

GOD'S PLAN FOR UNIVERSAL DOMINION
ZECHARIAH 6:1-8

In his book *Comrades*, Stephen Ambrose writes about the horror of war:

"Combat requires all the nerves, all the physical attributes, every bit of the training. It is only in combat, nowhere else, where time is measured in other ways than by clocks or calendars. Only in combat does the soldier realize that he is in the worst situation that can ever be imagined that nothing else can compare to it, that the longer he stays where he is the more likely that he will be dead, or if he is extremely lucky he will be wounded. Only in combat is one in a position in which youngsters his age he doesn't know, has never met, are trying to kill him — and he is trying to kill them."

That state of war is a regular, ongoing part of our world. To be in this world is to be part of a world that is engaged in war. Historians have estimated that since 3600 B.C. the world has known only 292 years of peace. There have been nearly 15,000 wars in those 5600 years, and nearly four billion people have died.

Our world is so desperate that one of the greatest commanders in one of the worst world wars, General George Marshall said in 1945, **"If man does find the solution for world peace, it will be the most revolutionary reversal of his record we have ever known."** And to date, no such solution has been found.

You have some hope, though, don't you? It is the hope that was anticipated by the prophet Zechariah, who was writing to encourage the Israelites who returned from Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple. Nearly 20 years after their return, the temple still only had the foundation laid. The nation hadn't continued the work because of fear (and apathy?). So Haggai and Zechariah were given prophecies to encourage and exhort them to finish the work.

Zechariah's prophecy begins with eight visions in which God reveals something of His nature and something of His plan for His people. In the final vision in Zechariah 6, we will discover that...

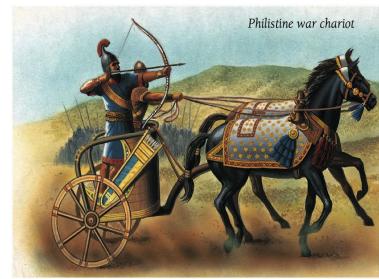
SOVEREIGN GOD IS IN HEAVEN AND ALL IS — AND WILL BE — RIGHT IN THE WORLD.

This morning, we consider Zechariah's eighth and final vision:

1. **What Zechariah SAW in the Eighth Vision (6:1-3)**
2. **What Zechariah's Eighth Vision MEANT (6:4-8)**
3. **What Zechariah's Visions TEACH About God**

1. What Zechariah SAW in the Eighth Vision (6:1-3)

- The significant elements of the vision —
 - ✓ **I lifted up my eyes** indicates the beginning of another vision; this is the last of the eight.
 - ✓ **Four chariots** — in the first vision there is a mention of horses; here horses are joined to chariots
 - Chariots were quite common in OT times, both preceding Zechariah's day and in his day.
 - Chariots were light, made mostly of wood and leather; only essential parts were iron or bronze.
 - **The main basket** was made of a light wicker and large enough to accommodate 2-4 men (driver plus warriors); if more than two men, one would often have a shield to protect against arrows.
 - Usually two horses were used to pull the chariot; occasionally a third horse would follow behind.
 - Chariots were both used in war (because of their speed) and in peacetime to carry dignitaries — even God appears in a "chariot" as a theophany in Ezk. 1:15-21. Both uses are significant here:
 - ... The chariots carry out an act of war at the end of the vision (cf. **Is. 66:15-16**).
 - ... They are carrying God's messengers (**spirits**) — acting as His dignitaries to do His will.
 - ✓ **The two mountains** — Zechariah describes them as *the* mountains — two particular mountains, that likely would have been well known to the hearers of the vision.
 - It has been suggested that they were Mt. Zion in Jerusalem and the Mt. of Olives.
 - That's a reasonable and logical assumption, but we just don't know.
 - Perhaps more significantly, mountains were used in ancient near-eastern culture to represent a habitation of the gods. While the Israelites did not believe that God literally dwelt in the mountains, the OT refers to His living there figuratively (cf. **Ps. 48:1-3**; 132:13-14). That seems to be the most reasonable conclusion, since His judgment is coming from the mountains.
 - ✓ **Bronze mountains** — what is being emphasized with "bronze?" Could be the color or metal.
 - If he is pointing to color caused by the sun, it may be emphasizing sunrise — "new day dawning" as God's purposes are being fulfilled. It would be a contrast to the "sunset" of 1:8.
 - More likely the emphasis is on the metal than the color; bronze is a hard, virtually impenetrable material that points to the inability of the nations to resist the sovereign will of God.
 - Even more elementarily, since these are not "natural" mountains, we should see these as supernatural mountains where God dwells and from which He sends His messengers (notice that the chariots are coming out of the cleft between the two "heavenly" mountains, **6:5**).
 - ✓ **Red...black...white...dappled horses** — similar in color to the horses of the first vision.



Philistine war chariot

- “If the colors are significant, perhaps red symbolizes war and bloodshed, black designates death and famine, white speaks of triumph and victory, and dappled denotes pestilence and plagues” (according to the explanation of other horses in Rev. 6:1-8). [Lindsey]
- However, that’s reading something 2500+ years in the future into this text. Similarity ≠ identity.
- Since the colors remain unexplained it is best to leave it that way. More importantly, they “go.”

- The *similarities* to the first vision —

	<u>VISION 1</u>	<u>VISION 8</u>
“ACTORS”	Horses	Horses/chariots
ACTIVITY	Patrolling	Patrolling (3x)
DOMAIN	Earth	Earth
SENDER	Lord of Hosts	Lord of All the Earth
OUTCOME	Israel’s comfort (1:13)	Israel’s peace (6:8)

- ✓ The common themes are used as brackets for the start and finish of the visions and remind us of the common theme of the victory of God in all the visions.

- The *differences* from the first vision —

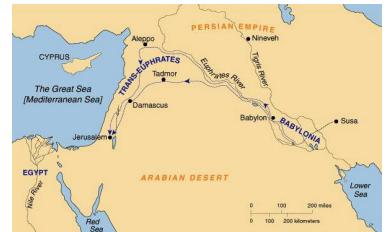
	<u>VISION 1</u>	<u>VISION 8</u>
LOCATION	Valley	Mountain
ACTORS	Riders	“No riders”
OUTCOME	Worldly rest (1:11)	Godly rest (6:8)

- ✓ While there are similarities, there are also unique aspects to each vision —
 - They are all designed to teach a different aspect about God and His plan for Israel.
 - They give different exhortations and encouragements to Judah to rebuild the temple.
- That’s what Zechariah saw — but what did it mean?

2. What Zechariah’s Eighth Vision MEANT (6:4-8)

- In verse four, Zechariah asks, ***what are these, my Lord?*** (v. 4)
 - ✓ Many have wondered whether he is talking about the chariots or horses. Yes. He doesn’t understand anything about any of the vision. (Since the chariots aren’t mentioned again, we also can understand that the important part of the vision is the horses and where they go.)
 - ✓ That he asks for help in interpreting the vision is a good reminder for us.
 - Zechariah is not untrained and not mentally deficient.
 - He could have speculated many things about the horses, mountains, and colors. He wisely waited to hear from the Lord what was important. We do well to follow his example. Be careful about speculating about meanings of details in visions/parables that are not explained.

- The four chariots and the horses are ***the four spirits of Heaven...*** (v. 5)
 - ✓ The word “spirits” can also mean “wind,” but it is best to understand this as spiritual beings since they had been standing before the Lord (*Adonai*, v. 5b, 3:7) and that is the way Scripture interprets it (Heb. 1:7). These are angelic beings sent by God.
 - ✓ What is most important is about these spirits is that they “go” — 1x in v. 5, 3x each in v. 6-7. They have been sent on a mission and they are eager and equipped to complete the task.
 - ✓ The other notable part of v. 5 is that they are not acting on their own initiative, but they are sent by ***the Lord of all the earth*** (not YHWH, but *Adonai*, “Master, Lord,” emphasizing His sovereignty).
 - He is Lord not only of Judah and Israel, but of all the nations — all things and people (cf. 1:10).
 - God the Lord will subjugate every person, enemy, and governmental entity to Himself (Rev. 4-19), culminating in the rule of the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16).
 - This is a Messianic title, denoting the rule of God in the Millennial Kingdom (4:14; Mic. 4:13).
 - Note: when the angels come out of Heaven they arrive on earth with the authority of God as His emissaries, and thus are incapable of being resisted or defeated.
 - So this is an encouragement to the residents of Jerusalem in 519 B.C., but also an encouragement to all God’s people in every age of His ultimate and final rule.
- What is important about the horses is not their colors, but where they go and what they do: they go to the ***north...south*** (v. 6) and they ***patrol the earth*** (v. 7)
 - ✓ Too many commentators have spent too much time attempting to figure out the meaning of the colors of the horses, why they don’t go to all four points of the compass and why the red aren’t sent.
 - ✓ When reading narrative lit., let the writer tell you what is important.
 - ✓ What is important is where the horses and chariots go — N and S.
 - ✓ Why not east and west? Remember the ***location of Israel*** — Med. to west & desert to east; so eastern adversaries came from north.
 - ✓ Every invader against Israel came from either the north or south; the most significant enemies were Egypt (south) and Babylon (2:6-7; Assyria, M-P,... “north”).
 - ✓ It is likely that the four chariots/horses went N & S and then to four points of the compass/earth.
 - ✓ To say that the messengers go out to the north and south is to say that they are executing judgment on all the enemies of the Israelites and throughout all the earth (cf. Is. 43:5-7).
 - ✓ In v. 7 the ***strong ones*** are sent (v. 3 calls the dappled horses “strong”); this is probably a reference to all the horses being strong — one translation renders it “all these strong ones...”
 - ✓ What is important is what they were going to do — ***to patrol the earth*** (3x). To patrol is to constantly and extensively examine as a military exercise (and to execute military plan).
 - ✓ They are sent by the Lord of all the earth (***He said...***) and they were eager to comply.
 - ✓ Their only responsibility was to carry out God’s mandates against the nations.
 - ✓ “From first to last (cf. 1:10) the affairs of the nations are under God’s direction, not man’s.” [Baldwin]



- The full significance of their patrolling is in v. 8 —
 - ✓ **He cried out to me** is a loud utterance, with the sense of making a proclamation. There is weightiness and importance to the call — along with urgency. It is intense and excited.
 - ✓ We might assume that the angel is speaking (v. 4), but notice **My wrath** — that's not angelic wrath but divine wrath. We should understand that the **Lord Almighty** is speaking again. What does He say?
 - ✓ **Those going to the land of the north** — refers to the angelic messengers doing battle against the northern enemies (identified as Babylon in 2:6-7).
 - The first vision identified God's anger against the nations who felt they were secure (1:11, 15).
 - He has not overlooked Babylon, but has destroyed her. First she was imprisoned (5:11) and here she was defeated (anticipating her final defeat, Rev. 18:2, 10ff).
 - While the text doesn't say it explicitly, we can assume that if the messengers to the north are successful, so are all the other messengers — all the nations of earth will be subjugated to God.
 - ✓ **God's wrath** has been executed and **appeased**.
 - The word **wrath** is actually "spirit" or "wind." Occasionally the word has the sense of "anger" (Judg. 8:3; Eccl. 10:4; Prov. 16:32 — "spirit of anger").
 - It is also important to notice that God says His wrath was **appeased** — "put to rest."
 - God's spirit of anger is put to rest because the full weight of His judgment has been executed.
 - He will be finished with His work of wrath.
 - Previous visions have pictured peace for Israel; here peace for the world is promised. God has carried out all the implications of His sovereign control over **all the earth**. He is finished.
 - Since Genesis 3, all creation and people in creation have groaned under the weight of sin. Now God has acted with finality — "God is in Heaven and all is right with the world."
 - The King is universally ruling over His realm in actuality (there are no rebels).

3. What Zechariah's Visions TEACH About God

• *God's plans are unchangeable and undefeatable*

- ✓ The messengers come from God's mountain — from His habitation in Heaven where He makes His eternal plan; whatever He wills in Heaven will (must) be accomplished on earth (Mt. 6:10).
- ✓ The messengers will be sent according to God's divine timetable; neither He nor they are late.
- ✓ The messengers come from God's impregnable fortress (bronze mountain)...
- ✓ It is a temptation to despair when we observe "overwhelming" unrighteousness (think Abraham, Elijah, David w/ Philistines, and me...). Don't despair. God isn't defeated and won't be defeated.

• *God's wrath is not immediate, but it is imminent*

- ✓ Babylon was defeated and will be defeated. And so will every ruler and authority.
- ✓ No injustice against Israel will remain and no injustice against Israel will be unpunished.

- ✓ Even more, no injustice of any kind will remain and no injustice will be unpunished. The wrath of the Lamb of God will eternally be poured out against the nations (cf. **Jer. 25:12ff**, esp. v. 27; Rev. 14:10).
- ✓ If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, don't assume that God doesn't care about your sin. He does. He has been patient with you, but there will be an end to His patience. You must repent. But if you repent, He will forgive and buy (redeem) your sin and transform your life, both now and in eternity.
- ✓ God's wrath will be satisfied, and He will "rest" from His anger.

- ***God's day of final peace is not yet here, but its arrival is soon***

- ✓ The Son of Man is already seated on His throne and is at peace (His work is finished; **Col. 3:1**)
- ✓ The Father will execute His wrath and will do it soon, and peace will follow (cf. **Lk. 2:14**; **Jn. 16:33**)
- ✓ What hope the Israelites had to receive from this prophecy! God would preserve "His feeble flock, checkmating every effort to destroy them till Messiah should Himself appear." [Ironside]
- ✓ God's wrath will be put to rest means that while it will always exist in Hell, it won't be in Heaven. Every tear of grief will be wiped away permanently.
- ✓ Whatever is tempting you to discontentment, unrest, and lack of peace, remember — the spirit warriors of God are soon to be unleashed and He will bring lasting peace — for Israel and for us.
- ✓ In dark days, it is tempting to think the dark days are final. They are not. Listen to one father who buried his 20-year-old son who died from a sudden heart attack:

"God makes many promises, and *the best of them are for our worst times*. It is when we are struck down and very nearly destroyed that we most crave God's comfort, God's assurance, God's words of peace. Perhaps the most precious of all is this: all things work for good. Those who love God and are loved by him can have confidence that he is working through all of life's circumstances to bring good out of bad, light out of darkness, joy out of sorrow. It's not that God is especially agile, a kind of cosmic PR man adept at manipulating circumstances, but rather that he is the planner, the engineer, the designer, who has ordained the means just as much as the end. He ordains the calm and the storm, the darkness and the dawn, the famine and the feast. This being the case, no event is meaningless, no situation purposeless, no condition ultimately hopeless. God is working out his good will, not despite dark days, difficult trials, and broken hearts, *but through them*. Such circumstances are the raw material he uses to form and shape his good plans, his perfect purposes. [Challies, *Seasons of Sorrow*, 87-8; my emphases.]

- ✓ God's promises are for the worst of our times. That was true for Judah in Zechariah's day. And it is true for us, in whatever the worst of our days is.

BENEDICTION: **Jude 24-25**