

Title: **“THIS IS WICKEDNESS”**
Text: Zechariah 5:5-11
Subject: *Zechariah’s Seventh Vision*
Date: Sunday Morning — February 19, 2006
Reading: *Revelation 18:1-19:9*
Tape # Zechariah #26

Introduction:

We often hear that “the world is going to hell in a hand basket.” I have no idea what the origin of that statement is; but that is exactly what Zechariah saw in his seventh vision, which is set before us in Zechariah 5:5-11.

(Zechariah 5:5-11) 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. (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. (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. (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.

Proposition: The woman cast into a basket (“*an ephah*”) describes both the full measure of wickedness, for which God shall judge the earth, and the limitation of it by God’s decree and power.

In the previous vision of the flying scroll, you will remember, Zechariah saw “*the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth*” (v. 3), the curse of God’s holy law upon all men. Here he sees, and sets before us, a vision of the wickedness that covers the earth. It is set before us as a woman cast into an ephah, a basket.

AN EPHAH

First, Zechariah saw “*an ephah.*” An ephah was a dry measure. It was a large basket that would hold about ten gallons of grain. An ephah was a measure used in trade.

(Zechariah 5:5-6) 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.

This ephah, or basket, was seen going forth, or moving and spreading through all the earth, like the curse in verse 3. Then, the angel told Zechariah, “*This is their resemblance through all the earth.*” That word, “*resemblance,*” would be better translated “*eye.*” It is used figuratively. **Essentially**, the angel points to the basket, and the wickedness in it, and said, “This is their eye. This is the thing to which people the world over look. This is the object of their faith, their confidence, and their hope.”

A WOMAN

Then, a huge, 125 lb. lead weight was taken off the basket, and Zechariah saw, sitting in the midst of the basket, a woman. This woman is the thing to which the whole world looks (v. 7).

(Zechariah 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.

This woman is **the personification of wickedness** (v. 8).

(Zechariah 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.

No doubt, there is an allusion here to the universal depravity of the human race. You will recall that, in the garden of Eden, the woman was first in transgression; and that wickedness which engulfs the whole human race is here personified as a woman. Perhaps, **the lead weight** covering the basket represents the absolute impossibility of any man freeing himself from sin.

If that is the thing intended, then **the image of two women, like storks, carrying away the Ephah to the land of Shinar,** might be a picture of the complete removal of wickedness into a land not inhabited by our Lord Jesus Christ (the woman's Seed — Gen. 3:15 and Rev. 12), as the iniquity of Israel was symbolically taken away on the day of atonement (*The Scapegoat* — Lev. 16:22).

I make **no apology** for presenting such an interpretation of the vision, because, without question, both the vision of the flying scroll and this vision of the woman in an ephah are intended to show us the universality of sin. — “*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*” That fact is constantly set before us throughout the Book of God. The sin and fall of our race in Adam, our native guilt and estrangement from God, are things we must never forget. But, whenever we consider that, let us look up for grace from God the Holy Ghost, to see our all-glorious Savior, the blessed work he has accomplished by his obedience unto death as our Substitute, and the complete salvation that is ours in him.

When the Son of God saw us bound under the horrible weight of guilt in sin, utterly incapable of removing it, or even desiring that it should be removed, like the ephah filled with wickedness, he came to save us. By the sacrifice of himself, he took away our sins, removing them to a land

not inhabited, cast them behind God's back, and into the depth of the sea of his forgetfulness! Let his name be praised forever and ever! Let every knee bend before him, and every tongue confess, that "*Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father.*"

But, I think this vision is intended to describe something else. It is a vision, not of mercy and grace, but of wrath and judgment. Throughout the Word of God false religion is set before us under the image of a harlot, a deceitful woman with flattering lips. — "*Her house is the way to hell*" (Pro. 2:10-11, 16-17; 5:3-4; 7:1-27; Rev. 17:1-4).

(Proverbs 2:10-11) When wisdom (*Christ*) entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; (*11*) Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee:

(Proverbs 2:16-17) To deliver thee from the strange woman, *even* from the stranger *which* flattereth with her words; (*17*) Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God.

(Proverbs 5:3-4) For the lips of a strange woman drop *as* an honeycomb, and her mouth *is* smoother than oil: (*4*) But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a twoedged sword.

Read Proverbs 7, and you will see the cunning craftiness of that great harlot whose influence is universal. She represents all freewill/works religion, the way that seems right to all men. To this great harlot all men look, hoping that she will give birth to life. — "*This is their appearance through the earth.*" But her end is eternal death in hell!

(Revelation 17:1-4) And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: (*2*) With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have

been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. (3) So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. (4) And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:

THE WICKEDNESS

Now, read verse 8 again.

(Zechariah 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.

Young's Literal Translation reads, "And he saith, 'This is the wicked woman.' And he casteth her unto the midst of the ephah, and casteth the weight of lead on its mouth." The word "*wickedness*" should read "**the wickedness**." The message of the text is — "This is the woman of wickedness, the one from whom all wickedness flows. He pushed her back down into the basket and clamped the lead lid over her." The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses the very same word Paul used in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, and calls this woman "*the man of sin*," — "This is the man of sin."

- The wickedness that covers the earth is here set before us as false religion.
- The wickedness is universal.
- The blame for all wickedness in the world is laid at the door step of religion (Rom. 1).
- But, be sure you do not fail to see that the Angel who spoke to Zechariah, our Lord Jesus Christ, the King and sovereign Monarch of the universe, has cast the great whore into the ephah; "*and he cast the*

weight of lead upon the mouth thereof.” — That means that the wickedness is both measured and completely controlled by him!

CARRIED AWAY

In verses 9-11, Zechariah saw the wickedness by which the whole world is deceived, the wickedness that motivates the nations of the world, is carried away to a place called Shinar.

(Zechariah 5:9-11) 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. (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.

Two women were used to carry the woman and the basket away to destruction. As Assyria and Babylon carried Judah away because of their idolatry, the Lord God sovereignly uses the wicked of the earth to destroy wickedness, when her cup is filled (Rev. 17:15-17).

(Revelation 17:15-17) And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. (16) And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. (17) For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.

As two “anointed ones” (Zec. 4:14) stand by the Lord as his ministers, so here two winged women execute his purpose in removing the embodiment of “*wickedness*,” “*mystery of iniquity*” and “*the man of*

sin,” whom the Lord shall destroy with the spirit of his mouth and the brightness of his coming (2Thess. 2:3, 7-8).

“And the wind was in their wings.” — By the power of God the Holy Spirit, this woman is lifted up between heaven and earth and carried to destruction, implying that God’s judgment shall be executed before all.

We are not told much, in the Scriptures, about **Shinar**. But everything we are told about that place is instructive, and suggests that the interpretation of this vision is precisely as I have given it.

- Shinar was **a province of Babylon**, where the Tower of Babel was built.
- **Amraphel was king** of Shinar in the days of Abraham (Gen. 11:2; 14:1).
- And Daniel tells us that **the temple of Nebuchadnezzar’s idol**, where he put the sacred vessels he took from Jerusalem, was in Shinar (Dan. 1:2).
- And as the “woman” here is **carried away to a house prepared for her in Shinar**, for her everlasting woe, so it shall be in the last day when the Great Whore, Babylon, is cast into hell (Rev. 17:3-7; 18:2).

(Revelation 17:3-7) So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. (4) And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: (5) And upon her forehead *was* a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. (6) And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration. (7) And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst

thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.

(Revelation 18:2) And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

JOHN'S VISION

In Revelation 18 we see John's vision of this woman's destruction. **Satan has always opposed the Lord Jesus Christ.** In the beginning, his heart was lifted up with pride against the Son of God. He inspired, organized, and led a rebellion among the angels of heaven, attempting to overthrow God's throne, frustrate his purposes, destroy his works, and prevent the triune God from executing and fulfilling his eternal covenant of grace. Though his revolt was totally unsuccessful. (He did not even shake God's throne, much less overturn it! {See Isa. 14:24, 26, 27}). Yet, the old serpent has never ceased to oppose the purpose of God. He knows he has but a short time until Christ shall cast him forever into the pit (Rev. 12:12). Yet, he continues his rebellion. He continues to inspire, organize and lead men and women in rebellion against the God of heaven. And his primary means of opposition to Christ is organized false religion.

That religious system, inspired, organized, and led by Satan, the religion of antichrist, is portrayed as a great harlot patronized by the whole world and a great city of world wide influence and wealth. The name of that great harlot and that great city is Babylon. Babylon represents the world, especially the religious world, in opposition to Christ. The religions of the world have many names. But their essential tenets are always the same. The religion of the world, the religion of antichrist, the religion of Babylon, is the religion of free-willism and works salvation. The religion of Babylon, the hell inspired religion of antichrist by which the souls of deceived multitudes are destroyed, always proclaims that

salvation is ultimately decided and determined by man. Free-will, works religion is satanic antichrist and damning to the souls of men. Both the preachers and the adherents of such religion, like Nimrod, are rebels against God, utterly lost, without the knowledge of the living God. And, like Nimrod, they all shall perish under the wrath of God.

It is popular. Men love it, support it, promote it, and defend it. It has always been the religion of the world. It is wealthy. The world's most famous, most well respected religious leaders are the servants of this great whore. And the religion of Babylon so thoroughly controls the minds of men that it controls the political, economic, academic, and philosophical powers of the world. The whole world, by the deception of satan, cherishes free-will, man-centered, Babylonian religion. But, thank God, the religion of Babylon, all opposition to the church of Christ, the truth of Christ, and the glory of Christ shall be destroyed. That is the subject of Revelation 17 and 18.

(Revelation 18:1-2) And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. (2) And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

A great, mighty angel came down from heaven, whose glory lightened the earth. These mighty spirits, who were created by God to be ministering spirits to those chosen and ordained of God to be the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14). But these mighty angels are also the instruments by which God executes his judgment upon his enemies. Those holy beings who, by divine direction, have protected God's church from their enemies in every age shall destroy our enemies in the end. — But the Angel here is Christ himself, the Angel of the Covenant, whose glory fills the earth.

This mighty angel announced the fall of Babylon as if it had already occurred (vv. 2-3). — So sure and certain is God's judgment upon Babylon that it is recorded as a past event. Notice how the angel describes Babylon. It is not a literal city, but a religious system that encompasses and includes everything opposed to God. It is the habitation of devils, the home of every foul spirit, and the cage of every unclean and hated bird! Babylon is the idolatrous religion of the world (Isa. 21:9; Jer. 50:2). The gods of Babylon are the dung-gods of freewillism and works salvation. The dung of Babylon's religious solemnities has smeared and defiled the whole earth. Had it not been for the Lord's free, preserving grace, we all would have been swallowed up in Babylon. But God would not allow us to have our way (Jer. 51:7-10; 2 Thess. 2:10-13).

Yet, even Babylon serves the purposes of God. Though the heresies of false religion are hatched in hell and set in opposition to the throne of God, they are under the rule of God and serve only to accomplish his purpose of grace toward his elect (1 Cor. 11:19; 2 Thess. 2:3). By the spreading fame and popularity of free-will religion, God's elect are proved. Though all the world goes after Babylon, God's own will not fall for her lies. When Babylon has served her purpose, she shall be brought to utter destruction. By what means God will publicly destroy false religion, we are not told. But these things are plainly revealed: Babylon will fall suddenly. Her destruction will come from within (Rev. 17:16-17). And God's judgment upon Babylon is just and well deserved (v. 3). When the world's religious system is destroyed, the whole earth shall be thrown into chaos and confusion, because it is the religion of the world that governs the economics, philosophy, and politics of the world. When Babylon falls, everything falls.

In verse 4, John records an admonition from the mouth of Christ himself.

(Revelation 18:4) And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

This is a call which the Lord our God repeatedly issues to his Church in all ages. It is an urgent call to separation, “*Come out of her, my people!*” (Read Isa. 48:20; 52:11; Jer. 50:8; 51:54; Zech. 2:7.) The Lord does not say, “Stay in Babylon and heal her.” He does not say, “Find a way to get along with Babylon.” He does not say, “Love Babylon, pray for Babylon, and try to help Babylon.” God says, “*Come out of her, my people*” (Jer. 51:7-10). And all of God’s people will deliberately come out of Babylon (2 Cor. 6:16-18). To remain a part of any church or denomination that denies the gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ is to line up with the Lord’s enemies and court eternal damnation. To come out of her is to have no fellowship with her, give no support to her, offer no hope to her, and publicly repudiate her doctrines and practices by identifying with Christ, his gospel and his church.

APPLICATION

Recently, a five-volume history was published in English about Auschwitz, the Nazi death camp. It reveals the horrors that took place there. Over one million people died as a result of Hitler’s barbaric cruelty from 1940-1945.

The History of Auschwitz describes construction plans for gas chambers and crematories, prisoner lists, and rare photographs. It gives an almost day-by-day calendar of events, along with notes on how few of the 8,000 guards were brought to justice. References are given from war crimes proceedings, memoirs, and other records. There are also quotes from first-person narratives — testaments secretly buried around the Auschwitz grounds, written by prisoners.

These records chronicle the evil of Hitler’s regime. In a similar way, Zechariah’s visions serve as prophetic records of evil. This seventh night

vision reinforces the point that at God's appointed time sin will be judged. In that day, when Babylon falls, all who are not found in Christ, will be established in hell forever, there to set forever under the sentence of everlasting damnation, upon their own base. In other words, all who are damned will be justly damned forever.

(2 Corinthians 5:20-21) Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. (21) For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

(2 Corinthians 6:1-2) We then, *as* workers together *with him*, beseech *you* also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (2) (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.)

(2 Corinthians 6:17-18) Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, (18) And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

(2 Corinthians 7:1) Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

May God give you grace, oh, may he graciously force you, to flee from your own works of righteousness, confess your sin, and flee to Christ, by whom alone and in whose blood alone, we can "*cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*"

Amen.