

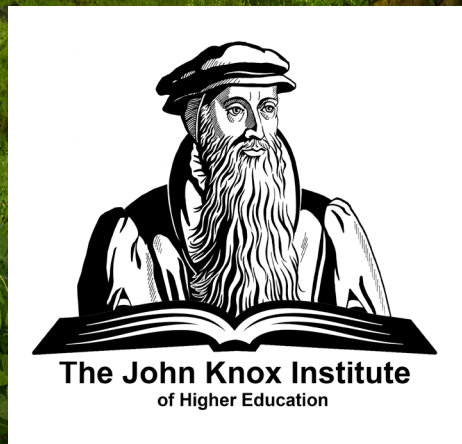
The Visions of Zechariah

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. William Macleod

Lecture #7

The Sixth Vision: The Flying Scroll



John Knox Institute of Higher Education

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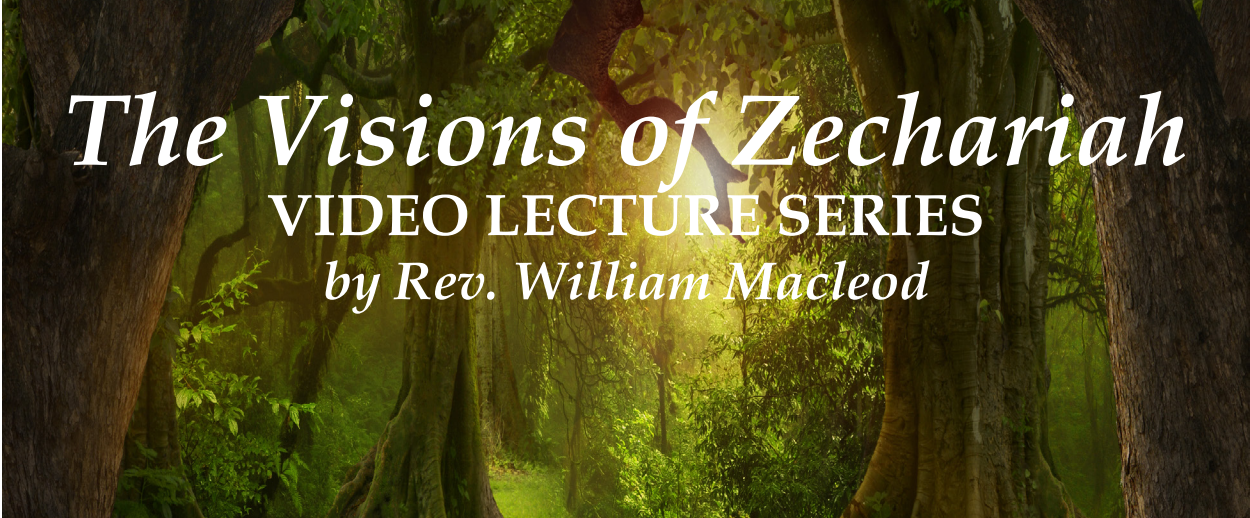
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The Visions of Zechariah

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

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Lecture #7 – Zechariah 5:1–4

The Sixth Vision: The Flying Scroll

Today we come to our seventh lecture in this series on Zechariah’s visions. Today we’ll be dealing with the flying scroll, which is the sixth vision, and is to be found in Zechariah, chapter 5, verses 1 to 4.

The first five visions of Zechariah are full of encouragement but the next two are more challenging. We all need encouragement, but we also need rebuke and correction. Too many ministers today flatter their congregations. They tell them that all is well when it is not. They do not mention sin and repentance, though these topics are a huge part of the Biblical message. People today like to hear that God is love, but they forget that God’s love is a holy love. He created a world that was perfect and happy, but very quickly man sinned, and so spoiled God’s beautiful world. God, in his wrath, cast our first parents out of the garden of Eden and threatened them with eternal hell if they would not repent and put their trust in the Savior he provided. That same truth was emphasised when God destroyed the ancient world with a flood, but provided an ark for salvation. Later, God delivered his chosen people from the land of Egypt, from their bondage there, but when they sinned in the wilderness, he punished them severely, so that actually only two men of the many who left Egypt entered in the promised land. The rest perished in the desert. Down through the centuries, God sent prophet after prophet to warn the Israelites of their sins, but they hated the faithful prophets because they demanded repentance. God complained through Isaiah, “This is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits”—Isaiah 30, verses 9 to 10. People do not like criticism, but always want “smooth things,” encouraging and comforting words. However the faithful messenger would cry, like Ezekiel, “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”—Ezekiel 33:11. Continue as you are going and you will perish. Repent and you will be saved. Turn to God, because there’s life with him.

The teaching of the New Testament is just the same as the Old Testament. John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah proclaiming, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”—Matthew 3, verse 2. When Jesus Christ appeared he used the same words in his preaching: “Repent:

for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”—Matthew 4, verse 17. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, having pointed out the terrible sin of the Jews in crucifying Christ, exhorted the thousands who were listening, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”—Acts 2:38. Paul addressed the Greeks, the philosophers, on Mars Hill in Athens. And there, he did not use “smooth” words, but faithfully declared that “God...now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead”—Acts 17:30–31. The Bible’s message from Genesis to Revelation is clear—repent! But modern man does not want to hear it, and sadly, too many ministers are afraid to proclaim it. Even most professing Christians today cannot stand hearing about their sinful lives being condemned. But sin is a terrible reality. Unless we repent, we will perish forever in hell. But the glad tidings of the gospel are that God has provided a Savior, his own Son who died on the cross to save sinners. All who repent and receive the Savior will be reconciled to God, adopted into his family, sanctified, and spend eternity with him, in his home in heaven. Only holy people get to heaven. “Follow...holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord”—Hebrews 12, verse 14.

First, we have then, A Flying Scroll, verses 1 and 2—“Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll. And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits.”

Books in ancient times were not bound as ours are today. Rather, they were rolled up in the form of a scroll with a stick attached to each end. Sometimes they were made of leather, and other times of papyrus. As they were read, they would be unrolled just enough for a person to read them. By unrolling one end and rolling the other end, the whole scroll could be read. Normally such books would only be about 25 centimeters, or 10 inches, broad. This scroll, however, is enormous. Its length is twenty cubits, or 30 feet, or 9.25 meters. Its breadth is 10 cubits, or 15 feet, or 4.5 metres. This gigantic scroll could not be held by one man, nor is it spread on a table, but actually it’s flying in the air. It is like a banner unfurled by an airplane. Interestingly, the dimensions are the same as for the holy place in the tabernacle. This emphasises that it is of significance for God’s covenant people. Also it is of the same dimensions as Solomon’s porch where the law was read. On this scroll is written a message from God. It is God’s word to Judah. We are to ask what is God’s word to us today.

Then verse 3, The Curse—“Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one 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.”

The one speaking here is the angel who was showing Zechariah these visions. He explains that the curse goes over the face of the earth. We live in a world where we are constantly hearing cursing and swearing. Some people cannot speak without every second word being a curse. This is of course totally wrong, but it’s nothing new. Jesus confronted it in his own day. Though the Jews were a very religious society, yet their language was far from what it should have been. In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord said, “Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil”—Matthew 5:34-37. All coarse language should be avoided, and swearing is strictly forbidden. The Christian’s language should mark him out as different from the world around him. Also remember

that the curses of our fellow man can do us no harm, no matter how horrible they sound. God's curses, however, are totally different. They are terrible because God is powerful, and what he says happens. Whom God curses is cursed. His wrath and curse must be avoided at all costs. We should greatly fear offending God. As the men of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God?"—1 Samuel 6, verse 20.

This huge scroll contains curses upon the one who breaks God's commandments. It's a flying scroll, and therefore quick to deliver its punishments. It hovers like a hawk or eagle about to dive on its prey. "Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together"—Matthew 24:28. How frightening for the sinner! How wonderful it is that as Christians, we can hide in Christ. He bore the wrath and curse of God for us, being made a curse for us—Galatians 3, verse 13. He is our hiding place—Psalm 32, verse 7. He is a willing Savior, ready to receive and to deliver all those who come to him. He grieved and wept over the Jews rejection of him: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"—Matthew 23, verse 37. All who come to him—to Christ—are saved. Under his outstretched wings, they are protected.

When the Israelites entered the promised land, they were to be divided into two groups. Half of them would stand upon Mount Gerizim and pronounce blessings. The other half would stand upon Mount Ebal and pronounce curses. Notice some of these curses: "Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen. Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen"—Deuteronomy 27, verses 15–19. There are many more curses. In the next chapter, Deuteronomy 28, there Moses pronounces God's blessings on obedience, but he also declared: "It shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me"—Deuteronomy 28, verses 15–20. And the curses continue in that chapter. They are horrible and terrifying.

God's law is serious. He is a great God. Our duty is to obey him. We were created to "glorify and enjoy him"—*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, answer #1. He is a loving God, but he is also a holy and just God. He revealed himself to Moses as: "The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation"—Exodus 34, verses 6–7. Sin will certainly be punished. God's name and character demand that. This is emphasised by Paul when he wrote quoting from the law: "Cursed is every one

that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them”—Galatians 3, verse 10. It is not simply the big commandments which must be kept. All commandments have to be observed in every detail, and one breaking of one of the least commandments will send that guilty person to hell forever. God requires perfection: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”—Matthew 5:48. None of us is perfect. This is why we need a Savior.

And then verse 4, The Punishment—“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 thereof and the stones thereof.”

Two commandments are singled out as examples, but all are included. The Eighth Commandment states, “Thou shalt not steal”—Exodus 20, verse 15. In a sense, all the commandments could be summed up under this one. The First Commandment states that we are to have no other gods before him. To have another god, would be to steal glory from the only real God. The Second Commandment states that we are not to worship him with images, or in any other way that he himself has not directed. So that would again be stealing from the proper worship which is to be afforded to God. The Third Commandment warns against taking God’s name in vain, which would again be stealing from the honor which should be given to God. The Fourth Commandment requires that we give to God one day in seven to be specially kept for him as a holy day. Not to do so would be to steal the time for our pleasure which we should be giving to God. The Fifth Commandment calls upon us to honor our parents. Failure to do so steals from them the respect they are due. The Sixth Commandment condemns murder, and the stealing of another person’s life from them. The Seventh Commandment condemns adultery, or the stealing of someone else’s wife. The Ninth Commandment condemns the stealing of the truth from another person—lies. The Tenth Commandment, which is “Thou shalt not covet”, makes plain that even the desire to have that which belongs to someone else is a sin, because it is stealing in the heart, and it is the thought that precedes every other stealing. The very first sin of Adam and Even was stealing fruit from God’s special tree. Stealing is a very serious sin.

The other sin mentioned here is swearing falsely. This is also to commit a great crime against the Lord. To swear falsely means taking God’s name in vain, and so breaking the Third Commandment. It also means bearing false witness, or telling a lie, which is a direct breach of the Ninth Commandment. To sin in this way involves treating God with contempt. It calls the God who is almighty and all-seeing to witness a statement made. Further it requires God to punish if that promise is broken. To go ahead and to break a promise in the light of this is to regard God as not seeing what is going on, on earth, or not caring what happens, or not able to punish a breach of promise. It is not loving God with all your heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. Indeed it is despising him and his rule over the earth. Swearing falsely also involves not loving your neighbor, but trying to deceive, and so hurt him. There is a particularly serious warning attached to the Third Commandment. “The LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain”—Exodus 20, verse 7.

The great scroll is threatening. It is flying, watching like a hawk, hovering as it were over the sinner, ready to pounce. God has his eye on every individual in the world and on all that is happening. The scroll enters the house of the transgressor and burns up the stones as well as the timber. When the Jews returned from their exile they had permission of the emperor to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. The Samaritans opposed the work and succeeded in stopping it for a time. Later it was discovered that the Jews had the emperor’s permission, and in fact, Darius decreed,

“That whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this. And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed”—that’s Ezra 6, verses 11–12. Terrible punishment would come on any who opposed Darius’ decree. But far worse will happen to the one who is found guilty here. The scroll of curses would enter their house and remain there. Not only was the timber of the house to be burnt but even the very stones were to be consumed. This is the sort of fire that came down from heaven on the altar which Elijah built on Mount Carmel. Everything was burnt—the stones, the dust, the water, everything. God promises blessing on the faithful, but he hates sin and will surely punish it with terrifying wrath. So we see that the great scroll has written upon it God’s law and the curse of God upon the law breakers. It will destroy all who are outside of Christ.

In conclusion, we should note that there are three uses for the law of God. First, God’s law shows us our sin, convicting us of our sinfulness and danger, so that we flee to Christ as our only hope for salvation. The law, as Paul said, is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ—Galatians 3:24. It is binding upon every man and woman. To some extent, it is written upon every conscience and is the basis for God’s judgment on the last day: “They were judged every man according to their works”—Revelation 20, verse 13. The second use of the law is as a rule for society. It provides the basis for the laws of every country, and in this way, restrains evil. The third use of the law is as a guide and rule for the Christian life. Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments,” keep my law—John 14, verse 15. Having been saved by grace, we need the law as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We do not merit salvation by keeping the commandments, but we show our love and appreciation to God by keeping the commandments.

The law, like the scroll here, is that which will condemn the unbelieving sinner to hell. Amen.