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# Zechariah's Basket: A Vision of Today?



Zechariah was given a perplexing vision. In it, he saw a basket lifted up towards heaven and then transported away by two women with wings of storks. Puzzling as this vision is, it has attracted many different interpretations. Yet, it holds some important insights for our day.

Then the angel who was speaking to me came forward and said to me, "Look up and see what this is that is appearing." I asked, "What is it?" He replied, "It is a measuring basket." And he added, "This is the iniquity of the people throughout the land." Then the cover of lead was raised, and there in the basket sat a woman! He said, "This is wickedness," and he pushed her back into the basket and pushed the lead cover down over its mouth. Then I looked up—and there before me were two women, with the wind in their wings! They had wings like those of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between heaven and earth. "Where are they taking the basket?" I asked the angel who was speaking to me. He

replied, "To the country of Babylonia to build a house for it. When it is ready, the basket will be set there in its place" (Zechariah 5:6–11).

What is significant about the symbols — a measuring basket, two women with wings of storks, the woman inside the container and the lid of lead? God chose these symbols for a reason.

The measuring basket that Zechariah saw lifted up towards heaven is referred to as an "ephah" in the King James Version and in other Bible translations. The ephah was a commercial measuring unit for dry goods, the equivalent of about 8–9 bushels today. This unit of measure is used more than twice as much as any other mentioned in the Bible (the "hin," the "homer" or the "seah,"

for example). Clearly, it was the key unit of commerce during the prophet's time, both for measurement and transport. If Zechariah's vision had been given today, God may have used the symbol of a twenty-foot shipping container (the type that is transported on ocean-going ships and tractor trailers) or perhaps even a cardboard box.

The symbolism of the wings of a stork is equally significant. The stork was considered an unclean bird, unfit for eating (Deuteronomy 14:18; Leviticus 11:19). Furthermore, the characteristics and lifestyle of the stork may be considered as offering some indications as to why its wings are used as a symbol. Some of these traits are mentioned in the Bible. It is a migratory bird that knows its seasons

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and perches very high in the trees. As such, we can conclude that it is an opportunistic bird that sets itself very high (Jeremiah 8:7). It is not a very caring or compassionate animal, treating its young very harshly. It doesn't care that its labor is in vain nor is it blessed with wisdom and good sense. Yet, it is a bird that is beautiful in flight, with an enormously wide wingspan (up to ten feet in some species) (Job 39:13–18). This bird can soar to great heights with little effort of flapping its wings.

It is not clear which species of stork that Scripture describes. It could be referring to the large marabou stork that is found in Africa, as it is the largest of the storks. After all, it would require some very large wings to lift three women and a basket into the air. This aggressive variety is a carrion eater that often associates with a related bird, the vulture. An extremely ugly bird, it also is quite filthy, having the manner of excreting upon its long legs to cool itself. The nature of this bird surely fits the foul content of the measuring basket shown in Zechariah's account.

Next, this vision portrays three women. An image of a woman is sometimes used in the Bible as a symbol for idolatry — spiritual adultery, in other words. The fact that three are de-

picted speaks of great idolatry. Does each woman represent a different aspect of spiritual adultery? Probably. However, we are not given any clear indication of what these connections may be. Although we could consider some candidates, it would be sheer speculation. The women sitting in the basket could have some connections to the whore of Babylon the Great (Revelation 17, 18) but again, we can only speculate on the basis of Zechariah's comments alone.

The most revealing statement is that this measuring basket will be transported to Babylonia. It is important to note that at first this ephah was lifted up towards heaven by the two stork-women. Then, only when the house for it in Babylonia is ready, will it be transported there. This elevation towards heaven reveals that the ephod is set up as an image against God, as a system that compares itself to heaven. Almost certainly, the account in Zechariah clearly shows the center of the world's commercial system — a system of “wickedness” and “iniquity” — is moved to Babylonia, otherwise referred to as Shinar. The symbolism of the ephah confirms its commercial connections.

How can this be? Zechariah sees the center of world commerce being transported to Shinar, which represents the

approximate area of today's Iraq. Admittedly, it sounds rather unlikely, gauging by what we see in the world today. Iraq is considered a backward nation, much of it in disrepair and upheaval. The world's commercial center will be found here some day? If so, it would be fitting. The first image of wealth was worshipped in this very place when Nebuchadnezzar constructed a statue of gold and demanded that all bow down to it (Daniel 3). Only this time the furnace may burn seven times hotter for those who do worship the image of gold.

#### Heading Towards Shinar

The account in the book of Zechariah undoubtedly does say “Shinar.” Therefore, though we may be puzzled as to how this could happen, this vision must be referring to a future event. We can only speculate how and why this might happen. It could most likely occur during the Great Tribulation period. If a great new temple can be built in Jerusalem in 42 months or less, then why not a shift of the commercial center to the region of ancient Babylon? An increasingly centralized commercial world is already well underway, a clear prefigurement of the whore of Babylon depicted in Revelation 18. In any case, before this event occurs, there will have been some sweeping power shifts in the world. Some of



Crowds and cars compete for space in a street market near the Central Bank of Iraq in Downtown Baghdad.



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these precursors already can be discerned on the horizon.

At some point, it will not be a technological impossibility to move or construct a world commercial nexus in Iraq. Today, the center of commerce doesn't need to be anything more than great; a worldwide electronic trading system connected with fiber-optic cables. Already, a profusion of fiber-optic cable strung across the world's oceans is rapidly changing the very nature of world trade. The wave of outsourcing of American "white collar" work to India and China in the fields of accountancy, software and design development, call centers and other industries, are an early indication of how these technologies are changing the balance of trade in the world.

Speculating for a moment how this might eventually happen, already, the Iraqi nation seems headed towards a protectorate status under a UN-coordinated world government. Iraq, after all, is the "test" case for

Iraq, after all, is the "test" case for many humanists and social theorists who see "religion" as an impediment to the advancement of mankind. They want to prove that "globalization" and "free-market capitalism" can revolutionize the world, bringing peace and prosperity to all mankind.

many humanists and social theorists who see "religion" as an impediment to the advancement of mankind. They want to prove that "globalization" and "free-market capitalism" can revolutionize the world, bringing peace and prosperity to all mankind. Taming and converting the despotic heart of this Islamic country to the virtues of their adulterous religion — the marriage of the "spirit of capitalism" (Mammon) to Western Christendom — would be the crowning glory of globalists, humanists and socialist theologians. We can imagine that little effort will be spared in "converting" Iraq. Whatever our speculations, time will prove the veracity of God's Word whether or not we can see how it will happen.

#### No Escape for Christians

In the meantime, Christians today encounter many corrupting philosophies and false religions, even though we will not face the Tribulation. Whereas the Bible clearly points to certain and literal events that will occur in the endtime Tribulation Period, we are witnessing the same

trends play out in type throughout the Church Age, particularly during the latter stages of this dispensation.

For example, the processes that foreshadow the literal Babylon in Revelation 17 and 18 play out on the world scene in allegorical form prior to the Great Tribulation. During this period, Babylon is foreshadowed on a global scale as it is today. Then, after the departure of the true Church, the center of the previous financial and commercial web is moved to Shinar. She is evident, or foreshadowed, before the true, literal whore emerges in the post-Rapture period. Next, the real whore comes to full force in all her aspects — political, religious and commercial — during the Tribulation under the aegis of the false prophet.

We see a similar example in the allegory provided by the account of Joseph. The worldwide economic enslavement laid out in this Old Testament record plays out during the dispensational period — the gap between the 69th and 70th weeks of Daniel — across the world stage. However, the actual seven-year literal enslavement under Antichrist only unfolds in the Great Tribulation. In contrast, it is the

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“spirit of Antichrist” that is the power behind the processes that unfold during the Church Age, the dispensational period before the appearance of the Antichrist. As the Apostle John admonished the Church, “This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world” (1 John 4:3). Only after this period, after the “restrainer” is removed, does the actual, literal embodiment of the Antichrist take place.

#### A Look Underneath the Lead Lid

Our nations are overrun with programs to promote good “ethics” and “corporate governance,” new university chairs for the studies of ethical practices and high-sounding commitments by lawmakers and leaders to punish evildoers. It is hardly surprising that the study of ethics and organizations promoting its cause has literally boomed in the recent decade. Many companies now hire senior executives with the title of “Ethical Program Director.” Virtually every major company has a “Statement of Ethics” or a “Standards of Practice.”

Why this fixation? For one, it’s good for business. It’s even better for the swelling cadre of “ethics” consultants. But, today’s ethics have very little to do with “right” and “wrong.” Certainly, the word “sin” is never men-

tioned nor is God’s Word or its repository, the Bible, ever appealed to as the ultimate moral authority in these circles. That would be too “politically incorrect.” Even worse, God’s Word is much too inflexible of a standard in the pursuit of affluence or a profit plan. It may get in the way of a quick buck or shareholder return targets. In the end, profit and gain is the ultimate arbiter of what is right and wrong in our society. What goes up in price is good; what goes down in price is bad. Try arguing otherwise with mutual fund holders or stockholders. They will say, “How can a declining stock price or house price be good?” Of course, no one wants to face financial hardship, nor do we wish it upon others. The point is that “gain” has been set up as the ultimate standard of our society. Of course, “gain” itself is not necessarily wrong nor must it involve a sin. “Gain” has been set up as the ultimate measuring basket of what is acceptable no matter what the morality.

What passes for ethical practice these days concerns itself more with the appearance of doing good rather than what is right or actually converting the heart to doing right. Most of the infatuation with “ethics” is nothing more than a veneer that attempts to cover up a deep moral slide in the area of greed and gain.

Ezekiel spoke to a similar situation of two-faced morality. “My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice” (Ezekiel 33:31–32).

We see the same attitude today. There is much expression of devotion to good ethics. The statements of commitment to good ethics are as soothing as love songs sung by angels. But there is no intent to change the desires of the heart. These songs make pleasant background music even as corruption deepens and becomes more sophisticated at high levels. So we see that while even the most rapacious people vaunt “ethics” as a high social good, corruption and cheating continue to heighten.

Despite the high-profile convictions of various individuals such as Martha Stewart, Bernie Ebbers and others (some of them declared Christians, as everyone is at risk) at the corporate level, business ethics continues to spiral down the drain. Yes, a few of the corporate elites are being sent off to prison as



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sacrificial lambs on behalf of on an entire community. These individuals were probably unlucky at best, and at worst may have become a little too noticeably greedy and caught in the public eye. There has been no change of heart at all in the corporate and financial world. I believe all that has changed are the techniques that in the meantime are becoming more sophisticated and hidden. In fact, the greatest corruption is now taking place at global levels, too far above the heads of most people to be either noticed or understood. One only needs to observe the heinous policies at work in world monetary affairs between nations today to get a sense of how wicked corruption has engulfed the entire world. It surely fits the description of the “iniquity” and “wickedness”

found in Zechariah's measuring basket.

No, there has not been any change of heart—at best, only a state of repressed avarice for a temporary period. So soon after the global economic tremors of recent years, the genie of greed is out of the bottle and unbridled greed is again baying at a new moon of a rising stock market and other asset prices.

#### A Pandering New Religion

Samuel Brittan, a noted columnist and economic historian, asks rhetorically, “Is economics a religion? According to the *Dictionary of Christianity in America*: ‘If belief in a god is necessary to define a religion, secular humanism does not qualify. If on the other hand religion, or a god, is defined as one's ultimate value, then secular humanism is

a religion.’”<sup>1</sup> The field of economics belongs to humanism. Therefore, economics is a faith system. Few secular practitioners of this discipline would disagree with this statement. Yet, many economic theologians who declare they are Christians do not see any contradictions. They almost exult in their friendliness with the world, secure in their “new” understandings — even revisionism — of Scripture. With these, they seek to change the world in the name of good ethics.

Mammon is the worship of earthly power and prosperity for its own end. It has nothing to offer the eternal Kingdom of God. Let the devices of Mammon into the Church, even by a nose length, and the road to destruction begins. Diverting our attention and worship from God for even a moment, or bemoaning our unsatisfied physical wants, can sting us with poisons. As happened to Israel in the desert (Numbers 21) when they were dissatisfied with their physical circumstances, they were beset upon by poisonous snakes. Only when they focused upon the bronze snake (representing Christ) that Moses had set upon a pole did they find relief.

Adam Smith, in his famous book, *The Wealth of Nations in*

1776,<sup>2</sup> stated he thought the church (in his case, referring to the Church of England) was doomed. He reasoned that since independent clergy relied upon the voluntary donations of their congregation for their income, they had little incentive to give them what they needed, but rather what they wanted. The “men of learning and elegance” in the state church would eventually lose “market share” to those “popular and bold, though perhaps stupid and ignorant” independents. While we may not lament the demise of a state church as did Smith, he hit upon a truth. Eventually, the love of money leads to false teaching and apostasy, particularly as related to materialism and lusts of the flesh. Actually, Smith was not the first to observe this problem. Every movement of false teaching mentioned in the New Testament epistles reveals an improper infatuation with money and gain.

A similar force works in academia. Theologians studying economics are also held hostage by “market forces.” They are subtly forced to conform to accepted norms and assumptions. After all, their well being and long-term careers depend upon tenure and perceived legitimacy. Any hint of a “personal relationship with Christ” and their career potential is impaired. Marketable theology sells because that is what the world demands. The most rewarded theological product is the type that marries Mammon with scriptural legitimacy. It meets a ready market in a materialistic

world that has immersed itself in a “culture of affluence.” Not only does it meet friends in high places, but it also appeals to the masses that still believe in the “American Dream.”

Says one incisive observer, “There are two types of economic theologians. The first is an economist who functions as a theologian for progress by helping to provide an ethical foundation for society. If economic progress is the route to ‘salvation,’ these ‘priests’ will be the experts on how to achieve that progress. Because society looks to economists for this knowledge, they logically become the leading priesthood of the age. The second [...] study economics from a theological perspective.”<sup>3</sup>

These first types of economic theologians are the main prophets of Mammon — economic “theologians” that have fallen for the “error of Balaam.” They have sold their prophecies and prescriptions for a price, seeking to feather their own positions. They have elevated “progress” and “prosperity” as the solution to mankind’s ills. In doing so, whether professing to be Christian theologians or not, they prescribe ethics. The most perverted among them whitewash this new human and global prerogative with twisted appeals to Scripture. Parading their “Christian” credentials and claimed objectives of bringing good and new insight to the world, they sprinkle holy water on the volcanic forces that power Mammon. Their water baptisms will prove sorely ineffective in cooling the burning furnaces of Mammon.

What will be the ultimate outcome of this continuing slide into idolatry?

#### Points to Ponder

As many global commentators note, America is the most religiously Christian of all the major nations of the world, by far. It is the nation that makes the most noise about morality, even seeing its task as ridding the world of evil. But, inwardly, it has sold its soul to Mammon. As we have briefly examined, there are not a few Christian leaders who lend their alliance to this “gospel of affluence” and global “power of prosperity.” As a result, America is the most enslaved major nation of the world. Its citizens work more hours per week than any other advanced country; its households labor under more debt than any other nation; their cisterns are empty, and their wants still unsatisfied.

The “god of gain” has not been keeping his promises of ease and comfort. Now, it is no longer a matter of choice. Mammon must be served just to keep our heads above water. The same dilemma now confronts the entire nation on a sovereign level. Why? Because our whole society remains fixated on the pursuit of affluence.

Moses, more than 3,000 years ago, offered a complete analysis of the current error and its consequences. Though it was a song to Israel, it clearly applies to all nations. A few of its verses are quoted here:

Jeshurun (sic: or righteous Israel) grew fat and kicked; filled with food, he became heavy and sleek.



As we have seen, the literal interpretations of Scripture suggest that world power in its various forms will shift to Rome and the Middle East. The world's power center is not in America at the end of days.

He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior. They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols. They sacrificed to demons, which are not God—gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear. [...] I will heap calamities upon them and spend my arrows against them. [...] For their rock is not like our Rock, as even our enemies concede. Their vine comes from the vine of Sodom and from the fields of Gomorrah. Their grapes are filled with poison, and their clusters with bitterness. Their wine is the venom of serpents, the deadly poison of cobras. [...] The LORD [...] will say: "Now where are their gods, the rock they took refuge in, the gods who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offerings? Let them rise up to help you! Let them give you shelter! See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me (Deuteronomy 32:31–39).

This song containing prophecy has all the ingredients we have reviewed — recently appeared gods, idols, snakes and poison. It wasn't a "culture of affluence" that saved them. Rather, it was precisely their conceited reliance upon their power of affluence that opened them up to error. They had forgotten the original author of their prosperity. The consequences couldn't be clearer. Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's prophecies, quoted at the beginning of

this chapter, mention similar outcomes:

"I will surely strike my hands together at the unjust gain you have made and at the blood you have shed in your midst" (Ezekiel 22:13).

"Therefore I will give their wives to other men and their fields to new owners. From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit" (Jeremiah 8:10).

"To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the LORD is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it. But I am full of the wrath of the LORD, and I cannot hold it in" (Jeremiah 6:9).

Will our nations hear and turn from the error of Balaam? We can keep praying despite our deepest fears on this question. Personally I have difficulty seeing America and its sibling countries changing voluntarily. If this is correct, America and its immediate allies will not be much of a force in the final events just before and during the Great Tribulation. As we have seen, the literal interpretations of Scripture suggest that world power in its various forms will shift to Rome and the Middle East. The world's power center is not in America at the end of days.

Whatever may occur, we can — and must — make a personal choice. Whom to serve? Him alone — always — or diabolical

Mammon that leads to destruction? However, deciding for Christ is sure to cost us in the here and now, at least in the terms that people subsumed in today's "culture of affluence" will see.

God will be faithful and reward our faith 100-fold over in eternity. The seed that fell on good ground — the faith truly acted upon "came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown" (Luke 8:8). Though "The LORD will [...] have compassion on his servants when He sees their strength is gone and no one is left, slave or free" (Deuteronomy 32:38).

Can we really believe this statement? We can take Jesus at His word: "[...] everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:29). (MC)

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 Brittan, Samuel, "How Economics Came to Rival Religious Faith," *Financial Times*, London, August 15, 2002, Section 1, Comments & Analysis, pg. 11.
- 2 Smith, Adam, *An Inquiry into the Natures and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 1776.
- 3 Nelson, Robert H. "Religion, Economics and the Market Paradox," *Religion and Liberty*, Volume 12, Number 1 (January/February 2002).