

Zechariah 5-6 • Three Kind of Judgments

Introduction

We can break Zechariah's eight visions down assigning the first three to the work of God the Father, the fourth vision to the work of God the Son, and the fifth vision to the work of God the Holy Spirit. In the final three visions we see the work of the Godhead in three aspects of judgment working on three levels: personal, societal, and global. Overall the eight visions combine to provide a picture of God's whole working in this world not just in the past, but for the present and future as well. The thing to pay attention to throughout all these visions is how God connects happenings on earth with heavenly parallels in spite of our limited viewpoint. Just because our something is not in our field of vision does not mean God is not aware or actively addressing it.

¹Then I lifted up my eyes again and looked, and behold, there was a flying scroll. ²And he said to me, "What do you see?"

And I answered, "I see a flying scroll; its length is twenty cubits and its width ten cubits."

³Then he said to me, "This is the curse that is going forth over the face of the whole land; surely everyone who steals will be purged away according to the writing on one side, and everyone who swears will be purged away according to the writing on the other side. ⁴I will make it go forth," declares the LORD of hosts, "and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears falsely by My name; and it will spend the night within that house and consume it with its timber and stones."

[Read 5:1-4]

Q: What is probably the greater spiritual meaning of a scroll that is "flying" and "written"?

A: Being "written" represents God's Word from which there can be no escape or repeal. "Flying" shows that God's Word is ready to swiftly visit its full weight upon all transgressors. The picture here is very similar to the one in Ezekiel.

"Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you." Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it. When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe.

— Ezekiel 2:8–10

Q: What might the dimensions of the scroll be alluding to?

A: One thing may be the fact that these are the same dimensions as the Temple porch (1 Ki. 6:3), the place where the Law was usually read. But for sure such a large size (30' x 15') implies not just its magnified importance but perhaps the depth of detail it contained.

Q: What is the primary difference between a scroll that is open versus one that is rolled up?

A: When it is not being used and ready to be stored away a scroll is rolled up and closed; when it is in use and being read it is unrolled and open. The overall effect here is to portray the divine pronouncement of His Word being read from Heaven. The message is out in the open for everyone .

Q: So how do we plainly know what part of God's Word is published in this particular flying scroll?

A: Verse 3 categorically states, "This is the curse that is going forth over the face of the whole land". We don't know for sure, but it probably refers to those things specifically articulated in the Law such as Deut. 27:15-26, Deut. 28:15-68 and Num. 5:23-28. This is the application of God's authority to condemn and punish for breaking His Law.

Q: Why might we also associate this scroll with the Law and the Ten Commandments in particular?

A: Just as there were two "sides" or tablets presented by Moses, so the writing here is on both sides of the scroll. (v.3) Whereas the first tablet of the Law is thought to contain the commandments governing our relationship with God and the second our relationship with others, one

side of the scroll condemns those for violating the first tablet (“everyone who swears”) and the other side those violating the second tablet (“everyone who steals”). This is further confirmed in v.4 where its target is designated as “the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears falsely by My name”.

“Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,” says the LORD of hosts.

— Malachi 3:5

Q: To the people of Zechariah’s day, why would the threat to “enter the house” be particularly powerful?

A: This is the place people of the day usually felt the most secure, the place where they could shut themselves up against potential enemies and wild animals. Judgment is promised even when they feel the most secure, a kind of deception that is at work.

Q: To an Old Testament believer, what picture would come to mind by the promise to “spend the night within that house and consume it with its timber and stones”?

A: It was what the Law demanded happen to something which was unclean and could not be cleansed or redeemed – it had to be completely destroyed. It is a teaching pertaining to the inevitable results of unresolved sin.

Application: *The first vision is the working of God in the world to address personal sin, God holding each individual personally accountable according to His Word.*

⁵Then the angel who was speaking with me went out and said to me, “Lift up now your eyes and see what this is going forth.”

⁶I said, “What is it?”

And he said, “This is the ephah going forth.” Again he said, “This is their appearance in all the land ⁷(and behold, a lead cover was lifted up); and this is a woman sitting inside the ephah.” ⁸Then he said, “This is Wickedness!” And he threw her down into the middle of the ephah and cast the lead weight on its opening.

⁹Then I lifted up my eyes and looked, and there two women were coming out with the wind in their wings; and they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heavens. ¹⁰I said to the angel who was speaking with me, “Where are they taking the ephah?”

¹¹Then he said to me, “To build a temple for her in the land of Shinar; and when it is prepared, she will be set there

[Read 5:5-11]

Q: What is an “ephah”?

A: First and foremost it is the largest unit of Old Testament dry measure that is equal to about half a bushel. In Zechariah’s vision what is being described is a container which is “ephah sized”, a basket or container much like the modern-day bushel basket. There are many instructions in the Law where elements of sacrifices and offerings are measured in relationship to an ephah.

Q: What is the greater spiritual representation of the ephah?

A: It is a way of stating that something is being measured against the standard of the Law of the Lord.

Q: What is meant by, “This is the ephah going forth”?

A: It is an expression meant to visualize the filling up of the measure of iniquity, a situation where sin rises to a point where God must absolutely deal with it.

“Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers.

— Matthew 23:32

on her own pedestal.”

I heard another voice from heaven, saying, “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

— Revelation 18:4–5

Q: What is meant by, “This is their appearance in all the land”?

A: This is a representation of the wicked in the land, their full measure of sin having been achieved.

Q: Why is the lead cover lifted up?

A: So Zechariah can see what is contained inside. Being made of lead implies that what is inside cannot escape from the weight pressing down upon it.

Q: Why should we not be surprised to see wickedness personified as a woman?

A: This is the repeated biblical metaphor for wickedness and spiritual seduction. All the bad women in the Bible personify this such as Jezebel, Athaliah or God’s repeated illustration of an unfaithful woman as a teaching about spiritual unfaithfulness. (Is. 1:21; Jer. 2:20; Hos. 2:5; Ezek. 23)

Note: *When the Septuagint was written, the translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew and Aramaic into Greek, their translation of wickedness in Zechariah was the equivalent of the “mystery of iniquity” which Paul uses in 2 Th. 2:3, 7-8 to refer to “the man of sin” – the Antichrist. This is pointed out because of the possible further layers of spiritual meaning to this vision.*

Q: Who are the women who take the Ephah away?

A: It is not plainly provided. Since they only rise “between the earth and heavens” and their purpose according to v.10 is to “build a temple for her”, and since they are female like the woman restrained in the ephah, it might be inferred that they themselves are agents of wickedness. Throughout history God has used the wicked as tools for punishing and removing wickedness such as Babylon punishing Assyria, Medo-Persia punishing Babylon, and so forth.

Q: Where and what is Shinar?

A: This is another name for Babylon. When Scripture uses the old name “Shinar” it is probably trying to teach something about the original, ancient character of the roots of Babylon which is associated with its founder Nimrod and the famous Tower of Babel incident. In other words, man setting himself up in the place of and to be worshiped like God. This is most likely confirmed by the fact they will “build a temple for her” – a place of worship, and “she will set there on her own pedestal” – a very vivid representation of an idol set up to be worshiped.

Application: *The second vision is God working in the world going beyond the issue of personal sin to hold nations accountable for societal sin.*

[Read 6:1-8]

¹Now I lifted up my eyes again and looked, and behold, four chariots were coming forth from between the two mountains; and the mountains were bronze mountains. ²With the first chariot were red horses, with the second chariot black horses, ³with the third chariot white

Q: What would a chariot represent?

A: This is something used strictly for military rather than civil purposes and would therefore suggest a very aggressive agenda.

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horses, and with the fourth chariot strong dappled horses. ⁴Then I spoke and said to the angel who was speaking with me, “What are these, my lord?”

⁵The angel replied to me, “These are the four spirits of heaven, going forth after standing before the Lord of all the earth, ⁶with one of which the black horses are going forth to the north country; and the white ones go forth after them, while the dappled ones go forth to the south country. ⁷When the strong ones went out, they were eager to go to patrol the earth.”

And He said, “Go, patrol the earth.” So they patrolled the earth.

⁸Then He cried out to me and spoke to me saying, “See, those who are going to the land of the north have appeased My wrath in the land of the north.”

Q: Why might four chariots be significant?

A: At first blush it would imply completeness, something corresponding to each point on the compass. But as we will discuss further below, only north and south is mentioned – there is no reference to east or west. V.5 plainly states, “*These are the four spirits of heaven, going forth after standing before the Lord of all the earth*”.

Q: What do the mountains represent?

A: This is another biblical symbol about which scholars have provided a lot of theories. But since the Bible uses bronze as a metaphor for the corrupting effects of sin and stubbornness, and mountains as huge obstacles that seem impossible for a man to overcome, the simplest explanation is that this probably references what appear to be insurmountable, manmade obstacles or kingdoms which are no problem for God’s forces to deal with.

Q: What is the significance of the different colored horses?

A: It is very hard not to see a possible correlation to the horses in Revelation 6 or Zechariah 1, but it really depends on the true meaning of the chariots. Do they represent different kingdoms? Different dispensations? Different judgments? All that this author can offer with confidence is that it indicates a different role or responsibility assigned to each one.

Q: What is the greater teaching of v.5 that these go forth “after standing before the LORD of the earth”?

A: The implication is that there are greater spiritual forces at work behind world events, that they are ultimately controlled by God and not just happenchance.

*He makes the winds His messengers,
Flaming fire His ministers.
— Psalm 104:4*

*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for
the sake of those who will inherit salvation?
— Hebrews 1:14*

Q: But why might it be significant that the only directions specified in this particular case is north and south for the black, white, and dappled horses?

A: As we know from Daniel the final earthly battles are characterized between the King of the North and the King of the South. (Dan. 11) This is most likely a picture of the drawing together of world forces we know to come in the Last Days.

Like other pictures of the End Times which are characterized by four great empires, it is also possible that the first three represent the empires that have already come and the last chariot in v.7 is moving to action that last kingdom we know is yet to come in the character of both Babylon and Rome. This might also explain why this is reserved for the red horses, red often symbolizing extreme bloodshed and carnage.

Q: How might v.8 in its reference to “the land of the north” have a dual meaning for both Zechariah’s day and the Last Days to come?

A: In Zechariah’s day the literal Babylon had been punished but we know from Scripture there is a final world kingdom coming in the character of Babylon yet to be dealt with.

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Application: The third vision is God working in the world for final judgment, making the whole world accountable for its sin.

[Read 6:9-15]

⁹The word of the LORD also came to me, saying, ¹⁰“Take an offering from the exiles, from Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah; and you go the same day and enter the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah, where they have arrived from Babylon. ¹¹Take silver and gold, make an ornate crown and set it on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. ¹²Then say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the LORD. ¹³Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the LORD, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.”’”

¹⁴“Now the crown will become a reminder in the temple of the LORD to Helem, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Hen the son of Zephaniah. ¹⁵Those who are far off will come and build the temple of the LORD.” Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. And it will take place if you completely obey the LORD your God.

Q: In the context of these visions having been presented through Zechariah, what is now taking place? How is this connected to the overall message of the visions?

A: It is a public act intended to confirm that what God has promised will take place, both for the present Temple in the immediate future, and for the Temple to come through the Messiah in the distant future.

Q: Why might there be a greater spiritual significance to the men from whom Zechariah is to obtain materials for the crown?

A: If we were to look at the meaning of their names, another way of understanding this is by translating it, “*From the chief men, and from its good men, and from those who have understood it*”. It is a picture of God’s people returning to the land from captivity **AND** their fully acknowledging and accepting the Messiah.

Q: How do we know for sure that “Branch” is referring to the Messiah and not to Joshua?

*“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD,
“When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch;
And He will reign as king and act wisely
And do justice and righteousness in the land.
— Jeremiah 23:5*

*‘In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of
David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and
righteousness on the earth.
— Jeremiah 33:15*

Q: What does it mean in stating, “He will branch out from where He is” in v.12?

A: The Messiah will not just arise from His own country but will spring from a lowly origin to the highest of all glory.

*Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,
And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.
— Isaiah 11:1*

*For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,
And like a root out of parched ground;
He has no stately form or majesty
That we should look upon Him,
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.
— Isaiah 53:2*

Q: What Temple is being referred to in v.12?

A: The body of Christ as specified in the New Testament.

*If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for
the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.
— 1 Corinthians 3:17*

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Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,

***“I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM;
AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD,
AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.***

— 2 Corinthians 6:16

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

— Ephesians 2:19–22

Q: What is v.13 speaking about?

A: The fact that the Messiah will be both King and Priest. *“He will be a priest on His throne”*.

Q: How does this contrast with the historical situation in Zechariah's day?

A: Zerubbabel and Joshua were the civil and religious authorities cooperating to build the Temple, a kind of harmony that often did not exist in the overall history of Israel. It was a temporary peace but far from the permanent peace the Messiah will bring when simultaneously occupying both offices.

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;

— Ephesians 2:13–17

Q: What prophet was also active at the same time as Zechariah?

A: Haggai.

Q: Why might this be significant since through Zechariah God is stating that Joshua the High Priest is representative of the Messiah to come?

A: Through Haggai God stated that Zerubbabel is also representative of the Messiah to come. Zerubbabel is the embodiment of the kings of Israel, Joshua the high priests. It is a further confirmation *“He will be a priest on His throne”* (v.13), someone who is both King and High Priest.

Q: What is the crown to be a dual reminder of?

A: It will be placed in the Temple of Zechariah's time as a visible reminder that since God fulfilled His promise to see that Temple built, so He will fulfill His future promise of the greater Temple to come through the Messiah.

Q: But what is the nature of the final promise sealing God's Word?

A: "...it will take place if you **completely** obey the LORD your God." (v.15)

Application: Having begun His message through Zechariah with a call to obedience based on the past (Zech. 1:1-6), God here ends the visions with a call to obedience based on the future.

Overall Application

What is the state of Israel today because of its lack of obedience to God's Word and ways, especially in its rejection of the Messiah? It is somewhat ironic, especially in the context of God's repeated identification of the Messiah as the Branch:

If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?

— Romans 11:16–24

But for those who steadfastly refuse to repent and change their ways according to God's Word and ways, there will come judgment for each individual, judgment for each society, and ultimately final judgment for the whole world.