

Judgement and Repentance

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- [0 : 00] But turn with me to Zechariah, chapter 5, this week. And I'll read the passage for us. Zechariah says, Again, I lifted up my eyes and saw, and behold, a flying scroll.
- And he said to me, What do you see? I answered, I see a flying scroll. Its length is 20 cubits and its width 10 cubits. 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 shall be cleaned out according to what is on the other side. 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. And the angel who talked with me came forward and said to me, Lift your eyes and see what this is that is going out.
- And I said, What is it? He said, This is the basket that is going out. And he said, This is their iniquity in all the land. And behold, the leaden cover was lifted and there was a woman sitting in the basket.
- [1 : 19] And he said, This is wickedness. And he thrust her back into the basket and thrust down the leaden weight on its opening. 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 stalk. And they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven. Then I said to the angel who talked with me, Where are they taking the basket?
- 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. Again I lifted my eyes and saw and behold four chariots came out from between two mountains.
- And the mountains were mountains of bronze. The first chariot had red horses, the second black horses, the third white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled horses. All of them strong.
- Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, What are these, my lord? 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.
- [2 : 26] 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. 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. Then he cried to me, Behold, those who go toward the north country have set my spirit at rest in the north country.
- Now we've been working our way through Zachariah's eight visions over the last few weeks. Remember the date is February 15th, 519 BC. So Zachariah has presumably just celebrated Valentine's Day.

That's a joke. But I don't think it was around at that point. But February 15th, 519 BC. And we've covered so far the first five visions that he had on that night in chapters 1 to 4.

Which are all about the Lord returning to his people to dwell in his temple in Jerusalem. God returns. Now the temple was basically about three things.

[3 : 35] Okay, so number one, the temple was about the presence of God. Ultimately, God's plan is for his presence, his glorious presence, to fill the whole of his universe.

But the temple was sort of like the beachhead. And all the first outposts towards that goal. God cannot live and move freely among us because of our sin.

But God separated out and cleansed this one little part of the universe so that he could live there with his people. The temple was about God's presence.

And number two, the temple was about the mercy of God. Right, it's the place where people can come to God for forgiveness. Where sacrifices can be made for atonement.

Right, the temple's about the mercy of God. And then thirdly, the temple was all about the rule of God. It's where God sits on his throne.

[4 : 35] God's law is housed in the Ark of the Covenant. And the priests were to be trained to teach the people the law. So that God's word was ruling over his people from his temple, from his palace.

Sometimes the temple is described as kind of the footstool of God. As if his real throne is in heaven. But he's resting his feet on earth at the temple. So if you want to come to God on his throne, you approach the footstool.

And you approach him at the temple. Okay, so whenever we think about the temple, we should at least, I think, think about those three things. The temple was about the presence of God. And the mercy of God.

And the rule of God. All this means that when the temple was rebuilt, what we've been watching over the last few visions is the rebuilding of the temple.

And God returning to it. When God returns to his temple, all of that means it's time for the judgment to begin. You see, now that God's rule has been established at the heart of his universe, God is going to begin rooting out all the things that he doesn't like.

[5 : 43] All the things he doesn't want in his world or among his people. Which is why I think it should come as no surprise to us that now that the temple has been rebuilt and God has returned, the last few visions of Zechariah that Zechariah had that evening, they are all about judgment.

Now that the temple has been rebuilt by Zerubbabel and the priest king has been established, and God has returned to his people, now it is time for the judgment to begin. When God comes to dwell among his people and live in his world, sin must leave.

And this is spelled out in a series of visions which build in intensity until the judgment is complete. So the first one is in chapter 5 verses 1 to 4.

It's vision 6. If you've got an outline in front of you, you'll see we're sort of starting from point number 6. But starting from vision 6. Okay.

The vision of the flying scroll. Let me read it again. Zechariah says, Again, I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, a flying scroll. And he said to me, that's the angel, the sort of tour guide angel.

[6 : 58] He said to me, what do you see? I answered, I see a flying scroll. Its length is 20 cubits and its width 10 cubits. 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 shall be cleaned out according to what is on the other side. 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. Okay, so the first thing to notice about this scroll is that it's absolutely massive.

Right? I'm not familiar with cubits, but it's 30 feet by 15 feet. Right? It's 30 feet long. You know, if I'm 6 foot tall, it's 30 foot tall, and it's 15 foot wide.

So it's more like a billboard than a standard sort of scroll. It's huge and imposing, and it has writing on both sides of it, which is probably an allusion to the Ten Commandments.

[8 : 04] This is something I didn't know, but actually in Exodus chapter 32, did you know, when Moses is coming down the mountain, and he's about to find God's people dancing around a golden calf, we are specifically told about the Ten Commandments, those two tablets of stone, that they were written on both sides, on the front and on the back.

They were written, Exodus chapter 32, verse 15. This is actually picked up in Ezekiel later. So in Ezekiel chapter 2, verse 10, where Ezekiel is being told to eat a scroll, it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe.

Okay, so both of these scenes are very ominous, and Zechariah is developing this theme. In other words, here is this absolutely massive scroll, flying around the land, as if to say that God's law is going to hunt down and condemn people.

That when God takes his seat on his throne in his temple, where the Ten Commandments are stored in the Ark of the Covenant, and the scrolls are stored and the scrolls are read in the temple, what Zechariah sees is that when God takes his seat on his throne in the temple he's rebuilt, all of a sudden there is going to be a massive scroll, flying around the land, God's law, as it were, roaming to condemn people, roaming the earth to condemn people.

Catherine and I often take the kids to Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary. And our favorite thing is the free flight raptor show. I love going to see the raptors.

[9 : 50] They are incredible birds with sharp talons and strong beaks, and my kids love when they just sort of catch a mouse and guzzle it down in one go, right? And they're just sort of playing with this thing.

They soar high up into the air, and then they can just sort of drop out of the sky at breakneck speed. They catch and kill their prey, and they keep flying. They eat their victims on the wing.

Now, it's a great show. I take it, Zachariah, is describing something similar here. He's seeing something a little bit like that. It's like God's law is a swift and strong bird of prey, a raptor roaming the earth.

So beware, you sinners. The law will hunt you down and find you out. Call now, O sinners, on your coming judge to be here even now as your saviour.

The law will hunt you down and find you out. It will come into your house, in verse 4, and it will burn it to the ground. It will consume the timber and the stones. Again, I can't help but think of the angel of death flying out across Egypt.

[11 : 07] Do you remember? During the Passover. God's judgment. Unstoppable. Swift. Terrifying. Killing all the firstborn sons.

But here, the focus is really on the nation of Israel first. As I say, because the Ark of the Covenant contains the Ten Commandments, the scrolls are all stored in the temple.

I think we are meant to imagine the scroll, this scroll, flying out of the temple. And it is purging the surrounding neighborhoods to begin with.

It's beginning in Jerusalem first. We're not talking about God's judgment being poured out upon Egypt, or Edom, or somewhere else. It begins in Jerusalem, and it starts to clean out the unrepentant within Israel first.

Specifically, notice that it's those who steal and those who swear falsely who will be targeted. It might be that these were particular sins, sort of running rampant in Zechariah's day.

[12:10] I think more likely they are meant to represent the whole of the law. So, in Leviticus chapter 19, verse 11 and 12, Moses puts these two sins together.

I think it might be the only place where he actually uses these exact words together, elsewhere. And one has to do with mistreating your neighbor, the other has to do with dishonoring God.

So, he says, You shall not steal, you shall not deal falsely, you shall not lie to one another, and you shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God.

I am the Lord. So, I think these two issues, as it were, are supposed to capture the horizontal aspects of the law and the vertical aspects of the law. Stealing is obviously a crime against one's neighbor.

And swearing falsely in the Lord's name, I mean, that will hurt your neighbor. But more importantly, it dishonors the Lord. It sort of cheapens his name.

[13:09] That seems to be the chief concern in Leviticus 19. When someone says, you know, I swear to God I didn't do it. Well, they commit perjury. They swear on the Bible, but they still lie. What they're really saying is, I don't believe in the power of the name of God.

I don't believe in the judgment of God. Happen to call down curses on myself. This is all fairy tales anyway. So, I think that's most likely why these two sins are being highlighted here.

It's that they represent the whole of the law, both halves of the Ten Commandments, as it were. The promise of vision number six is that after God's temple is rebuilt and God returns to his place, the judgment will begin with the household of God.

God will drive out all the unrepentant, unholy people hiding among his people. Now, on to vision number seven and the woman in the basket.

Zachariah says, 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. And I said, What is it? He said, This is the basket that is going out.

[14:19] And he said, This is their iniquity in all the land. And behold, the leaden cover was lifted and there was a woman sitting in the basket. And he said, This is wickedness. And he thrust her back into the basket and thrust down the leaden weight on its opening.

And 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. And I said to the angel who talked with me, Where are they taking the basket?

He said to me, To the land of Shinar to build a house for it. And when that is prepared, they will set the basket down there on its base. Now the big picture here is that we're looking at a perverted parody of Ezekiel chapters 10 and 11.

Okay? If you want to chase it up later, you can go through Ezekiel 10 and 11 in all its glory and in all the detail. We're not going to do that now. But what we're looking at in summary is a perverted parody of Ezekiel chapters 10 and 11.

Famously in Ezekiel 10 and 11, the glory of God leaves his temple. Okay? Because of the idolatry that has begun to inhabit it. Okay?

[15 : 34] So because God cannot dwell with sin, when the temple had become so corrupt, God decided it was time for him to leave. And Ezekiel has this, you know, strange Ezekielian kind of vision of the glory of God getting up and flying away in a chariot, flying away from the temple and a chariot.

Well, now what Zechariah is seeing is that when the Lord returns to his new temple, it's the idols who will have to leave and fly away. And so Zechariah gives us a sort of perverted parody where idolatry is getting up to go and fly away.

And there are basically five features of the vision to notice. Let me just run through them quickly. First, the basket. The basket is meant to be a perverted version of the Ark of the Covenant.

Right? It's got a leaden cover instead of a golden cover. Secondly, there's the woman in the basket. Now, Jeremiah tells us that the people at this time were worshipping a goddess by the name of Asherah.

They were calling her the Queen of Heaven. Some people were even suggesting that she was Yahweh's consort. Right? She was Yahweh's kind of wife. And archaeological evidence from Jerusalem at the time confirms this.

[16 : 50] We have dug up hundreds of little figurines of Asherah from around Jerusalem at this time. This one is on display at the Met Museum in New York. The word for wickedness used in verse 8 is harisha, which again sounds suspiciously like Asherah, doesn't it?

Right? It's a play on words about Asherah just being pure wickedness, the embodiment of evil. Thirdly, the two winged women who carry the ark are probably meant to mimic the winged cherubs from Ezekiel's vision.

They carry the heavenly chariot on which the Lord departed from his temple. Except this time they're sort of unclean birds and so on, storks.

Fourthly, they carry the basket to a house, which is a temple. and they set up the basket or they set up the basket on a base or a pedestal there as you would an idol.

And finally, notice the place where the temple is located. The land of Shinar. So that is another name for Babylonia where they first built the tower of Babel.

[18 : 05] In other words, listen to how one commentator puts it. Zechariah 5, 5-11 is a vision of an anti-ark born by anti-cherubs being taken to an anti-temple in an anti-Jerusalem.

Does that make sense? I think it sums it up quite well. It is a perverted parody of God's original departure from Jerusalem in Ezekiel 10-11.

Just as God once had to leave because of sin, now sin is going to have to leave because of God. In a sense, it is another tale of two cities.

Jerusalem, on the one hand, is being cleansed so that the true and living God, Yahweh, can dwell with His people in His temple. And on the other hand, Babylon is being given over to sin, as it were.

It's now being completely given over to sin, given back the personification of wickedness, this horrific idol, Asherah, She has been installed on her throne.

[19 : 11] You can have her in her temple over in Babylon. That brings us to the final vision because, perhaps unsurprisingly, God is not just going to leave wickedness in her place on her throne being worshipped over there.

God's plan is eventually to rid the whole world of wickedness. The temple was only ever meant to be a beachhead. So Zechariah says, Again, I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four chariots came out from between two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of bronze.

The first chariot had red horses, the second black horses, the third white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled horses, all of them strong. Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, What are these, my Lord?

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. We'll just stop there for a moment.

So the first thing that's immediately obvious, I hope it's obvious if you remember, if you've been here the whole time, is the fact that this vision is very similar to the first one, isn't it?

[20 : 24] To return to our diagram, we are back to multicolored horses, or different colored horses. Except that this time, notice the crucial difference is that these horses are now pulling chariots, which is the ancient equivalent of a tank.

In other words, as we move from the first vision to the last vision, we have moved from reconnaissance, swift kind of riders, to conquest ancient tanks.

So the four horsemen or groups of horsemen in Vision 1, they went out to patrol the earth to see what things were like and to report back. That's how the Persian Empire kept track of what was happening in its empire.

They're like drones or something. And if you remember, what they reported back was that all the nations are at rest. undisturbed, blissful, the whole world is peaceful, except for God's people who are suffering under the wickedness and oppression of all the nations.

So God promised in Vision 1 that he would bring judgment upon them. Vision 1 anticipated the judgment. Now in Vision 8, we are going to see the judgment executed.

[21 : 42] The number 4 in apocalyptic literature represents things that have universal significance. Think of the four corners of the earth or the four points of a compass.

So here, these four chariots are going to execute God's judgment across the earth. That's the idea. Now they ride out, notice, from between two bronze mountains after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth.

Now again, think of the significance of the temple. And outside the temple, you might know, there were two massive bronze pillars that stood outside Solomon's temple.

They both had names. I'm not sure of the significance of the names, but they were named. Yakin and Boaz were told their names in 1 Kings chapter 7. In Zechariah's vision though, I take it, these two bronze pillars have become two bronze mountains.

In other words, they're sort of next level bronze pillars. Meant to indicate perhaps that what we're talking about here are not just the earthly copies of things, as it were, but the real throne room of God in the heavenly realms.

[22 : 53] These chariots, representing angels, have been standing in the presence of the Lord, standing to attention, as it were, and now they have been sent on their mission out the front door of the temple, sent to execute God's judgment across the world.

They begin in verse 6 by splitting north and south, which is basically the only way to get out of Israel, because of the geography of the country. You can't go west into the sea.

You can't go east into the desert. That big red patch is called the fertile crescent, and basically, if you want to keep an army alive in ancient Mesopotamia, you have to stay within it.

Okay, so they begin in the temple, and they split north and south. But then the crucial thing happens in verse 8 in the north country, notice. So we'll keep reading.

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. We don't hear anything about them. 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.

[23 : 58] Then he cried to me, behold, those who go toward the north country have set my spirit at rest in the north country. Now, the crucial thing to realize is that the north country is another name for Babylon, which at first might sound a bit strange because of where Babylon is.

Babylon is over there, sort of hardly north, but when you are not going due east, you go to Babylon north. Basically, all of Israel's enemies, except for the Egyptians, all of Israel's enemies always come from the north.

The north country is just kind of code for the country that keeps destroying us and trashing us and is hostile to us and has trampled over us for hundreds of years.

In verse 8, Zechariah says, Behold, those who go toward the north country have set my spirit at rest in the north country. Now, there's a bit of nuance here or sort of double meaning here, which is worth mentioning just because we miss it in the English.

In Hebrew, the word for spirit can also mean anger. Okay, so, it's the usual word for spirit, ruach, which you might have heard of.

[25 : 21] It means breath or wind or spirit, but on occasion it's also translated anger. For instance, in Judges chapter 8 verse 3, when the men of Ephraim are angry with Gideon, Gideon calms them down and the narrator of the book of Judges says, then their anger against him subsided, but actually the word is ruach, their spirit.

Their spirit subsided. The same thing is being described here. When God's spirit has come to rest, we are to understand that his anger has subsided.

He has been satisfied or pacified by the conquest in the north country, which is exactly what you'd expect, right? God's spirit is often described as jealous or furious or provoked by idolatry, but now that the chariots have done their job in the north country, right?

The temple of Asherah has been destroyed over there. Now that God's anger has been poured out upon her, God's spirit can rest peacefully again. Again, just to borrow an image from one of the commentators, he kind of describes it like a bomb disposal unit, right?

First we saw the woman wickedness carried off out of Jerusalem far away at a safe distance from God's people. No danger for the people of Israel when she's sort of over there in Babylon.

[26 : 46] And now we've seen her crushed and destroyed. It was not meant to be the end of the matter just to remove her. Now she's been completely obliterated.

Okay, so time to wrap up. What does all this mean for us in the New Testament? I think the first thing to realize is that in the New Testament we discover in places like John chapter 1 and John chapter 2 that Jesus is the true fulfillment of the temple.

We are not waiting, all of these Old Testament promises, we are not waiting for a physical temple to be rebuilt as if such a thing would be of any value. We are, the Old Testament prophets were always looking forward to Jesus.

He is the fulfillment of the temple. So remember in John chapter 2, just after Jesus has been driving out the money changes and knocking over the tables in the temple in Jerusalem, the Jews said to him, what sign do you show us for doing these things?

Jesus answered them, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews then said, it has taken 46 years to build this temple and you will raise it up in three days.

[28 : 01] But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

And in other words, Jesus is the true temple that the old stone building always pointed to. He's the presence of God among us. He's the ultimate expression of God's mercy to us.

He's the sacrifice to cleanse us of our sins. He's the great high priest who mediates God's rule to us in the new covenant. So just as the old shadow temple was first destroyed by sin and then rebuilt, so in the crucified body of the Lord Jesus we see the real and true temple being destroyed by sin and then in the resurrection of Jesus we see the temple being rebuilt and reinforced with imperishable steel if you like.

Now at the cross we see the beachhead of God's presence and holiness among us. Wasn't he wonderful when he walked around healing people, forgiving sins, showing mercy.

This is what it's like to have God live among us. But at the cross we see the beachhead of God's presence being snuffed out, desecrated, trampled by the nations.

[29 : 32] We see God's mercy and rule rejected. And then in the resurrection we see the temple being rebuilt. Jesus was raised up immortal.

So the true temple will never be destroyed again. Now God's presence is permanently secured. God's mercy to us is permanently secured.

God's rule over us is permanently secured. And this is why the resurrection of Jesus signals the judgment day. You remember what Paul tells the idolaters in Athens in Acts chapter 17.

The times of ignorance God overlooked but now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

See those three things that the resurrection the judgment and repentance. The resurrection means the judgment day is upon us and that means it's time to repent.

[30 : 51] it's exactly the same thing we've been seeing in Ezekiel really. The rebuilding of the temple means the judgment day is upon us and remember the whole context of these visions is repentance.

And all of these visions in Zechariah are set against the backdrop of the introductions. Remember chapter 1 verses 1 to 6 verse 3 In other words all of these visions are really about explaining and reinforcing one thing the urgent need to turn around.

The urgent need for repentance. The blessings of repentance on the one hand if we will return to God he will return to us and renew and restore us.

Imagine having such a wise powerful and good king living among us. Imagine if it was God himself living in Canberra. But on the other hand what we've seen this week particularly are the ugly consequences for the unrepentant.

If we don't want God to be our king if we will not repent we have been warned. God will hunt sinners down with his law.

[32 : 24] God will not put up with idolatry or idolaters. He is purging his universe beginning with his own people. Judgment begins at the household of God.

There are always the Lord Jesus tells us going to be tares hiding among the wheat. There are goats among the sheep. Zachariah is talking about wicked people hiding among his holy people.

God will not put up with us harboring secret wickedness. So before we do think about out there we ought to think about in here. I can't help but think of people like Ananias and Sapphira.

Do you remember lying to the Holy Spirit thinking they could get away with it? The Lord struck them down then and there. It's a lesson for all of us to warn us to fear God to turn away from the sins in our hearts.

So friends it's time to repent. The true and final temple has been permanently established because Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead imperishable. That means the judgment day is upon us.

[33 : 37] there is an opportunity for mercy because Jesus has paid the ultimate sacrifice but there is also inevitably going to be a purging of God's universe a cleansing.

Those who are still in Babylon need to flee and join the city of Jerusalem. In Zechariah's day many of the people of Israel would still have been in Babylon at the time he was preaching and part of what these visions are about I'm sure is warning them to leave that city and come home.

Those who are still in Babylon need to flee and join the city of Jerusalem but even within the city those of us I hope it's none of us but those of us who might still be clinging to Babylonian ways idolatry and wickedness if you've let sin in your life get too close and you're too comfortable with it even within the walls of Jerusalem as it were within the church we need to be warned that we will not escape the judgment we can't hide among the holy people repentance is about turning away from your sin and turning back to God seeking him while he may yet be found seeking his mercy which is lavish and wonderful provided for us in the death of his own son seeking to live under his rule which is full of grace and truth is good and wise the times of ignorance God overlooked but now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead let's pray almighty God

Lord of hosts we pray that you would help us to heed the warnings the gracious warnings of terrible passages like this one that remind us that you are a holy God and our sin is corrupt and wicked and deserving of judgment we pray that you have mercy upon us that no one here would be hiding sin in our lives you help us to come clean help us to repent and to encourage each other to keep living in righteousness and holiness and father we do pray for those outside of here those around Brisbane who are living in rebellion against you ignorant of the gospel ignorant of the coming judgment we pray that you have mercy upon them bring them to salvation bring them into the your true city into Jerusalem before it's too late and the judgment is complete we ask all these things in Jesus name amen