

Zechariah 5:1-4: The Flying Scroll

Composed by Brad Lippincott on July 13th, 2011

This has got to be one of the strangest visions in the whole Bible. For about five years I did not fully understand this passage, but one day I was just determined to understand this passage and the Holy Spirit showed me some cool things. The following is what I learned. The following is my personal commentary. This is more of an informal commentary of what I learned and it is documented for personal reference and for anyone who wants to read this. You can use as much of this info as you wish!! Enjoy the notes!! ☺

The Jist – This passage of Zechariah 5:1-4 is about God judging the individual sinner. The key to this passage is in Zechariah 5:3 where it mentions the two sins of swearing and stealing. Since swearing falsely (which is taking the name of the Lord in vain; see below) and stealing are the middle commandments of the first five and the last five of the Ten Commandments; this scroll represents the Ten Commandments as a whole and God’s Word. God’s judgment is also contained within this scroll. We see that individuals are judged based on these sins because of the word “everyone who...” in verse 3. In this passage, God is judging the individual sinner.

How does this passage relate to Jesus Christ – Firstly, Jesus will be judging in this manner as explained in this passage of Zechariah 5:1-4 in the future (see Jesus unsealing the scroll in the book of Revelation). We see that in this passage God hates sin, and as a result, we are separated from God. But, thankfully, Jesus can be our Savior if we ask Him to be. If we ask Jesus Christ into our heart as our personal Lord and Savior, He will save you from this judgment. Jesus does hate sin, but He loves you so greatly that He wants to forgive you. You are important and you matter!! Jesus died on the cross for our sin, if we ask Jesus to forgive us and ask Him into our heart, He will forgive us 100%, and you are guaranteed to go to Heaven. A gift from someone is not yours until you officially take it. Please take the gift of eternal life from Jesus the way you would take a gift from someone on your birthday.

Personal Commentary on Zechariah 5:1-4

5:1 Then I lifted up my eyes again and looked, and behold, there was a flying scroll.

Then I lifted up my eyes again When reading Zechariah, you will notice the phrase “Then I lifted up my eyes again” appears multiple times (Zech 1:18, 2:1, 5:1, 6:1). The implication is that Zechariah was looking down and then he lifted up his eyes again. I personally believe that Zechariah was worn out from the previous vision he saw, and then he lifted up his eyes to see the next vision.

Flying scroll Like what it means when we take this with face value. Zechariah is seeing a scroll that is flying in the air. This must have been one weird sight to see!! This flying scroll is written on both sides (see Zechariah 5:3).

5:2 And he said to me, “What do you see?” And I answered, “I see a flying scroll; its length is twenty cubits and its width ten cubits.”

And he said to me The “he” here is the angel that is speaking to Zechariah. The context of the previous chapters shows this.

Cubits A cubit is an ancient form of measurement and it is about 18 inches (or 45.72 Centimeters for my metric friends.)

Its length is twenty Cubits and its width ten cubits In other words, this flying scroll has a length of 30 feet (9.14 Meters) and a width of 15 feet (4.57 Meters).

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I have heard that this is the exact dimension of the holy place in the Tabernacle. I am still to research if these dimensions of the flying scroll match the dimensions of the Holy Place of the Tabernacle because I am not certain; I need to see it with my own eyes if I am going to agree with that.

Factually however, Solomon’s Porch is twenty Cubits in length by a width of ten cubits according to 1 Kings 6:3. As far as the significance of Solomon’s Porch, I am still to research this.

5:3 Then he said to me, “This is the curse that is going forth over the face of the whole land; surely everyone who steals will be purged away according to the writing on one side, and everyone who swears will be purged away according to the writing on the other side.

Then he said to me, The angel is telling Zechariah what the flying scroll is.

The Curse This root word in Hebrew is אלה *'alah*. (To see how *'alah* is parsed in the Hebrew see foot note below)¹ Notice the definite article “the”, it is “the curse”, it is one curse. This is a curse from God.²

Face of the whole land This is where some disagreement comes along. Some translators like the King James Version will translate this phrase as “Face of the whole earth” and the NASB says “face of the whole land”. If the translators believe that this judgment is for the nation of Israel

¹ אלה Hebrew Definite article ה preceding root; Qamatz added beneath the Lamed shows that this word is feminine singular. Brown Driver Briggs states that this word is a noun and is feminine

² Brown, F; S. Driver; C. Briggs *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), 46b.

alone, than it will be rendered “face of the whole land”; if the translators thought this curse applies to the whole world, it will be translated as “face of the whole earth”. ארץ *'erets* can be translated as either “earth” or “land”. So many wonder if this passage has to do with the land of Israel, or the whole earth. I believe the answer is actually both. I believe that God has his divine standard, symbolized and explained within the double sided scroll, and it applies to those part of Israel or not part of Israel in the time period of Zechariah, but this standard certainly has a future implication for all those who do not meet the standard of God. We will never meet the standard of God, this is why we need Jesus Christ!!

This scroll symbolizes the Word of God and anytime there is a judgment. For one example of this scroll judgment please see Zechariah 13:8-9; also see that Jesus the Messiah gets struck down in Zechariah 13:7. Notice how the one third remnant (Zechariah 13:8-9, reacts to Jesus in Zechariah 12:10-13:1.) For another example of this scroll judgment in action, read the book of Revelation.

How can I avoid this future judgment?

Jesus forgives us of all of our sins. If we make Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior of our lives; the judgments proclaimed on this scroll will not touch us. If we believe that Jesus Christ is God and raised from the dead we are saved (Rom 10:9). See how Jesus forgives us in Gen 3:15; Isa 53:4-6; Zech 12:10 – 13:1; John 3:16-18.

Everyone who steals...everyone who swears falsely The question that is often asked is why is stealing and swearing falsely the sins that God chooses to list on this flying scroll that Zechariah sees. From here I will tell you the typically explanation, then I will tell you what I think along with my agreements and disagreements and why.

The main theory behind why stealing and swearing falsely are the targeted sins goes like this: The ten commandments were written on two tablets (Exodus 34:28) that were double sided (Exodus 32:15). On one tablet, the first five commandments were written and on the other tablet, the last five commandments (commandments 6-10) were written. The middle of the first five commandments is taking the Lord's name in vain which is synonymous with swearing falsely (Zech 5:3-4), and the middle of the last five commandments on the second tablet is stealing (Exodus 20 is where the Ten Commandments are listed). Since the middle commandment of the first five and latter five are listed here in Zechariah 5, it shows this flying scroll represents all the Ten Commandments.

I partly agree with the typical explanation in a way, but I disagree by about 20% for the following reasons. (1) First of all it is pure speculation that the first five commandments were written on the first tablet that Moses received and that commandments six through ten were written on the second tablet. One cannot build a case on that kind of speculation. (2) Secondly, when I read the ten commandments in Exodus 20, some of these commandments are tremendously longer than others when in their full explanation, it is very plausible that the balance of commandments on the two tablets were actually lopsided, like, four commandments on the first tablet then six on the second tablet; but one cannot say for certain either way. The

case is not built on how many commandments were written on each tablet, one will never know and it does not change any understanding of this passage here in Zechariah 5.

Swearing falsely and taking the name of the Lord in vain are synonymous: Here's why!!

Swearing falsely and taking the Lord's name in vain are surprisingly related.³ When I first saw this I was thinking that if you swear on the name of the Lord, then you are taking the Lord's name in vain. But if you swear on something else, like the earth, or your aunt; then it is not taking the name of the Lord in vain. Well...the Israelites eventually took this same type of thinking I had, and Jesus addresses it in Matthew 5:33-37.

More notes on this for my sake: Taking the name of the Lord in vain (אִשָּׁו *shav'*) means to take God's name falsely. If you want to be so strict about it, misrepresenting God or anything He has charge over is taking His name in vain (more reason why good accurate teaching is important). Compare Exodus 20:7 to Leviticus 19:12 to Jeremiah 7:9 and then to Matthew 5:33-37. Zechariah 8:17 shows that God hates a false oath (swearing falsely).⁴ Remember, all sin is against God. Therefore swearing falsely is still a sin against God. But why exactly is swearing falsely taking the name of the Lord in vain? Jesus explains it best in Matthew 5:33-37:

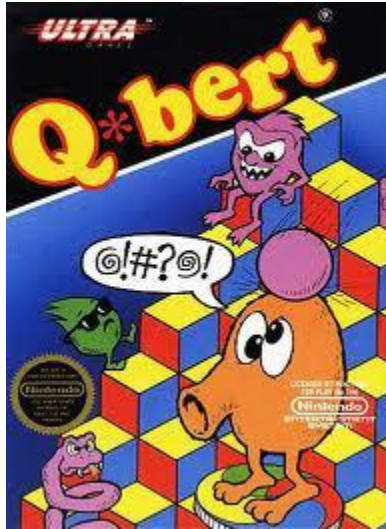
Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.' But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.

So basically all oaths not kept are of evil (Mt. 5:37). Oaths in themselves are not bad, but oaths not kept are. God made oaths (you can do a word study on oaths) but then again; God keeps His oaths. It seems that swearing by Heaven or by Jerusalem or anything for that matter insults God directly; even though it seems indirect. This is because when we swear by something in this universe it gets God involved into the picture since He is the creator of everything and is everywhere. Even if you swear on one of your ancestors, you are swearing to God in an indirect way because they are created by God. If you make a promise by the name of whatever, and you don't do it, you took God's name in vain by swearing falsely; therefore you took the name of the Lord in vain. Don't make promises on the name of others, places, or things because God made it all, or dwells there, and you will be insulting Him; thereby taking His name in vain. This is why swearing falsely is synonymous with taking the name of the Lord in vain.

³ Originally, I thought taking the name of the Lord your God in vain was separate from swearing falsely unless you swear by the name of God Himself. However, in doing a study on oaths; I found that when people swear on the name of whatever, or on a place or person; and then they don't keep that oath; they are taking the name of the Lord in vain. Matthew 5:33-37 makes this clear.

⁴ Zechariah 8:17 (NASB) states: "Also let none of you devise evil in your heart against another, and do not love perjury; for all these are what I hate," declares the Lord". Now the immediate context of Zechariah 8:17 actually goes from Zechariah 8:14-17.

Conclusion on stealing and swearing falsely (Zech 5:3)



When the Bible speaks about “Swearing falsely” it does not mean using an expletive!! ☺ In the Bible “swearing” means your making a super promise. It’s not just any promise, it is a promise based on a name, person, or thing. Some Americans say things: “I promise on my mom’s grave that....”. Or in court when a testimony is given: “Do you swear by the Bible to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?” (Q-Bert was a cuss bucket. He never says anything good. He just swears.)

This flying scroll represents the entirety of the Ten Commandments and the Word of God; including God’s standard for judgments (See the phrase: **according to the writing on one side...according to the writing on the other side**). Here is why...of the Ten Commandments, stealing is actually the middle commandment of the *final* five and swearing falsely or taking the name of the Lord in vain is the middle of the *first* five. This flying scroll represents the entirety of the Ten Commandments, the standard of God. God’s judgments are also listed on this scroll, not just the two commandments listed; notice the phrase “purged away according to the writing on one side” (Zech 5:3 and See Below), and therefore it represents the entirety of the Word of God. God’s standard and judgments are revealed in the Word of God.

Purged away⁵ This means to clean out; as in “cleaning the house out of roaches”.

According to the writing on one side...according to the writing on the other side Notice that this is a double sided scroll. Interestingly, all double sided scrolls in the Bible represent judgment. -----> **See the double sided scrolls in Ezekiel 2:8-10 and in Revelation 5:1-9.**

⁵ נקה *naqah* is the word for purged. In this context it means to gut out, to clean out. Like cleaning the house of roaches.

Notice further that this judgment is “according to the writing on one side” and “according to the writing on the other side”. There is more than the commandments written here. God’s judgment and how He is going to accomplish His judgment is written on this scroll. His judgments and His means of judgments are also written in the Word. This scroll represents the Word of God and God’s judgment against the individual sinner here in Zechariah 5:1-4. The next section in this chapter, Zechariah 5:5-11 explains how God will wipe out the evil system of sin.

5:4 I will make it go forth,” declares the LORD of hosts, “and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears falsely by My name; and it will spend the night within that house and consume it with timber and stones.”

I will make it go forth This means that God will make this curse go forth, this curse is guaranteed to occur. Additionally, this promise shows that when this vision was seen by Zechariah, the flying scroll did not go out yet because of this future phrase “I will make it go forth”. This curse is definitely future, but one must remember that God has been using His standard of judgment as explained in His Word forever. God can judge anyone at anytime (I am not talking about the Bema Throne judgment or the White Throne Judgment. See John 3:16-18)

Night within that house There is no running from God bro!! If the curse is in your house, the only way to get rid of it is to humbly ask Jesus to become your savior, not your judge. That is what I did in 2001. I did not want the Messiah to be my judge, I wanted Him to be my Savior. When you know how scary the Messiah is, it makes it more beautiful that He wants a relationship with you.

Consume כלה *kalah* This verb means to “be complete, at an end, finished, accomplished, spent”.⁶ Remember, the object that is taking this curse from the flying scroll is the house. Of course if someone is in the house and the house gets destroyed, it is understood that the people in the house will also be destroyed.

Well...that concludes this commentary on Zechariah 5:1-4!! To Jesus Christ be the glory forever and ever!!!! Amen!!

Romans 11:36 – For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

⁶ Ibid., 477-478b. This rendering in Zechariah 5:4 is actually found in this edition of BDB on 478a top and at the end of the definition on 478b. The object of this wrath of God is actually on the house.