

Session 6 The Cleansing of Israel’s People and Land (Zech. 5:1-11)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Zechariah was commissioned to proclaim the message of God’s zeal for Jerusalem (1:14) and the sure destruction of her enemies (1:15, 21). All eight visions show different aspects of the Lord’s zeal for Jerusalem. The Lord will visit Jerusalem with His glory and will fight to defend her against the political oppression of the Gentiles and the spiritual compromise of the Jewish people. He desires Jerusalem’s covenant loyalty and her promised destiny.

¹⁴***“Proclaim... ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: “I am zealous for Jerusalem...with great zeal.””***
(Zech. 1:14)

- B. The first three visions (Zech. 1-2) have a millennial promise of prosperity and blessing for Israel. The fourth and fifth visions (Zech. 3-4) speak of Israel’s leadership being cleansed and anointed. Before the fullness of God’s blessing can be released in and through Israel, both the people and the land of Israel must be cleansed from everything contrary to the Lord. The message of the sixth and seventh visions (Zech. 5) pertains to the judgment and cleansing of national Israel. Before the promises in the first five visions are fulfilled, there will be a period of moral darkness.
- C. The two visions in Zechariah 5 go together (as the two visions in Zechariah 3-4 go together). The sixth vision deals with removing ***individual sins*** from the lives of Israelites (5:1-4). The seventh vision deals with removing the ***systems of sin*** from Israel (5:5-11).
- D. The fullness of the end-time systems of sin will move to Babylon (Shinar; 5:11; Rev. 17-18). The sixth vision describes the removal of individual sinners from Israel by judgment (5:3). This seventh vision involves the national cleansing of wickedness from Israel (3:9; 5:10-11).
- E. Malachi prophesied that the Lord would cleanse Israel in the end times, so that they would live righteously before Him. He will bring swift judgment on perjurers and thieves who exploit people (Mal. 3:1-5).

³***He will purify the sons of Levi...that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness ...⁵I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien—because they do not fear Me. (Mal. 3:3-5)***

- F. There is coming an “Acts 5 season” in Israel when liars like Ananias will be quickly struck dead (Acts 5:1-11). This will happen in Israel’s darkest hour when the abomination of desolation is set up in Jerusalem as many worship the Antichrist (Mt. 24:15; 2 Thes. 2:3-4; Rev. 11:8).

³***Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?...”⁵Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last...¹¹ So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things. (Acts 5:3-11)***

⁸And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city [Jerusalem] which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. (Rev. 11:8)

II. THE SIXTH VISION: THE FLYING SCROLL (5:1-4)

- A. **Summary:** Zechariah saw a large scroll flying through the sky with a message on it that all could read, announcing that God's judgment would come swiftly on all who steal and lie. As the scroll traveled over homes and businesses, it entered in and totally consumed those who stole or lied.
- B. The vision has two parts: The symbolism of the flying scroll (5:1-2) and the interpretation of the symbolism of the flying scroll (5:3-4).
- C. The symbolism of the flying scroll (5:1-2).

¹I turned and raised my eyes, and saw there a flying scroll. ²And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I answered, "I see a flying scroll. Its length is twenty cubits and its width ten cubits." (Zech. 5:1-2)

- 1. **A flying scroll:** This scroll represents the release of the curse, or judgments, described in God's word. The fact that it flies speaks of it traveling rapidly. The fullness of these judgments will be released in the end times to prepare Israel to receive Jesus as king.
 - 2. **What do you see:** The interpreting angel asked Zechariah to say what he saw, or understood (5:2). The angel knew the symbolism was such that Zechariah may have been able to understand it if he had concentrated on it. Zechariah looked carefully to describe everything that he saw (5:2b).
 - 3. **Its length:** The scroll was twenty cubits long (30 feet) and ten cubits wide (15 feet).
 - a. It is not an accident that it is the same size as the *holy place* in Moses' tabernacle, where the lampstand of Zech. 4 was (Ex. 26:8), and the *porch* of Solomon's temple (1 Kgs. 6:3). The porch was where God met with His people (1 Kings 7). The altar of burnt-offering was just before the porch. The priests gathered for prayer between the porch and the altar (Joel 2:17). Thus, the flying scroll is symbolic of judgment being meted out according to "the measure" of the holy place—men are weighed, judged, according to God's holiness, as represented by the holy place.
 - b. We know the large scroll was unrolled, because its dimensions were seen and it had writing on both sides (5:3). The scroll was open and large so all could read it easily; therefore, no one could plead ignorance of its requirements.
- D. The interpretation of the symbolism of the flying scroll (5:3-4).

³Then he said... "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole earth: 'Every thief shall be expelled,' according to this side of the scroll; and, 'every perjurer shall be expelled,'

according to that side of it.”⁴“I will send out the curse,” says the LORD of hosts; “It shall enter the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears falsely by My name. It shall remain in the midst of his house and consume it, with its timber and stones.” (Zech. 5:3-4)

1. ***This is the curse:*** This is God’s curse on rebellion against Him (5:3a). He is the One who sends out the curse (5:4a). The curse written on the scroll speaks of the curses that Moses prophesied (Deut. 28:15-68). The Lord removes sin in two ways: He delights in showing grace, as when He replaced Joshua’s dirty garments with clean ones (3:4-5). But when His grace is refused, His judgments are necessary to remove all that hinders love. Only those who repent will avoid the curses of the covenant (Deut. 30:1-6).
⁹When Your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants...will learn righteousness. (Isa. 26:90)
2. ***The whole earth:*** The Hebrew word *ha’aretz* can mean the “the earth” or “the land.” It often refers to the land of Israel. The context determines which to use, *land* or *earth*, but sometimes it is indecisive. “The land” here is contrasted with “the land of Shinar” (5:11). I think that *the land* is the best translation here, because those on whom the curse falls are the families that swear falsely by the Lord (5:4b), which speaks of Israelites, not Gentiles. The reference to both sides of the scroll (two tablets of the law of Moses) points to Israel.
3. Zechariah specified only two sins—perjury and theft. He picked the middle command from each of the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. The two sins, one from each tablet of the Ten Commandments, represented all of Israel’s sin before God and man.
4. ***Every perjurer shall be expelled:*** Perjury sins against God by swearing falsely in His name; it breaks the third commandment, and is on the first tablet of the law, which summarizes loving God.
5. ***Every thief shall be expelled:*** Stealing sins against one’s neighbor; it breaks the eighth commandment, and is on the second tablet of the law, which summarizes loving man.
6. ***Both sides of the scroll:*** This scroll represents God’s Word and what it says about His judgments (5:3). One side of the scroll said *every thief shall be expelled*, and on the other side it said *every perjurer shall be expelled*. The scroll was not rolled up, but flying fully open, so that both sides could be easily read.
7. Having writing on both sides of the scroll parallels the way that the Lord wrote on both sides of the two tablets when He gave Moses the Ten Commandments (Ex. 32:15-16).
¹⁵Moses...went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand. The tablets were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other they were written. ¹⁶Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets. (Ex. 32:15-16)

8. **Entering the house:** Zechariah personified the curse by describing it as entering into the home of the one who refuses a relationship of obedience to the Lord. Judgment will come to his home, i.e., the very place he thinks he is safe and hidden from God's judgments.
9. **It shall remain until it consumes:** The judgment will continue there until it consumes every facet of his home. There is no solution or deliverance from this problem because God is the source of it. The idea of consuming the "stones and timber" of one's house is found in the Law of Moses which commanded that the house of a leper be completely torn down, dismantling every stone and all the panels of wood so that the leprosy in that house would not spread (Lev. 14:45). "Leprosy" is often used to denote sin.

⁴⁵And he shall break down the house, its stones, its timber... (Lev. 14:45)

- E. Jesus removed the curse by becoming a curse for all who will give their life to Him.

¹³Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. (Gal. 3:13)

III. THE SEVENTH VISION: THE WOMAN IN THE BASKET (5:5-11)

- A. **Summary:** This vision deals with moving the end-time systems of sin to Babylon (5:5-11). This vision pictures the national cleansing of wickedness from the land of Israel (2:12; 3:9). Zechariah saw a wicked woman trapped inside a basket (5:6-8) and two other women with wings like a stork. They picked up the basket in their beaks and took it to Babylon (5:11).
- B. John describes an evil global economic and religious system—the harlot Babylon (Rev. 17-18). Satan will use economics as a primary means of controlling people and nations in his end-time plan. The harlot Babylon includes an alliance of apostate Judaism and corrupt Christianity pursuing a false peace amid much luxury. This is symbolized by the basket, or ephah (5:7).
- C. The vision has four parts: the symbolism of a wicked woman in a basket (5:5-7), the interpretation of the symbolism of the woman (5:8), the symbolism of the two women with wings of a stork (5:9), and the interpretation of the symbolism of the two women (5:10-11).
- D. The symbolism of the vision of the woman in the basket (5:5-7)

⁵Then the angel who talked with me came out and said to me, "Lift your eyes now, and see what this is that goes forth." ⁶So I asked, "What is it?" And he said, "It is a basket that is going forth." He also said, "This is their resemblance throughout the earth: ⁷Here is a lead disc lifted up, and this is a woman sitting inside the basket." (Zech. 5:5-7)

1. **The angel came out:** The interpreting angel comes out (5:5a) after withdrawing for a short time while Zechariah was meditating on the significance of the flying scroll.
2. **It is a basket:** (5:6b) The word *basket* is an English translation of *ephah*. An ephah was a standard commercial measurement. It was both a measurement and a container.

- a. The KJV translates the basket as an *ephah* because it was the largest measure for dry goods in that day. For example, they measured an ephah of corn in a basket.
 - b. An ephah was a basket that held about half a bushel, about five gallons of grain, etc. The ephah, or basket, is a symbol of economics or commerce. In the Diaspora, Israel changed from being an agriculture-based society into a nation of merchants.
3. The ephah spoke of God measuring out judgment according to the measure of one's sin.
4Come out of her [Babylon], my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues... 6Repay her double according to her works... 7In the measure that she...lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment. (Rev. 18:4-7)
4. ***The basket is going forth:*** The basket goes forth to influence others throughout the earth. Merchants, or financiers, hold influential and powerful positions in society. Satan will use commerce and economics to control people and nations in his end-time plan. A measuring basket speaks of a commerce-centered system of wickedness.
5. ***This is their resemblance:*** The angel explained that the sin of the wicked woman in the basket resembled the kind of wickedness that would go forth in all the nations. The resemblance (appearance) of sin will look the same across the earth because all nations will be affected by the system of evil economics represented by the woman in the basket. The woman's evil will run through the nations, capturing people by her greed and deceit.
23For your [Babylon's] merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. (Rev. 18:23)
6. ***A women sitting inside the basket:*** The woman (5:7b) is the personification of an evil and immoral system of commerce.
7. ***Lead disc:*** A heavy lead cover was lifted to reveal the woman trapped inside (5:7a).
- E. The interpretation of the symbolism of the woman (5:8)
8Then he said, "This is Wickedness!" And he thrust her down into the basket, and threw the lead cover over its mouth. (Zech. 5:8)
1. ***This is Wickedness:*** The woman is the very embodiment of iniquity (5:8a). This satanic plan to tie economic systems to religion is characterized as "Wickedness."
 2. ***Thrust her down:*** The woman tried to escape, not wanting to be restrained (5:8b). She was restrained in the basket. The heavy lid on top prevented her from escaping.
- F. The symbolism of the two women with the wings of a stork (5:9)

⁹Then I raised my eyes and looked, and there were two women, coming with the wind in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven. (Zech. 5:9)

1. ***Lift up between earth and heaven:*** (5:9c) The two women carried the basket, flying with the wind of divine assistance (Hebrew *ruach* means *wind* and *Spirit*). They were doing God's will by the wind of the Spirit, carrying the basket far away from the land of Israel.
2. ***Wings of a stork:*** Storks are strong birds, capable of carrying loads a long distance in flight. The stork was an unclean bird; thus, some see them as instruments of sin. But if that were true, they would be helping the woman of wickedness to escape.

G. The interpretation of the symbolism of the two women (5:10-11)

¹⁰I said to the angel who talked with me, "Where are they carrying the basket?" ¹¹And he said to me, "To build a house for it in the land of Shinar; when it is ready, the basket will be set there on its base." (Zech. 5:10-11)

1. ***Where are they carrying the basket:*** This is a prayer for us to imitate in this hour.
2. ***To build a house of it:*** The two women were carrying the basket with the wicked woman to a place where a house would be built for it (5:11a). The *house* speaks of a system of wickedness based on demonic worship. The woman is a system of wickedness. She will land in *her own place*.
3. ***When it is ready:*** After a season of lawlessness she will seduce the kings of the earth and the merchants to their destruction by her seductive luxury. When God's plan in the nations develops, it will be time to move harlot Babylon over to the city of Babylon (Rev. 18).
4. ***Set there on its base:*** The system of wickedness will have a base (Rev. 17:17).
¹³They [the 10 kings] give their power and authority to the beast [Antichrist]...¹⁷For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. (Rev. 17:12-17)
5. ***The land of Shinar:*** The land of Shinar is the ancient name for Babylon, where the tower of Babel was originally built (Gen. 10:10; 11:2; 14:1, 9). It is in present-day Iraq.

IV. BABYLON IN THE END TIMES (REV. 17-18)

- A. Revelation 17 is about the seductive power, cruel persecution, and inevitable destruction of this harlot system. The harlot (woman of wickedness) is a counterfeit of the Bride that the Holy Spirit is preparing for Jesus.

- B. ***Harlot Babylon:*** This system will be established in the rebuilt city of Babylon (50 miles south of Baghdad) in Iraq. The judgments which Jeremiah prophesied about Babylon's sudden, total, and final destruction have not yet happened (Jer. 50-51). It will be the most powerful economic center in the earth (Rev. 17-18). The harlot will have authority over the nations by seducing and controlling the world's most powerful leaders (kings and merchants) through global economic networks (Rev. 18:3, 9, 11, 15, 17, 19, 23)

³All the nations have drunk of...her fornication, the kings of the earth... and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury. (Rev. 18:3)

- C. The harlot will be arrayed in purple and scarlet (royal status) and will be respected by the elite financial leaders of the earth, who will give their allegiance to her. She will have a cup full of abomination and filth. *Abomination* refers to idolatrous, demonic activity (OT). *Filthiness* refers to moral perversions.

⁴The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet [royalty], and adorned with gold...having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. (Rev. 17:4)