



ZECHARIAH, Being the People of God

Refined to God's Standard

Lesson 5 Zechariah 5:1-11

SIXTH NIGHT VISION (1:1-4)

5:1 “Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll.”

In this verse, Zechariah begins to write about his sixth night vision (recall that there are eight total that he sees in a single evening). Typical of the beginning of the prior night visions, Zechariah’s lifts up his eyes and watches the vision unfold (Zechariah 1:18, 2:1, 5:1, 5:5, 6:1). What he sees is a “flying roll,” or what we would call a flying scroll. The Hebrew is *megillah* and is literally “roll” because the writings were done on sheets of papyrus or animal skins and attached in long rolls. Modern Jewish synagogues still read from handwritten Torah scrolls today. We are to understand that the scroll is moving through the air. The scroll is in the air almost like a billboard for all to see. One of the orthodox Christian doctrines not often discussed in our day is the perspicuity or clarity of the Bible. “The clarity of Scripture is that quality of the Biblical text that, as God’s communicative act, ensures its meaning is accessible to all who come to it in faith.” See Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear And Present Word, The Clarity of Scripture*, pp. 169-170, Inter Varsity Press (2006). God is not hiding the ball here, but intends that people understand that which He purposely conveys to them. This is evident in Jesus’ own teaching that consistently alluded to and quoted Old Testament scriptures, which presumes the ability of his audience to understand. Other passages supporting the clarity of the Word of God include Deuteronomy 30:9-14, Joshua 1:8-9, and Habakkuk 2:2.

5:2 “And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits.”

As before, an angel talks with Zechariah. It is probably safe to assume that this is the same angel as before, namely the angel of the LORD (see Zechariah 1:9, 13, 19; 2:3; 4:1, 4, 5; 5:5, 10; 6:4). The angel asks Zechariah what he sees, and Zechariah reports that he sees a flying scroll. He also reports the dimensions of this scroll. There is some debate about the length of a cubit, but many scholars take it to be about 18 inches or 1.5 feet. If this is correct, the scroll measures about 30 feet long and 15 feet wide. Obviously, this is much larger than an ordinary scroll, its width is out of proportion to its length, and its size is emphasized here in the vision. As indicated above, I believe the size emphasizes that the message is not hidden. Scholars have also observed that these dimensions match those of the Holy Place in the Tabernacle (Exodus 26:15-25) and the Porch of Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 6:3), and on this basis they have connected the judgment (see the next verse) with (1) the concept of God’s holiness or (2) the concept of judgment beginning at the House of God. The Text itself does not make either of these connections.

5:3 “Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it.”

The angel explains the meaning of the scroll. It is a “curse” that goes forth over the entire earth. Of course, scrolls are for writing on, which means that the curse refers to its content. That it goes over the whole earth is indicative of the fact that the people had been scattered from the land. The term translated “curse” is Strong No. 423 in Strong’s Hebrew dictionary, which defines it as follows:

“אלהּ 'alah, *aw-law'*; from 422; an imprecation:—curse, cursing, execration, oath, swearing.”

The word is often translated as an oath, curse, or swearing (see Deuteronomy 11:26-28). In this context, the curse is God's declaration of His moral standard against a people that characteristically defies it. These are the standards of the Law, the very Word of God in Zechariah's time. Although only two examples of God's standard are presented (commands against stealing and swearing, part of the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20), these are representative of the entirety of the Law. For this reason, one is representative of God's standard that governs His people's relationship to other people, and the other example (false swearing) is representative of the standard applicable to their relationship to Him. We must remember that the Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy) was to govern the Jewish people. This book of Zechariah is about the reconstitution of the scattered nation back into the land God gave them, and so it makes perfect sense that they would be reminded of God's standards. But God's moral standards are not just for the Jewish people. They arise out of God's holiness, which is unchanging, and God will hold the entire world to His standards whether or not they acknowledge Him. The problem we face is that no one but Jesus Christ could truly keep the Law and so it is actually a curse for all of us who would seek salvation by works; the New Testament teaches that righteousness is only in Christ through faith. (Galatians 3:10-13). Finally, it should be noted that the scroll has writing on both sides, again indicative of the fact that God is not sending out a declaration only against thieves and those who swear falsely, but these examples are representative of the whole of God's moral standard.

5:4 "I will bring it forth, saith the LORD of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof."

God will not only set the standard, but also enforce it worldwide. It is in this sense that the standard is also a curse. The thief and the person that swears falsely by God's name shall be consumed. The vision pictures the scroll entering a house and consuming it like a fire, taking both the timbers and the stones. God's standard cannot be rejected, for those that do so will surely be consumed. This standard is a refining standard, and Zechariah's audience is a refined remnant (from their 70 years of captivity under Babylonian domination) who must remain refined. This is a key principle to what it means to really be the People of the Living God!

QUESTIONS

1. State in your own words the principle taught in 5:1-4 about being the people of God.
 2. If the flying scroll is only representative of God's moral standard, what are all the sources from which a person can learn the actual moral standard of God? Is ignorance a defense to abiding by God's moral standard?
 3. What is the significance of the size of the flying scroll? Does God intend that His Word be understood by believers?
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SEVENTH NIGHT VISION (1:5-11)

5:5 "Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what is this that goeth forth."

Zechariah again references the "angel that talked with me" (see note on 5:2), a reference to the angel of the LORD. This begins the sixth of the eight night visions. Zechariah is told to lift up his eyes to see the next vision.

5:6 “And I said, What is it? And he said, This is an ephah that goeth forth. He said moreover, This is their resemblance through all the earth.”

Zechariah’s immediate response is “*What is it?*” Zechariah’s seeks understanding that only comes through God’s revelation. What he sees, as reported by the angel, is an ephah. An ephah is a measurement, usually of grain (one ephah equals one tenth of a homer or one bath of liquid, and one ephah equals ten omers), and so we are to understand that he sees as basket or bucket or other container used to measure out an ephah. This is no ordinary ephah, however, for it “*goeth forth.*” Like the scroll that flies, this ephah is in motion. The angel further says, in explanation of the ephah, that it is “*their resemblance through all the earth.*” The term translated “*resemblance*” is normally translated in terms of eyes or sight. The ephah contains what God sees as He looks at the world. We will see that this is the iniquity of the world, which connects this vision to the flying scroll vision earlier in the chapter. Note that numerous Old Testament passages speak to the issue of integrity (or lack thereof) in terms of the ephah, since an ephah that was too small or large could be used to cheat in commercial transactions. (Leviticus 19:36, Deuteronomy 25:14-15, Ezekiel 45:10, Amos 8:5)

QUESTION

4. From this verse, we can conclude that no iniquity goes _____ by God. That being the case, can any sin be done in secret? Is there any such thing as a “victimless” crime?
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5:7 “And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah.”

The ephah has on it a “*talent of lead.*” The Hebrew term translated “*talent*” can indicate a measurement of weight (about 70 pounds), as well as a plain or flat surface or even a loaf of bread. Here, it seems to indicate a weight of lead that covers the top of the ephah, or perhaps the talent is the lid itself, but in any event, the thought is the same, namely that the ephah is covered. The cover is made of lead, which is heavy and probably indicates that what is in the ephah should be contained there and not released. It may also be relevant that the term “*talent*” is a measure like the “*ephah*” of the prior verse, and it is a measure used in commerce. More comments on this idea will follow. When the cover is lifted up, Zechariah sees a woman sitting inside it.

5:8 “And he said, This is wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof.”

We need not guess at what the woman in the ephah represents. For the angel tells Zechariah that she represents wickedness or iniquity. The angel forces her back into the ephah, suggesting she would escape if not trapped, and slams the lid shut on her. This is a picture of the putting away of iniquity. Again, this relates the vision to the flying scroll vision where the scroll pictured God’s moral standard. The woman represents sin, and from the imagery of the talent and ephah, it may be that God is emphasizing commercial sin. It is not that all commercial activities are sinful, but the pursuit of money has given rise to all manner of sin and wickedness. But the woman represents more than just the sin of ungodly commercialism. Likely she also represents that harlot image that occurs throughout scripture as a symbol of spiritual adultery. In Revelation 17, a similar image is used, and there she is called a “*whore*” (Greek *porne*). This same Greek word is often translated “*harlot,*” and the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) typically translates the word harlot into the same Greek term, *porne* (from which we get the English term pornography). Strong’s defines the word as, literally, a harlot, but also it can mean an idolater. What Strong’s is pointing out is that the term is often used in the Bible figuratively; it is translated harlot, but the meaning is idolater. The term is used often the Bible, and it is God’s term for an apostate. The ordinary, run of the mill pagan is never called a harlot, but the person who worshipped the true living God and turns away to worship false gods is a harlot. Let me defend this view with several

citations (Isaiah 1:18-21; Jeremiah 2:20; Jeremiah 3:1, 6, 8; Ezekiel 16:15-17, 20, 25-26, 28; Micah 1:6-7; Hosea 1:2). This idea of people that worshipped God but turned away fits the historical context of Judah, and it makes sense for Zechariah to deal with it here. In Ezekiel 5:5-9, God deals with this precise issue and uses the same word for their wickedness.

5:9 “Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out two women, and the wind was in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven.”

Zechariah now sees two women with wings that fly to the ephah and carry it away. Their wings are “like the wings of a stork,” which under the Law was an unclean bird (Leviticus 11:13-20), a fitting image for those that would carry away wickedness, but it may simply be that they have stork-like wings because those wings are powerful and able to carry this heavy weight away. Note that there is nothing here to indicate that these women are angels. If they are angels, they would be the only angels in the Bible that are indisputably feminine in appearance, and the only angels that have wings except for the four angels surrounding God’s throne (see Revelation 4-5). Probably, people have given too much significance to the two women when the focus of the vision is the ephah, the talent, and the woman, Wickedness. The ephah is lifted into the sky and taken away.

5:10 “Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah?”

Zechariah asks an important question, namely where wickedness in the ephah is being carried away.

5:11 “And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base.”

The angel responds to Zechariah’s question and tells him that the wickedness will be taken back to Shinar, another term for Babylon (see Genesis 11:2, Daniel 1:2). The sin is not only being taken to Babylon, but it will be established there, which is pictured by the woman in the ephah having a house built there. Indeed, the ephah will be put on a pedestal (“base”), a place of honor in the eyes of the people there. To put this all into the context of Zechariah’s audience, the refined remnant that God brought back from Babylon to reconstitute the Holy Nation in the land God gave them must be purified against God’s moral standard to truly be the people of God. This is not simply a matter of following God’s moral standard, but also of removing iniquity from the land, which is pictured in the sixth night vision with the wickedness being carried back to Babylon. Whatever wickedness the remnant might have brought with them from their captivity in Babylon should be sent back to (or left in) Babylon. This would include all manner of immoral behavior as well as idolatry. That has no place in the lives of the people of God. The expression, “whatever is done in Vegas, stays in Vegas” is a lie, for the wickedness latches on to us. Following God’s moral standard and separation from iniquity are key principles to being the people of God.

This vision, like so many of the passages in Zechariah, looked to his present day and looks to the future. Babylon is a real place, but throughout Scripture has been symbolic of everything opposed to God. This began with the tower of Babel (i.e. Tower of Babylon) back in Genesis 11:9, and continues through the Bible until the consummation of all things. In Revelation 17 and 18, we again see the images of a woman representing sinfulness and the city of Babylon united within the same vision. Zechariah’s vision looks forward to a future, in which sin is finally and fully eliminated, wiped from the face of the Holy Land.

QUESTIONS

5. State in your own words the principle taught in 5:5-11 about being the people of God.
 6. What are some concrete examples of putting away sin in a believer’s life?
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