

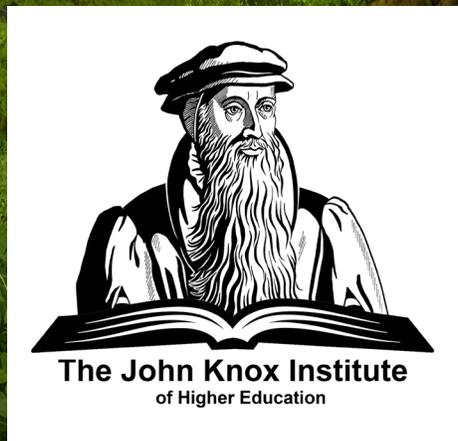
The Visions of Zechariah

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. William Macleod

Lecture #8

The Seventh Vision: The Ephah



John Knox Institute of Higher Education

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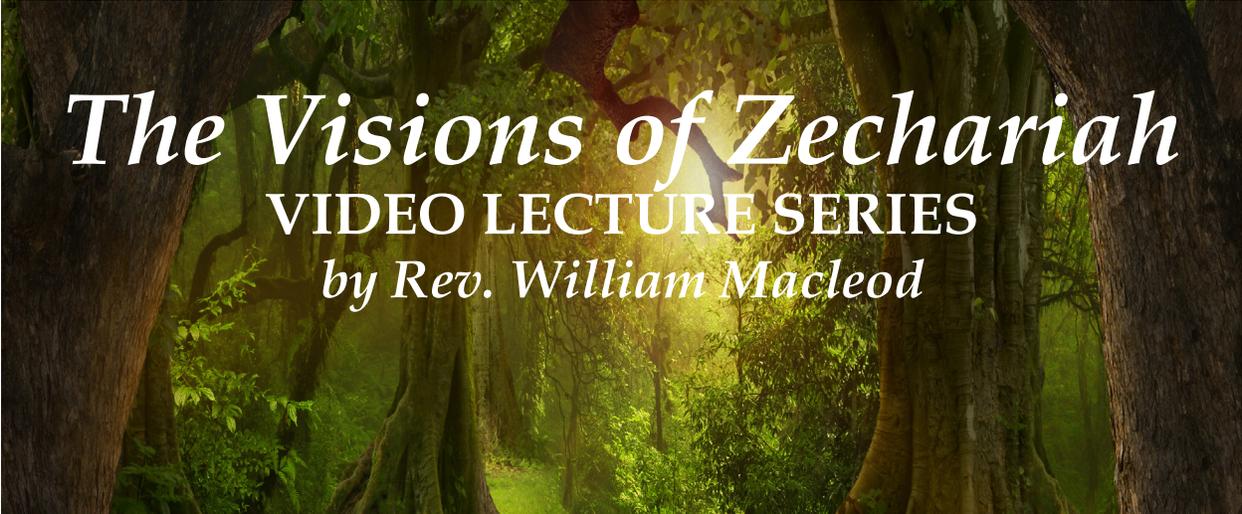
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The Visions of Zechariah

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

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Lecture #8 – Zechariah 5:5-11

The Seventh Vision: The Ephah

Today we come to our eighth lecture in our series on The Visions of Zechariah, and our lecture today is entitled, “The Ephah,” and it deals with Zechariah, chapter 5, verses 5 to 11.

In the sixth vision, the prophet saw a flying scroll which contained curses upon the wicked. Sin is certainly going to be punished. This scroll enters the house of the thief and the perjurer and burns up everything, even the very stones of their homes. God’s wrath will burn against the wicked with fire unquenchable through all the ages of eternity. This present vision is similar. People seem to sin with impunity at times. They appear to get off with their sin but, we are assured, eventually all sin will be punished. “The wages of sin is death”—Romans 6:23, and God never fails to pay wages. Sin is serious. God hates it. The wicked shall not go unpunished.

So, The Ephah, verses 5 to 6—“Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what is this that goeth forth. And I said, What is it? And he said, This is an ephah that goeth forth. He said moreover, This is their resemblance through all the earth.”

The same angel who had shown him the previous visions directs Zechariah to notice a new revelation. The prophet is still thinking about the previous vision, but now there is another vision to see. He sees an ephah. An ephah was a measuring basket used for selling grain. Among the main crops grown in Israel were cereals—wheat and barley. Merchants would use these baskets to measure the quantities being sold. Idolatry used to be the big sin of the Israelites. Time and time again they forsook the Lord and turned to the gods of the nations round about them. Even shortly after leaving Egypt, they made a golden calf and worshipped it. Later, in the plains of Moab, they were enticed by beautiful Midianite and Moabitish women to come to their pagan feasts in honor of their idols and commit fornication with them. After entering the promised land, and after the death of Joshua and the elders who outlived Joshua, they forget the Lord again, and turn to worship Baalim. God hands them over to their enemies who oppress them. In their suffering, they turn to the Lord who raises up a deliverer for them. Again they fall away, and again in their trouble, they cry to God, and he saves them. The Book of Judges records how time and again they backslide and worship idols. Their enemies are allowed to conquer them and oppress them. In their distress,

they return to God, and he sends them a judge to deliver them. The same is true in the days of the kings. Eventually God hands them over to the Babylonians, who carry them away captive to Babylon. For seventy years, they suffer exile far from home. By the time eventually when they return to the land of Canaan, they are at last cured of this kind of gross idolatry. But sadly, new sins emerge. Not worshipping the old idols, but now their sins are the love of money, materialism, and self-righteousness.

When they first returned from Babylon, they set up the altar of the Lord, and began again to worship God with the sacrifices which he had required of Moses and Aaron. They also started to rebuild the temple and were initially enthusiastic. But gradually, struggling with the difficulties, facing the opposition of enemies, but especially concerned to build their own homes and cultivate their own fields, they left off building the temple. They procrastinated, putting off the building work. They said, one day they would build it, but not now. Haggai refers to this in his prophecy: “This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD’s house should be built. Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways”—that’s Haggai 1, verses 2–7. They lived in beautiful ceiled or panelled houses, while God’s house was a ruin. They worked hard to be rich, but actually they were not prospering. They earned money, as it were, to put it into a purse with a hole in the bottom. Their money just disappeared. There was no blessing on their labors. Jesus said: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”—Matthew 6:33. In this we have a wonderful promise. But because they were seeking first their own wealth, God refused to bless them with prosperity in earthly riches.

The sin of the Jews at that time was exactly the same as the sins of the world today. People’s priorities are wealth and material things. The majority of people are full of covetousness. In their greed, they forget that they have souls and spend almost all their time and energy in the pursuit of wealth. Paul warned, “The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness”—that’s 1 Timothy 6, verses 10–11. Strikes are common today, as people demand more pay. People move far away for a better paying job, and they never seem to ask, “Will I be near a good church?” or, “Will it badly affect my opportunity to serve in God’s church?” or, “Will the longer hours I have to work have a negative effect upon my soul?” Jesus warned, “You cannot serve God and mammon”—Matthew 6:24.

Now, The Woman, verses 7 to 8—“And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah. And he said, This is wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof.”

Zechariah next sees a woman sitting in the middle of the basket. The lid has been raised. The basket seems too small for her, and she appears to be trying to get out of it. She is called wickedness and represents the Jewish people. The wickedness is obviously connected with the ephah or measure being used in buying and selling. We think of God’s words through Amos: “Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth

wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse”—the rubbish—“of the wheat?”—Amos 8, verses 4–6. There are many sins particularly connected to the marketplace. God sees the greed that oppresses the poor. He notices when an ephah for selling is made smaller than it should be, and when the shekel for payment made larger. He is aware of the wicked hearts of the merchants who grudge stopping their work for holy days and giving the new moon and the Sabbath Day to God. They long for the holy days to be past, so that they can return to their dealings and their moneymaking.

Similarly, God warns through the prophet Micah that he will certainly punish the cheating merchants: “Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable? Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights? For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee, in making thee desolate because of thy sins”—Micah 6, verses 10–13. They had a bag of deceitful weights which were used to deceive and to rob people. The dishonest traders are becoming rich but God is watching. Nothing is hid from him. He sees their behaviour as abominable. He will smite them and make them sick and desolate.

Our Lord was troubled when he saw the Court of the Gentiles in the temple, which was meant to be a place for prayer for the Gentiles, taken over by the money changers and merchants, who were selling their sheep, and cattle, and doves. At a cost, they had received permission from the priests to trade there, and the animals and birds which they sold would be approved for sacrifices. The priests were paid bribes to allow it, and so made money out of it, and the merchants got their profits too. But the scriptures says, “Jesus went into the temple...and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves”—Matthew 21, verses 12–13. There is, of course, no sin in being a merchant, nor in being rich. Sadly however, the love of money had led many of these Jews into dishonesty. They could easily find ways to justify making a little extra “profit” this way or that, finding ways of deceiving people. After cheating two or three times, the conscience is hardened and no longer condemns. An unconverted person dead in trespasses and sins can easily degenerate into being a thief. Even born-again Christians must be constantly on guard against the temptations of Satan. What a sad picture we have here then of God’s church in Old Testament times. She is represented by a woman called “wickedness” sitting in a measuring basket.

Verses 7 to 8, The Weight of Lead—“And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah. And he said, This is wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof.”

It appears as if the woman is trying to get out of the basket. She is pushing up the lid. But a huge lead weight is placed upon her crushing her down. The world and the devil promise freedom and pleasure. If you have lots of money, they say you will be really happy. People work very, very hard, and for long hours, and sometimes in difficult and unpleasant employment in order to be rich. Some, foolishly, put their hard-earned money into the lottery hoping for sudden wealth. If they win, they think that will be the end of all their troubles—they will be able to enjoy themselves. But it does not work that way. Money, like the devil, is a cruel master. The more money you have the more worries it brings. It is Christ alone who gives joy, and peace, and lasting happiness. He is the one who sets us free: “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my

word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”—John 8, verses 31–32.

Carried Away, verses 9 to 11—“Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out two women, and the wind was in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven. Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah? And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base.”

So two women now appear having wings like a stork, and the wind is in their wings. The stork is a migratory bird with strong wings and able to fly a great distance. These women come and pick up the basket with the wicked woman inside it and carry it far away to the land of Shinar. Shinar first appears in Genesis 11, as the place where an attempt was made to build the tower of Babel that would reach right up to heaven. That was man in his determined revolt against God. That too was where Babylon was located. The Jews have just returned from seventy years exile in Babylon. So this speaks of a new exile. Four hundred years later, the sin of the Jews had reached a new climax with the rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah whom God sent to them. When Pilate tried to release Jesus, whom he knew to be innocent of the charges laid against him, the Jews said, “His blood be upon us and upon our children.” The Roman eagles came, a terrible struggle ensued, and many died in the siege, the famine, and the war. The Jews who were left were carried off to a new exile that has lasted for 2000 years. Only now are they returning to their own land again.

The ephah was set upon its own base. It was not founded on Christ or on the truth but on their own righteousness. The Jews are notorious for their self-righteousness and arrogance. They think because they are Jews and keep their traditions that they have special favor with God. But rejecting the God-appointed Messiah they are under God’s condemnation. Yet surely in their return at last to their own land, we see the Lord’s mercy reaching them after so many years. They were God’s chosen people in Old Testament times, and the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. “And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob”—that’s Romans 11, verses 23–26.

So here again, there is a call to repent of our sins, and to return to the Lord. We are warned against the love of money, and called upon to set our hearts on heavenly and eternal things rather than on worldly things. If we continue to love this world, and its riches, and pleasures, God’s wrath will break out upon us. Amen