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Zechariah 5:5-11

Aren't you tired of sin? Though at times our delight (Hebrews 11:25), sin is one of our greatest regrets! Paul put it this way:

Romans 7:15, "...that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate."

If you have walked with Christ very long, you know this struggle! In fact, Paul would expound upon it just a couple of verses later.

Romans 7:22-23, "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members."

Such a strange contradiction. When we are sinning, we love it! But when God opens our eyes and we are brought to repentance, the very thing we loved becomes something that we hate! So, what is the answer?

Romans 7:24-25, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

The answer for this struggle is Christ — both for us individually and as a body.

This is the topic of the seventh vision which God gave to Zechariah. The sixth century BC found God's people struggling in Babylon having been sent there by God as punishment on account of their corporate sin! There they remained seventy years, until 538 BC when Cyrus gave the decree which allowed God's people to return to their home in Palestine. Shockingly, most God's people did NOT want to leave Babylon, for they had become paganized, valuing the passing pleasures of this world more than the things of God! Yet there was a remnant who returned to Jerusalem at this time to rebuild both the temple and the city.

Yet because it was far from easy, in short order compromise set in such that the people who returned looked an awful like their countrymen who chose NOT to return! It was to this people God sent two prophets to rouse them unto fidelity! The aged prophet, Haggai, whom the Lord used to inspire God's people to rebuild the temple. The younger, Zechariah, whom the Lord used to address the thinking, attitude, motives, and worldview of God's people that they might live in light of their Covenant Keeping God!

The first section (chapters 1-6) contains eight visions which the Lord gave Zechariah in one night! We are looking at the seventh vision which gives us a peak into God's plan and program as it relates to the sin of His people!

[The Banality of Wickedness, vv. 5-8a.](#)

Zechariah 5:5, "Then the angel who was speaking with me went out, and said to me, 'Lift up now your eyes, and see what this is, going forth.'"

With this vision, the angel and guide of Zechariah moves away from the temple, out amongst God's people to give Zechariah a glimpse at what God would do about the sin of His people.¹ And so, the angel calls upon the Zechariah to, "Lift up now your eyes, and see what this is, going forth."

Notice that the vision began with a distant image which Zechariah could hardly see. As it nears, Zechariah inquired of the angel.

Zechariah 5:6, “And I said, ‘What is it?’ And he said, ‘This is the ephah going forth.’ Again he said, ‘This is their appearance in all the land.’”

The word for “ephah” refers to a large basket used for measuring grain (cf. Ruth 2:17; 1 Samuel 1:24).² It was one of the many tools used in Judaism to ascertain the amount or worth of a product or good (like grain), much like we use a bushel basket. Its capacity ranged from approximately five to ten gallons — which means the basket was rather large (when it came to grain), BUT incredibly small if it were to measure the sin of God’s people (as it does here). With that notice the word “appearance.”

The word used in the Hebrew is the word for “eye” (אֵינַן [ayin]) which doesn’t make sense, “This is their eye in all the land”? Accordingly, Bible scholars have taken these one of two ways:

- EITHER they stretch the idea and take the word as “appearance”- because that is what the eye sees... *appearances* of things- NASB, KJV, NKJV.
- OR they have noted that the difference in spelling between the Hebrew word for “eye” (אֵינַן [ayin]) and the Hebrew word for “iniquity” (אֲוֹן [avon]) is the length of the tail of the middle letter of the word, the yôd (י) as in “eye” or the wāw (ו) as in “iniquity.”- ESV, NIV, RSV.

Because of the context, most today believe that the correct translation is the latter.³ For indeed, God here is talking about His people’s sin — as in the sixth vision: v. 3, “This is their iniquity in all the land!” In that vision God instructed His people as to how they ought to respond to a brother or sister in sin. With this vision, the focus is on God’s response! With that, notice that response.

Zechariah 5:7-8a, “(And behold, a lead cover was lifted up [to give Zechariah a peek]); and this is a woman sitting inside the ephah. Then he said, ‘This is Wickedness!’”

An objection has been raised for it seems as if God is being sexist here, using “a woman” to personify “wickedness.” Yet that is only on account of ignorance. The reason “a woman” is used to personify wickedness — NOT only here, BUT throughout the Bible — is because the word for “wickedness” NOT ONLY is a feminine noun (which means if you are going to personify it, it will have to be a woman), BUT the word for “woman” and the word for “wickedness” rhyme: אִשָּׁה (ishshah)/ woman vs. רִשָּׁעָה (rishah)/wickedness.

That being said, the subject in this vision would NOT have been a new concept either to Zechariah or the people of God. God uses this language — wickedness — as the

personification of evil/sin throughout the Bible⁴ from which we learn five incredible truths about wickedness- from Proverbs 7.

First, the appearance of wickedness is NOT ugly or something which we naturally would recoil from. Rather, she is most desirable.

Proverbs 7:7-10, "For at the window of my house I looked out through my lattice, and I saw among the naive, I discerned among the youths, a young man lacking sense, passing through the street near her corner; and he takes the way to her house, in the twilight, in the evening, in the middle of the night and *in* the darkness. And behold, a woman *comes* to meet him [this is the woman of Zechariah 5...], dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart."

"Wickedness" is as a prostitute... cunning, well-dressed, and so most desirable!

Secondly, she is fun and makes herself quite available to any and all interested.

Proverbs 7:11-12, "She is boisterous and rebellious; her feet do not remain at home; *she is* now in the streets, now in the squares, and lurks by every corner."

In other words, one doesn't have to go far to look for wickedness/sin. She is everywhere, always available to any customer!

Third, from outward appearances, she is NOT dirty BUT clean.

Proverbs 7:13-15, "So she seizes him and kisses him, and with a brazen face she says to him: I was due to offer peace offerings; today I have paid my vows. Therefore I have come out to meet you, to seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you."

Fourth, she promises the high-life, the good-life, and so the rich life!

Proverbs 7:16-18, "I have spread my couch with coverings, with colored linens of Egypt. I have sprinkled my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning; let us delight ourselves with caresses."

Fifth, she always comes across as being safe and therefore no big deal!

Proverbs 7:19-20, "For the man is not at home, he has gone on a long journey; he has taken a bag of money with him, at full moon he will come home."

"Go ahead and sin... no one will know! No one will find out! You need never worry about that!"

From this we see the banality (or commonness) of wickedness. It is a lovely lady most

to be desired. It always looks clean, safe, innocuous, fun... promising great rewards! That no doubt is why those spiritual Green Berets who left Babylon for Jerusalem were so quickly sidetracked into sin! They weren't "watching and praying"! They simply were responding in the flesh to the trials and difficulties of life which naturally led to the indulgence of private, personal sin!

Such was the state of God's people in 520 BC — which is why God sent Haggai and Zechariah — for notice the danger of wickedness.

The Danger of Wickedness, v. 8b.

Zechariah 5:8, "Then he said, 'This is Wickedness!' And he threw her down into the middle of the ephah and cast the lead weight^{5,6} on its opening."

The language is fraught with conflict/struggle.⁷ The moment the lead covering was lifted (v. 7), "wickedness" began to struggle free. That is how virulent wickedness is! Speaking of our obligation to minister to brothers and sisters in sin, Jude gave this warning:

Jude 22-23, "And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh."

We must never look upon sin lightly! It is so dangerous.

2 Timothy 2:16-17a, "But avoid worldly *and* empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene..."

That is why in this vision, the angel doesn't play games. Rather, he "throws wickedness back down" into the basket! The word for "throw down"^{8,9} is the same word used to describe Moses when he "threw" the Ten Commandments down [Exodus 32:19] to break them!¹⁰ It carries the nuance of disgust, righteous anger, and forcefulness! But that is NOT all. NOT ONLY did the angel forcefully and quickly throw wickedness back into the basket, BUT he placed back on the basket a massive "lead weight" so that it could NOT get out!

One of our greatest pleasures as sinners is sin! Accordingly, we will have the tendency to play with sin and so take it lightly. Yet listen to the wages of unchecked sin in the life of a Christian. Solomon, speaking of the naïve child of God playing with sin wrote this:

Proverbs 7:22-23, "Suddenly he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as *one in* fetters to the discipline of a fool, until an arrow pierces through his liver; as a bird hastens to the snare, so he does not know that it *will cost him* his life."

Truly we must NEVER play with sin, NOR take it lightly! This brings us to God's twofold response to wickedness.

Zechariah 5:9, "Then I lifted up my eyes and looked, and there two women were coming out with the wind in their wings; and they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heavens."

With this verse, we have further proof that God here is NOT looking upon women negatively. Yes "wickedness" is personified as a woman, BUT so is God's answer to it! Notice the particulars of this verse.

The fact that these "two women" had "wind in their wings" is quite significant. The word for "wind" (רוּחַ [ruach]) is the word used of the almighty power of God by which He made the world (Job 26:13) and parted the Red Sea (Exodus 15:8-10). Yet ultimately, the word is used in reference to the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 40:13; Numbers 11:17, 25). And that is the nuance here.

When God's people sin, the Spirit of God lifts it "between the earth and the heavens". The significance of this reference comes to light when we read such passages as these:

John 3:14-15, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness [the idea here is that of being 'lifted up between the earth and the heavens'], even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life."

I don't know if Zechariah or the people of God understood the significance of the language here, YET we can and must! It was in that space "between heaven and earth" where the Son of God dealt with the "wickedness" of His people once for all.

John 12:32-33, "'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth [again, raised 'between the earth and the heavens'], will draw all men to Myself.' But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die."

What is God's response to His people's sin? He places it in a basket and lifts it up to the place where Christ atoned for it! Now does God do this in anger. Absolutely not!

Notice the expression, "the wings of a stork"¹¹... the picture is that of power/strength and yet tenderness and compassion. In Bible times, the "stork" had the reputation of being a powerful bird which cared tenderly for its own young!^{12,13} God's response to His people's wickedness is NOT that of condemnation or wrath! Just as Christ would NOT break a bruised reed (Isaiah 42:3), SO the Lord is tender, compassionate, and kind to each of us when we fall into sin!

That is God's initial response to His sinning people... He cleanses them through the redeeming work of Christ (cf. Zechariah 3)! Yet ultimately what is God's plan when it

comes NOT simply to His people's sin, BUT all wickedness?

Zechariah 5:10-11, "And I said to the angel who was speaking with me, 'Where are they taking the ephah?' Then he said to me, 'To build a temple for her in the land of Shinar; and when it is prepared, she will be set there on her own pedestal.'"



The language here is loaded with biblical/theological significance. The "temple" referenced here is that of a ziggurat. Furthermore, the "land of Shinar" was the ancient title used of the land of Babylon!¹⁴

So why didn't God just use the common term, "Babylon"? Because He is making an important statement/allusion here!

If one is familiar with the Bible, you will recall the horrible sin which began in "the land of Shinar" which involved a ziggurat.

Genesis 11:1-4a, "Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. And it came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and burn *them* thoroughly.' And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. And they said, 'Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower [a ziggurat] whose top *will reach* into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name..."

And so, following the flood, "wickedness" broke out in "the land of Shinar." It began with how mankind approached God, BUT then quickly came to encompass the kingdoms and economies of the world. Accordingly, understand that when the Bible speaks of "wickedness" it is NOT talking about groupings of various sins, BUT a specific grouping — beginning with the Satanic counterfeit of approaching God by one's senses believing that God is NOT a Being to be honored, worshipped, served, and obeyed, BUT a force to be experienced via the carnal elements of our flesh. Now this "mind" or worldview didn't simply remain as a religion of the ancient world BUT infected its kings and tradesmen such that today "wickedness" as used in the Bible encompasses the governments, economies, and religions of this fallen world which in the last day will join together as an unholy trivium! We read this in Revelation speaking of this "wickedness:"

Revelation 17:1-5, "And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, 'Come here, I shall show you the judgment of the great harlot [this is the 'wickedness' of Zechariah 5. It began with the Tower of Babel and is personified throughout the Bible as an adulterous woman] who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed *acts of* immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality [that's commerce]. And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a

woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, and upon her forehead a name *was* written, a mystery [this is all worldly religion] “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”¹⁵

It is this that is the subject of the text before us! Here God pictures the ongoing cleansing of His people by which He confines wickedness in a measuring basket and then ultimately and forcefully brings the basket to where it began, the land of Shinar! Here it would be “set there on her own pedestal”¹⁶ which means it would continue to be the object and focus of the worship and work of worldlings!¹⁷

And here the prophecy ends leaving the people of God with the twofold message of

- (1) God’s cleansing grace and
- (2) The ominous warning that Wickedness has been confined to Babylon to infect its governance, trade, and religion.

The implication is quite clear, in the face of your sin, don’t lament as if you are condemned! God has taken your wickedness away by lifting it up between heaven and earth! That being said, we must not think upon sin casually, as if it is no big deal. Rather, we must “watch and pray” for sin remains in this world and its desire is for you such that we must ever and always remain vigilant that we might master it!

And yet, there is more to be said here. For while the people of God in Zechariah’s day were NOT privy to God’s ultimate answer for the “wickedness” of this world, we are!

[The End of Wickedness, Revelation 18:1-10; 19:1-3](#)

Revelation 18:1-10, “After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality [notice once again, it is personified as a woman], and the kings of the earth have committed *acts of* immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.’ And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Pay her back even as she has paid and give back *to her* double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, “I sit *as* a queen and I am not a widow and will

never see mourning.”

For this reason, in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong. And the kings of the earth, who committed *acts of* immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’”

While the people to whom Zechariah spoke could NOT have known the ultimate significance of God confining wickedness “to the land of Shinar”, we do on account of God’s subsequent revelation! Accordingly, in the vision before us God is setting the board up for His end game as it relates to wickedness! Confining it to the land of Shinar, the Lord is readying it for its final judgment!

Until then, we must be sober and understand that the fallen world system in which we live is NOT a friend of grace, BUT in fact wages war against Christ (Revelation 17:14) and ultimately will seek the life of any and all who would be true to Christ (Revelation 17:6)!

So, what must we do?

- Watch and pray (Matthew 26:41).
- Delight ourselves in the Lord (Psalm 37:4), His Christ, the cross, and so God’s forgiveness and grace! May it be the love of Christ which controls us (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14)!
- Live with sobriety and understanding (Genesis 4:6-7)! Wickedness is NOT a friend of grace! It is the enemy of everything we hold dear! Therefore, let us “hate even the garment polluted by the flesh” (Jude 23)!
- Lastly, rejoice in the message we have received — for wickedness is NOT a force opposite and equal to God, BUT under the sovereign control of our Lord!

And so, rather than respond to this message with fear and a foreboding which will rob you of joy, the Bible exhorts us unto the opposite speaking of wickedness/Babylon the Great:

Revelation 18:20, “Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets [this is NOT calling us to rejoice on account of wickedness, BUT as ones looking over her dying corpse], because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.”

While this judgment has yet to come in its fullness, it is more certain than the rising of the sun! Accordingly, let us “come out of her that we might not participate in her sins” (Revelation 18:4) and so live our lives unto the honor, glory, and pleasure of Christ!!

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End Note(s)

¹ “Oddly, the dominant introductory observation note (‘then I raised my eyes and looked’) is employed in 5:9 to signal the beginning of a new phase of the visionary experience which begins here in 5:5. In ch. 5 there are thus two scenes which follow the common visionary sequence (5:1–4 and 9–11), and these have a few elements in common beyond the common introductory observation note. Both introductory notes are followed by a description of the scene introduced by behold (*hinnēh*). Both scenes involve an object flying which is not usually associated with flight. The destination of the objects in both cases is a ‘house’; in the first case, the object is the cause of its destruction and in the second case, the object is the cause of its construction. On the one side, the material that falls between these two visionary experiences (5:5–8) provides an important foundation for the visionary description and interpretation of the scene in 5:9–11. On the other side, the use of the interpreting messenger’s commands in 5:5, rather than the prophet’s autobiographical description to transition from one scene to the next, softens the distinction between 5:1–4 and 5:5–8.” (Boda, 2016, p. 341)

² “The measuring basket is actually an ephah, the largest dry measure in Israel. It contained about thirty-nine American quarts.” (Boice, 2006, p. 512)

³ “*This is the iniquity* represents a widely accepted emendation of the Hebrew, which reads ‘this is their eye’, AV *resemblance*. Granted that ‘eye’ can be applied to a wide variety of concepts in Hebrew (see note on 3:9), it seems best on three grounds to accept the emendation here. (a) It is supported by the Greek and Syriac versions. (b) The consonantal text requires only the substitution of a wāw for a yôd, letters which easily become interchanged. (c) The sense is greatly improved. The ephah, named by Amos in his invective on short measure given by the merchants (Amos 8:5), symbolized injustice in all the land. The life of the community was vitiated by iniquity that infected it in every part (cf. Hag. 2:14). The meanness that prompted the making of false measures was a symptom of an underlying perversity that was at the root of perverse actions and relationships.” (Baldwin, 1972, p. 136)

⁴ “[Wickedness] is a comprehensive term for all kinds of sin, both religious and social (Deut. 9:4; 2 Chr. 22:2–3). The broad usage to cover sins both against God and against fellow members of the covenant community is perhaps alluded to by the details of the vision.” (Duguid, 2010, p. 117)

⁵ “...literally, a ‘lead talent’. A talent was a measure of weight, roughly seventy-five pounds (or 34 kilos). Normally ‘talent’ was associated with precious metals such as gold or silver, but a base metal like lead was more suitable for this profane task. It is thus an unusual but substantial restraint, which keeps the woman trapped in the jar like a genie in a lamp.” (Duguid, 2010, p. 117)

⁶ “The lead item is called first a lead talent weight (*kikkar ‘ōperet*) in v. 7 and then a lead stone (*‘eben hā ‘ōperet*) in v. 8. Lead (*‘ōperet*) is listed alongside gold, silver, bronze, iron, and tin in the series of precious metals in Numbers 31:22, and alongside silver, iron, and tin in Ezek. 27:12.

Its position at the end of both lists may suggest its lower value. This substance is rarely found in its pure form, and although the land of Israel did not yield this substance, there were rich deposits to the north in Syria and Asia Minor. Ezekiel 27:12 reveals that it was imported by the Phoenicians from Tarshish. Its heaviness explains its practical use in Amos 7:7 as a construction instrument and its poetic use in Exod. 15:10 to describe the Egyptian army's descent beneath the waves of the Reed Sea." (Boda, 2016, p. 347)

⁷ Speaking of wickedness, "She attempts to escape from captivity, but the angel with superior strength is able to confine her to the ephah, though the verbs indicate a struggle involved. The power of evil was to be taken seriously." (Baldwin, 1972, p. 137)

⁸ "As soon as the lid of the basket rose, the woman hiding within attempted to escape. Dramatically, the angel forced the woman back into the basket giving her no additional opportunity to escape and spread her evil about the land. The verb *wayyašlēk* (NIV "he pushed") suggests that the woman struggled with the angel, even though he prevailed. The woman appears so threatening in this vision that she must remain in strict confinement under the powerful guard of the Lord's angels." (Klein, 2007, p. 179)

⁹ "This verb does not designate a gentle act, but rather a vigorous and at times violent act that would ensure the occupant of the ephah did not escape (e.g., Genesis 37:20, 22, 24; Exod. 1:22; Josh. 8:29; 10:27; 2 Samuel 18:17; 2 Chr. 25:12; Jer. 38:6, 9)" (Boda, 2016, p. 349)

¹⁰ Cf. also Revelation 18:21!

¹¹ "Stork wings are appropriate for the task of these women, since they would be able both to lift such a heavy load as well as to transport it the distance from Yehud to Babylon. The stork's migratory habit (cf. Jer. 8:7) of moving from south to north in the spring, would match the journey to Babylon, the land of the north." (Boda, 2016, p. 352)

¹² Cf. George L. Klein, *Zechariah*, NAC, p. 179.

¹³ "The angel may also intend an additional meaning for 'stork.' Even though the stork ranks among the unclean animals, it also had the reputation for caring tenderly for its own young. This observation lies behind the pun in the Old Testament between the Hebrew word for 'stork' (*ḥāsîdāh*) and the word rendered 'loyal' or 'faithful' (*ḥāsîd*). This same tender care for the helpless young marks the Lord's treatment of his 'young,' the Israelites." (Klein, 2007, p. 179)

¹⁴ "Shinar was the ancient name for the district in which the cities of Babylon, Erech and Akkad were situated (Genesis 10:10), from the earliest times regarded as opposed to God's way (Genesis 11:1–9)." (Baldwin, 1972, p. 137)

¹⁵ This is "wickedness" which refers to the fallen world system involving the kings and kingdoms of this earth (Revelation 18:9), its trade and so economic structure (Revelation 18:11), and its darkened religion (Revelation 17:4,9)!

¹⁶ "The verb has an unusual form, an intensified passive, which emphasizes her helplessness. Such were the other gods of Babylon (Isa. 46:1, 2). Once set there on its base, an idol to be worshipped, there it will stay." (Baldwin, 1972, p. 137)

¹⁷ "The antithesis of a rebuilt house for the Lord in Jerusalem is a rebuilt tower of Babel in Shinar (Genesis 11:2)." (Duguid, 2010, p. 119)