



Night Visions

This lesson begins the first major unit in the book – the Eight Night Visions in chapters 1 through 6. The prophet Zechariah saw all eight visions in one night, on February 15, 519 B.C., about three months after his first vision (vv. 1-6). To understand the setting, we must know something of Israel's history to this point. After King Solomon the nation was split with a northern kingdom (called Israel or Samaria) and a southern kingdom (called Judah). The northern kingdom had only wicked kings and fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Judah fell in 586 BC to the Babylonians after a prolonged period of rebellion and warning from God through the prophets about what would happen. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others tried to turn the people from their sins, but to no avail. The destruction by the Babylonians left behind a nation in ruins, and according to prophecy the people would be captives for 70 years, a period that likely ended in 539 BC. After a small group of about 50,000 Jews (Ezra 2) returned to Judah to rebuild, then needed to be encouraged with the promises of God.

1. **Chiasm:** Jewish writers often wrote in a chiastic structure (even in the New Testament). The structure of the Eight Night Visions is chiastic, which serves to emphasize the middle visions as climactic:

A — vision 1 (scouting mission, the world at rest)

B — vision 2 (God removes Israel's enemies from the land)

C — vision 3 (Jerusalem to be reconstructed, Messiah dwells there)

D — vision 4 (Joshua fit for priestly service, Messiah to remove sin and bring lasting peace)

D' — vision 5 (Zerubbabel will lead people to finish the temple, enabled by Holy Spirit)

C' — vision 6 (God's righteousness enforced in Israel)

B' — vision 7 (God removes wickedness from the land)

A' — vision 8 (warriors sent, God's spirit quieted)

2. **First Vision (1:7-17):** The date is February 15, 519 BC, during the second year of the reign of the Persian king Darius (521-486 BC). This is the first of the eight visions seen by the prophet that night. The participants in the vision are (1) the man on the red horse, (2) riders on red, sorrel, and white horses, (3) the Lord of Hosts, (4) Zechariah, and (5) the interpreting or guide angel.

— The man on a red horse standing by myrtle trees in a valley, and behind him are the other horses and riders.

— The man sends the riders on the other horses to do reconnaissance throughout the world, and their report (v. 11) is that world is at rest.

— The man on the red horse is then identified as the Angel of the Lord (v. 12), who asks the Lord of Hosts when He will again show mercy to Judah.

— The Lord of Hosts is jealous for Jerusalem but angry with the nations, and He promises Jerusalem and His temple will be rebuilt, and Judah will again prosper.

— **KEY** questions are who is "the man" and what is the significance of the "myrtle" trees / shrubs

3. **Second Vision (1:18-21):** The prophet sees four horns that scatter Israel and Judah, followed by four artisans or craftsmen that remove the horns. Many readers try to identify the four horns as specific nations, but it is better to understand this as a picture of all of the enemies of Israel followed by God's complete and final deliverance of Israel from her enemies.