

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

Lesson 9, Chapters 4 and 5

This 4th chapter of Zechariah is aimed at encouraging Zerubbabel, the civic leader of the returned Jews from Babylon, in his role as the Persian-appointed governor of Yehud. The chapter before this one did essentially the same as concerned Joshua, the religious leader of the returned Jews, in his role as the Persian-appointed High Priest of the revived Hebrew faith community and as head of the Levitical Priesthood. What we need to gather from these 2 chapters is that while it was the Persian King that appointed these 2 Judean leaders, these 2 men apparently had inward doubts about whether God approved of them as legitimate. And, just as clearly, the Judean people (and here I am using the terms Jewish and Judeans as more or less synonymous) had doubts about it as well. And, indeed, that divine validation and encouragement is the focus of chapter 3 for Joshua and chapter 4 for Zerubbabel.

Since the primary mode of communicating these several prophecies that were being given to Zechariah was symbolism, then chapter 4 uses a menorah and 2 olive trees as its symbol. As we discussed last week, because this is a vision, there is no intent for the symbolic elements to accurately represent something real that has or currently is in existence. That is, the description of the menorah is like nothing we've seen before, and there is no evidence that a menorah configured in this particular way was ever built and used in the Temple. Nonetheless, it is immediately understood that it is intended to call to mind the Temple menorah. There is nothing to indicate that the Olive trees in the vision were anything other than ordinary looking as one would expect.

Even so, in chapter 4 verse 4, Zechariah says he can't discern the meaning of this symbol. To which the Interpreting Angel of the vision more less says "why not?", implying this ought to be a no-brainer for Zechariah. Since Zechariah doesn't get it, then neither should we feel as though it ought to be self-evident for us. Great Bible scholars over the centuries have had a field-day trying to figure it out, and so there are various interpretations of it.

We ended last time with the 10th verse of chapter 4, so let's re-read a portion of Zechariah to lay the groundwork for today's lesson.

RE-READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 4:8 – end

As we go forward, be reminded that just as Joshua represents himself, and also symbolically represents the office of the High Priest and all of the Priesthood, so Zerubbabel represents himself, and also symbolically represents the office of the civic ruler of the Judean people, as well as all the Judean people themselves.

The message of verse 8 is that God is giving this part of the vision/oracle directly to Zechariah. Verse 9 is a statement of Yehoveh's divine validation of Zerubbabel as the God-approved leader to complete the Temple rebuilding project; and that because of the way the ancients thought of Temples being associated not only to a god but also to a king, then even though Zerubbabel was not a king the Judeans ought to consider his function and position before God as king-like. Thus, just as the first Temple was called Solomon's Temple, then this rebuilt one should be thought of as Zerubbabel's Temple.

Verse 10 must be approached with a better translation than most Bible versions supply. I suggest it ought to be the following to get the original and true intent of it across:

TNK Zechariah 4:10 *Does anyone scorn a day of small beginnings? When they see the stone of distinction in the hand of Zerubbabel, they shall rejoice. "Those seven are the eyes of the LORD, ranging over the whole earth."*

That is, no one treats with contempt a day of small beginnings. No reasonable person who has the goal or hope of seeing something grand accomplished despises the day when the necessary series of small steps that will be needed to reach that goal, begins. Sometimes that beginning is little more than an inauguration ceremony. In this case, it is that when building Temples kings customarily "lay the first brick" so to speak. So, Zerubbabel is depicted as holding a plum bob in his hand as the ceremonial beginning of the building

process. The "stone of distinction" more literally reads "the tin stone". What this is talking about is the weighted object attached to the end of a string that allows a builder to align stones straight up and down and not leaning one way or the other. This weighted object is made of tin; calling it a stone is just a euphemistic way of saying it is heavy like a stone, because no doubt in centuries prior to using metal the weighted object used *was* a stone.

Moving to verse 11, we find that Zechariah is still perplexed over the issue of the symbolic meaning of the 2 Olive trees in his vision.

CJB Zechariah 4:11 *I replied by asking him, "What are those two olive trees on the right and left sides of the menorah?"*

Recall that there is a bowl sitting above the menorah into which oil from the olives is placed. That bowl acts as a reservoir for the olive oil that is then distributed to each of the 7 oil lamps via 7 connecting tubes. So, when trying to comprehend this symbol we need to give as much (or probably more) weight to the olive itself than to the tree that produces it, because it is all about the oil that is squeezed from the olives. I think my interpretation of this is validated by what comes next. In verse 12 we read:

CJB Zechariah 4:12 *Then I asked the question again: "What are those two olive branches discharging gold[-colored oil] through the two gold spouts?"*

It's all about the oil. As far as the Interpreting Angel is concerned, Zechariah has asked the same question twice. Thus, the Angel responds with the same answer a second time: don't you know what it means? To which Zechariah replies "no". Let's review that the golden lampstand (the menorah) represents the presence of God among His people. So, what do the two branches with olives that produce the oil then symbolize? Here is what the Angel says:

CJB Zechariah 4:14 *He said, "Those are the two who have been anointed with oil; they are standing with the Lord of all the land."*

First, I question this CJB translation. Practically all other translations, including those of Jewish source, say that these two are "standing with the Lord of all the earth"... not standing with the Lord of all the land". The difference is substantial. The word translated as earth or land is **eretz** and indeed it can be used either way. However, when we look at the context we see that the word used to declare who exactly it is that is sovereign over all the **eretz**, the word is (in Hebrew) **adon**. While lord is not the wrong translation of **adon**, it ought not be capitalized because it is not meant to be used as a proper noun... that is, it is not a name or an official title. Rather, it is meant to be descriptive. So, I think, it would be better to say: "...standing with the master of all the earth". Little "L" lord means the same thing as master, but "lord" is not in common usage in modern times to refer to someone who is in charge...having power or authority... so master is better. Therefore, what is being stated is that the scope of the master's sovereignty is not just the immediate land of Yehud, but rather the entire known world.

Second: looking at the first part of this verse, a translation revision is also necessary. Much better and more literal is this:

YLT Zechariah 4:14 *And he saith, 'These are the two sons of the oil, who are standing by the lord (the master) of the whole earth.'*

Sons of oil is, in Hebrew, **bene yitshar**. Before we can understand this, we need to know that grammatically, **yitshar** is not a general term for oil produced from olives, but rather it is speaking specifically of "fresh oil" or "new oil". When we back away and look at the entire context of the Books of Haggai and Zechariah as they operate together, then we see that one of the major matters being dealt with is that the returned Judeans' expectation of their fields producing abundantly has been dealt a disappointing blow. The crops of every kind have been producing but a fraction of what they should have been. The reason? Lack of consistent rain. The reason for the inconsistent rain? The leaders and the people had been disobedient by putting their own wants and needs above God's command, thus dragging their feet on rebuilding His Temple. So, new or fresh oil is directly associated with a bountiful harvest. In our context, it is symbolic that divine favor has returned to the land and the

Judean people because the Temple rebuilding project has begun again in determined urgency, thus pleasing Yehoveh.

Bottom line: "sons of oil" is not to be taken literally; rather, it is yet another expression. It more indicates something fruitful or abundant. Actually, in this passage, it carries a dual meaning (as so many Hebrew expressions do). One meaning concerns bounty and fertility (in this case, a newly returned bounty and fertility of the land), and the other meaning is that this concerns two persons or individuals. That is, two individuals are to be associated with the joy of God's returned presence, which has led to increased crop yield throughout Yehud, which is the reward for rebuilding God's House... the Temple.

Can we identify these two individuals? Certainly; it is the two that have been the subjects of chapters 3 and 4: Joshua and Zerubbabel. Joshua and Zerubbabel are the two Olive trees.

I want to remind you of something that I will repeat again a few times as we continue in Zechariah. Every vision, every oracle, every prophecy of Zechariah must be taken in the context of the contemporary world of the returning Jews from Babylon when Zechariah was given, and then wrote down, all of this prophetic information. A modern Bible student... no matter where on this planet this student might reside... is greatly challenged by this because attempting to understand these symbols that only have meaning in the context of Zerubbabel's time and circumstances requires much study of those ancient times. One cannot merely read the words and then somehow know what their intent is. Unfortunately, especially in the gentile Christian world, in lieu of doing the needed research the tendency is to correlate these biblical words and symbols to modern examples of our day. The results are interpretations that can be far off the mark. Here is yet another example of this phenomenon from one of the greatest Bible academic teams of the past 3 centuries.

Kiel and Delitzsch say this about this passage: "***the two children of oil cannot be the Jews and Gentiles, or Israel and the Gentile world in***

their fruitful branches... Because the candlestick is the symbol of the Church of the Lord..."

Applied through the filter of centuries of Constantinian Christian doctrines, and through attempting to correlate ancient symbols to more modern things rather than understanding them within their own ancient time and culture, then the meaning truly becomes distorted if not lost altogether. As a result, a fissure is opened into the underlying foundation of anti-Semitism of the Constantinian Church, and what comes bubbling up are the streams and streams of erroneous conclusions and statements as the one I just read to you. Let's move on to Zechariah chapter 5.

READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 5 all

The opening verse that speaks of Zechariah lifting or raising his eyes means to do something again. He returns to looking at a God-sent vision/oracle. This time the symbol is a flying scroll. The Hebrew that is translated as scroll is ***megillah***. Technically speaking, a ***megillah*** is a rolled-up, and not a rolled-out, scroll. So, a few Bible versions will call it a roll instead of a scroll.

Once again, the difficult and unique symbolism we find in Zechariah confronts us. There is no other place in the Bible, nor is there any known non-biblical Hebrew document, that speaks of a flying scroll. However, because it is used symbolically and doesn't attempt to picture a real object in the real world, then the trick is to sort through exactly what that symbol represents.

The size of the scroll plays a large part of understanding what it means. The CJB doesn't help us as it uses a measurement that is not literal... it gives it to us in feet. The literal reading about the dimensions of the scroll is that it is 20 cubits by 10 cubits. So, is this a flying billboard (the scroll is unfurled)? Or is this a flying roll (the scroll is rolled up like for storage)? There are thoughts in both directions, But, despite the conjectures, it seems to me that a vision of a rolled-up scroll that then speaks of its rectangular dimensions as 20 by 10 cubits, makes little sense. This scroll has been rolled-out so that it's length and width can be seen by Zechariah.

Equally important to the dimensions of it, is that it is flying in the air. The point of this is movement. The movement of the scroll works similarly in meaning to the horses of different colors that roam the earth. The idea is universality and comprehensiveness. It indicates that the scroll's contents are not just locally effective, but rather it applies to a large portion of the world and people, if not all. What is the scroll about? Well, any scroll contains writing. It is where covenants are recorded, and scrolls are important records that are usually placed in libraries.

Back to the dimensions. Are these fanciful or meaningful, and/or do they actually connect to something? Some commentators think that it is the 2 to 1 ratio that we ought to pay attention to. Or, that the huge dimensions are just to create an effect of awe in the Prophet, and then finally in the reader. I don't think so. When dimensions are stated in such a straightforward manner, then we are to take them more literally in order to see what they might correspond to. Since verse 3 tells us this scroll is the curse that goes out and applies to law breakers, then we immediately get it that this must be representative of the Law of Moses... which is more than merely another law code, it is also a covenant between God and Israel.

CJB Zechariah 5:3 *Then he said to me, "This is the curse that goes out over the face of all the land; for [according to what is written] on one side, everyone who steals will be swept away; and [according to what is written] on the other side, everyone who swears will be swept away.*

Just as the overriding context of Zechariah and Haggai is the Temple, then clearly what comes *out* of the Temple is part of it. At this time in history, the Temple and its significance was less important to the largest part of Judean society than it had been before their exile, and we see this reflected by the mere 5% of the Jewish exiles who decided to come back when given the opportunity. They of course had read and heard stories of the Temple, but had never actually seen it or experienced it because they were either very small children when exiled to Babylon, or for the vast bulk, they had been born in Babylon. This also means that the Law of Moses and its contents was lesser known, thus having lesser relevance, to the younger generation of the exiles.

Because the Temple no longer existed, then the Priesthood essentially no longer existed in any meaningful way. According to the Torah, the Priests were only granted the Temple and its grounds to do their service upon (they also had been granted a string of cities of refuge to operate but this seems to have faded away over the centuries). Once in Babylon, then, Priests served no functional purpose. Thus, the Law of Moses and all that it prescribed took a backseat in the minds of the people. In its place arose some ad hoc houses of meeting and prayer led mostly by concerned laymen. Historically, it had never been the job of anyone other than the Priests to teach the Law of Moses to the people, and to enforce it. Thus, what came from these home fellowship meetings up in Babylon was a mixed bag of those laymen's understanding of the Law along with some Traditions and Customs they created relative to their current circumstances, although no doubt these Traditions and Customs were said to express the intent of the Law of Moses. It was this innovation of laymen leading and teaching the Law instead of the Priests that evolved into the Synagogue system.

We are told that the original Torah had been placed in the Ark of the Covenant; but, the Ark had gone missing when Babylon invaded Judah, and so it would, until this day, never again be found (I doubt it still exists... although some claim to have seen it... probably having been melted down for its precious gold). No doubt there were copies of the Torah by now that were in the possession of the Priests that had gone off to Babylon. However, in viewing this reality from an overall effect on the people, the Law's relevance and its commands for the exiles in Babylon were, in most cases, fading from their minds and memories. They now lived in a society that was governed by a different set of rules and laws, and operated in a different notion of morality. Therefore, when the exiles came home, in order to get their historic brand of faith operating again the Temple, as the center of their faith, had to be reinstated. If the Temple was reinstated then the Priesthood had to be reinstated for the Temple to operate. And in order to run the Temple and the Priesthood, and for Zerubbabel and Joshua to rule over the people, so did the Law of Moses have to be reinstated because Temple, Priesthood and Law of Moses all worked together to form the core of the covenant that made Israel uniquely Israel: their covenant relationship with God.

Joshua represented the Temple and the Priesthood, Zerubbabel represented the civil governance of the people, and now the flying scroll symbolically represented the Torah and the Law of Moses. However, for the moment, the focus is on the curses side of the Law for those who break it. And so, a third aspect to the symbolism of the flying scroll is that the flying represented *swift* movement such that the provisions of the Law would be reestablished and quickly visit the law breakers.

Let's be clear about this curse aspect of the Law because it is so terribly misunderstood within traditional Christianity, and therefore it is so radically misspoken about. The Hebrew word used here for curse is ***alah***. It doesn't mean curse in the sense of a blasphemous word or phrase, nor does it mean an expression of anger. It is a word that operates within covenant language, and is part of the terms of a covenant. It is that part of a covenant that says what happens when one party to the covenant breaches its terms. The Law of Moses covenant provides for two basic outcomes: blessings for obedience to God's commands, and curses for disobedience. Curse is more properly seen as a penalty equivalent to a sentence handed down by a court of law for a violation. That is, IF one obeyed the Law of Moses they could expect God's shalom and fruitfulness in their lives. But IF they broke a commandment, there would be a penalty... a prescribed consequence... based upon a hierarchy of the seriousness of the sin involved in what is commonly known as a *lex talionis* structure: that is, the punishment is proportionate to the seriousness of the crime committed. It is no different from most Western legal systems in existence today. No one has to worry about being punished if they obey the laws of society. Yet, just because there are punishments in these legal systems for breaking the various laws, that hardly means that the legal system itself is only about oppressing and punishing people to make them unhappy slaves to that society's laws.

Constantinian Christianity, however, has twisted the meaning of curse for its own purposes, saying that the term "the curse" or "the curse of the Law" as found in the Bible means that the Law of Moses is no more nor less than a system of oppression upon people, making the Law of Moses itself essentially nothing but a needless heavy burden upon the people to appease a God who

will never be fully appeased. All one has to do is to read the Torah to dismiss such a slanderous notion.

Upon the return of the Babylonian exiles to their former homeland after 70 years of exile, God then determined it was time for a re-recognition of the authority of the Law of Moses within the Judean community. The flying scroll is a visualization of His determination to bring social cohesion and stability to the Judeans through the force of that covenant made on Mt. Sinai that, by now, was 700 years old. If I could presume to add a tag line to the symbol of the flying scroll it would be "the Law of Moses is again in effect everywhere".

When, in verse 2, the Interpreting Angel asks Zechariah what he sees, the main focus is on the flying scroll's dimensions of 20 cubits by 10 cubits. Now that I have filled in some background for you, it ought not to surprise that the porch of Solomon's Temple that lay at the entrance into the Holy Place was 20 cubits by 10 cubits. Some of those Bible commentators who do see a connection between the dimensions of the flying scroll and the Temple claim that these dimensions must represent the Holy place... that front chamber of the Temple sanctuary. This cannot be correct because that is NOT the dimensions of the original Wilderness Tabernacle's front chamber nor that of Solomon's Temple. But, it is the dimensions of Solomon's porch where those two giant columns, one called Boaz and the other called Yachin, were on display. We know this is the case because it was recorded.

JPS 1 Kings 6:3 *And the porch before the temple of the house, twenty cubits was the length thereof, according to the breadth of the house; and ten cubits was the breadth thereof before the house.*

This association of the **ulam** (the Hebrew word for this porch) and the flying scroll then represent the reinstatement of the very place where the Law had been used for centuries to judge cases. Just as in the smaller walled Israelite cities when cases would be brought to the Elders who sat at the city gates to judge, so especially difficult cases that were brought to the Priests in Jerusalem to judge were brought to the **ulam**... to the porch.

The first crime against the Law of Moses that is listed in Zechariah 5:3 is stealing, and it just the way we think of it; taking something that doesn't belong to us. It is a crime of human against human. The second crime is swearing. This does not mean blasphemy. It is a legal term that essentially means perjury. While we can in one way see this as intent to harm a human, God more sees it as a crime against Him because swearing always involves invoking the name of your god; in this case, invoking Yehoveh's name as a guarantor of your statement. So, it is not that these 2 crimes are the narrow limit of what the curse is to affect. Rather, they are representative of all the crimes of human against human, and human against God.

The comment that these criminals will be "swept away" is meant to conjure up the enduring mental picture of the Great Flood. God puts these people in the same category as everyone but Noah and his immediate family, and those people were all destroyed by an act of divine wrath. In verse 4 this is further explained:

CJB Zechariah 5:4 *'I will release it,' says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, 'and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of anyone who swears falsely by my name; it will stay there inside the house and consume it completely, even its timbers and stones.'*

The CJB says "I will release it". The Hebrew more literally says "I have brought it forth". The CJB says this is going to happen; the Hebrew says this has happened. More, God is not "allowing" the curse to go out (the way one would release a lion from a cage that has held this lion back from doing what lions do), He Himself has intentionally sent it out to do what He intends to do.

When this speaks of the curse entering the house of the thief and the perjurer, it means that anyone who commits sins will not go unfound. Even if one feels safe and hidden inside his own home, the consequence for their covenant violation will seek them out and it is assured that they will bear the grievous results.

When we move on to the 5th verse of chapter 5, another vision is given. This time, the vision's symbol is of a woman inside of an **ephah**. Like the previous

vision of the flying scroll, the Interpreting Angel is involved in gaining Zechariah's attention for him to see it. While this apparently comes quickly after the previous vision, there is no way to know for sure how much time passed. The statement of "raise your eyes and see what this thing is", could easily mean "here is another vision", and no time at all has passed since the flying scroll vision. But, we can't know for certain. However, what the flying scroll explains about what happens to sinners, the next verses beginning with 5 offers another perspective on the matter.

What we are to notice is that while the **ephah** seems to be the primary vision object, in fact it is what is inside of it that is the point. An **ephah** is a means of measurement of dry goods. It doubles as meaning the container that the dry goods are in. So, saying **ephah** is like saying a bushel. We easily equate bushel and bushel basket as essentially being the same things.

To help us visualize it, an **ephah** was slightly more or a bit less than the size of a bushel (no one knows for sure). What might not be so apparent is that an **ephah** was the largest unit of dry goods measurement of volume (not weight) in use in biblical times. When we read of the **omer** (as in counting the **omer** meaning counting the days between the Passover and Shavuot biblical feasts), this is said to be the equivalent of 10 ephahs. But **omers** were simply ritual oriented and used only in ritual language, and there was no such thing as an actual **omer**-sized container, nor was the **omer** used as a standard measure of dry goods in commerce. Everything was **ephah** based.

CJB Zechariah 5:6 *I asked, "What is it?" He said, "This is the eifah-measure [a one-bushel dry-measure] passing by." Then he added, "This is their eye in all the land."*

The CJB, therefore, incorrectly interprets the sense of the meaning of **ephah** as do many Bible versions. It explains that the point of it is its size. Rather, we need to analyze this symbol in the sense of **ephah** more meaning a basket or a container, and not as a unit of measurement. The next verses explain why that is. Before we go there, what is this strange wording to end this verse that says: "This is their eye in all the land"? Indeed, the Hebrew word translated to

“eye” is **ayin**. But, can this be correct? If we keep this as literal as possible, then there is no logical connection between a basket and a human eye.

The Greek Septuagint (created about 250 B.C. as a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), takes this word differently. It takes it to mean “their iniquity”. But the Latin translations read “eye”. While I certainly don’t know the answer, my suspicion is that the word eye also at one time had a secondary meaning as “appearance”. That is, to the eye means what something looked like.

But then we get to verse 7.

CJB Zechariah 5:7 *Next I saw a lead disc lifted up to reveal a woman sitting in the eifah.*

What a strange sight! A lead lid covers a container, and within the container sits not grain or some other commodity, but rather a woman! This is strong evidence that the size of the basket has no meaning, because an **ephah** is only about one cubic foot. The woman would have to be very tiny to fit in such a small space. So here size simply plays no role in the symbol, even though size was everything in the matter of the flying scroll. There is a woman in a container with a lead lid on top of it.

What has a lead lid to do with anything? Why would there be a woman inside a basket? That’s what we’ll explore the next time we meet.