

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The End of Sinners and Sin

Scripture: Zechariah 5:1-11

Code: 2160

As we come to the fifth chapter tonight of this great prophetic book we could entitle the fifth chapter the final removal of sin and sinners, the ultimate end of sin and sinners 'cause that's what it talks about. Let me give us a little introduction to begin with. Psalm 99:9 says, "Exalt the Lord our God and worship at His holy hill, for the Lord our God is holy." In Psalm 5:4, "For thou art not a God who hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with Thee." In Psalm 11:4, "The Lord is in His holy temple. The Lord's throne is in heaven. His eyes behold. His eyelids test the children of men. The Lord testeth the righteous, but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. Upon the wicked He shall rain snares, fire, and brimstone and in horrible tempest this shall be the portion of their cup, for the righteous Lord loveth righteousness." In Psalm 34:15, again the character of God is made manifest, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears are open upon their cry. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

In Habakkuk, that wonderful little prophecy that so outlines the character of God, the first chapter and the 12th verse, "Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One. We shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity." God cannot tolerate sin. That's what all of those verses say.

Far into the New Testament the first Epistle of Peter the 1st Chapter, the 15th verse, "But as he who hath called you is holy so be ye holy in all manner of life because it is written, be ye holy for I am holy." God is a holy God. God is not a God who looks with favor on unrighteousness. God is a God who punishes sin and Habakkuk says that essentially. He says, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on iniquity." That he knows to be the character of God. But immediately after that he asks a question. He says, "Why lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" In other words Habakkuk says my theology tells me you can't look on sin. My theology tells me you hate sin, but the experience I'm going through, God, makes me ask the question why do the sinners seem to get along so well? Why do the unrighteous seem to prosper? Why do you look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are you silent when the wicked swallow up those that are the righteous?

I know your character is that, which is abhorring sin, but in practice it seems as though you're often tolerant of it. It's a fair question. It's a question that's been asked many times since and is being

asked today even by Christians who seem to have trouble and struggle and anguish in their own life and they look about them and they see that the ungodly who seem to be so very prosperous.

It was the question on the heart of the Psalmist in Psalm 10 when he said, "Why standest thou afar off O Lord? Why hidest thou Thy self in times of trouble? The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor." God I don't understand how you can let this happen, how you can sit by while it goes on. And the 15th verse of the same Psalm, the Psalmist cries, "Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man. Seek out his wickedness till thy find none." God, do something to bring this kind of evil to a halt.

Halfway through the Psalms and the 73rd Psalm and the 3rd verse the same cry is given. "For I was envious of the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." I was envious of the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Why is it that the wicked people seem to be so happy and having all the fun and making all the money and having the success.

In Jeremiah 12:1, Jeremiah says in his prayer, "Righteous art thou O Lord, when I plead with thee. Yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments." First of all he says like Habakkuk, God I know you're righteous and I know you're just, but can I talk to you a little bit about some practical things? Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are all they happy that deal very treacherously? That's a fair question, Jeremiah.

In Revelation 6:9, we find something of the same attitude. And Jesus is opening the seals of judgment in the tribulation "And when He opened the fifth seal I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God and for the testimony, which they held." And John sees the martyrs who died in the tribulation, "And they cried with a loud voice saying, 'How long O Lord?' Holy and true."

Again like Habakkuk and Jeremiah and like the Psalmist they restate the character of God holy and true, "but how long dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" When are You going to make the thing right? And I suppose that's a question every one of us has asked in our lifetime. Will God end sin someday and sinners? Will God purify the world or will evil always seem to prosper and will evil always tend to dominate?

Well there's an answer in the Bible to the cries that we've heard and the answer is God will act. In Psalm 50:3, this is what the Psalmist said, "Our God shall come and shall not keep silence. A fire shall devour before Him and it shall be very tempestuous around Him." And so the Psalmist says God will do something. God will act. At the end of Psalm 50 and verse 21, God says, "These things hast thou done and I kept silence. Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such and one as thyself." You thought I was just a man, he says, that I could just let those things go by, "but I will reprove thee and I will set them in order before thine eyes." Now you'd better consider this you who forget God, lest I tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver.

God says I will come, I will not keep silence, fire will devour, it will be tempestuous and you had better consider this lest I tear you in pieces. That's a fearful, fearful Psalm, nonetheless it is the word of God. God will judge sin and He will judge sinners in His own time.

In Psalm 97, we get a little insight into that. It says, "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of aisles be glad thereof. Clouds and darkness are round about him. Righteousness and justice are the habitation of His throne. A fire goeth before Him and burns up His enemies round about. His lightnings lighten the world, the earth saw and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. The heavens declare His righteousness and all the people see His glory." And verse 12 says, "Rejoice in the Lord ye righteous and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness." There's going to come a judgment and He's going to come in great judgment; fire is going to go before Him, lightening is going to light the world; the hills will melt like wax, and He will bring judgment. That sounds almost like a paraphrase of II Peter 3, when it says, "In the great day of judgment the elements will melt with fervent heat." Yes there is coming a time when God will judge sinners and the Bible says at that great time the sinners both those who are alive and those who are in the graves will be drawn before Him for ultimate judgment. Isaiah tells us it will happen when the Lord comes to set up His kingdom.

In Isaiah 42, Isaiah is talking about the coming of the Lord and the establishing of the kingdom and in verse 13, he says of Isaiah 42, "The Lord shall go forth like a mighty man. He shall stir up jealousy like a man of war. He shall cry yea roar, He shall prevail against his enemies. I have for a long time held My peace. I have been still and restrained Myself. Now will I cry like a travailing woman? I will destroy and devour at once. I will make waste mountains and hills and dry up all their herbs. I will make the rivers coastlands and I will dry up the pools." God says I've been silent for a long time, but that's going to change. And He's referring to the period of time when He establishes the kingdom because that's the time of judgment.

In Isaiah 65:2, we get a further word about God's judgment in the coming kingdom. "I have spread out My hands all the day unto a rebellious people that walketh in a way that is not good after their own thoughts. A people that provoketh Me to anger continually to My face, that sacrificeth in gardens and burneth incense upon altars of brick." He's talking there about their idolatry, "that remain among the graves and lodge in the monuments, that eat swine's flesh and broth of abominable things in their vessels." In other words they have violated all of the Mosaic Law. "That say stand by thyself. Come not near to Me for I am holier than Thou." In other words they have a false piety, a false righteousness and God says these are a smoke in my nose.

You ever get smoke in your nose? Irritating isn't it? It's irritating! And God says, "Behold it is written before me I will not keep silence, but will recompense even recompense into their bosom. Your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith the Lord, who have burned incense on the

mountains and blasphemed Me upon the hills; therefore, will I measure their former work into their bosom. God says I'm going to bring it right back on you. Now these are stern words and God is very stern when He talks about sin and when He talks about judgment and just as serious as when He talks about grace.

You say, "When is this going to be?" It's going to be in the time of the kingdom. God is going to begin to judge when Jesus comes to set up His kingdom. And the Bible says in Matthew 24:25, the first thing He does when He returns to earth is judge the nations. And then as the kingdom of a thousand years begins He will rule with what, a rod of iron and He will judge instantly sin. And at the end of that thousand-year period there will be what the Bible calls the great white throne judgment, the end of all judgment on sin, so that you have at the beginning of the kingdom, during the kingdom and the end of the kingdom great information about judgment.

And from now until that time men are going to get worse and worse and worse. In II Timothy 3:13, it says, "And evil men shall grow worse and worse." And in II Thessalonians Chapter 2, it says, "That the mystery of iniquity which already works will continue to work and to grow until Christ comes and it will grow under the anti-Christ, under the son of perdition, says Paul in II Thessalonians. The falling away, the apostasy will flourish. And so from our time until Jesus comes evil is going to get worse and worse and there will be an apostasy, there will be a falling away, there will be a falling away of Israel, the Old Testament indicates. There will be a falling away of the church and we're already seeing it aren't we?

Apostasy is a key word to define the church today, the apostate church. And it will all reach a terrible, terrible climax during the period of the tribulation when all hell breaks loose, and sin like no one every dreamed possible will occur. Why? because in Revelation 9, for one thing, the Bible says that God unlocks the pit and lets every bound demon that is bound there temporarily, out of the pit and they run over the earth and they bring men against God in a terrible final display of sin.

And so you hate to say it, but before it gets better it's going to get worse. And He will begin to judge and then Jesus will come and He will begin to judge and He will judge all through the kingdom and He will judge at the end.

Now this is the subject of Zechariah Chapter 5. Let's look at it. At this point there have been five visions of the eight that we said were in this section. And we told you that basically these visions were for what purpose? Remember? To comfort Israel. And the first five have been very comforting, wonderfully comforting. And the natural question that would be asked at this point by any godly Jew would be this: God, it's very wonderful to hear about all this comfort, very wonderful to hear about what You're going to do in rebuilding and restoring the city and the temple and bringing the Messiah and all of these wonderful things, they're so great to hear, and making Your people the witness people and saving them and cleansing them. It's all great, but God what about the sinners and what

about the ungodly? What happens to them? What is going to be their part in the kingdom? What is going to be their part in the great day of the restoration? And primarily they are referring to Jews and their thinking would be there are many Jews who are outwardly Hebrew but inwardly they're not Jews. They're not true Jews. There are many sinners that have prospered in their sin and they've caused suffering for the nation and that was true.

As we told you before Zechariah was written they had just come back from seventy years of captivity and the seventy years were the price that they all paid for the sinners in their midst. Because there was so many sinners the whole nation had to pay. And so they're simply saying there's so many sinners who have seemed to prosper and their sin has caused so much pain for everybody else what about them in the future? And from our vantage point today we can understand how Zechariah's contemporaries might wonder about that and we might be saying to ourselves, "Why is it that so many godless Jews today seem to prosper?" Why? How is that?

And the answer comes in Chapter 5. And the answer is: God will deal with them in His own time. And when you question His time you are toying, not only with His sovereignty, but watch this, you are also toying with His grace. Because as Peter said, "God is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish."

Now remember the message of the first five visions has been of comfort. Historically and prophetically it's been of comfort. Historically the comfort came in the knowledge that they would rebuild their temple in Zerubbabel's time and rebuild their wall and they'd have a sense of security again and they'd begin to worship God. And do you know that from the time that they rebuilt their temple, after the captivity, they have never been idolatrous since? The Babylonian purged Israel of idolatry. They've never been any false Gods' tolerated there. Oh they may worship money and things like that, but none of the gods of the nations.

And so there was a sense of restoration to worship, and the prophecy historically said they would be safe from their enemies, but there was much more to the prophecy than the historical and that was the prophetic one. And Zechariah was really looking way beyond Zerubbabel and way beyond Zechariah and way beyond Nehemiah, and way beyond Haggai, the contemporary prophet, and he was saying, "Some day there will be a glorious new city built with unlimited boundaries. Remember that? And no walls, and a glorious temple, and there will be an internal cleansing of the nation, as they are brought into salvation, and we saw that in Chapter 3 as Joshua, the high priest, symbolizes the people and he is cleansed. And they will be restored, as we saw last time, to their original call to be God's witnesses to the world.

And then in Chapter 5 God says but before that can all happen God has to deal with sin. God has to deal with righteousness against sinners, and that's what this vision of Chapter 5 is talking about. And in fact there are two visions here, really there are two visions but three parts, as we shall see. And

what it's saying is that God will judge sinners. Barron who has written one of the classic commentaries on Zechariah says, "The message here is this: sin must be purged away, iniquity must be stamped out in the city of God, and when the sinner is so wedded to his sin that he is no longer separable from it he becomes the object of God's curse and must be cleansed away from the earth." And I guess these visions that we will see in Chapter 5 should force on our minds what Paul said when he called this kind of thing the exceeding sinfulness of sin in Romans 7:13.

A footnote as we look at these visions. Dr. Ironside says, "It is noticeable as we go on with the series of visions, there is less and less given in the way of interpretation. It is as though the Lord would give enough in regard to the earlier visions to lay a solid foundation for the understanding of the later ones." And the reason I say that is because I want you to understand that we are interpreting them as we go built upon what we've already known because there isn't much interpretation given.

Now let's look at three features in this chapter connected with two visions but having three parts. Number one, God's judgment on the sinner; number two, God's judgment on sin; number three, God's judgment on the system. God's judgment on the sinner, sin, and the system, and each has its unique part.

First of all God's judgment on the sinner in verses 1 to 4, and here we see God move against sinners as He purges the earth for the setting up of the kingdom. It is the darkness before the kingdom dawn. Verse 1, "Then I turned and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying scroll. And he said unto me, what seest thou? and I answered, I see a flying scroll. Its length is twenty cubits and its breadth ten cubits. Then he said unto me, 'This is the curse that goes forth over the face of the whole earth, for everyone that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it, and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it.' 'And I will bring it forth,' saith the Lord of hosts, 'and it shall enter into the house of the thief and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name, and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber and it's stones.'"

Now let me show you what this is saying. There are three elements here on God's judgment on the sinner. This is talking about God's judgment on the sinner. The key is verse 3, "He said unto me, this is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth. For everyone that stealeth shall be cut off," later, "everyone that sweareth shall be cut off."

Now, this is a curse that goes over the whole world. It is an act of divine judgment on the sinner. It results, in the end of verse 4, in consuming his house, the timber and the stones, total devastation, total destruction of the sinner. That's the message of this vision.

Now there are three things that I want you to see, three elements: the criterion for God's judgment, the completeness of God's judgment, and the certainty of God's judgment. Let's look at the criterion,

verse 1. "I turned and lifted up mine eyes and looked and behold a flying scroll, *megillah* Hebrew. "What is a flying scroll," you say? Well what is a scroll? You know what a scroll is? Two sticks and on those two sticks is wound a long piece of papyrus or hide. And you begin at one point and you just roll. And, of course, in Hebrew you go backwards so you're rolling backwards and as you roll you read.

A scroll, could be papyrus, could be leather, in fact as early as 2600 B.C. animal skin was used, cut and sewn into great sheets, so it might have been leather one or it might have been papyrus, which was made out of a reed.

Now this must have been a large scroll. Its length was 20 cubits, its breadth was 10 cubits, 30 feet there by 15 feet. That's a big piece of whatever. 30 feet by 15 that's a good sized room. There is an Egyptian papyrus that was found, I think they call it Papyrus Hovus, if I remember right. It was 133 feet long and 17 inches wide. And incidentally, have you ever heard of the Egyptian book of the dead? That's on a scroll 123 feet by 19 inches, all one solid sheet of papyrus in those cases.

Now here is this huge 30 by 15 sheet of writing on both sides actually, and notice it's a flying scroll, which means it is unwound, that's the only way you would know it was 30 by 15, and it's flying, it's in motion, it's a wide-unrolled scroll flying through the air.

Now I want to tell you something interesting. It is exactly the size 30 by 15; it is exactly the size of the Holy Place in the tabernacle. You remember that the Holy Place in the tabernacle was 30 by 15 and the Holy of Holies was 15 by 15 by 15, perfect symmetry? This is exactly the size of the Holy Place. You say, "Great!" Where will I write that? Well, let me tell you why I say it. It's not coincidence. If you see something that is exactly the size of the Holy Place, that means that God has made that thing to conform to divine dimensions. Okay? That means that the scroll is a divine standard.

Now let me tell you. The scroll contains the curse of God's judgment against the sinner. Now listen, and the criterion for God's judgment will be the divine standards. Do you see the point? God made that scroll to conform to the Holy Place in the tabernacle in the temple because that was the form of divine measurement, and the flying scroll is simply the curse that is based on God's divine measures. That's the criterion for judgment. This is a symbol of the word of God, and it is the word of God that is alive and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword that pierces and divides asunder. It is the word of God that is the criterion.

Now let me tell you another thing interesting. In verse 3 he says, "This is the curse that goes forth over the face of the earth," and it says, "On this side and on that side." You see that in verse 3? This side and that side. You want to hear something interesting? That is exactly the same phrase that is used to speak of the Mosaic Law when it was given on tables of stone, on this side and on that side. Again, aligning it with a divine standard, it is like the temple and the tabernacle Holy Place. It is like

the Mosaic Law. What it is saying is that it is a divine standard by which God is going to judge. God sets the criterion for judging sin.

In Romans 2:1, Paul says, "Thou art inexcusable O man, whosoever art that judges for when in thou judges another thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things." Now watch, "But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth."

Now listen, God will judge you not on the basis of works, not on the basis of your good deeds, but on the basis of truth. And what is truth? Jesus said, "Thy word is truth," John 17:17. Judgment will be on the basis of the word of God. So the criterion for God's judgment on the sinner is God's word. Jesus reiterates this in the fifth chapter of John in a rather lengthy passage, not all of which we'll read, but in John 5:24 begins to talk about this. Verse, well let's start with verse 24 and see if we can't go along. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that hears My word and believes on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment." In other words judgment is predicated on whether you do hear or do not hear His word. It is the word that judges, and so the criterion for judgment, the word of God. Men will be put up against this word and if they have violated this word and have rejected the only sacrifice for sin, Jesus Christ, they will be judged.

Secondly, we see in point one the judgment of sinners. We see the completeness of judgment. Look at verse 3. This is most interesting. "This is the curse that goes forth over the face of the whole earth." Now some would want to translate that land and refer it only to Israel and other scholars broaden it to incorporate the whole earth and I think that is the best rendering. The breadth of the statement over the face of the whole earth, and even though the word can be translated land, it can also be translated earth, and the statement seems to be grandiose enough to make it earth and the facts here of the finality and totality of judgment seem to be overwhelming in making it apply not only to the Jew, but to the Gentile who also will be brought into judgment, divine judgment.

Now the word curse, *alah*, in Hebrew means the punishment or the retribution, which falls on those who deny God's word, or deny His infinite holiness by defying His law. And the scroll then is judgment. You can compare with Ezekiel 2:8-10, where you have a similar scroll with a similar meaning. You can compare Revelation 5:1-9, Revelation 10:1-11, where in those cases also a scroll signifies judgment. In fact in Revelation 5 when Jesus comes He comes to the throne and He takes the scroll out of the hand of the Father and He begins to unroll the scroll and what comes forth? Judgment! The judgment of the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls, the terrible judgments that make up the tribulation. And so the scroll is a judgment scroll. It is a scroll full of curses against sin, and it goes over the whole earth.

Now here's another reason we believe it's broader than just Israel, for every one that steal, for every one that swears falsely, shall be cut off. God is going to judge every one, every one, and here you can see the judgment that occurs at the beginning of the kingdom, the rule of the rod of iron during

the kingdom, and the great white throne at the end, and in all of that judgment is total. Messiah will never tolerate wickedness when He comes. If there is any wickedness He will crush it instantaneously. If men violate His law during His kingdom they will feel His rod immediately. There will no longer be God's silence, there will no longer be God's long suffering, there will no longer be this period of patience, there will be instantaneous judgment.

Now notice that two of the commands are mentioned, stealing and swearing falsely. You know why those two are mentioned? I tell you why. The law had two sides, God wrote His law on one side of this table of stone and on the flip side He wrote the rest of it. There were five laws on one side and five laws on the other side. On the front side the command about stealing that's the third command, the middle of the five. On the other side swearing falsely is the third of the five, the middle of the five. By referring to the middle one on both sides of God's law, He is encompassing the whole law. Half of the commandments define a man's sin against God and the second half a man's sin against his brother.

And so we find that by taking one command from each side of the Mosaic Law, the middle command, He is representing the whole Law and He is simply saying that if a man defiles God's law on one side or God's law on another side, he'll be cut off.

Now who would fall into that condemnation? Would you? I would. Did you ever lie? I did. Did you ever covet? I did, do. So you see we all fall into that. But you see some of us have been saved by God's grace through the shed blood of Jesus Christ because we received Him by faith and His blood is applied to our sin and we're no longer condemned. But if a person doesn't have the salvation of Jesus Christ, he must stand condemned by those acts of violating God's law. And it says he will be cut off. You say, "What does that mean?" *Naqah*, that is a word that it means just that, to be wiped out. It is used in Isaiah 3:26 of a city that was totally destroyed. He will be destroyed. Notice the totality and the completeness of judgment. The criterion is the word of God, the completeness means everyone who sins will be totally wiped out of any possible blessing.

And thirdly, the certainty of judgment. Verse 4, "I will bring it forth," says the Lord of armies. In case you doubt that it's true, in case that you doubt that it's certain, emphatically God says, "I the Lord of the celestial and terrestrial armies I will cause this judgment to go forth with certainty like a flying scroll swift and complete." And you know when that judgment begins to break out, Revelation Chapter 6 says, "The people cry for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them to hide them from the face of the one who comes." It's a terrible judgment. It is certain. It shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him who swears falsely by My name, and it will remain in the midst of his house and consume it with its timber and its stones. Complete and certain judgment!

In our present day there is grace as God waits and suffers long with the sins of men while the gospel is preached and God is silent to the blasphemes and the crimes of sinners. But in the millennial

dawn, in the day when Jesus comes, the unrelenting curse of God will ferret out every sinner in the world and destroy him before the kingdom and when sinners are born in that kingdom and they sin against God the rod will drop on them and consume, it says in verse 4, or exterminate. Thorough judgment! Listen, any chastening that happens to overtake a sinner in this life is only a token of the terrible things that yet are to come. No wonder Jude 14 says, "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these things: behold the lord comes with ten thousand of His saints to execute judgment upon all and to convict all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

So the first vision deals with the judgment of God on the sinner himself. The second vision verse 5, deals with God's judgment on sin itself, not the sinner so much, as sin, although the sinner is inextricably connected. This again is clearly millennial in its ultimate interpretation. It has a present condition in Zechariah's time. The Jews had recently returned from Babylon. Outwardly they had put away pagan idolatry. They really had. It never rose again, but inwardly in their hearts they had become materialistic. They had hung around Babylon just long enough to get sucked into materialism. The foreign commercial emporium of Babylon had granted to them a kind of new greed that they never knew before. The spirit of self-centered materialism that had been so foreign to Israel, when they were shepherd people, had overtaken them since the spell of Babylon had been cast on them. And Nehemiah Chapter 5 is a chapter written to rebuke the spirit of selfish materialism in the post-Babylonian captivity Israelites. And Malachi 3:8-9, does the same thing saying that they have robbed God in their greed. And incidentally it is the greed and the commerce and the economics of materialism that formulate the final world empire of Babylon, isn't it, Revelation 18.

Let's look at verse 5. "Then the angel that talked with me," this is interpreter Angel again, "Went forth and said unto me, 'Life up now thine eyes, and see what is this that goeth forth.'" And again he comes up from a momentary pause of meditation that occurs between each vision, and he looks, "And I said, 'What is it?' And he said, 'This is a ephah that goes forth.' He said, 'Moreover this is their resemblance through all the earth.'"

Now you say, "What is an ephah?" An ephah was the largest measure for measuring grain. It would be like a barrel today. An ephah equals 1.05 bushels, 8 gallons, or 38.86 quarts. It's like a big barrel, and it was what was used to measure grain, to carry flour or to carry barley. And it was even large enough for a small person to fit in it. So what he looks here and sees is, he sees an ephah filled up and what he's seeing is the iniquity of Israel is full. Israel's sins are heaped up. The largest possible measure in the Jewish society was an ephah, and he is saying, "You're not sinning by the quart any more, you're sinning by the ephah, fully heaped up." And this basically was the sin of materialism and this is exactly what it will be in the end time. God will look down at the society of mankind just before Jesus comes and He will see nothing but materialism all over the globe.

Religion will be dead because the false church will be gone and all that will be left will be a worldwide economic materialistic society. And when God sees materialism piled high, when God sees the idea of the fatness of sin heaped up like grain in a big barrel then He's going to act. And even the idea of the ephah containing the grain is symbolic of commerce and trade and economics.

And notice in verse 7, "Behold there was lifted up a talent," or a round, a better way to translate that Hebrew word would be a round, a round disk of lead and obviously it had a lid on the barrel and there was lifted up, "And this is a woman that sits in the midst of the ephah. And He said, 'This is wickedness.' And he cast it into the midst of the ephah, and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth of it." God keeps the lid on evil, none gets out, because when God comes to wipe out sin He's going to do a job on it and there isn't going to be one grain outside.

Notice the phrase at the end of verse 6. "This is their resemblance or appearance." The Septuagint translates it this way: This is their wickedness, this is their iniquity and that's really what He's saying. What is the ephah? This is their iniquity; this is their evil filled up and what you see here is the same thing that James sees in Chapter 5. He sees the godless, materialistic, self-centered riches of the last days.

And in James 5 he says, "Come now you rich men weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you, your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten, your gold and silver are rusted and the rust of them shall be a witness against you and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. You have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is a view kept back by fraud, cries out and the cries of them who have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Ye who lived in pleasure on the earth and been wanton, ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and killed the just and he doth not resist you." There's coming a day when God is going to act in judgment on rich, materialistic sinners who operate in the age known as the last days.

Now this is a tremendous prophecy. The idea of the ephah and the grain being symbolic of wickedness carries the thought, as I mentioned earlier, that it is an economic wickedness, that it is an economic trafficking like grains in a basket where the commodity of exchange. And so what the prophet is saying is in the future the final form of wickedness, which God will slam the lid on and judge will be an economic materialistic wickedness that is literally heaped up and through all the earth, it says in verse 6, a world-wide system of materialism.

Now I'll tell you something people, we're fast moving toward that, aren't we? Fast incredible materialism! Turn with me for a moment to Revelation 18, and I want you to see what the system looks like in the eyes of John the apostle, the same system that Zechariah sees in the vision. In fact, how interesting that it is called Babylon, here, "After these things I saw another angel come down

from heaven, having great power, and the earth was made bright with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of demons and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.'"

The final form of evil, the final form of the world's system of economics and materialism is called Babylon. And it was the Babylon of the time of Zechariah that was so materialistic, and it was the Babylon at the time of the tower of Babel that spawned the whole thing to begin with. And God has always identified that same anti-God materialistic idolatrous self-worship as Babylon. It's always been called that.

And now we see this system and this time we see it in Revelation 18, Jesus is coming and the system is about to be smashed. Verse 3 defines the system. "For all nations," it's a world-wide system, have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." In other words the whole world has gotten in on the orgy with this system. "And the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are grown rich through the abundance of her delicacies." In other words here is a picture of the economics of the last times.

In verse 7, "How much she hath glorified herself and lived luxuriously." Verse 9, "And lived luxuriously," and verse 11, "and the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn." Verse 12, "The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and thyine wood and all kinds of vessels of ivory and wood and bronze and iron and marble and cinnamon, and incense, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and flour, and wheat, and cattle, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and so forth. It's a whole economic materialistic mishmash. Verse 15, "The merchants of these things, who were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment and weeping and wailing and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great system, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and bedecked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls, for in one hour so great riches are come to nothing.'" And the merchants who carry the things, the shipmasters, that's all done with. The city, the system will be burned. In one hour, the end of verse 19 says, "She will be made desolate."

So Zechariah sees the same thing. He sees a basket and that speaks of materialism and trade and commerce. And it is heaped with grain that symbolizes sin, and God slams the lid on the basket and not one thing escapes and God comes in sweeping judgment. You say, "There's only one confusing part of this whole deal, and that's that woman. What's she doing in there?" Well, there's always one confusing thing in every one of these things. This is a woman that sits in the midst of the ephah and he said, "'this is wickedness and he threw that in with the rest of it. It's simply this: the grain in the barrel symbolizes the system, the economy, the materialism, the woman symbolizes the evil of it. And I don't know how to say this nice, nicely to make it an adverb, but woman is used symbolically in Scripture for religious evil. But before you panic, the church is also called the bride of Christ.

And so whenever there is a false church she is a prostitute and religious prostitution is pictured as a woman. We see that in the 17th Chapter of Revelation or the false religious system is called Babylon, the mother of harlots. And so she is wickedness. She is a symbol of sin, and so we see that the whole system, the whole Ecclesiastical Babylon, the whole economic Babylon, the whole false church, the whole false materialistic economy is going to be thrown in the same basket. God's lid is going to be slammed on the top and God is going to move out in judgment.

And so God will deal in judgment on the sinner and God will deal in judgment on sin and He'll heap the whole thing in one basket and when God takes care of sin, folks, it'll be taken care of won't it? And you want to know what happens? At the end of the kingdom God will have done with sin and will enter the new heaven and the new earth and there will never be any more sin at all. It'll all be in the basket and the basket will get God's destruction. Won't that be a wonderful world? No sin. And what's most amazing about it I will be allowed to be there because I will be purified and you and I won't contaminate it.

Lastly, we see God's judgment on sin, sinners and lastly on the system, and I've already hinted at that because I had to, to explain the text. But lastly, God's judgment on sin's system is shown to us as we look at this final worldwide system in the vision of Zechariah. Look at verse 9. "Then lifted I up mine eyes," and this applies again to the first half of the vision was such a knock out he went into one of those meditative periods and now he looks up again, "And behold there came out two women and the wind was in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork;" and that would be very large and very strong, "And they lifted the ephah between the earth and the heaven."

All of a sudden in his vision this ephah with all the wickedness in it, these two women come, they lift is up, they start flying away with it, "and I said to the angel who talked with me, where are they going with the ephah?" Now watch this: "And he said to me, 'to build for it a house in the land of Shinar, and it shall be established and set there upon it's own base.'" Do you know what Shinar is? It's another name for what, Babylon. And Zechariah way back there saw that the final form, the end of the world, would be Babylon, set up all over again; exactly what Revelation 17 and 18 says. And so here is the system.

Now these two women can fly fast; the wind is in their wings. They have wings like a stork. Somebody said, "Well who are these women? Are the good angels or bad angels?" Well number one, good angels are never seen as women, two, women are often symbols of religious evil, so my own conviction is that they are demons and I say that because for one thing they are associated with the other woman in the basket who is wickedness, for another they are protective of that basket, for another they set it up on its base and they are responsible for the organizing apparently of the Babylon system, for another thing according to Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, storks are unclean birds, and I don't think God would use an unclean bird to symbolize a holy angel, and I think another

reason is in the final end of everything evil spirits will set up the final kingdom of evil. So I think you've got a couple of demons. They grab the basket and they fly off to Babylon. Shinar's the ancient name for Babylon.

You know what? Where did worldwide evil begin? Babylon! Where's it going to end? Babylon! Some people think the literal city of Babylon will be rebuilt. Maybe, could be. I don't know, but the point here is not so much that a literal city will be rebuilt as the point is that there will be a restructure of a worldwide anti-God Babylon mentality with a false religious materialistic self-centered kind of mentality. God defying Babylon will be rebuilt again. And it will be judged. It shall be established and set on its base, but God is going to come in judgment. His curse that is mentioned in the vision before is going to sweep over that system as well, and we'll find more about that as we get into Chapter 6.

Listen, God is going to judge sin as a totality and wipe it out. God is going to judge sinners as individuals and wipe them out. And God is going to judge the evil sin system of the world in its final great form during the tribulation and wipe it out, and then He's going to rule with a rod of iron. When is all this going to happen? When Jesus comes. You say, "Well maybe we have a lot of time. When is Jesus going to come?" And the Bible says, "In an hour that you think not, the Son of Man comes, and when He comes it's going to be too late for many." You say, "Well what do we do?" Well be reminded of this: Malachi, the last testimony of the Old Testament in his last chapter says this: "For behold the day cometh that shall burn like an oven and all the proud, ye, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of host, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." In other words he says it's coming, the inevitable day, God will not be silent always, God will not let the wicked prosper always, God will come in judgment like fire, but verse 2, "Unto you that fear My name, shall the Son of righteousness arise with healing in His wings." It's a great promise, isn't it?

And earlier Malachi says, "And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts in that day when I make up my jewels and I will spare them as a man spares his own son that serves him. Yes then shall you return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." Only two possibilities, you either serve God or you don't. If you serve God it's because you love Jesus Christ and you've accepted His salvation. If you haven't received Christ you don't serve God. If you don't serve God you fall into the category of God's eternal judgment.

Galatians 3:10 says, "Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." Does that include you? Have you obeyed every command in this book always? Then you're cursed. You say, "Well what's my hope?" Well the next verse says, "The just shall live, what, by faith." If we, even though we be cursed because of sin, put our faith in the perfect work of Jesus Christ, says Paul, "Therefore is now no more condemnation to them who are in Christ." But if we refuse then we fall under God's judgment. And I plead with you as Paul did and say be ye reconciled

to God.

Our Father we are deeply torn as was the apostle John on the Isle of Patmos, when he ate the little book and it was sweet in his mouth, but it was bitter in his stomach. As we talk about the day when Jesus comes, it's sweet because He deserves to reign, He deserves to be king, He deserves to rule. It's been too long that He has been blasphemed and crimes against Him have been committed and gone unpunished and it's sweet to know that He will get what is rightfully His. It's sweet because we love Him. But as the book was bitter in the stomach of John, it's bitter in our stomachs because it is so painful to know that though it may be sweet that Jesus reigns it is agonizing that He must purge out the rebels, both of Israel, as Ezekiel says, and of the world to set up His kingdom. Father our prayer tonight for those here and for any and all who ever hear this message is that they would come to Jesus Christ in simple faith, except the fact that He died and rose again for their justification, believe Him, submit to him as king, Lord, and Savior, and step out of condemnation into eternal blessing. To that end we pray. For the glory of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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