 15, 17). The striking of this shepherd is divinely commanded, and the scattering is its consequence. The final phrase — vahashivoti yadi al-hatso'arim ('I will turn my hand upon the little ones') — is ambiguous: 'turn my hand against' can mean judgment or 'turn my hand to' in protection. The context of verses 8-9 suggests a refining purpose.
8. The proportions are devastating: pi-shenayim ('two-thirds,' literally 'a mouth of two') will be cut off (yikkartu) and die (yigva'u). Only the shelishit ('third') survives. This echoes Ezekiel 5:1-4, where the prophet divides his hair into thirds representing different fates for Jerusalem. The severity establishes the remnant theology: survival is not guaranteed by membership in the covenant people but by divine selection through refining fire.
9. The refining metaphor — silver (tsaraph) and gold (bachan) — represents two stages of testing: tsaraph ('smelt, refine') removes dross from silver by heat, and bachan ('test, prove, assay') verifies gold's purity. The surviving third is not merely spared but transformed by fire. The final exchange — amarti ammi hu / vehu yomar YHWH Elohai ('I will say, My people / they will say, The LORD is my God') — is the bilateral covenant formula in its most intimate form. This is the goal of all redemptive history: mutual belonging between God and his refined people.

14

Summary: *Zechariah 14, the final chapter of Zechariah, is the most fully developed day-of-the-LORD passage in the post-exilic prophets. It describes a cataclysmic last battle against Jerusalem: the city is taken, houses looted, women violated — then the LORD goes out to fight. The Mount of Olives splits in two, creating a great valley for escape. A day of unique light comes, living waters flow from Jerusalem east and west, and the LORD becomes king over all the earth. The nations that survive the battle will come yearly to Jerusalem to worship at the Feast of Tabernacles. Even the bells on horses and the cooking pots in Jerusalem will be inscribed 'Holy to the LORD.' The entire city becomes a sanctuary.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The declaration in verse 9 — 'The LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one' — is one of the most exalted monotheistic statements in the Hebrew Bible, echoing and amplifying the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4). The living waters flowing from Jerusalem (v. 8) inform the river of life in Revelation 22:1-2. The universalization of holiness — even horse bells and cooking pots become 'Holy to the LORD' (vv. 20-21) — abolishes the distinction between sacred and secular. The entire created order becomes a sanctuary. The Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) as the universal pilgrimage festival (vv. 16-19) is significant because Sukkot celebrates both harvest thanksgiving and God's provision in the wilderness — themes of gratitude and dependence that all nations share.*

Translation Friction: *The chapter contains the most violent imagery in Zechariah (vv. 2, 12-15), juxtaposed with the most universalist vision (vv. 9, 16, 20-21). This tension between judgment and inclusion is characteristic of eschatological prophecy. The plague described in verse 12 — flesh rotting while standing — is gruesome and has been compared to modern descriptions of nuclear effects, though such comparisons are anachronistic. The phrase YHWH echad ushemo echad (v. 9) can be read as 'the LORD is one and his name is one' or 'the LORD will be the only one and his name the only one' — the Hebrew echad ('one/alone/unique') carries both meanings.*

Connections: *The Mount of Olives splitting (v. 4) is the site of Jesus's ascension (Acts 1:11-12). Living waters (v. 8) inform Ezekiel 47:1-12, Joel 3:18, and Revelation 22:1-2. The universal kingship (v. 9) fulfills the vision of Daniel 7:13-14 and Psalm 97:1. The Feast of Tabernacles pilgrimage (vv. 16-19) connects to Isaiah 2:2-4. 'Holy to the LORD' on the horse bells (v. 20) echoes the high priest's turban inscription (Exodus 28:36). The abolition of the distinction between sacred and secular anticipates the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21:22 ('I saw no temple in the city').*

¹A day is coming for the LORD when your plunder will be divided in your midst. ²I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem for battle. The city will be captured, the houses plundered, and the women violated. Half the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. ³Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. ⁴On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. The Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a very great valley, as half the mountain moves north and half moves south. ⁵You will flee through the valley of my mountains, for the valley between the mountains will reach to Azal. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. ⁶On that day there will be no light — the luminaries will diminish. ⁷It will be a unique day — known only to the LORD — neither day nor night. And at evening time there will be light. ⁸On that day, living waters will flow out from Jerusalem — half toward the eastern sea and half toward the western sea, in summer and in winter alike. ⁹The LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one. ¹⁰The whole land will be transformed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem, but Jerusalem will be raised up and inhabited in its place — from the Gate of Benjamin to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses. ¹¹People will dwell in it, and never again will there be a decree of total destruction. Jerusalem will be inhabited in security. ¹²This will be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples who waged war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. ¹³On that day a great panic from the LORD will fall on them. Each will seize the hand of his neighbor, and each will raise his hand against his neighbor. ¹⁴Judah too will fight at Jerusalem, and the wealth of all the surrounding nations will be gathered — gold, silver, and clothing in great abundance. ¹⁵The same plague will strike the horse, the mule, the camel, the donkey, and every animal in those camps — the same plague as on the people. ¹⁶Then all the survivors from the nations that came against Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of Armies, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. ¹⁷If any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of Armies, no rain will fall on them. ¹⁸If the family of Egypt does not go up and does not come, then the plague that the LORD strikes upon the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles will fall on them as well. ¹⁹This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. ²⁰On that day, 'Holy to the LORD' will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the house of the LORD will be like the sacred basins before the altar. ²¹Every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the LORD of Armies. All who come to sacrifice will take from them and cook in them. On that day there will no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of Armies.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase *yom ba laYHWH* ('a day coming for/belonging to the LORD') introduces the eschatological 'day of the LORD' — the decisive moment of divine intervention. The address is to Jerusalem, and the spoil (*shelalekh*) being divided 'in your midst' means the enemy is inside the city, dividing loot — the most dire stage of siege warfare.
2. God himself gathers the nations — the assault is divinely orchestrated, not merely permitted. The horrors are stated bluntly: houses plundered (*nushassu*), women violated (*tishshagalnah* — the verb is deliberately coarse, and some manuscripts use a euphemistic substitute). Half the population goes into exile. But the critical qualifier: *veyeter ha'am lo yikkaret min-ha'ir* ('the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city') — a remnant survives. The darkest moment precedes the divine intervention of verse 3.
3. The divine warrior motif: *veyatsa YHWH venilcham* ('the LORD will go out and fight'). The comparison *keyom hillachamo beyom qerav* ('as on a day of battle') refers to God's historical interventions — the Exodus, the Red Sea, Joshua's conquests. The past tense of God's warfare guarantees the future: what he has done, he will do again.
4. The anthropomorphic description — God's feet standing on the Mount of Olives — is the most physically vivid theophany in the prophets. The Mount of Olives, directly east of the temple mount, is the site from which Jesus ascended (Acts 1:9-12), and the angels promised he would return 'in the same way' (Acts 1:11). The geological splitting — north and south halves separating to create an east-west valley — provides an escape route for the besieged population. The seismic imagery may reflect actual geological fault lines in the region.
5. The earthquake in Uzziah's reign is also referenced in Amos 1:1 — it was evidently so devastating that it became a historical reference point. The destination Azal is unknown but apparently distant enough to represent full escape. The climactic statement — *uva YHWH Elohai kol-qedoshim immakh* ('the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with you') — describes a divine arrival accompanied by a heavenly army. The *qedoshim* ('holy ones') may be angels, glorified saints, or both. Paul echoes this in 1 Thessalonians 3:13.

6. The Hebrew is difficult: or yeqarot veqippa'on. The word yeqarot may mean 'precious/brilliant' or 'thick/heavy,' and qippa'on means 'congealing, freezing, thickening.' The overall sense is a disruption of normal celestial light — a day unlike any other, where the ordinary categories of light and dark no longer apply. This cosmic disruption signals that the created order itself is being transformed.
7. The yom echad ('unique/singular day') belongs to God alone — hu yivvada' laYHWH ('it is known to the LORD'). The categories of day and night are suspended: lo-yom velo-laylah ('not day and not night'). The final reversal — le'et erev yihyeh-or ('at evening time there will be light') — overturns the creation order where evening leads to darkness. On this day, evening brings light instead. The ordinary rhythm of creation yields to a new divine order.
8. The mayim chayyim ('living waters') — fresh, flowing, life-giving water — stream from Jerusalem in both directions: toward the yam haqqadmoni ('eastern/former sea' = the Dead Sea) and the yam ha'acharon ('western/latter sea' = the Mediterranean). The Dead Sea, lifeless and stagnant, will receive life-giving water — Ezekiel 47:1-12 describes the same phenomenon in greater detail. The phrase baqqayits uvachoreph ('in summer and in winter') means these waters never dry up — unlike seasonal wadis, they flow perpetually. Revelation 22:1-2 transforms this into the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God.
9. This is the theological climax of the entire book of Zechariah. The phrase YHWH lemelekh al-kol-ha'arets ('the LORD will be king over all the earth') extends the kingship beyond Israel to universal scope. The declaration YHWH echad ushemo echad ('the LORD is one and his name is one') echoes and amplifies the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4). The word echad ('one, alone, unique') carries both numerical and qualitative force — the LORD is the sole deity and the uniquely incomparable God. On that day, what Israel believes will become what all creation knows.
10. The surrounding terrain is flattened (ka'aravah, 'like the Arabah/plain') while Jerusalem is elevated (ra'amah, 'raised up') — the city becomes the geographical high point, the natural center of all the land. Geba (north of Jerusalem) and Rimmon (south) mark the extent of Judah's territory. The Jerusalem landmarks — Benjamin's Gate, First Gate, Corner Gate, Tower of Hananel, royal winepresses — trace the city's perimeter, indicating full habitation within its walls. The topographical transformation fulfills Isaiah 2:2: 'The mountain of the LORD's house will be established as the highest of the mountains.'
11. The word cherem ('total destruction, the ban') is the most extreme form of warfare in the Hebrew Bible — the complete annihilation of a city and everything in it (cf. Joshua 6:17-21, Jericho). The promise that cherem lo yihyeh-od ('there will never again be a decree of total destruction') means Jerusalem's destruction is permanently over. The phrase lava'etach ('in security') describes the absence of fear — the city will never again face the terror of siege or destruction.
12. The plague (maggephah) is described with horrifying specificity: flesh, eyes, and tongue dissolve (himmeq, 'rot, decay, dissolve') while the victim is still alive and standing. The three body parts represent the whole person: flesh (physical being), eyes (perception), and tongue (speech). The instantaneous decomposition is divine judgment without human weapons — the attacking nations are destroyed by God directly.
13. The mehumat-YHWH ('panic/confusion from the LORD') is a divine weapon used throughout Israel's history (cf. Judges 7:22; 1 Samuel 14:20) — God causes enemies to turn on each other. The phrase 'seize the hand of his neighbor... raise his hand against his neighbor' pictures chaos: allies become enemies, coalition partners attack each other. The same pattern appeared in Haggai 2:22 and Zechariah 11:6.
14. The preposition bi ('at/in') in tilachem biYerushalaim could mean 'fight at Jerusalem' (alongside it) or 'fight against Jerusalem' (attacking it). Given the context of restoration, 'at Jerusalem' (defending it) is the more likely reading. The plunder gathered from the defeated nations — gold, silver, clothing — echoes the Exodus plundering of Egypt (Exodus 12:35-36). God's people receive the wealth of their would-be destroyers.
15. The plague extends to the animals — the entire war machine (horses, mules, camels, donkeys) is destroyed. The comprehensive list of pack and war animals means the attacking army loses all means of transport and retreat. The phrase kammaggephah hazzot ('like this plague') ties the animal plague to the human plague of verse 12.
16. The transformation is breathtaking: the nations that attacked Jerusalem now make annual pilgrimage to worship there. The title hammelekh YHWH Tsevaot ('the King, the LORD of Armies') combines royal and military titles. The Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) is specified rather than Passover or Weeks — Sukkot celebrates harvest thanksgiving and God's provision in the wilderness, themes accessible to all peoples. It is also the most joyful of Israel's festivals (Deuteronomy 16:13-15).
17. The consequence for refusing the pilgrimage is agricultural: no rain. This reverses the opening call of 10:1 ('ask the LORD for rain') — rain depends on relationship with the LORD, and refusal to worship results in drought. The punishment is measured, not annihilating — withholding rain rather than destroying the nation. There is still opportunity for obedience.
18. Egypt is singled out because it does not depend on rainfall — the Nile provides irrigation. The drought punishment of verse 17 would not affect Egypt, so a different punishment is specified: the plague (maggephah) from verse 12. Egypt cannot exempt itself from the pilgrimage obligation by geography — God has a plague for every situation. The specific mention of Israel's ancient oppressor now joining the Sukkot pilgrimage is deeply ironic and redemptive.
19. The word chattat can mean both 'sin' and 'punishment for sin' — here it carries the latter sense. The universality is emphasized: Egypt AND kol-haggoyim ('all the nations'). No nation is exempt from the obligation to worship the LORD at Jerusalem during Sukkot.
20. The phrase qodesh laYHWH ('Holy to the LORD') was inscribed on the gold plate attached to the high priest's turban (Exodus 28:36) — the most sacred inscription in Israel's worship. Now it appears on horse bells (metsilot hassus) — the most mundane objects imaginable. The cooking pots (sirot) in the temple, used for preparing sacrificial food, will be elevated to the status of the mizraqim ('sacred basins') used to catch and sprinkle

sacrificial blood at the altar. The distinction between sacred and common vessels is abolished — everything becomes holy.

- 21.** The universalization of holiness reaches its climax: kol-sir ('every pot') in the entire region — not just the temple — becomes qodesh laYHWH Tsevaot. Any pot can be used for sacred purposes because all things are now holy. The final statement — velo-yihyeh khena'ani od beVeit-YHWH ('there will no longer be a Canaanite/trader in the house of the LORD') — is the book's last word. Khena'ani can mean 'Canaanite' (ritually unclean foreigner) or 'trader/merchant' (cf. Proverbs 31:24). Both readings work: no unclean person and no commercial exploitation will defile God's house. The temple becomes what it was always meant to be — a space of pure worship, free from both impurity and commerce. Jesus's cleansing of the temple (Matthew 21:12-13) enacts this prophecy.