

ZECHARIAH

Chapter 5

The Flying Scroll

I looked again—and there before me was a flying scroll! ² He asked me, “What do you see?” I answered, “I see a flying scroll, thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide.” ³ And he said to me, “This is the curse that is going out over the whole land; for according to what it says on one side, every thief will be banished, and according to what it says on the other, everyone who swears falsely will be banished. ⁴ The LORD Almighty declares, ‘I will send it out, and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of him who swears falsely by my name. It will remain in his house and destroy it, both its timbers and its stones.’”

5:1–4 The sixth vision. Lawbreakers are condemned by the law they have broken; sinners will be purged from the land. (CSB)

5:1 *flying*. Unrolled and waving like a banner, for all to read. (CSB)

scroll. This was a book-scroll, or parchment, of great size, or consisting of many large leaves fastened together. (Kretzmann)

This scroll comes from heaven and contains God’s message. Jeremiah was told to write on a scroll all the words the Lord had spoken, and Ezekiel was supposed to eat a scroll filled with lamentations (Ez 3:1). (TLSB)

5:2 *What do you see?* See 4:2. (CSB)

thirty ... fifteen. Unusually large (especially in its width), for all to see. Such a bold, clear message of judgment against sin should spur the people on to repentance and righteousness. (CSB)

It is massively oversized, 30 by 15 ft., the scroll had the same dimensions as the Holy Place in the original tabernacle and in Solomon’s temple (1 Ki 6:3). This links the heavenly scroll and its message to the earthly sanctuary being restored. (TLSB)

5:3 *curse*. The interpreting angel revealed to Zechariah that the scroll contained a curse, just as the Lord’s covenant with Israel included a series of curses for those who failed to obey His commandments (Dt. 27:15-26; 28:15-68). (TLSB)

on one side ... on the other. Like the two tablets of the law (Ex 32:15), the scroll is inscribed on both sides (cf. Eze 2:9–10; Rev 5:1). (CSB)

thief. He breaks the seventh commandment (Ex 20:15). (CSB)

This was an especially prevalent sin in economically depressed Judah. (TLSB)

WILL BE BANISHED – ESV has “cleaned out.” This is the Hebrew *naqah* which is the expression meaning “purge out” or “empty” from the holy people. (TLSB)

everyone who swears falsely. See 8:17. Such a person violates the second commandment (compare v. 4 with Ex 20:7). Although theft and perjury may have been the most common forms of lawbreaking at the time, they are probably intended as representative sins. The people of Judah had been guilty of infractions against the whole law (cf. Jas 2:10). (CSB)

Swearing an oath of innocence was one feature of the Israelite system of justice (Ex 22:11; Nu 5:19-21). To swear falsely was likely a common abuse of this legal procedure. (TLSB)

WILL BE BANISHED – That is, the sinners who refuse to repent, who persist in their wickedness, must be cut off and removed; the holiness of God cannot rule in any other way. (Kretzmann)

5:4 *it will enter ... and destroy.* “It” refers to the curse (v. 3). God’s word, whether promise (ch. 4) or warning (as here), always accomplishes its purpose (cf. Ps 147:15; Isa 55:10–11; Heb 4:12–13). (CSB)

People who steal and swear falsely might escape human punishment but not the Lord’s. His curse will enter a house and remain there until the house is consumed. His covenant, including its curses, was still in effect. (TLSB)

These words are properly expressive of the curse and of the punishment of God upon every form of deliberate transgression. The Lord is like a consuming fire upon everything that is called sin. (Kretzmann)

5:1–4 God’s curse rests on all who fail to keep His Law perfectly (Gal 3:10), but in Christ, that curse is removed. For “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). How blessed we are that our debt was canceled by having it nailed to the cross (Col 2:14)! • Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for removing God’s curse, which rested on me because of my sin. Assist me as I share this Good News with others. Amen. (TLSB)

The Woman in a Basket

⁵ Then the angel who was speaking to me came forward and said to me, “Look up and see what this is that is appearing.” ⁶ I asked, “What is it?” He replied, “It is a measuring basket.” And he added, “This is the iniquity of the people throughout the land.” ⁷ Then the cover of lead was raised, and there in the basket sat a woman! ⁸ He said, “This is wickedness,” and he pushed her back into the basket and pushed the lead cover down over its mouth. ⁹ Then I looked up—and there before me were two women, with the wind in their wings! They had wings like those of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between heaven and earth. ¹⁰

“Where are they taking the basket?” I asked the angel who was speaking to me. ¹¹ He replied, “To the country of Babylonia to build a house for it. When it is ready, the basket will be set there in its place.”

5:5–11 The seventh vision. Not only must flagrant, persistent sinners be removed from the land (vv. 1–4), but the whole sinful system will be removed—apparently to a more fitting place (Babylonia). (CSB)

5:5 THE ANGEL – This was the angel who acted as the interpreter of all these visions. (Kretzmann)

CAME FORWARD – There was a pause in the revelations of the Lord. (Kretzmann)

LOOK UP – What was appearing before his eyes was something that he should observe very closely. (Kretzmann)

Begins the seventh of Zechariah’s eight visions. (TLSB)

going out. The angel called attention to the fact that the object in the vision was moving away. (TLSB)

5:6 *measuring basket.* A normal ephah-sized container would not be large enough to hold a person. This one was undoubtedly enlarged (like the flying scroll of vv. 1–2) for the purpose of the vision. (CSB)

Lit, an “ephah,” a container roughly the size of a bushel. This basket must have been oversized, since a woman was inside and a lid on top (v 7). (TLSB)

iniquity. See v. 8 (“wickedness”). (CSB)

When the contents of the basket were revealed to Zechariah, he understood better why it was labeled “iniquity.” (TLSB)

The object in the vision was evidently a receptacle having the shape of an ephah, and the ephah was chosen because it was often called the measure of unrighteousness and of deceit. (Kretzmann)

5:7 COVER OF LEAD – Lead is a heavy metal, which unlike gold, silver, bronze, and iron, was considered quite useless in biblical times. A lead cover is most appropriate when confining iniquity. (TLSB)

woman. Perhaps the reason the people’s wickedness was personified as a woman (cf. also Rev 17:3–6) is that the Hebrew word for “wickedness” (v. 8) is feminine in gender. (CSB)

Some women and female figures posed threats to the worship of the true God in several ways. The foreign wives of Solomon “turned away his heart after other gods” (1 Kg 11:4). Marriage to foreign wives was a problem among the exiles who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon (Ezra 9:2; 10:18). In Revelation, Babylon is called the “mother of prostitutes” (Rv 17:5). (TLSB)

5:8 *wickedness*. A general word denoting moral, religious and civil evil—frequently used as an antonym of righteousness (e.g., Pr 13:6; Eze 33:12). The whole evil system was to be destroyed (cf. 2Th 2:6–8). (CSB)

The ultimate wickedness is idolatry, worshiping other gods and goddesses (SC, First Commandment). Judeans taken captive to Babylon would have become familiar with worship of the fertility goddess Ishtar. Queen Athaliah of Judah, who promoted idolatry even within the temple, is called “that wicked woman” (2 Ch. 24:7). The woman in the basket is the personification of idolatry. (TLSB)

5:9 *two women*. Divinely chosen agents. (CSB)

Likely angels, though the setting is in a vision, which may not depict heavenly reality; this is the only place in Scripture where female figures have an angelic role. It is fitting that these two carry away the wicked woman. (TLSB)

wind. Also an instrument of God (Ps 104:3–4). The removal of wickedness would be the work of God alone. (CSB)

THEIR WINGS – Humanlike angels are not depicted with wings elsewhere in Scripture, though they are described as flying (Rv. 14:6) Cherubim and seraphim are winged. (TLSB)

STORK – Large white and black bird with powerful wings. The Judeans would think of storks as birds on the move since they were migratory and hatched their eggs elsewhere. (TLSB)

5:11 *Babylonia*. See Ge 10:10. Babylonia, a land of idolatry, was an appropriate locale for wickedness—but not Israel, where God chose to dwell with his people. Only after purging it of its evil would the promised land truly be the “holy land” (2:12). (CSB)

land of Shinar. Babylon, the land from which the exiles had come, a land where many Judeans were still living (2:6–7). (TLSB)

In the land of Babylon, representative of the ungodly world, wickedness was to have its place, to the forever excluded from the kingdom of the Lord. The congregation of the Lord is the holy Christian Church, and for that reason the Lord will brook no open wickedness in its midst. Willful and unrepentant sinners must be excluded from the communion of saints. Note: There may be a special reason for comparing the essence of all wickedness with a woman; for so also the great harlot of the Book of Revelation is

described, the kingdom of Antichrist being the climax and summary of all godless doctrine. (Kretzmann)

house. Temple (Hg 1:9). In Jerusalem, the temple was being restored for the worship of the true God; in Babylon, the people were building a house for an idol. (TLSB)

base. The pedestal on which the woman's image was placed. (TLSB)

5:5–11 The ever-present temptation to idolatry came to the people of Jerusalem who had worked so hard at rebuilding the temple. God made it clear that idolatry had no place among them; that wicked woman had to be carted off to Babylon. Idolatry has no place among us either. "You shall have no other gods" (Ex 20:3). We were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The triune God has given us life and salvation. Worship and serve Him alone! • Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever. Amen. (TLSB)