

Zechariah

Chapter 5

VIII. Some Background Discussion

At this point, we have looked at five of the eight visions that Zechariah had regarding the future of Israel and Jerusalem. The first five visions dealt with the subject of restoration and glorification. The final three deal with the theme of judgment.

Before we look at these final three visions, we need to ask ourselves the question "What is the time period that these visions refer to?". The answer to this question will determine the interpretation we give to each of these visions.

The first possible answer is that the time period in view here is the immediate future. Note the following arguments for or against this:

1. All of the visions to this point refer to a distant future when God's promises to Israel will be fully realized. The restoration of Jerusalem and Israel as the habitation of God was not fulfilled in Zechariah's time but will be fulfilled during the Millennium.
2. Historically, the events described by these visions did not come to pass. Although they were fulfilled in a small sense, their final fulfillment is yet future.

The second possibility is that the time in view here is immediately prior to the establishment of the eternal state. However:

1. Israel did not understand the concept of the eternal state. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel was promised earthly blessing, not heavenly. The concept of the eternal state was not revealed by God until the New Testament.
2. This interpretation would not fit with the second judgment vision, the Woman in the Ephah. In that vision, we note that the establishment of wickedness was future. With the start of the eternal state, there will be no possibility of evil outside of the lake of fire.

The third, and I believe best, possibility is that the time spoken of in these visions is the period just prior to the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom. Furthermore, although the primary time period may be thought of as the Millennium, there is an element of time that precedes the establishment of the Kingdom as put forth in the first and second visions. (We will examine this later) Note the following points in support of this:

1. This view fits in with the fact that prior to the start of the Millennium, sinners will be dealt with in finality. In other words, no sinner will be allowed to enter the Kingdom. This squares with the first judgment vision.
2. This view fits in with the fact that throughout the Bible, Babylon is seen as the system of false religion energized by Satan, and as such it will be dealt with by God. In Revelation 17 and 18, we see this destruction of the Mystery Babylon immediately preceding the establishment of the Millennium.

3. This view fits in with the statement in Zechariah 5:11 in which Zechariah was told that the false system of religion would be established in Shinar. The tense is future and would indicate the fact that some time must elapse between Zechariah and the fulfillment of this vision. (The judgment on this system of religion is seen in Zechariah 6, the establishment is seen in Zechariah 5:5-11)
4. This view fits in with the vision of judgment in the third judgment vision, the Four Chariots. What we actually see in this vision is the judgment of God on Israel's enemies coupled with the continuing vigilance of his instruments of judgment. We know that during the Millennium no religious apostasy will be allowed by God. (We will see this as we analyze this vision in a later chapter).

As a result, we will interpret these visions with the view that the time being described is in a primary sense the time immediately preceding and including the Millennium, and in a secondary sense the preceding period of time from Zechariah to the Millennium.

IX. Vision 6: The Flying Scroll - Zechariah 5:1-4

5:1 Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll. 5:2 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. 5:3 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. 5:4 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.

Zechariah 5:1-2

The subject of this vision is given as being a flying scroll. The figure of a scroll would be well known to Zechariah in the same manner a book would be known to us.

We are given further details regarding this scroll in verse two. There we are told that the length of the scroll was 20 cubits (about 30 feet), and the width was 10 cubits (about 15 feet). Interestingly enough, this is the exact measure of the holy place in the tabernacle (See Exodus 26).

That the dimensions of this scroll are the same as that of the holy place in the tabernacle no doubt has its significance in the concept of the divine standard. What we can see here is the fact that man is judged, not by his standard, but by the divine standard of God.

Zechariah 5:3-4

The significance of this flying scroll is now given by the interpreting angel. It is the "curse" that goes forth over the whole land. This curse is further explained as referring to thieves and liars. At first this appears a bit confusing, but the meaning can be easily seen by examining the following points:

1. The curse must refer to the fact that the law "curses" those who live by it. This is the problem faced by the Pharisees of Christ's day. They thought

that the law could be used as a path to salvation when in fact, it is a path to hell. Paul uses the concept of a curse in Galatians 3:10 where he quotes Deuteronomy 27:26. Paul's point is that the law does not have the power of salvation, only the power of condemnation.

2. The phrase "the whole land" is a source of debate among Bible scholars. Some say that only the nation of Israel is in reference here since it was to Israel that the law was given. Others say that it refers to the whole world. I lean towards the latter view although the former certainly is true. The reason for this is that the law is the source of cursing to the entire human race, not just the Jews. The law is a codification of the divine standard, a standard that will be used to judge every man (Romans 2:6-16).
3. The condemnation of thieves and liars would refer to the breaking of the third and seventh commandment. These commandments were the middle commandment of each half of the decalogue and as such can be seen as representatives of the whole law. Note that the commandment regarding stealing was on one side of the scroll, and the commandment regarding lying was on the other.

As a result, we can conclude that the flying scroll is a symbol of the curse of God on anyone who violates one of the laws of God. In this example, stealing and lying are mere representatives of the entire law.

Verse four is one of the most descriptive passages regarding the destructiveness of sin in the scriptures. The curse of God will enter into a man's house, literally day and night, until that house is consumed in judgment. We need to realize that sin is a hideous thing to deal with. It cost God his own Son, and it will cost the lost an eternity in hell.

In summary, then, we see that this vision portrays the judgment of God on the sinner as an individual. More specifically, it is looking forward to that future day in which the sinner will be removed from Israel. This removal is necessary if the promises of Millennial blessing are to be fulfilled. More will be said on this when we look at Zechariah 13:1-9.

X. Vision 7: The Woman in the Ephah - Zechariah 5:5-11

5:5 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. 5:6 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. 5:7 And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this [is] a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah. 5:8 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. 5:9 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. 5:10 Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah? 5:11 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.

This is the second vision regarding judgment of three. In the first judgment vision, we see the judgment on the sinner. In this vision, we will see the judgment on the system. The

last judgment vision gives us a picture of the judgment on the nations who oppose God's people and God's purpose.

Zechariah 5:5

As is characteristic of each vision so far, Zechariah is prompted by the interpreter angel to look at the subject of this vision. No doubt, this is a divine tool used to set the background of each of these visions for those who would be reading Zechariah's account.

Zechariah 5:6-8

Three elements of this vision are described in these three verses. The elements, and their interpretation, follow.

The first element is an ephah. An ephah was the largest commercial measure used by Israel at that time. It is somewhat like our bushel. In actuality, the volume of 1 ephah is equivalent to a little over 8 gallons. In verse 6 we are told by the interpreter angel that the ephah is "their resemblance". The word translated "resemblance" is *aynahm* and means "outward appearance". Since the ephah was a commercial measure, there is almost universal agreement that the ephah represents commerce. Furthermore, the use of the word *aynahm* indicates that the system in view here is a commercial system. In other words, the characteristic of the system of evil described in this vision is best seen as commercialism.

The second element is a woman who sits in the midst of the ephah. This element is not too hard to interpret since a woman is used throughout the Bible to refer to religious apostasy. A cursory reading of the Old Testament will show that Israel is identified as a harlot because of her idolatry over and over again. In Revelation 17 and 18, the final form of religion is seen as a scarlet clothed woman riding on the back of a beast. Therefore, the woman in this vision refers to religious apostasy and the fact that she is seen in the midst of the ephah denotes her close connection with commercialism.

The third element is a talent, or literally, a "round" of lead which serves as a "cork" for the ephah. In verse 8 we find the woman being "cast" into the ephah and the lead "cork" put on. In fact, the wording of verse 7 indicates that the ephah was "uncorked" for Zechariah so that he could see the contents of this ephah.

The interpretation of the vision so far is made significantly easier by comparing this vision with Revelation 17 and 18. There we find that the final form of world religion is seen by God as a scarlet clothed woman riding on the back of the kings of the earth. Furthermore, she is seen with a cup in her hand full of abominations and as being drunk with the blood of the saints. It is therefore no great leap of logic to see that this seventh vision is a picture of the final form of apostate religion. Also, note that when this apostate religion is destroyed in Revelation 17 and 18, all of the people of the earth will mourn because of the commercial ramifications of its destruction. It is very important to note that God has revealed in two separate accounts, here and Revelation, that the final apostate religion of the world will be closely coupled with commercialism. In fact, many Bible expositors make the connection between the apostate religion of the last days and commercialism so strong that the major characteristic of this religion is materialism. One look around us today is enough to convince anyone of the possibility, if not certainty, of this interpretation.

Zechariah 5:9-11

The identification of the woman in the ephah and religious apostasy, which we have taken as granted above, is made clear in these three verses.

In verse nine we find that the ephah is taken by two women who appear as birds. These two women are seen by many as referring to demons. The reasons for this are 1) the use of woman indicates religious evil (angels are universally seen in the male form throughout the Bible), 2) they had wings like storks, an unclean bird, and 3) they participate in the establishment of this system, an activity that no holy angel would participate in.

Understandably, Zechariah's burning question would be "Where are they taking the ephah?". The interpreter angel's answer that they are taking the ephah to Shinar is proof that the woman in the ephah denotes apostate religion and commercialism. Note the following points on this:

1. In Genesis 11:1-9 we find the account of the Tower of Babel. In that account, we find that men decided to go to the plains of Shinar to build a city and a tower (literally ziggurat) so that they could make a name for themselves. In other words, instead of obeying the command of God to replenish the earth, they wanted to stay around each other and build a comfortable life.
2. Because of their disobedience, God confounded their language so that they could not communicate with one another. Because of this, they were scattered over the whole world.
3. If one studies the culture of these people, one will find that their religion was an apostate form of self-salvation linked to a mother-child myth. Space does not permit details to be given at this point, but a reading of the book *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop will present a thorough characterization of this religion.
4. All of the above is given to show that when the people were scattered from Babel, they took with themselves this apostate religion. That is why a study of world religions will show common threads between Baal worship by the Phoenicians and Osiris worship by the Egyptians. Because of this, Babylon is seen as the source of apostate world religions.
5. By comparing this passage with Revelation 17 and 18, the identification of Shinar with Babylon is made clear. Both the Tower of Babel, and Babylon are in the plains of Shinar. Thus, we see that the final form of apostate religion is seen as a culmination of the false religion of the people of the Tower of Babel.
6. A further proof of this identification can be seen by comparing the desire of the people to make a name for themselves in Genesis 11:4, and the commercialism which is characteristic of the false religion described in Revelation 17 and 18. In both cases we see a system of religion and commercialism which has at its core self indulgence and a spirit of rebellion against God.

In summary then, we see that this vision describes the final form of false religion which has as its main characteristic rampant materialism. When compared with Revelation 17 and 18, this vision is seen to describe the time immediately preceding the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom. Furthermore, although we do not see the destruction of the system in this vision, we can assume that it is destroyed in the time of judgment described in the last vision of Zechariah.