

The Vision of the Horns and Craftsmen

Zechariah 1:18-21

Zechariah 1:18-21 - *“Then I raised my eyes and looked, and there were four horns. ¹⁹ And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these?” So he answered me, “These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.” ²⁰ Then the Lord showed me four craftsmen. ²¹ And I said, “What are these coming to do?” So he said, “These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no one could lift up his head; but the craftsmen are coming to terrify them, to cast out the horns of the nations that lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it.”*

Background Notes

The prophet Zechariah was a contemporary of the prophet Haggai. Both Zechariah and Haggai were post-exilic prophets. Both of them returned from the Babylonian captivity under the leadership of Zerubbabel in 538 BC. Under Nebuchadnezzar, in 586 BC the Babylonian armies had destroyed Solomon's Temple, so when the Jewish captives returned from Babylon one of the first things they did was rebuild the altar of the Lord and restart the sacrifices. Soon afterwards they laid foundation of a new Temple.

At first everything seemed to be going well, and it look like the rebuilt Temple would be finished in good time. But the people became discouraged because of threats from the surrounding pagan provinces and pressure from the Persian government. So they stopped working on the House of the Lord and spent all their time building their own houses instead. Although it wasn't wrong for them to build their own houses, it was wrong to neglect the house of the Lord. This sad state of affairs went on for about 15 years. You can read about this in the book of Haggai.

Then in 520 BC, in the second year of King Darius of Persia, God stirred the hearts of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to rise up and motivate the people to get back to the work of rebuilding the Temple of the Lord. All these events are recorded in the book of Ezra.

So 520 BC was quite a year of prophetic ministry! All Haggai's sermons were given during that year - he preached four fiery sermons in that four-month period. Haggai 1:1 - *“In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet”* - and Haggai's first sermon followed.

In addition, 520 BC was the year of Zechariah's prophetic visions - in the eleventh month of that same year (Zechariah 1:7). Zechariah's eight visions of encouragement came after Haggai's four sermons of exhortation. In fact, all eight

visions came to Zechariah on the same night – the 24th day of the eleventh month of 520 BC, the Hebrew month Shabach, in the second year of King Darius of Persia.

Doctrinal Points

1. God uses “horns” to discipline His people.

Verses 18-19: *“Then I raised my eyes and looked, and there were four horns. And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these?” So he answered me, “These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.”*

In the vision Zechariah saw four “horns.” The interpreting angel told him that these horns had scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. What were those “horns”? They were animal horns (not musical horns!). The horns of various animals represent the power of nations: *“the horns of the nations that lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it”* (v21).

The four “horns” represent various Gentile nations that have dominated and scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem over the years. In Scripture, “horns” often represent Gentile powers. Daniel 8:20-21 is the interpretation of Daniel’s vision about the ram and the goat: *“The ram which you saw, having the two horns—they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king...”* represented Alexander the Great. Revelation 17:12 is the interpretation of the apostle John’s vision of the End Time “Beast”: *“The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast.”* So the four horns in Zechariah’s second vision represent Gentile powers that have attacked and scattered Israel throughout history.

Do the four horns represent four specific Gentile powers, or are they figurative for Gentile powers throughout the four corners of the earth, or are they figurative for the Gentile powers to the east, west, north, and south of Israel? We believe that the four horns represent four specific Gentile powers - the four world empires that are seen in the image of the Daniel 2 vision. These powers cover the entire “times of the Gentiles,” from the time of Babylon conquering Israel to the End Times, when the Lord returns.

In line with Daniel 2, the four horns in Zechariah 1 represent the Babylonian Empire, the Persian Empire, the Greek Empire, and the Roman Empire, including the End Times phase of the Roman Empire. God used (and will use) these powers to discipline, rebuke and purge His people Israel until the End Times, when the nation of Israel returns to the Lord. Daniel 11:35: *“to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end; because it is still for the appointed time.”*

However, all the afflictions that the Jewish people have suffered at the hands of Gentile powers down through the centuries have been under the sovereign control of God. Since everything is under God's control, even the Nazi holocaust was under His sovereign control and purpose. God uses "horns" to discipline His people.

2. God uses "craftsmen" to destroy the "horns."

Verses 20-21: *"Then the Lord showed me four craftsmen. And I said, 'What are these coming to do?' So he said, 'These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no one could lift up his head; but the craftsmen are coming to terrify them, to cast out the horns of the nations that lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it.'"*

Although God uses the "horns" to discipline His people, that does not mean that God condones the evil and sinful action of those Gentile powers through the centuries. In His sovereign ways and purposes God has permitted the evil of these Gentile powers, and He has used it to accomplish His purposes. But in no way did He condone it, and in no way is God responsible for that evil committed by those Gentile powers.

But God is able to work all things together for His good purposes, including the evil action of nations. Psalm 76:10 says, *"Surely the wrath of man shall praise God."* However, even though God uses the evil actions of the nations to discipline His people, God also holds all nations responsible for their evil decisions and evil actions. And that's where the craftsmen come in. These nations were to suffer the consequences of their evil actions.

Verse 21 says that the "horns" would be terrified and destroyed by the "craftsmen." Who are the "craftsmen" in this vision? Various suggestions have been made: natural calamities, wars, internal problems in the foreign nations. Most likely the craftsmen here also represent Gentile powers - the "craftsman" Gentile powers that God used to overthrow the "horn" Gentile powers. In other words, in this vision the first craftsman was the Persian Empire that overthrew the Babylonian Empire; the second craftsman was the Greek Empire that conquered the Persian Empire; and the third craftsman was the Roman Empire that overturned the Greek Empire.

But what about the fourth craftsman? It is the world empire and kingdom of our Lord Himself. The Lord Jesus Christ will set up this future kingdom here on this earth when He returns. I believe we read about this fourth craftsman in Daniel 2:44: *"And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."*

By the way, folks, this kingdom should **not** be incorrectly interpreted as the present-day Church! No! This is the future **literal** kingdom of Christ on this earth – a kingdom that He will set up when He returns. In that day, all vestiges of former

foreign “horn” and “craftsman” power will be destroyed forever. What a wonderful day that will be! God uses “craftsmen” to destroy the “horns.”

Practical Application

Remember - for every horn there's a craftsman!

There were four horns, and there were four craftsmen. For every horn there was a craftsman. Just as God used ungodly Gentile powers (horns) to discipline His people down through the centuries, so God may use ungodly powers in our lives. God can harness any kind of power available, good or bad, to accomplish **His good purposes** in our lives.

Maybe you're not a Christian, but you're here at church today because the pressure of some ungodly person or situation has driven you to come. God is using that “horn” to bring you to Himself! He loves you and He wants you to receive His free gift of salvation in Christ. Why don't you put your trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and commit your life to Him? He died on the cross for your sins. Become a believer - a born again Christian - today.

Maybe you're a believer, and God is allowing some “horns” to afflict you right now. Maybe a person or a situation is a problem in your life. God has a lesson for you to learn from this vision. But you may say, “These horns are **ungodly** people or powers!” Well - so what? God can still use those evil “horns” to accomplish His good purposes.

And remember, for every horn there's a craftsman. You don't have to become bitter and vindictive, and you don't have to take your own revenge, because **God is the ultimate “Craftsman”!** Listen to the words of Romans 12:19: *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves but rather give place to wrath. For it is written, vengeance is Mine. I will repay, says the Lord.”* And 2 Thessalonians 1:6: *“For after all, it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you.”*

Remember - for every horn, there is a craftsman – and God is the ultimate Craftsman!