
Would you please explain Zechariah's vision of the "four chariots," as recorded in Zechariah 6:1-8?

As we mentioned in previous Updates (360 and 359) when discussing Zechariah's visions of the "woman in the basket" and the "flying scroll," as recorded in the fifth chapter, Zechariah's visions must be viewed, foremost, as containing prophecies for us today.

In Zechariah 6:1-8, the following is recorded:

"(1) Then I turned and raised my eyes and looked, and behold, four chariots were coming from between two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of bronze. (2) With the first chariot were red horses, with the second chariot black horses, (3) with the third chariot white horses, and with the fourth chariot dappled horses--strong steeds. (4) Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, 'What are these, my lord?' (5) And the angel answered and said to me, 'These are four spirits of heaven, who go out from their station before the LORD of all the earth. (6) The one with the black horses is going to the north country, the white are going after them, and the dappled are going toward the south country.' (7) Then the strong steeds went out, eager to go, that they might walk to and fro throughout the earth. And He said, 'Go, walk to and fro throughout the earth.' So they walked to and fro throughout the earth. (8) And He called to me, and spoke to me, saying, 'See, those who go toward the north country have given rest to My Spirit in the north country.'"

Many commentaries try to explain this vision by identifying the four chariots and horses as the world-ruling ancient empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Or, they identify them as the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, i.e., religious

deception, war, famine and disease epidemics. However, in doing so, they miss the entire point of the vision, and replace the clear biblical explanation with human reasoning.

(1) The Bible tells us very distinctly who and what the four horses with their chariots are. Zechariah 6:5 says that they are "four spirits of heaven," that is, angelic beings. A few commentaries accept this explanation. For instance, Scofield Reference Notes points out:

"That which is symbolized by the four chariots with their horses is not the four world-empires of Daniel, but 'the four spirits of heaven which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth...' These 'spirits' are angels..."

Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible agrees, stating:

"These are the four spirits of the heavens - They cannot be literal winds: for spirits, not winds, stand before God, as His servants, as in Job, 'the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord'..."

In our free booklet, "Angels, Demons and the Spirit World," we have explained at length the fact that the four spirits of heaven, as mentioned in Zechariah 6, are indeed angelic beings. We are setting forth below a few excerpts:

"Some Angels Look Like Horses

"We find additional accounts in the Bible, describing angels as fiery horses. Note, for example, 2 Kings 2:11-12: 'Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, 'My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!' So he saw him no more.'

"A similar account can be found in 2 Kings 6:15-17: 'And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, 'Alas, my master! What shall we do?' So he answered, 'Do not fear, for those who are

with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.'...

"The angel who spoke directly to Zechariah [in chapter 6] is described as a man [compare Zechariah 1:8, 10-11]. The horses walking to and fro throughout the earth are called 'spirits of heaven.' They are spirit beings, or angelic beings, that look like horses. In Revelation 5:6, some of those spirit beings are described as 'seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits [better translated: "spirits" or "spirit beings"] of God sent out into all the earth.'...

"We find another description of angelic beings that look like horses in the famous passage in Revelation 19:11, 14, describing the return of Jesus Christ to this earth. Notice, however, what the Bible actually says in this little-understood passage: 'Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war... And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.'

"We are told here that Christ and His armies in heaven will come, riding on white horses. These horses must be spirit beings, because they come from heaven down to this earth. The armies in heaven, riding on white horses, are angelic beings that presumably look like men... certain angels are 'warriors.' Their main function is to fight the forces of evil. Other angels, like those who look like horses, have different or additional functions, including the task to carry Christ and His warrior angels."

(2) Since two of the four horses in Zechariah's vision are sent into the "north country," special emphasis is placed on its judgment. Most commentaries agree that the "north country," as referred to in Zechariah 6:6 and 8, speaks of Babylon. The commentary of Jamieson, Fausset and Brown states: "... 'the north country,' that is, Babylon..." The commentary adds: "The 'white' [horses] go after the 'black' horses to the same

country [Babylon]; two sets being sent to it because of its greater cruelty and guilt..."

The commentary continues that the "south country" (mentioned in Zechariah 6:6) signifies "Egypt, the other great foe of God's people."

(3) We need to remember that the judgment and punishment of Gentile nations, as described in Zechariah's vision, is mainly of future application.

The "north" country applies to MODERN Babylon, as described in Revelation 17 and 18. In addition, an interesting end-time reference to MODERN Egypt is found in Daniel 11:42-43, stating that "the land of Egypt shall not escape" the king of the North who will have "power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt."

The Scofield Reference Notes explains further:

"The vision... speaks of the Lord's judgments upon the Gentile nations north and south in the day of the Lord..."

The Day of the Lord refers to the time when God begins to intervene actively in human affairs by pouring out His wrath on disobedient humanity--commencing about one year prior to Christ's return. (For more information, please read our free booklet, "The Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord.")

Note also the following comments in the Ryrie Study Bible:

"... the vision may also depict the final subjugation of the world, especially 'Babylon,' during the Tribulation days..."

Even though the commentary of Jamieson, Fausset and Brown applies Zechariah's vision foremost to the destruction of world-ruling empires in Old Testament times, it does allow also for an end-time fulfillment. It points out that the "strong steeds" in verse 7 seem "to apply to all four horses, and here especially to the 'red.' Their office is to complete hereafter the work already in part executed by the

previous three who have stilled Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Graeco-Macedonia; namely, to punish finally the last great foe of Israel, the final form assumed by the fourth world kingdom, Rome, which is to continue down to the second advent of Christ [and which is identified in Revelation 17 as the modern Babylonian system]. Hence they 'walk to and fro through the earth,' counterworking Satan's 'going to and fro in the earth'... in connection with the last awful development of the fourth world kingdom."

(4) We also read, in verse 1, that the four horses and their chariots came from "between two mountains" of "bronze" or "brass" (Authorized Version).

The commentary of Jamieson, Fausset and Brown speculates that the "two mountains" might refer to "the valley of Jehoshaphat, between Moriah and Mount Olivet... or the valley between Zion and Moriah, where the Lord [will be, Zechariah 2:10], and whence He sends forth His ministers of judgment on the heathen..." The commentary continues that "bronze" or "brass" is "the metal among the ancients representing hard solidity; so [is] the immovable and resistless firmness of God's people (compare Jeremiah 1:18)," implying that the two mountains of bronze or brass might picture God's firm and immovable judgment on disobedient nations.

We must point out, however, that the four spirit beings are sent out from heaven (Zechariah 6:5), eager to walk the earth (verse 7). Therefore, these two mountains ought to be understood as spiritual mountains in heaven--as the Bible records the existence of a spiritual Mount Zion in heaven (compare Hebrews 12:22-23; Isaiah 14:13-14; Ezekiel 28:14, 16).

(5) Commentaries are divided as to the meaning of Zechariah 6:8, saying that the angels have given "rest to My Spirit in the north country." Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible seems to have the correct explanation, pointing out that the phrase should be translated as "'These have quieted My spirit in the north country' [compare Authorized Version], Or rather, 'have made My anger to rest'

on, that is, have carried it thither and deposited it there, made it to rest upon them, as its abode, as John saith of the unbelieving, 'The wrath of God abideth on him' [John 3:36]."

The commentary of Jamieson, Fausset and Brown agrees, stating that the angels "caused My ANGER to rest" on Babylon [Ecclesiastes 10:4; Ezekiel 5:13]."

God will destroy modern Babylon in His anger (compare Revelation 18:4-6, 8; 14:8). As we see in Zechariah's vision, He will do so with the help of His angels. This fact seems to be confirmed in Revelation 18:21, where we read: "Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, 'Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore.'"

God's judgment on this disobedient world is sure and certain, and it will be swift. Most people will be caught unawares, but God warns His servants today to be awake and to watch world events, so that they can be prepared and ready for Christ's return (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4; Luke 21:28; Matthew 24:32-33, 44).

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