

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON SIN
ZECHARIAH 5:1-11

We live in a sinful world. We are well aware of the sinfulness of the world:

- There is a kind who is pure in his own eyes, Yet is not washed from his filthiness. (Prov. 30:12)
- For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire, And the greedy man curses *and* spurns the LORD. (Ps. 10:3)
- Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. (Ps. 51:5)
- “[The ungodly] count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children; forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness...” (2 Pt. 2:13-15)

It has always been this way:

- “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Gen. 6:5 — the beginning of the flood story)

It seems that our day is particularly heinous, though Paul also spoke of depraved days:

- And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. (Rom. 1:28-32 — that could be a theme song for our culture)

R. C. Sproul wrote about that short paragraph —

“Despite the scope of his list, it is only partial. It is merely representative of our corruption. If Paul had enumerated all the sins that the Bible spells out, he could have filled the entire epistle and then some. He gives us a representative list that should be enough to stop every mouth and convict every conscience. Surely there is something on the list that we recognize as a part of our own experience. [Sproul, *Romans*]

Don't you sometimes wonder, “How long, Lord? Will the unjust go unpunished? Will the perverse continue to prosper and the obedient continue to be oppressed?” Something like that had to be on the minds of the Israelites after they returned from their Babylonian captivity. They were back in the land, but they were still facing opposition that was so strong that they gave up rebuilding the temple. The foundation was poured and there it sat undeveloped for 15 years while the Israelites held back from building in fear and apathy.

To that people, God spoke to the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to exhort them to repentance and to stimulate them to obedient action. To stimulate these dispirited and perhaps rebellious people to action, God revealed His nature and part of His plan. In Zechariah's prophecy that revelation began with eight visions on the night of February 15, 519 B.C.

In chapter five we find two related visions regarding sin. But there is something of an unexpected emphasis; rather than focusing only on the sins of Babylon and Medo-Persia, the vision from God also addresses the ungodly in Israel. Combined, these two visions reveal the character of God in His justice towards sin and both comfort and warn the Israelites about sin (*their* sin and the sin of others) —

GOD COMFORTS AND WARNS HIS PEOPLE WITH THE PROMISE OF HIS JUDGMENT ON SINNERS AND SIN.

This morning, we consider Zechariah's sixth and seventh visions:

1. What Zechariah **SAW** in the Sixth Vision (5:1-2)
2. What Zechariah's Sixth Vision **MEANT** (5:3-4)
3. What Zechariah **SAW** in the Seventh Vision (5:5-7)
4. What Zechariah's Seventh Vision **MEANT** (5:8-11)
5. What Zechariah's Visions **TEACH** About God

1. What Zechariah SAW in the Sixth Vision (5:1-2)

- When Zechariah says, *I lifted up my eyes again...* it is the start of another vision (the sixth of eight).
- What he saw was a *flying scroll*...
 - ✓ You are familiar with scrolls. OT scrolls were made of either parchment or leather and pieces were sewn together to make the needed length and then the ends were attached to wooden rollers.
 - ✓ The scroll was written from right to left (in Hebrew); the scroll was unrolled from the left roller onto the right roller as the scroll was read, typically one column/section at a time.
 - ✓ Let's also recognize the uniqueness of this vision — scrolls don't fly. They open, they roll, they rest, they are written, they are read. But they don't fly. (This is the only instance in Bible of flying scroll.)
 - ✓ That it was "flying" meant that it was visible to all — all had access to it (and all were responsible for its message). It also suggests that it is being revealed from God in Heaven (has authority).
- The only thing notable about the scroll was its size: **length is 20 cubits and its width 10 cubits...**
 - ✓ A cubit was about 18 inches, so the scroll was about 30 feet by 15 feet (450 sq. feet).
 - ✓ What is interesting about that size is that a normal scroll would have about 8-12 inches in height but it would have been up to 20 feet long; so the proportions of this scroll are unusual.
 - ✓ Some have speculated that the scroll was rolled up, so that it's "width" was its circumference. That seems unlikely since the writing is clearly obvious — on both *sides* (prob. front and back, though perhaps columns on one side of the parchment).
 - ✓ Some have said it was fully unrolled and was this size because it contained a brief message.
 - ✓ More likely, it is like a typical scroll; it is only partially unrolled and only part of the writing has been exposed.
 - ✓ The other item of interest is that it has the same dimensions as the Holy Place in the Tabernacle (Ex. 26:15-18) and the porch of Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 6:3). What does that mean? We don't know, because the angel doesn't tell us, so we need to be careful about speculating; but perhaps we are being reminded of the Tabernacle to remember the covenant God made with Israel and the need for forgiveness from sin (since God's dealing with sin is going to be the emphasis of both visions).
- The angel does tell us what is important in the vision and that is in verses 3-4 —

2. What Zechariah's Sixth Vision MEANT (5:3-4)

- The scroll is a particular kind of scroll — it's one with a **curse** (v. 3) — the word used is a technical term to refer to sanctions that are associated with covenantal documents.
- While the word **curse** is used over 900x in the OT, when it is used with the article it appears only 9x.

- ✓ Several of those uses are in Dt. 29-30, the Mosaic covenant and the promises of blessing and cursing for Israel, dependent on their obedience or rebellion to the Law (cf. Dt. 29:14; Dan. 9:11).
 - ✓ The tendency of the flesh is to say, “it will be ok; God won’t do that...” (Dt. 29:19). But He will (Dt. 29:20)
 - ✓ This is a reminder to the hearers in Judah that they are still under the Law and still under the covenant stipulations of Dt. 28-30.
 - ✓ Even though they have returned from Babylon, God still expects submission to Him.
 - ✓ And notice that this curse is going **over the face of the whole land** — all Israel will be evaluated.
- There are two objects of the curse — **everyone who steals...everyone who swears...**
 - ✓ The two objects are written on two sides — perhaps front and back or perhaps two columns.
 - ✓ Those who **steal** is a reference to the eighth commandment, “you shall not steal” (Ex. 20:15).
 - ✓ Those who **swear** is a reference to the third commandment, “You shall not take the name of the Lord Your God in vain...” (Ex. 20:7).
 - ✓ Combined the two prohibitions encompass the two tables of the Law — sins against God and sins against mankind (one another). We should understand these two laws as representing the whole Law.
 - ✓ These two statements are a way of saying, “If you have violated even one of these commands one time, then you are guilty of violating the whole Law.” It’s akin to James 2:10.
 - ✓ The hearers of the prophecy would understand that they are all convicted as guilty of the Law.
 - ✓ [Aside: remember that the primary function of the Law was to reveal sin and reveal man’s inability to keep the Law (Rom. 7:7-11; Mt. 5:48). They could not be righteous; they needed help.]
 - And notice the consequence of their guilt (same for both): **will be purged away**.
 - ✓ To be purged is to be “removed.” How would they be removed?
 - ✓ The angel is indefinite about how, but the Mosaic Covenant says that if one rebels against God then they will be removed by exile (Dt. 28:63-64).
 - ✓ It is a warning to the Israelites back in the land of Judah, “just because you have returned doesn’t mean that God won’t send you back into exile — it’s part of His covenant with you.”
 - And the consequences are total (v. 4) —
 - ✓ **The Lord Almighty** (sovereign, omnipotent God) says, **I will make it** (the scroll) **go forth...**
 - ✓ It will go into every **house** where there is a thief or swearer (the place where they believe they are safe) and **it will spend the night...and consume it...timber and stones**. There is no hiding from God.
 - ✓ This judging scroll will stay until the judgment is complete (**consume** is “finish...destroy”).
 - ✓ This is a reminder that there is no shortening the wrath of God. He is patient (judgment is not always immediate), but He cannot compromise His wrath. Justice will be accomplished fully. There are no “flesh wounds” from the wrath of God; He will be fully satisfied. (Unbeliever, beware.)
 - ✓ This reminded Judah that her problem was not M-P, but her own sin of apathy, fear, and disobedience.

3. What Zechariah SAW in the Seventh Vision (5:5-7)

- The seventh vision begins much as the others — *lift up now your eyes...* And it is a continuation of one of the themes in the visions: holiness. In 2:12, the land is made holy and in 3:4 Joshua is cleansed. This vision will emphasize the cleansing of all the land (by the removal of sin).
 - ✓ The angel asks not just “what do you see?” but *what this is going forth* (v. 5), i.e., “what is moving?”
 - ✓ [Aside: notice how often movement is mentioned in ch. 5; it is a reminder that “moral forces in the world do not remain stationary or stagnant; there is either progress or retrogression.” (Feinberg)]
 - ✓ Zechariah did not immediately understand so he asked, *what is it?*
 - ✓ It was *the ephah*. An ephah was a unit of measurement (about five gallons) and also a vessel (like a bushel for us). In this case it was a container for grain.
 - ✓ In v. 6 is “what is *their appearance?*” Literally it means, “their eye...” How can the ephah see?
 - Some have changed one letter in the word “eye” so that it means “iniquity.” That fits the context, but it is unwarranted to change it.
 - The word “appearance” is an appropriate translation of the sense, but it is unclear...
 - Context helps us: four other times in Zechariah, the phrase *in all the earth* is used (1:10-11; 4:10; 6:7). They all have to do with dominion, authority, and rule. In 4:10, the seven are “eyes of the Lord which range to and fro...” The eye here is similar — the eye of wickedness (which is what inhabits the ephah, v. 8) is going through the land seeking to devour and rule (1 Pt. 5:8).
- The angel continues with the explanation in v. 7 and reveals that a *woman* is in the ephah.
 - ✓ The *lead cover* was a “talent” which was a weight of about 75 pounds. The weight of the lid indicates that the woman is meant to be “imprisoned” in the vessel. It’s a provision of security.
 - ✓ As with some of the other details, don’t press them here; a woman would not normally fit inside a five gallon container. The point is not the realism (like a massive scroll), but what it represents.
- And what does this woman represent?

4. What Zechariah’s Seventh Vision MEANT (5:8-11)

- *This is wickedness!* The word is a very general word for a variety of kinds of civil and religious evil.
 - ✓ The woman represents *wickedness* (v. 8). The vision is not “anti-women,” but the word is a feminine word, so to match that feminine form, a woman is pictured in the ephah.
 - ✓ Here the angel not only explains, but he also acts, *throwing the woman down* and putting the *lead weight on its opening*. It suggests that “wickedness” tries to escape and that the angel prevailed and put her back into confinement.
 - ✓ (There is an inherent danger to wickedness; sin is not amoral or benign. It was against corporate Judah, all the individual inhabitants of Judah and is still against us.)

- The vision continues with the appearance of **two** more **women** (v. 9). These women came **out of the wind** and **had wings like the wings of a stork**.
 - ✓ We don't know who these women are other than they aren't angels because angels aren't feminine. We don't need to be concerned about who they are, but should give attention to what they do.
 - ✓ Because **storks** were unclean animals according to OT Law (Lev. 11:19), it has been supposed that these were workers of evil setting up an assault (perhaps the final one?) against God.
 - ✓ However, notice that they came **out with the wind**. The word **wind** is the same as **Spirit** (4:6); it could be that we are to understand that God sent them by His Spirit (which I believe He did).
 - ✓ The emphasis is not on the nature of the storks, but in the power and the speed with which they carry away the ephah of wickedness. And of even more importance is where they took it.
- The storks took it out of the land (away from Judah) to **build a temple for her in the land of Shinar**.
 - ✓ To take it out of the land is a reminder that God is going to cleanse His land of wickedness/sin.
 - ✓ The word **temple** is literally "house." It can be used for temple, but most translate it "house."
 - ✓ The ephah of wickedness is being taken to a place of habitation where it will be imprisoned.
 - ✓ **Shinar** is another name for Babylon.
 - The great post-flood rebellion against God began in Shinar/Babylon — Babel (Gen. 11:2).
 - Babylon has represented the rebellion against God through the ages — it is "the very fountainhead of antitheocratic social, political, and religious ideology." [Merrill]
 - Wickedness has returned to the place where it belongs. [Merrill]
 - We should also recognize that Babylon will represent the great rebellion against God in Revelation. Note this: every time Babylon is mentioned in Revelation, it is always in reference to her destruction (Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21). There is no profitable escape or end for evil. It will be destroyed by God; He will not forget what evil has attempted to do to His people.
 - ✓ The hearers of this prophecy are meant to understand that God will vanquish sin finally; but they are also meant to understand that He will not tolerate sin among His people.

5. What Zechariah's Visions **TEACH** About God

- These visions are different than the other ones in that there is no oracle (declaration) section in either of them; they only contain the revelation of the vision and its explanation. However, there are clear implications about God and us that are easily discernable in the visions.
- Be **MINDFUL**: the law of sowing and reaping is God's law
 - ✓ The Mosaic Covenant (Dt. 28-30) was given to reveal how God would respond to Israel's obedience and disobedience. Israel's history demonstrates God's faithfulness to that covenant.
 - ✓ The principle applies today to us (Gal. 6:7-9). The Scriptures are given to evaluate our lives and they will be evaluated and God will dispense appropriate judgment/discipline and blessing.

- ✓ Parents — one of our jobs is to teach our children this law. Let them experience, at times, harsh consequences (be gracious, but without always rescuing), so they learn God condemns sin,=.
- ✓ We are wise to consider the cost of disobedience, but don't forget the blessing of obedience — (Are you stunned that God will reward you even for your halting obedience?? **Jn. 12:26**; 1 Cor. 3)

- **Be SOBER: Our problem is inside us, not outside us**

- ✓ Judah was slow to rebuild the temple because she was concerned about M-P; Judah saw her problem as only being external. These two visions remind Judah that God would not tolerate sin in His people any more than He would tolerate sin in the pagan nations.
- ✓ While we live in a perverse culture (it's always been that way; Gen. 9), our greatest problem is us.
- ✓ G. K. Chesterton answered a newspaper editorial, "what is wrong with the world?" with "I am."
- ✓ There is a sense in which our own sin is worse than the sins of the unregenerate and the world:
 - Unregenerate sinners cannot do anything different. Everything they do is sin (Rom. 3:9ff). They can only sin and can do nothing else. (They can only act in accord with their nature.)
 - We have the Spirit of God and have been freed from sin. When we sin we are now acting against our new nature in Christ.
- ✓ While we should speak for righteousness and evangelize and vote and plead, we should not be surprised when the world does what the world does. It's always been that way (cf. Gen. 6).
- ✓ These visions are a reminder to every person of God that sin is an ever-present danger...
- ✓ Be more concerned about your own propensity to engage in fleshly indulgences than you are concerned about the perversity you see in the world.

- **Be WARNED: God will punish/discipline all sinners**

- ✓ While wickedness is looking to devour and consume sinners (v. 6), God is omniscient in His vision and He and His Word will judge every sin of every sinner everywhere (the certainty of v. 4).
- ✓ Particularly the first vision reminds us that there is never a good end to sin. It always brings consequences that are harsh and hard. And ultimately, the consequences will be devastating.
 - The believer never needs to worry about final destruction (1 Cor. 3:15)
 - The believer may experience fatherly discipline if he is unrepentant (Heb. 12:5ff).
- ✓ God disciplined Israel and Judah, His chosen nation; He will discipline us if warranted.
- ✓ Beware of dabbling in sin; would you eat the smallest piece of a cyanide pill? No! God is gracious and patient and long suffering, but He is also eternally committed to your transformation, and He will graciously lead you or graciously discipline you if you persist in playing with sin. No small sin.

- Be **ENCOURAGED**: God will forgive all repentant sinners

- ✓ Remember v. 11 and the removal of wickedness to Shinar? God has removed sin from His people.
- ✓ There is another similar image to that in the OT: it was the removal of the scapegoat on which the sins of the people were placed each Day of Atonement into the wilderness (**Lev. 16:9-10**) — a picture that God has taken away sin and He is no longer holding it against His people.
 - What happened on the Day of Atonement was temporary (happened annually).
 - What happens in Shinar will be ultimate; sin will be destroyed and will be no more.
- ✓ God is not demanding perfection; He is providing imputed righteousness (perfection) for all repentant sinners (cf. **1:3-4, 6**)
- ✓ If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, understand that He is the One who has taken away your sin by dying on the cross for you (**Heb. 9:28 - 10:4, 10**).
- ✓ God takes your sin seriously and He will hold you accountable.
- ✓ But He also treats you and your sin graciously if you will repent and believe in Jesus.

- Be **HOPEFUL**: God will destroy all sin

- ✓ These visions were looking to encourage the Israelites in their day, that God would protect them from sin (and also stimulate them to obedience and repentance).
- ✓ But these visions are also looking past 519 B.C. and looking toward the end of time when Satan will be cast into the Lake of Fire for eternity and sin and death will be *no more* (**Rev. 20:10, 14**).
- ✓ Even before He went to the cross, because He has already fulfilled all righteousness, Jesus could declare, “I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).
- ✓ At the cross He defeated sin and death two ways:
 - He died of His own will (life was not taken from Him).
 - He was resurrected of His own will (life was not kept from Him).
- ✓ Remember and anticipate that while sin is rampant in this world, God will remove it.

CONCLUSION:

These visions are a reminder of the horridness of sin. There is *no good end to sin*; it is never profitable.

But there is a good *end of sin* — when God gives a final judgment against it, carries it away, and puts down its rebellion against Him. Lift up your eyes and see — *this wickedness will be taken away*.

BENEDICTION: **Jude 24-25**