

The Minor Prophets
Lesson 29: God and The Nations
(Zechariah 5—6)

The previous vision ended with the interpreting angel calling Israel's God "the Lord of the whole earth" (4:14), a title that is also used in Psalm 97:5 and Isaiah 54:5. Zechariah's purpose in writing is to tell us about the future of the Jews and Jerusalem, but the future of the whole world is involved in the future of the Jews, for God called Israel to bring blessing or cursing to all the nations of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3).

The prophet describes three key events that gives evidence that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is indeed "the Lord of the whole earth."

1) The Cleansing of the Land (5:1—11)

The vision of the flying scroll and the vision of the ephah focus primarily on the land of Israel. In both, God performs a cleansing operation and deals with the sins of the nation.

- a. **God removes lawlessness (vv. 1-4).** The prophet saw a large open scroll, fifteen feet by thirty feet, floating through the air, with writing on both sides. On one side he read the third commandment against taking God's name in vain (Ex. 20:7), and on the other side he read the eighth commandment against stealing (v. 15).
 - i. This scroll represented the law of God that brings a curse on all who disobey it, and that includes all of us (Deut. 27:26; Gal. 3:10-12), because nobody can fully obey God's law. For that matter, the law was never given to save people (Gal. 2:16, 21; 3:21) but to reveal that people need to be saved, "for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20).
 - ii. Out of the Ten Commandments, why did the Lord select the two that forbid stealing and swearing falsely? It may have been because many of the Jewish people were not faithful in their giving to the Lord, robbing Him of tithes and offerings and then lying about it. In their business dealings, they may have cheated one another.
 - iii. But there is another reason. The third commandment is the central commandment on the first tablet of the law, and the eighth commandment is the central commandment on the second tablet of the law, so these two commandments represented the whole law.
 - iv. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). If we were suspended over a chasm (a deep cleft) by a chain of ten links, how many would it take to break before we would fall?
 - v. Obedience to one law doesn't negate disobedience to another law. To break one is to become a lawless person.
 - vi. God announced that the scroll of His law would visit the individual homes in the land and judge those who were deliberately disobeying God. Whether "cut off" means killed or expelled from the covenant community isn't made clear. Like a thief or a plague, the curse would enter the houses unannounced and bring destruction.

The Jewish people were familiar with the "blessings and curses" of the covenant recorded by Moses. Lawlessness abounds today and the only commandment many people worry about is "*Thou shalt not*

get caught!” Ultimately, God will judge all sinners who have rebelled against His law (Jude 14-15), but He will start with Israel, the nation that gave us God’s law. It’s a divine principle that judgment begins with God’s people (1 Peter 4:17; Ezek. 9:6). This judgment will occur before our Lord establishes His kingdom on earth, and the “holy land” will truly become holy. God will “remove the iniquity of that land in one day” (3:9).

- b. God removes wickedness (vv. 6-11).** Not only will individual sins and sinners be judged, but also wickedness itself will be removed from the land. In this vision, wickedness is personified by a woman, because the Hebrew word for “wickedness” is feminine.

The ephah was a common measure in Israel, but no ephah would be large enough to house a person, so like the huge scroll, this was a special ephah. The woman attempted to get out of the ephah, so a heavy lead cover was put on the ephah to keep her in. A talent of lead would weigh from seventy-five to one hundred pounds.

- i. The prophet then saw two other women, but they had wings! With the help of the wind, they lifted the basket and its contents, plus the heavy lead cover, and carried it in the air to Babylon.
- ii. Although angels are sexless (Matt. 22:30) in Scripture they are generally depicted as male, so these two women were special agents of the Lord created just for this particular task. They took the ephah to Shinar (Babylon, Dan. 1:2) and put the ephah on the base of a special house.
- iii. In order to understand this vision, we must ask ourselves, “What did the Jews bring to their land from Babylon when they returned after their captivity?” The answer is commercialism.
- iv. The Jews were people of the land when they went to Babylon, but many of the Jews born in Babylon became people of the city and successful merchants. So, it was the spirit of commercialism that was represented by the woman in the ephah, for both the ephah and the talent are measures of commodities.
- v. Throughout Scripture, Babylon symbolizes the world’s enmity against God, culminating in the vivid description in Revelation 17—18. (See also the parallel in Jer. 50—51.) The contrast in the book of Revelation is between the bride (the heavenly city) and the harlot (the earthly city of Babylon). When you read Revelation 18, you see the emphasis is on the commercial success and the vast wealth of Babylon, the very “virus” that some of the Jews had caught during the Babylonian exile.

This doesn’t imply that people of Israel today are guilty of bad business practices, or that it’s wrong for anybody to earn money by engaging in business. Both believers and unbelievers, Jews, and Gentiles, can be manufacturers and merchants and faithfully do their work. But if the worldly commercial spirit infects the child of God, it will result in twisted values, confused priorities, and a craving for wealth and position that grieves the Lord (1 Tim. 6). The best antidote is Matthew 6:33.

- vi. The two women with the stork like wings placed the ephah on a base in a special house in Babylon, which suggests that commercialism was worshipped as one of the Babylonian gods. Unfortunately, money has become a god around the world, and, like a god, money is trusted by people to give them help, to solve their problems, to provide happiness, and to empower them to accomplish their goals in life.

- vii. The last of the Ten Commandments is, "Thou shalt not covet," but coveting will cause people to break the other nine commandments.

God has now cleansed the land. What is His next step in preparing His people for their personal kingdom?

2) God Judges the Nations (6:1-8)

The images in this vision are like those described in Zechariah 1:7-17, but the details are significantly different. The emphasis here is on the horses and chariots rather than the riders, and their ministry is that of accomplishing God's purposes rather than reporting on conditions in the Gentile world. In the first vision, there were many horses and many riders, but here, there are only four chariots, each with their horses.

- c. The four chariots with their horses represented the "four spirits" from God, that is four angels (Heb. 1:14) assigned to different parts of the world to do God's bidding. "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels".
- d. (Ps. 68:17). The presence of chariots suggests battle and implies judgment.
 - i. "For behold, the Lord will come with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render [bring down, NIV] His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire" (Isa. 66:15 NKJV).
 - ii. If the horses' colors are significant, then Revelation 6:1-8 can assist us. The red horses symbolize war; the black horses in the vision, famine; and the white horses, death. There are no dappled horses in the vision John had in Revelation 6, but they could well symbolize plagues. During the "day of the Lord," God will use wars, famines, plagues, and death to punish the nations of the earth.
- e. Since the two mountains (Zech. 6:1) were made of bronze, they are symbolic, for there are no bronze mountains in the Holy Land or anywhere else. In Scripture bronze often symbolizes judgment.
 - i. The altar of sacrifice in the tabernacle and the temple was made of wood covered with bronze, and that's where sin was judged when the sacrifices were burned.
 - ii. "The serpent that Moses put on the pole was made of bronze (Num. 21:9), and when our Lord appeared to John and was about to judge the churches, His feet were compared to bronze" as if they burned in a furnace" (Rev. 1:15).

So, the cumulative effect of this vision is that God will judge the Gentile nations for their sins. This will occur during the period of time called "the tribulation" or "the day of the Lord" that precedes the return of Christ to the earth to set up His righteous kingdom.

When Zechariah saw the horses, they were straining to go to their appointed destinations and do what God had ordered them to do. However, judgment is in the hands of God, reserved for the right time and place (see Rev. 9:15). The black horses were assigned to the north country (Babylon) and the white horses would follow them, while the dappled horses would go to the south (Egypt). Nothing is said about the red horses, so apparently the Lord was holding them back for another time.

The ministry of the angels among the nations and in dispensing God's judgments is clearly taught in other parts of Scripture (Dan. 4:4-18; 10; 12:1; Rev. 8:14; 16). Zechariah's vision assures us that God is in control of the future and will judge the Gentile nations during "the day of the Lord." God is

long suffering (2 Peter 3:9), but there comes a time when nations “fill up the measure of their sins” (Gen. 15:16; Matt. 23:22), and then God’s judgment must fall.

3) God Crowns His King-Priest (6:9-15)

The eight visions came to an end, but there was yet another message from God to His servant. In the visions, God had assured His people that He would cleanse them and protect them from their enemies. But there was a message for the future as well. During the “day of the Lord,” the nations would be punished for their sins, but Israel would be delivered. At the climax of that day, Messiah would return, the Jews would see Him and trust Him, and the nations would be cleansed. The Messiah would be crowned as King-Priest to reign over His righteous kingdom (Zech. 9—14).

a. Confrontation (vv. 9-11). We aren’t told when God gave Zechariah these instructions, but it was probably shortly after he had seen the eight visions, for the event is really the climax of the revelations given in the visions.

- God told Zechariah that three esteemed Jews would arrive from Babylon, bringing gold and silver offerings to the Lord for the building of the temple. They would stay in the home of Josiah, who had the wonderful nickname, “Hen,” which means “gracious one” (v. 14). After they arrive in Jerusalem, Zechariah went to see them.
- We can only image what transpired when the prophet told the visitors what God had commanded him to do: take their silver and gold offerings and make an elaborate crown.
- He was then to put this crown not on the head of Zerubbabel the governor, who was of the royal line of David, but on the head of Joshua the priest.
- The visitors no doubt faced two problems: (1) the money from the Jews in Babylon was supposed to be used for the completion of the temple, and (2) there was no precedent in Scripture for a priest to be crowned king.
- Was Zechariah trying to oust the governor and make Joshua ruler of the struggling nation? How would this better the situation of the remnant and hasten the completion of the temple?

b. Coronation (vv. 12-13). Zechariah saved the explanation until he had fully obeyed the Lord. He made the crown and, taking the visitors with him went to Joshua the high priest and conducted a coronation service. We don’t know if all the elders of Israel were invited, but since the message this act conveyed was such an important one, it’s likely that they were.

- Then Zechariah explained God’s message to the high priest and the witnesses. He must have told them that both Zerubbabel and Joshua were “men symbolic of things to come” (Zech. 3:8 NIV).
- Even though Zerubbabel was from David’s line, he wasn’t the one God chose to be crowned. God chose Joshua, and for the first time in Jewish history, the Lord united the monarchy and the priesthood.
- All of this refers, of course, to Jesus Christ, for He is “the man whose name is the Branch” (6:12; see 3:8). Looking down to the time of the kingdom, God announced that Messiah would be both King and Priest: He would sit on the throne and reign, but He would also build the temple and serve as priest.

- No priest in Jewish history ever served as king, and the one king, Uzziah, who tried to become a priest, was severely judged by the Lord (2 Chron. 26:16-21).
- Only in Messiah does Jehovah unite both the throne and the altar. Today, Jesus Christ serves in heaven as both King and Priest, ministering “after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 7—8).
- But during the reign of Christ on earth, there will be a restored temple and priesthood, and Jesus Christ will sit on the throne of His father David as King and Priest (Luke 1:32-33). This will be the fulfillment of God’s covenant promise to David.

“The statement in Zechariah 6:13 that ‘the counsel of peace shall be between them both’ is translated in the NIV, ‘And there will be harmony between the two.’ In the kingdom, there will be perfect peace and justice because all civil and religious authority will be harmonized in one Person, Messiah, the King and Priest.”

c. Commemoration (vv. 14-15). Zechariah then took the crown off Joshua’s head and gave him his priestly miter (3:5). Why? Because the symbolic act was over, and the crown did not belong to Joshua. It belonged to the coming Messiah. Zechariah placed the crown somewhere in the temple as a memorial (reminder) of the Lord’s promise of a King-Priest who would bring peace and holiness to His people.

- God will be faithful to His promises even if His people are unfaithful (2 Tim. 2:12-13), but they will miss out on the blessings. He didn’t put any conditions on the wonderful promise of a future King-Priest, but Zechariah 6:15 seems to limit God’s working to the obedience of His people. “This will happen if you diligently obey the Lord your God” (NIV).
- This statement is a reference to God’s covenant recorded in Deuteronomy 28: “Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God” (v. 1 NIV).
- The remnant of the Jews then in the Holy Land had to obey God’s law so that He might protect them and bless as He Promised, for the Messiah had to be born from this nation.
- Within a few centuries, the angel Gabriel would visit Mary and tell her she had been chosen to bring the promised Messiah into the world (Luke 1:26-38).
- The faithfulness of one generation assured the blessing of the next generations and ultimately the blessing of the whole world.

The visions are ended. We have seen a vivid panorama of God’s plans for Israel, culminating in the King-Priest on David’s throne, ruling over Israel and the whole world.

Remember these prophecies the next time you pray, “Thy kingdom come.”

Homework: Read **Zechariah 7— 8**. Study title: Truth, Traditions, And Promises.

The Wiersbe Bible Study Series, Warren W. Wiersbe, David C. Cook Publishing Company; Knowing the Bible, Lydia Brownback, Crossway Publishing