

THE WOMAN IN A BASKET

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This, the sixth vision of Zechariah, deals with the fall of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 (Zech. 5:1-4); and, then, ultimately the fall of apostate Christianity, the harlot woman, at the end of time.

“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. 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.” Zech. 5:1-3.

The “flying roll/scroll” is identified as “the curse” (vs. 3). “The curse” is “the book of the covenant.” In 2 Chron. 34:24 we read: “Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book. . . .” This book is then identified in 2 Chron. 34:30 as “all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord.” The covenant stands written with blessings and curses (Deut. 8:1-68; 29:16-28). Israel was told “It shall come to pass, if you do not obey [listen] Yahweh your God, . . . that all these curses will come upon you. . . . They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed” (Deut. 28:15, 45). Their would be siege and destruction of their dwellings in the holy land and banishment to an alien land. “Yahweh will bring a nation against you from afar . . . swooping down like an eagle” (Deut. 28:49). “You will be plucked off the land . . . and Yahweh will scatter you among all peoples” (Deut. 28:63, 64).

By Zechariah’s day the exile had befallen Israel from which they had recently been restored from Babylonian captivity. Now they are being warned of a future curse that will descend upon and unbelieving Israel. Their houses will be consumed (Zech. 5:1-4) and they would be removed to Shinar (Zech. 5:5-11).

“I will bring it [the curse scroll] forth, saith Yahweh of hosts” (Zech. 5:4). The God of Israel’s covenant would bring the fierce foreign nation against His hardened people.

This was an unusually large flying scroll. Its dimensions were twenty cubits long and ten cubits wide. A scroll was normally a foot wide and it could be any number of cubits long as it was kept in a roll when

read. These dimensions of the covenant scroll point us in the direction from which they proceed, and that is, the most holy place of the sanctuary. The covenant was kept in the ark of the covenant. This is where God's judicial process took place.

The cherubim covering the ark stood ten cubits high and their outer wing tips spanned ten cubits, touching the walls of the compartment. So with the two cherubim's wings outstretched to the opposing walls the distance was twenty cubits. See 1 Kings 6:23-27).

God's judgment is administered "according to it" "according to it" (Zech. 5:3). The covenant has recorded in it the blessings and the curses. To unfaithful Israel the judgments will be executed by divine justice.

The flying scroll represents the Lord sending forth His heavenly agents on their winged mission as executors of His judgment. The coming of the agents of Yahweh's judge is "as the eagle flies" (Deut 28:49). God rides upon the chariot clouds of His angels in order to bring forth His judgments upon the unbelieving, hardened part of Israel. Just who are these?

They are God's professed covenant people. "The whole earth" (Zech. 5:3, 6) is a reference to Canaan dwellers, who are to be removed to another land, "the land of Shinar [Babylon]" (Zech. 5:11). That they are swearing falsely by the name of Yahweh (Zech. 5:3, 4), implies that the offenders have been avowed subjects of Yahweh.

These are perjurers and thieves (Zech. 5:3, 4). They embezzle from their neighbors and swear by God's name that they are innocent. Their sins embrace the eighth commandment which deals with stealing and the second commandment which deals with taking the name of the Lord in vain.

A new covenant perspective of the ten commandments is that they are God's ten promises which are received by faith. God promises the believer that His love will transform the heart and mind to the degree that he will not desire to steal from his neighbor. The Spirit teaches us to say, No! to ungodliness. Obviously, those spoken of in this prophecy have not learned to believe God's covenant promises in the ten commandments. They are lifting property that belongs to others and professing innocence in the name of God. This is practiced to such a degree that their whole livelihood is dependent upon it. Their commercial dealings, their whole economic way of life, is bound up with their religious worship. These are not so-called pagan idol worshipers, but professing Christians who worship before

the true God. These are worshipers of Mammon. They have amassed their fortunes and properties off their greed for money. Now God manifests the secret practices that are done in His house of worship and His judgment brings to the light of day that which is done in secret. God brings forth the covenant scroll of judgment in order to excise them from the land.

The first stage of exile will be siege and destruction in A. D. 70. The words “cut off” repeated twice in Zech. 5:3 mean “be made desolate, empty” (Isa. 3:26); “to clear away, purge” (Joel 4:19, 21). The clearing away means the demolition of the apostates’ houses (Zech. 5:4). The covenant breakers will discover that the fiery doom of the curse will “consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof” (Zech. 5:4.). They have put all their money into wood and stone in their houses. Their houses were temples of Mammon. Just as surely as wood and stone are made into idols by the heathen; so also have these people of God idolized acquisitions turned into wood and stone.

Restored from the Babylonian exile Israel is forewarned of a future cutting off. Israel was elected by God as His typical kingdom on earth into which all nations of the earth were to be gathered in preparation for the eternal inheritance of the earth made new in righteousness. But their election could be forfeited beyond recovery. This fate foretold in Zechariah 5 overtook them in 70 A. D., as announced by Jesus: “Your house is left unto you desolate” (Matt. 23:38).

The Deuteronomic covenant sanctions foretold a day when it would be said of Israel that “because they forsook the covenant . . . the anger of Yahweh was kindled against this land to bring upon it all the curse that is written in this book; and Yahweh rooted them out of their land . . . and cast them into another land” (Deut. 29:25-28; cf. 28:63). Zech. 5:5-11 portrays a final carrying away of Israel into exile as the transporting of a woman, Wickedness, in an ephah-container borne by two stork-winged women to the land of Shinar.

“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.” This ephah is a bushel basket used for holding grain. And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah.” Zech. 5:5-7.

The “talent of lead” is a stone (vs. 8) lid weighing seventy-five pounds. These standardized weights and measures represent God’s

holy standards of covenant life, also symbolized by the twenty-by-ten-cubit flying scroll. There were laws concerning just weights and measures (Lev. 19:36; Deut. 25:15) and “divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the LORD” (Prov. 20:10). Such abuse of ephah and talent, sins of market place traffic, is thievery and perjury (falsification of the standards and vain exploitation of the name of God).

The price of gasoline today is such that every drop costs money and the consumer wants just weights and measures at the pump. There is a government seal on each dispenser indicating that it is certified by the state agency so that fraud at the pump is precluded. Likewise, God wished for His people to deal honestly in their commercial transactions.

“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.” Zech. 5:8.

The angel prepares Zechariah for the emerging of the woman with the announcement: “This is their appearance in all the land” (v. 6b). To reveal the woman sitting within, the lead cover of the ephah had to be momentarily lifted, and afterwards it was slammed down again. The role of the lead-talent was to ensure that the captive within could not escape; it made the ephah a prison. The heaviness of lead would suit it to that function.

Israel, unfaithful to her marriage covenant with Yahweh, is often portrayed as a harlot, an unfaithful woman who forsakes the Lord God and commits whoredom with her idol-lovers (e.g. Hosea 1-3; Jer. 2; 3; Ezek. 16; 23). As taken up into the symbolic fabric of the Book of Revelation, the woman of Zechariah 5 is the great harlot, unfaithful to the Lamb and prostituting herself to the Beast and the world.

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The idolatrous, spiritually adulterous nature of the objects of God's anathema is intimated by the symbolic figure of the woman. Israel, unfaithful to her marriage covenant with Yahweh, is often portrayed as a harlot, an unfaithful woman who forsakes the Lord God and commits whoredom with her idol-lovers (e.g. Hosea 1-3; Jer. 2; 3; Ezek. 16; 23). The woman's name, "Wickedness" also indicates harlotry, the harlotry of apostasy from the covenant Lord.

It was because of the sins associated with the ephah and talent that the apostates were under the curse of the covenant. That idea is conveyed in the symbolism of Zech. 5:5ff, by having the talent-covered ephah function as God's instrument of judgment, carrying off the guilty into exile (cf. Prov. 13:6). The woman "Wickedness," symbol of the accursed deportees, is confined within the ephah.

"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." Zech. 5:9. This is a vision of the two stork-winged women who lift the ephah into the air and fly it away to Shinar [Babylon]. The stork as an unclean bird (Lev. 11:19), are the agents used by the Judge of Israel to remove the defilement from His holy land to unclean Babylon, habitation of demons and a hold of every unclean spirit and unclean bird (Rev. 18:2). His use of these evil beings as instruments of his wrath against the apostates here is like his employing of the ungodly Assyrians and Babylonians to take rebellious Israel into exile. The choice of female figures to depict the unclean agents might be by attraction to the symbolism of the woman "Wickedness."

"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." Zech. 5:10-11.

Shinar, the exile destination of the captive woman, Wickedness (Zech. 5:11), was the site of postdiluvian humanity's ancient challenge against the Lord of Har-Magedon (Gen. 11:2; cf. 10:10; 14:1, 9). The Babel project stands in Scripture as the representative attempt of an idolatrous world in revolt to exalt itself to heaven by its own strength for its own glory. It was a repudiation of the redemptive grace of God that had been manifested in his ark-covenant with Noah

(Gen. 6:18) and it serves in the Genesis record as a foil for the immediately following narrative of the covenant of promise given to Abraham (Genesis 12ff.) Babel in the land of Shinar is the great apostasy. In the final days of Judah and its monarchy Nebuchadnezzar revived the ancient apostate ideology there in Babylon, the world city. It was to the land of Shinar that he carried the captives of Judah, along with the vessels of the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, which he placed in the house of his god there (Dan. 1:2). That is the pattern reproduced in the visionary deportation of the woman in the ephah to the land of Shinar. For the harlot Wickedness to be reestablished in this Shinar location is to be absorbed back into the apostate, idol-worshipping world (cf. Deut. 28:36) from which Israel had been separated by national election and redemption.

Construction of a house for the apostates in Shinar at the close of the vision (v. 11) balances the destruction of their houses in Canaan in the first part of the vision. The houses destroyed by the curse-scroll had been virtual temples of Mammon, and in the account of the house prepared for the ephah in Shinar the Hebrew *bayit* is evidently used in the sense of “house of a god, temple.” The god to be enshrined here is the same—Mammon, the idolized treasures of this world represented by the ephah with the talent cover. Indicative of the cultic character of this house is the setting of the ephah on its “base” (*mekunah*). Such bases were features of temples in the historical background of Zechariah’s visions.

The woman in the ephah is “established” in Babylon. She is enthroned in the “resting place.” She would “sit a queen” (Rev. 18:7) over the great city Babylon.

So here are a people from Israel who have revolted against God’s covenant and they are given a flying escort by God’s agents of judgment. These demonic impostors march these apostate Israelites far off to unholy Babylon, away from the true sanctuary on Zion’s mount of assembly to a shrine belonging to the false-Har-Magedon ziggurat of Shinar. There the idol-ephah is enshrined in its temple and sealed in its revolt against God’s covenant.

Exile-repudiation, a complete reversal of the exodus-redemption—that is the fate of the accursed apostates. How this plays out in history is not disclosed in Zechariah’s sixth vision. Zechariah 5:11 hints at a future for the woman Wickedness enthroned in the Shinar shrine. Another chapter in the story of the harlot Babylon is adumbrated here, something beyond the end of the old era in the 70

A. D. destruction of the temple, a mystery that unfolds in John the Revelator's visions of the New Testament.

In Revelation, the true Israel, is represented by the figure of a woman, who is first seen (Rev. 12:1ff.) adorned with heavenly glory and giving birth to the messianic male child, and at the close of the book (Rev. 21:9ff.) appears as a bride, the wife of the Lamb, shining with the glory of God. The Book of Revelation is concerned primarily with the woman as the mystery church of the messianic age, but her role in bringing forth Christ as to the flesh also implies her previous presence in the pre-messianic era. Spanning the old and new covenants, she evidences the underlying unity and continuity of the ongoing covenant of grace.

We shall be considering the relation of this woman to the harlot Babylon figure in the Book of Revelation, and as we do so we will be commenting on the influence of Zechariah 5 on the Revelation treatment of the career of the harlot. At the moment, we want to note allusions to Zechariah 5 in the Revelation 12 account of the woman who represents the true Israel. Her deliverance from the dragon is pictured in exodus imagery. She is threatened by a river poured out of the dragon's mouth, but the waters are swallowed by the earth, an event akin to Israel's crossing of the sea (Rev. 12:15, 16). Her flight from the dragon takes her into the wilderness, as did Israel's from pharaoh (Rev. 12:6, 13, 14), and as God carried Israel on eagles' wings (Exod. 19:4), so the woman is given the two wings of a great eagle to fly to safety (Rev. 12:6, 13, 14). It is at this point that the influence of Zechariah 5, specifically its depiction of the deportation of the woman Wickedness, is evident, not just in the motif of flying but in the description of the destination as "the place prepared for her" (Zech. 5:11; Rev. 12:6, 14). These allusions to Zechariah 5, by calling attention to the exodus-like event in the career of each of the two women, actually brings into focus the difference between the two. For the exodus in the case of the woman Wickedness of Zechariah 5 is in fact a reversal of the exodus, an abandonment to the world, while the exodus experienced by the Revelation 12 woman is the true, antitypical exodus, a deliverance from the satanic world power accomplished by the man-child this woman brings forth, the mighty mediator of the new covenant.

A second mystery is revealed in the symbolism of the New Testament Apocalypse, the mystery of another woman over against the woman who represents the mystery of Christ's church. Carried

away in the Spirit into a wilderness, John the Seer was shown a woman on whose forehead was written a name: "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth" (Rev. 17:5). In this harlot Babylon we see again the Zecharian figure of the woman Wickedness, who, exiled from Canaan, becomes identified with Babylon in Shinar, set there as its enshrined queen (Zech. 5:7-11).

The identity of the woman Wickedness in Zechariah 5 as the apostate covenant community confirms the indications within the Book of Revelation itself that her equivalent there, the harlot Babylon, is an image of the false church. And the elaboration of the career of that harlot church in the visions of the Apocalypse opens up for us the history of the woman in the ephah that is latent in Zech. 5:11.

The mother of the son who is caught up to God's throne flees into the wilderness for refuge from the dragon and his beast-agent (Rev. 12:13, 14; 13:1-7). Then—strange sequel—there in the wilderness John sees a woman, the harlot Babylon, sitting on the satanic beast (Rev. 17:3). The impression given is that the harlot is a corrupted derivative from the holy woman who had fled into the wilderness, a devolution out of the true covenant community, a false church.

According to the announcement at the outset (Rev. 17:1), the harlot Babylon, especially her judgment, is the main theme. Elaborated in considerable detail is the mercantile activity of the great city (Rev. 18:11-17). This is not inconsistent with the ecclesiastical nature of the harlot city for it is precisely the nature of the false church that it despises its calling to be distinct from the world and proceeds to make itself indistinguishable from the world. Moreover, it is sin in this very sphere of merchandising, the sphere of the ephah and talent, that characterizes the apostates from God's covenant who are portrayed as the Babylon-bound harlot of Zechariah 5.

Babylon the Great is decried as a hold of every unclean bird and a habitation of demons (Rev. 18:2), recalling the stork-winged demonic vehicle that transports the ephah to Shinar in Zechariah 5. The harlot of Rev. 18:7 boasts that she "sits as a queen" in the world city, making the kings of the earth drunk with the wine of her fornication (Rev. 17:1, 2), a status that is anticipated in Zechariah's vision of the woman Wickedness enthroned like the fertility goddess in the temple in Babylon (Zech. 5:11). "The punishment of the great harlot who sits on many waters" (Rev. 17:1) reminds us of the curse inflicted by the flying scroll of Zechariah 5 on the thieves and perjurers and their

houses. She is left desolate (Rev. 17:16; 18:19). All her luxuries are consumed by fire (Rev. 18:8, 14). Dramatizing Babylon's fall, a strong angel takes up a stone like a great millstone and casts it into the sea (Rev. 18:21), a symbolic variation on the scene in Zechariah 5 where the angel lifts up the stone talent (circular in shape like the millstone) and casts it on the ephah, which was to be deposited in the depths of the sea of the nations (vv. 7, 11; cf. Rev. 17; 15).

In the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 Jesus saw the future fall of the Christian world. Ellen White describes it this way. "Jesus, looking down to the last generation, saw the world involved in a deception similar to that which caused the destruction of Jerusalem. The great sin of the Jews was their rejection of Christ; the great sin of the Christian world would be their rejection of the law of God, the foundation of His government in heaven and earth. The precepts of Jehovah would be despised and set at nought. Millions in bondage to sin, slaves of Satan, doomed to suffer the second death. . . . The prophecy which He uttered was twofold in its meaning; while foreshadowing the destruction of Jerusalem, it prefigured also the terrors of the last great day. . . . In the fate of the chosen city we may behold the doom of a world that has rejected God's mercy and trampled upon His law."¹

It's astonishing how old covenant ideas can penetrate into our thinking. Even our hymns are sometimes examples, like the beautiful one, "O Jesus, I Have Promised To Serve Thee To the End." But we can turn it into a new covenant hymn by simply changing one word so it reads, "O Jesus, I Have Chosen." Well-meaning teachers can fasten innocent children into old covenant spiritual bondage by inducing them to make promises to God, which He has never asked them to do. They promise; and then later perhaps in forgetfulness they break their promise, and then the syndrome of "bondage" develops into spiritual discouragement. Parents sometimes weep their eyes out wondering why we lose so many youth who get discouraged spiritually and leave our churches. All kinds of tragedies can develop in an atmosphere permeated with old covenant "Christian experience."

Correctly understood, the message of the new covenant is part of the light which is yet to "lighten the earth with glory" in the closing hours of this world's history (Revelation 18:1-4). The message will be

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 22, 25, 36.

centered in a true understanding of righteousness by faith which alone can prepare God's people for the final time of trouble (see 19:1-14). Many, when they hear its Good News will awaken as from a dream. All of God's biddings will become enablings, and the Ten Commandments will become to them ten precious statements of Good News. Nothing will be able to stop them from responding to God's gracious last call, "Come out of her [Babylon], My people" (Revelation 18:4).

May this refreshing "new" perspective on the Ten Commandments bring great joy to your heart.