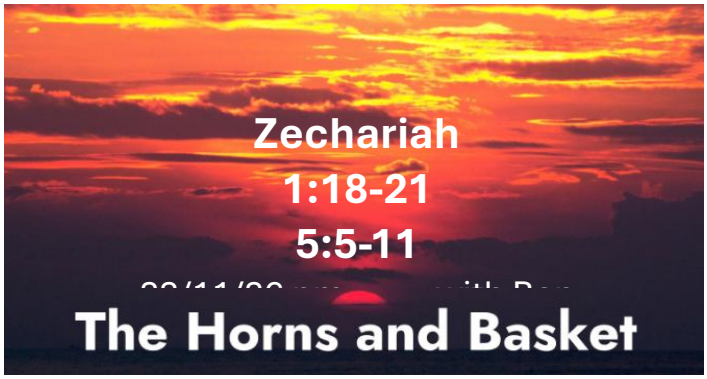
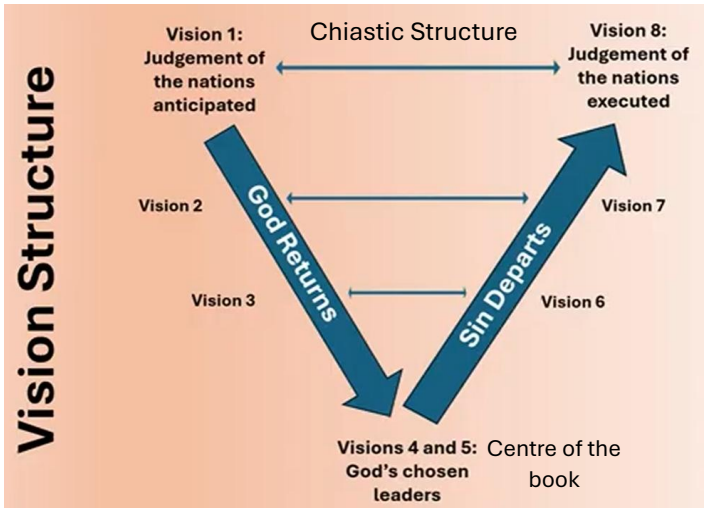




I think we can all appreciate that the book of Zechariah is a challenging portion of scripture. The opening lines describe a little group of beleaguered people returning to a completely ruined city after decades in captivity. They have been left on the edge of ruin because of the decisions of their forebears. The Persian king has sent them back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the house of God to his glory. Zechariah has eight visions that come in couplets in a Chiastic Structure. (See Morgan's chart) Visions 4&5, at the heart of the book, focus on the 2 leaders who were tasked with encouraging the people to carry on building to the glory of God. The last few chapters are the most mysterious but they contain more references to Jesus Christ than in any other part of the book. The word of God is coming to them in the 'here and now' to do something important. It is all leading towards the fact that the Lord is coming. For us, the things that we are doing now are not disconnected from the day of his appearing. This parallels with Luke 10 when the Lord sent out 72 disciples as ambassadors to the villages Jesus would visit later.

Zechariah doesn't understand his visions but his helpful questions get answered so thankfully, by the grace of God, we get further illumination too. He asks what the four horns are. They are symbols of military strength, power and brute force. They were used as drinking cups when toasting their strength or as a trumpet to rally the men to battle, worship and praise. Or a horn of oil was used to sprinkle oil on the people as they gather to act for their God. Altars had a horn on each corner to anchor the sacrifice over the fire in a cruciform. These four horns are symbols of the brute strength and power of the four mighty nations who came to scatter Israel. Assyria came but they were overthrown by Babylon who was overthrown by the Medes who were overthrown by Persia. Each in their turn scattered Israel, Juda and Jerusalem before coming to ruin by the next great power. These nations were terrifying people who did abominable and cruel things to the people they conquered. Zechariah and his contemporaries were still living under the oppressive regime of the Persians.

In the second part of the vision Zechariah sees four craftsmen. How can carpenters, bricklayers, weavers, jewellers and potters "terrify the four horns"? These craftsmen are going to need all their creative energy, genius, wisdom and vision to rebuild the glorious city and the house of God. There are some people who are so proud and arrogant, so consumed with power and their own self and the perpetuation of their own futures that they have no concern for others and who would never be fearful of craftsmen like these. But we read in other places that these craftsmen can take a plough share and make it into a sword. They can take a pruning hook and turn it into a spear. They can make shields and siege engines, catapults and devise mechanisms to undermine the walls of great cities. The painter Leonardo da Vinci's greatest contributions to the renaissance world were the fortifications that he built so that great cities could withstand violence. These craftsmen struck fear into these four great nations. The Babylonians came with skills and technology to overthrow and undermine the power of the Assyrians. The strong, ingenious, determined people of Media set their craft of war against Babylon and came into power. Then out of nowhere came the Persians who had superior skills and power to reduce the Medians to subjection.

When dealing with powerful and unreasonable people you have to be careful how you speak. Jesus spoke in parables so those who had ears to hear and eyes to see would understand. Zechariah had plausible deniability. No one could accuse him of making an indirect threat against the Persian Empire when he is talking about horns and craftsmen. But he was bringing the word of God to God's

people. Inserted in this passage is an indirect prophesy (and it is the substance of this passage) that their rulers would not be ruling over them much longer. In time the kingdom of Persia will come crashing down around their ears. If that message got to the ears of Darius the Great, it would be a treasonable offense. It is good news to know that the power of your oppressors will be broken.

Zechariah sees a parallel vision in chapter 5. He sees a measuring basket. It is specifically an epha of wheat, or about two and a half stone in weight. When the lid is lifted off the basket expecting to find wheat what do they find but a woman! A female skeleton weighs about 1.7 stone. This woman is nothing but skin and bones. This is a horrifyingly malnourished living skeleton. Unsurprisingly the angel replaces the lid very quickly. This is a devastating view of the state of the people of God: emaciated, afflicted, ruined, broken, cramped, small, weak, pathetic, miserable. You are looking for wheat, but this is what you see. This is what the four horns have done over the years. This glorious city of praise and worship has come to this! This is wicked devastation of decline and loss. But the prophesy does not end at this point. By contrast two beautiful, strong vigorous women who can literally fly, appear working and serving the Lord together. They lift this terrible thing into the air and fly 5000 miles across the desert, far, far away. There is no other horn to oppress them. The future is bright. Wings like a stork take your troubles, your heartaches, disappointments and frustrations far, far away. The basket will land in Babylonia (Shinar), what we call Mesopotamia between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers. They flow from Turkey, through the Middle East and an enormous flat plane that is one of the most furtile places in that part of the world. It is the cradle of civilization. It is where Assyrians (Nineveh), the Babylonians (Babylon), the Medes (Epatana) and the Persians (Suza) and all the hurt and harm has come from. The basket of hardship and deprivation is going back to where it came from. The enemy of our souls will finally be judged with the same judgement with which they have judged us. Justice is coming. From this point onwards, never again did anyone arise out of Mesopotamia to trouble Jerusalem, Judea or Isreal. The walls went up, the city grew, the house of God was built by God's continuous help. Daniel foresaw the prophesy of a goat with horns coming out of the mountains of Greece. The twenty year-old Alexander, student of Aristotle, and son of Philip the king of Macedonia, conquered Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and part of India in the 12 years he had left to live. Nothing on earth could stop him. Mesopotamia was burned to the ground, never to trouble Israel again.

How many people believed the prophesy that they were a free people? Free to use their power, energy, imagination and skills, faith, love and community to rebuild the house of God together and continually till Christ comes? Christ did come just as the prophet foresaw. We get so afraid and our spirit and enthusiasm and energy dampens. We are held back by our 'What-ifs'. Just give yourself to the work of God and see what he will do. God has made you good promises: hope and a future, to be with you always even to the end of the earth and the end of the age; right to the end! When he appears will that day be for you a day of unmatched glory? Won't you be glad of all the things you did in faith for his great name between now and then? Won't you be glad you didn't give into the fear and gave yourself to the faith? That you believed the word of God and didn't hold back? Won't you be glad on that day when you hear those word, "Well done good and faithful servant! Come up higher."

God is always speaking. This group of people invested themselves into what they heard. They set to work. They built the city and God crowned their efforts with success. Shall we do likewise and build the house of God?

When is Jesus coming back? We don't know. If he came today would he find faith in the earth? Would he find you about his business? If he tarries will you keep going with that sense of expectation? Keep your hearts stirred up in hope and expectation. As in Revelation 19, where Jesus appears Heaven is open and there he is on the white horse, ruler over all the nations. There is no one more powerful, no one more important or worth of your love and service than Jesus Christ. And he will 'Hold you fast'

When I fear my faith will fail
Christ will hold me fast
When the tempter would prevail
He will hold me fast
I could never keep my hold
Through life's fearful path
For my love is often cold
He must hold me fast
He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For my Savior loves me so
He will hold me fast