
OUTLINE

5

THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH VISION Purification and sanctification of the church, 5:1-11

5.1 The manner of purification: 5:1,2

Again Zechariah lifted his eyes and he saw a flying scroll. One did not know books in those times like we do. They had parchment scrolls. The parchment was rolled around a stick and during the reading it was unrolled. The prophet saw such a roll-of-a-book. The scroll was opened. There are two special things concerning this scroll.

In the first place we read what this scroll is *doing* and in the second place it describes what this scroll *looks* like.

In the first place we see what this scroll is doing. Zechariah discovers a scroll that is flying. In the situation of being rolled out it gave the impression of an enormous bird of prey that is flying forward with its mighty wings, ready to throw itself upon its prey.

This is how the interpreter angel explains it also, "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land . . ." In other words: the curse of the LORD will go around and will destroy all the sinners who are not converted to the LORD just like a ferocious animal.

But not only is it mentioned what this scroll is doing. We also read exactly what this scroll looks like. The length is 20 cubits and its breadth is 10 cubits. That is a very special measure. They are the exact measurements of the sanctuary of the tabernacle of the LORD. It is a measure that directs the thoughts of everyone in Israel to the holy place of God.

When this measure is mentioned here so precisely it receives a very special meaning. It means that the curse of the LORD comes according to the measure of the full length and breadth of the *church* in Israel.

No judgment is mentioned concerning the world which has forgotten God.

No judgment is mentioned concerning the people of the church that are still staying in Babylon and are obedient to the LORD.

No. The judgment is coming to those who belong to the reformed church of those days!

Therefore this curse is very terrible and its effect very horrible.

We can ask, though, "Is actually something new being said here?"

What about Exodus 20, the constitution of God's law? We also read there about sanctions, e.g., v. 5: God is visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate God.

That also has to do with God's curse in His covenant.

Yet, there is a difference between Exodus 20 and Zechariah 5.

In the situation of Zechariah 5 the judgment of the LORD is much sharper and His curse is more terrible than in Exodus 20.

In the days of Zechariah the church already had a long history. Every time when the LORD is giving the law to the people of His covenant the contents of the law is the same but the date is different. Therefore, we have to bear in mind what date the LORD places above the law.

When the LORD gives His law for the first time on Mount Horeb in the desert, the people of Israel do not have as much experience as on the occasion of the preaching of the law in the book of Deuteronomy (ch. 5).

Then Israel was already starting to receive more responsibility. They had experienced not only the Red Sea, but also the journey throughout the great and terrible desert for 40 years. They had received the manna from heaven day after day. They had drunk water from the rock and God had helped His people overagainst all the enemies of the neighbourhood.

Thus, to have a historical background, as the church of the LORD did, means a lot! By then one should know: forewarned is forearmed! If one then despises God's grace, the punishment will be heavier than before.

That is the seriousness of the situation in Zechariah 5.

The church had already passed the place of Exodus 20 a long time ago.

There were many blessings and promises. They had been freed from Babylon and the LORD promised to comfort Zion and to choose Jerusalem. He would be a wall of fire round about His people. He promised to give His Spirit in order to build up the temple. He let His lampstand burn continuously.

Therefore the scroll of curse is given according to the measure of the sanctuary. Therefore also, this scroll is flying: it is to be spread over the whole land in one minute. It follows its own way.

5.2 The nature of purification: 5:3

In verse 3 we read a precise description of this judgment. Twice we read, "henceforth." Actually that means: "according to what is written on the one side" and "according to what is written on the other side."

So the scroll was written on the outside and the inside. On the one side was written about the sin of stealing and on the other side about the sin of swearing falsely. These sinners shall be excluded and excommunicated.

Bear in mind what kind of sinners are mentioned here. Stealing is a matter of the second table of God's law and swearing falsely has to do with the first table of the law of the LORD. One sin is mentioned especially from both tables. Why? Why is this curse directed especially against thieves and perjurers?

We have to compare verse 3 with both the rest of the prophecies of Zechariah and with the book of Haggai, the "twin prophet" of Zechariah. Then we will discover that these were the special sins, the main sins of those days! (Cf. Haggai 1:9, 2:13, 18, Zech. 7:9). These specific sins were the church sins. The people that had received God's grace and mercy after the exile of Babylon are now busily looking for their own advantage rather than serving the LORD. They build their own houses, panelled houses with all luxuries, but they do not build God's temple. They do not serve God in the first place but themselves. Also in the church there is a bitter contrast between the rich and the poor. They promise a lot of things in the meantime but they do nothing. That is the false oath mentioned by Zechariah. They lie to God and they rob each other. These sins are damaging the church. The false oath breaks down the relationship with the LORD God and the robbery among the people breaks down the mutual relationships between men. The communion of saints is broken by it.

Then the LORD says: This cannot go on in this way. This sinner who is living in these sins in the church must be excommunicated. He must be cut off, says the LORD.

The fact that Zechariah is saying this, is really God's mercy. They are still warned, these sinners in the church. God is still speaking to them. Yet, it is an ultimatum. If it does not change, the excommunication is at hand! Twice Zechariah uses the words, "to cut off." It is a strong expression. The prophet Isaiah uses the same word in the sense of: to shake out, or, to clean a person out (cf. Is. 3:26). In Psalm 104 it says, "Let sinners be consumed from the earth." So, here a sharp weapon is used by God the Holy Spirit. First the LORD said that the building up of the temple will be done not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit. But now He says that it will also be the might and the power of the Holy Spirit which will cut off the sinners from the communion of saints!

5.3 The Author of purification: 5:4

The LORD Himself is the Author of this curse when He says, "I will send it forth." It is not a human judgment.

Grace and curse are coming from the same God.

First the LORD said: Not the people but *I* will build up the temple.

Now He also says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay;" (Cf. Heb. 10:30). Also the curse comes from God Himself. It means that the matter is very serious. There is no doubt that the curse will enter the house of the sinner. When God comes with His curse, no sinner will be passed over. God's curse enters the houses. It even enters the closed rooms of the houses. And the curse is going to *abide* there. It means that the curse will enter the places where one had thought himself to be safe.

The LORD says: Your panelled houses will be damaged and destroyed.

What will it help you if you are living behind a nice front? It is terrible to live in a house where the curse of God is also living!

Still, there is a comfort for the people of the LORD. In the last book of the Bible we also read about something that is flying. Then, however, it is not the flying *curse* but the flying *gospel* (cf. Rev. 14:6,7).

At the same time that God's judgment is coming over the earth, the proclamation of God's Word is still heard, "Fear God and give Him glory for the hour of judgment has come!"

Then John sees the followers of the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths for they are spotless. Neither do they swear falsely. They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Their sins against the first and second table of God's law are forgiven. They may join the marriage of the Lamb.

5.4 The necessity of sanctification: 5:5-8

Zechariah then sees the seventh vision which is in close connection with the night vision concerning the purification of the church. The flying scroll had scarcely gone away when Zechariah saw a woman sitting in an ephah. An ephah is a cubic measure of about 30-40 litres and no more than 10 gallons. In that pot a woman was sitting. Considering the measure of the ephah she must have been a little woman.

A heavy leaden cover had been placed over the mouth of the ephah. What is this?

Again it is the prophet who questions the interpreter angel about this, who, in turn, explains everything to Zechariah. The answer is, "This is their iniquity in all the land." A footnote in the RSV says that it may also be translated, "This is their eye in all the land!"

This translation would be better. To direct your eye to something can also mean to have something in mind. It means here: this is the view of the sinners of the whole land. Thus, this is their background and they are dominated by these things: the spirit of iniquity and corruption.

This woman is called "Wickedness" in verse 8. Thus there is a special connection between this normal household cubic measure and the iniquity of Israel. Right away we can see that the sixth and seventh night visions of Zechariah have to do with one another. The result of the flying curse of God over the whole land is now visible in this cubic measure in which a woman is sitting. It means: here is the terrible result, the

harvest of God's curse. The iniquities of the people are gathered together. Just like a common tradesman measures his grains of corn in an ephah, so the sinners are gathered together and measured. The harvest of God's curse is made manifest here!

Keep in mind that the prophet had to see *this* image in the night vision: an image that was derived from social life, trade and business; both from daily practical life circumstances. Precisely in that respect the iniquities of Israel were made manifest. In the book of Nehemiah we can read about examples of these trade and business practices in the life of Israel (cf. Neh. 5, 9, 13).

The prophet saw even more. There was a cover on this ephah. It was not a normal cover but a very heavy piece of lead. The reason for this was that the woman would not be able to get out by any means.

Yet, suddenly, that leaden cover is lifted up from the inside. It appears that the little woman in the ephah itself tries to come out. It means that this enormous power of trying to break out and do its terrible work among the people of God is the power of sin. That is wickedness. But then the angel comes and the woman does not have the ghost of a chance. He thrusts her back into the ephah and thrusts down the leaden weight. She may not escape! Here is a vivid image of the character of sin.

First the prophet saw the consequences of sin: corruption and deceit, robbery and perjury. Now the question is: What is the mysterious character of sin? What are actually the motives which cause the people to sin so terribly? The angel says that it is wickedness as represented in the figure of a woman. For sin against the LORD is often described in the Bible as a whore, the work of a harlot (cf. Hoseah 2; Jeremiah 3 and other places). It is a matter of adultery and fornication. Hence the Bible repeatedly points to sin as an evil woman who is wandering about on wrong paths and who refuses obedience to her lawful husband.

But then there is the necessity of the sanctification of God's church. Sin does not want to be kept in prison. Continuously wickedness wants to live its life to its fullest. It hates the four walls of the ephah. It wants to break out and to saturate the whole land with its iniquities.

5.5 The manner of sanctification: 5:9

How then will the sanctification of the church take place?

Zechariah saw two women coming forward. The wind was in their wings. They had wings like the wings of a stork and they lifted up the ephah between earth and heaven. That is very remarkable! Those two women took the heavy ephah with its whole contents into the air, further and further away, higher and higher until the figures became so minute that they are not seen anymore by the amazed eyes of Zechariah.

It is not sufficient that this woman was locked in the ephah. Maybe she could escape. More radical means would have to be used. The best solution seemed to be that the ephah is taken away with the woman in it.

What does this mean? It is extraordinary that here the wings of a stork are mentioned. According to the Bible it is an unclean bird (cf. Lev. 11:19, Deut. 14:18). It belongs to the many unclean animals who are considered to be useless for the service of the LORD. Yet, precisely these unclean birds are enlisted in the sanctification of the church!

Besides this, there is another striking thing. The prophet saw that the wind was in their wings. It was as if they were forced away on the wings of the wind. An enormous power drives them on. They have to execute a special task force by a higher power. The question is, "Which power is to be recognized in the wind?" Bear in mind that the Bible uses the same word for both wind and spirit.

In other words, in relationship to a vision we are pointed to the power of the Holy Spirit. There are unclean and unholy powers which are set to work for the sanctification of God's church. Yet, He who sets to work is the Holy Spirit Himself! It is always the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify, purify and to cleanse the church.

Not only *angels* are used by the Holy Spirit in the enormous struggle against unholiness in life. Not only *saints* (in the sense of believers) are used by Him. He even uses *demons*, in spite of themselves, in order to purify and sanctify the church. He Himself, though, is always the Author, the Operator, who finishes His own work of sanctification. He is going to banish the sins out of the church of Jesus Christ in His own manner and with His own means.

5.6 The thoroughness of sanctification: 5:10-11

To banish — that is the result of sin in the church given by the Holy Spirit.

One time the people of Israel had been banished. Although they had been purified in that Babylonian exile, in that melting pot of Babylon, they had not left their sins behind. On the contrary, it is terrible how great and manifold the sins were which must be punished yet after the exile.

It even seems as if the old sins of the people were worse than before. Now the sins have to be banished. Zechariah asks were the storks are taking the ephah. The answer is, "Far away, to the land of Shinar, to build a house for it." They will build a *platform* and they will place the ephah there. Shinar is the place of exile.

Shinar was the land where rebellion started against the LORD. We read in Genesis 10:8 and 9 that Nimrod was a mighty hunter in Shinar. He was the first on the earth to be a kind of dictator.

Shinar was also the land where people wanted to build a city and a tower with its top in the heavens. They wanted to make a name of themselves, a central point of concentration, a symbol of ecumenism, lest they would be scattered upon the face of the whole earth. They were afraid to lose one another (cf. Genesis 11:1-9).

In the prophecies of Isaiah Shinar is called the place where the remnant, the rest of God's people, must be brought from exile (Is. 11:11). The prophet Daniel also mentions in his prophecies that the king of Babylon brought some of the vessels of the house of God to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god (Dan. 1:2).

It means that Shinar is mentioned in the Bible as a synonym for Babylon, the place of horror and deportation, the place of lust for power and dictatorship. To that land, where sin celebrated its triumph, a land cursed by God, the woman Wickedness is brought. There is her place. There she has to sit on a platform. There she will live like a goddess in her temple.

We see the fulfilment of this vision in the last book of the Bible. The apostle John hears the great judgment concerning Babylon, where the full-grown sin dominates, where dictatorship has reached its full measure, where the powers against God live their lives to the full (Rev. 17).

John is going to see the judgment upon the woman who is not sitting in an ephah (measure of man), but who is sitting upon many waters (measure of the whole creation).

With her the kings of the earth have committed fornication. She has made a firm covenant with the world and its desires. The secret of this woman is that she has received a dwelling place, a throne where the beast is living too: Shinar, land of the full measure of sin. Presently they conspire together against the Lamb. All of them are of one mind and give over the power and authority to the beast. But then the Lamb will conquer them, for He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings. Not only the Lamb will triumph but also those who are with Him; those who are called and chosen and faithful. These are His allies, those who are sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Babylon or Shinar means a place of terror. It is the place of the full measure of sin. Therefore, John will hear a voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities;" (Rev. 18:4). Then, however, Babylon is falling and Jerusalem is coming down from God out of heaven.

5.7 Some questions

1. *Can it be proven from the Scriptures that there is a difference in judgment and curse on the church and the world?*
2. *In what case does excommunication have to be used in the church?*
3. *Is there a contrast between church discipline and the message of the gospel?*
4. *Does the figure of the woman as "Wickedness" point to fornication just as the Scriptures say?*

5. *In what respect is Shinar to be called the first ecumenical centre?*
6. *Are there sufficient reasons to prove that the woman of Zechariah 5 is the same as the false church of Revelation 17?*

5.8 Literature

See Outline 1.

B. Holwerda, *The Church in the Final Judgment*, translated by P.Y. de Jong, Vonkenberg Study Aids, London, ON, n.d.