

# The Book of Zechariah—Part 10

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This article is the tenth in a series of articles designed to give a brief commentary on the prophetic portion of the Old Testament known as the book of Zechariah. In particular, this article will deal with the Vision of the Four Chariots given in Zechariah 6:1-8. This vision is the eighth of eight night visions, which Zechariah receives (1:7-6:15). The Coronation of Joshua (6:9-15) in this scheme is being viewed as a conclusion to the eight visions and will be dealt with in the next article.

This particular vision of the four chariots is related to the previous Vision of the Woman in the Ephah (5:5-11) in that it portrays in more detail the judgment upon Babylon, which is perhaps only an incidental point in the vision of the ephah. It is also true that this vision is different from the preceding vision in its focus since the cleansing of the nation of Israel was in view in the previous section. There is also a correlation between this eighth vision and the first vision (1:7-17). In both visions, horses appear and there is a patrol of heavenly messengers throughout the earth. In a sense, these similarities make the two visions book-ends to the entire section of the night visions. In general, the idea is put forward that God's sovereign desire will not be thwarted. It will be accomplished in its entirety and Israel should have hope in light of this fact. Thus, we state the general gist of this Vision of the Four Chariots as the judgment of the godless, Gentile nations who have opposed the nation of Israel.

Zechariah "lifts up his eyes" as in previous visions and "looks." The seer observes the basic scene of the vision. There are four chariots coming forth between two bronze mountains. Different color horses pull each chariot: red (v. 2), black (v. 2), white (v. 3), and dappled or speckled (v. 3). The four colors in the first vision of Zechariah were red, speckled, and white.

The first necessary interpretive decision that needs to be made, however, is the identity of the two mountains. There is no better understanding than to see them as the Mount of Olives and Mount Zion. Zechariah sees the chariots going forth from the area of God's seat not unlike the spirit of the prophet Amos' declaration that the "LORD roars from Zion" (Amos 1:2). This makes sense when one realizes that the valley between Zion and the Mount of Olives is the valley of judgment (Jehoshaphat) and the place of the future judgment of the nations (Joel 3:1-12). The fact that in Zechariah the Mount of Olives is mentioned later in conjunction with the Messiah coming back in judgment upon the peoples that have warred against Jerusalem (Zech. 14:1-12) reinforces this conclusion in this particular vision. The bronze nature of the mountains strengthens the notion of judgment inherent in the passage. (cp. Num. 21:9, Rev. 1:15, 2:18).

What is harder to interpret is the meaning of the four colors that are given. The later interpretation of the vision given by the interpreting angel is not specific concerning the nature of the colors. However, all chariots with the horses seem to be involved, at least in part, in a patrol of judgment. Similar to the first Vision of the Red-Horse Rider (1:7-17), the red horse may refer to war and blood, the white horse to victory of some kind, and the speckled horse to a mixture. The black horse does not appear in the first vision as it does in the eighth. Some commentators (e.g., Feinberg) have suggested the following meanings

for the four horses: red—war and bloodshed, black—death and famine, white—triumph and victory, speckled—pestilence and plagues. However, it is impossible to be dogmatic about such exact details. It may be best to see judgment separating and keeping the good from the bad in line with the judgment of the nations (Matt. 25) and in harmony with the overall thrust of this eighth vision.

The interpretation that the four horses represent the four world kingdoms in Daniel (chapters 2 & 7), while giving a previous Scriptural background to the vision here and correlating it to the second vision (the Four Horns and Craftsmen), should be rejected. Rather, the correlation is to the first vision with its patrols. Furthermore, in this eighth vision, the chariots and horses are said to go directions that do not clearly match the four world kingdoms of Daniel.

The interpreting angel responds to Zechariah's specific request for understanding about the vision (v. 4). The angel identifies the four chariots with their varied horses as four "spirits" (NASB) going forth from God (v. 5). This word could also be translated "winds." If the latter meaning is taken, the overall interpretation of the passage might lend itself more easily to God's judgment coming from all corners of the earth, i.e., a general statement. However, this would not rule out the use of angelic messengers in this process. One would simply have to go to other passages to discover that fact. If the term "spirits" is the best explanation, then, angelic messengers are meant. There is no reason to suggest that these four angels are any more special than other angels. They are simply representing God in this particular judgment task. The interpretation of "spirits" should be accepted on the following grounds: (1) the correlation to the previous vision with its angelic messengers involved in judgment upon Babylon (5:5-11) is made easier, (2) the correlation to the first vision with its angelic messengers on patrol (1:7-17) is made easier. It is impossible to take the riders on the horses in the first vision as anything but angels. One of them is declared to be the angel of the LORD (1:8-12). Of particular significance would also be the role of angels in the book of Revelation bringing about the judging acts of God upon the world in general and upon Babylon in particular (Rev. 17-18).

The major feature left in the interpreting angel's presentation is the direction the chariots are going. The black and white horses go to the north country while the speckled or dappled horses go to the south country. In the context of that historical time, the north country must be understood as Babylon while the south country must refer to Egypt. These were the two main enemies of Israel in its history up to the time of Zechariah. Babylon's earlier mention in the visions helps to substantiate its identification here. Then in verse eight, the appeasing of the wrath of God with respect to the north country is highlighted. Since the north country is Babylon and Babylon had already been put down by Zechariah's time, the vision may be speaking of a future appeasement to come (again cp. Rev. 17-18). It would certainly focus on Babylon as the seat of evil in God's eyes. The red horses are not mentioned directly in the interpreting angel's presentation. Most commentators correctly see them as the "strong ones" of verse seven even though the adjective *strong* is attached to the dappled horses in verse three. The red horses go out patrolling all the land. If a correlation to 5:3 is appropriate here, the patrol, which is commanded by God, covers the land of Israel. However, the judgment of all nations may be in view with Babylon and Egypt representing the beginning point of God's dealings with the nations.

In Zechariah's time, a vision portraying the truth that God would continue to deal with the sins against Israel by the surrounding Gentile nations would certainly have been a positive

message of hope for the struggling nation as it attempts to revive its national prestige and place after the return from the Babylonian captivity. So the transition is set for the coronation picture for Joshua the High Priest, who receives a promise in the next section of Zechariah that One was going to arise, the Branch (Messiah) who would be a king-priest. This promise would be a reminder to the children of Israel of their great destiny as promised by the LORD.