

Week of October 31 - November 6

Zechariah 5 Cleansing the Land

The vision of the flying scroll and the measuring basket focus primarily on Israel. In both visions, God performs a cleansing action and deals with the sins of the Israelites. The prophet saw a large scroll floating through the air with writing on both sides. On one side he read the third commandment against taking God's name in vain, and on the other side he read the eighth commandment against stealing.

This scroll represented the Law of God that brings a curse on those who disobey it, including us. The law was never given to save people but to reveal that people need to be saved since it shows us our sin. Out of Ten Commandments, why did the Lord select the two that forbid stealing and swearing falsely? Were these sins especially common among the Jews at that time? It may be that many of the Jewish people were not faithful in their giving to the Lord, robbing Him of tithes and offerings, and then lying about it. God announced that the scroll would visit every home and judge those who were deliberately disobeying God.

Lawlessness flourishes today, and the only commandment many people worry about is "Thou shalt not get caught!" Ultimately, God judges all sinners who rebel against His law, but He started with Israel. Judgment begins with God's people.

The basket was a common measure in Israel, so, like the huge scroll, it was a special basket. A woman attempted to get out of the basket, so a heavy cover was put on top of it to keep her in. The prophet then saw two other women who had wings lift the basket and its contents and carry it to Babylon and put it on a base in a special house.

What did the Jews bring to Israel from Babylon when they returned from captivity? It wasn't idolatry since their years of exile cured them of idolatry. Throughout Scripture, Babylon symbolizes the world's enmity against God, a place where commerce was worshiped as a god.

God has now cleansed the land.

Zechariah 6 God Judges the Nations and Crowns Joshua

The four chariots with their horses represented the "four spirits" from God assigned to different parts of the world to do God's work. Chariots suggest battle, and this implies judgment.

The red horses symbolized war: the black horses, famine, and the white horses, death. There are no dappled horses in the vision John had in Revelation 6, but they could symbolize plagues. God will use wars, famines, plagues, and death to punish nations.

Since the two mountains were made of bronze, they are symbolic. Bronze often symbolizes judgment. The altar of sacrifice in the tabernacle and the temple was made of wood covered with bronze, and that's where sin was judged when the sacrifices were burned. The serpent that Moses put on the pole was made of bronze, and when our Lord appeared to John and was about to judge the churches, His feet were compared to bronze. God will judge the Gentile nations for their sins.

When Zechariah saw the horses, they were straining to go to their appointed destinations and do what God had ordered them to do. But judgment is in the hands of God, reserved for the right

time and place. The black horses were assigned to the north country (Babylon), and the white horses would follow them, while the dappled horses would go to the south (Egypt). Nothing is said about the red horses, so apparently the Lord was holding them back for another time. God was angry with the nations in the north, and His messengers would see to it that His purposes were fulfilled. This would bring peace to God's heart as His justice was satisfied.

Another message came to Zechariah where God assured His people that He would cleanse them and protect them from their enemies. The nations would be punished for their sins, but Israel would be delivered.

We now see the crowning of Joshua as high priest and as "the Branch." Zerubbabel is not mentioned here. It seems Joshua bore full responsibility for building the temple. The disappearance of Zerubbabel from the scene is nowhere explained and remains a mystery. Joshua's crown was not to be worn, only kept in the temple as a memorial to the promise of help from the exiles far away.

God told Zechariah that three Jews would arrive from Babylon, bringing gold and silver offerings to the Lord for the building of the temple. After they arrived in Jerusalem, Zechariah went to see them and made the crown to be placed on Joshua's head. God chose Joshua, and for the first time in Jewish history, the Lord united the monarchy and the priesthood. All of this refers to Christ since He is "the man whose name is the Branch." No priest in Jewish history ever served as king. One king, Uzziah, who tried to become a priest, was severely judged by the Lord. Only in Christ does the Lord unite both the throne and the altar.

Zechariah 7 Problems concerning Tradition

Two years later, a group of men came to Jerusalem from Bethel to ask Zechariah about the traditional Jewish fasts and mourning. Zechariah used the opportunity to teach the people about true spiritual worship and turned their eyes away from the past to the promises of the future. The temple is now about one-half complete.

The Law of Moses required the Jews to observe only one national fast, on the Day of Atonement. Individual Jews could fast from time to time as they felt led, but this wasn't required of the entire nation.

However, four new fasts had been added to the Jewish calendar by the Jewish exiles in Babylon: one in the tenth month, when the Babylonians began the siege of the city; another in the fourth month, when the city walls were broken through; one in the fifth month, when the temple was burned; and the fourth in the seventh month, when the Jewish governor Gedaliah was assassinated. The question was: "Now that the temple was being rebuilt, was it necessary to continue the fast in the fifth month that commemorated the burning of the temple?"

Zechariah's response didn't give them an immediate reply. First, he had to deal with the heart attitudes of the people. Our relationship with the Lord isn't so much a matter of traditions and rules as it is faith, love, and a desire to please Him. God wants us to mature spiritually and grow from obeying rules to following principles and having a personal relationship with Him. Zechariah answered their questions with some questions! "When you fasted," Zechariah asked, "did you do it for the Lord or for yourselves? And when you feasted, was it for the Lord or for yourselves? What was in your heart?"

The prophets had taught that the Israelite religious observances had to come from the heart. To worship God any other way meant to practice hypocrisy. God told the people that He wanted their obedience and not their sacrifices as far back as Samuel. Isaiah and Micah said the same thing, but the people didn't listen. Life was peaceful and secure in those days, and it was much easier to keep the traditions than to meet with God in true worship. God's final answer was that all four of the fasts would one day turn into feasts.

Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed because their "religion" was part of their lives, but not from their hearts. They could go to the temple and present their prayers and sacrifices, but then leave the temple to break God's Law, worship idols, and abuse other people.

Zechariah 8. Promises concerning Israel

Zechariah declared that God was jealous for Jerusalem, that He was returning to it, and that its prosperity was assured, even though the people saw only the devastation which caused their discouragement. Because of the certainty of this restoration, the prophet appealed to the remnant to be strong and build the temple, promising them in the name of the Lord that instead of being a curse they would become a blessing and that Jerusalem will be rebuilt and become a completely different city, dedicated to truth and holiness, a city so safe and friendly that the elderly can leisurely sit in the streets and talk, and where the children can play in the streets and not be in danger. Israel's and the Lord's relationship will be restored.

The land of Israel would be refreshed by the Lord, and the crops would grow. Laborers would make enough money to pay their bills. Israel would become a witness to the glory of the Lord.

God's covenant with Israel has always declared that He would punish them physically and materially if they disobeyed Him, but bless them if they obeyed Him. However, He has no such covenant with Christians today. He promises to meet all our needs and direct our circumstances.

Zechariah 9 The coming of the Anointed King

The coming of Jesus Christ to this earth wasn't God's "Plan B" or a quick decision by the Father after Adam and Eve sinned. The plan of redemption was settled in eternity before there ever was a creation. The coming of the Lamb of God was "foreordained before the foundation of the world," for He was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

In these verses, we see Alexander the Great and his army as they march through the area north and east of Palestine. Alexander defeated the Persians in 333 B.C. and then turned to conquer cities in Phoenicia. Daniel had predicted Alexander's success.

After a two-month siege of Gaza, Alexander took the city and then went to Jerusalem. He was unhappy with the Jews because they had refused to pay him the annual tribute that they usually gave to the Persians. The high priest in Jerusalem called for the people to fast and pray, and he presented sacrifices to the Lord to seek His special protection.

Zechariah had promised that Jerusalem and Judea would be spared. Alexander arrived at Jerusalem on his way to Gaza but did not attack it.

The coming of the King was fulfilled when Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem on what we traditionally call "Palm Sunday." This is the only public demonstration Jesus allowed during His ministry, and He did it to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9.

Alexander rode a mighty horse and proudly led a great army from one victory to another, but Jesus rode a lowly donkey and came in humility. The people who welcomed Him were common people who laid palm branches and garments before Him on the road. Jesus could have brought judgment, but He brought grace and forgiveness. Instead of making a grand speech, Jesus looked at Jerusalem and wept over it; instead of killing His enemies, He went to a cross and died for them!

Jesus will proclaim peace. His Word will go forth with power, and there will be general disarmament around the world. Chariots and war horses and every weapon will be destroyed. His rule will be universal, from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth. The image here is that of a storm as he marches forth with a voice like thunder and arrows like lightning, and His army will march with Him. He'll shield them from danger and death and will enable them to defeat their enemies.

This chapter ends with a description of the land and the changes God will make for the joy of His people.