

Sermon Notes, Zechariah 5:1-11, Sunday 11 Oct 2026

Terms and conditions apply. Wording that could exclude you from certain benefits. (Breakdown under ¼ mile from home; use your phone in Europe but not Switzerland.) You need to know what could lead to you missing out on the benefits.

Zechariah has had a very positive message. 520BC. Exiled, returned to rebuild temple, opposed, discouraged, no progress for 15 years. Zechariah has encouraged them by saying God will return to them, he sees his people and will restore them, the carpenters will overcome their strong enemies, God's city and his people will be huge, God will clothe his people and priests in his perfect righteousness, God's leader Zerubbabel will finish the temple by God's power. In short: God will gloriously restore his people.

Now we come up against the holiness of God. God is totally pure, the people were rebellious and the exile was not a mistake. God's rescue may be free and wonderful, but it's not universal. People will miss out, so we want to make sure that's not us.

There are many visions in the first half of Zechariah, but these two particularly belong together.

Scroll

Verses 1-4. Scrolls. Normally rolled up. This one's unrolled so you can see what's written on it. Elsewhere in the prophets, God writes a message on a scroll to tell his people what they've done wrong and what the consequences are. This one contains curses. The background to that is Deuteronomy 28:15 ("However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you.") and Deuteronomy 30:19 ("This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live."). God made a covenant with his people and these are covenant curses.

In particular, they contain 2 of the 10 commandments. Not just any 2. Number 8 ("you shall not steal") and a cross between number 9 ("you shall not give false testimony") and number 3 ("you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God").

These are carefully chosen. They are sins that Zechariah will pick up later in the book. We know there was a lot of poverty in this part of the Persian empire. The people had returned from comfortable homes in Babylon to ruins. You can see how they'd try to redraw the boundaries of their land, and then lie about it under oath.

This scroll is both very big and very small.

It's big enough to see. Verses 2-3. Size: 20 cubits long and 10 wide. Half the size of the wall in Hall A. Not a scroll it's a billboard. Only it's flying over the whole land. So it's more like an advertising banner on the back of an aeroplane. Nobody misses

it. In military terms, it's like the satellites that let an army see exactly what happens on the ground. It sees everything.

But it's also small enough to find you. Verse 4. It's like a heat-seeking missile. You might think that things you do in a dark corner of your home are hidden to God, but they're not. The curse of God's judgement focuses in on everyone who deserves it, and wipes out both the and their house. There's no escape.

Basket

The second vision. Verses 5-6. (When he asked what it was, he knew it was a basket. He was asking what it meant!)

Iniquity just means the ways we are corrupt. The question is: How is a *basket* the iniquity of the land? It's not just any old basket. The word is an "ephah". When you went to the shops to buy flour, you'd buy by volume, and this was the largest measure they had. The vision: "This is the people's wickedness" and it was one of the standard pieces of equipment used for buying and selling. Their wickedness was how they did business. It's back to stealing and greed again.

The lead lid is a "talent", a way for measuring weight. Also a symbol of trade.

Then the angel shows him what's in the basket. Verse 7. It's a woman! He hadn't seen that coming. The point is not that women are wicked. (Men and women are equally wicked.) The shock is that it's a person. Wickedness has a face. The lid is lifted, what do you see inside the basket? Someone just like you!

The good news is that God is stronger than wickedness. Verse 8. As Zechariah is given his peek inside, the woman tries to make her escape, but the angel pushes her back inside and pushes the lid back on top. The word is a strong one – she's forced back down. The lid is a heavy one. That's about 35 kilos of lead. She wasn't pushing that up from the inside. Evil causes trouble, but God is stronger.

The basket is then airlifted. Verse 9. Why do they have wings? Angels don't have wings; cherubim do but aren't depicted as women. So these aren't exactly the same as any heavenly beings we meet elsewhere, but the point is clear: These are God's heavenly agents, so this airlift is God's doing. This is reinforced by the fact they have the wind in their wings: God's Spirit blows them along. There is so much wickedness that it's so heavy that it needs two of them to carry it.

Zechariah wants to know where they're taking it. Verses 10-11. The answer is really specific.

To Babylon. The place the people have just come back from. The place that symbolised rebellion against God. It will go to where it belongs.

But remember that wickedness has a face. God's not just going to remove wickedness in abstract. He'll remove people. This isn't quite prophesying a second exile. But nearly. Those who are wicked will be removed from everything good and taken to a place where evil is fully at home. The New Testament calls that hell.

It will be placed **in a house**. That's an odd thought. A house is being built for it. Why does it need to go in a house? 1:16. There's a house being built in Jerusalem

for God, and a house being built in Babylon for wickedness. Wickedness will be put in a temple.

And it will be put **“in its place”**, or on its base / on its stand. This word was used of the bronze stands for some of the equipment in Solomon’s temple. So we might read, “the basket will be placed on its pedestal”.

The basket representing wickedness and greed, placed on a stand in a temple in Babylon (the place where wickedness belongs). Their wickedness will be worshipped by the people who fit in Babylon.

If you live your life for money, comfort, career and prosperity, what’s your judgement? To be taken away from the presence of God to a place where you can worship those things forever. Matthew 6:24: “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money”. Part of God’s judgement on us is that we end up worshipping the things we live for.

Message to the people and to us

They’re strange visions. The public placard proclaiming God’s inescapable judgement on his rebellious people. Their greedy focus on possessions, swept away by God to Babylon along with people just like them. But what is God saying through all this – to them, and to us? Here are three things God wants

Devoted lives

Haggai and Zechariah encouraged them to finish rebuilding the temple. This passage tells us that rebuilding the temple is not enough. It’s no use having a perfect restored temple if the people are too sinful to worship a holy God. They were in danger of having double lives. Build the temple, but their lives were untouched.

They finished the temple. Then Herod the Great refurbished it. You might remember Jesus was not impressed when he found a beautifully ornate temple that had become the Jerusalem market hall.

It’s easy for us to do the same thing. The New Testament warns us against living double lives. We get church right. We build the kingdom by sharing our faith with others. But the rest of us isn’t devoted to Jesus. Jesus doesn’t rebuild our careers, homes, holidays, relationships.

Converted wallets

I said that they faced all kinds of economic pressures. Life back in Jerusalem was much less comfortable than it was in Babylon. This passage confronts them with the question of what they’re living for. They have a choice. They can build God’s kingdom, building him a temple and letting him rebuild their lives. Or they can build their own kingdom, giving themselves a nice comfortable nest.

We don’t live amongst the rubble of ruined Jerusalem, but we live in a culture that is obsessed with comfort and material pleasure. The temptation to live for those things is massive. If the ephah basket could have been their religious symbol, ours could easily be the card terminal or the shopping website.

Here's the warning. The scroll will enter every house and destroy it completely. The woman in the basket will be taken away and placed in Babylon. If we live for these things, there's no hiding. Only destruction, and separation from God and the far more pleasurable life that flows from knowing him.

Jesus said: "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" (Mark 8:36)

New hearts

Don't get this wrong. God's not telling them to tidy up their lives to make themselves acceptable to him. Remember chapter 3: Joshua the priest was given white clothes to wear, God's spotless righteousness as a perfect gift. He was completely passive. It was done for him.

Colossians 2:14 says that when Jesus died on the cross, God "forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross." Attach yourself to Jesus and that scroll of God's curse against you is nailed to the cross. The heat-seeking missile found him, instead of you.

The call of Jesus is a call to repent and believe the good news. If we truly come to him to say yes to his goodness, it will transform the way we live. If our lives are not transformed, we haven't really come to him.

Jesus says: "Come to me. I'll give you a new heart. I'll build my kingdom in your life."

It's why we had the story of Zacchaeus read. Jesus said to Zacchaeus: "Come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." And Zacchaeus said: "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." And what did Jesus say? "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Conclusion

Devoted lives. Converted wallets. The gift of a new heart from Jesus, that leaves nothing in our lives untouched – for our good and for his glory.

Mark 10:29-31: "Truly I tell you, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – along with persecutions – and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."