

Zechariah 6:1-8

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Zechariah sees four chariots emerging from between two bronze mountains. The angel speaking with him identifies the chariots as four spirits of heaven who go forth from the presence of God. The chariot going to the north satisfies God's anger for taking advantage of Judah by judging the land of the north.

This passage records Zechariah's last vision. The prophet began with the particle *Now*, translated as "then" in the previous chapter (Zechariah 5:1). The Old Testament often uses the particle in narrative texts to explain a sequence of events (how a story unfolds). It indicates what is next chronologically. Thus, after Zechariah saw a woman in a basket, symbolizing wickedness, and two women transporting the basket to Babylon (Zechariah 5:5–11), he told his readers what was next in line. He stated, *Now I lifted up my eyes again and looked* (vs 1).

To *lift up the eyes* is an idiomatic expression meaning to look around (Genesis 13:10; 18:2). That the prophet *looked* around means he had focused on the images of the previous scene until another one caught his attention and interrupted his thoughts. As the prophet *looked* to see the new episode, *behold, four chariots were coming forth from between the two mountains* (vs 1). We are not told what the number *four* represents. The image of *chariots* typically represents military power. The passage will tell us that these *four chariots* represent four spirits that stand in the Lord's presence. They are sent forth from God to do His bidding.

During most Old Testament history, *chariots* ("merkābâ" in Hebrew) were two-wheeled vehicles pulled by two horses and designed for speed and maneuverability in battle and races. They were mobile platforms allowing soldiers to shoot volleys of arrows at their enemies. The prophet Nahum describes the rumbling wheels, "galloping horses," and "bounding chariots" of an attack on the bloody city of Nineveh (Nahum 3:2). Similarly, the prophet Habakkuk describes the LORD's victorious attack with horses and *chariots* (Habakkuk 3:8).

In the book of Zechariah, the prophet observed *four chariots emerging from between two mountains* (vs 2) to wage war against some of the neighboring nations.

Zechariah identified the colors of the *two mountains* as *bronze* (vs 1). The term *bronze* ("nehōšet" in Hebrew) is often a symbol of strength in the Old Testament. For instance, when God commissioned Jeremiah, He stated, "Behold, I have made you today as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze against the whole land..." (Jeremiah 1:18; see also Isaiah 45:2).

Here in Zechariah, the *mountains of bronze* likely symbolize the impregnable strength of the LORD. In short, the *chariots coming from between the mountains of bronze* signify that the LORD, the great warrior, was going forth from His "holy habitation" to fight against His foes.

Next, the prophet told his audience the colors of the horses pulling the *chariots*: *with the first chariot were red horses, with the second chariot black horses, with the third chariot white horses, and with the fourth chariot strong dappled horses* (vs 3).

In the book of Revelation, each of these colors is given a meaning. The white color stands for victory, red for war and bloodshed, black for famine, and dappled for death (Revelation 6:1–8). In Zechariah, however, we are not told that the color represents anything.

The images of the *four chariots* with these different colors caught Zechariah's attention and aroused his curiosity. He *spoke to the angel who was speaking with him and said, "What are these, my lord?"* (vs 4). Zechariah made his usual inquiry to ensure he understood what he saw in the vision (Zechariah 1:9, 19; 4:4).

The Hebrew title translated as *lord* is "'adon" in the Hebrew text. It means "master" or "ruler." It appears in the Old Testament over 300 times for an earthly lord and about 30 times for a divine lord. The brothers of Joseph, not knowing who he was, addressed him as "my lord" and referred to themselves as "your servants" (Genesis 42:10). Sometimes, however, the Old Testament uses the term *lord* as an expression of courtesy, as in our text (see also Genesis 31:35).

Without hesitation, *the angel replied to the prophet, These (the horses and chariots) are the four spirits of heaven* (vs 5). The term translated as *spirit* is "rûah" in the Hebrew language. It can mean "breath," "wind," or "spirit." It appeared in the second chapter as "wind" (Zechariah 2:6). In our context, it refers to *spirits* sent by God to perform supernatural work around the globe.

It is inferred that the *four spirits of heaven* were angelic beings serving as Yahweh's emissaries. They would go *forth after standing before the Lord of all the earth* (vs 5). That these heavenly beings were *standing before the Lord of all the earth* indicates that they have a high position of rank and authority.

The term *Lord* is "'adon" in the Hebrew text. It means "master" or "ruler." The prophet used it in the previous verse to express courtesy when addressing the interpreting angel (verse 4). Here, the *angel* utilized it deliberately to describe *the LORD* as the Master or Ruler of the entire universe. In doing so, he reminded Zechariah that God is the *Lord of lords*. The angelic beings that he sees, powerful and impressive as they are, are under the authority and in service of the *LORD*.

The prophet Zechariah then described the travel directions of the *chariots*: *with one of which the black horses are going forth to the north country; and the white ones go forth after them* (vs 6). The *north* was often the direction from which the adversaries would come. In Jeremiah, the LORD informed the prophet, "Out of the north the evil will break forth on all the inhabitants of the land" (Jeremiah 1:14–15).

The region of Babylon was that evil from the *north* that had invaded Judah (Zechariah 2:6–7). Even though Babylon was more east than north from Israel, its armies traveled northwest along the rivers, resulting in them entering Israel from the north when invading. They did this rather than attempt to traverse the mountains and .

The *white horses* followed the *black* ones and went *north* (to Babylon) also, *while the dappled ones went forth to the south country* (vs 6), likely meaning Egypt.

The prophet then made a general statement about the *horses*. He said, *When the strong ones went out, they were eager to go to patrol the earth* (vs 7). Here apparently each of the serving spirits are called *strong ones*, further indicating their power and authority to act.

Zechariah portrayed the *horses* as powerful and *eager*; they were anxious to get to work. That means they were impatient to start a journey and travel throughout the earth. *And He said, Go, patrol the earth* (vs 7). The pronoun *He* likely stands for *the LORD*. Zechariah wanted his audience to hear the command from the mouth of God, who has all authority and power, so he introduced Him as the speaker.

God is clearly in control of all things (Revelation 19:16). Therefore, once the angels heard the divine command, *they went and patrolled the earth*. This is similar to the horses that patrolled the earth in Chapter 1, and found it at peace (Zechariah 1:11).

Then, *the LORD cried out to the prophet to disclose a revelation to him*. This sound was loud because *the LORD* was distant from Zechariah. And as He summoned the prophet, He said, *See, those who are going to the land of the north have appeased My wrath in the land of the north* (vs 8).

The expression *appeased My wrath* is literally “caused My Spirit to rest.” That the Spirit of God would rest in Babylon means justice would have been done to those who had abused God’s people (Zechariah 1:15).

This final vision of Zechariah reminds the reader of the first vision, in which a patrol of heavenly horsemen mounted on different-colored horses reported that all the earth was then at peace. Also, in the first vision, the interpreting angel reassured Zechariah that the LORD was still angry with the Gentile nations but would comfort Jerusalem and restore her fortunes (Zechariah 1:7–17). In chapter 1, there was peace upon the earth, but God was not pleased with that condition, because the nations He had used to punish Israel had abused their authority, and gone far past what was necessary (Zechariah 1:15).

Those spirits sent from God *going to the land of the north* would execute judgment upon the wicked, on God’s behalf, in order to satisfy His wrath. This was because He was “very angry with the nations who are at ease” for being overbearing against His people (Zechariah 1:15).

At the time Zechariah is prophesying, Judah’s captor, Babylon, had already been defeated by Persia (Zechariah 1:1). But God speaks of “the nations” who “are at ease” and connects these nations directly with Babylon, stating they they “furthered the disaster” upon Judah, beyond what was necessary. So this would seem to apply to nations that had been allied with Babylon, or in some way otherwise complicit in the abuse of Judah.

The point seems to be that God’s justice on behalf of His people will be gotten. This is part of His covenant promise to Israel, that when they return from having been judged with curses for

breaking His covenant, God will redeem them when they repent, and bring justice upon their enemies (Deuteronomy 32:35-36, 43).

This passage tells us that the LORD is the great and righteous warrior who fights against sin and wickedness to restore righteousness and peace in His world. He also enforces the provisions of His covenant, both the curses for disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:15-68) as well as the promised restoration and application of justice when they repent (Deuteronomy 32:35-36, 43).

Biblical Text

¹Now I lifted up my eyes again and looked, and behold, four chariots were coming forth from between the two mountains; and the mountains *were* bronze mountains. ²With the first chariot *were* red horses, with the second chariot black horses, ³with the third chariot white horses, and with the fourth chariot strong dappled horses. ⁴Then I spoke and said to the angel who was speaking with me, “What are these, my lord?” ⁵The angel replied to me, “These are the four spirits of heaven, going forth after standing before the Lord of all the earth, ⁶with one of which the black horses are going forth to the north country; and the white ones go forth after them, while the dappled ones go forth to the south country. ⁷When the strong ones went out, they were eager to go to patrol the earth.” And He said, “Go, patrol the earth.” So they patrolled the earth. ⁸Then He cried out to me and spoke to me saying, “See, those who are going to the land of the north have appeased My wrath in the land of the north.”