

Zech 5:1-11 The Curse of God and its Removal

Today, we come to two visions found in Zech. 5. These are very important for us. For they deal with the curse of God. And this curse is found everywhere because of sin. But, the good news is that God has removed this curse for his people. I have two parts and some applications.

1. The Curse of God. We see this in vv. 1-4 as Zechariah sees a very large flying scroll. We don't identify easily with a scroll. We read books. They read scrolls. Basically, a scroll is a book written and rolled up on special paper. We may think of works of art drawn on paper than rolled up and stored. So, when Jesus came into the Synagogue and read from the Scroll of Isaiah, he would have rolled it out until he found the right place and then rolled it back up when finished. In Zechariah's vision, he saw an extremely large scroll, measuring about 30 x15 feet. And, it was flying. I think of a huge flying carpet. And as Zechariah wondered what this scroll pictured, the angel said in v. 3: **"This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land."**

So, what is this curse? And who is sending it out? Well, it is the judgment of God because of sin. Continuing in v. 3, we get some specifics. He says, **"For everyone who steals shall be cleaned out according to what is on the other side, and everyone who swears falsely shall be cleaned out according to what is on the other side."** And then in 4 we read: **"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."** If we remember our context, Israel had been in exile for 70 years and was now returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple. And we can imagine how tough the times would have been. There was political turmoil as foreigners had control of the land. I am sure there would have been a lack of materials, goods, and food. There was an exchange of houses and lands. There would have been lawsuits and fights on issues of justice. We don't really know all the details except what we read in Ezra and Nehemiah. But, times were very difficult, worse than we can imagine. And apparently, God's people were stealing, lying, and doing this in God's name, as they were going back to rebuild the "holy" city. Some of the very sins that sent Israel into exile in the first place were again being committed AGAIN.

So, comes the picture of a SCROLL, which is called a "curse." Where do you think the language of "curse" comes from? What would they have recalled? I believe Zechariah was reminding them of God's covenant with them. When Moses came down the mountain at Sinai and gave Israel God's laws . . . And God said to them, **"Obey them and you will be blessed,"** they said, **"We will obey."** But, what would happen if they did not obey. God would "curse" them with judgment (Deut. 28-29). And this SCROLL was HUGE. It wasn't a normal size. In fact, it was the same size of Solomon's porch from the first temple. This was the place where the priests administered justice. And what was their basis of justice? It was the Word of God (ie. SCROLL). Also, do you remember what was placed inside the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies? The two tablets of stone containing God's words. I think Zechariah was saying, *"You cannot rebuild the temple and expect God to be among you, in your midst, in a covenant relationship if you continue to sin."*

And if you continue to break God's covenant, there will be NO BLESSING, but instead a CURSE." We will apply this more in a few minutes.

But, for now, I must remind us that ALL sinners fall under the curse of God. From the fall of Adam, this is what we have in this world . . . the curse of God. Sin, death, separation from God. This is what we see in this world. And we find it in every nook and cranny. From natural disasters as the creation groans and waits for its redemption (Rom. 8), to wars between countries and peoples, to all the sins we find everywhere in this world as people love their idols, love themselves, hate the ways of God, and disobey his commands. From the murder of children in the womb to the degradation to natural marriage and the exaltation of self. AND, we see this in our homes. Fights and tantrums in families, difficulties in raising children, loving the things of this world more than God, evil thoughts, anxieties, depressions, etc. On and on I could go. Why these things? The CURSE of God because of sin! There is good news coming in the next truth as God will take away this curse.

2. The Removal of God's Curse. Before showing this truth, I believe these two visions go together. Both picture the removal of sin and evil among God's people. In the previous vision, as they move back into the land to rebuild the city and the temple, God will remove the thieves and those who swear falsely in his name. We see this in v. 5 as the curse "**shall remain in his house and consume it, both timber and wood.**" In vv. 5-11 we see the curse carried away to a different land. In both cases, God cleanses his people from sin and evil.

So, in this next vision, Zechariah sees a basket. And when the cover of the basket is lifted up, there is a woman inside trying to get out. And then she is forced back down into the basket, covered up, and then a lead weight is put on top to keep her in. Then, two flying women with wings like a stork take the basket and fly away to a land called "Shinar." And there they build a house for the basket. What an interesting vision! What are we to make of it? Well, from one perspective, it is pretty simple. It is a basket of "iniquity" (v. 6), a basket of "wickedness" (v. 8) that is taken away to a special place (vv. 9-11), away from God's people. So, keep this in mind as we look at some of the details of this basket of wickedness.

The Hebrew word translated basket is the word "ephah" (KJV translation). This is a standard basket used in that day for measuring things. It was used in the market place to measure products like flour, barley, grain, etc. When we lived in Russia, we went to the markets where they would often weigh your goods on a scale. Or, they would have different size containers for different prices. So, one container might be a gallon, while another might be 2 gallons or 3. Etc. We get the concept. But, what if you have a container that is just short of a gallon, but no one would ever know the difference? This is dishonest. Over time, this would be considerable profit for the seller. Throughout the OT, this kind of practice was condemned as dishonest. It was theft. This is what we see back in our first vision. Venders were stealing with unjust "baskets," unjust weights and measures. And then, they were swearing by God's name that they were doing the right thing.

And to amplify this sin, the basket is opened up and a woman pops her head up and is then thrust back down into the basket and covered with a lid and a lead weight. And this basket with this woman inside is called “wickedness” (v. 8). I think the fact that she was hidden pictured that the sins mentioned are largely hidden to most people. (Let me say briefly by way of application that God is a God of justice ALWAYS. And, He demands justice from the world and from his people. As Christians, we must never be those who deceive others, lie to others, cheat others, fudge on our taxes, and even hide away our sins for no one to see. God sees all. He commands holiness from us. And eventually, unrepentant sin will be judged.)

Let’s keep moving through this vision. Next, we see two women with “*wind in their wings.*” And their wings were like those of a stork. And they carry the basket between earth and heaven and they take it away to the “*Land of Shinar,*” where they build a base and a house for the basket. The big picture is that God will take away their iniquity. He will transport their iniquity far away to its place. This will be the loving kindness of God to his people. In Hebrew, the word for stork is “*chesedah.*” We miss this in the English as we merely think of a stork. But, to the Israelites, the root sound of this word for stork is “*chesed.*” And practically, the word “*chesed*” means “loving kindness” or “faithfulness.” God was saying, “**though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they are red like crimson they shall be as wool**” (Is. 1:18). “*I will carry your sins away! Though the basket of your sins be evil and full, I will take care of them and put them in their proper place. Though you are cursed because of your sins, I will take away your curse.*” (Brothers and sisters, isn’t this the PROMISE of the Bible beginning in Gen. 3:15?)

Now, the vision continues as the basket with the woman is taken to the Land of Shinar. Have you heard of this place? Back in Gen. 10-11, this is where we find the city of Babel. And what happens in Babel? This is the place where the evil people of that day build a tower, a temple, in opposition to God. And throughout the OT, this becomes the city of Babylon. If we had time this morning, we could move to the Book of Revelation and see Zechariah’s woman of wickedness pictured again as the Harlot of Babylon (Rev. 16-18). (There are other pictures as well such as the evil woman Jezebel and her daughter Athaliah. See 1 Kings 21, 2 Chr. 24:7.) But, generally speaking, Babylon is a picture of this evil world, and evil world that persecutes God’s people. And, eventually Jerusalem itself, again will be judged in 70 AD in their rejection of Christ. But, as a world culture, Babylon in the Land of Shinar is the place of idolatry, the place and the people who oppose God. This land is cursed because of iniquity and wickedness and false worship. And in our picture, this basket with the evil woman inside MUST be taken away if God’s land and God’s people and God’s temple will be blessed and not cursed.

Sin cannot simply be managed. It must be completely taken away! Self-righteousness and the attempts of man to save himself and take away his sins will not suffice. God must do it! And this vision looks to a time when this will happen.

You see, if we stop preaching with only judgment and curse, we miss the entire point of this passage, of the OT, of Mosaic law. We must preach Christ as the fulfillment of this vision. This vision looks forward to the cross of Christ. You might ask, "How?" Well, think of our picture. The basket and the woman of wickedness, or curse, will be taken away from Jerusalem to its proper place. Do you remember on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would take the blood of the bull into the holy of holies. But, the skin and the flesh and other parts were considered unclean and were taken outside the city to be burned (Lev. 16:27). At other times, unclean persons and unclean items were also taken outside the camp. And when someone committed a crime deserving death, where did they take them for execution? . . . Outside the camp! Unclean things must be carried away . . . away from the congregation, away from the temple, away from the city. Brothers and sisters, as regards our sins, this is what we all deserve! Our sins have separated us from God! Is. 59:2 says, **"but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear."**

Let me ask, *"Where do we deserve to live? Where do we deserve to dwell?"* All of us deserve the curse of God in the Land of Shinar. As sinners by nature and by choice, we are in the basket with the evil woman in this vision. Paul says in Eph. 2: **"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy (*chesed*), because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ . . ."** (2:1-4). What did Christ do to accomplish this for us? Heb. 13:12 says, **"So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood."** Also, in Gal. 3:13: **"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree . . ."**

Brothers and sisters, Jesus went to the Land of Shinar. And He took ALL the punishment our sins deserved! And God received his sacrifice! . . . outside the camp. He did what ONLY the sinless Son of God could do. He removed the curse! He removed the curse! This vision looks forward to that day. And . . . this vision looks even further when ALL sin, ALL the evils of this world, the Devil and his angels, and Death itself will be completely taken away. But, ALL of this comes because of the Gospel of Christ.

Judgment will take place in the Land of Shinar or it will take place at the cross of Christ. One results in the curse never being removed. The other results in blessing as the curse is removed forever. **"As far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us"** (Ps. 103). **"While we were yet still sinners and enemies of God, Christ died for us!"** The Best news is that in spite of our sins, God is faithful. John 3:16. Israel never did what was completely required. They could not! And neither could we! So, what are some applications for us today.

First, for the Christian, rejoice in the cross of Christ. Your sins are taken away. The wrath of God has been appeased. The curse of God has fallen upon the Son. This is why we are here today. God did what we could not do! Next, if you are not a Christian, do not neglect such a great salvation. Look to Christ and you will be saved.

The Word of God is our standard for life and godliness. God's scroll is ever before us. Tim. 3:16-17 says: **"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."** So, how are we doing in our Bible reading, our daily time in the Word?

Also, The scroll of Zechariah was huge, everyone could see it. God sees all. Heb. 4:12-13 says, **"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."** This also means our sin will eventually find us out. The woman in the basket was hidden, but God knows all. And for those who sit under the preaching and teaching of the Word and still continue in their sin, beware. For the Christian, there will either be repentance. Or, one day, like Judas (and others) their apostasy will come to fruition. (Consider all the warnings from the Book of Hebrews.)

At the end of the day, right worship will translate into right living. In Zechariah's context, the people could not continue to sin and break God's covenant and expect God to bless their efforts and be with them. We see this with Jesus' words to some of the churches in Revelation. We also must heed these warnings. The primary evidence that a person is a Christian, is a repentant heart. If, over time, our hearts are not repentant, we will prove ourselves to be apostates. This is a general warning. But, as the writer to the Hebrews says, **"Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation"** (Heb. 6:9). And, he says: **"But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls"** (Heb. 10:39).