

Stork Women and the Flying Scroll

Zechariah's Sixth Night Vision

- ¹ Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, **a flying scroll!**
- ² And he said to me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a flying scroll. Its length is **twenty cubits**, and its width **ten cubits**."
- ³ Then he said to me, "**This is the curse** that goes out over the face of the whole land. For everyone who steals shall be cleaned out according to what is on one side, and everyone who swears falsely shall be cleaned out according to what is on the other side.
- ⁴ I will send it out, declares the LORD of hosts, and it shall **enter the house of the thief**, and the house of him who swears falsely by my name. And it shall remain in his house and consume it, both timber and stones."
- ⁵ Then the angel who talked with me came forward and said to me, "Lift your eyes and see what this is that is going out."
- ⁶ And I said, "What is it?" He said, "This is **the basket** that is going out." And he said, "This is their iniquity in all the land."
- ⁷ And behold, the leaden cover was lifted, and there was **a woman sitting in the basket!**
- ⁸ And he said, "This is **Wickedness**." And he thrust her back into the basket, and thrust down the leaden weight on its opening.
- ⁹ Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, **two women coming forward!** The wind was in their wings. They had wings like the wings of a **stork**, and they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven.
- ¹⁰ Then I said to the angel who talked with me, "Where are they taking the basket?"

¹¹ He said to me, "To the land of **Shinar**, to build a house for it. And when this is prepared, they will set the basket down there on its base."

Zechariah 5:1-11

Two Women

LADY WISDOM. FLOOZY FOLLY. Mystery one. Mystery both. “**Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town, ‘Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!’ To him who lacks sense she says, ‘Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight’” (Prov 9:1-6).**

“The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house; she takes a seat on the highest places of the town, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, ‘Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!’ And to him who lacks sense she says, ‘Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is

pleasant.’ But he does not know that the Rephaim are there, in deep places of Sheol her invited ones” (13-18).¹

Proverbs 9 describes the way of two very different woman. Both have prominent houses. Both invite travelers into their homes. Both offer refreshment and nourishment to the weary. Both offer something more than the meal. The home of Wisdom is life. The home of Folly is death.

Two opposite women resurface again and again in the Scripture. Consider Yahweh’s wife, **Christ’s bride**. She is a spotless virgin adorned with gold, her true beauty is inward and most pleasing in God’s sight. The converse is a whore and a harlot, tempting on the outside, she is a ghoul adorned in webs and worms. **Mystery Babylon** she is called in the Apocalypse, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations (**Rev 19:5**).

The ancients knew her by many names: **Astarte** to the Canaanites, **Aphrodite** to the Greeks, **Venus** to the Romans, **Inanna** to the Sumerians, and in Babylon she was **Ishtar**—goddess of fertility, love, war, and sex. The goddess is an exact match for the women in Revelation who rides a scarlet beast and represents all of the sins of

¹ The last verse beginning with “Rephaim...” is Young’s Literal Translation.

pleasure the world has to offer. And the world worships at her feet.

In a sense, the entire Bible can be read as the story of these two women. The Apostle takes the history of Abraham and his two wives and turns it into an allegory for the purposes of teaching theology. Sarah and Hagar, two women, are called two covenants. One is from “Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar ... Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, ‘Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband’” (Gal 4:24-27). Notice how in this allegory, biological descendants of Abraham who pride themselves on being his children are called “present Jerusalem.” But the others are Jerusalem from above. These are, “like Isaac, children of promise” (Gal 4:28).

It is into this world of two women that I want to look at Zechariah’s sixth vision, a vision full of strange and bizarre women. First, a little about the context. Many commentators see two different visions in Zechariah 5:1-8;

9-11. This is because of the phrase, “Then I lifted up my eyes and saw,” which they interpret as starting a new vision (see 1:18; 2:1; 5:1; 6:1).

However, as we have seen, there is a natural outline in the form of a chiasm in these visions. The outline moves from the world, to Israel, to the temple, to the Most Holy Place, then back out to the temple, to Israel, and then finally to the world. The focus of the vision throughout ch. 5 is clearly Israel, as it is in its parallel: vision 2 (1:18-21).² Seeing this as a single vision rather than a double vision will actually help us in our interpretation later. But what “Israel” is in mind? Such a question only makes sense in light of things like we saw with the two Jerusalems (above).

The Flying Scroll

As with many of these visions, the pictures described are very strange to our modern ears, though that would not have been the case to an original hearer. Therefore, let’s try to figure out what is happening. It begins with Zechariah lifting up his eyes and seeing something. This time he sees a “flying scroll” (Zech 5:1). As he has heard throughout his night visions, his accompanying angel asks him, “What do you see?” (2). He answers, “I see a flying

² Another parallel is in 13:2-9. See Kline, 177.

scroll.” Sometimes, Zechariah is a master of stating the obvious. Unlike some other occasions where he stops at the obvious, at least this time he describes more of the scene up front.

“Its length is twenty cubits, and its width ten cubits” (2). Then he said, “This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land” (vs. 3). In this way, the angel/Angel tells us that the scroll is a curse. So, the vision uses a physical object (the scroll) to describe an invisible reality (a curse). But can we be more specific about this invisible reality? It is the covenant relationship God has with the Jews. At Mt. Sinai, he entered into a covenant which was represented by two tablets of stone. It is the covenant that has curses, and thus the scroll contains the curses of the covenant, as Deuteronomy 27-28 gives in great detail. Where Zechariah calls it a scroll, Paul might call it Hagar!

Why is the scroll so large, nearly 15 x 30 feet? These dimensions actually teach us more about the nature of the curse. The dimensions of the scroll correspond to two different parts of the temple. The first is the forecourt (1 Kgs 6:3), a precinct where judicial activity would occur (1 Kgs 8:31–2). The second is the holy space spanned by the winged cherubim figures in the holy of holies (1 Kgs 6:23–

7), the place where God sat upon his throne. So like Solomon who used to judge all kinds of activities as the King, the dimensions of the scroll remind us of the place where this would occur. Therefore, if the scroll is a covenant curse with dimensions that are associated with **the justice dispensed by the King**, it probably does not portend well for someone.

The fact that there are two winged cherubim that stand guard over the ark of the covenant where, it just so happens, Moses was told to put the law, is important to the vision. As we see, the scroll is not just sitting on a table (that would be one huge table). It is “**flying**.” It has wings, like cherubim. Later in the vision, we will see more flying going on, and it is all related supernaturally to this judgment theme. This is similar to the various angels that go out in both the Old and New Testaments to judge and punish those who are receiving justice (**Ex 12:23; 2 Sam 24:17; 1 Chr 21:12; Ps 35:5-6; Rev 8:7-12**; etc.).

As mentioned, the curse goes out “**over the face of the whole land**” (3). Here, “land” refers to Israel. We know this, because the scroll is the covenant, and the covenant made here is not the one made with the whole world. It is

the covenant made with Israel, as symbolized in her temple architecture. Later in the vision, we will see this for certain.

But I asked, “which Israel?” The curse is directed at particular people within the covenant people. “**Everyone who steals shall be cleaned out according to what is on one side, and everyone who swears falsely shall be cleaned out according to what is on the other side**” (3). It continues, “I will send it out, declares the LORD of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief, and the house of him who swears falsely by my name.” Stealing and swearing falsely are things in the Law. Thus, the curses of the scroll come because people have broken God’s law. Now, they fly forth from the throne room as if on angels’ wings, to the four corners of Israel, seeking out whom they will.³

You see, in the old covenant, Israel was under a principle of “**do this and live**” (Lev 18:5; cf. Luke 10:28; Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12). It was physical. It was tangible. It was typological. That is what the Law said. If they obeyed,

³ **Going Deeper:** Three things should be kept in mind. First, there is a general sense in which everyone was guilty of these crimes. Second, the entire nation suffered the consequences. Thus, even God’s elect were brutally taken out of their land and brought into captivity in Babylon, if they weren’t put to death before they got there. Finally, the curses were temporal curses, not eternal curses. That is, God’s elect could suffer temporal curses, even being put to death for their sins, but not go to hell for it. The temporal points typologically to the eternal, but is not itself equal with the eternal curses, and that is why the elect can suffer temporal punishment for their sins.

they would stay in the land, God would bless them, they would have many wonderful things given to them by God. But if they did not, “cursed” are you. “Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl” (Deut 28:17); “Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out” (Deut 28:19); etc.

There are two sins mentioned, but perjury and stealing may simply be examples of the whole law. “Dishonoring God’s name by perjury violates the requirement to love him supremely and stealing from one’s neighbor is failure to love him as oneself.”⁴ The two sins are found together in Leviticus 6, “If anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against the LORD by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor or has found something lost and lied about it, swearing falsely-- in any of all the things that people do and sin thereby-- if he has sinned and has realized his guilt and will restore what he took by robbery or what he got by oppression or the deposit that was committed to him or the lost thing that he found or anything about which he has sworn falsely, he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs

⁴ Kline, 181.

on the day he realizes his guilt. And he shall bring to the priest as his compensation to the LORD a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent for a guilt offering” (Lev 6:2-6). Obviously, the people were not doing as they were commanded. Yet, to do these two things shows the highest disregard for holiness and submission to Yahweh. For they are offenses against God and neighbor.

Things haven’t changed today. As much as people want to make ethics situational and morals relative, it is still wrong to swear falsely and deceive for the sake of hurting someone. All people are held accountable for these kinds of sins, whether they are in a covenant like Israel was, or they are more generally under the covenant with Adam that still keeps all people in covenant relations with the Almighty. Anyone who wants to live under these rules must obey these rules. Anyone who wants eternal life by these rules must obey them perfectly. If not, then the consequences will not be pretty, as Israel was about to find out.

Demolition and Deportation

What follows next in the vision is demolition and deportation of Israel because of its sin. It starts off, “I will send it out, declares the LORD of hosts” (Zech 5:4).

“Human hands never touch a ‘flying scroll.’ God retains sole responsibility for sending this message to his people.”⁵

This is the LORD of Armies about to do something. “It shall enter the house of the thief, and the house of him who swears falsely by my Name. And it shall remain in his house and consume it, both timber and stones” (4). This is the **demolition**. The sinner is not safe even in his own house, for God’s curses for violating the covenant will find him out.

The image reminds us of the Exodus, but in reverse. In Moses’ day, the Angel of Death passed over the houses of Israel, because of the blood of the lamb brushed on the doorposts. But now, there is no blood, except maybe on their own hands. The destroying angel is not appeased. He is on the lookout, and he will enter the house of any who have sinned against God. He will enter it, and he will destroy it, **consuming** it, as it were, with fire. God is a consuming fire. So complete will be the demolition that even the stones will not be left. It sounds like Sodom.

It is at this point, that this starts to get very strange. “Then the angel who talked with me came forward and

⁵ George L. Klein, *Zechariah*, vol. 21B, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), 171.

said to me, ‘Lift your eyes and see what this is that is going out.’ And I said, ‘What is it?’ He said, “This is the basket that is going out.’ And he said, ‘This is their iniquity in all the land’” (Zech 5:5-6). I mentioned going in and out and baskets a moment ago as part of the curses of Deuteronomy. But what is this particular basket? And where is it going?

The basket is called, “Their iniquity in all the land” (6). So it isn’t like there are only the two sins of swearing falsely and stealing that are in mind. It is much, much more. This is personified more in the next two verses. “And behold, the leaden cover was lifted, and there was a woman sitting in the basket! And he said, ‘This is Wickedness.’ And he thrust her back into the basket, and thrust down the leaden weight on its opening” (7-8).

There is a very, very old story. It is a story that goes back farther in time than even Zechariah, around 700 B.C. It is told by the Greek poet Hesiod. He explains that there are two Strifes in this life. Both are, curiously, women. One is cruel and fosters war, while the other is wholesome and causes men to work hard. Writing to his brother Perses, Hesiod accuses him of seizing their inheritance. Suddenly, the story turns.

The great Titan **Prometheus** (god of fire) steals fire from **Zeus** who has been hiding it from men. This enrages Zeus. In retribution and punishment, Zeus plans to do evil to men. He enlists **Hephaestus**, the god of crafting, to fashion a maiden. All the Olympians get in on the act. **Athene** teaches her about finery, **Aphrodite** gives her grace and beauty, and **Hermes** gives her a shameless mind and deceitful nature. Then Zeus names her: **Pandora**. They did not place her in a box like we think of boxes. She was put into a jar (a *pithos*, see below), along with “gifts”: plagues to men, and shut it with a lid.⁶



A pithos, from Crete 675 B.C.

⁶ See especially Hesiod, *Works and Days* 1.59-94.

It is quite possible that Homer's poem was influenced by their neighbors to the south and east. The Hittites used to imprison certain kinds of criminals in caldrons and then seal them shut with leaden lids. Even more bizarre, but sounding a lot like Pandora, texts “describe both the detention of wickedness or sins, and the imprisonment of an evil demon” in such jars.⁷ Finally, many Canaanite figurines from this time period have been found in sealed in jars, buried inside or around the sacred areas of temples. The idea seems to have been that in sealing the criminal, the demon, or a figurine that personified evil, that you were bringing a kind of offering or sacrifice to the god.

There are differences in Zechariah and similarities. Rather than man making an offering to a god, God is the one putting the woman into the box. So this is not some kind of a sacrifice. But unlike Zeus who acts capriciously, God is acting in accordance with the covenant that the people themselves ratified on more than one occasion, swearing that they would do everything written in the book of the law. This is not a sacrifice. This is not revenge. This is justice ... by their own admission.

⁷ Eibert, J. C. Tigchelaar, *Prophets of Old and the Day of the End: Zechariah, the Book of Watchers, and Apocalyptic* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1995), 60-61.

God, starting at his temple, is taking the evil woman wickedness, throwing her into a virtual Pandora's Box, closing the lid, and sending her far away. “And he said, ‘This is Wickedness.’ And he thrust her back into the basket, and thrust down the leaden weight on its opening” (Zech 5:8). But where is he sending her, and how is she getting there?

“Then I lifted up my eyes and saw, and behold, two women coming forward! The wind was in their wings. They had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven” (9). There is a lot going on here, though some of it remains a mystery. First, again we see two women. Thus, I think of the way we began the sermon this morning and the continual return to the idea of women representing either fidelity or harlotry in the Bible. But we are not told anything about these women, other than that they have wings.

The wings are described as the wings of a stork. Of course, when we think about storks, we think about babies, because everyone knows that storks deliver babies. When Breanna was born, we won some hospital prize, and they put this giant ten ft. stork in our yard to prove it! But these

stork-women are not delivering babies, they are **delivering Wickedness**.

Why the stork? Possibly because its **migratory** route takes it right over Israel and on into the place Zechariah has these women going.⁸ It would have been a perfect metaphor. Also, the stork is an **unclean** bird. **Leviticus 11:19** has the stork among several birds, “**And these you shall detest among the birds; they shall not be eaten; they are detestable.**” (**Lev 11:13**). For that matter, some have suggested that the unclean bird might go with the unclean **cycle** of a women once a month, and therefore the picture of women-birds was given to Zechariah in his vision.

Whatever the case, a couple more supernatural observations are in order. The first is that I often hear people say that there are **no female angels** in the Bible. They are all men. Of course, the text does not call these women “angels,” but then again “angel” is a function. Angels send messages. These women aren’t saying anything, though I suppose in a sense they are delivering a message to the place they are going, much like the image of

⁸ The path takes the stork north from Africa, through Israel, into western Syria, before making its way east and south into Babylon. North is the same direction Israel was taken into captivity in the parallel thought in Jeremiah 8:7. Also, the opposite parallel, “Flee from the lands of the north” (Zech 2:6) is its reversal.

a stork carrying a baby in its beak is a delivery of sorts. Still, it is without question that these women are supernatural creatures. They are the companion version of the two guardian cherubim of the ark of the covenant. Yet, they are women. Are they good women or evil women? We don't know.

Perhaps as many as three **other evil female supernatural entities** appear in the Bible. None appear to be good. **Lilith** is a she-demon who would snatch little children away in the night.⁹ In fact the Talmud says, “**It is forbidden to sleep in a room all alone and whoever sleeps in a room all alone—Lilith grabs him.**”¹⁰ She was associated with a class of vampires.¹¹ A Babylonian terracotta relief shows her with human eyes, slender, well shaped, nude, with wings and owl-feet.¹² Others depict her with owls beside her. Owls are another unclean bird. She is a beautiful night-hag. She is found in **Isaiah 34:14**. The ESV (in these verses utterly blowing it in my opinion), simply translates it as

⁹ John D. W. Watts, vol. 25, *Word Biblical Commentary : Isaiah 34-66*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 13-14.

¹⁰ Babylonian Talmud *Shabbat* 151B.

¹¹ Raphael Patai, “Lilith,” *Journal of American Folklore* Vol. 77, No. 306 [Oct.-Dec., 1964], 295-314. http://www.godawa.com/chronicles_of_the_nephilim/Articles_By_Others/Patai-Lilith.pdf

¹² Ibid., 295.

night bird (others have night-monster [JPS, NAS], centaurs [onokentauros, LXX Greek], and satyrs [LXX Brenton English]). The Targum (Pseudo-Jonathan) refers to Lilith in an addition to the Aaronic blessing, “May the Lord bless you in all your deeds and protect you from the Lilith.”¹³

The parallel passage in Isaiah that has the Lilith, also has the strange “daughters of the ostrich,” and since no one knows what this is, many translations leave “daughters” out (Isaiah 13:21; cf. 34:13). Jeremiah also talks about these creatures (Jeremiah 50:39; 27:39 LXX). Simply note that they are women and they are birds. The Isaiah translation in Greek yields a siren, the man-eating, female she-fish. They are beautiful, ravenous, hungry. They eat fishermen. They are not The Little Mermaid. They are demons. The Jeremiah translation apparently from a different scribe rendered it as *indalma* which means “an appearance, form, or apparition.”

Finally, the context of the verses in Isaiah should be mentioned. They appear in an oracle against Babylon. Second, Revelation summarizes the creatures in this passage as “a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every

¹³ See Robert Hayward, “The Priestly Blessing in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 10 (April 1999): 85-87.

unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast” (Rev 18:2). These are the very creatures that Isaiah has in mind (the supernatural part is unbeknownst to the ESV translator).

ISAIAH 34:12-13 AND 13:21-22 COMPARED									
Isaiah	Hebrew	LXX	LXX trans.	YLT	NAS	ESV	KJV	JPS	TNK
34:11	qaath qippod yanshuph oreb	ornov echinos ibis korak	birds hedgehog ibises ravens	pelican hedge-hog owl raven	pelican hedgehog owl raven	hawk porcupine owl raven	cormorant bittern owl raven	pelican bittern owl raven	jackdaws owls great owls ravens
34:13	Tan Yaanaah	seiren strouthion	monsters ostriches	dragons ostriches	jackals ostriches	jackals ostriches	dragons owls	wild-dogs ostriches	jackals ostriches
34:14	Tsiyyim 'iyyim Sair lilith	daimonion ovokentauros onokentauros	devils satyrs satyrs	ziim aiim goat night-owl	des. creatures wolves hairy goat night monster	wild animals hyenas wild goat night bird	wild beasts wild beasts satyr screech owl	wild-cats jackals satyr night-monster	wildcats hyenas goat-demon lilith
34:15	Qippoz dayyah	echinos elapos	hedgehog deer	bittern vulture	tree snake hawk	owl hawk	great owl vulture	arrowsnake kite	arrowsnake buzzard
Isaiah	Hebrew	LXX	LXX trans.	YLT	NAS	ESV	KJV	JPS	TNK
13:21	Tsiyyim Oach Yaanaah Sair	theron echos seiren daimonion	wild beasts "howling" monsters devils	ziim howlings daut of ostrich goats	des. creatures owls ostriches shaggy goats	wild animals hyenas ostriches wild goats	wild beasts doleful creat. owls satyrs	wild-cats ferrets ostriches satyrs	beasts owls ostriches goats
13:22	'iyyim Tan	ovokentauros echos	satyrs hedgehogs	hyenas jackals	hyenas jackals	hyenas jackals	wild beasts dragons	jackals wild-dogs	jackals dragons

I have several reasons for this little diversion. First, I wanted to show you that there are other female supernatural entities in the Bible. Whether there are female “angels” or female counterparts of the sons of God, I have no idea. Second, they are demonic.¹⁴ In the Bible, they are always demonic, except perhaps here in Zechariah. Third, all of them are related to unclean birds (Lilith and the owls, Daughters of the Ostrich, the two stork-women). So

¹⁴ If the early Fathers were right and the demons are the disembodied spirits of Nephilim, we know that there were female giants.

whether these are evil supernatural women here too, we do know that their mission is related to evil, as they are to take Wickedness far from Israel.

But where does it go? Where does the woman Wickedness go? First, the two women come forward and **grab the jar** with Wickedness sealed inside. Then, with their powerful stork-wings, they **lift the basket high up** “**between earth and heaven**” (**Zech 5:9**). The place of birds. The place of demons (**Eph 2:2**). They do this not apart from God’s will, but at the express command of God, much like the spirit who said he would go and be a lying spirit in the mouth of the prophets in the prophet Micaiah’s heavenly vision (**1 Kgs 22:22-23**). Thus, importantly, even if these are evil spirits, they are not outside of the control of Yahweh. He is the LORD of Hosts in this passage, throughout the Bible, and on into today. Too many people, perhaps not so much in Reformed circles, but certainly in others, have this almost paralysis that overtakes them when they think about the evil supernatural world. But that is why our doctrine of God is so vital. Evil is not greater than God.

This may not seem like much of a big deal to you on an experiential level, if you don’t really think all that much

about the supernatural world. But part of Zechariah is to get you to start thinking about it, because it is real. And it is heavily involved in the world of men. But anyone who does recognize this really can take great comfort—and many are in need of such comfort when they get overly hyped up about the supernatural or have a theology that puts it out of whack with other things. God's sovereignty over these beings is perhaps the greatest comfort they could ever feel.

And then there's sin. What about sin? Is God really greater than sin? If there is so much sin in the world, is he uncaring or unable to help? Beloved, these thoughts get at the purpose of the vision here, to show that God is greater than supernatural evil or human wickedness. Evil beings take Wickedness far away from the Promised Land at God's bidding. He cannot dwell amidst such things. He is Holy. There is tremendous comfort in this, if you will repent of your own sin and come to see the working of God in the mystery that is the existence of sin.

And once more, where to they take it? Zechariah wants to know where they are taking the basket too (**Zech 5:10**). The angel answered him, **"To the land of Shinar, to build a house for it. And when this is prepared, they will set the**

basket down there on its base” (11). This ends his vision, but not our time together. There is still much that needs to be said.

First, the land of Shinar. We mentioned this place in a previous vision when we were considering Eden and Babel. Shinar is the land of Babel. It is the land where they took Daniel (Dan 1:2). It is the land that was dispersed for its wicked attempt to reach up to heaven with the Tower (Gen 11:2). It is the land of Isaiah’s prophecy of the demonic women and other demons and unclean birds and animals. It is the place where the woman who rides the scarlet beast resides. She is the great evil woman of Revelation. All of these converge at Shinar.

There is a wicked woman coming to Shinar (the Great Whore) now in a basket. Again, she is herself called Wickedness. Her name derives from the evil king Ahab’s daughter Athaliah. “For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken into the house of God, and had also used all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD for the Baals” (2Ch 24:7). But this wicked woman Athaliah is herself the daughter of another wicked woman: Ahab’s evil wife Jezebel. Jezebel is the model for “Mystery Babylon,” “the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s

abominations” (Rev 17:5). “And when Joram saw Jehu, he said, ‘Is it peace, Jehu?’ He answered, ‘What peace can there be, so long as the whorings and the sorceries of your mother Jezebel are so many?’” (2Ki 9:22). “When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it. And she painted her eyes and adorned her head and looked out of the window” (2Ki 9:30). This is all the language of Babylon the Terrible Woman.

I want to look one more time at the identity of this evil women, in a way we have not yet considered. But to do that, let me make one more comment about the last verse of our chapter first. The “house” for Shinar seems to be not just a home, but a [temple](#). “House” is the word that is used for Yahweh’s temple in Zechariah. Thus, the NAS has “temple” instead of “house.” We have already seen what they did with figures in baskets in the ANE. They buried them in sacred spots near the temples. This is similar to what Zechariah is seeing as the stork-women swoop down and set the basket on a sacred place near the base of this new-Babel.

The idea seems to be that God is removing the evil that is in his land, and putting it in the land that wanted it so badly in the first place. Babylon. But this is not Babylon as

you might think of it—totally deprived of God. The way I was raised, and the way many people still take this today, is that since Babylon is not even rebuilt in our day, and since we have to interpret it as referring to something in our day, that perhaps Babylon is America. I remember a dinner conversation we had around our family supper discussing just this when I was in high school.

America certainly is wicked. No question about it. But then again, so is every other nation in the world. But everyone comes to America for trade, isn't that how John puts it? Yes. But in the modern world, everyone goes to everyone for trade. It isn't like the ancient times when one sea-faring people had the monopoly on the seas. But America is the last superpower. Maybe. Maybe not. But why do we want to read modern 21st century headlines into Revelation 18 so badly?

Let me make a suggestion. Consider the only place that Jezebel appears in the NT. “I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols” (Rev 2:20). Jezebel is again the pattern for the

Woman Babylon. But this is written to one of Christ's *churches*.

This Babylon is actually the Evil *Jerusalem*. The Apostate church of the OT. She isn't pagans. God is cleansing the land of apostates who were in covenant with him through Sinai. It is their Wickeness that is being purged. They are those who get the covenant curses. Shinar is the counterfeit Promised Land. Even Babel knew the truth at one point. Babel is the anti-Mountain where God resides. This is the definition of antichrist. The imagery is perhaps that of two unclean demonic women carrying one very wicked woman to the holy place of the Great Whore Babylon and the Beast upon which she sits. "You want this religion? Fine. Here you go. In all of its despotic, depraved, debauched glory. Enjoy."

Chrysostom has a fascinating quote on this regard. "‘For now,’ he says, ‘the axe is laid at the root of the trees.’ (**Mt 3:10**). There is nothing more terrible than this turn of his discourse. For it is no longer ‘a flying sickle [scroll]’ (**Zech 5:1** LXX), or ‘the taking down of a hedge,’ or ‘the treading under foot of a vineyard’ (Is 5:5), but an axe exceedingly sharp, and what is worse, it is even at the roots. For inasmuch as they continually disbelieved the

prophets and used to say, ‘Where is the Day of the Lord?’ (**Amos 5:18; Jer 17:15**), and ‘Let the counsel of the holy one of Israel come, that way we may know it’ (**Is 5:19**), by reason that it was many years before what they said came to pass; to lead them off from this encouragement also, he sets the terrors close to them. And this he declared by saying ‘now,’ and by his putting it to ‘the root,’ ‘for the space between is nothing now,’ he says, ‘but it is laid to the very root.’ And he said not ‘to the branches’ or ‘to the fruits’ but ‘to the root.’ Signifying that if they were negligent, they would have incurable horrors to endure, and not have so much as hope of remedy. It being no servant who is now come, as those before him were, but the very Lord of all, bringing on them his fierce and most effectual vengeance” (*Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew* 3:7.4).

The great preacher is essentially telling us, “The flying axe and sickle of judgment have already arrived with the first advent. Those who disbelieved Christ have brought calamity upon themselves.”¹⁵ This is what Paul tells us in Romans 11. Israel was punished and was cut off. But you

¹⁵ Alberto Ferreiro, *The Twelve Prophets*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT 14 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 246.

must beware too, lest you not be found in the Vine and be cut off as well. Some have given up their faith and no longer follow Christ. Some have let their sins so overtake them that they stop looking to the Savior who alone can bring forgiveness. Some have flown to Babylon and engaged in the very things that Christ died to forgive, and have not returned home to the people of God, Christ's temple, and sought forgiveness and justification.

One commentator writes, “For Yahweh to return to this temple, as Zechariah’s vision complex promises (**Zech 1:16**), [all] abominations must be removed from the temple.”¹⁶ This is what Zechariah sees typologically speaking in this sixth vision. He returns to the time 90 years earlier when God carried the people away, thus purging the land of sin. But this serves his interests because the people are building a new temple, and they need to see how serious God still takes sin. Do you think this has changed today, even though Christ has died for sin? He DIED for SIN!

He is also seeing the time when God will cut-off Israel in the days when the One Who Takes Away Sin Once For

¹⁶ Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 308.

All dies on the cross, but they reject him. Yet, though they rejected him, he still bore sin in his body and paid the consequences it deserves. Therefore, any who trust in him will be clean, because he was clean. He was carried away to a worse Babylon, when he “**descended into hell**” as he was forsaken by the Father and became a curse for us. He became the scroll of Zechariah. He became the women Wickedness—as far as the Law was concerned. He took the punishment that covenant breakers earned. And he has purged the Temple once for all of sin, so that even when we do sin, and repent, we have an advocate in heaven who pleads our case.

For, “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish ... This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (**Eph 5:25-27, 32**). Mystery Babylon. Mystery Church. One Lady of Wisdom. One lady of Folly. One with beauty on the outside. One with beauty on the inside. One forgiven. One Unforgiven.

Both beckon. Both call. Both invite. Which lady's house will you draw near this day?