

Littlebourne Chapel - 27th October 2024 – Zechariah 6 – PH

I looked up again, and there before me were four chariots coming out from between two mountains – mountains of bronze. ² The first chariot had red horses, the second black, ³ the third white, and the fourth dappled – all of them powerful. ⁴ I asked the angel who was speaking to me, ‘What are these, my lord?’ ⁵ The angel answered me, ‘These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world. ⁶ The one with the black horses is going towards the north country, the one with the white horses towards the west, and the one with the dappled horses towards the south.’ ⁷ When the powerful horses went out, they were straining to go throughout the earth. And he said, ‘Go throughout the earth!’ So they went throughout the earth. ⁸ Then he called to me, ‘Look, those going towards the north country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north.’

⁹ The word of the Lord came to me: ¹⁰ ‘Take silver and gold from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon. Go the same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah. ¹¹ Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jozadak ¹² Tell him this is what the Lord Almighty says: “Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord. ¹³ It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.” ¹⁴ The crown will be given to Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Hen son of Zephaniah as a memorial in the temple of the Lord. ¹⁵ Those who are far away will come and help to build the temple of the Lord, and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently obey the Lord your God.’

This prophecy follows chapter 5 – so it’s at almost the same time or just a little later. It is the seventh vision Zechariah has. It comes in two parts – verses 1 to 8 about four horses and chariots, and verses 9 to 15 about Joshua the high priest.

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It starts at a place between two mountains from which the four chariots appear. Most commentators assume these mountains are Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives, because the Hebrew says “the mountains” as if they had been seen earlier but not mentioned. The NIV isn’t being literal here. The Hebrew says, “and I turned and raised my eyes and looked and behold four chariots coming from between two mountains, and the mountains (were) mountains of bronze” But calling them mountains of bronze or brass doesn’t quite fit in with the mounts of rocks and stone at Jerusalem. The symbolism of mountains of brass or bronze is that these are unchangeable as is the word of God, as are God’s plans and purposes, God’s judgment and God’s strength, while the chariots come forth from a Godly place with power. These chariots are coming through a valley gateway from heaven.

² The first chariot had red horses, the second black, ³ the third white, and the fourth dappled – all of them powerful.

We’ve seen some of these horses before in Zechariah 1 *⁸ During the night I had a vision, and there before me was a man mounted on a red horse. He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown and white horses. ⁹ I asked, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The angel who was talking with me answered, ‘I will show you what they are.’ ¹⁰ Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, ‘They are the ones the Lord has sent to go throughout the earth.’ 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.’*

The red horses could be chestnut, and the dappled could be grizzled or a pale horse. We have the symbolism of the colours of horses in Revelation 6 where the red horse is war, the black judgment, the white victory and the pale pestilence and death. The four horses were given power over the earth to kill by the sword, famine, plague and wild beasts. Other fours are in Ezekiel 14 (war, famine, wild beasts and plague) and in Daniel 2 kingdoms (gold, silver, bronze, iron&clay). As for a chariot harnessed to a horse, it is designed to convey a person swiftly and not much was swifter in 500 BC than a light one-man chariot. Another set of fours is found in Revelation 7 where there are four angels at the four corners of the earth holding back the four winds blowing over the earth.

⁴ I asked the angel who was speaking to me, ‘What are these, my lord?’ ⁵ The angel answered me, ‘These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world.

In Isaiah 11 the four spirits of heaven are wisdom, understanding, counsel and strength. In Revelation 7 the four winds – the word spirit and wind and breath all come from the same Hebrew root – are held back by the four angels at the four corners of the earth. The angels are sent down from the presence of God to the earth to bring about the purposes of God on earth.

⁶ The one with the black horses is going towards the north country, the one with the white horses towards the west, and the one with the dappled horses towards the south.’ ⁷ When the powerful horses went out, they were straining to go throughout the earth. And he said, ‘Go throughout the earth!’ So they went throughout the earth.

The “north” is usually interpreted as Babylon/Assyria, the “south” Israel. The NIV says the white horses went west, but the Hebrew says the white horses are going after the black horses. Why would the NIV say, “towards the west” with a footnote “going after them”? The King James translation says, “going after them”. Black followed by white is judgment followed by victory. Going west is going into the Mediterranean Sea, and makes the matter meaningless. Babylon/Persia will be judged and there will be victory afterwards, while in the south there will be pestilence and death from the dappled horse. 150 years after Zechariah’s prophecy, Persia was judged and defeated by Alexander the Great and afterwards Israel was oppressed by the Greek Seleucid occupation for 100 years, until the Maccabees gained independence for 100 years under the Hasmonean kings. That’s one interpretation. Another would be that the spirit of God goes in all directions seeking to deal with matters as God sees fit. The horses and chariots go north and south... directions Zechariah sees in his vision and at the same time hearing the instruction “go throughout the earth”. Another would be more general – that even today the four spirits of the Lord roam the earth, and that these two verses are universal while verse 8 which could be seen as more specific, can also be a general revelation of the principle that where God’s judgement has been executed, afterwards there will be rest or peace.

⁸ Then he called to me, ‘Look, those going towards the north country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north.’

This verse implies that the horse and chariot of judgment has gone north to the Persian empire and there is peace. There was peace inside the main part of empire, but like all empires, troublesome border peoples would always require pacifying along with campaigns of conquest beyond the boundaries of the empire. The Persians attacked the Greek speaking people for many decades with notable defeats until they were themselves conquered by Alexander the Great in a ten-year campaign. In the time of Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi there was peace in the north and in Israel for about a hundred years. The Old Testament is one of the oldest known books of history which reveals not just events but the hand of God behind events as well as the nature of God and his love for mankind. Time is different when it concerns God outside time.

The next seven verses are Zechariah’s eighth vision and are personal towards Joshua the high priest, and Zerubbabel – the Branch – descendant of the kings of Judea.

⁹ The word of the Lord came to me: ¹⁰ ‘Take silver and gold from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon. Go the same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah. ¹¹ Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jozadak ¹² Tell him this is what the Lord Almighty says: “Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord. ¹³ It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.”

Zechariah is given a direct instruction to crown a Levite, while Zerubbabel, grandson of King Jeconiah, is already the Persian appointed governor of Judea. The sources of the materials for the crown come from the exiles newly arrived from Babylon - Heldai (means *robust*), Tobijah (means *God’s goodness*), and Jedaiah (means *God knows*). The high priest’s role is spiritual, and he does not govern the land. We know the high priests had considerable influence in Judea, but kings ruled and the high priests advised, prophesied and did the ceremonial duties to atone for the sins of the nation. So this vision to crown Joshua goes against the usual conventions of the time. However, the Lord declares that the man whose name is Branch will build the temple. Zerubbabel is Branch, and he will rule from his throne. Who the “he will be a priest on his throne” is a little obscure, but it seems to be Joshua. And both Joshua and Zerubbabel will be at peace with each other. Crowning the high priest would be an act of rebellion normally, but we need to be aware of what the high priest wore on his head. He wore a flat topped turban with a gold plate engraved with the words “holy to YHWH”. No silver appears to be involved as the gold engraved plate on his

forehead was to be of pure gold. Exodus 28 ³⁶ *'Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as on a seal: holy to the Lord. ³⁷ Fasten a blue cord to it to attach it to the turban; it is to be on the front of the turban. ³⁸ It will be on Aaron's forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever their gifts may be. It will be on Aaron's forehead continually so that they will be acceptable to the Lord.* That turban with its gold plate isn't a crown really. Commentators have wondered if this crown was symbolic to assure the people that both Joshua and Zerubbabel were divinely appointed and that the people should obey them instead of rebelling and stirring up trouble.

¹⁴ *The crown will be given to Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Hen son of Zephaniah as a memorial in the temple of the Lord. ¹⁵ Those who are far away will come and help to build the temple of the Lord, and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently obey the Lord your God.'*

The three exiles brought gifts to help build the Temple and had to make a crown from some of their gold and silver, and look after it. It is to be put away in the Temple, so it isn't the high priest's turban with its gold plate. Zechariah reiterates that people will come from far away to help build the Temple, and because they do this, Zechariah's words will be believed. The temple was rebuilt and Zechariah remains in the eyes of all believers, Christians and Jews, a true prophet who heard the words of God and shared them with his people.

The crown would be a reminder that a king was coming and the anticipation of a Messiah with a kingly and priestly role was common among Jews in the centuries before Jesus. For the Jews who didn't accept Jesus, and still don't accept Jesus was the Messiah, the anticipation remains. This crown was a sign that God had not forgotten his people and one day they would again be free.

So what is it saying to us today?

The spirit of God roams over the earth today as he did from the beginning of creation. He continues to watch over all of us. So we must be careful. Jesus says, in Luke 12

Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: 'Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ² There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ³ What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs. ⁴ 'I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. ⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. ⁷ Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. ⁸ 'I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. ⁹ But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God. ¹⁰ And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. ¹¹ 'When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.'

Praise the Lord that we have Holy Spirit to guide us and Jesus to forgive us. Jesus will acknowledge us before God, clothed in his righteousness as we have none of our own. Let's pray.