

Zechariah 6:1-15 – Chariots and the Branch

The first five chapters of Zechariah contain the first 7 of 8 visions. The first three visions communicated that God would judge those who harmed Israel, that God would protect and dwell with the people of Israel and that Jerusalem would prosper. The fourth vision was about Joshua the high priest and one called the Branch. The fifth vision was about Zerubbabel and the completion of the temple. Visions 6 and 7 spoke about the punishment and removal of evil from Judah and Jerusalem.

Read Zechariah 6:1-8.

What did Zechariah see in the 8th vision? How is this vision similar to the first vision in chapter 1? How is it different? What are chariots used for? As in the first vision, there is no explanation of the different colors. It is best not to try to assign meanings to each of the colors. The two bronze mountains are also not explained. Some associate them with the bronze pillars at the front of Solomon's temple. They would then represent the gateway to God's presence. (6:1-3)

In verse 4, what did Zechariah ask the interpreting angel? (6:4)

In verse 5, according to the angel, what did the four chariots represent? ESV has "presenting themselves before the Lord". KJV has "standing before the Lord". NASB has "taking their stand before the Lord". NIV has "standing in the presence of the Lord". All these translations are similar. Anthony R. Petterson, who references Rogland, notes that the translation could be "on account of the taking of a stand against the Lord". The idea is that the chariots are sent out in response to the nations opposition to God. (6:5)

In verse 6, where did the chariots go? What does the north represent? What does the south represent? (6:6)

In verse 7, the horses and chariots patrol the earth. This is like the first vision. See 1:10-11. (6:7)

In verse 8, why is God's Spirit at rest in the north country? Both Petterson and Mark J. Boda understand that the rest is because the north has been punished in fulfillment of the first two visions. (6:8)

Read Zechariah 6:9-15.

Some people have referred to this section as another vision. The section is introduced by “And the word of Yahweh came to me”. Visions 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8 all have “I saw” or “I lifted up my eyes and saw. Vision 4 has “he showed me”. Vision 5 has “I see”. There is no such language in this section, so I don’t see any good reason to call it a vision. It is correctly referred to as a sign-act or sign action. An example of a sign-act is Jeremiah 27 where God told Jeremiah to wear a yoke around his neck to symbolize the bondage that Nebuchadnezzar would put the people of Judah under. (6:9)

In verses 10 and 11, what did God tell Zechariah to do? Who were Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah? Who was Josiah, the son of Zephaniah? (6:10-11)

What was Zechariah told to say to Joshua, the high priest? When “Branch” was introduced in this chapter, ESV, KJV, NIV all have “the man”. NASB has “a man”. “The man” may lead people to the impression that God was calling Joshua the high priest, “Branch”. “A man” is a better translation because it helps us understand that Joshua was not “Branch”. Hundreds of years later there would be a Joshua (Jesus) who was The Branch and who is also our high priest. This may remind you of the 4th vision, chapter 3, where Joshua the high priest and “Branch” were also linked. What would seem wrong to the observers about a priest wearing a crown? (6:12)

Based on verses 12 and 13, what would be true of The Branch? (6:12-13)

In verses 11 and 14, KJV has “crowns” while ESV, NASB and NIV all have “crown”. This is an interpretive difference. The form of the word is plural but it can have a singular meaning and the singular best fits the context. Notice that in verse 14 that the crown was not to remain on Joshua’s head. What did God say to do with the crown? Notice that Heldai (vs 11) is Helem (vs 14) and Josiah (vs 11) is replaced by Hen (vs 14). Heldai and Helem were most likely the same person. Josiah vs Hen is more challenging to reconcile. Both were a son of Zephaniah. (6:14)

In verse 15, who were the “far off” people who would come and build the temple? Some understand them to be Gentiles. The inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God occurs in other places in Zechariah. Others understand them to be returned exiles in keeping with the exiles of verse 10 who returned from Babylon. How was the word of Yahweh in 6:9-15 fulfilled? (6:15)