

# Zechariah 1:18-21

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/zech/zech-1/zechariah-118-21/>

*Zechariah sees four horns representing the nations of the four points of the compass. He also sees four blacksmiths who will destroy the horns, meaning that successive political powers will destroy the powers before them.*

The second vision of Zechariah begins Chapter 2 of the Hebrew Bible (Hebrew: Zechariah 2:1-4). It describes God's judgment on the nations that afflicted His chosen people, Israel and Judah. The prophet began by saying, *Then I lifted up my eyes and looked* (vs 18). This idiomatic expression indicates that Zechariah focused on all the images of the previous vision until another one caught his attention. This expression thus marks the beginning of a new unit in the narrative.

As the prophet *looked* up to see the new scene, *behold*, he saw *four horns*. Since the *horn* gives animals a regal look and provides a defense mechanism, ancient people often used the imagery to symbolize power or status (Deuteronomy 33:17; 1 Kings 22:11). Here in Zechariah, it represents the nations that afflicted Israel and Judah. That the prophet saw *four horns* suggests that the adversaries of God's people were on every side. They attacked from all directions.

As the prophet focused on the *horns*, he wanted to know what they were. So, he *said to the angel who was speaking with him*, *'What are these?'* (vs 19). This *angel* is the same one mentioned in verses 9, 13, and 14. His task was to interpret the meaning of the vision and answer questions about it, as the angel Gabriel did for Daniel (Daniel 8:16). Thus, the interpreting *angel* answered Zechariah's question and said, *'These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem'* (vs 19).

The term *horn* stands for nations. It represents the military entities that defeated Judah and Israel. Assyria and Babylonia were among these four nations since they defeated Israel and Judah and sent them into exile (see 2 Kings 17:23–25; 2 Kings 25:1–2, respectively). These powerful nations *scattered* the people of God, meaning they cast them in various directions. They attacked the chosen people of God and dispersed them throughout the earth. But God took notice. He would judge them accordingly.

The prophet Zechariah continued to describe his vision. Now he said, *Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen* (vs 20). The term translated as *craftsman* is “hārāšīm” in Hebrew. It often refers to workers skilled in stone, wood, or metal (Exodus 35:35; 38:23). When Zechariah saw the *craftsmen*, he did not ask who they were. Instead, he asked, *What are these coming to do?* (vs 21).

In answering the prophet, the interpreting angel first told him what the *horns* had done, saying: *These are the horns which have scattered Judah so that no man lifts up his head*. The Gentile nations dispersed the citizens of Judah via exile. Assyria exiled the people of the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17:23). Babylon exiled the people of the southern kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 24:14, 21). In each case they crushed their land. They oppressed God's covenant people

and humiliated them, *so that no man lifts up his head*. The picture is of a downtrodden people, with heads bowed.

But *these craftsmen* of Zechariah's vision *have come to terrify* the oppressive nations, *to throw down the horns of the nations who have lifted up their horns against the land of Judah in order to scatter it* (Judah).

The verb *terrify* describes crippling terror. The *craftsmen* are going to strike terror into the hearts of the likes of Assyria and Babylon. The Bible often uses the verb translated *terrify* when someone is in a state of horror after receiving some bad news or an unpleasant surprise (Genesis 27:33).

In our context, it describes what would happen to the *horns*, that is, the Gentile nations that oppressed Judah. Not only would the *craftsmen terrify* them, but also, they would *throw them down*, meaning defeat them. Now they would be the ones to experience the same shame and humiliation that they imposed upon God's people.

Under normal circumstances, the biblical *craftsmen* used their skills to build (2 Kings 12:11). They worked in the mediums of wood stone, metals, gems, and clay. Here, however, in this case they would use their skills to destroy. That *the craftsmen* came to terrify *the horns* and cast them out implies divine retribution. God would repay the Gentile nations for the way they mistreated His covenant people.

The *four craftsmen* likely symbolize four successive powers that would defeat the powers before them. The punishment would fit the crime. Just as the Gentile nations mistreated God's people, so other ethnic groups would do to them.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>18</sup> Then I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, *there were* four horns. <sup>19</sup> So I said to the angel who was speaking with me, "What are these?" And he answered me, "These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem." <sup>20</sup> Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen. <sup>21</sup> I said, "What are these coming to do?" And he said, "These are the horns which have scattered Judah so that no man lifts up his head; but *these craftsmen* have come to terrify them, to throw down the horns of the nations who have lifted up *their* horns against the land of Judah in order to scatter it."**