

Zechariah Chapter Five

The remaining night visions of Zechariah 5 and 6 are of an altogether different character to those before them. So far, they have depicted God's grace – His *presence, power, protection* and *pardon* in relation to His people. But now God acts in judgment. Before the blessing of millennial day can dawn, He must deal with unrepentant sinners in Israel. *Romans 11.22: Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God.* The sixth vision deals with the *sins* of individuals, followed by an unveiling of the root cause of the nation's *iniquity* in the seventh vision. Again, the visions have a present *and* future application. God is warning the returning remnant that He will not tolerate sin amongst His people. This foreshadows the purging of all sin and iniquity from the nation (and indeed the world) before the glorious day of the millennium (Matthew 13.41). God has *two* ways of dealing with sin, both of which are in perfect accord with the holiness of His character. He delights in the method of *grace* (cf. Zechariah 3), but for those who persist in wickedness and despise His grace, the method is that of *judgment* (David Baron).

Vision Six: The Flying Scroll (5.1-4) Divine Precepts

v.1: Again, Zechariah lifts up his eyes to see a 'flying (airborne or floating) scroll'. The scroll (either papyrus or leather) was clearly unrolled, as it could be measured (v.2), and contained writing on both sides (v.3, cf. Exodus 32.15). **v.2:** The scroll was unusually large, like a long banner, measuring 20 cubits (9m or 30ft) in *length* and 10 cubits (4.5m or 15ft) in *width*. The scroll represents the word (or law) of God as embodied in two commandments (v.4). The measurements of the scroll are exactly the same as the holy place in the tabernacle (Exodus 26.15-25) and porch of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6.3). This suggests that the curse upon the scroll is exactly according to the holy standard of the One who dwells therein. God was weighing the actions of His people according to His law (Daniel 5.27). We are reminded that sin is not judged according to the standards of men, but the righteousness (and truth) of God (1 Samuel 2.3; Romans 2.2).

Note *three* characteristics of the scroll.

- It was flying. This suggests the *swiftness* and *imminence* of God's judgment upon the transgressors as well as the *active power* and energy of the word of God (Hebrews 4.12).
- It was unrolled. There is no deceit in the word of God. All is open to be read and understood. Often what is evil is tinged with secrecy and disguise (Matthew 13.3). When Paul preached the gospel, there was nothing of deceit or craft in his methods or message (1 Thessalonians 2.3).
- The size of the scroll meant that *all* could see and read what was contained therein. No-one could be excused for ignorance. Its size could also suggest the large number and great magnitude of the sins of Israel.

v.3: The law promised *blessing* for obedience and *cursing* for disobedience (Deuteronomy 28). Thus, the scroll contained 'the curse' – God's judgment (retribution) upon every law-breaker. The curse went out over the 'face of the whole earth'. The word for 'earth' is more often translated 'land' and is probably a reference to Palestine (cp. v.11). But, prophetically, God's judgment will go forth throughout the whole world condemning not just Israel *under* the law, but Gentiles which shew the *work* of the law written in their hearts (Romans 2.14-15). *Two* specific sins are identified – 'stealing' and 'swearing' (lying under oath, false testimony). These sins represent the whole law; stealing is the central command of the *second* table (Exodus 20.15; cf. Malachi 3.8); swearing falsely by God's name (v.4) breaks the central command of the *first* table (Exodus 20.7). The definite article suggests these are not occasional offences but individuals who are characterised habitually by these actions. These two sins were particularly significant in Zechariah's day. Individuals would have pledged donations to support the building of the temple. Often, such donations were accompanied by formal oaths which '*transformed the pledged gifts into divine property. Anyone who had pledged gifts to the temple initially but then reneged on their pledges would be guilty first of swearing falsely and then of theft, for they continued to possess that which now technically belonged to deity*' (Craig Keener). Haggai 1.4; Malachi 3.8-10. It is a serious matter to rob God. Such individuals would be 'cut off' or 'cleansed away' as something defiled and defiling.

v.4: The curse entered the houses of the guilty and 'remained' or 'spent the night'. The judgment would accomplish that for which it was sent. There was no place to hide. The house (including its timber and stones) was destroyed, symbolising complete judgment including even the possessions of the individual concerned. It is almost as if their sins had penetrated the very fabric of their dwelling (cp. Leviticus 14.45), contaminating even the house in which they lived. The message for those of Zechariah's day was simply that the people could not expect to rebuild the temple and continue in covenant relationship with God if they tolerated such sin in their midst. This would bring down God's curse upon them. True *worship* must be accompanied by a righteous *walk*. Prophetically, we are reminded of another scroll which will unseal its judgments upon a rebellious world (Revelation 5.1-9; 10.1-11). These judgments will purge the world in preparation for the millennial dawn (13.2-3, 8-9; Matthew 13.41).

Vision Seven: The Woman in a Basket (5.5-11) Divine Prophecy

v.5: Again, Zechariah is told by the interpreting angel to lift up his eyes to see another closely connected vision. Note. Some commentators see one single vision in Zechariah 5, vv.5-11 forming the *second* part. This vision unveils the root cause of the nation's *iniquity*. **v.6:** Zechariah sees an 'ephah' container that typically held flour or grain. An ephah was a large, standard measure (22 litres, dry weight); the equivalent of what Ruth collected in the barley fields of Boaz (Ruth 2.17). A tenth of an ephah of fine flour (omer) was required for a sin offering (Leviticus 5.11), and a tenth of an ephah of manna was collected to be kept before the ark of the covenant (Exodus 16.36). The ephah is said to be 'their resemblance' (visual appearance *or* form). The ephah thus appears to represent the iniquity (as translated in LXX) of the Jewish nation, characterised by the sinners identified in the earlier vision. Both the *ephah* and *talent* of lead (v.7) are symbols of trade and commercialism. The remnant had recently returned from Babylon, a captivity which had cured them of idolatry. Sadly, they had been long enough in exile to become infected with the spirit of materialism and greed (cf. Nehemiah 5; Malachi 3.8-9). They had been an agricultural (pastoral) people, but many Jews born in Babylon became merchants and successful businessmen. The ephah is spoken of as 'going forth' suggesting an invasive influence. This new breed of merchantmen were particularly marked by theft and lies (Amos 8.4-6). The fact the ephah was a known measure may signify a limit to which God would allow iniquity in the land to reach before judgment came (cf. Genesis 15.16; 1 Thessalonians 2.16).



v.7: A woman is revealed sitting in the basket, made visible by the lifting of a lead cover one *talent* in weight (30kg). She is said to be the personification of 'wickedness' (**v.8**). In scripture, a woman is often used as a symbol of corrupting influence (cf. Matthew 13.33; Revelation 2.20). She represents the worldwide commercial empire of the end times, centred in Babylon (Revelation 18). Israel had imbibed her spirit. Sitting 'in the midst' of the ephah suggests rest and contentment; she is apparently enjoying the luxury and wealth her position affords her. The talent of lead upon the ephah suggests the woman is being contained. Perhaps this represents the restraining hand of God which will be removed during the tribulation allowing full expression of her iniquity (cp. 2 Thessalonians 2.7).

v.9: The closing verses appear to show the full development in the end times of this wicked system of idolatrous commercialism. The two women with 'wings like the wings of a stork' possibly represent corrupt *ecclesiastical* (Revelation 17) and *civil* authority (Revelation 18), the exact antithesis of Joshua and Zerubbabel. Both religion and politics will encourage and support her rule. They have 'wind in their wings' picturing demonic forces (the 'stork' was an unclean bird, Leviticus 11.19) carrying her to the land of Shinar in order that she might be revealed in her true character (Revelation 18.2). **v.10:** Zechariah questions the destination of the ephah and is told of its final rest in the 'land of Shinar' (**v.11**). 'Shinar' is the ancient name for the Mesopotamian plain which included the city of Babel (cf. Genesis 10.10; 11.2). There she was built a 'house' (occasionally translated 'temple') which signifies a dwelling place of deity, or place of worship. The woman was set 'upon her own base' (pedestal), as an object of worship. This commercial empire centred in Babylon will ultimately be destroyed by God (Isaiah 13.19; Revelation 18.8). Prophetically, the picture is of the removal of the great sin of materialism, greed and self-worship from God's land and God's people. Not until this evil system is removed will Palestine become the 'holy land' (2.12; 13.2).

Note on Materialism (The Spirit of Babylon)

The world revolves around money. Society is obsessed and motivated by it. It is the constant and relentless pursuit of 'stuff' – a bigger house, better car and more luxurious living standards. The satanic purpose is to submerge humanity in the relentless pursuit of riches and materialism so mankind lives for time and self, thus forgetting God. That was the purpose of Babel of old with its blatant disregard for the sanctity of life and marriage, a city characterised by music and industry (Genesis 4.17-24).

Believers must not imbibe the spirit of Babylon. It is a spirit that seeks *earth* not heaven, its motto is *success* not holiness, and emphasises the *social* over the spiritual. Have we by God's help overcome the snare of materialism? The Bible is really the tale of two cities – Babylon and the New Jerusalem. Which city are we building for? *Babylon the great is fallen! She is no more!*

Revelation 18.4: Come out of her, my people, That ye be not partakers of her sins... No believer can serve both God and mammon. We should be marked by godly contentment and seek **all** satisfaction in Christ. Philippians 4.11; 1 Timothy 6.6-11; Hebrews 13.5.

Some notes adapted from John J Stubbs (What the Bible Teaches)