

Zechariah Chapter 5 — The Flying Scroll and the Basket of Wickedness

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Zechariah Chapter 5 shifts the focus from encouragement and restoration to the serious problem of sin among God's people.

In the previous visions, God promised protection, cleansing, spiritual power, and future blessing.

But restoration could not mean ignoring wickedness.

A holy God would not rebuild Jerusalem while allowing sin to remain unchallenged.

Zechariah therefore receives two striking visions.

The first is a **flying scroll** carrying God's judgment against specific sins.

The second is a **basket containing a woman called Wickedness**, which is carried away to the land of Shinar.

Together these visions teach an important truth:

God not only restores His people; He also purifies them.

The chapter contains two major sections:

1. **The Flying Scroll — Judgment on Sin — verses 1–4**
2. **The Woman in the Basket — Wickedness Removed — verses 5–11**

The message is clear:

God sees sin, judges sin, restrains sin, and ultimately removes wickedness from among His people.

I. THE FLYING SCROLL — JUDGMENT ON SIN

Zechariah 5:1

“Then I looked up again, and I saw a flying scroll.”

Zechariah now sees another vision.

This time it is a scroll flying through the air.

Scrolls in Scripture often contain written revelation, commands, warnings, or judgments.

The fact that the scroll is flying suggests that the message is active.

God's Word is going out.

It is not sitting unused.

It is moving throughout the land to accomplish the purpose for which God sent it.

Cross References in Simple American English

Ezekiel 2:9 — Ezekiel saw a scroll containing words of sorrow, mourning, and judgment.

Revelation 5:1 — John saw a scroll in God's hand that contained His purposes for judgment and redemption.

Jeremiah 36:2 — God told Jeremiah to write His words on a scroll.

Spiritual Lesson

God's Word is active.

It reveals.

It warns.

It judges.

It exposes what human beings try to hide.

Application

Never treat Scripture as merely information.

God's Word confronts us personally.

Zechariah 5:2

"The angel asked me, 'What do you see?' I answered, 'I see a flying scroll, twenty cubits long and ten cubits wide.'"

The scroll was enormous.

Twenty cubits by ten cubits would have made it roughly thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide, depending on the cubit used.

Its size emphasized the importance and visibility of the message.

Interestingly, these dimensions correspond closely to the dimensions of the porch of Solomon's temple.

The scroll therefore may also suggest judgment proceeding from God's holy standard.

Cross References in Simple American English

1 Kings 6:3 — The porch of Solomon's temple measured twenty cubits long and ten cubits deep.

Ezekiel 40:49 — Ezekiel measured the entrance area of the future temple.

Revelation 21:16 — The New Jerusalem was carefully measured according to God's design.

Principle

God measures according to His own standard.

Application

The question is not whether our behavior seems acceptable to society.

The question is whether it agrees with God's Word.

Zechariah 5:3

“He said to me, ‘This is the curse that goes out over the whole land. On one side, it condemns everyone who steals; on the other side, it condemns everyone who swears falsely.’”

The scroll carried a curse.

This refers to the judgment connected with breaking God's covenant commands.

Two sins are specifically mentioned:

Stealing.

Swearing falsely.

Stealing violates a person's relationship with others.

False oaths violate a person's relationship with God.

These two sins may represent broader violations of God's law.

The people were rebuilding a holy community, but outward reconstruction would mean little if dishonesty remained in their hearts.

Cross References in Simple American English

Deuteronomy 27:26 — A curse rests upon the person who refuses to keep God's law.

Malachi 3:5 — God promised to judge thieves, liars, oppressors, and those who dishonor Him.

Leviticus 19:12 — God commanded His people not to swear falsely by His name.

Spiritual Lesson

Sin affects both our relationship with God and our relationships with other people.

Application

A person cannot claim devotion to God while living dishonestly toward others.

Zechariah 5:4

“The Lord Almighty declares: ‘I will send it out, and it will enter the house of the thief and of the one who swears falsely by My name. It will remain in that house and destroy it completely—its wood and stones alike.’”

God’s judgment would enter the homes of those living in deliberate sin.

This is a frightening image.

Sin may appear private.

But it is never hidden from God.

The curse would remain until the house was consumed.

The mention of wood and stones emphasizes complete judgment.

Cross References in Simple American English

Leviticus 14:45 — A contaminated house could be torn down completely, including its stones and wood.

Habakkuk 2:11 — Even the stones and beams of a house are pictured as testifying against injustice.

Proverbs 3:33 — The Lord’s curse rests upon the house of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the righteous.

Key Truth

Sin carries consequences beyond the moment in which it is committed.

Application

Hidden sin can damage:

Families.

Homes.

Relationships.

Reputations.

Churches.

Ministries.

Do not wait until sin destroys what you value.

Repent while mercy is offered.

II. THE WOMAN IN THE BASKET — WICKEDNESS REMOVED

Zechariah 5:5

“Then the angel who talked with me came forward and said, ‘Look up and see what is coming.’”

Zechariah is directed to look again.

Another symbolic picture is coming.

The first vision showed judgment against individual acts of sin.

The second vision broadens the picture.

Now wickedness itself is personified and removed.

Cross References in Simple American English

Amos 7:1 — God showed Amos symbolic visions revealing His purposes.

Daniel 10:1 — Daniel received visions concerning future events.

Revelation 4:1 — John was invited to look and see what God would reveal.

Spiritual Lesson

God wants His people to understand not only individual sinful actions but the deeper reality of wickedness itself.

Zechariah 5:6

“I asked, ‘What is it?’ He replied, ‘It is a measuring basket, an ephah. This is the sin of the people throughout the land.’”

Zechariah saw an **ephah**, a basket used for measuring grain and other goods.

Because an ephah was associated with commerce, the image may suggest economic corruption, dishonest trade, materialism, or wickedness becoming organized within society.

The basket represented the iniquity found throughout the land.

Cross References in Simple American English

Amos 8:5 — Dishonest merchants made the ephah smaller so they could cheat customers.

Micah 6:11 — God condemned dishonest scales and fraudulent measurements.

Leviticus 19:36 — God commanded His people to use honest scales and measurements.

Key Principle

God cares about integrity in everyday life.

Application

Faithfulness to God includes honesty in:

Business.

Money.

Contracts.

Work.

Sales.

Taxes.

Promises.

A person cannot separate spirituality from integrity.

Zechariah 5:7

“Then the lead cover was lifted, and there sat a woman inside the basket.”

Inside the basket was a woman.

The woman is symbolic.

The next verse identifies her clearly as **Wickedness**.

The heavy lead cover suggests restraint.

Wickedness was being contained.

Cross References in Simple American English

Revelation 17:3 — John saw a symbolic woman representing a corrupt religious and political system.

Proverbs 7:10 — Wickedness is sometimes personified through the image of an immoral woman.

Revelation 17:5 — Symbolic Babylon is pictured as the mother of abominations.

Spiritual Lesson

Scripture sometimes personifies sin to show its active, corrupting influence.

Zechariah 5:8

“He said, ‘This is Wickedness,’ and he forced her back into the basket and pushed the lead cover over its opening.”

The angel identifies the woman:

“This is Wickedness.”

The meaning is not uncertain.

She represents evil.

But notice what happens.

She is forced back into the basket.

The cover is shut.

Wickedness is restrained.

This reveals God’s authority over evil.

Sin is powerful.

But sin is not sovereign.

Cross References in Simple American English

Revelation 20:1 — An angel is given authority to restrain Satan.

Proverbs 9:13 — Folly is personified as loud, foolish, and destructive.

Micah 7:19 — God promises to conquer the sins of His people and cast them away.

Key Truth

Evil may be active, but it is never beyond God’s control.

Application

Never believe that wickedness has become too powerful for God to restrain.

Zechariah 5:9

“Then I looked up and saw two women flying with the wind in their wings. They had wings like those of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven.”

Two women now appear with wings like those of a stork.

They lift the basket and carry it away.

The stork was an unclean bird under the Mosaic Law, which fits the context of removing wickedness.

The picture is one of complete relocation.

Wickedness is being taken away from the holy land.

Cross References in Simple American English

Leviticus 11:19 — The stork was classified among the birds Israel was not to eat.

Revelation 12:14 — Wings are used symbolically to picture rapid movement and escape.

Ezekiel 17:3 — Ezekiel used symbolic winged creatures in prophetic imagery.

Spiritual Lesson

God's goal is not merely to expose wickedness.

He intends to remove it.

Application

True repentance does not ask:

How much sin can I keep?

It asks:

How completely can this be removed from my life?

Zechariah 5:10

“I asked the angel, ‘Where are they taking the basket?’”

Zechariah again asks for understanding.

The destination matters.

Where wickedness is taken will reveal more about the meaning of the vision.

Cross References in Simple American English

Ezekiel 8:3 — Ezekiel was transported in a vision to see spiritual corruption.

Ezekiel 37:1 — The Spirit carried Ezekiel to a place where God revealed a message.

Revelation 21:10 — John was carried away in the Spirit and shown the holy city.

Principle

Prophetic symbols should be interpreted carefully rather than guessed at carelessly.

Zechariah 5:11

“He replied, ‘To the land of Shinar, to build a house for it. When it is ready, the basket will be set there in its place.’”

The basket is taken to **Shinar**.

Shinar is associated with ancient Babylon.

It was the region connected with Babel and early human rebellion against God.

It later became associated with Babylonian power, idolatry, pride, and opposition to God.

Wickedness is removed from the holy land and carried back to a place historically associated with rebellion.

The building of a house for it suggests wickedness becoming established within a system opposed to God.

Cross References in Simple American English

Genesis 11:2 — The people who built the Tower of Babel settled in the land of Shinar.

Genesis 10:10 — Nimrod's kingdom began in Babel in the land of Shinar.

Revelation 18:2 — End-time Babylon is pictured as a center of corruption destined for judgment.

Spiritual Lesson

God separates holiness from wickedness.

Application

God does not call His people to make peace with Babylon.

He calls them to come out of its corruption.

III. MAJOR THEMES OF ZECHARIAH 5

1. God's Word Judges Sin

The flying scroll reveals that God's Word carries moral authority.

It does not merely advise.

It judges.

2. Sin Cannot Remain Hidden

The curse enters the sinner's house.

Private wrongdoing is still visible to God.

3. God Requires Integrity

Stealing and false oaths show that God cares deeply about honesty.

Spirituality without integrity is counterfeit.

4. Wickedness Can Become Organized

The ephah suggests that sin can become embedded in society, commerce, culture, and systems.

5. God Restrains Evil

The lead cover is forced over Wickedness.

God remains sovereign over sin.

6. God Removes Wickedness

The basket is carried away from the land.

God's purpose is purification.

7. Babylon Represents Rebellion

Shinar connects the vision with humanity's long history of organized resistance against God.

8. Judgment and Restoration Belong Together

God cannot restore His people while ignoring the sin that destroyed them.

True restoration requires purification.

IV. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND THE FLYING SCROLL

The two sins specifically named are important.

Stealing

This violates the command:

“You shall not steal.”

It concerns our relationship with other people.

Swearing Falsely

This violates the command against misusing God's name.

It concerns our relationship with God.

Together these may represent the two major directions of God's moral law:

Our responsibility toward God.

Our responsibility toward others.

Spiritual Lesson

Sin always affects relationships.

It damages fellowship with God.

It damages fellowship with people.

V. BABYLON IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Shinar is more than a geographical location.

It carries theological significance.

1. Babel Began in Shinar

Genesis 11 records humanity gathering in rebellion and attempting to build a name for itself apart from God.

2. Babylon Became a Center of Idolatry

Babylon later became one of the greatest pagan empires of the ancient world.

3. Babylon Destroyed Jerusalem

It was Babylon that destroyed the temple and carried Judah into captivity.

4. Revelation Uses Babylon Symbolically

Revelation presents Babylon as a larger symbol of human civilization organized in rebellion against God.

Key Principle

Babylon represents what humanity builds when it seeks greatness apart from God.

VI. CHRIST IN ZECHARIAH 5

Zechariah 5 primarily emphasizes judgment, but its themes also point us toward our need for Christ.

1. Christ Bears the Curse

The flying scroll reveals the curse brought by breaking God's law.

The New Testament teaches that Christ redeemed believers from the curse of the law by bearing judgment in our place.

2. Christ Cleanses from Sin

The basket reveals wickedness that must be removed.

Christ does not merely forgive the penalty of sin.

He also begins the work of cleansing His people from sin's power.

3. Christ Will Ultimately Remove Evil

The vision anticipates a world in which wickedness does not remain among God's people forever.

Christ will one day judge evil completely.

4. Christ Calls His People Out of Babylon

The biblical call to separate from Babylon ultimately represents separation from the sinful world system opposed to God.

Believers belong to Christ.

Our loyalty is to His kingdom.

VII. SIN IN THE HOME

Zechariah 5:4 gives a sobering picture of judgment entering the house.

Sin rarely remains isolated.

A hidden sin can eventually affect an entire family.

Dishonesty can destroy trust.

Greed can destroy relationships.

Adultery can destroy marriages.

Addiction can devastate households.

Bitterness can poison generations.

The lesson is clear:

Deal with sin before sin deals with your home.

VIII. GOD'S PURPOSE IS PURITY

Zechariah's visions reveal a pattern.

Chapter 3 showed Joshua being cleansed.

Chapter 4 showed God's Spirit empowering His servants.

Chapter 5 shows wickedness being removed.

God does not merely want a rebuilt temple.

He wants a holy people.

Outward restoration without inward holiness is incomplete.

Principle

God is interested in more than rebuilding our circumstances.

He wants to transform our character.

IX. KEY LESSONS FROM ZECHARIAH 5

1. God's Word exposes and judges sin.

The flying scroll carries divine judgment throughout the land.

2. Sin cannot remain hidden forever.

God sees what happens inside the home as well as in public.

3. Dishonesty matters to God.

Stealing and false oaths are serious offenses.

4. Wickedness can influence entire societies.

The basket shows sin becoming something larger than individual acts.

5. God remains sovereign over evil.

Wickedness is forced back into the basket and restrained.

6. God intends to remove evil from His people.

The basket is carried away from the land.

7. Babylon represents organized rebellion against God.

Shinar recalls the long history of human pride and idolatry.

8. Restoration requires purification.

God does not simply rebuild what is broken.

He removes what caused the destruction.

X. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Zechariah 5 challenges us to ask:

Is there hidden sin in my life that I am hoping God will ignore?

Am I completely honest in my dealings with others?

Do my words honor God?

Have I allowed dishonesty to enter my home?

Am I treating sin casually because judgment has not come immediately?

Is there something God is trying to remove from my life that I keep bringing back?

Have I become comfortable with the values of Babylon?

Do I want God merely to improve my circumstances, or do I want Him to purify my heart?

XI. QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What did Zechariah see flying through the air?

Answer

He saw a large flying scroll.

Question 2

What did the scroll represent?

Answer

It represented God's curse and judgment against sin throughout the land.

Question 3

Which two sins were specifically mentioned?

Answer

Stealing and swearing falsely by God's name.

Question 4

Why are those two sins significant?

Answer

They represent violations against both other people and God, showing that God's moral law governs every part of life.

Question 5

What happened when the curse entered the house of the sinner?

Answer

It remained there and brought complete destruction.

Question 6

What was the ephah?

Answer

It was a measuring basket commonly used in trade and commerce.

Question 7

Who was inside the basket?

Answer

A woman who symbolically represented Wickedness.

Question 8

What happened to Wickedness?

Answer

She was forced back into the basket and covered with a heavy lead lid.

Question 9

What does the lead cover teach us?

Answer

It shows that wickedness remains under God's authority and can be restrained by Him.

Question 10

Who carried the basket away?

Answer

Two women with wings like those of a stork carried it away.

Question 11

Where was the basket taken?

Answer

It was taken to the land of Shinar.

Question 12

Why is Shinar significant?

Answer

Shinar is associated with Babel and Babylon, places that symbolize organized human rebellion, pride, and idolatry.

Question 13

What is the main lesson of the second vision?

Answer

God intends to remove wickedness from among His people.

Question 14

What is the central message of Zechariah 5?

Answer

God judges sin according to His Word and will ultimately remove wickedness from among His people.

XII. FINAL THOUGHT

Zechariah Chapter 5 reminds us that restoration and holiness cannot be separated.

God had promised to rebuild Jerusalem.

He had cleansed Joshua.

He had promised to empower Zerubbabel.

But now He confronted the sin still present among the people.

The flying scroll declared:

God sees sin.

The curse entering the house declared:

Sin has consequences.

The woman in the basket declared:

Wickedness is real.

The lead cover declared:

God can restrain wickedness.

The journey to Shinar declared:

God intends to remove wickedness from His holy people.

This chapter therefore asks us a serious question:

Are we asking God to bless what He is trying to cleanse?

Sometimes we pray for restoration while protecting the very sin that caused the destruction.

Sometimes we ask God to rebuild while refusing to repent.

Sometimes we want blessing without holiness.

Zechariah 5 will not allow that contradiction.

God restores.

But God also purifies.

God forgives.

But God also transforms.

God comforts.

But God also confronts.

So when God exposes sin, do not hide it.

When His Word confronts you, do not resist it.

When He begins removing wickedness, do not fight to keep what He is taking away.

Let the flying scroll speak.

Let the basket be carried away.

Let God purify what He intends to use for His glory.

Key Verse

“This is the curse that goes out over the whole land.” — Zechariah 5:3

Key Phrase

God exposes sin, judges wickedness, and removes evil from among His people.