

Bible Commentaries

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Zechariah 1 ▾

Verse 1

This chapter has one of the most impressive calls to righteousness in the whole Bible (**Zechariah 1:1-6**), and the first two of eight remarkable visions: (1) that of the horsemen in the myrtle grove (**Zechariah 1:7-11**), with the divine interpretation of the vision (**Zechariah 1:11-17**), and (2) the vision of the four horns and the four smiths, including its divine interpretation (**Zechariah 1:18-21**).

Despite the purpose of Zechariah's prophecy being that of conveying comfort, consolation, and encouragement to the frustrated and depressed remnant of once-mighty Israel who had made their way back to Jerusalem following the seventy years of captivity, the prophet quite properly began with a stern call to repentance, reaffirming the eternal principle of God's truth that the divine favor is absolutely inseparably linked to faithful, godly living. Every generation needs this truth reinforced in the popular mind. The loving grace of God, of course, is free; but a sensuous, irreligious life is the forfeiture of God's grace and mercy. "Faith only" as a valid claim upon heavenly mercy is only a fool's nightmare.

Zechariah 1:1

"In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of Jehovah unto Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet, saying."

Eighth month ... second year of Darius ... The eighth month was called Bul before the captivity,^[1] and also Marchesuan, according to Josephus.^[2] It corresponds to our October-November and was a rainy season. Darius was Darius the Great, grandson of Cyrus the Great who issued the decree for the end of the captivity. His second year is identified as 520 B.C. This was only about two months after Haggai issued his prophecy.

Came the word of Jehovah ... A number of Old Testament books begin with this statement, including: Hosea, Joel, Jonah, Zephaniah, Micah, etc. This is an affirmation of Zechariah's authority and commission as a deliverer of the Word of God himself to his people. It is not correct, therefore, to interpret Zechariah's messages as if they were merely the words of the prophet. Many comments on the sacred Canon are worthless because they do not take this into consideration.

Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet ... In Jewish genealogies, they were sometimes abbreviated by skipping some names, as evidenced by the genealogy of Jesus in

Matthew 1, and in the case of Jehu, the son of Nimshi (**1 Kings 19:16**), who is called Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi (**2 Kings 9:2,14**). On account of this, there should be no question that "Zechariah, the son of Iddo" (**Ezra 6:14**) is also a true reference to the author of this book. Baldwin pointed out that this is the "simplest explanation and one that requires no alteration of the text."^[3]

The sudden resurgence of activity by the Jews in the rebuilding of their temple which appears both in Haggai and in Zechariah came about because of the neglect of the project by the central government founded by Cyrus the Great, a neglect which began with the death of Cyrus and extended throughout the reign of Cambyses his successor. This neglect came to a sudden end with the accession of Darius the Great who renewed the project with all diligence (**Ezra 6:11-12**). Thus, there were two good reasons why the prophet dated his epistle from a point in the reign of Darius. First, God's people were politically subject to his authority, and second, he was an ally and benefactor of it.

Verse 2

"Jehovah was sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore, say thou unto them, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: Return unto me, saith Jehovah of hosts, and I will return unto you, saith Jehovah of hosts."

The appropriateness of this call to repentance was stressed by Matthew Henry thus:

"Before he published the promises of mercy, he published calls to repentance, for thus the way of the Lord must be prepared. Law must first be preached, then the gospel. He preached what was plain and practical, for it is best to begin with that."^[4]

Robinson called these verses "the keynote of the entire book, and one of the strongest and most intensely spiritual calls to repentance to be found anywhere in the Old Testament."^[5]

Some have professed surprise that Zechariah called for repentance from the same group of people that Haggai, only two months previously, had assured by the promise of the Lord that, "I am with you" (**Haggai 1:13**). But, as Leupold observed:

"Every repentance is imperfect at best. A godly life, in a sense, consists of perfecting repentance. Thus what Zechariah claimed was also true. Israel needed to return with more sincere devotion if God's promises for the future were to become a reality."^[6]

Jehovah was sore displeased with your fathers ..." This is an instance of the American Standard Version being no improvement upon the old version (Douay Version) which has, "The Lord hath been exceeding angry with your fathers." Some theologians are very tender about ascribing anger to the God of heaven; but the scriptures of both testaments bluntly proclaim it. As Ellis pointed out, "The anger of the Almighty is not as inconsistent with the New Testament as some suppose."^[7] See **Romans 1:18-32**; **2:4**; and **Ephesians 2:3**. "The word employed here describes a consistent element in God's nature as contrasted with a momentary or temporary indignation."^[8]

Saith Jehovah of hosts ..." The solemn, holy name of Almighty God is joined to this admonition in **Zechariah 1:3**, no less than three times, indicating the extremely sacred authority behind Zechariah's message.

Verse 4

"Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets cried, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, Return ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear nor hearken unto me, saith Jehovah."

This verse affords an excellent view of the honor and esteem in which the prophets prior to the times of Zechariah were held.

"The authenticity of earlier prophets is endorsed by the fulfillment of what they predicted and by the testimony of the Lord as he speaks through the contemporary prophet (Zechariah)."^[9]

Be not as your fathers ... "Absurd are they who follow the ignorance of their fathers, pleading inherited custom as an irrefragable defense."^[10] Every kind of religious error ever known on earth is still being perpetuated by people who blindly follow the customs and religious prejudices of their ancestors.

Verse 5

"Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live forever?"

In this, Zechariah is preparing to answer an objection which the prophet anticipated. Both the fathers and prophets of the former era were long dead and removed from current affairs; and some were probably prepared to raise the question of "What has all that got to do with us?"

Before leaving the passage, Matthew Henry's pertinent comment on the passage (out of context) is noted:

"Where are they? Those who lived and died in sin are in torment; and we are warned by Moses and the Prophets, and by Christ and his apostles to look to it that we come not to that place of torment (**Luke 16:18,29**). Those who live and die in Christ are in Paradise; and if we live and die as they did, we shall be with them shortly, with them eternally."^[11]

Verse 6

"But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? and they turned and said, Like as Jehovah of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us."

But my words and my statutes ... This thought contrasts with the ephemeral nature of the lives of the fathers and the prophets just mentioned. The argument is that, although the men who spurned the words of God uttered by the prophets were at that time long dead and gone, the word of the Lord was still living and active. Furthermore, the sinful generation who had rejected God's Word, confessed at last the justice of God's dealing with them and testified to the truth of all that God had said through his prophets.

And they turned and said ..." The whole sinful generation did not "turn to God"; and Zechariah made no such claim here; but it is an unquestionable fact that many did turn. For countless thousands of them, there was never any opportunity for them to turn, as they were enslaved, murdered, carried away as captives, starved, mutilated, or beaten to death; but some of the people, called everywhere in the prophets "a righteous remnant," did turn and seek the Lord with all their hearts. Those who at last returned to Jerusalem after the captivity ended are proof enough of that. Morgan listed the returnees as follows:

"Of the priests, 4 courses out of 24; Levites, only 74 individuals; singers, only 128 out of the family of **ASAPH**: gate-keepers, only 139; helpers, only 392; of the people, 200,000; slaves, 9337."^[12]

And they turned ..." The obvious facts noted above did not prevent the radical challengers of God's Word from alleging a contradiction here with **Zechariah 1:4** which says the people did not turn. Sellin went so far as to claim this "contradiction" as "a piece of nonsense."^[13] Such allegations are indeed "nonsense?" Especially distressing is the attitude of some of the writers in the Interpreter's Bible. D. Winton Thomas, for example, stated that this verse "contradicts what is said in **Zechariah 1:4**, and is probably a later editorial edition."^[14] If such a comment is sincere, it obviously springs out of a failure to understand what the sacred text plainly teaches.

"Did they not overtake your fathers ...?" Men may deny God's Word and try to run away from it, but it always overtakes them. The word here, according to Unger, "The Hebrew root of the word here rendered 'overtake' means to reach, or catch up with."^[15] The true meaning appears in **Deuteronomy 19:6**, "Lest the avenger of blood pursue the slayer and overtake him, because the way is long, and slay him."

The nostalgic Psalms which came out of the Babylonian captivity are more than sufficient to show how genuine and sorrowful was the repentance of the more spiritually discerning among the captives. "Thus God was glorified even in their abasement and discomfiture."^[16] Keil identified the scriptures that show the penitential attitude of the exiles as **Lamentations 2:17**; **Daniel 9:4ff**; and **Ezra 9:6ff**.^[17]

This verse concludes the introductory call to repentance.

Verse 7

"Upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Shebat, in the second year of Darius, came the word of Jehovah unto Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet, saying."

The time indicated here was exactly five months after the rebuilding of the temple had been resumed (**Haggai 1:15**), and Keil thought that, "The choice of the day for the divine revelation to Zechariah was evidently connected with that."^[18] This was also some two months after the last message of the prophet Haggai.

See under **Zechariah 1:1**, which except for the date is the same as this verse. Perhaps the reason for such a formal beginning being used twice is that the first (**Zechariah 1:1**) pertains to Zechariah's call as a prophet, and this (**Zechariah 1:7**) pertains to the particular series of visions beginning here. All of these visions came within a single night, "two full months after Haggai's last message (**Haggai 2:10**) it is February, 519 B.C."^[19]

Verse 8

"I saw in the night, and, behold, a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him there were horses, red, sorrel, and white."

I saw in the night ..." Although it was night, the prophet made it clear throughout that he was not asleep. It was no dream that he "saw" but an objective vision that he observed, whether by literal eyesight or some inner power of observation we do not know.

A man riding upon a red horse ..." From **Genesis 25:30**, it is seen that this color is actually a reddish-brown. We are convinced that we should identify the rider here with the angel of the Lord introduced later. Those "behind him" were "those agencies that God employs for the correction and punishment of men: war, fire, and victory on his part."^[20] The function of these agencies is not outlined in the vision, the "patrol" upon which they had been engaged being but a fraction, no doubt, of their total utility in the economy of God. The effect of such a view of the legions of supernatural beings engaged in doing the will of God would be one of amazement and encouragement. It is impossible not to find in **Revelation 6** a more detailed and expanded vision of these same agencies, the very same figure being employed. Nor should it surprise us a little later in the vision to find that the Angel of the Covenant, Christ himself, controls and directs this vast resource of Divine power; for in Revelation, it is Christ himself who leads the van, riding upon a white horse! (See my commentary on Revelation, p. 135f.)

That school of interpreters which has abandoned all objective standards and launched out into the "deep" of their own subjective imaginations in order to "discover" the meaning of Biblical passages (!) offer some bizarre opinions. For example, McFadyen, explained this horse-vision as having been suggested to the prophet's mind, "by the sight of Persian cavalry scouts!"^[21]

"Nothing in the text or the fact portrayed is in the least at variance with the claim that the thought as well as the form in which it was cast was given by God."^[22]

This prophecy is important, millenniums after it was given, solely because Almighty God is believed to be the author of it. A revealing glimpse of eternal realities is afforded by what God showed to Zechariah.

Myrtle trees that were in the bottom ..." This tree, famed for its fragrance, was once abundant in Palestine. Pusey thought that the lowly character of the tree and its sweet odor suggested such qualities later revealed in God's Church and characteristic of his true people in all ages.

Verse 9

"Then said I, O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will show thee what these are."

This verse frees us of the burden of trying to puzzle out what is meant by various features of the vision. A supernatural being promised to reveal the meaning, and we would do well indeed to confine our speculations within the boundaries of his explanation.

Verse 10

"And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom Jehovah hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth."

And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said ..." There is a sharp difference of opinion as to whether this person is the same as "the angel of Jehovah" (**Zechariah 1:11**), but we cannot resist the conclusion that he is indeed the "angel of Jehovah," as indicated by the identifying clause "stood among the myrtle trees" here and in **Zechariah 1:11**. Keil has stated the reasons for the two identities thus:

"The `angel that talked with me' appears in company with other angels and receives instructions from them (**Zechariah 2:5-8**). His whole activity is restricted to the duty of conveying higher instructions to the prophet, and giving him an insight into the higher meaning of the visions; whereas the angel of Jehovah stands on an equality with God, being sometimes identified with Jehovah, and sometimes distinguished from him."^[23]

Nor should it trouble us that, whereas the "angel that talked with me" promised to show the vision's meaning, it was the angel of Jehovah who spoke and explained the meaning. As Jamieson said: "The angel of the Covenant here gave the reply instead of the interpreting angel to imply that all communications through the interpreting angel came from Him (the angel of Jehovah) as their source."^[24]

Verse 11

"And they answered the angel of Jehovah that stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest."

The entire horse-company, apparently ridden by angels, are here represented as reporting to the "angel of Jehovah," indicating that everything represented by them was under his control. He is the one who appeared in **Zechariah 1:8** "riding a red horse." Some have supposed it is inappropriate for Christ (with whom we identify the angel of the Covenant) to be represented as riding a red horse; but, on the other hand it perfectly fits him who traveled in the greatness of his strength with the garments dyed red, who came from treading the wine-press alone, and whose lifeblood was sprinkled upon his garments (**Isaiah 63:1-3**). We do not hesitate to identify him as "none other than the Angel of the Presence (**Exodus 23:23**), Jehovah himself, the Messiah in his pre-incarnate glory."^[25]

We have walked to and fro through the earth ..." This is the only function of the great company of horsemen which is mentioned; but, in all probability there were many others that are kept out of view. The four horsemen of the apocalypse in their missions of judgment against rebellious humanity (**Revelation 6**) could very well be a part of the vast reality glimpsed in this passage.

All the earth sitteth still, and is at rest ..." This should not be interpreted to mean that all was well in the earth, for it was not. What this worldwide patrol signified to Zechariah was that the kind of universal upheaval the Jews at that time were confidently expecting to take place was not happening in any sense. Only a few weeks previously, Haggai had prophesied that, "God would shake ... the heavens and the earth ... and all ... the nations" (**Haggai 2:6**); and the tiny nation of returnees, discouraged, enfeebled, and depressed were expecting some mighty, cataclysmic revolution that would destroy the Gentile nations and enthrone Israel as rulers of the world. The widespread disorders, rebellions, and defections that threatened the beginning of the reign of Darius the Great, only a few months prior to this prophecy, were viewed by the Jews as the actual

beginning of what they expected. Instead, Darius quickly put down all opposition to his authority; and, as events concerned him and his throne, the earth was indeed at rest.

But there is more than this. That very uneasy peace in which Darius the Great controlled the known world of that era was exactly the reason that there were at that time no further impediments to the Jews going ahead and rebuilding their temple. God's people, the old Israel, as they so frequently did, were still thinking of God's kingdom in terms of their wicked state, a thing that God hated, that had never been in God's plan from the first, and the desire for which had led them in their initial, fatal rejection of God from ruling over them. See **1 Samuel 8**.

It is apparent that this vision was exactly what Israel needed. First, and preeminently, it corrected a false notion that they had acquired through misunderstanding the prophecy of Haggai. Yet it showed God's innumerable resources to them, and in connection with the accompanying visions, demonstrated that God would still richly bless his people, provided only, that they continually and faithfully served God.

The angel of Jehovah ..." The very fact of this magnificent Person's appearance to one of Israel's prophets must have been a source of the greatest encouragement to God's people. "The Angel of the Lord had not been appearing to men for a long time ... now, after 200 years, he appeared again." [26] He was associated with all of the great victories in Israel's glorious past, including the occasion when he appeared as "The Captain of the hosts of Jehovah" to Joshua at their entering into Canaan. His is the **BIG** appearance in this vision.

Verse 12

"Then the angel of Jehovah answered and said, O Jehovah of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years."

Our Lord Jesus Christ appeared in his true character in this Christophany, as an intercessor of the people of God, a function now being fulfilled by him for Christians before the throne of God (**Hebrews 7:25**). It was like a stroke of lightning at midnight. Israel is not deserted, small and weak as they undoubtedly were; for their mighty champion, the Angel of God's Presence, is pleading their case before the God of all creation!

These threescore and ten ..." The basis of this intercession is that the appointed years of their captivity, the enforcement of sabbaths long neglected, had reached the foreordained termination; it was time for God to hear his people's cry. Furthermore, their punishment had been far more than enough, much beyond what God intended, due to the sadistic cruelty of God's enforcement agencies who had far-exceeded their commission, actually trying to exterminate them, which God had never purposed to do.

Hailey pointed out that there were two periods of seventy years associated with the subjugation of Israel: (1) from the year 606-605 when Nebuchadnezzar annexed Judea to the fall of Babylon to Cyrus the Great who at once ordered the return of the Jews to their land in 536 B.C.; and (2), from the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C. to the completion of the rebuilt Temple in 516 B.C.^[27] It was this latter period which lacked but a little of having expired when this intercession came.

This cry for mercy from the angel of the Lord also provides the key to understanding just how the world sat still and was at rest, as just reported by the heavenly patrol.

"From this cry, it is clear that the peaceful and untroubled state of the world is bad news to some: to captives who await rescue, to slaves who await freedom, to the

downtrodden who look for a helping hand."^[28]

Verse 13

"And Jehovah answered the angel that talked with me with good words, even comfortable words."

The exact message of comfort and encouragement is not repeated here, only the nature and character of the communication; but that is all that mattered. "The angel that talked with me," as distinguished from the angel of Jehovah relayed to Zechariah the thrilling, comfortable words in the next verse; and they were comforting indeed.

Verse 14

"So the angel that talked with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion, with a great jealousy."

This was a total reaffirmation of God's love for His people. God would never restore Israel's wicked state, which was never in any sense, God's kingdom, but theirs. However, the ancient promises to Abraham and David still remained, and the word of the Lord would yet "go forth from Jerusalem" on the Day of Pentecost when the Gospel Age began.

Zion ..." The use of this term appears to be significant. This was the ancient name (pre-Israelite) of the hill captured by David (**2 Samuel 5:7**); and, as Baldwin said, "It sometimes stands for the people of Jerusalem in their religious privilege and responsibility."^[29] We believe that to be the reason why the term is used here. The true covenant with God on Israel's part ante-dated all the worldly glory of the secular kingdom, having been begun on the basis of promises to Abraham and formalized when God brought them up out of Egypt by the hand of Moses. The entire history of their secular state had been nothing but a tragic detour from the right pathway; and the use of "Zion" in this passage signals God's desire that the people should more perfectly understand the true nature of their sacred covenant.

Verse 15

"And I am very sore displeased with the nations that are at ease; for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction."

This is the second basis of the Covenant Angel's intercession, here being relayed to Zechariah by the interpreting angel. God always used pagan nations to punish his people, but in the wretched destruction of Israel, the Assyrians and Babylonians had gone much too far.

I am sore displeased ..." This in itself was the best of good news to the Israelites. From anything they had been able to see, the hostile powers oppressing them were getting away with it; but here is the assurance that they shall receive merited punishment. (See further comment on this clause under **Zechariah 1:3**, above.)

The nations that are at ease ..." Here is heavenly comment on those nations "at rest" (**Zechariah 1:11**). Their condition was one of carnal security, confidently asserting itself over the groanings of the enslaved and oppressed. God was displeased with it, to the point of a burning and continual anger, which before long would erupt in the punishment of wicked states.

For I was but a little displeased ..." This is one of the most astounding statements in God's Word. The punishment which God inflicted upon Israel for their rebellion against him was as tragic as anything that can be imagined. Their kings and princes were ruthlessly murdered; tens of thousands of the population were uprooted, deported, enslaved and destroyed; their temple was razed; their possessions parceled out to the conquerors, their women ravished, their little ones dashed to pieces, and their every treasure looted. Why? God was a "little displeased!"

Is not this the same thing that God meant when he compared the utmost agony of the crucifixion of Christ to be but the "bruising of the heel" of the seed of woman? (**Genesis 3:15**). Contrasted with such a heel-bruise will be the "bruising of the head" of Satan when he and his followers are overwhelmed in the lake of fire; and the same analogy holds here. Severely as God's children were punished, it is but a "little thing" compared to the destruction of the wicked yet to take place. Something far more terrible was laid up in store for those godless states which had ravished God's people. Not only would their peoples and cities be utterly destroyed, but the final rendezvous in hell yet awaits them.

And they helped forward the affliction ..." The inhumanity of the punishing nations God brought against Israel was marked by their efforts utterly to exterminate them. An example of this horrible attitude is to be observed in the Biblical account of Jehu's excessive ruthlessness in the destruction he visited (at God's commandment) upon the house of Ahab and Jezebel. As a result of his greedy and insatiable blood-lust, God destroyed his dynasty.

Verse 16

"Therefore, thus saith Jehovah: I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies; my house shall be built in it, saith Jehovah of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth over Jerusalem."

My house shall be built in it ..." They are wrong who see in this promise nothing more than the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple. Despite the obvious fact that the Jews understood this to mean exactly that, it is actually open to question whether or not their Temple was even included in this. In all of these visions, God was speaking of that distant day when the righteous **BRANCH** should appear and build God's true Temple, which is the Church of Jesus Christ (**Zechariah 3:8**).

My house shall be built ..." actually means that God's purpose of bringing in the Redeemer for all mankind will surely be achieved. All of the sins and apostasies of Israel would not be permitted to nullify that eternal purpose. Perhaps as a concession to people so naturally born to secularism, God also allowed the rebuilding of a Temple which he had not wanted from the first, and which, in the fullness of time, like its predecessor, would be summarily condemned and destroyed by the same God who destroyed the first. In any case, the physical Temple was rebuilt and finished in 516 B.C.

As Unger said:

"This promise had an incipient application to the prophet's times, and supplied the means of encouragement in the construction of the second temple. That application, however, was only partial."^[30]

And a line shall be stretched forth over Jerusalem ..." This expression was used in two ways, either for destruction, or for building; but it is in the latter sense that we find it here. It meant that Jerusalem would be rebuilt. A line would be stretched out to measure and identify the streets and begin the process of rejuvenation for the destroyed metropolis.

Verse 17

"Cry yet again, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: My cities shall yet overflow with prosperity: and Jehovah shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem."

My cities shall yet overflow with prosperity ..." This is not a flat promise that the walled city of Jerusalem shall be rebuilt. Note that "cities" are in view, not merely Jerusalem. The same corresponds with "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls" (**Zechariah 2:4**), making it obvious that there are significant overtones in these visions suggesting the kingdom of Messiah in the age of the gospel.

Higginson split the meaning of the verse, applying half of it (**Zechariah 1:17a**) to the successful era of the Maccabees,^[31] and referring the latter part of it (**Zechariah 1:17b**) to the times of Christ and the gospel. It appears to this writer that the whole passage, indeed this whole series of eight visions, is principally Messianic, with the lesser fulfillments in the history of secular Israel only tokens of the ultimate reality.

Before leaving this first vision, we would like to point out that it is the Covenant Angel which stands out. We do not therefore call this a horse-vision, nor the company in the myrtle trees, but the dramatic appearance of Israel's ancient champion, the angel of Jehovah.

One other thing. We have scarcely noted the many emendations, rearrangements, omissions, additions, and alterations of the text which have been advocated by the liberal scholars. It is our deep and unwavering conviction that an examination of such operations against the sacred text is a waste of time.

In no case, does the result they arrive at recommend itself as more feasible than does a sober Scriptural exposition of the very text as we find it.^[32]

We do not reject legitimate corrections of the text based upon acceptable manuscript authority, but the subjective, imaginative guesses of men who know far less about the word of God than is generally supposed, we feel privileged to reject with impunity.

Verse 18

"And I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns."

We do not hesitate to identify these horns as "the powers of the world, which rise up in hostility against Judah and hurt it."^[33] "Horns" when used figuratively, typify power and strength; and in **Daniel 8:3**, they specifically stand for mighty world powers. Leupold appeared to back away from this interpretation, saying, "The difficulty would be to pick out the four powers that have scattered Judah."^[34] We do not consider that a difficulty. These four horns correspond to the great scarlet beast that the apostle John saw rising out of the sea (**Revelation 13**). The horns here correspond exactly to the first four heads of that beast, despite the fact of different metaphors being used. We identified the seven heads of the sea beast as: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece,

Rome, and the religious tyranny that succeeded Rome. In each case, the great monolithic "head" of the beast was a persecuting power against God's people and enjoyed worldwide authority. At the time Zechariah wrote, the Jews were living in the times of the fourth of these seven monolithic enemies of God's peoples; and indeed they (in a collective sense) were the powers that had devastated, scattered, and destroyed Israel. How appropriately therefore were these four great world powers identified as "horns" enemical to the people of God. No other understanding of these horns fills the bill exactly as does this interpretation.

Higginson affirmed that they might mean "danger on every side"^[35] just as we might speak of the four points of the compass; but as Keil noted, "The number four here does not point to the four quarters of heaven."^[36] There was no danger to Israel front any quarter except from the capital of the Medo-Persian government. The error of some interpreters here is that of trying to make the horns represent dangers to Israel in Zechariah's time; but there is a much wider sweep to his prophecy than that.

The great 19th century scholar, Adam Clarke, identified these horns perfectly, as, "The Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Chaldaeans, and Persians."^[37] Gill and other writers hesitate to accept this explanation, because it was the Medo-Persians who overthrew the Babylonians and sponsored the return of the exiles to Jerusalem.^[38] Although that is true, such an attitude was characteristic of the fourth horn only at the outset. It was precisely this power that eventually plotted the murder of every Jew in the empire and the confiscation of all their wealth through the wicked devices of Haman, a threat so serious that it required the intervention of God Himself to prevent it. That one event entitles them to be classified with the others as the powers that "scattered Judah."

Ironside identified the four horns as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome;^[39] and, although those four powers were of the same character as all the other "heads" of the scarlet colored beast, two of them had not appeared upon the stage of history when Zechariah was written. It seems more logical to see the first four of the "seven heads" here instead of the "third, fourth, fifth, and sixth."

The horns of this vision represented powers that had scattered Judah; but, as Pusey pointed out, Judah was never threatened by four great powers moving simultaneously; and, from this, he properly concluded that the horns represent successive world-powers that were hostile to the people of God.^[40] This appears to us to be absolutely correct.

Verse 19

"And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What are these? And he answered me, These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem."

Despite the fact of "Israel" being omitted in the LXX, it is best to read the text as it stands in the American Standard Version. The New English Bible and others follow the Septuagint (LXX) in omitting it, based upon the supposition that Zechariah would not have been much concerned over the scattering of Israel (the northern kingdom) which had taken place such a long while previously to the scattering and deportation of Judah; but this is another error deriving from the failure to read the prophecy as God's Word, not Zechariah's. The thing in view here is the scattering of the whole Israel (both Judah and the northern kingdom). Joyce Baldwin discerned this accurately:

"The Hebrew, which is supported by the Qumran Greek text, should be allowed to stand (leaving both "Israel" and "Judah" intact in the passage). Zechariah has in mind the whole people scattered in exile, just as he considers the whole pagan world responsible for the scattering."^[41]

This passage properly understood thus strongly supports the interpretation of the "horns" advocated under **Zechariah 1:18**, above. The whole Israel of God throughout its entire history had been viciously opposed by the great world powers: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and shortly after Zechariah's times, by Medo-Persia; therefore, Medo-Persia must be understood as the fourth horn.

Watts also discerned another good reason why both the names of Judah and Israel are used here. Judah, at this point in history, was the only Israel.^[42] Ephraim (the northern kingdom) never had any lawful right to the title "Israel"; and after their total destruction as a kingdom, the title naturally reverted to the lawful holder of it.

"Jerusalem' picks up the claim to the mercies of David and the election of `Zion.' When Judah is defined in terms of Israel and Jerusalem, it is understood that she is the heir to the promises to Abraham, Moses, and David."^[43]

Before leaving **Zechariah 1:19**, it should be observed that "the angel that talked with me" is here said to explain the meaning of the horns; but this is due only to the brevity of the account. It was established in **Zechariah 1:13**, that the Covenant Angel himself is actually the source of communications relayed to Zechariah by the interpreting angel.

Verse 20

"And Jehovah showed me four smiths. Then said I, What come these to do? And he spake, saying, These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head; but these are come to terrify them, to cast down the horns of the nations, which lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it."

Four smiths ... these are the horns ... What a dramatic depiction of the rise and fall of nations. Assyria was the "smith" that ruined Egypt, and Assyria was also the "horn" that scattered Israel; and Babylon was the "smith" that ruined Assyria, but Babylon was also the "horn" that destroyed and scattered Judah; and Medo-Persia was the "smith" that destroyed the horn of Babylon; but in time Medo-Persia also, itself now become a persecuting horn, was destroyed by yet another "smith" not visible in this prophecy, but certain, in time, to come, nevertheless.

Great, monolithic world governments carry within themselves the seeds of their own destruction, a fact discernible here in the "horns" that were also described as "smiths."

In line with a great many current interpreters, Hailey described efforts to identify the four horns and smiths with the world powers of, "Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, and Medo-Persia, as futile. The four stand for all the world powers who have scattered God's people."^[44] However, when properly understood merely as different "heads" or manifestations of the great scarlet beast of **Revelation 13th** chapter, it is dramatically clear that these actually are "all of the world powers" that ever lifted themselves up against God's people.

The purpose of this brief, but powerful, vision of four horns and four smiths was "To show to the people of God, that every hostile power of the world which has risen up against it, or shall rise up, is to be judged and destroyed by the Lord."^[45] Such a revelation was no doubt a source of inexhaustible comfort and encouragement to the people of God.

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