**Look up again! The Chariots are coming!**

Text: Zechariah 6:1-8

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**Scriptures:** Zechariah 6:1-8; Revelation 6:1-10

*Suggested song of response: STTL308 The strife is o’er, the battles done*

**Series: Zechariah**. Sermon 3 of 19 – Last (8th) night vision

**Theme:** God is coming to judge the nations and bring final victory for his people when His peace finally reigns throughout the earth,

**Fallen Condition Focus (FCF):** We can become weary and discouraged and ready to cease serving the Lord

**Proposition:** Continue to labour for the Lord, rest is coming!

**Introduction**

English poet William Blake looked forward to the coming of Christ when the holy city of new Jerusalem would be built, and he wrote:

And did those feet in ancient time  
Walk upon England's mountains green:  
And was the holy Lamb of God,  
On England's pleasant pastures seen!  
  
And did the Countenance Divine   
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded here,  
Among these dark Satanic Mills?  
  
Bring me my Bow of burning gold;  
Bring me my Arrows of desire:  
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!  
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

The phrase ‘chariots of fire’ (which is found in 2 Kings 6:16–18) became well known through the 1981 movie of the same name which told the fact-based story of two athletes in the [1924 Olympics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1924_Summer_Olympics): [Eric Liddell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Liddell), a devout [Scottish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland) [Christian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian) and [Harold Abrahams](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Abrahams), an [English](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England) [Jew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jew). In order for Liddell to keep running to victory he needed to focus heavenward on God.

In the same way, the discouraged temple builders in 520BC needed again to turn their eyes upwards. This is what Zechariah did in the eighth night vision (6:1): ***“****I looked up again-- and there before me were four chariots coming out from between two mountains-- mountains of bronze!”*

We can readily see the close parallels to the first night vision where horse riders come in to report, here chariots are moving away, powered by horses eager to be on their way. The scene has moved from a narrow valley with small shade trees to two gleaming mountains standing tall on the landscape with the metallic sheen of bright bronze.

Some have suggested, if all the visions occurred in a single night, then the first took place in the late evening and the last just before the dawn of a new day. The idea of progression from the present reality towards a bright future is certainly evident as we move from vision one to vision eight.

1. **The Message Then**

This final vision focusses on rapid movement as four chariots appear. In the ancient world, horse-drawn chariots gave significant military advantage in war. They moved swiftly and allowed a soldier to shoot arrows or throw a javelin as he moved through the warzone. The power of an army was reflected in the number of chariots which could be deployed in battle. In Scripture, we read that king Solomon “accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem” (1 Kings 10:26).

In this vision there are only four chariots and they appear from between two bronze mountains. The symbolism of a mountain is that of strength, permanence, grandeur and stability. The significance of the two bronze mountains reflects the entrance to the Jerusalem Temple which had twin cast bronze pillars at the entrance way named Jakin and Boaz. They were over 8m in height and 5.4m in circumference. You can read about these in 1 Kings 7:13-22. These pillars visually represented the power and might of the Lord whose presence dwelt in the Temple. The twin bronze mountains portray the ‘gates of heaven’, the dwelling place of Almighty God, the Lord of armies. The picture here is of four chariots hurtling out from God’s presence.

The ‘interpreting angel’ explains this in verse 5 “These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world”. Here the Hebrew word for ‘spirit’ is the same as for wind (ruah). The idea is that God’s messengers move like the winds which cover the whole earth. (Psalm 104:4 ‘He makes winds his messengers’). There is no region on the globe which is outside their reach. These war machines are travelling to cover the whole earth.

It is helpful for us to know that the image of chariots is used in the Old Testament to depict God as the Divine Warrior bringing judgement: e.g. Isaiah 66:15-16 “*See, the LORD is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the LORD will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the LORD.”*

Not surprisingly there is a close association between the swiftness of the moving chariot and the animals which provide the horse power e.g. Jeremiah 4:13 “*Look! He advances like the clouds, his chariots come like a whirlwind, his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us! We are ruined!”*

We see horses linked to the judgement of God in Revelation 6:1-16. Firstly, a white horse, then a fiery red one, then the black horse, finally the pale one. The rider of the white horse goes out as a conqueror, the rider of the red horse as a remover of peace, the rider of the black horse as the bearer of famine, the rider of the pale horse as the bringer of death. All are instruments of the Lamb for judgement upon his enemies. This vivid imagery from Revelation 6 helps us to see the central purpose for which these horse-drawn chariots in Zechariah are going out from the Lord’s presence to cover the earth. They are bringing God’s judgement.

Now we are going to see God’s judgment on wickedness within Israel in the vision of the flying scroll (5:1-4) and the woman in a basket (5:5-11), but here we have His judgement on all the gentile peoples surrounding Israel. As we heard from Zechariah 1:15, God was very angry with the complacent nations who felt secure in their own power. It is to these nations that God’s army of judgement comes in this eighth vision.

In our text we see four groups of horses with different colours: red, black, white and dappled. As with the first vision, there seems to be no particular significance to the different colours. The eagerness of these powerful horses – they were straining to go - portrays that God's judgement on the earth is imminent. The heavenly army is about to move out rapidly from home base.

Three of the groups of horses and their chariots go north, west and south, the east is not mentioned. Some scholars have suggested changing the text to replace what they think might have been lost: that the dappled horses are sent to the east. Perhaps the fourth group of dappled horses are held in reserve – we really don’t know. However, the accurate history we have in the Bible tells us that the main enemies of Judah had come from the north (Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia) and also from the south (Egypt).

Here the north in particular relates to Babylon, the great rival of the city of God, a symbol of wickedness. Although the region of Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (present day Iraq) is not strictly geographically to the north, this is the direction of travel from Israel. If victory is proclaimed there, (v6b) ‘I have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north’, then symbolically it must be universal. So the message here is that God will bring peace to the entire earth as full and final judgement comes upon the nations.

At last, the Spirit will be at rest. The work will have been completed, nothing further needs to be done. There is a full and final defeat of all those opposed to God and His people. This is the complete fulfilment of God’s Word to his people in Deuteronomy 12:10 *“But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety.”*

How would you feel if you were labouring in the rebuilding of the walls and temple in Jerusalem? A trowel in one hand, a sword in the other. Longing for relief, an easier life, less trouble, more evidence that God’s promises were actually coming true.

This message would have been one of great encouragement to those engaged in rebuilding the temple after the exile in 520BC. Through their history as a people they had been held captive in Egypt and attacked by the Assyrians who took the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom captive. The Babylonians had destroyed the Temple and taken Judah captive. Now the Persians had allowed them to return to their land, but they were still under the control of a foreign power. They longed for the peace and freedom which their covenant God had promised and now through his prophet Zechariah, He confirmed that it was coming!

They needed to look up from their discouraging circumstances and see again that God was not silent, but that He would complete his work and build Jerusalem in a green and pleasant land, a peaceful home for his people in which they could dwell forever in safety. This vision conveys the powerful message that God’s final victory is most certainly coming and that therefore the temple builders could proceed with their work in confident assurance in the power of their God.

Do we need this kind of encouragement today too? So how do we get from their situation 2500 years ago to ours now?

**2. The Message Now**

Let’s start moving the clock forwards from the time of Zechariah to today.

In 330BC the Persian Empire fell to the Greek conqueror Alexander the Great and the empire splintered into parts until the Romans Empire began to grow in power around 200BC, becoming more and more dominant as time progressed. Throughout all this time, God’s people Israel longed to be set free from the domination of foreign powers. Tensions reached boiling point in the 2nd cent. BC when the priest Mattathias was pressured to offer sacrifices to pagan gods. He and his sons fled to the hills and organized a movement of freedom fighters. Judas, one of the sons known as ‘the Maccabee’ took over the leadership and through extensive guerrilla warfare, defeated the occupying Syrian forces and restored proper temple worship (1 Macc. 2-4). Such movements to overthrow foreign occupation continued into the time of the Roman Empire, some were known as the ‘Zealots’. One of the twelve disciples, Simon was called ‘the Zealot’ (Luke 6:15).

God’s people were waiting for the promised Messiah and when Jesus came, many hoped that he would be the military leader they were expecting. For example, we read in Luke 19:11 that “the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once”. Jesus’ disciples also expected to see a Jewish victory over the occupying Roman forces now that He had come. When Jesus explains that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life, Peter rebukes Him "Never, Lord!" he says "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." (Matt 16:22-23)

The strength of Jesus was not to be demonstrated by an armed overthrow of the Roman governing forces in the small backwater province of Judea. His work was so much more powerful than what the zealots could foresee. Like Zechariah and the returned exiles, they too needed to look up again.

Jesus demonstrated his power over demons and evil spirits (Matt 17:18; Mark 1:23-28; Luke 4:31-37) and announced that he had attacked and overpowered Satan (Luke 11:14-28). Ultimately Jesus conquered death at the cross. He comforted his anxious and frightened disciples with these words before he left them to go to Calvary: *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33)

We now live in an age between the first and second coming of Christ. The victory has been won, but the battle still rages. We long for rest, but there is still work to do!

In order to understand the message to us from this last night vision, we need to look to Revelation 6 again. This passage points forward to the time of the return of Christ when he will completely fulfil this vision of Zechariah. There will be a complete defeat of all hostile forces and the permanent establishment of his everlasting kingdom.

We read of the close of this age in Revelation 6:15-17 **-** Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

“Who can stand when the chariots of God’s fiery judgement come upon them?” When perfect justice is done?

Only those who have found shelter in Christ. The Christ who took upon Himself the fearful wrath of God at Calvary. In Zechariah’s eighth night vision the Spirit of God was finally at rest. The wrath of God had finally been fully spent. For God’s people, all saved by faith in Jesus Christ, this day came when Jesus died. He is the atoning sacrifice (propitiation) for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Propitiation is the removal of wrath by the offering of a gift. God’s gift to his church is Christ, the Lamb who was slain to appease God’s righteous anger against the sin of His people.

We see around us the seeming victory of evil forces today, God’s people being trampled down by political strength and military might. Islamic militants targeted Christians in an attack that took place Garissa University College on the morning of 2 April 2015, killing at least 147 people. According to the survivors of the attack, the assailants specifically killed Christians while leaving Muslims unharmed. ISIS have executed Ethiopian Christians in Libya. Leaflets were distributed in East Jerusalem are warning Christians to leave the city before the end of Ramadan on 18 July 2015 or risk being killed.

We do not need to be fearful or intimidated by the apparent victory of evil around us, for that evil will not last, it will not stand. Brothers and sisters, in Christ we have become more than conquerors (Romans 8:37) because Christ Jesus has won the battle and He is coming back to claim His bride, the church.

**“***The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you*” (Romans 16:20)

AMEN