



Zechariah - Chapter Five

I Zechariah 1:1-8:23 - Oracles and Visions (continues)

I.b Zechariah 1:7-6:15 - Eight Night Visions and a Coronation (continues)

Summary of Chapter Five

There are two further visions described in this chapter. The first is a large flying scroll that goes throughout the earth pronouncing judgement on wickedness, especially on thieves and liars or blasphemers, those who swear falsely in God's name.

The second vision is that of a woman in a basket. She was securely held in by the lid and represented wickedness that was to be symbolically transported away to a far land and punished there.

I.b.vii Zechariah 5:1-4 - Sixth Vision: The Flying Scroll

The sixth vision is of a gigantic scroll, 30 feet by 15 feet or 9.1m by 4.6m, flying in midair. Its dimensions are those of a large advertising board, suggesting that the scroll is unrolled so that its fearful contents may be read. The scroll is a covenant document, written on both sides, like the tablets Moses received from the Lord. Its task is to bring the covenant curses to bear on covenant breakers, using everyone who steals and everyone who swears falsely as representative examples. Theft was a sin against one's fellow man, while swearing falsely was an offense to God, since the oath was taken in the Lord's name. All covenant breakers will be cleaned out from the community by God's covenant curse. It will enter the house of the covenant breaker and consume it, no matter what building materials have been used.

¹ Again I looked up and saw a flying scroll. ² And he said to me, 'What do you see?' I answered, 'I see a flying scroll; its length is twenty cubits, and its width ten cubits.'

Zechariah 5:1-2

A flying scroll. In this vision Zechariah sees a scroll flying through the air, apparently open to be read because Zechariah can see how large the scroll is. Normally, such a scroll would be sealed: <<*Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals*>> (Revelation 5:1).

Its length is twenty cubits, and its width ten cubits. These were the dimensions of the holy place in the tabernacle and of the porch of Solomon's temple.

³ Then he said to me, 'This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land; for everyone who steals shall be cut off according to the writing on one side, and everyone who swears falsely shall be cut off according to the writing on the other side. ⁴ I have sent it out, says the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief, and the house of anyone who swears falsely by my name; and it shall abide in that house and consume it, both timber and stones.'

Zechariah 5:3-4

This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land; I have sent it out, says the Lord of hosts. The two sins, one from each side of the tablets of the Ten Commandments, is representative of all of Israel's sin. God will curse the people who commit these sins and their house: <<*Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindled, and few people are left*>> (Isaiah 24:6).

Everyone who steals shall be cut off; everyone who swears falsely shall be cut off. This indicates that the text on the scroll contains the Ten Commandments or similar covenantal requirements. To steal was to injure your neighbour; to perjure was to dishonour God, because it had been sworn in his name.

The prophet will again receive similar warnings to pass on to the people: <<*These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgements that are true and make for peace, do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the Lord*>> (Zechariah 8:16-17).

I.b.viii Zechariah 5:5-11 - Seventh Vision: The Woman in a Basket

The seventh vision is closely linked to the sixth, adding deportation to the threat of destruction. This vision symbolically describes iniquity being removed from the land and taken off to a far place, the Land of Shinar, from where the exiles had recently returned. The Land of Shinar was a general geographic term for what is

today Iraq, known in ancient times as Mesopotamia. There, two of the greatest of ancient empires, Persia and Babylon, were centred.



The Land of Shinar is in modern day Iraq.

⁵ Then the angel who talked with me came forward and said to me, 'Look up and see what this is that is coming out.' ⁶ I said, 'What is it?' He said, 'This is a basket coming out.' And he said, 'This is their iniquity in all the land.' ⁷ Then a leaden cover was lifted, and there was a woman sitting in the basket! ⁸ And he said, 'This is Wickedness.' So he thrust her back into the basket, and pressed the leaden weight down on its mouth.

Zechariah 5:5-8

This is a basket coming out. The basket was an *ephah*, it and the leaden cover or lead disc were units of measurement and symbols of commerce: <<*Can I forget the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is accursed? Can I tolerate wicked scales and a bag of dishonest weights?*>> (Micah 6:10-11). An *ephah* is approximately 21 litres and the term for the cover was a weight of approximately 34kgs.

This is their iniquity in all the land. Despite all that had befallen the Israelites because of their continual sin against God, these people, who had only been allowed to return to the land from exile in the past twenty years, were still sinning against God and faced expulsion from the land again. Zechariah prophesied to those who returned from the Babylonian exile. God's people came back from Babylon with a materialism problem, and this vision speaks to this problem.

There was a woman sitting in the basket! The Hebrew word for iniquity is feminine and thus a woman is used in the vision to symbolise this. Wickedness

personified in female form may also represent an idolatrous image of a female deity, perhaps Asherah, and is a comprehensive term for all kinds of sin, both religious and social: <<*When the Lord your God thrusts them out before you, do not say to yourself, 'It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to occupy this land'; it is rather because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is dispossessing them before you*>> (Deuteronomy 9:4), and: <<*Ahaziah was forty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned for one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counsellor in doing wickedly*>> (2 Chronicles 22:2-3). It is also possible that the woman represents foreign wives, an ongoing problem for the returned Israelites; refer to Ezra Chapter 9 and Nehemiah 13:23-27. The two issues were connected, since foreign wives often led the Israelites into idolatry: <<*Did not King Solomon of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin*>> (Nehemiah 13:26). Yet the vision includes nothing less than the removal of all iniquity from the land; refer to Zechariah 3:9.

So he thrust her back into the basket, and pressed the leaden weight down on its mouth. God demonstrates his opposition to wickedness by firmly sealing it in the basket, ready to symbolically transport it to a far land where iniquity dwells. The angel was careful that the woman did not escape. There is no danger of the situation getting out of control. Wickedness exists under the power and authority of God alone.

⁹ Then I looked up and saw two women coming forward. The wind was in their wings; they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and sky. ¹⁰ Then I said to the angel who talked with me, 'Where are they taking the basket?' ¹¹ He said to me, 'To the land of Shinar, to build a house for it; and when this is prepared, they will set the basket down there on its base.'

Zechariah 5:9-11

The wickedness that has been personified in female shape was removed by two women with the wind, Hebrew *ruakh* - the divine agency of motion, in their wings. They have wings like the wings of a stork, a large bird that migrates northward from Palestine each year, travelling in the same direction as the basket. There is no consensus among interpreters regarding any other symbolic significance of these women. They are God's messengers, perhaps angels or other heavenly beings. If they are angels this would be the only place in Scripture where angels are portrayed as women rather than as men.

The basket of wickedness was to be transported to a new location in the land of Shinar, where a house or temple would be built for it. Such a building existed at the time of the exodus: *<<And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god>>* (Daniel 1:2 NIV). All the idolaters would thus be removed, along with the object of their idolatry, to a safe distance from whence they would never again return to trouble God's people by their wickedness.

In Genesis 10:10, the beginning of Nimrod's kingdom is said to have been Babel (Babylon), Erech (Uruk), and Accad (Akkad), all in the land of Shinar. Genesis 11:2 states that Shinar enclosed the plain that became the site of the Tower of Babel after the Noahic Flood.