

Lesson 8

Chapter 6

The book of Zechariah opens with eight visions, and we have now reached the final vision of those eight.

As we have seen, each vision has had a specific message for the people of Zechariah's day as well as a message for the people of God in any age.

With most of those messages, God lifted the curtain so that the downtrodden Jews of Zechariah's day could briefly glimpse the wonderful blessings that God was preparing for his people. The Messiah was coming, and he would establish an eternal kingdom that would sweep away all of the kingdoms of this world.

God told them that those blessings were coming, and that their faithfulness was vital to God's plan.

Today, we know much more about those blessings than they did. We have the full revelation of God, and we know that the Messiah came into this world, gave himself as a perfect sacrifice, rose from the dead, ascended back to Heaven, and established his eternal kingdom (of which we are now a part).

If you ever have doubts about the importance of the church in the plan of God, then Zechariah is the book for you! Most of the visions we have seen have pointed to Christ and to the church of Christ.

If that was a cure for discouragement in Zechariah' day, how much more so must it be a cure for discouragement in our own day? For them, it was a blessing yet future, but for us it is a blessing that we enjoy every day!

***Ephesians 1:18-23** — The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*

That had not yet happened in Zechariah's day, but for us it is a living reality — and we should thank God every day for the time in which we live.

This final vision has much in common with the first vision we studied. The first vision and the eighth vision act as bookends to the visions in between.

Both the first vision and this final vision describe different colored horses going throughout the earth, and both visions use the number four. In both visions, God dispatches key figures to fulfill a divine assignment.

6:1 And I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass.

Although the text does not confirm it, many commentators believe that the first vision occurred at dusk and the eighth vision appeared to Zechariah at dawn on the same evening. Some even explain the “mountains of bronze” as the color of the mountains when the dawning rays of the sun strike them, but that is all mainly just speculation.

In verse 1, we see four chariots coming out from between two mountains of brass. What does that mean?

In the Old Testament, chariots sometimes carried important individuals. But, in most cases, the Old Testament refers to chariots as the ultimate military weapon.

Solomon bought chariots from Egypt in 1 Kings 10:29. Isaiah prophesied against those who trusted in those chariots.

***Isaiah 31:1** — Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!*

Jeremiah described Babylon’s chariots.

***Jeremiah 4:13** — Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as a whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe unto us! for we are spoiled.*

But God also has chariots, and their description in Isaiah 66 reminds us of verse 1 here in Zechariah 6.

***Isaiah 66:15-16**— For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many.*

Psalm 68 also reminds us of verse 1 here, even mentioning a mountain, Mount Sinai.

***Psalm 68:17** — The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.*

So what are we seeing here in verse 1?

We will soon see that these four chariots are being sent out by God. The number four, as we have said, figuratively depicts the earth — the four seasons, the four compass points, the four basic elements. So what we see here are God’s war chariots being sent out to show God’s dominion and power over the earth.

It reminds us of:

Isaiah 37:16 — *O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth.*

Jeremiah 10:10 — *But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation.*

No earthly power can stand against God.

Nebuchadnezzar learned that lesson the hard way in Daniel 4! As McGuiggan said, that great king was bragging one minute and munching grass the second! Here is the lesson he was being taught:

Daniel 4:17 — *To the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.*

These chariots are going forth to teach that same lesson to anyone and to everyone who needs to hear it. And there were many people in Persia and Babylon who needed to hear it, as there still are today.

What are the two mountains of brass?

Although we have seen mountains before in this book and elsewhere in the Bible, nowhere else in the Bible do we find mountains of brass.

Elsewhere we have seen earthly mountains arrayed against God, and those mountains have been turned into plains.

That might be the case here, but these mountains seem instead to depict the abode of God, or at least they surround the abode of God — his stronghold. If so, the brass would indicate their beauty and their strength.

Verse 1 reminds me of Psalm 48.

Psalm 48:1-2 — *Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.*

I think that is the picture we see here in Zechariah 6:1. These chariots come out from God's beautiful stronghold to perform his will upon the earth.

2 In the first chariot were red horses; and in the second chariot black horses; 3 And in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot grisled and bay horses. 4 Then I answered and said unto the angel that talked with me, What are these, my lord?

Now we can really see the similarity between the first vision and the eighth vision. Each involves horses of four different colors, although the colors are different between the two visions.

What do the colors signify? We have the same difficulty with that question here as we did in the first vision.

Most likely the colors depict the different missions of the four chariots, which may be in alignment with the four colors of the horses we will see in Revelation 6. If so, white may indicate victory, red may stand for bloodshed, black for judgment, and the dappled color may signify death. We can't be certain, and it may simply be that the colors serve only to distinguish the chariots, having no further significance.

The ancient rabbis believed the four colors represented four world powers, with the four powers of Daniel being the most likely candidates: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. If so, that would be a nice tie-in with Daniel (to go with the many other tie-ins we have already seen!). But, unlike with Daniel, we are not told here that these four colors represent four world powers.

As usual, Zechariah has the same questions that we have. In verse 4, he asks, "What are these?" Let's read the answer.

5 And the angel answered and said unto me, These are the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth.

The angel tells Zechariah that these four chariots are "the four spirits of the heavens" and that they "go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth."

Our first question is what is meant by "the four spirits." Are they *spirits* (as the KJV translates the word) or are they just *winds* (which is another possible translation of the Hebrew word used here)?

The same word seems to mean "winds" in Psalm 104:4, where the ASV has: "Who maketh *winds* his messengers; Flames of fire his ministers." But the KJV has: "Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire," so there is a translation disagreement even with that verse.

We saw this same Hebrew word in the previous chapter of Zechariah — the two women in 5:9 had "the wind" in their wings. There the meaning was almost certainly "wind" rather than "spirit."

If the same word from 5:9 also means "winds" here in Chapter 6, then the meaning here would be similar to what we see in Jeremiah 49.

Jeremiah 49:36 — And upon Elam will I bring the four winds from the four quarters of heaven, and will scatter them toward all those winds; and there shall be no nation whither the outcasts of Elam shall not come.

But others maintain that the meaning here is "spirits" and that these chariots represent four divine spirits or emissaries sent by God to do his work on the earth.

That view makes more sense to me because verse 5 is an *explanation* of a figure (the chariots in verse 2-3). Although not impossible, it seems odd for the explanation of a figure to be yet another figure.

Whether the meaning is spirit or wind, the message of verse 5 is clear: No matter who it is who thinks they can thwart God's plan, they will soon learn otherwise. God is sov-

ereign over the universe, and, if anyone thinks otherwise, they will soon learn the truth as God comes against them from every direction!

Why is this important here?

The Jews at this time were standing in the ruins of their city and were surrounded by the rubble of their former temple. These visions had promised them a wonderful future under their Messiah and his eternal kingdom. They may have wondered whether it would really happen — after all, they had also been promised blessings for Jerusalem and the former temple — and that was all now just rubble!

God's message in these final visions is two-fold. First, as we saw in the prior vision, God reminds them that they are the reason they are surrounded by rubble. God had told them it would happen if they forsook the covenant, and they forsook the covenant. They had no reason to act surprised about their current situation.

Second, God's message is that those future blessings are secure because God said they would happen. True, these people might fall away again and be punished. But God would always have a faithful remnant with which to work his plans on the earth. God is in charge, and what he says is going to happen, will happen. These divine emissaries are being sent out to make sure it all happens, and nothing will stand in their way.

The question is not whether God will bless his people. That has never been in doubt. The question is whether we are a part of God's people. If we are, we will share in those wonderful blessings. If we are not, then we will not. But the blessings will come. That much is certain.

The explanation continues in verse 6.

6 The black horses which are therein go forth into the north country; and the white go forth after them; and the grisled go forth toward the south country. 7 And the bay went forth, and sought to go that they might walk to and fro through the earth: and he said, Get you hence, walk to and fro through the earth. So they walked to and fro through the earth.

Verse 6 shifts our attention from the chariots to the horses, and this emphasis will continue throughout the remainder of the vision.

Verse 6 also contains some unexpected descriptions of the horses. For example, the order in which verse 6 mentions the horses varies slightly from their introduction in verses 2-3. Also, verse 6 fails to mention the red horses, and the grisled and bay horses for the fourth chariot in verse 3 are mentioned separately in verses 6-7.

The first thing we notice is that the emphasis here seems to be on the north, which is where both the black horses and the white horses go. This fits perfectly with the history of the time — the struggle for world dominion had for centuries been concentrated in the north. (Recall that anyone coming from Babylon in the east would approach Jerusalem from the north.)

But what about Egypt in the south? They were still an important power but their power was waning. The grisled horses travel south.

Why doesn't he need to mention the other two directions? He doesn't need to. If God can take care of what is coming from the north and from the south (and we know that he can!), then God can handle any problems that might arise from the east or the west.

The north and the south were the biggest problems at the time, and so God uses them to represent *all* problems. We will see that again, both in this book and in the book of Revelation.

The description of the bay horses in verse 7 is vague, but it seems most likely that that the bay horses went south with the grisled horses as they are associated with the same chariot.

The phrase “walk to and fro through the earth” occurs three times in verse 7. That repetition emphasizes the message here — there is no place to hide for the enemies of God. He knows where they are, and he can reach them wherever they are. They are not safe in Babylon or Egypt or anywhere else.

8 Then cried he upon me, and spake unto me, saying, Behold, these that go toward the north country have quieted my spirit in the north country.

From the perspective of those in Jerusalem, all of the trouble lay in the north. Babylon was the seat of all political unrest and evil in their minds, and anyone coming from Babylon always arrived from the north.

Verse 8 tells us that these chariots have accomplished their purpose in the north. God’s spirit has been quieted in the north country. Literally, God’s spirit is at rest in the north.

What does that mean? Hadn’t the people seen these prophecies before? Didn’t Isaiah prophecy something similar against Babylon in Isaiah 13?

Isaiah 13:19-20 — *And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there.*

That had not *literally* happened in Zechariah’s day, or even to the present day. What is different here? Why is God at rest?

Daniel answers that question for us.

Daniel 2:44 — *And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, **but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms,** and it shall stand for ever.*

The church would do that! The church would break and consume those other kingdoms.

And also Isaiah in Isaiah 2.

Isaiah 2:4 — *And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*

Those verses are describing the establishment of the church in the first century — and how is it described? As a time when the nations of this earth would be judged and broken, and as a time when there would be peace with God. Those are the *same two blessings* we see here in this final vision!

This final vision is pointing to the church — the kingdom of Christ that would come about 500 years later. And the description we see here of that kingdom is a beautiful description — God is in Heaven, and all is right with the world!

But the world was in a mess! The people of God were living among the ruins! The powers of the earth seemed to be in total control! Yes, but God is in Heaven, and all is right with the world! That was true in Zechariah's day, and it is true in our own day.

John 16:33 — *In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

Think about John 19:30 for a moment.

John 19:30 — *When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, **It is finished**: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*

It is finished. There is so much meaning behind those three words. What is finished? All that God had been planning for us since before the foundation of this world. All that God had promised to Abraham so long before. All that God had promised through centuries of speaking to mankind through his prophets. All that Daniel and Zechariah and the others were telling us about. **It is finished!**

Yes, Jesus would rise from that grave a few days later. And yes, Jesus would ascend back into Heaven and establish his kingdom shortly after that. And yes, someday Jesus will come again to claim his own. But it was finished on that cross. **That cross was the finish line!**

We should never read John 19:30 without pausing to think about all that Jesus finished on that cross! He finished the kingdoms of this earth — they were broken and consumed. He finished his work of reconciliation — we can boldly approach God because of his shed blood. We, like Paul, can look forward to being with Christ as soon as we depart this world (Philippians 1:23, 2 Corinthians 5:8, Hebrews 10:19). Everything changed at the cross!

Ephesians 2:16 — *And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:*

Colossians 1:20 — *And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.*

Hebrews 12:2 — *Looking unto Jesus the author and **finisher** of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

It is finished! We are at peace with God, and the enemies of God have been broken. And those are the same two wonderful blessings we see promised here in this closing vision.

Questions about the eighth vision?

The Crowning of Joshua

Before we look at verses 9-15, let's consider two questions about the remainder of Chapter 6.

1. How does this section relate to the 8 visions we just studied?
2. Is this section another vision or is it something else?

As for the first question, commentaries are all over the map on how this section relates, if at all, to the eight visions.

There is definitely a relation, and we can see that simply by looking at what these verses share in common with the prior visions.

We saw Joshua, the High Priest, in Chapter 3, and we will see him again in these verses. Also, we saw Zerubbabel, the descendent of King David, in Chapter 4, and — although we will not see Zerubbabel here — we will see his ancestral crown. Also, we see the Branch in 3:8, and we will see the Branch again here in 6:12.

I think what we are seeing here is what we would expect to see at this point in the book — a beautiful capstone for the eight visions that preceded it. All of those visions were ultimately pointing to something or someone, and we are about to see what or who in these next few verses.

What about the second question — is this a vision? Are we seeing a ninth vision? And, if not, what are we seeing here?

Commentaries are almost unanimous in saying that this is **not** a vision, and I agree with that conclusion. We don't have any of the usual "vision" language that we saw with the earlier visions, and we don't see an interpreting angel. Also, the focus here is not on what Zechariah is *seeing*, but instead is on what Zechariah is *doing*. He is told to do something — and we can be sure that he did it.

Zechariah is not the only prophet who was told to do something as a sign for the people. In fact, one might say that Zechariah got off light in that regard! Hosea was told to marry a prostitute in Hosea 1:2, and Ezekiel was told to lie on his left side 390 days and eat bread baked over human dung in Ezekiel 4. So I suspect that Zechariah was just fine with this assignment (although it was dangerous, as we will discuss in a moment).

What was the assignment? Let's start with verse 9.

9 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 10 Take of them of the captivity, even of Heldai, of Tobijah, and of Jedaiah, which are come from Babylon, and come thou the same day, and go into the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah; 11 Then take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them upon the head of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest;

Zechariah is first told to find three people (Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah) and take them to see a fourth person (Josiah). He is then told to make crowns of silver and gold and to put them on the head of Joshua the high priest.

Who are all of these people?

We should first ask if “Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah” are even proper names. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew words, not as names, but rather as descriptions: “from the rulers, from the useful men, and from those who have understood it.” But most commentaries see the Hebrew words here as three proper names, and I don’t see any reason to disagree with that conclusion.

But who are they? The short answer is that we don’t know, but they were likely important exiles who had recently arrived from Babylon. There are a few other people in the Old Testament with these same names, but we can’t definitely link them with these three, and in some cases we can definitely say they are not the same as these three.

Why do we think they were important men? First, it seems they had some silver and gold. And second, their father’s name is not given, which suggests that everyone already knew who Zechariah was talking about.

I think one commentator accurately described the situation:

Zechariah’s selection of truly renowned individuals to contribute to the restoration effort and to witness the solemn ceremony underscores the political and religious importance of the prophet’s action. The involvement of such conspicuous people must have exerted great influence over the community and left a lasting impression.

I think that is why these three people were chosen.

But why did Zechariah take them to see Josiah son of Zephaniah? Who is that? Guess what — we can’t say for sure!

Again, we see both names elsewhere in the Bible, but again we can’t say for sure if any of those people are the same people we see here. If the Zephaniah here is the priest from 2 Kings 25:18, then perhaps Josiah is his great grandson. But we can’t say for sure.

Perhaps, though, the simplest solution is that Josiah was someone who was able to make crowns from the gold and the silver supplied by Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah. That explanation makes the most sense to me.

How do we know that they supplied the silver and gold?

The Hebrew in verse 10 is literally: “take from the captives — from Heldai, and from Tobijah, and from Jedaiah.”

What was taken? Most commentators agree that what Zechariah took from them was the silver and gold that he has in the very next verse. Either it was their silver and gold, or perhaps they had been entrusted with it by some who remained behind so that it could be used for the temple.

Other possibilities are that verse 10 instructs Zechariah to take them to Josiah’s house or that verse 10 instructs the prophet to take their offering. The verse is ambiguous on that point, unless you reading the NIV, which solves the ambiguity by adding uninspired words to the inspired text: “Take silver and gold from the exiles” (not something I recommend in view of Revelation 22:18!).

A final possibility is that this silver and gold was plunder from Babylon. If so, then we see an interesting parallel here between the departure from Babylon and the much earlier

er departure from Egypt. In Exodus 25:1-3, Moses accepted gold and silver plunder from Egypt for use in making the tabernacle.

Verse 11 uses the plural “crowns.” How many crowns did they make, and why did they make more than one?

One theory is that they made two crowns, a silver one for Joshua and a gold one for Zerubbabel, but (as the theory goes) the text failed to mention Zerubbabel for fear of offending the Persian authorities. That theory is dead wrong for several reasons, not the least of which is that placing a crown on anybody’s head (silver or gold) would certainly offend the Persians. You can be sure that King Darius did not want the Jews to crown anyone! This was a dangerous and courageous thing for Zechariah to do!

Also, this theory completely misses the entire point of this symbolic action — one that we have already seen in the visions — that of a **combined royal priesthood**. No one would be surprised to see a crown on Zerubbabel’s head — but that cannot be said of Joshua the High Priest. Putting a crown on his head was shocking, and likely the most shocked person of all was Joshua himself!

The most likely answer is that multiple crowns were placed on Joshua’s head. You will look in vain in these verses for a divine instruction for Zechariah to crown anyone other than Joshua.

Perhaps the gold and silver crowns were intertwined when placed on the head so that they together became a single crown. If so, that in itself would be symbolic depiction of what is being shown here — a combination of two offices: priest and king.

The key question is not what the crowns looked like but rather what did they mean?

We know they were not intended to invest Joshua into the office of High Priest. Why? Because Joshua was already the High Priest.

Some suggest that this was just intended to honor Joshua because of the important role he was about to play. That might be a good explanation if Joshua had been given a fruit basket, but he was not — he was given a crown. Placing a crown on someone’s head goes far beyond just giving that person honor. Crowns had a specific meaning then just as they do now.

So what did it mean? We don’t need to guess. Why? Because we already know, and because verse 12 tells us.

12 And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: 13 Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

Before we discuss the details of these two verses, let’s take a higher level look at these two verses.

Let’s assume for a moment that I am a prophet, and that I prophecy that the U.S. president in the year 2030 will also at the same time be a U.S. senator representing Texas. You certainly can’t prove me wrong today, but you can say that my one prophecy is really two prophecies. Why? Because for my prophecy to come true there would have to be a big

change in the law. The constitution forbids a sitting president from serving in the house or the senate. The constitution would have to be changed before my prophecy could come true.

We see the same thing here in verses 12-13, but with the Old Testament covenants rather than with the constitution. Under the Davidic covenant, Kings came from the line of David, the tribe of Judah, while, under the Mosaic covenant, priests came from the tribe of Levi. The same person could not be priest and king under those covenants. For that to ever be true, at least one of those covenants would either have to change or be replaced with something else.

Which is it? Jeremiah answers that question.

Jeremiah 31:31 — *Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.*

But how is that verse related to what we see here in Zechariah 6? Keep reading.

Jeremiah 33:15 — *In those days, and at that time, will I cause the **Branch** of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.*

That is the same Branch we see here in verse 12 — that Branch is Christ. When Christ came he would usher in a new covenant. And what would happen to the old covenant?

Hebrews 8:13 — *In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.*

Simple. But how could we ever convince a Jewish person of that truth? Start with Jeremiah 31, 33 and then go to Zechariah 6. Those chapters to a Jew are just like my presidential prophecy to an American. You know immediately that something has to change. That prophecy cannot come true under the current system.

Let's look now at the text of verses 12-13.

Again, verse 12 — “Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD.”

Verse 12 tells us *why* Zechariah placed a crown on Joshua's head — it was to teach us something about the Branch, something about Jesus. We have discussed the Branch before, and we know that it is a Messianic title for Christ.

Verse 12 (“he shall grow up out of his place”) sounds much like Jeremiah 33:15, which we read earlier: “In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David.”

And verse 12 tells us that Jesus would build the temple. Really? I thought Zerubbabel was building the temple. Did Jesus build a temple?

Mark 14:58 — *We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.*

John 2:19 — *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*

That temple was his body (John 2:21), but that temple had two meanings. First, Jesus built the temple in 3 days when he was raised from the dead, but that resurrection ushered in another temple that Jesus built — one that is also described as his body — the church.

Ephesians 2:20-21 — *And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto **an holy temple** in the Lord.*

2 Corinthians 6:16 — *For ye are **the temple of the living God**; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

It is Jesus, *not* Zerubbabel or Joshua, who is the great temple builder!