

IX. The Flying Ephah

27-Jan-08 Zechariah 5:5-11

Theme: God will remove wickedness from the midst of His covenant people; but wickedness will not be completely removed until Christ returns again.

Key Verses: Zechariah 5:10-11 ¹⁰So I said to the angel who talked with me, "Where are they carrying the basket?" ¹¹And he said to me, "To build a house for it in the land of Shinar; when it is ready, the basket will be set there on its base."

Review

Last week, we studied the sixth Night Vision, "The Flying Scroll." Zechariah saw a large scroll, written with the law of God on both sides, flying over the land of Israel. The scroll represented the moral law of God, proceeding from the heavenly sanctuary, and was applied to the entire covenant people of God. It held them to God's sanctuary standard of moral obedience as summarized in the Ten Commandments. Of course, no human can keep the law, so it was in reality a curse which seeks out sinners to bring judgment upon them. There is no place to hide from God's curse; it will seek out and find every sinner and hold him or her accountable for their sin, both public and secret.

Historically, the curse of God fell upon the Jews in AD 70 when the city of Jerusalem, including the rebuilt temple was destroyed. The Jews had rejected Jesus Christ, the Messiah promised in these Night Visions of Zechariah, and so the curse of God fell upon His unbelieving people.

The same curse falls upon all those who reject the Lord Jesus Christ. For all are under the curse of the law and deserve its penalty for disobedience. Our only hope is to trust in Jesus the Messiah, who was born under the law but kept it perfectly, thus meriting the blessings of obedience. But rather than keeping those blessings for Himself, He freely gives them to His people in exchange for the curse that they deserve. In taking the curse upon Himself, Jesus Christ has secured salvation for all who believe in Him. In response, we are called to reflect the holiness of Jesus Christ in our lives. If there are any "unclean stones or timbers" in our lives, let us work to remove them, so that the houses of our lives may be clean dwellings for the Holy Spirit of God.

Introduction

The seventh Night Vision is closely related to the vision that precedes it, "The Flying Scroll." In fact, Kline treats "The Flying Ephah (Basket)" as the second part of the previous vision. We will follow the majority opinion and consider it as a separate vision, connected with what precedes it. The flying scroll declared that God's righteous law would bring a curse upon all lawbreakers in the land of God's covenant people. In this vision, the flying ephah gathers up wickedness and carries it out of the land, demonstrating God's commitment to remove sin from His covenant community.

Chiastically, this seventh vision is paired with the second vision of "The Four Horns and the Four Craftsmen." Structurally, both visions are similar. In the second vision, Zechariah sees four horns, and asks, "What are these?" (2:19). In this vision, Zechariah sees a flying basket and asks, "What is it?" (5:6). In the second part of each vision, Zechariah ask another question. After he sees the four craftsmen, he asks, "What are these coming to do?" (2:21). And here, after he sees those who are carrying the ephah, he asks, "Where are they carrying it?" (5:10). So

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structurally, these visions are linked by their common construction as a two-part question and answer: “What is it?” followed by “What’s going on?”

But more importantly, the second and seventh visions are connected thematically as well. Jordan points out that “the second vision has to do with true and false altars – we see the false altar with four horns, and we see the four craftsmen coming to tear down the horns and build up the true altar. And in an obverse of that, we see that now the temple of God has been rebuilt the false worship is being taken away. In the second vision, the people come to tear down the false altar and build the true one. In the second-to-last vision, the true altar has been rebuilt; now instead of godly people coming to the land, the ungodly are being driven out.”

Exposition

A. The Seventh Vision: The Ephah (5:5-9)

1. The Container (5:5-7a)

⁵Then the angel who talked with me came out and said to me, “Lift your eyes now, and see what this is that goes forth.” ⁶So I asked, “What is it?” And he said, “It is a basket that is going forth.” He also said, “This is their resemblance throughout the earth: ⁷Here is a lead disc lifted up...” (Zechariah 5:5-7a).

We noted in our previous study that Zechariah had moved from inside the holy place of his visionary temple to the doorway, in order to see God’s scroll flying over the land of Israel. Now we see that the movement in this vision has proceeded completely out of the temple. In order to view this vision of wickedness leaving the land, Zechariah and the interpreting angel “came out” of the temple and into the courtyard area. Positioned in the courtyard, facing away from the temple, Zechariah is commanded to look up and see what is going on.

So Zechariah obeys, and he sees an “ephah.” What exactly is an “ephah?” Most English translations call this object a “basket,” because that is really what an “ephah” is. In the Hebrew system of measures, an ephah is the largest volume of dry goods, roughly equivalent to 10 gallons. The ephah was usually used to measure and store grain. An ephah was typically a woven basket, although clay pottery could also be used.

Now, you have no doubt been trained by the other visions to expect that this ephah is not an ordinary ephah, and you would be right. Once again, there are a number of unique features about this common object that Zechariah sees in the vision: 1) its movement; 2) its “resemblance”; 3) its cover; 4) its contents; 5) its conveyance; and 6) its destination.

The first unusual thing we learn about this ephah is that it is “going forth” (5:6a). It is not a stationary object; it is moving. As we read on through the vision, we will learn how it moves and where it is going, but for now, we are just told that it is moving away, it is “going forth.”

Secondly, there is an unusual description applied to the ephah: “This is their resemblance throughout the earth” (5:6b). Some translations say “resemblance” or “appearance,” while other translations say “iniquity.” That’s a fairly significant difference in translation. Why? Well, the Hebrew literally says that “this is their eye in all the earth.” However, with slight emendation, the word can be changed to read “iniquity” in Hebrew. This is what ancient translations, such as the Septuagint, have done. The probable reason for doing so is that in the minds of the translators, “iniquity” fits the context of this vision better than “eye” does.

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However, it seems fairly clear that the actual text says “eye” rather than “iniquity.” So modern translations, trying to be true to the original Hebrew, have a difficult time trying to convey in English what is meant. We’ve already seen the word “eye” used in several different ways in Zechariah. Our prophet referred to Israel as “the apple of God’s eye” (2:10), signifying that God’s people are precious in His sight. Zechariah has also twice described the “seven eyes” of the Lord, once associated with a priestly stone (3:9), and once associated with a kingly stone (4:10). In both cases, the word “eye” (which can also mean “fountain” or “springs”) was referring to the Holy Spirit of God, describing His watchful omniscience and power.

By translating this word as “resemblance” or “appearance,” translators are focusing on the eye as the organ of viewing. Thus, when our eye is applied to this basket, we see what it resembles or how it appears. This association makes a certain amount of sense, because seven times throughout these Night Visions, Zechariah is said to have raised his eyes in order to view the visions (1:18; 2:1; 5:1; 5:5; 5:9; 6:1). When Zechariah raises his eyes, he sees what the visions look like.

However, Jordan proposes an alternate explanation for the use of this Hebrew word “eye.” Not only is the eye the organ of viewing, but it is also the organ of judgment. You have to look at something in order to evaluate it, to judge it. For example, in Creation God looked upon what He had made each day and declared it or judged it to be “good”; at the end of the week He declared it was all “very good.” God viewed His work and evaluated it. We do the same thing when we turn our eyes on something – we look it over, and we assess it; we “size it up.” Thus, when Zechariah raises his eyes to see the Night Visions, he is not only viewing the appearance of the vision, but he is also evaluating the contents: “Why am I seeing this particular object? What is the symbolism? What does it all mean?” So, when Zechariah says that the ephah is their “eye,” he means that the basket consists of evaluations or judgments made by the eye.

But even if this is so, we are still left with a question: to whom does this description refer? The text says that it is “their eye.” But who are “they?” Well, in context, Zechariah is likely referring back to the covenant lawbreakers of the previous vision – those who swear falsely and those who are thieves. Thus, the ephah is related to the sinful judgments and evaluations of those who are cursed by God because of their lawlessness. This fits the context of the vision better than just saying that this is “the resemblance” of the container, because this phrase in Hebrew is meant to describe what the ephah symbolizes, not what it looks like.

The Hebrew word at the end of verse 6, variously translated either “earth” or “land,” is the same word used in 5:3 to describe the scope of the flying scroll’s mission in the previous vision. We saw last time that in context, the meaning of the word should be limited to the land of God’s people, since the vision applied specifically to the covenant community. Because of the close linkage with the previous vision, we should understand the word here also refers to the land of Israel and not the whole earth.

So, the flying scroll goes back and forth throughout the whole land of Israel, bringing the curse of the law against all lawbreakers within the people of God. And now in this vision, the unrighteous judgments of those sinners are gathered up in this ephah. “Just as God’s judgments and power are set up, the judgments and power of the wicked are taken away. God’s eyes will range to and fro in the land instead of the eyes of the wicked. Therefore, instead of saying that this is their ‘resemblance’ in the land, it is better to think of it as their ‘influence’ or their ‘hegemony’ which is removed” (Jordan).

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In the third place, this ephah had a special round cover made out of lead. Ephahs usually did not have covers, and if they did, lead would be a most unusual material to use! This lead lid is literally a “talent” of lead; a talent being the largest measure of weight in the Hebrew system. Since a talent is approximately seventy-five pounds, this was an extremely heavy cover for this visionary container. The function of this lead lid is made clear in verse 8, where it effectively imprisons the contents of the basket inside.

Taken together, the sixth and seventh visions are full of references to weights and measures. The dimensions of the flying scroll were twenty cubits by ten cubits (5:2). In this vision, we have an ephah, the unit of volume, covered by a lead talent, the unit of weight. Cubit, ephah, talent – these were standard measures of commerce in the ancient world. Kline points out that the sins highlighted on the flying scroll – theft and perjury – are associated, like these units of measure, with “the world of commerce, its business, and its sins. What characterizes the apostates targeted by the covenant curse is mercantile idolatry.” Rather than worshiping the living God, these sinners worshipped “mammon” – the almighty dollar of their day.

God’s law warned about the dangers of commercial sins:

¹³You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a heavy and a light. ¹⁴You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large and a small. ¹⁵You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁶For all who do such things, all who behave unrighteously, are an abomination to the LORD your God (Deuteronomy 25:13-16).

God promised blessing and long life in the land if they kept honest weights and measures, if they treated customers fairly, and if they did not try to cheat others out of what was rightfully theirs. Implied in this law, however, was that those who used dishonest weights and measures would have their days in the land shortened, rather than lengthened.

So, this law on weights and measures is part of the background or context for Zechariah’s vision of the ephah. The basket is symbolic of the sinfulness of those who engage in mercantile sins, who cheat their customers and perjure themselves in the pursuit of wealth. This slavish idolatry to economic prosperity is an abomination to God, and He will drive those who practice such sinfulness out of His covenant community.

2. *Its Contents (5:7b-8)*

⁷“...and this is a woman sitting inside the basket”; ⁸then he said, “This is Wickedness!” And he thrust her down into the basket, and threw the lead cover over its mouth (Zechariah 5:7b-8).

The fourth point of interest about this ephah is its contents. Inside the container was a woman, whose name was “Wickedness.” In order to hold a woman, the ephah must have been considerably bigger than the standard size of 10 gallons.

To get the picture of what is happening think back to the movie “Raiders of the Lost Ark.” Indiana Jones and Marian are in Cairo, being chased by the bad guys. While Indy is fighting, Marian hides in a large wicker basket with a lid. The traitorous little monkey tips off the bad guys where Marian is hiding, and they carry her away as a prisoner through the marketplace. We have a similar image here. A woman is inside the basket, kept in place by the heavy lead cover, which effectively makes the ephah a prison. She may struggle to get out, but she is thrust down into the basket and trapped inside.

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Who is this woman “Wickedness” that is trapped inside the ephah? She is a brazen harlot, symbolic of both physical infidelity and spiritual apostasy. In the former history of Israel, the prophets were constantly warning the people of God not to follow after idols, but to serve the living and true God. To illustrate this message, the metaphor of harlotry was often used. The clearest example of this occurs in the book of Hosea. The prophet Hosea was commanded by God to marry a harlot as a living picture of unfaithful Israel (Hos. 1:2). Just as Gomer the harlot was unfaithful to Hosea, so Israel was spiritually unfaithful to the Lord. But other prophets also compared the idolatry of Israel to harlotry. For example:

¹“They say, ‘If a man divorces his wife, and she goes from him and becomes another man’s, may he return to her again?’ Would not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return to Me,” says the LORD. ²“Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see: where have you not lain with men? By the road you have sat for them like an Arabian in the wilderness; and you have polluted the land with your harlotries and your wickedness (Jeremiah 3:1-2).

¹⁵“But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it. ¹⁶You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on them. Such things should not happen, nor be.... ³⁰How degenerate is your heart!” says the Lord GOD, “seeing you do all these things, the deeds of a brazen harlot” (Ezekiel 16:15-16, 30; see also Ezekiel 23).

In addition to these general warnings against spiritual harlotry, two infamous women in the Old Testament stand out as particular examples of this woman “Wickedness” who is in Zechariah’s ephah. The first is Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, king of Israel. She introduced Baal worship into Israel and tried to destroy the worship of the true God. She massacred the prophets of God (1 Ki. 18:4) and incited her husband Ahab to all kinds of wickedness (1 Ki. 21:25), including the murder of Naboth for his vineyard (1 Ki. 21:1-16). God raised up the prophet Elijah to fight against Jezebel and the prophets of Baal, and it was Elijah who prophesied her gruesome death (1 Ki. 21:23-24). Ultimately, “painted Jezebel” (*cp.* 2 Ki. 9:30) becomes a symbol of wickedness and harlotry:

²⁰Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols (Revelation 2:20).

The other outstanding example of the woman “Wickedness” is Queen Athaliah the daughter of Ahab. Her story is told in 2 Kings 11 and 2 Chronicles 22-23. As queen-mother, she advised her son King Ahaziah to rule wickedly (2 Chr. 22:3), just as Jezebel had controlled Ahab. After her son died, Athaliah decided to take the kingdom of Judah into her own hands. She wanted to rule herself, so “she arose and destroyed all the royal heirs” (2 Ki. 11:1). This ploy of Satan to destroy the house of David to prevent the promised Seed from coming ultimately failed, because Jehosheba, the half-sister of Ahaziah and the wife of the priest Jehoida, rescued her infant nephew Joash, and hid him from his murderous grandmother (2 Ki. 11:2). Having gained control of the kingdom, Athaliah ruled illegally for six years, until Joash was seven years old. At that time, the priest Jehoida staged a palace coup to put Joash on the throne in place of his evil grandmother, who was executed for her wickedness (2 Ki. 11:3-16). Following the death of Athaliah, Jehoida renewed God’s covenant with the people of Judah and tore down the temple of

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Baal, thus purging the land of Athaliah's idolatry. Because of her evil acts and idolatrous ways, she is known in Scripture as "that wicked woman" (2 Chr. 24:7).

Ultimately, the people of God chose to walk in the ways of these wicked women, Jezebel and Athaliah, rather than to obey God's covenant. And it was because of the infidelity of God's people, because they played the harlot with idols, that the curses of the covenant came down upon them and they were driven out of the land into exile.

The Babylonian captivity is over now in Zechariah's day, and this sin of idolatry has been forever purged from the Jews. But other sins creep in, such as the love of money and economic prosperity, to replace the worship of false gods. And so this woman "Wickedness," with all the associated sins of harlotry and unfaithfulness to God, is still an appropriate image in the post-exilic era. It is also an appropriate symbol of the sins of our age, for many have played the harlot by chasing after the gods of wealth and prosperity, forsaking the living and true God.

The book of Revelation, building on the Old Testament imagery of this woman "Wickedness," uses the image of the great harlot to portray unfaithfulness to the Lamb of God:

³So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. ⁴The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. ⁵And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. ⁶I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement (Revelation 17:3-6).

3. *Its Conveyance (5:9)*

⁹Then I raised my eyes and looked, and there were two women, coming with the wind in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven (Zechariah 5:9).

The fifth unique feature of this visionary ephah is the method in which it is conveyed away from Zechariah. He sees two women, with stork-like wings, coming to carry the basket and lift it away. These winged-women seem to be a caricature of cherubim, the winged angels of God who worship Him around His throne and are His messengers who do his bidding. We know that cherubim have human faces and wings (*cp.* Ez. 10:20-22). However, these women are a parody of the cherubim, because they are unclean creatures, like mythological harpies.

The stork is only mentioned five other times in Scripture, and two of those references are in the list of unclean animals (Lev. 11:19; Dt. 14:18). Thus, the primary emphasis in Scripture regarding the stork is that it is an unclean bird. It seems appropriate that this basket of "Wickedness" would be carried by unclean creatures. The stork is also a large bird with large wings, and so the stork may also be pictured here because it would have been able to carry such a heavy load over a long distance.

In the previous vision, the flying scroll containing the law of God was up in the sky, indicating its heavenly origin. Here in this vision, the flying ephah containing sin and wickedness originates from earth, and is lifted up "between earth and heaven." I think this is a significant detail, which we will explore under the last point of the vision – the destination of the ephah.

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So, putting the picture together thus far, Zechariah sees a large ephah containing the personification of “Wickedness” that represents the sinful lawbreakers within the covenant community. God has confined these sinful ones in this basket that is being carried away from land of God by unclean creatures.

B. The Seventh Vision: The Land of Shinar (5:10-11)

¹⁰So I said to the angel who talked with me, “Where are they carrying the basket?”

¹¹And he said to me, “To build a house for it in the land of Shinar; when it is ready, the basket will be set there on its base” (Zechariah 5:10-11).

Zechariah asks a second question that seems obvious as he watches these stork-women carry off the ephah of Wickedness. “Where are they carrying the basket?” The answer forms the sixth and final feature of significance concerning this vision. The basket is being carried to Shinar. Where is “Shinar”? It is the ancient name for Babylon. We first are introduced to Shinar in Genesis 10, where we learn that Nimrod, the mighty hunter, established his kingdom there:

¹⁰And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar (Genesis 10:10).

But the real significance of Shinar is revealed to us in the next chapter of Genesis, where the men of that place attempt to build a tower to heaven:

⁴And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (Genesis 11:4).

The tower of Babel project was an illustration of man’s attempt to seize what was not rightfully theirs, just like Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden. Rather than submit themselves to the name of God, Nimrod and the people of Shinar sought to make a name for themselves. Rather than being content with their position on earth, they wanted to storm the heavens. “The Babel project stands in Scripture as the representative attempt of an idolatrous world in revolt to exalt itself to heaven by its own strength for its own glory” (Kline).

It is in the context of the tower of Babel, built in the land of Shinar, that we see the significance of the ephah being lifted up “between earth and heaven” (5:9). Just as the men of Babel sought to lift themselves from earth up to heaven by building a tower, so this basket of “Wickedness” is being lifted up toward heaven. But it never gets there; instead it is transported to the land of Babylon, back to Babel, back to the land of exile, outside of the land of the people of God. Symbolically, Babylon or “Shinar represents the world, generally speaking, as contrasted with the church” (Phillips). It starts with the tower of Babel, and ends in the book of Revelation, where the great harlot is identified with “Babylon the Great” (Rev. 17:5).

But God has called His people out of Babylon. We are called to come out of that sinful place and to enter His holy land instead. He first called Abraham out of the land of Shinar, out of Ur of the Chaldeans (*cp.* Gen. 11:28). But Abraham’s descendents ultimately were transported back to the land of Shinar in the Babylonian captivity. The Jews of Zechariah’s generation had returned to the land of Israel from that captivity, and they were called to establish God’s worship in Jerusalem. They were not supposed to go back to the land of idolatry and sin (*cp.* 2:6-7).

In Zechariah’s vision, another tower of Babel project is envisioned in Shinar. This basket of wickedness is set up in its own house. The houses of the wicked are destroyed by God’s curse in

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the sixth vision (5:4), but here in the seventh vision, the wicked are re-established in a house in Shinar, which is in reality a false or counterfeit temple. The ephah is set up on a base or pedestal, and becomes a fixture in this pagan temple, which like the tower of Babel, is an attempt to build the city of man instead of the city of God.

How does this vision fit in with the others? Remember, the overall theme of these visions is to build the temple of God in Jerusalem and to establish His worship on earth. And here in this vision, we really have the opposite – we have a house of wickedness being established in the land of Shinar, in opposition to the work of God’s people. While the people of God are called to build the true temple, the enemies of God’s people are also busy at work, building up counterfeit religions and philosophies.

How are we to understand what this all means? I believe that James Jordan and Meredith Kline have unlocked the mystery of this vision by linking it to the original exodus and construction of the tabernacle, the forerunner of the temple. This vision is really a counterfeit exodus with the goal of building a counterfeit temple. Instead of leaving the land of slavery and bondage for the Promised Land, in this vision, we have a departure from Jerusalem back to the land of wickedness, symbolized by Shinar. In the exodus, God bore His people on the wings of an eagle (Ex. 19:4) through the wilderness to His holy mountain. In the vision of the flying ephah, the wicked are carried on the wings of storks across the desert to their own evil place.

Once at their respective destinations, two houses of worship are built: either the tabernacle of God or the temple of idolatry. In the house of Shinar, the ephah of wickedness is set on a pedestal and established. What corresponds to that in the exodus? It is the Ark of the Covenant!

What is the Ark? It is a container with a heavy golden lid with two winged cherubim on top of it. Inside the Ark amongst other things was stored the tablets of the Law containing the Ten Commandments – God’s righteous and holy standard. Meanwhile, the ephah is a container with a heavy lead lid with two stork-winged women on either side of it. Inside the ephah was confined “Wickedness,” all that is opposed to the Law of God. Jordan describes the parallels:

The Ark is a box with a gold lid, and the ephah is a container with a lead lid. Lead is heavy like gold, but it does not shine – it is a good parody of a golden lid. In real life, you would never have a big, round, lead lid on an ephah, so it is clearly symbolic. Secondly, the Ark is transported by winged cherubim with human faces. The physical ark that was built was carried about on the shoulders of the priests, but we know from Ezekiel that the idea is the ark is transported by cherubim with human faces. The ephah is transported by unclean birds with human faces. The uncleanness is part of the parody. Third, the Ark is set up inside of God’s house, once it is built. And the ephah is set up on a pedestal in its own temple, once it is built. Fourth, the Ark contains God’s bread, which is measured in ephahs (Ex. 16:33-36). A tenth of an ephah of God’s bread is placed in the Ark. The ephah in Zechariah’s vision contains wickedness.

Conclusion

The church of God is called to build the temple of God – to establish His worship in the earth. That was the mission of Zechariah’s generation – to build the temple of the Lord for His glory. And that is our mission as well. Our building project is different than theirs – they used physical stones to build a physical building; our glorious temple is the body of Christ, with living stones of individual saints being built together:

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⁵...you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

Because the church is to be a “holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:21), wickedness is being removed from its midst. This is the message of the flying ephah, which removes wickedness from God’s holy land, from His holy people. God does this first by separating the godly from the ungodly. We are called to be holy, separate from the world:

¹⁷...Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you (2 Corinthians 6:17; *cp.* Isaiah 52:11).

But even further, He is progressively purifying those who are within the church. We are all undergoing a process of sanctification to become more and more like our Savior:

¹⁵...but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16; *cp.* Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2).

So, one lesson from the flying ephah is that while we build the church as the city of God and establish true worship, God will remove wickedness from our midst. However, the vision also shows us that although wickedness is being removed from the church, it is being established elsewhere. False worship is set up in the world to oppose the true worship of the church. Whether it is man-made religions, heretical cults, or secular philosophies, the mindset of the world is to worship at the temple of wickedness, established in the land of Shinar, the city of mankind.

We are surrounded and bombarded by those who worship other gods. Our newspapers, our television and radio media, our politics, our movies, our music, our culture – all of it is designed to take our eyes off of God and worship created things – pleasure, beauty, power, wealth, and so on. These are the gods of the temple of wickedness; they are what is contained in the ephah of wickedness and in opposition to the worship of the true God.

We are to remove this wickedness from the church, but we need to understand that God will not ultimately destroy all evil until Christ returns again and history ends. This is the meaning of the parable that Jesus tells of the wheat and tares. The wicked tares are sown in amongst the good wheat, but the final separation does not come until judgment day:

³⁰Let both [the wheat and the tares] grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn” (Matthew 13:30).

So, in the final analysis, the vision of the flying ephah should be an encouragement to us. We are called to establish true worship in the church. Meanwhile, God is removing wickedness from our midst, through separation of His holy people from the world and through our progressive, ongoing sanctification. Although wickedness remains in the world and is in opposition to God’s people, we already know the end of the story. False worship will be in the world, but God will ultimately remove it forever, and we will dwell in eternity in heaven with our Savior.

Next week: Lesson 10 – The Chariots of God – Zechariah 6:1-8

Close in Prayer.