

Zechariah 10:6-12

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The Suzerain (Ruler) God promises to strengthen and regather all of Israel to their homeland. He will have compassion on them and restore them, allowing them to live worthy of their calling.

In Zechariah 10:1–5, the prophet addressed the concerns of his contemporary Judeans living in an agricultural society at the mercy of the whims of the weather. He urged them to petition the LORD for rain for their crops instead of turning to pagan gods. He also informed them that their Suzerain (or Ruler) would provide for them and give them victory in battle because He is the true God. In the present section, the LORD promises to populate and restore His people, causing them to become His loyal followers. He began by saying, *I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph* (v 6).

The *house of Judah* refers to the descendants of the people of the southern kingdom that remained after the northern kingdom broke away after the reign of King Solomon (1 Kings 12:16-17). The *house of Joseph* represents the descendants of the people of the northern kingdom, usually called Israel or Samaria.

The prophets often referred to the northern kingdom of Israel as Ephraim since the latter was the most prominent tribe in those days (Hosea 5:3, 13, 6:4, 10; Isaiah 7:17). But in the present verse, Zechariah used the name *Joseph* as a collective to represent the northern kingdom of Israel since he was the father of Ephraim (Genesis 41:52). The use of *Joseph* might presage the reunification of the tribes into one nation, as God promises (Hosea 1:11).

The LORD promised to *strengthen* the southern kingdom of Judah and *save* the northern kingdom of Israel. The verb translated as *strengthen* comes from the same root word translated earlier as “mighty men” (v. 5). It speaks of extraordinary strength or power (1 Samuel 2:4; Amos 2:14; Zephaniah 1:14). The verb *save* means to deliver someone from a difficult situation, as when the LORD rescued the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt (Exodus 14:13, 15:2). Here too in Zechariah, God would deliver His covenant people and *bring them back* to their homeland. The restoration would be an act of God’s love, grace, and mercy. As He stated, *I will bring them back because I have had compassion on them* (v 6).

To *have compassion* means to show sympathy to someone. This quality is inherent to the LORD’s nature (Jeremiah 33:26). His *compassion* is as constant as that of a father for his children and superior to that of a “woman for the son of her womb” (see Psalm 103:13 and Isaiah 49:15, respectively). Because of God’s unfailing love for His people, they would regain the precious care they once had.

God put it this way: *They will be as though I had not rejected them* (v 6). The reason God would make His covenant people feel this way is clear from the next line, where He declared, *For I am the LORD their God* (v 6). The phrase *I am* makes clear that God never rejected Israel as being His people. His love for Israel is because of His grace, not because of their performance

(Deuteronomy 7:7-9). God *rejected* Israel from living in the land under His blessing. This rejection, or cursing, was a provision of His covenant/treaty with Israel. His covenant/treaty specified that if the people sunk into practicing the exploitative ways of paganism instead of His love-your-neighbor ways of self-governance, then they would be exiled from the land (Deuteronomy 28:41, 49, 64).

The Hebrew term for *LORD* in the phrase *LORD their God* is “Yahweh,” the covenant/treaty name of God. That name speaks of God’s character and His relationship with His covenant people (Exodus 3:14; 34:6). The pronoun “I” in the phrase *For I am the LORD their God* is emphatic in the Hebrew text, indicating that God alone is Israel’s deliverer.

He alone rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and redeemed them “with an outstretched arm” (Exodus 3:13–15; 6:6–7). He then established a covenant relationship with them and claimed them as His treasured possession, caring for them “as the pupil of His eye” (see Exodus 19:4–6 and Deuteronomy 32:10, respectively). God promises that He will save all Israel in the future, both here in the Old Testament as well as in the New (Romans 11:26).

Therefore, although the covenant people disobeyed God and moved away from Him, and suffered the enforcement provisions of their covenant/treaty with God, He would *answer them* when they petitioned Him. He would forgive their sins and restore His fellowship with them.

When the LORD restores His people, *Ephraim will be like a mighty man* (v 7). *Ephraim* here refers to the northern kingdom, usually called Israel or Samaria. This kingdom broke away from Judah after the reign of King Solomon (1 Kings 12:16-17). Ephraim was the second son of Joseph, a younger brother of Manasseh. Joseph named him *Ephraim*, which means “doubly fruitful,” because he said, ‘God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction’” (Genesis 41:52). Later, the descendants of *Ephraim* became known as the tribe of *Ephraim*. Since it was one of the most prominent tribes in ancient Israel, the Bible often uses it to represent all the ten northern tribes (Hosea 10:6, 11:8).

During the pre-exilic period, God often rebuked the northern tribes (represented as *Ephraim*) for idolatry and association with pagan nations (Hosea 4:17, 12:1). Unfortunately, they ignored the divine warning, and God used the Assyrians as His tool to send them into exile in 722 BC (2 Kings 17). This was according to the enforcement provisions of the covenant/treaty Israel entered into with God (Deuteronomy 28:41, 49, 64).

Nevertheless, God never abandoned His people. Although He chastised them, He would remember them at the appropriate time (Jeremiah 31:20). This was also according to His covenant/treaty (Deuteronomy 32:36). One day, He will revive them, *and their heart will be glad as if from wine* (7). The Israelites will be happy and joyful. Their happiness will prompt them to act like people filled with *wine*.

Indeed, their children will see it and be glad, their heart will rejoice in the LORD (v 7). They will recall God’s gracious acts on their behalf and praise Him for His goodness and mercy. Instead of living with a false reality that they can control pagan deities with sacrifices, in order to

have their desires met, the people will see reality truly, and recognize that all good things come from God (James 1:16).

In the next verse, God spoke directly to disclose His plan for His covenant people. He declared, *I will whistle for them to gather them together* (v 8). The verb translated as *whistle* is “shāraḳ” in the Hebrew language. It is a word which can also mean “to hiss” or “to call” (Isaiah 5:26). In ancient times, shepherds often *whistled* to call their flock (Judges 5:16). Accordingly, the Suzerain God would *whistle* for His covenant people to return from exile, and they would come at His call. This shows God’s sovereignty, that when He wills something, it will transpire.

The LORD next gave the reason that He would call His people back from exile: *For I have redeemed them* (v 8). The verb translated as *redeem* is “padah” in the Hebrew text. It means “to ransom.” It occurred several times in the context of the Exodus event, when the LORD delivered the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:8, 15:15, 24:18). Likewise, the day will come when God graciously rescues His covenant people from having been exiled. They were exiled according to the corrective provisions of their covenant/treaty with God for disobedience to His commands (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). God also promised to redeem them from exile in His covenant/treaty with Israel, after they were exiled (Deuteronomy 32:36).

God’s restoration will include expanding the population: *and they will be as numerous as they were before* (v 8). Just as the Israelites experienced numerical growth during their sojourn in Egypt, so they would multiply again when God redeems them (Exodus 1:7, 20). This infers safety from enemies, material and physical prosperity, and spiritual health. All these things are necessary for a thriving population.

The LORD returned to the topic of exile and said, *When I scatter them among the peoples, they will remember Me in far countries* (v 9). The dispersion of the Israelites was God’s way of chastising them for their disobedience to His covenant/treaty. His treaty with Israel clearly set forth provisions for disobedience, if the people fell into the pagan ways of mutual exploitation rather than living in obedience to God, following His ways of self-governance and loving our neighbors (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

One example from the “cursings” passage in Deuteronomy, where Moses warned the people about the consequences they would endure for violating their vow to God, stated:

“The LORD will bring you and your king, whom you set over you, to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone.”
(Deuteronomy 28:36)

The northern tribes fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC and the southern tribes in 586 BC, thus fulfilling this curse. The covenant people, whom *the LORD* chose as His treasured possession, rebelled against His laws, and fell under His disciplinary actions. He used the enemy as His tool to send His people into captivity (Deuteronomy 28:63, 64). They even went to *far countries*.

Nevertheless, one day, the dispersed remnant of God’s people will *remember* Him, meaning they will recall His past saving deeds and turn to Him in faith. Such a remembrance of God will cause

a transformation in the lives of the Israelites to the point that *they and their children will live and come back* (v 9). Thus, when they repent and seek God genuinely, they will experience spiritual blessings that even succeeding generations (*children*) will enjoy. Obedience to God's commandments leads to a safe and prosperous society, which lends itself to its people living long and prosperous lives (Deuteronomy 5:33).

Once the Israelites return to God in repentance, He will restore them. He declared, *I will bring them back from the land of Egypt and gather them from Assyria* (v 10). Egypt is a country situated along the Nile River, the place where the Israelites lived as slaves for about 400 years (Genesis 15:13, Acts 7:6).

Even after the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem in 586 BC, a group of Judeans forced Jeremiah to go with them to *Egypt* (Jeremiah 43:6, 7). While in Egypt, they grew exponentially during the inter-testamental period (roughly 400 BC to 30 AD) and gradually forgot their primary language. For this reason, they translated the Old Testament into Greek (the Septuagint) between 250 and 150 BC.

Assyria is the region of northern Mesopotamia, where the northern kingdom of Israel went into exile in 722 BC (2 Kings 17). Since Egypt and Assyria were traditional enemies of Israel, Zechariah used them as archetypes to represent all nations opposing God. They symbolized suffering in the exile endured by the disobedient people of God (Hosea 8:13; 9:6). But one day, the Israelites will no longer suffer because God will restore them. As He stated, *I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon until no room can be found for them* (v 10).

The place named *Gilead* was in the region east of the Jordan River, the northern part of the current country of Jordan (see map). It was one of the cities designated as cities of refuge, where people who committed accidental killing could safely flee (Joshua 20:1–2). The country of *Lebanon* is a mountainous region north of Israel (see map). It was known for its natural beauty and resources (Hosea 14:5–7; Psalm 92:12).

The LORD might have referred to *Gilead* and *Lebanon* to describe the completeness of the restoration since these places were wide open and sparsely inhabited. The point is that God's restoration of His chosen people will be so complete that they will need extra territory in *Gilead* and *Lebanon* for their dwelling. Even so, they will run out of space because they will be so numerous.

They will *pass through the sea of distress* (v 11), as they did in the days of Moses when the LORD struck the waters of the Red Sea and provided a safe passage for them (Exodus 14:21–22). This is likely a metaphor that pictures future difficulties that will be faced by the Jewish people, strife that will require God's miraculous deliverance.

And God will deliver Israel in its distress. He will perform a similar miracle to parting the Red Sea once again for His chosen people. He will *strike the waves in the sea so that all the depths of the Nile will dry up* once again (v 11). All of this indicates that Israel's future restoration will follow great difficulties, and a deliverance like unto that of delivering Israel out of Egypt will precede their restoration as a nation, and the fulfillment of these prophecies of blessing.

The *Nile* is the life-stream of Egypt in northeast Africa. Its length is about 4,000 miles, making it the longest river in Africa. It is the basis of Egypt's wealth, a unique agricultural society not dependent upon rainfall (Genesis 42:1–2; Numbers 11:5). Despite its depth and importance for Egypt, the LORD can dry it up at the appropriate time. The prophet Zechariah used this imagery to tell his audience that the LORD will remove every obstacle to their restoration. And just as the *Nile River* will dry up, *the pride of Assyria will be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt will depart* (v 11).

The two nations listed in verse 10 —Assyria and Egypt —stand for all the nations opposing God and His covenant people (see map). The *scepter* is a staff that symbolizes royal authority (Genesis 49:10). Similarly, the word *pride* stands for human trust in self. Scripture contrasts pride with faith (Habakkuk 2:4). The idea is that pride is faith in self, which is the opposite of having faith in God. The nations of the world will have faith in themselves, in their military might and material wealth. But God will ensure that they are *brought down*.

That means the LORD will humble the proud Assyrians and abase the Egyptians, probably symbols of the nations of the earth. He will reduce their power and authority to nothing. But He will have mercy on His people. As He stated, *I will strengthen them in the LORD* (v 12), repeating an earlier promise to emphasize its certainty (v. 6). When that happens, *in His name they will walk* (v 12).

The Israelites will behave in a way that honors their covenant partner, Yahweh. They will live as obedient children. They will not merely speak in a way that conveys compliance. They will actually *walk* in the ways of God. They will keep His covenant commands to love one another.

Zechariah closed the chapter with the prophetic formula *declares the LORD*.

The phrase *declares the LORD* carries much weight in the prophetic books. It is an affirmation that the prophets spoke on behalf of God. In Bible times, a prophet would receive a message from God and deliver it to the recipient(s) that God intended. Thus, when the prophet Zechariah said, "*declares the LORD*," he added weight and emphasis to his message, indicating that it did not come from him. Instead, it came from *the LORD*, Judah's Ruler. Therefore, the returning Judean exiles would find comfort knowing that their covenant partner will one day remove every obstacle and restore them.

When will this prophecy be fulfilled? The Old Testament has many such prophecies of Israel's complete restoration, and a restoration of the earth to its original design. The full realization of these prophecies is still future as of this writing.

Biblical Text

**“I will strengthen the house of Judah,
And I will save the house of Joseph,
And I will bring them back,
Because I have had compassion on them;
And they will be as though I had not rejected them,**

For I am the LORD their God and I will answer them.

**7 “Ephraim will be like a mighty man,
And their heart will be glad as if *from* wine;
Indeed, their children will see *it* and be glad,
Their heart will rejoice in the LORD.**

**8 “I will whistle for them to gather them together,
For I have redeemed them;
And they will be as numerous as they were before.**

**9 “When I scatter them among the peoples,
They will remember Me in far countries,
And they with their children will live and come back.**

**10 “I will bring them back from the land of Egypt
And gather them from Assyria;
And I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon
Until no *room* can be found for them.**

**11 “And they will pass through the sea *of* distress
And He will strike the waves in the sea,
So that all the depths of the Nile will dry up;
And the pride of Assyria will be brought down
And the scepter of Egypt will depart.**

**12 “And I will strengthen them in the LORD,
And in His name they will walk,” declares the LORD.**