

Lesson 8

Last week when we ended we had just started looking at the sixth vision, in which Zechariah saw a giant flying scroll with a curse on it. What was the curse?

Zechariah 5:3-4

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. 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.

In verse 3 we have an answer to what is written on the large flying scroll - it contains a curse "that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth" and that curse was brought forth by God.

Should Zechariah and his listeners have been surprised to see a giant curse on a flying billboard? Not really. Why? Because they were in their present situation because of a curse. They were currently living under the effects of a curse in the Mosaic covenant.

Deuteronomy 28:15 - But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these **curse**s shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.

So, the people were very familiar with a curse from God. They were living under a curse from God because of the disobedience of their ancestors.

The question was this: would that curse continue because of their own disobedience or would that curse be lifted?

Some commentaries try to link this flying curse with what they say was a common practice at the time. They say that it was common to curse your enemies using "curse-tablets" made of lead or "curse-slips" made of parchment. And they say that this flying curse is modeled after those other curses.

Perhaps, but I don't think they have completely made their case. But if there is such a relation here, I

think Leupold correctly describes it. He says that God is, in effect, saying:

"As you set loose *futile* curses against your enemies, so I send forth *effective* curses that invariably accomplish their purpose; your efforts are hollow mockery, mine terrible reality."

In other words, your little curse-slips are meaningless, but my giant flying curse is not, as you are about to discover.

Two groups of people are particularly identified in verses 3 and 4 as the objects of this curse: thieves and perjurers. Why those two groups? There are several theories.

One theory for why we see theft and perjury is that those two sins were often connected. When someone was charged with theft in the absence of any witnesses, it was sometimes possible for that person to swear their innocence before God and avoid punishment. Of course, that means that if they were guilty of the theft, they were now also guilty of perjury.

Another theory for why we see theft and perjury is that those two sins were the most evident or easily identified sins among those who were not true to God. Yes, the thieves and the perjurers were almost certainly guilty of other sins, but perhaps their thievery and their perjury were their most evident sins.

Another theory for why we see theft and perjury is that each of those two sins represents a whole collection of sins. Some say that theft and perjury represent all of the commandments in each of the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. Why?

The first tablet focuses on commandments that involve man's relationship with God, while the second tablet governs man's relationships with each another. Swearing falsely in God's name would cover those sins that are directed at God, while theft would cover those sins that are directed at men.

Another theory is interesting because it fits well with the context in which the temple was being rebuilt.

As in building projects today, the building process often calls for raising support from some key donors before construction begins. They pledge donations that provide assurances for the project to proceed. In the ancient world, such pledges were supported by formal oaths, and such oaths transformed the pledged gifts into divine property. In this combination, anyone who 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 belonged to God.

Malachi 3:8 - Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

That verse would soon be directed to these very people by the prophet Malachi. Perhaps we are seeing the same thing here in the book of Zechariah - people robbing God. Of all the various theories, this last one is my favorite. There is certainly a focus on building in Zechariah.

What is the curse in verse 3? Those who steal "shall be cut off as on this side according to it" and those that swear falsely "shall be cut off as on that side according to it." What does that mean?

"This side" and "that side" refer to the two sides of the scroll. One side cursed thieves, and the other side cursed liars.

The phrase "cut off" is better translated as "purged out" or "cleansed by purging." Does this mean that the thieves and the liars were literally transported away? No.

Remember that we are reading apocalyptic language. I think what we are seeing here is a figurative description of the verse we read earlier from 2 Timothy 2:19 - "The Lord knoweth them that are his."

The thieves likely thought that they were being very clever and would never be caught. The perjurers likely thought that their lies would never be found out. If so, they were wrong. There was a huge flying scroll headed their way with a curse from God written on it just for them! God knew exactly who was on his side and who was not on his side.

What does the end of verse 4 mean? "It shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof."

I think this statement confirms that the final option we considered for the identity of the thieves and perjurers was the correct option - they stole from God's house to instead build their own houses, and so this curse will target them in their homes.

It reminds us of Haggai 1:4, which was directed to these same people as this same time.

Haggai 1:4 - *Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?*

So that is the message of the sixth vision. The exiles needed to understand that they were still under the Mosaic covenant. They needed to understand that the conditional curses for those who disobeyed that covenant were still operative. If they violated the covenant, they could once again find themselves in exile.

Let's now look at Zechariah's seventh vision: the vision of the ephah.

Zechariah 5:5-6

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. 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.

First question: what is an ephah? An ephah is a unit of measurement that is close to a bushel. It is between five and ten gallons.

But the word ephah also has another meaning. It is also used (as it is here) to describe a measuring basket used for dry measure. The ephah was not the largest measure known at the time, but it was the largest in common use.

Just like the scroll we saw earlier was much larger than a typical scroll, so this ephah may have been much larger than a typical ephah. Why? Because we will soon see that a woman is crouching within it.

The final phrase in verse 6 is difficult: "This is their **resemblance** through all the earth." What does that mean?

The ESV translates it as: "This is their **iniquity** in all the land." Another has: "This is their **eye** throughout all the earth." (NET)

So which is correct? "This is their eye," "this is their iniquity," or "this is their resemblance"? Some of the Hebrew texts have the Hebrew word for "eye," but others do not, which explains the differences in the English translations.

How do we decide? There is a rule of textual analysis that may be helpful. That rule says that when we have a situation such as this with a variety of possible readings, we should select the reading that

is the most difficult to explain (which, in this case, would be "eye").

The use of the word "eye" is difficult to explain in this context, so why then would we select that most difficult option? Because the easier readings likely came from scribes trying to solve the problem they saw with the difficult reading. That is, they also did not see how the word "eye" fit into this context, so they tried to "fix" the text.

If "eye" is the correct reading, then what does the statement in verse 6 mean? "This is their 'eye' throughout all the earth."

Some suggest that it is the eye of God on the evildoers. Others suggest that it is the eyes of the evildoers who are always looking for opportunities to do evil. Of those two, I think the latter fits best with the context. Also, the phrase is "their eye" rather than "his eye," so I don't think this is the eye of God.

If "eye" is not correct, then I think the best option is "this is their iniquity." That choice fits well with the context because in verse 8 we will see that this ephah contains wickedness.

To whom does the pronoun "their" refer? Most likely it is referring back to the ones who stole and the ones who swore falsely - is their eye looking to do evil, or it is their iniquity.

What about the third option that we saw in the KJV? "This is their **resemblance** through all the earth." If that is the correct translation, what does it mean?

We are about to see that this vision involves the removal of wickedness from the land, so most likely "their resemblance" or "their appearance" in verse 6 would refer to the appearance of the wicked. That is, as the ephah looks, so do the wicked look.

So what does the ephah look like? Keep reading.

Zechariah 5:7-8

7 And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah. 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.

In verse 7, the lid of the ephah is lifted off so that we can see inside.

A better translation than "talent of lead" in verse 7 is "a round lid of lead." The Hebrew word means "round" but it is usually translated "talent" when referring to gold or silver. But because the metal here is lead, the word "round" should be used instead of the word "talent," and "round" fits better with the context as we see this lead being used as a cover.

But this heavy metal lid is not a natural cover for a measuring basket - its use here as a lid must mean that there is something unusual inside this basket.

Having such a heavy metal lid suggests that the contents of this basket must be kept from escaping. Whatever is inside the basket must be kept separate from the people of God.

When the lid is lifted, Zechariah sees a woman sitting (literally, crouching) within the ephah. She is immediately identified in verse 8 - "This is wickedness."

Was this an actual woman? Perhaps, and if so, then this flying ephah must have been much larger than an actual ephah, just as the flying scroll was much larger than an actual scroll. But it is also possible that the woman within the ephah is smaller than an actual person.

Some commentaries suggest that this wicked woman is shown in the form of a female idol of the type that was often used for Canaanite goddesses. Or perhaps this woman depicts the Babylonian goddess who was called the "Queen of Heaven."

Why is wickedness depicted here as a woman? If the idol represents a specific false goddess, then that answers the question.

Idolatry was never the problem for Israel *after* the exile as it was *before* the exile. The Jews seemed to have learned their lesson in Babylon, but perhaps this vision tells us that the problem had not been eliminated completely. Perhaps some of those false gods had come back to Jerusalem along with the returning exiles.

But another possibility is that this vision is showing us a very common figure in the Old Testament - the people's faithlessness to God was often depicted as the people of God playing the harlot. Hosea does this, as does Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 16:15, 28, 32 - But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because

of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by; his it was. ... Thou hast played the whore also with the Assyrians, because thou wast unsatiable; yea, thou hast played the harlot with them, and yet couldest not be satisfied. Thou hast moreover multiplied thy fornication in the land of Canaan unto Chaldea; and yet thou wast not satisfied herewith. How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord God, seeing thou doest all these things, the work of an imperious whorish woman ... But as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband!

There may also be a lesson here about the problem of taking foreign wives, which we know was a problem at this time from what we see in the book of Ezra.

One last theory on why wickedness is shown here as a woman may be the simplest of all: the Hebrew word for "wickedness" is feminine, and so that alone may explain why the vision personifies wickedness as a woman. We see something similar in Proverbs 8 where wisdom (also a feminine noun in Hebrew) is personified as a woman.

It seems that the woman must have tried to escape her confinement because she is cast back into the ephah, and the lid of lead is placed back upon it.

The Hebrew verb used here suggests that the woman struggled with the angel, even though he prevailed. One translation (NJB) has: "And he rammed her back into the barrel and jammed its mouth shut with the mass of lead."

What happens next? Keep reading.

Zechariah 5:9

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.

In verse 9 we see two more women. They have the wind in their wings, and their wings are like the wings of a stork. They lift up the ephah that has the wickedness trapped inside.

First question: why a stork?

Storks were frequently seen in Palestine, and during the migratory season they would appear in great numbers. They had very powerful wings, which may be why that bird is mentioned here - it could lift the heavy ephah, and it could fly very high up in the sky.

In addition to being propelled by powerful wings, these women are being propelled by a special wind, and so what we see here is a swift and powerful transportation of the wickedness inside the ephah.

Who are these two women? For starters, I don't think we should look for anything particularly symbolic here for the number two. It would have been natural to see two people carrying a heavy ephah with a lead cover.

But why women? Some commentaries suggest that all of the women here are wicked, and that what we see here is God punishing sin with sin. They point for evidence to the fact that the stork was an unclean animal (Leviticus 11:19), and they say that the stork's and the women's submission here shows God's power over false gods.

But no one here is eating a stork, and no one could doubt God's power over these false gods! Plus, as we have seen there are some good characteristics of storks that may explain why we see them mentioned here. I don't think that there is any particular reason to conclude that the two women in verse 9 are evil.

One last point about the stork - storks have a reputation for caring tenderly for their own young. (Even today stork's are pictured as delivering human children.) That view of storks is likely what caused the Hebrew word for "stork" to be almost the same as the Hebrew word for "faithful" or "loyal." (They differ by one letter.) That may explain why we see the stork mentioned here in a vision that is teaching a lesson about faithfulness and loyalty to God.

This wicked basket is lifted up between heaven and earth. It is evil, so it cannot come into God's presence - but neither should it be left on earth in man's presence. So we see this sin lifted up from the earth. That is a big clue! Let's keep reading.

Zechariah 5:10

10 Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah? 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.

Zechariah has the same question that we likely have at this point: where are these two women taking the ephah? The answer is in verse 11: "To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base." What does that mean?

Shinar is an old name for the land where Babylon was located. Other prophets use Shinar to refer to Babylon (Isaiah 11:1, Daniel 1:2).

But Shinar is also a reminder of what that word stood for when it was first used in the Bible in Genesis 10:10 and Genesis 11:2. In those verses, Shinar described an earthly kingdom that stood against God and that built the tower of Babel. In short, Shinar had long been a center for activity that was opposed to the plan of God. Shinar, or Babylon, was the epitome of an arrogant and rebellious people.

To the Jew, the land of Shinar was firmly associated with wickedness, and that had been true for many centuries. Shinar was the perfect place to send this wickedness, and the picture in verse 11 is that it will permanently reside there in a house where it will be established.

The word "house" in verse 11 can also refer to a temple, so we may be seeing the false idol returned to the very false temple in Babylon where it came from - even to the point of being placed on the same pedestal.

"What could be more appropriate than to banish all idolatry to Babylon, infamous for her own idolatries, as well as the site of Judah's punishment for her own idolatry?"

We can see what is happening in the vision, but what does the vision mean? And when would it be fulfilled?

The premillennialist thinks this is all yet future - and if it were to be taken literally, then it would have to be future. It is certainly not the case today, nor has it ever been the case, that wickedness has all been banished to one particular land. But, of course, we know that this vision was not meant to be interpreted literally.

So what does it mean? When was iniquity ever carried far away from the people of God?

Don't we all know the answer to that question? And don't we all know when it happened (past tense)?

Hebrews 9:26 - For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

When Jesus sacrificed himself, he put away our sin. The premillennialist says the fulfillment is yet future, but the Bible says that the fulfillment happened 2000 years ago.

We also see this idea in the great prophecy of the new covenant in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 - Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Did you hear that last part? "For they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them." Is there a kingdom in which everyone in the kingdom knows God? In which everyone in the kingdom loves and obeys God? A kingdom in which nothing wicked is allowed to enter? Yes - and you are part of that kingdom if you have obeyed the gospel. That kingdom is the church.

God adds people to the church when they are saved, and there is no other way to gain entry. And those who are lost are not in the church. The church is the body of Christ; it is the body of the saved.

Colossians 1:13-14 - Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

The people were worried about the wickedness in the land, and God is telling them here about the eternal unshakable kingdom that was to come in Acts 2, and in that kingdom there would be no wickedness. Wickedness would instead be carried far away, just as the wickedness in this ephah is shown being carried off to the land of Shinar.

Chapter 6

The book of Zechariah opens with eight visions, and we have now reached the final vision of those eight.

As we have seen, each vision has had a specific message for the people of Zechariah's day as well as a message for the people of God in any age.

With most of these messages, God lifted the spiritual curtain so that the downtrodden Jews of Zechariah's day could briefly glimpse the wonderful blessings that God was preparing for his people. The Messiah was coming, and he would establish an eternal kingdom that would sweep away all of the kingdoms of this world. God told them that those blessings were coming, and that their faithfulness was vital to God's plan to bless the entire world.

Today, we know much more about those blessings than they did. We have the full revelation of God, and we know that the Messiah came into this world, gave himself as a perfect sacrifice, rose from the dead, ascended back to heaven, and established his eternal kingdom (of which we are now a part).

If you ever have any doubts about the importance of the church in the plan of God, then Zechariah is the book for you! Are we just a footnote to history? Perhaps in men's histories, but in God's histories we are anything but a footnote!

Most of the visions we have seen have pointed to Christ and to the church of Christ. If that was a cure for discouragement in Zechariah's day, then how much more must it be a cure for discouragement in our own day! For them, it was a blessing yet future, but for us it is a blessing that we enjoy every day.

Ephesians 1:18-23 - The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

That had not yet happened in Zechariah's day, but for us it is a living reality - and we should thank God every day for the time in which we live.

This final vision has much in common with the first vision we studied. The first vision and the eighth vision act as bookends to the visions in between. Both the first vision and this final vision describe different colored horses going throughout the earth. In both visions, God dispatches key figures to fulfill a divine assignment.

Zechariah 6:1

6:1 And I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass.

Although the text does not confirm it, many commentators believe that the first vision occurred at dusk, and the eighth vision appeared to Zechariah at dawn on the same evening. Some even explain the "mountains of bronze" as the color of the mountains when the dawning rays of the sun strike them.

In verse 1, we see four chariots coming out from between two mountains of brass. What does that mean? In the Old Testament, chariots sometimes carried important individuals. But in most cases, the Old Testament refers to chariots as the ultimate military weapon. Solomon bought chariots from Egypt in 1 Kings 10:29, and Isaiah prophesied against those who trusted in those chariots.

Isaiah 31:1 - Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!

Jeremiah described Babylon's chariots.

Jeremiah 4:13 - Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as a whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe unto us! for we are spoiled.

But God also has chariots, and their description in Isaiah 66 reminds us of verse 1 here in Zechariah 6.

Isaiah 66:15-16- For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many.

Psalm 68 also reminds us of verse 1 here, even mentioning a mountain, Mount Sinai.

Psalm 68:17 - The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.

So what are we seeing here in verse 1? We will soon see that these four chariots are being sent out by God.

The number four, as we have said, figuratively depicts the earth - the four seasons, the four compass points, the four basic elements - even the base 4 used to encode our DNA!

So what we see here are God's war chariots being sent out to show God's dominion and power over the earth. It reminds us of:

Jeremiah 10:10 - But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation.

No earthly power can stand against God. Nebuchadnezzar learned that lesson the hard way in Daniel 4 when he was made to live like an ox. As McGuigan says, that great king was bragging one minute and munching grass the next! And here is the lesson he was being taught:

Daniel 4:17 - To the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.

These chariots are going forth to teach that same lesson to anyone and to everyone who needs to learn it. And there were many people in Persia and Babylon who needed to learn it, as there still are today throughout the world.

What are the two mountains of brass? Although we have seen mountains before in this book and elsewhere in the Bible, nowhere else in the Bible do we find mountains of brass.

Elsewhere we have seen earthly mountains arrayed against God, and those mountains have been turned into plains. That might be the case here, but these mountains instead seem to depict the abode of God, or at least they surround the abode of God - his stronghold. If so, the brass would indicate their beauty and their strength. Verse 1 reminds me of Psalm 48.

Psalm 48:1-2 - Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the

mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.

Why are there two mountains? Perhaps they show the combined royal priesthood of Christ, which is a key theme in this book and in this chapter (as we will see). It is also a key theme in the book of Revelation.

I think that is the picture we see here in Zechariah 6:1. These chariots come out from God's beautiful stronghold to perform his will upon the earth.

#Zechariah