

CHAPTER 5

Hitherto we have seen visions of peace only, and all the words we have heard have been good words and comfortable words. But the pillar of cloud and fire has a black and dark side towards the Egyptians, as well as a bright and pleasant side towards Israel; so have Zechariah's visions; for God's prophets are not only his ambassadors, to treat of peace with the sons of peace, but heralds, to proclaim war against those that delight in war, and persist in their rebellion. In this chapter we have two visions, by which "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." God will do great and kind things for his people, which the faithful sons of Zion shall rejoice in; but "let the sinners in Zion be afraid;" for,

I. God will reckon severely with those particular persons among them that are wicked and profane, and that hated to be reformed in these times of reformation; while God is showing kindness to the body of the nation, and loading that with his blessings, they and their families shall, notwithstanding that, lie under the curse, which the prophet sees in a flying roll (v. 1-4).

II. If the body of the nation hereafter degenerate, and wickedness prevail among them, it shall be carried off and hurried away with a swift destruction, under the pressing weight of divine wrath, represented by a talent of lead upon the mouth of an ephah, carried upon the wing I know not where (v. 5-11).

~~301~~ ZECHARIAH 5:1-4

THE VISION OF THE FLYING ROLL

We do not find that the prophet now needed to be awakened, as he did ~~301~~ Zechariah 4:1. Being awakened then, he kept wakeful after; nay, now he needs not be so much as called to look about him, for of his own accord he *turns and lifts up his eyes*. This good men sometimes get by their infirmities, they make them the more careful and circumspect afterwards. Now observe,

I. What it was that the prophet saw; he looked up into the air, and *behold a flying roll*. A vast large scroll of parchment which had been rolled up, and is therefore called a *roll*, was now unrolled and expanded; this roll was flying upon the wings of the wind, carried swiftly through the air in open view, as an eagle that shoots down upon her prey; it was a *roll*, like Ezekiel's that was *written within and without with lamentations, and mourning, and woe*, ^{<3639>}Ezekiel 2:9, 10. As the command of the law is in writing, for certainty and perpetuity, so is the *curse of the law*; it *writes bitter things* against the sinner. "What I have written I have written and what is written remains." The angel, to engage the prophet's attention, and to raise in him a desire to have it explained, asks him *what he sees?* And he gives him this account of it: *I see a flying roll*, and as near as he can guess by his eye it is *twenty cubits long* (that is, ten yards) and *ten cubits broad*, that is, five yards. The scriptures of the Old Testament and the New are *rolls*, in which God has *written to us the great things of his law* and gospel. Christ is the Master of the rolls. They are large rolls, have much in them. They are *flying rolls*; the angel that had *the everlasting gospel to preach flew in the midst of heaven*, ^{<6646>}Revelation 14:6. God's word *runs very swiftly*, ^{<1475>}Psalms 147:15. Those that would be let into the meaning of these rolls must first tell what they see, must go as far as they can themselves. "*What is written in the law? how readest thou?* Tell me that, and then thou shalt be made to *understand what thou readest*."

II. How it was expounded to him, 5:3,4. This flying roll is a *curse*; it contains a declaration of the righteous wrath of God against those sinners especially who by swearing affront God's majesty or by stealing invade their neighbour's property. Let every Israelite rejoice in the blessings of his country with trembling; for if he swear, if he steal, if he live in any course of sin, he shall see them with his eyes, but shall not have the comfort of them, for against him the curse has gone forth. *If I be wicked, woe to me* for all this. Now observe here,

1. The extent of this curse; the prophet sees it flying, but which way does it steer its course? It *goes forth over the face of the whole earth*, not only of the land of Israel, but the *whole world*; for those that have sinned against the *law written in their hearts* only shall by that law be judged, though they have not the book of the law. Note, All mankind are liable to the judgment of God; and, wherever sinners are, any where upon the face of the whole earth, the curse of God can and will find them out and seize

them. Oh that we could with an eye of faith see the flying roll of God's curse hanging over the guilty world as a thick cloud, not only keeping off the sun-beams of God's favour from them, but big with thunders, lightnings, and storms, ready to destroy them! How welcome then would the tidings of a Saviour be, who came to *redeem us from the curse of the law* by being himself *made a curse for us*, and, like the prophet, *eating this roll!* The vast length and breadth of this roll intimate what a multitude of curses sinners lie exposed to. God will make their plagues wonderful, if *they turn not*.

2. The criminals against whom particularly this curse is levelled. The world is full of sin in great variety: so was the Jewish church at this time. But two sorts of sinners are here specified as the objects of this curse: —

(1.) Thieves; it is *for every one that steals*, that by fraud or force takes that which is not his own, especially that robs God and converts to his own use what was devoted to God and his honour, which was a sin much complained of among the Jews at this time, ^{<088>}Malachi 3:8; ^{<130>}Nehemiah 13:10. Sacrilege is, without doubt, the worst kind of thievery. He also that *robs his father or mother, and saith, It is no transgression* (^{<184>}Proverbs 28:24), let him know that against him this curse is directed, for it is against *every one that steals*. The letter of the eighth commandment has no penalty annexed to it; but the curse here is a sanction to that command.

(2.) Swearers. Sinners of the former class offend against the second table, these against the first; for the curse meets those that break either table. He that swears rashly and profanely shall not be held guiltless, much less he that swears falsely (v. 4); he imprecates the curse upon himself by his perjury, and so shall his doom be; God will say *Amen* to his imprecation, and turn it upon his own head. He has appealed to God's judgment, which is always according to truth, for the confirming of a lie, and to that judgment he shall go which he has so impiously affronted.

3. The enforcing of this curse, and the equity of it: *I will bring it forth, saith the Lord of hosts, 5:4*. He that pronounces the sentence will take care to see it executed. His bringing it forth denotes,

(1.) His giving it commission. It is a righteous curse, for he is a righteous God that warrants it.

(2.) His giving it the setting on. He brings it forth with power, and orders what execution it shall do; and who can put by or resist the curse which a God of almighty power brings forth?

4. The effect of this curse; it is very dreadful,

(1.) Upon the sinner himself: *Every one that steals shall be cut off*, not corrected, but destroyed, cut off from the land of the living. The curse of God is a cutting thing, a killing thing. He shall be cut off *as on this side* (cut off from this place, that is, from Jerusalem), and so he that swears from *this side* (it is the same word), from this place. God will not spare the sinners he finds among his own people, nor shall the holy city be a protection to the unholy. Or they shall be cut off *from hence*, that is, from the face of the whole earth, over which the curse flies. Or he that steals shall be *cut off on this side*, and he that swears *on that side*; they shall all be cut off, one as well as another, and both according to the curse, for the judgments of God's hand are exactly agreeable with the judgments of his mouth.

(2.) Upon his family: *It shall enter into the house of the thief and of him that swears*. God's curse comes with a warrant to break open doors, and cannot be kept out by bars or locks. There where the sinner is most secure, and thinks himself out of danger, — there where he promises himself refreshment by food and sleep, — there, in his own house, shall the curse of God seize him; nay, it shall fall not upon him only, but upon all about him for his sake. *Cursed shall be his basket and his store, and cursed the fruit of his body*, ^{<327>}Deuteronomy 28:17, 18. *The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked*, ^{<303>}Proverbs 3:33. It shall not only beset his house, or he at the door, but *it shall remain in the midst of his house*, and diffuse its malignant influences to all the parts of it. *It shall dwell in his tabernacle because it is none of his*, ^{<305>}Job 18:15. It shall dwell where he dwells, and be his constant companion at bed and board, to make both miserable to him. Having got possession, it shall keep it, and, unless he repent and reform, there is no way to throw it out or cut off the entail of it. Nay, it shall so remain in it as to *consume it with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof*, which, though ever so strong, though the timber be heart of oak and the stones hewn out of the rocks of adamant, yet they shall not be able to stand before the curse of God. We heard the stone and the timber complaining of the owner's extortion and oppression, and groaning under the burden of them, ^{<321>}Habakkuk 2:11. Now here we have

them delivered *from that bondage of corruption*. While they were in their strength and beauty they supported, sorely against their will, the sinner's pride and security; but, when they are consumed, their ruins will, to their satisfaction, be standing monuments of God's justice and lasting witnesses of the sinner's injustice. Note, Sin is the ruin of houses and families, especially the sins of injury and perjury. *Who knows the power of God's anger*, and the operations of his curse? Even timber and stones have been consumed by them; let us therefore stand in awe and not sin.

~~3816~~ ZECHARIAH 5:5-11

THE VISION OF THE EPHAH

The foregoing vision was very plain and easy, but in this are things *dark and hard to be understood*; and some think that the scope of it is to foretel the final destruction of the Jewish church and nation and the dispersion of the Jews, when, by crucifying Christ and persecuting his gospel, they should have filled up the measure of their iniquities; therefore it is industriously set out in obscure figures and expressions, “lest the plain denunciation of the second overthrow of temple and state might discourage them too much from going forward in the present restoration of both.” So Mr. Pemble.

The prophet was contemplating the power and terror of the curse which consumes the houses of thieves and swearers, when he was told to turn and he should see greater desolations than these made by the curse of God for the sin of man: *Lift up thy eyes now*, and see what is here, v. 5. *What is this that goeth forth?* Whether over the face of the whole earth, as the flying roll (v. 3), or only over Jerusalem, is not certain. But, it seems, the prophet now, through either the distance or the dimness of his sight, could not well tell what it was, but asked, *What is it?* v. 6. And the angel tells him both what it is and what it means.

I. He sees an *ephah*, a measure wherewith they measured corn; it contained *ten omers* (~~1236~~ Exodus 16:36) and was the tenth part of a *homer* (~~2516~~ Ezekiel 45:11); it is put for any measure used in commerce, ~~6514~~ Deuteronomy 25:14. And *this is their resemblance*, the resemblance of the Jewish nation *over all the earth*, wherever they are now dispersed, or at least it will be so when their ruin draws near. They are filling up the

measure of their iniquity, which God has set them; and when it is full, as the ephah of corn, they shall be delivered into the hands of those to whom God has sold them for their sins; they are *meted* to destruction, as an ephah of corn measured to the market or to the mill. And some think that the mentioning of an ephah, which is used in buying and selling, intimates that fraud, and deceit, and extortion in commerce, were sins abounding much among them, as that people are known to be notoriously guilty of them at this day. This is a proper representation of them *through all the earth*. There is a measure set them, and they are filling it up apace. See ^{<4182>}Matthew 23:32; ^{<5126>}1 Thessalonians 2:16.

II. He sees a *woman sitting in the midst of the ephah*, representing the sinful church and nation of the Jews in their latter and degenerate age, when *the faithful city became a harlot*. He that weighs the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance measures nations and churches as in an ephah; so exact is he in his judicial dealings with them. God's people are called *the corn of his floor*, ^{<2310>}Isaiah 21:10. And here he puts this corn into the bushel, in order to his parting with it. The angel says of the woman in the *ephah*, *This is wickedness*; it is a wicked nation, else God would not have rejected it thus; it is as wicked as *wickedness* itself, it is abominably wicked. *How has the gold become dim! Israel was holiness to the Lord* (^{<2488>}Jeremiah 2:3); but now *this is wickedness*, and wickedness is nowhere so scandalous, so odious, and, in many instances, so outrageous, as when it is found among professors of religion.

III. He sees the woman thrust down into the ephah, and a *talent*, or large weight, *of lead*, cast upon the *mouth* of it, by which she is secured, and made a close prisoner in the *ephah*, and utterly disabled to get out of it. This is designed to show that the wrath of God against impenitent sinners is,

1. Unavoidable, and what they cannot escape; they are bound over to it, concluded under sin, and shut up under the curse, as this woman in the ephah; *he would fain flee out of his hand* (^{<8772>}Job 27:22), but he cannot.
2. It is insupportable, and what they cannot bear up under. Guilt is upon the sinner as a talent of lead, to sink him to the lowest hell. When Christ said of the things of Jerusalem's peace, *Now they are hidden from thy eyes*, that threw a talent of lead upon them.

IV. He sees the ephah, with the woman thus pressed to death in it, carried away into some far country.

1. The instruments employed to do it were *two women*, who had *wings like those of a stork*, large and strong, and, to make them fly the more swiftly, they had the *wind in their wings*, denoting the great violence and expedition with which the Romans destroyed the Jewish nation. God has not only winged messengers in heaven, but he can, when he pleases, give wings to those also whom he employs in this lower world; and, when he does so, he forwards them with the wind in their wings; his providence carries them on with a favourable gale.

2. They bore it up in the air, denoting the terrors which pursued the wicked Jews, and their being a public example of God's vengeance to the world. They *lifted it up between the earth and the heaven*, as unworthy of either and abandoned by both; for the Jews, when this was fulfilled, *pleased not God and were contrary to all men*, ^{ROMS}1 Thessalonians 2:15. *This is wickedness*, and this comes of it; heaven thrust out wicked angels, and earth spewed out wicked Canaanites.

3. When the prophet enquired whither they carried their prisoner whom they had now in execution (v. 10) he was told that they designed *to build it a house in the land of Shinar*. This intimates that the punishment of the Jews should be a final dispersion; they should be hurried out of their own country, *as the chaff which the wind drives away*, and should be forced to dwell in far countries, particularly in the country of Babylon, whither many of the scattered Jews went after the destruction of their country by the Romans, as they did also to other countries, especially in the Levant parts, not to sojourn, as in their former captivity, for seventy years, but to be nailed down for perpetuity. There the *ephah shall be established, and set upon her own base*. This intimates,

(1.) That their calamity shall continue from generation to generation, and that they shall be so dispersed that they shall never unite or incorporate again; they shall settle in a perpetual unsettlement, and Cain's doom shall be theirs, to dwell in the land of shaking.

(2.) That their iniquity shall continue too, and their hearts shall be hardened in it. *Blindness* has *happened* unto Israel, and they are settled upon the lees of their own unbelief; their wickedness is established upon

its own basis. God has given them a *spirit of slumber* (~~618~~Romans 11:8),
lest at any time they should convert, and be healed.