

Zechariah 10:1-5

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/zech/zech-10/zechariah-101-5/>

Zechariah urges the people of Judah to ask the LORD for rain for their crops instead of turning to divination experts. He informs them that God will care for them and give them victory in battle.

In the last section of the previous chapter, Zechariah foresaw the time when the LORD would defend His covenant people, care for them, and restore their fortunes because they are so precious to Him (Zechariah 9:14–17). In the present section, the prophet interrupted his description of the future to address the immediate needs and concerns of the Judeans of his day. He opened his discourse with a command: *Ask rain from the LORD* (v 1).

In the Hebrew text, the sentence reads as follows: “Ask from the LORD rain.” This reading emphasizes *the LORD*, the all-powerful God who established a covenant relationship with Judah. It also contrasts Yahweh with the pagan gods who were nothing but deaf and dumb idols (Deuteronomy 32:21). In Zechariah, the returning Judean exiles learned that the LORD is the God who provides. They could *ask* Him to supply for their needs.

The verb *ask* invites them to take an action, and petition God for help. In Psalm 27, the psalmist turned to God in faith while experiencing persecution. He asked that he might “dwell in the house of the LORD all the days” of his life (Psalm 27:4). In Zechariah, the returning exiles would petition Yahweh for *rain*.

The ancient Israelites lived in an agricultural world where drought and aridity were common. They relied heavily on rainfall for their vegetation and crops. Thus, *rain* was vital; it symbolized life and abundance (Deuteronomy 11:11). It signaled divine favor and blessing, usually understood as a reward for obedience to the covenantal stipulations. To the contrary, the absence of *rain* meant deprivation, a sign of divine displeasure, as the book of 1 Kings shows (1 Kings 17:1).

In Zechariah’s day, the covenant people did not experience much *rain*. Why was this? The prophet Haggai, a contemporary of Zechariah, tells us that when the Judeans returned to their homeland after their years of captivity in Babylonia, the LORD instructed them to rebuild the temple, which the Babylonians had destroyed in 586 BC. The returning exiles began the building project but stopped for about sixteen years, rationalizing that the time was not right to complete it.

Yet, they were busy building paneled homes (Haggai 1: 2–4). The LORD was not pleased with them, so He disciplined them by sending a drought on their land, allowing them to experience famine and hunger (Haggai 1:5–11). The prophet Zechariah encouraged the returning exiles to petition the LORD for *rain* since they had not experienced agricultural prosperity for some time.

In an agricultural society at the mercy of the vagaries of rainfall, the timing of the *rain* was as critical as the amount. Thus, Zechariah asked the people to petition Yahweh to send the *rain at the time of the spring rain* (v 1). In Israel, there are two rainy seasons. The first is the early *rain* or autumn *rain* (October-November), which brings the dry summer to a close and loosens the soil in preparation for planting. The second is the late *rain* or *spring rain* (March-April), which enables the final growth period before gathering or collecting the crops (Deuteronomy 11:14).

The prophet spoke of the latter *rain* only because it is the *rain* that affects both harvests. It is a double blessing, a good provision from the LORD.

Zechariah then described the power of the covenant God of Judah. He stated that God is *the LORD who makes the storm clouds* (v 1). The ancient Near Eastern nations surrounding Israel and Judah were polytheistic; they believed in many gods. They thought they were to have more than one deity to satisfy their needs. They worshiped the storm god, who supposedly brought rain and fertility to their fields.

For the Canaanites, Baal was the deity of storms and rain. The pre-exilic Israelites followed the Canaanite practice and often attributed the fertility of the fields to Baal while acknowledging the LORD as their national God (Hosea 2:8). For this reason, Zechariah instructed the post-exilic community of Judah to get it straight. They were to look to *the LORD*, not Baal, for their source of blessing because He would *give them showers of rain, and vegetation in the field to each man* (v 1).

Having described the LORD's power to provide *rain*, Zechariah gave the reason for trusting Him. In doing so, he contrasted Yahweh, the covenant God of Judah, with the false gods. In a nutshell, he told his listeners that the Suzerain (ruler) God is all-powerful. He can do whatever He desires. He is always faithful and true. But the false gods are powerless and insignificant: *For the teraphim speak iniquity, and the diviners see lying visions and tell false dreams; they comfort in vain.* (v 2).

The term *teraphim* is the transliteration of a Hebrew word for household idols. It generally describes small, portable sacred objects, especially idols used for divination. The ancient Israelites often associated these small images with luck, safety, and prosperity. These were the items Rachel stole from her father Laban, which occasioned his angry pursuit (Genesis 31:19, 34).

The prophet Zechariah personified the idol *teraphim* and declared that it spoke *iniquity*. In other words, its use by the people of God led them to commit wicked deeds. In Deuteronomy, Moses condemned such idolatrous practices (Deuteronomy 18:9–14). The basic idea behind idol worship is “I am in control of divine powers, who answer to me.” This leads to an attitude of lawlessness and exploitation, which ultimately led people to emulate pagan culture.

The *diviners* attempted to manipulate the environment via mystical and spiritual means to foretell the future. They often read signs to interpret strange events. They misled others with false *visions and dreams* because their messages did not originate in God (Jeremiah 23:32). Indeed, *they comfort in vain*, giving false hope to the people of God. They lead God's people

astray, reinforcing the belief that they can manipulate divine forces to do their will. As a result, *the people wander like sheep* (v 2).

Sheep were an integral part of the Israelite economy from the earliest days (Genesis 4:2). Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David, and Amos were all shepherds (Genesis 12:16, 26:14; Exodus 3:1; 2 Samuel 7:8; Amos 1:1). Sheep were dependent on shepherds for protection, grazing, watering, and shelter because they are some of the least intelligent of livestock. They are not smart, and are too slow to flee, and too weak to fight for themselves.

Sheep are also prone to wandering and being unable to find their way to a sheepfold (corral) even when it is within sight. In short, sheep would not survive long without a shepherd because they do not know what is in their best interest. In Zechariah, the prophet compared the people of Judah with lost sheep, having no real sense of direction. *They are afflicted because there is no shepherd* (v 2).

That means that those responsible for leading the people and caring for them had neglected their duties. Those who were supposed to be seeking the best interest of the people were instead exploiting them. This would likely have been in the form of taking payment from the people for supposedly interceding for them with the pagan deities. These bad leaders would therefore have been both exploiting their flock as well as teaching them to be exploiters themselves. Therefore, they deserved divine discipline.

The prophet briefly removed himself from the scene, allowing God to speak directly to His people. The purpose of the direct speech is to add more weight to the message. God declared, *My anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the male goats*. The *anger* of God is His intense emotion of hot displeasure. God is holy. Although He is long-suffering, He eventually visits His judgment upon sin. When humans sin, they break fellowship with God by separating themselves from His (good) design.

God's *anger* is particularly reserved for the leaders who were leading people astray. There are severe consequences for leading astray those entrusted to our care. Jesus used a hyperbolic image to emphasize the reality that God will hold poor leaders to account:

“And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”
(Matthew 18:5-6)

God expressed the same basic sentiment in His covenant/treaty with Israel, stating that He would severely deal with those who oppressed the “stranger” or “widow or orphan” (Exodus 22:22–24). These verses show why God's *anger* was *kindled against the shepherds* or leaders of Israel, who were leading His people astray—exploiting them for their own gain.

In Zechariah, God's *anger* was against the *shepherds*, the corrupt leaders within the covenant community of Judah who led God's people astray. The LORD referred to them as *male goats* since these animals typically lead the goat herds (Isaiah 14:9). Since the Judean leaders

displeased God, He would dismiss them. *For the LORD of hosts has visited His flock* (v 3). The true Shepherd of Israel is God. His under-shepherds are supposed to be faithful stewards. When they are not, they will give an account to their Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:2-4).

The term translated as *hosts* in the phrase *LORD of hosts* is “Sabaoth” in Hebrew and means “armies.” It refers to the angelic armies of heaven, whose leader is *the LORD*. Thus, the phrase *LORD of hosts* qualifies God as a warrior who leads His army to defeat those who stand against Him (Amos 5:16, 9:5; Habakkuk 2:17). Here in Zechariah, it demonstrates God’s power as the supreme warrior who has complete authority over all human affairs. That is why He *visited His flock, the house of Judah*.

The *house of Judah* refers to the tribe of Judah. This is part of God’s *flock*. The verb translated as *visited* in the phrase *the LORD of hosts has visited His flock* is “pāqaḏ” in the Hebrew text. It is a word with a double meaning. Sometimes, it signifies disciplinary judgment, as in Zechariah 10:3a, where God promised to *punish the male goats* or the corrupt leaders of Judah. Other times, it communicates love and care, as in here. Thus, God stated that He would assume the position of Judah’s Shepherd to guide the people and *make them like His majestic horse in battle* (v 3). He would transform them into a mighty military force, and they would become as invincible as horses trained for warfare. At that time, the chosen people of God will experience renewed stability.

From them will come the cornerstone, from them the tent peg (v 4). The term *cornerstone* (“pinnah” in Hebrew) refers to the principal stone around which the ancient people anchored construction. It is thus the focal point of a building. Jesus Christ used this term to speak of Himself in the parable of the vineyard tenants (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17). Paul later identifies Jesus as the *cornerstone* of the church (Ephesians 2:20). The *tent peg* (“yathed” in Hebrew) is a small, cylindrical piece of wood used to secure tents securely to the ground (Judges 4:21–22). It is to the *tent* what the *cornerstone* is to a building—securing it in place.

Since the passage says *from them will come the cornerstone* as well as *the tent peg*, this likely refers to Jesus Christ. Jesus was born of the tribe of Judah (*them*), of the house of David.

The people of God will not only experience strength and stability but also, they will have victory over their foes. The prophet made that clear when he said, *From them the bow of battle, from them every ruler, all of them together* (v 4). The term translated as *bow* (“qešet” in Hebrew) denotes an instrument used for hunting or war. When shooting, the archer would hold the *bow* in his left hand and draw the bowstring with his right while notching the arrow (2 Kings 13:15).

Zechariah used these terms to describe Judah’s future stability, strength, and victory. He told his audience that God would raise leaders from this tribe who are strong like *cornerstones, tent pegs*, and instruments of war (Genesis 49:10). With the LORD’s help, *they will be as mighty men, treading down the enemy in the mire of the streets in battle* (v 5). He will empower them to defeat their adversaries.

This also likely foreshadows a time when Jesus will reign over the earth, ridding it of evil and bringing in a reign of righteousness (Revelation 2:27, 19:15). Jesus is of the tribe of Judah, which is called here God's "flock" (Revelation 5:5).

The term translated as *mighty men* who will trod down the *enemy* of Judah is "gibbor" in Hebrew. It refers to a strong person who can perform great deeds (Genesis 6:4). In other words, "gibbor" describes a hero. Thus, Zechariah told his listeners that the Judeans would defeat their foes like strong military men who can kill many people in battle at once (2 Samuel 23:8). This will apply to *every ruler, all of them together*.

The Suzerain God will empower these warriors, *and they will fight* (v 5). The reason they will do so is because *the LORD will be with them*. God's presence will guarantee the success and victory of His covenant people. He will pave the way for them, allowing them to march toward the enemy boldly. As a result, *the riders on horses will be put to shame* (v 5). That means that God's people will destroy the enemy soldiers, bringing *shame* and humiliation to them.

Biblical Text

1 Ask rain from the LORD at the time of the spring rain—
The LORD who makes the storm clouds;
And He will give them showers of rain, vegetation in the field to *each* man.
2 For the teraphim speak iniquity,
And the diviners see lying visions
And tell false dreams;
They comfort in vain.
Therefore *the people* wander like sheep,
They are afflicted, because there is no shepherd.
3 "My anger is kindled against the shepherds,
And I will punish the male goats;
For the LORD of hosts has visited His flock, the house of Judah,
And will make them like His majestic horse in battle.
4 "From them will come the cornerstone,
From them the tent peg,
From them the bow of battle,
From them every ruler, *all of them together*.
5 "They will be as mighty men,
Treading down *the enemy* in the mire of the streets in battle;
And they will fight, for the LORD *will be* with them;
And the riders on horses will be put to shame.