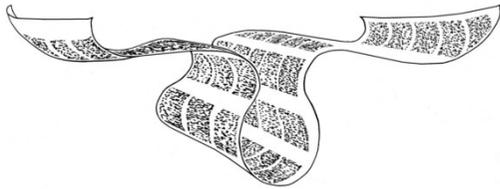


“FAREWELL TO SIN” (Zechariah 5:1-11)

Zechariah now will see a 6th and 7th vision from the Lord for His people in this chapter. It will involve some very strange symbolism – a flying scroll and a woman in a basket. These two visions and the 8th one deal more with God’s judgment against sin. The remnant of the Jews in Jerusalem had arisen out of their apathy, fears, and discouragement to rebuild the temple. But some had started to believe that because they were doing a “good work” that God would overlook their sin. Israel had been promised that the Messiah would save them from their enemies, forgive their sins, and restore them to the centre of the earth. The matter of their sins must be dealt with. These two visions provide part of the answer as to how that will be.



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. (v1-2)

Zechariah sees a huge scroll flying through the air. This airborne projectile is very large, “the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits.” This is around 30 feet by 15 feet in size (4.5 meters by 9 meters). It has writing on both sides of it.

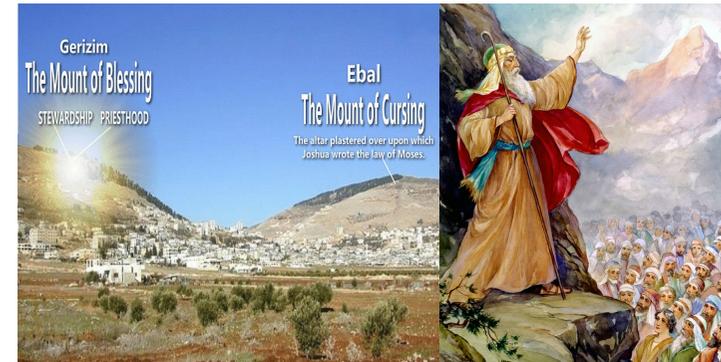
Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it. I will bring it forth, saith the LORD of hosts, and it 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. (v3-4)

The angel provides an explanation of the meaning of the symbol, “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 scroll is easy to identify. It is the Word of God (cf. Ezek. 2:9; 3:1-4). The passage contains part of the Ten Commandments, which is a summary of God’s moral law. Now the law has no power to save a person. But it is revealed to convict us of our sins and to drive us to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation,

“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:19-20)

The Law silences all objections and shows every man as, “guilty before God.” There are no exceptions. The evidence is overwhelming. God has spoken! The verb “*saihi*” is in the present tense to indicate that the Law is continually crying out in judgment upon all men. Let every man be silent and be humbled by the verdict. Every Jew is rendered speechless! Every Gentile is rendered speechless! Every person is rendered speechless! All the world is guilty as charged.

The portion of the scroll identified has a curse for breaking God’s law. Israel is being reminded that there is judgment for those who defy God. There is nothing new in this revelation, “*Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them.*” (Deut. 27:26; cf. Gal. 3:10-12) Joshua had taught them this same truth by way of an object lesson before they entered the Promised Land at Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal in Joshua 8:30-35.



Now on one side of the scroll contains God’s commandment against theft, “for every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it” and on the other side is God’s commandment against using God’s name in vain, “and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it.” These are likely selected because they represent man’s relationship to God, “every one that sweareth” (which are primarily dealt with in the first 4 commandments) and a man’s relationship to his fellowman, “for every one that stealeth” (which are primarily dealt with in the last 6 commandments). The Lord Jesus Christ revealed that these two key duties summed up the law of God,

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:37-39)

The Scriptures make clear that to break one part of His law results in all of it to be transgressed, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” (James 2:10)

The Lord reveals repeatedly that no one will escape His judgment, “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.” He promises that he will come after every lawbreaker. Even in their homes they

will not be safe. For His judgment will consume everything that they are hiding behind even solid wood and stone walls. God is a “*consuming fire*” (Hebrews 12:29)

Sin is never a private matter. God will reveal all things. The Bible declares that God will one day judge the secret life of every heart and “*bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts*” (1 Cor. 4:15; Romans 2:16; Eccl. 12:14) The Lord Jesus warned, “*For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.*” (Luke 12:2-3) The message has the same application to us today. The Lord hates the breaking of His law. He will track every sinner down. Nothing will stand in His way.



Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what is this that goeth forth. And I said, What is it? And he said, This is an ephah that goeth forth. He said moreover, This is their resemblance through all the earth. (v5-6)

Another vision then appears to Zechariah. This vision is more difficult to interpret and many are divided over it. There is an ephah that first is noted. An ephah is the largest Hebrew dry container like a giant basket or jar. It has a standard measure equivalent to about 8-10 gallons that was used to measure crops or oil. The Apostle Paul was let down the city wall in one in Acts 9:25.

This measurement seems to be a symbol of the amount of wickedness in the land, “*This is their resemblance through all the earth.*” The ephah and the lead weight were units of measurement and symbols of commerce. They are images of greed, materialism, and dishonesty for profit. One of the great sins of the Jews was materialism. The vast majority of those in the Exile refused to return from Babylon. They were too comfortable materially and felt secure there. Only a tiny remnant of around 50,000 returned.

In the end times the sin of materialism will be very prevalent. There is a hint here in Zechariah’s vision that this has wider application to a world-wide economic movement, “*through all the earth.*” Revelation 18 speaks of such a movement of powerful economic interests and relationships under the headship of “Babylon the Great.” We are told that this city “*is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.*” (Rev. 18:2) But the city has cast its tentacles throughout the world, “*For all nations have drunk of the wine of the*

wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.” (Rev. 18:3)

Large corporations are arising throughout this world today. These are using their economic power and influence to forward all kinds of unbiblical agendas. Leading the way are the Western Corporate powers. James warns in his epistle that God’s judgment will eventually fall on these corrupt materialistic individuals,

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. (James 5:1-3)

The Bible talks much about our money. It is said that there are around 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions. The reason that God puts such an emphasis on our attitude to our possessions is that they reveal our heart, “*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*” (Matt. 6:21). God’s delayed judgment is not God’s judgment denied. For even if you hoard it in the bank, you can’t take it with you. We will definitely lose all in death. The Apostle Paul told Timothy, “*for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out*” (1 Tim. 6:7).

God had an exact measure for sin and sinners. Once that limit is reached, the Lord’s patience and forbearance will end. The Lord has patiently waited on Israel to fill up the measure of their iniquity. The same will be true of the kingdom of the Antichrist in the future. For many years the Antichrist’s Empire will seem invincible. It will rapidly take over the whole world religiously and economically. All the rulers of the earth will bow the knee in submission. The merchants of the business world will be subservient to it also. But the party will be over when God decides to judge it when the cup of iniquity is full and overflowing, “*For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.*” (Rev. 18:5) John MacArthur observes of the connection to Zechariah’s vision,

“And so, what he looks here and sees is, he sees an ephah filled up. And what he’s seeing is that 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 – 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, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this is a woman that sitteth 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 thereof. (v7-8)

Then in the midst of the ephah container Zechariah sees a woman sitting in the middle of it. He was told, *“And he said, This is wickedness.”* Who is this woman and what does she represent? We know that a woman is used to represent false religion as pictured by the great whore of Revelation 17 and 18. So the ephah seems to represent the spirit of materialism and the woman likely represents false religion.



The woman sits in the ephah in contact with it. Likewise, the end times will see false religion and materialism working hand in hand to control the world. It seems the woman attempted to get out but the angel cast a lead weight to force her to stay inside. The lead weight is a cover for the ephah container. The sin cannot escape because God will deal with every aspect of it.

Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, 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 they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven. Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah? (v9-10)

The Lord then sent two women to deal with this problem. Many debate over whether these two women are godly or ungodly because the stork is an unclean bird. MacArthur observes,

“.....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 – 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 that in the final end of everything, evil spirits will set up the final kingdom of evil. So I think you got a couple of demons. They grab the basket, 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.”

Notwithstanding, these two women are subject to the sovereign will of God and accomplish His purpose. Zechariah wonders where these two winged women are going to take this ephah, *“Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah?”*

And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base. (v11)

Zechariah receives his answer as to the destination of the ephah and the woman, *“And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar.”* The land of Shinar is first mentioned in Genesis 10:10. It was the place that Nimrod, whose erected the first kingdom with its capital city in a place called Babel or Babylon. Hence, the city of Babylon has a dark history in the Bible. Babel or Babylon is the symbolic fountainhead of sin. Babylon became infamous for their rebellion against God, their cruel oppression of God’s people, their idolatry, and their pride. The rebellious character of this man undoubtedly impressed itself upon the city. Throughout Scripture, Babel or Babylon is synonymous with such values (cf. Dan. 4:30; Rev. 17:15).

In the end times, Babylon and Shinar re-emerge as a city and the representative of a system of sin that caters to the appetites of sinful men and women. Ancient Babylon was a city of pride, immorality, corruption, wealth, and idolatry. It was man’s attempt to live independently of God in his own Empire. In Revelation 18 we are told the future Babylon will be puffed up with pride concerning its wealth and influence, *“How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.”* But it will be destroyed by God in a final judgment. Cole notes,

“Zechariah doesn’t deliver the punch line until his final vision in chapter 6, which unfolds God’s judgment on this evil world and the crowning of Messiah. As Revelation 18 emphasizes, Babylon will fall in one day and in one hour (Rev. 18:8, 10, 17, 19). So the enthronement and triumph of wickedness in Shinar is only temporary and illusory. God is in control all along, and at the predetermined moment, Jesus will return in victory. Babylon the Great will fall, never to rise again.”

We know that when Christ returns the Jews will fully repent and turn from their sins. Their sins will be dealt with in a great revival in a moment of time, *“and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.”* (Zech. 3:9; 12:10) Therefore, this sin is to be forsaken and returned to Babylon, where it will be fully judged (see Revelation 17, 18). The word for *“base”* has the idea of a pedestal for an idol. Babylon is the place to display sin – not Jerusalem. The ephah must be sealed so that none leaks out among God’s people! Jerusalem must be purged so that God can dwell in the midst of His redeemed people. The Holy Land must become Holy! Steve Cole gives this application,

“Trust God who is sovereign even over evil and who will triumph mightily in the end. Both Zechariah and Revelation show that even though it appears that evil is unrestrained and that evil men go unjudged, it is not so. Judgment delayed does not mean that judgment has been cancelled! God’s Word has given us a clear view of the end times, when wicked Babylon will seemingly be succeeding in defiance of God. Don’t be tempted to join her, because her success is only temporary. Jesus Christ will return in power and glory, Babylon will fall, and all evildoers will be judged.”