

In the night visions of chapters 1-6, there are three times that it says
“the word of the LORD came to me”

In chapter 1, verse 7, that is the phrase that opens the vision.

In chapter 4, verse 8, it is the phrase at the heart of the visions:
“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house;
his hands shall also complete it.
Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.
For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice,
and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.”

Now in chapter 6, verse 9, the visions conclude with the same phrase:
“And the word of the LORD came to me...”

By using the same phrase at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end,
Zechariah connects the night visions and shows how they all fit together.
This is

There are eight of the night visions on February 15, 519 B.C.
Haggai’s visions had come from August to December of 520 B.C. –
and Haggai had encouraged Joshua and Zerubbabel
to persevere in building the temple.
Now Zechariah picks up where Haggai had left off.
And he includes both warnings and promises –
blessings and curses –
exhorting Joshua and Zerubbabel and all Israel
to continue the work.

Tonight we are concluding the night visions with consideration of the final three visions.
The first and the last visions include horsemen (or chariots) who patrol the earth.
In the first vision, the LORD was angry for 70 years with his people.
But the promise of the first vision was that
“the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.” (1:17)
And in the last vision – the vision of the four chariots, the Spirit of the LORD is now at rest.

In the second vision Zechariah saw four horns that scattered Judah –
and four craftsmen who cast down the four horns – the nations that scattered God’s people.

In the third vision, - the vision of a man with a measuring line –
the LORD had called his people out of Babylon,
and had promised that *many nations* would join themselves to the LORD.
(which is where chapter 6 will end as well!)

In the fourth vision, Zechariah saw Joshua, the high priest, standing before the angel of the LORD
in *filthy* garments –
and the LORD clothed Joshua in pure vestments –
taking his iniquity away
(and now in chapter 5, “iniquity” is taken away from Israel as well).

In the fifth vision, Zechariah saw a golden lampstand –
and heard the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel:
“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the LORD of hosts.”

1. The Vision of the Flying Scroll – The Curse that Consumes the House (5:1-4)

*5 Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, a flying scroll! 2 And he said to me, “What do you see?” I answered, “I see a flying scroll. Its length is twenty cubits, and its width ten cubits.”^[a]
3 Then he said to me, “This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land. For everyone who steals shall be cleaned out according to what is on one side, and everyone who swears falsely^[b] shall be cleaned out according to what is on the other side. 4 I will send it out, declares the LORD of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief, and the house of him who swears falsely by my name. And it shall remain in his house and consume it, both timber and stones.”*

A flying scroll!

You know – like at a football game,
when a small airplane pulls a banner ad across the sky.
Except they didn’t have airplanes back then!

So a flying scroll would be interpreted as a divine message!

Twenty cubits by 10 cubits – 30 feet by 15 feet –

It’s essentially a giant flying billboard,
proclaiming a curse upon the whole land.

At the end of Deuteronomy Moses had told Israel to build a billboard on Mt. Ebal
with the curses of the covenant – and in Joshua’s day, they did exactly that!

In Joshua 8, we are told that Joshua built an altar on Mt. Ebal,
and he wrote a copy of the law on the stones –

and “he read the words of the law, the blessing and the curse,
according to all that is written in the Book of the Law.” (Josh 8:30-35)

The altar on Mt. Ebal served as a billboard for many generations –
reminding every Israelite who walked by of God’s law –
and of his curse against those who rebelled against him.

Now, this flying scroll serves as a flying billboard reminding Israel once again:
“This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land.”

And there are two sides to the scroll:

“everyone who steals
shall be cleaned out according to what is on one side,
and everyone who swears falsely
shall be cleaned out according to what is on the other side.”

It is interesting to note which two commandments are emphasized.

Stealing and swearing [in Hebrew it simply says “swearing” not “swearing falsely”
because in Hebrew this is how you say “taking the LORD’s name in vain.”]
Why these two?

Often the prophets emphasize adultery and idolatry.
Other times they emphasize having other gods and oppressing the poor.

So why stealing and taking God’s name in vain?

Perhaps it is just that:

here are two commandments that *haven’t* been emphasized as much!
We know from Ezra and Nehemiah that the returned exiles were working hard
to avoid the sins of their fathers.
So Zechariah may well be saying that it’s not enough to commit *different sins* –
every sin deserves God’s wrath and curse!

Because watch what happens to this giant flying billboard:

“I will send it out, declares the LORD of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief,
and the house of him who swears by my name [takes my name in vain].
And it shall remain in his house and consume it, both timber and stones.”

In other words, this 600 square foot billboard will enter your house and consume it –
bring it to an end – destroy it!

In other words, God is getting ready to clean house.

And when he does, he will do it by his *word* that goes forth –
written on a scroll – so there is no confusion over what God says.
Sometimes there are controversies over the exact details of what God requires,

but on the basic principles and precepts, there is not much controversy.
Among those who accept the divine authority of the scriptures
there is very little difference of opinion.
If you sit down with an orthodox Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, Orthodox, Pentecostal –
you will find great commonality both in doctrine and practice.
Even where we disagree we are often *trying* to get at the same basic *point* –
although we may express it very differently.

The modernists have rejected the divine authority of the scriptures –
so we will have very little common ground with them,
because they don't believe in the *real things themselves*.
They believe that religious experience is what matters.

Religious experience is a good thing – *if it is the experience of the true God* –
if you think about Zechariah's visions –
he had a remarkable experience!
But it was the experience of the God who had spoken to Moses –
the God who had brought Israel out of Egypt by his mighty hand!
In the same way we experience the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ –
the God who, in the Person of His Son, became all that we are by nature,
so that we might become all that he is by grace.

Indeed, this is at the heart of Zechariah's night visions.
Because the scroll – the written Word of God – cleans house –
The word of God is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword (Heb 4:12)

I used to wrestle with that verse.
What it is referring to?
Listen to Hebrews 4:12-13
“The word of God is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword,
piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow,
and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed
to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

Hebrews 4 is developing the same theme as Zechariah 5.
The word of God cleans house.
When God's word comes to you, you cannot escape its penetrating gaze.
God's word remains the standard by which all humanity will be judged.

If you build your house on any other foundation,
then when the Word of the LORD comes to you,
your house will be destroyed by the Word of God.

And that theme continues in the next vision in verses 5-11:

2. The Vision of the Woman in a Basket – Building a House for Iniquity in Shinar (5:5-11)

⁵ Then the angel who talked with me came forward and said to me, “Lift your eyes and see what this is that is going out.” ⁶ And I said, “What is it?” He said, “This is the basket^[c] that is going out.” And he said, “This is their iniquity^[d] in all the land.” ⁷ And behold, the leaden cover was lifted, and there was a woman sitting in the basket! ⁸ And he said, “This is Wickedness.” And he thrust her back into the basket, and thrust down the leaden weight on its opening.

The reference to “their iniquity” can only refer back to the stealing and the swearing of verses 1-4

And again, these sins are named merely as examples –
it's not that thieves are worse than murderers –
or that those who swear falsely are worse than idolaters –

Rather, it is that *wickedness* in all its forms – needs to be purged from God’s people!

Why is Wickedness personified as a woman?

First of all, we need to remember that Hebrew (like many ancient languages)
is a gendered language.

So both the thieves and those who stole falsely in verses 1-4 were gendered as *men*.

To a certain extent Zechariah is merely providing equal opportunity to both genders!

But even more importantly, the prophets often use the figure of a woman

either as the bride of Yahweh and the mother of God’s people –
or as the adulteress who betrays Yahweh and the temptress who deceives God’s people.

What is striking here is that not only is Wickedness personified as a woman,
but so also are the ones who dispose of Wickedness:

⁹ Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, two women coming forward! The wind was in their wings. They had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven. ¹⁰ Then I said to the angel who talked with me, “Where are they taking the basket?” ¹¹ He said to me, “To the land of Shinar, to build a house for it. And when this is prepared, they will set the basket down there on its base.”

The identity of the two women is not clear.

If they are angels, then this is the only passage in scripture that speaks of ‘women’ angels.
But it is not at all clear that they are angels.

After all, look at what they do with Wickedness:

They are taking the basket to the land of Shinar, to build a house for it.

(Shinar is another name for Babylon)
Building a house has at least the hint of temple-building about it –
and setting the basket on its base suggests a pedestal for an image.
In other words they are going to build a temple for Wickedness,
in which Wickedness will be god.

The image here is that Wickedness will be removed from the people of God,
so that they will no longer be troubled by it.
But Wickedness will be established in Babylon – suggesting that conflict will remain
between the Babylon and Jerusalem
(think of how Revelation portrays these two women in Rev. 12-21).

3. The Vision of Four Chariots – My Spirit Is at Rest (6:1-8)

6 Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four chariots came out from between two mountains. And the mountains were mountains of bronze. ² The first chariot had red horses, the second black horses, ³ the third white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled horses—all of them strong.^[e] ⁴ Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” ⁵ And the angel answered and said to me, “These are going out to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth. ⁶ The chariot with the black horses goes toward the north country, the white ones go after them, and the dappled ones go toward the south country.” ⁷ When the strong horses came out, they were impatient to go and patrol the earth. And he said, “Go, patrol the earth.” So they patrolled the earth. ⁸ Then he cried to me, “Behold, those who go toward the north country have set my Spirit at rest in the north country.”

The final vision – the *eighth* vision – is the one that brings *rest* to God’s Spirit.
In the first vision there were four horsemen that patrolled the earth.
Now, in the eighth vision there are four chariots – with a similar array of horses –
patrolling the earth once more.

The LORD who threw the horses and chariots of Egypt into the Red Sea
now sends forth his own horsemen and chariots forth to patrol the earth.

But whereas in the first vision the focus was on the anger of the LORD against the nations,
now the Spirit of the LORD is at rest.

This is the word used in the fourth commandment to speak of how the LORD rested –
and then throughout the Pentateuch to refer to how we ought to rest –
or how the LORD gives rest to his people.

And when the Spirit of the LORD is at rest,
that leads to his people being given rest as well!

There is a sense in which the final section (verses 9-15) are still a part of the night visions.
Just as the “word of the LORD came to me”
as a part of the first vision of the four horsemen (1:7-17),
and just as the word of the LORD came to me
in the midst of the central vision of the golden lampstand (4:8),

so now the word of the LORD came to Zechariah to conclude the night visions
in 6:9-15.

And the Word of the LORD tells Zechariah to do something quite curious:

4. The Word of the LORD: Joshua – the Temple-Building Priest Who Sits on the Throne (6:9-15)

⁹ And the word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁰ “Take from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon, and go the same day to the house of Josiah, the son of Zephaniah. ¹¹ Take from them silver and gold, and make a crown, and set it on the head of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

When we met Joshua in chapter 3
his clothes were filthy –
covered in his own excrement –
far from the sort of condition one expects of a high priest!

We saw then that the cleansing of the high priest would involve new garments.
In other words, Zechariah points forward to a new covenant
in which the high priest has new clothes.

In the same way, chapter 6 now suggests that this new covenant high priest
will also have a kingly crown.

Throughout the OT, this word for ‘crown’ is used regularly of the royal crown.
In the wisdom literature it can also be used figuratively to speak of grandchildren
as the “crown of old men” (Prov 17:6)
or a virtuous woman as the “crown of her husband” (Prov 12:4)

So the idea of placing a crown on the head of a priest is not a normal one –
nor is it normal to say that “there shall be a priest on his throne...”

The ancient prophets regularly condemned the mingling of kingly and priestly roles.

When Uzziah offered incense in the temple (a priestly prerogative)
the LORD struck him with leprosy.

But Zechariah 6 is connecting the priest and the king in some important ways.

Joshua, the high priest, is crowned.

Then Zechariah says to *Joshua* –

“Thus says the LORD of hosts,...

¹² And say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. ¹³ It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there^[f] shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.’”

Jeremiah 23 and Isaiah 11 both spoke of the Branch as the Son of David –
so we should definitely take Zechariah in the same way.

Joshua is a Levite – so he cannot be the Branch –

but he plainly points to the Branch – is connected to the Branch.

Some want to say that Zerubbabel is the Branch – since Zerubbabel is a Son of David –
and Zerubbabel *did* build the second temple –

but Zerubbabel never achieved royal honor –

and never sat and ruled on his throne.

So it would be better to say that Zerubbabel is also a picture of and pointer to the Branch.

Joshua and Zerubbabel both – each in their own way – point forward to the greater Joshua –
our Lord Jesus –

who is the Branch – the one who unites the kingly and the priestly office
in his own person.

Why was he named Jesus?

Because Joshua means “Yahweh saves” – and he shall save his people from their sins.

Yes, that is what the angel said to Joseph (Matthew 1:21)

but the name Jesus – Joshua – was already important

both because of the Joshua of the Conquest

and because of the Joshua of the restoration from Exile.

He was named Jesus because this prophecy was about *him*.

He would be the Son of David who would also become our great High Priest!

*¹⁴ And the crown shall be in the temple of the LORD as a reminder to Helem,^[g] Tobijah, Jedaiah,
and Hen the son of Zephaniah.*

Note that the crown does not remain with Joshua – but it is placed in the temple of the LORD
as a reminder to God’s people that the days are coming
when God will do what it signifies.

The day will come when God will unite the royal and the priestly offices –
because only then will God bring salvation to his people.

And when that day comes (v15):

¹⁵ “And those who are far off shall come and help to build the temple of the LORD. And you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. And this shall come to pass, if you will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God.”

We have already seen in chapter 2, verse 11, that “many nations” will join themselves to the LORD.
God’s purpose in these night visions is to show Zechariah the glory of his coming kingdom.

When the Gentiles come to worship the LORD, that will show the truth of Zechariah’s words.
And the only way that this will come to pass
is if you will diligently obey the voice of the LORD.

When Israel obeys the LORD – then the nations will come.
After all, if Israel remains in unbelief –
how can anyone believe!!

When the church fails miserably to follow Jesus –
it makes it that much harder for unbelievers to come to faith!

But when the church diligently obeys the voice of the LORD –
when we are faithful disciples – who are taught – and who observe –
all that Jesus commanded –
then we tend to do better in our witness to the nations.

We need to be a people that put into practice the words of Jesus –
we need to be a place where those who have been beaten up by the words of this age
can find rest.

Think about it this way:

if Israel had given up and abandoned the land –
how could Jesus – the Branch – have ever come?

It was only because there was a faithful remnant the persevered in their faithful obedience
that there could be a temple for Jesus to be purified in –
a temple to be cast down – so that he might rebuild it!!

In the same way,
it is only through us – through the church of our Lord Jesus Christ –
that the gospel can come to the nations today.
If we give up – if we abandon our post –
then salvation will never come to those around us!

Yes, it is true that *only God can save* –
but that God has ordained *his people* as the means that he will use to save his people.