

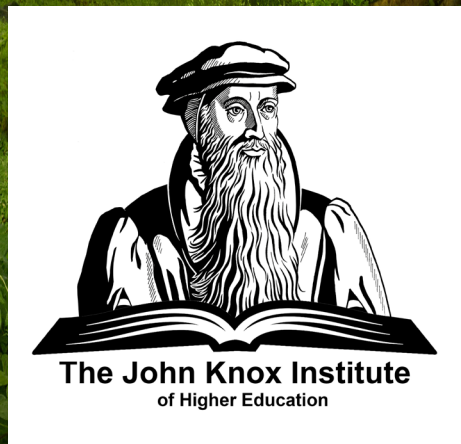
The Visions of Zechariah

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. William Macleod

Lecture #3

The Second Vision: The Four Horns



John Knox Institute of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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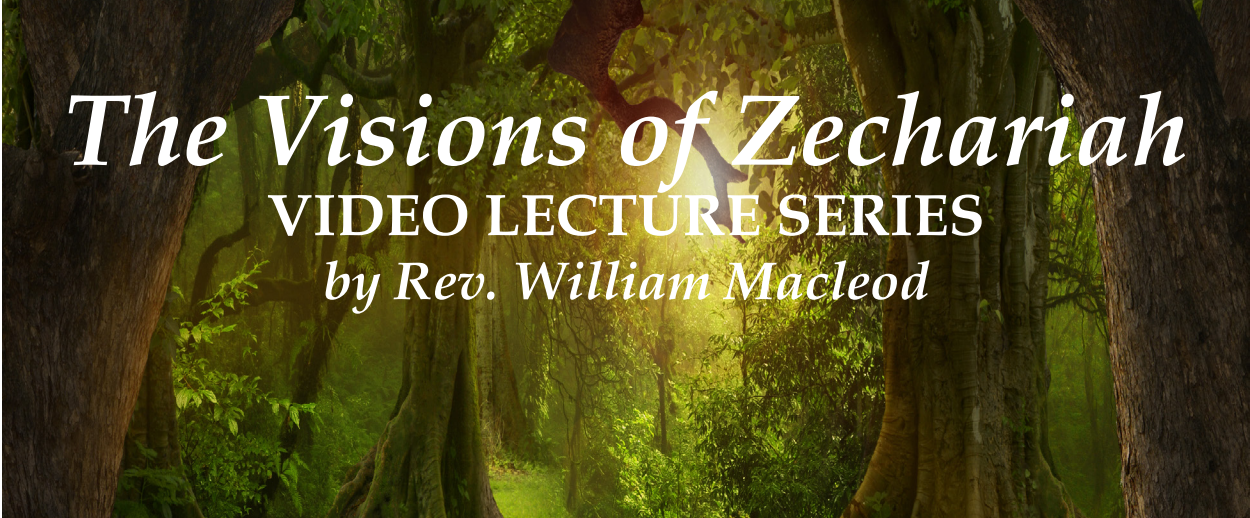
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1. Introduction: Turn to Me and I Will Turn to You
2. The Man on the Red Horse
- 3. The Second Vision: The Four Horns**
4. The Man with the Measuring Line—Church Growth
5. Joshua the High Priest
6. The Golden Candlestick
7. The Sixth Vision: The Flying Scroll
8. The Seventh Vision: The Ephah
9. The Eighth Vision: God Reigns
10. Climax of the Visions: The Crowning of Joshua



The Visions of Zechariah

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Lecture #3 — Zechariah 1:18–20

The Second Vision: The Four Horns

We come now to our third lecture in this series on Zechariah's visions. This one is about "The Second Vision: The Four Horns" which you will find in the prophecy of Zechariah, chapter 1, and verses 18 to 20.

God's people have many enemies. Sometimes we feel beaten and battered, and our head hangs down. Should we be angry with God for allowing this situation to develop? Should we allow hatred in our hearts towards our enemies? Jesus taught us to love our enemies. We are to lift up our eyes and to see that the Lord reigns. Nothing happens by chance. God is in control. He ensures that all things work together for our good. Here is a vision to encourage us in difficult times. The enemies of God's church will not prevail.

The Four Horns, verses 18 to 19—"Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns. And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem."

This vision is closely connected with the previous one. There it is said, "And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction"—verse 15. These enemies opposed the Jews, but now God expresses his displeasure with these enemies. The temple will be built. The church has a great future.

The prophet lifts up his eyes and sees four horns. He asks the angel which is showing him the visions what these are and what they are going to do? The angel replies, "These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it"—verse 21.

Horns are a symbol of power. We think of the horns of a ram or a bull and how they fight and seek to assert their supremacy with their horns. We are not told what animals the horns belonged to. It is a bit like the horses in the previous vision. We are told of the horses, but obviously their riders are included.

Why are four mentioned? This implies attack coming from the four points of the compass, north south, east, and west. From every side, the Jews were being crushed. These horns symbolise the

Philistines, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Syrians, the Egyptians, the Samaritans the Persians, indeed all their enemies. The Jews, who were the people of God, were bruised, and battered, and trampled underfoot. None of them could lift their heads. In the same way, the church of God today is being attacked by enemies on every side. The enemies are powerful. The church today is weak. The people of God feel oppressed and frightened. The four horns are very real. Attacks are directed against the church from every side. But what are the great enemies of the church today? I'd like to mention several.

First, there's evolution. Where have we come from, and where are we going has always been a pressing question for mankind. The church has provided the answer revealed by God in the Bible. However, the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, in 1859, had a huge effect across the world. Up till this point, people generally believed that God had created them, and that one day they would die and have to answer to God for their lives. But now the Biblical account of creation was rejected by many. It seemed possible that life had begun by chance, and the different forms arose from natural selection. People then began to question, "Is there a God?" The scientific community, generally speaking, accepted evolution and promoted it enthusiastically. Even many theologians and churches tried to accommodate Darwin's hypothesis. To begin with even some orthodox theologians were influenced. Also geologists began to speak of an "ancient earth". The Bible implies that the world is only a few thousand years old. The geologists argue that the earth is thousands of millions of years old. If the first few chapters of Genesis cannot be trusted, can the rest of the Bible be trusted? More recently, creation scientists have shown how the Bible does not conflict with true science. The earth appears to be old but is not actually old. The problems with evolution have been highlighted and the impossibility of life beginning by some kind of spontaneous generation has been demonstrated. But the schools, the universities, and the media all present evolution as a fact. Society generally has lost its fear of God, because the majority do not want to believe in a Creator and Judge and they hope that science has explained God away. Evolution has been a huge horn by which the devil has attacked and continues to attack the church.

A second enemy of the church is liberal theology. Liberal theology came into prominence in western Europe and America around the same time as the theory of evolution. It arose particularly in Germany, where there were several famous old universities. Seeing the progress in science and other disciplines, theologians also wanted to come up with new discoveries. Higher criticism arose. Basically, this approach treated the Bible just like any other book, and so, denying the Bible's supernatural character—its supernatural nature—these theologians cast doubt upon all its statements. It meant that neither the history, nor the geography, nor even the theological and ethical statements could be trusted. Human reason became the judge of what was true and acceptable. Julius Wellhausen, for example, developed his Documentary Hypothesis with regard to the Old Testament. In this, he denied the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and the whole historical account given in the first five books of the Bible. He argued that Deuteronomy was written in the time of king Josiah. Many theologians and ministers accepted his theories and they became very popular in the theological colleges. Some argued that it did not really matter who wrote this book or that. Surely it was a minor point, they said, whether Moses wrote these books or not. Just take the teaching of the book, they argued. But it did matter. If the Bible said that it was written by Moses, and if our Lord Jesus said the same—for example, in Mark 10, verses 3 to 5—then we must accept the Mosaic authorship, or the authority of the Scriptures are undermined. If the Bible is wrong in the little things it states, then it can be wrong in the major assertions that it makes too. Sadly, this is what happened. The authority of scripture was undermined. Human reason was instead placed on

the throne. Soon even the substitutionary atonement of Christ was rejected. The idea of sacrifice, and the blood of Christ, and propitiation, they were seen as prescientific religion and unworthy of a God of love. Error always enters a little at a time. Once some of the statements of the Bible begin to be questioned, soon the other statements are questioned too. Sadly this liberalism has taken over all the mainline churches. Here we have another horn which batters the true church of God.

A third horn is the ecumenical movement. Over the last hundred years, the importance of church unity has been stressed by such bodies as the World Council of Churches. Much is made of the fact that Jesus prayed for unity in his High Priestly Prayer, in John 17. Churches, they say, when united will surely be stronger. Doctrine is seen as divisive, and so must be downplayed. It is a kind of lowest common denominator kind of belief. Love is emphasised. We are told to forget our differences and worship together. The evangelical gospel is forgotten. Some churches teach salvation by good works, and others salvation by taking the sacraments. The liberalism of the mainline churches is prominent. The radical nature of the Christian gospel is forgotten. And all religions are seen as different paths to God and salvation. Emphasis is laid on helping the poor but also on certain political concerns. It used to be strongly against Apartheid and today tends to be hostile to Israel and pro-Palestinian. The ecumenical movement essentially empties the church of the gospel. The church becomes increasingly a branch of the state, just involved in social work.

A fourth horn is the charismatic movement. Since the 1960s, the charismatic movement has made huge inroads into the Christian church. Stress is laid on emotional excitement. Supernatural gifts, such as tongue-speaking, prophecy, and healing, are claimed by leaders. Many healings, when analyzed, are simply the effect of mind over matter. The individual is convinced that he is healed when no actual healing has occurred. In other cases there are fake healings. Where there is a failure to heal, the sufferer is blamed for a lack of faith. The music is worldly, and the songs lack content. Words are repeated over and over again in a mindless emotionalism. One African theologian has compared it to the incantations of the witchdoctors. The evangelists in a callous way persuade people to part with their money, promising them health and prosperity, which, of course, never comes. The prosperity preaching is widespread, especially in the developing world, and it does much damage. People become Christians because they have been promised health and wealth. But the Christ actually promised his faithful followers tribulation in this world—John 16:33, “In this world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Another horn is the LGBTQI philosophy. There has been a remarkable transformation in sexual ethics over the last forty years. In the past, everyone accepted that marriage should be between a man and a woman and that all sex outside marriage was wrong. Both premarital fornication and adultery within marriage were condemned. Homosexual practice was rightly seen as gross immorality. However, today things have changed dramatically, both in society and the churches. Sadly, too many churches receive their morality not from the Bible, but from the world around them. The world has invaded the church. Liberalism has undermined the authority of the scriptures. Instead of viewing homosexuality as a sin, it is argued that it is a condition that some people have from birth. The world says such people cannot help it or change it and therefore should embrace it. Mainline churches accept this and argue that love is love and must be good. But the Bible calls it not love, but lust. Also the scriptures make plain that some are converted from that lifestyle and are in fact liberated from that bondage to sin. Paul, for example, wrote to the Corinthian church, “Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are

sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God”—1 Corinthians 9:11.

Another horn is postmodernism. There has been in recent times the growth of the idea that religion should be private. People, it is said, should keep their beliefs to themselves. Postmodernism asserts that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Each person has their own truth. What you believe is right for you, and what I believe is right for me. There must be no attempt to convert others. Evangelism is condemned. It is seen as totally wrong to challenge others or criticise their views—it's regarded as a hate crime. However, true Christianity believes that there is such a thing as truth, and that God is the source of truth. Those who believe the Bible have the truth. Evangelism is a vital element of a healthy faith. Jesus stated quite clearly, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”—John 14, verse 6. All other religions lead to hell. All forms of the Christian faith which do not focus on Christ and him crucified are heresy and destroy souls.

A further horn is worldliness. People today have much more leisure time than in ages past. Work does not absorb all their time and energy. There are many forms of entertainment readily available—TV, videos, YouTube, social media, etc.—they're a great temptation to many. The time which used to be spent in studying the scriptures, praying, reading Christian books and fellowship with other Christians is often used now for pleasure. People have become “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God”—2 Timothy 3, verse 4. The church has lost its zeal for holiness and for evangelism. God is grieved by the idolatry of church members who spend their time in trivial pursuits and fail to love him with all their hearts.

Summarizing then, the church of God is being attacked from every side. The four horns batter it from the north, the south, the east, and the west. How can it survive? Every true Christian knows what it is to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil. The church as a whole is surrounded on every side by enemies. Some of the enemies come softly and aim to seduce with wily cunning. Others attack head on with the great ferocity as persecutors. Christ said to his disciples, “I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves”—Matthew 10, verse 16. How can a sheep possibly survive in the midst of a pack of wolves? Other attacks come from within, from sheep dressed up as wolves: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves”—Matthew 7, verse 15. These can often be the hardest to resist because they are the most difficult to detect. Zechariah is told, “These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.” God's people are scattered by their enemies.

And now we come to The Four Carpenters, verses 20 to 21—“And the LORD shewed me four carpenters. Then said I, What come these to do? And he spake, saying, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it.”

Zechariah then tells us, “The LORD showed me four carpenters.” The prophet is curious, “What come these to do?” He was told, “These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it.”

The horns seem all-powerful, and the church has in itself no answer to them. But God does have an answer. He is Almighty. He loves his church. He chose it from eternity. He sent his Son to die for it. He has his plan. In his time and in his way, he will deliver his people. The horns of the Gentiles will not prevail. He sends the carpenters, or workmen, to cut and break them with saws and hammers.

Down through the centuries, the heathen around Israel invaded their land time and again. The Chaldeans carried them away into captivity for seventy years. But even then the success of their enemies was measured and limited. They were allowed to go beyond certain limits. They were instruments of chastisement in the hands of the Lord to correct his people. Eventually the Jews committed the great sin of rejecting and crucifying the Messiah. For this, Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews were scattered across the world. But “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance”—Romans 11:29. One day they will be restored and grafted again into the olive tree of the church. The horns of their enemies will be frayed, cut, and cast out.

The church today, as we have seen, has many powerful enemies arrayed against it. But God cares deeply for his church. The beloved people will not be destroyed. The horns of their enemies will be cut. There is no doubt about the future and success of God’s church. God’s people will tread down their enemies as the mire in the streets. Paul could say to the Roman church, “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly”—Romans 16, verse 20. Even Satan will be overcome.

Rejoice, Christian friends. You are on the winning side. The Lord will fight for you. “Be strong and of good courage”—Joshua 1, verse 6. You will take possession of the land. As Paul said to the Romans, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us”—Romans 8:35 to 37.

In these difficult days, look up. God reigns. He sits upon the throne above every other throne. Remember, the Son of God is the King and Head of the church. His enemies will be made his footstool—Hebrews 1:13. The true church is precious to him because he purchased it with his own blood, precious blood. He is interceding for it at God’s right hand, and his intercession is not in vain. Remember too that the Holy Spirit has come to live in the church. He is sanctifying it. He unites it to God. We have the promise, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”—Philippians 1, verse 6. He has said, “And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him”—Malachi 3, verse 17. Amen.