

It is important that we recall the previous visions to help us understand the message of this one. The prophecies began with a call to repent. Then in the first two visions we saw God's heart to bless Jerusalem again and have the temple rebuilt. But the difference from the past was that God was going to influence nations through the men and women of faith, instead of the sovereign nation of Israel. The craftsman and the temple were to be the testimony in the world. The testimony was moving to individual people and their worship of the one true God.

Then in vision three the Lord promised a great return of people and that he would be a wall of fire around them and the glory in their midst (2:5ⁱ). Visions four and five were of the sanctification and calling of the high priest Joshua and governor Zerubbabel for the rebuilding of the temple by the power of the Spirit (4:6ⁱⁱ). The visions also addressed the certainty of the coming Messiah, the Branch (3:8ⁱⁱⁱ).

Now in vision six and seven the Lord will deal with the sanctification of the nation for the holy task before them. If the testimony is to be in individual lives and the temple worship rather than the sovereign nation, there had to be a purging out of those who would not return to the Lord. If those who distorted the message of life with God by their way of living were allowed to continue in the land, the people as a whole would end up right back where they were before they went into captivity. The hearts of the people would not be ready for the coming of the Messiah.

God wants our lives to demonstrate the blessing of knowing Him. He wants the world to see His light through the many ways we are different from the world (Philippians 2:15^v). That is why those who have the Holy Spirit residing in them experience conviction and have a longing to be more like Him. We want others to see Jesus in us.

¹ Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, a flying scroll! ² And he said to me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a flying scroll. Its length is twenty cubits, and its width ten cubits." ³ 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. Zechariah 5:1-3 In this sixth vision sins of the people stand in the way of the work on the temple starting up again. Before God will do a great work that sets the stage for renewal and a fresh beginning, there must be repentance. Those who refuse to repent must be removed.

The vision begins with a huge billboard sized flying scroll, 30 by 15 feet in size, that is written on both sides. On one side is a curse upon those who steal and on the other on against those who lie. These are violations of the seventh and ninth of the Ten Commandments. While obedience to the Laws of Moses is not required for salvation, the moral laws have never changed (1 Timothy 1:9-11^v). That is because they are a violation of God's very nature. To take what is not yours is to declare that God entrusted those things to the wrong person (1 Corinthians 4:7^{vi}). It is saying that God is wrong and you are the arbitrator of who should have what. We can steal in other ways

than taking tangible objects. We can steal another person's peace, reputation, or rob them of joy by the way we act. Stealing is most often an intentional act. Like all sin, it is defiance against God.

Joshua's uncleanness in vision four was his Adamic nature that he inherited from birth (3:4^{vii}). It was not a choice, though it would have been acted on in some intentional ways. This vision is addressing intentional acts. The thief has no qualms defying God. It is a deliberate and persistent act that expresses the basic nature of the person, which is greed. Perjury is the same in that regard. These commandments were well known in Israel, and they are a part of our normal God given conscience.

Bearing false witness in Israel was to lie about another person in a legal case and often involved some sort of personal gain for doing so. This could result in conviction of the accused and possibly death. If the lie was for financial gain and resulted in a person's death, then the one who swore falsely would be guilty of murder as well. The person testifying would have to swear by the name of God that they were telling the truth. This means they were also breaking the fourth command to not use the name of God in vain (Exodus 20:7^{viii}). In breaking one of the moral commandments we often break others.

The angel declared the curses on the scroll would clean out of the land of all the thieves and perjurers. This was God preparing the hearts of the people for rebuilding the temple. **Any church must come to repentance before they can be used of God as effective instruments to build the living temple.** If the bulk of the congregation is attending for financial gain and personal interest, there will be very little fruit. Fruit comes when the sap flows, and the sap of the Holy Spirit only flows when our lives are yielded in repentance and putting God first in all things (John 15:4^{ix}).

I have witnessed this several times. People will join the congregation with ulterior motives. They come with an agenda. Instead of joining in what God is doing, they want the church to join them. They usually attack the church leadership and declare they know better than their praying elders. In my seventeen years as pastor here I've seen it quickly happen out of immature pride, and I've seen it applied with patient years of subtle deception. Every time the Lord cleans it out in His way and His time IF the elders are in unity and praying, as they seek the heart of God. The message of the angel is that the Word of the Lord will clean out the land so the work of the LORD can go forward. God wants His message of love unadulterated. While weeds will always remain until the harvest, those who intentionally and consistently send the wrong message will eventually be purged out by God if the leadership is seeking God (Matthew 13:27-30^x).

⁴ 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." Zechariah 5:4 It is the LORD of hosts who sends out this curse upon these who have rebelled against Him and pollute the community with their sin. The LORD of hosts is the One who made the covenant on Sinai, and He pronounced a curse on those who broke the covenant (Deuteronomy 29:27-28^{xi}). He is the One they sin against. They stand in the way of His work. The fact

that the scroll is flying means the work will be done swiftly. Entering the house means that no one can hide from the LORD (Psalm 139:7,8^{xii}). It is like a laser guided missile that always strikes its target (Isaiah 55:11^{xiii}).

The thief and perjurer will be driven out of the land and their houses destroyed, not by man, but by the Word. This reminds us of the word of God to Zerubbabel, that it is not by might nor by power but by God's Spirit (Zechariah 4:6^{xiv})! What an intense and severe warning! How urgent it is that people repent, not because someone accuses them of sin, but because the LORD sees the heart and will not stand for people ignoring His Spirit and moral laws with brazen disregard for the damage it does to the work of the LORD and His people.

⁵ 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."⁶ 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." Zechariah 5:5-6
Vision seven is connected to the scroll vision. God is purging the land to prepare it for the temple and the coming Messiah. The foundation is not only a physical thing but the condition of the hearts of those who build it, and the hearts of those who will worship in it. The last vision was of the scroll that would clean the land of thieves and liars. This vision sees that being done but in a metaphorical way.

The interpreting angel asks Zechariah to see what is going out. He saw a basket going out. Basket is literally an ephah, a measure of about five gallons. This is their iniquity in all the land. "Their" I assume to be the thieves and liars as we will see in a moment. The curse on scroll was doing its work. The sins of the land were in this measuring basket. The fact that it was a measuring basket for trade implies that this has something to do with unjust commerce, which can be made so by lying about the volume. The fact that it is sin that is being removed connects the two visions.

⁷ And behold, the leaden cover was lifted, and there was a woman sitting in the basket!⁸ And he said, "This is Wickedness." And he thrust her back into the basket, and thrust down the leaden weight on its opening. Zechariah 5:7-8
Then Zechariah sees the lead lid of the basket lifted so he can see what was inside. It was a tiny woman. To fit in a five-gallon container she would have to be a miniature woman, a distortion of reality, which is what sin is. Apparently, she rose up over the rim of the basket and the angel identified her. "This is Wickedness," he says. Then he shoves her back into the basket, thrusts down the leaden weight to seal her back inside.

⁹ 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 stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven. Zechariah 5:9
Here are the only two angel-like women in Scripture. All other angels are male warriors in appearance. The cherubim and seraphim are the only others described as having wings (Isaiah 6:2^{xv}). These two women with stork like wings come forward and lift the basket up into the sky. Wickedness was leaving the land, just as the curse in the last vision promised. It was the Word of the Lord on the scroll that was accomplishing this removal of sins.

Remember that God promised Joshua the sins of the land would be removed in one day (3:9^{xvi}). The sins were being moved. This was an initial fulfillment, the ultimate fulfillment being the day Jesus was crucified when sins are completely removed (Acts 3:19^{xvii}). How this came about in Zechariah's time I can only speculate. We just know that God did remove the thieves and those who swore falsely.

¹⁰ Then I said to the angel who talked with me, "Where are they taking the basket?"

¹¹ 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." Zechariah 5:10-11 Zechariah wonders where the basket is going and asks the angel. The angel tells him it is going to the land of Shinar, which is Babylon. While Jerusalem is the city of God, Babylon is the city of man, the city where the first organized rebellion against God began, the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:4^{xviii}).

A house will be built for it. Jerusalem was going to have a house for God, and Babylon a house for "Wickedness." When the house is prepared the basket will be set down there on its base. Base can also be translated as pedestal. This is how idols were set up. There is a clear connection here with Babylon in Revelation (Revelation 17:5^{xix}).

Amos 8:5-6^{xx} helps us understand the meaning of this vision and how it ties into the previous one. The ephah basket was the main symbol of trade. Amos was rebuking the worshipers who would go through the ritual of temple worship while their minds were on gaining wealth through cheating the public by means of under-sizing the ephah baskets. There is nothing wrong with business, but to rob the public and cheat the poor by unjust means while at the same time pretending to be a worshiper of God is not only hypocrisy, but it pollutes the body of believers and sows that leaven that spreads the same mindset to others (Galatians 5:9^{xxi}).

Before the temple was completed, the people were hypocritically worshiping God while robbing the poor and lying about the volume of grain they were selling. They needed to be purged out. They were harming their fellow Jews and foreigners with their unjust practices. The measure for the grain was undersized and their scale for shekels undervalued the customers currency for unjust gain. These are the evil ways God spoke against in the introduction of the book (1:2-4^{xxii}). It was the idolatry of money. No wonder Jesus said, "You cannot worship God and money." Matthew 6:24^{xxiii} Some time after this Nehemiah and Ezra would confront the people about divorcing their Hebrew wives to marry women of the surrounding cultures which was most likely motivated by financial gain. Greed expresses itself in different manifestations. (See Nehemiah 13.)

Brothers and sisters, you are the temple of the living God. Together we make up the living stones of that temple. We are the heavenly city, New Jerusalem. Though we are not yet shaped as perfectly as we will be, we know Jesus will finish the work He has started in us (Philippians 1:6^{xxiv}). He said, "I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18^{xxv}) No wonder He was a carpenter! We need hearts that put Jesus first in all things.

At the same time, Satan is building an empire. Just as Jesus' kingdom is physically expressed in our actions, and yet spiritual and eternal, so is Satan's kingdom. Notice

that verse 11 speaks of the future. There is a day coming when the Anti-christ will stand in a temple and declare he is god (2 Thessalonians 2:4^{xxvi}). He will set up his image. He will control all trade, and you can be sure it will be to his advantage and make him the most wealthy and influential person to ever live. The idolatry of mammon will permeate the earth, and those who will not worship it, who will not take his mark, will be executed (Revelation 13:5-7^{xxvii}).

We see this war taking place right now. Every day around the world people must decide whether they will put God first or something else. **The most successful competitor for the love of God is the love of money which is the root of all evil** (1 Timothy 6:10^{xxviii}). Wealth can be a blessing from God. But we've seen in this chapter that it can bring a curse if we steal and lie to the harm of others so we can gain more.

My grandmother often complained about high prices by saying, "They're taking it without a gun." That was just murmuring about inflation. But if prices of necessities are set so high that the poor suffer while a few get wealthy, God is not pleased. We have a system of weights and standards today, but creative and greedy people find a way around them. This is about a concern for humanity and moral standards that God expects of us. God cares for the needy, and He cares about the condition of our hearts.

Some time ago Rick Burd alerted us to the need in our own community. More than ten percent of your giving at Wayside goes to causes that help the poor while giving the gospel at the same time. Another ten percent goes to missionaries. Without the gospel the poor will only fall into the same trap of trusting money to solve their problems and end up placing their hope in it instead of God. This problem is not limited to any one class or standard of living.

This chapter challenges us to be sure our hope is in God alone, and to see that we are a part of the building of the temple of God rather than the temple of man. Our trust is to be in God, not in unjust gain. Our worship is to be of God not money if we are living stones in the temple of God. It is an especially needed message in our culture where the promise of what money can buy constantly confronts us.

The Word of God tells us of the destruction of Babylon and the things it sells (Revelation 18:2-3^{xxix}). Immediately after announcing the destruction of Babylon in Revelation, the angel of God calls to His own. ***4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues;*** Revelation 18:4 It is the same call that God is giving through Zechariah. Which city are you living for? What are you worshiping? Babylon and those who worship Mammon will be swept away. That kingdom will remain but you wouldn't want to be there. Those who do the will of God abide forever in the glorious presence of our loving Savior (1 John 2:17^{xxx}).

We will see in the last third of this book how this is very much an end-time message. God's Word can speak to the present and at the same time to things yet to come. That's amazing, but then, we serve an amazing God!

Questions

- 1 Review the first five visions.
- 2 Who did the giant scroll curse?
- 3 Why were they removed?
- 4 What can keep a church from being fruitful?
- 5 Who does the purging?
- 6 What does the basket represent?
- 7 How is it related to the first vision?
- 8 What does Babylon represent?
- 9 Why is it on a pedestal?
- 10 What are the two choices before us?

ⁱ **Zechariah 2:5 (ESV)**

⁵ And I will be to her a wall of fire all around, declares the LORD, and I will be the glory in her midst.”

ⁱⁱ **Zechariah 4:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Then he said to me, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Zechariah 3:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch.

^{iv} **Philippians 2:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

^v **1 Timothy 1:9-11 (ESV)**

⁹ understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰ the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, ¹¹ in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

^{vi} **1 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)**

⁷ For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

^{vii} **Zechariah 3:4 (ESV)**

⁴ And the angel said to those who were standing before him, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” And to him he said, “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.”

^{viii} **Exodus 20:7 (ESV)**

⁷ “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

^{ix} **John 15:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

^x **Matthew 13:27-30 (ESV)**

²⁷ And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ ²⁸ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ ²⁹ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

^{xi} **Deuteronomy 29:27-28 (ESV)**

²⁷ Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, bringing upon it all the curses written

in this book, ²⁸ and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and fury and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as they are this day.'

^{xii} **Psalm 139:7-8 (ESV)** ⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

^{xiii} **Isaiah 55:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

^{xiv} **Zechariah 4:6 (ESV)** ⁶ Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

^{xv} **Isaiah 6:2 (ESV)** ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

^{xvi} **Zechariah 3:9 (ESV)** ⁹ For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.

^{xvii} **Acts 3:19 (ESV)** ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,

^{xviii} **Genesis 11:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

^{xix} **Revelation 17:5 (ESV)**

⁵ And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations."

^{xx} **Amos 8:5-6 (ESV)** ⁵ saying, "When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, ⁶ that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?"

^{xxi} **Galatians 5:9 (ESV)** ⁹ A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

^{xxii} **Zechariah 1:2-4 (ESV)** ² "The LORD was very angry with your fathers. ³ Therefore say to them, Thus declares the LORD of hosts: Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. ⁴ Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.' But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the LORD.

^{xxiii} **Matthew 6:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

^{xxiv} **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)** ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

^{xxv} **Matthew 16:18 (ESV)** ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

^{xxvi} **2 Thessalonians 2:4 (ESV)** ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

^{xxvii} **Revelation 13:5-7 (ESV)** ⁵ And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. ⁶ It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

⁷ Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation,

^{xxviii} **1 Timothy 6:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

^{xxix} **Revelation 18:2-3 (ESV)** ² And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. ³ For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living."

^{xxx} **1 John 2:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.