

Lesson Two: Zechariah's First Night Vision

The Foundation of our Study: How broad is our Spiritual Perspective?

The Exiles had a very limited Spiritual Perspective!

Pattern and Structure for the Night Visions:

Zechariah's visions address four problems the people of his day were facing:

- a. Absence of the Lord;
- b. Sins of the community;
- c. Leadership of the people;
- d. The lack of protection for those living in Jerusalem.

Zechariah is organized in a chiastic pattern:

- a. The first and the eighth vision form a universal outer layer.
- b. The second and the seventh vision cover an international perspective.
- c. The third and sixth vision take a national approach.
- d. The fourth and fifth vision form a local perspective.

The first Night Vision: The Vision of a Horseman!

Political Context to Keep in Mind: Cambyses died in 522 BC leaving no heir. A Persian general named Darius seized the throne and was installed as ruler on Oct.5, 522 BC. Rebellion continued to spread through the empire. Persia showed no mercy. Darius brought the rebellion to a close by ordering the execution of government officials who opposed his rule along with 2,500 supporters. By 520 BC most of the rebellions were ended and Darius was firmly in control.

Zechariah First Night Vision: On February 15, 519 BC, two months after Haggai's final message and during Darius' second year, Zechariah published his eight night-visions. The first of the eight visions cover events which preceded the reign of Darius and his violent punishment of those who rebelled. The vision makes the spiritual elements behind the world events visible and offers the promise of the Lord's return to Israel. --- A key figure in the vision is the "Messenger who speaks with me" (1:9). This messenger, the Lord Jesus, laments the length of the exile and speculates about how long it will last. The Almighty God responds to this lament with "good and comforting words" (1:13) that take the form of the first oracle (1:14-17).

1:7 *On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo.*

Special Timing Note: The date cited here is Feb.15, 519 BC. This was two months after the foundation for the new temple was completed on Dec.18, 520 BC (Hag.2:10-19;

Zech.4:6-10). It would take four more years for the builders to finish the second temple on March 12, 515 BC. ---

Context: *The elements in this first vision reveal conditions prior to the reign of Darius I. The vision makes the spiritual elements behind the world events visible and offers the promise of the Lord's return to Israel.*

1:8 *During the night I had a vision—and there before me was a man riding a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown and white horses.*

1. List the objects mentioned in this first vision.
2. Pay special attention to this “man” among the myrtle trees. He will accompany Zechariah through all eight visions, and he will explain God’s actions and plans. Use 1:11,12 to identify this “man.”

Bible Reading Principle 1: God says what he means, and he means what he says. We apply this principle to the visions God reveals. When God does not supply a meaning to an object within the vision, such as the horses here, God is telling us that further identification of the horses is not material to God’s message. Since God does not attach a meaning to the horses, we do not supply one from our imaginations.

1:9 *I asked, “What are these, my lord?” The angel who was talking with me answered, “I will show you what they are.”*

3. The presence of the horses and their purpose prompts the first of eight questions which Zechariah asks of the Lord’s Messenger. From the response the man gives, what is the task the “man” will carry out as God reveals each new vision?

1:10 *Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, “They are the ones the LORD has sent to go throughout the earth.”*

4. The horses in the vision carry out a purpose from God. What is that purpose here?

5. As the Jews returning from exile viewed the struggles between world powers in their world, what comforting message is God revealing through the actions of the horses as they carry out their mission?

1:11 *And they reported to the angel of the LORD, who was standing among the myrtle trees, “We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace.”*

6. Cambyses ruling Persia has pushed the Babylonians aside and now controls the world power. What message do the horses bring back about the condition of the world at that moment?
7. Was this message of a “world at peace” good news or bad news to the ears of the exiled Jews? Explain

1:12 *Then the angel of the LORD said, “LORD Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?”*

8. What was special about “these seventy years” to which the angel referred?
9. What prayer does the “angel of the Lord” address to the throne of the “Lord Almighty” upon hearing this report?

Since this “peace” was not welcomed news to those awaiting God to avenge his people, the Messenger responds to the news with a lament, “How Long?” The prophet Jeremiah had prophesied that Judah’s exile would last 70 years, a long wait. This can be counted approximately from 605BC (the first exiles deported) to 538BC (when Cyrus announced their release), though some count from 587BC (the last exiles deported) to 515BC (when the temple rebuild was completed) as a better fit. But now in the vision of Zechariah Israel stands on the threshold of the return of the Lord. Hope is just around the corner and the messenger is offering the final lament of the exile.

The First Oracle: Zech.1:14-17

¹⁴ Then the angel who was speaking to me said, “Proclaim this word: This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion ...

10. Here is the beginning of the “good and comforting words” the Angel of the Lord gave to Zechariah. What is the first part of the comfort God reveals to his people with this verse?

¹⁵ but I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity.’

11. God addresses the “peace” reported by the horses. What comforting message does God send to the Jewish exiles as they return to Israel?

¹⁶ “Therefore, this is what the LORD says: ‘I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem,’ declares the LORD Almighty. ¹⁷ “Proclaim further: This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘My towns will again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem.’”

12. What two promises does God make to his people that are connected with actions he is about to take regarding the ruling powers of this world at that time?

Application Thought:

13. As we apply the truth this vision reveals to our world and to our lives, what two spiritual principles does God reveal here which he assures us are fully at work in the world right now, even though our eyes can’t always see this?