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## Flying Scrolls and Baskets: A Vision of Today — Part II

By Wilfred Hahn

We continue with our examination of Zechariah's two strange visions mentioned in Zechariah Chapter 5 — the strange, flying scroll and the transported ephah. In Part I we concluded that both of these visions concern the judgment of the endtime boom of commercialism that is also depicted in Revelation 18 as Babylon the Great. We resume our review of the meanings of those that "swearth falsely" and "stealeth" that were listed on opposite sides of the unfurled scroll. We had already identified the meaning of those that swear falsely.



### Hand in Hand With Theft

What about stealing? It is the other side of the coin ... or we should better say, the other side of the flying scroll.

Stealing in our time is probably more prevalent than ever before. However, it is much more sophisticated. There are numerous types of stealing that are institutionalized in world systems. For example, consider the phenomenon of inflation (the price of goods continually rising in currency terms). Today it is one of the biggest forms of stealing. While there are many

complexities to inflation, in reality, it is nothing more than stealing. Yet, every central bank in the world today will argue that a little bit of stealing (inflation) is necessary for the smooth and safe functioning of economies and financial systems.

Too much inflation, however, can be disastrous. Therefore, quite a bit of inflation (meaning the stealing from the pocketbooks of the citizenry) is masterfully concealed or lied about so as to not arouse unnecessary suspicion. Officials are swearing falsely about inflation. These are factual statements that



can be proven, had we the space. However, we want to continue illustrating how endemic stealing is today.

It is the staple of many other activities, as well. Corporate executives steal from shareholders (like never before) and countries try to steal precious resources from other countries (oil, for example). Although such motivations are couched in official policy-speak such as “securing our interests” or “gaining access through free trade.” This is all the norm today, though every now and then some people who make this too obvious for comfort will face conviction.

In conclusion, we see that swearing falsely and stealing are at the very root of man’s global endtime edifice. The competitions of modern-day economic pagan man and sovereign countries around the world are typified by “swearing” and “stealing.” It comes to its apex in the form of the commercial Babylon the Great, ancient Tyre reborn into its final global manifestation.

### Two-Sided Meaning

We stop to consider the symbolic significance of the fact that the flying scroll has two sides. On one side thieves are listed, on the other those that swear falsely. Why are they shown as opposites or as two sides of the coin? Actually, the entire economic system upon earth is defined by these two symptoms as well as this nature of duality.

Isaiah, prophesying of judgment and wrath in the last days (the very same period that Zechariah sees) also emphasizes a duality.

“And it shall be—as [what happens] with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as



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with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor” (Isaiah 24:2—AMP).

He lists here six sets of pairs that harbor an element of opposites. For example, there can be no maid without a mistress. Interestingly, three of these pairs (50%) directly refer to commercial aspects. There is a buyer and a seller; a lender and a borrower; and a creditor and a debtor. Significantly, these are mentioned last. The sequence moves from the highest order of people and priest to the basest of creditor and debtor. It pretty much fits the evolution of mankind’s systems. The last pair pictures the crassest and most brutal world based on the rights of creditors and debtors — of those that “stealth” and those that “swear falsely.”

And, indeed that is the world today — a world witnessing an explosion of

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debt and the widest chasm between the lenders and borrowers ever in history. Interestingly, it is a commercial system perched upon the “double entry” book-keeping system, its foundational duality.

#### Zechariah’s Conclusion: The Final Judgment

The rendering of Zechariah speaks of an endpoint — a final judgment. He sees a picture of the world that is being cursed in its sophisticated perversions of stealing and perjury. Then comes the point where this idolatry is encased in an ephah and moved. The ephah, the filth and wickedness it contains, which is the related condition to the “swearing and stealing” that is upon the whole earth, and is therefore under a curse, is sealed off with a heavy lid of lead and is removed to a specific location.

The key aspects here are removal and a sealing off. We note that Zechariah tells us that after the contents of the ephah are revealed, that the angel “pushed her back into the basket and the pushed the lead down over its mouth” (verse 8). This does not reveal a releasing of this wickedness and idol-

atry to again reflourish in some endtime location, but rather a sealing. It is an end.

Next, we are told that the ephah is taken away, to be set upon its base which is a place that has been prepared for it ahead of time (verse 11). We must ask ourselves why such advance preparations are required? And,

who is doing the “preparing?” Of the many answers that can be probed, the only one that relates to the general theme of judgment in this entire chapter, is that this removal is one for divinely set purposes.

In other words, the filth and wickedness of a worldwide condition is quarantined and set upon a “resting place” (a base, possibly being a dungeon) somewhere in the land of Shinar.

#### Iniquity Moved to Its Final Quarantine

What is the significance of Shinar being mentioned as the final resting place for the flying ephah? Consider the significance of this location. It is just outside the eastern extremity of the land promised to the covenantal descendants of Abraham which is the Euphrates River (Genesis 15:18). Shinar, is on the eastern side of this river, as is Babylon and therefore is just outside the periphery of the restored Millennial Israel.

As the ephah contained wickedness (Zechariah 5:8) and as the restored land of Israel is considered holy in the Millennial period — harboring the holy hill of Zion and holy Jerusalem —



it is therefore understandable why this worldwide “wickedness” would be removed to somewhere outside the millennial Israel. And as Shinar was the original source of this wickedness, it is most fitting that it be returned to that location.

### The Meaning of Shinar

It is significant also that the original Hebrew texts confirm that Zechariah uses the word “Shinar” in identifying the future and final location of the ephah and not Babylonia. The latter term, Babylonia (which some Bible translations incorrectly use) was the more modern term for this region during the time of this prophet’s ministry (after the Babylonian captivity of Judah). The Babylonian kingdom at that time is referred to as Neo-Babylon by Assyriologists (experts in Middle Eastern history and archeology). Though both terms, Shinar and Babylonia, refer to the very same general region, the former is the more ancient term harking back to the days of Nimrod and Semiramus. That was at least 2,000 years before the prophet’s time, even earlier than Chaldea. This was the era out of which the original post-flood paganism and commercialism was spawned.

Since Zechariah refers to ancient Shinar, it is reasonable to conclude that he must be linking this prophecy to the ending of the ancient pagan beliefs and idolatry that first emanated out of the time of Nimrod, not the Neo-Babylonian empire. It is these that are removed to a dungeon outside the Millennial kingdom.

### Babylon Rebuilt?

Recognized is that many respected prophecy scholars see these final verses

in Zechariah 5, that refer to the ephah being moved to Shinar as lining up with a revived, rebuilt Babylon. In fact, some use this reference as proof that this will be the case. As such, they see the ancient commercialism and paganism being returned to its previous eminence in the rebuilt Babylon just before the final Armageddon.

Actually, Zechariah 5 provides no such proof. In fact, over the course of studying this topic, I have also gradually shifted my own views on this point. While possibly other Bible references may be used to support the “rebuilt Babylon” view, verse 11 here cannot qualify, for several reasons.

First, Shinar, the location to which the wicked is removed, is a region and not a city. Also, as already shown, Shinar does not refer to the same era as Babylonia. Therefore, to link this prophecy to the city of Babylon and its rebuilding cannot be substantiated. This verse simply does not say this to neither referring to any rebuilding nor to any city. Furthermore, as we have learned, the prophecies contained in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> visions speak of an end and a judgment, not a period of reflowering wickedness.

There are additional problems with the interpretation that the ancient city of Babylon will revive as a great commercial center of the world in the end-time. First, those that assume this indeed will yet occur, link it with the great global commercial colossus identified as Babylon the Great in Revelation 18. For this to occur, we must expect some monumental changes to occur over a very short period of time. This shift must take place no later than the Tribulation Period. Could this really happen?

We recognize, of course, that just because Bible prophecy may sometimes

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speak of incredible and unlikely developments (as humans may see them), this in no way disproves future literal fulfillment. Yet, let's consider the possibility of such a development as the city of Babylon reviving and the necessary developments for this to transpire.

#### Unlikely Events Must be Expected

As is well known, the ancient city of Babylon is located in Iraq of today. One could not think of a more dysfunctional and unruly country in the present-day world. Even the world's only superpower cannot bring this region to heel. Are we to believe that this region will be transformed into the center of the world's trading system by the midpoint of the Tribulation? If so, it would soon have to overshadow the financial and trade centers of New York, London, Frankfurt, Singapore or Hong Kong. Practically, how long of a period would such a transition require, were it possible?

Never before in the history of the world has such an unlikely transition taken place in a period of less than 50 years ... even perhaps 100 years. Not only does Scripture appear to preclude this outcome, this scenario stretches

simple common sense and historical precedent.

To begin, we must remember that we are living in the very generation that Christ said will see the birth pangs of the endtime world. Israel, the fig tree, has come back to life.

We don't exactly know what length of time Christ meant by

the phrase "this generation" (Matthew 24:34) when He said to the Jews — meaning the revived Israel of the future — that "this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." It may be 60 or 70 years or more, but likely not centuries. If so, there simply is not enough time for Iraq or the city of Babylon to flower into the world's economic power center. Alone, cultural changes of the type required to allow a Muslim nation such as Iraq to gain the type of broad-based power that determines world potency today, requires many decades. This is improbable in itself.

#### A Tree Must Be Related to its Cultural Fruits

An insightful book by Lawrence E. Harrison<sup>1</sup> recently concludes how unlikely and difficult it is for societies to change their cultural identities. The entirety of history provides no precedent for such a rapid change as would be required to so suddenly alter its cultural course. If and when this has happened for any particular society, such changes almost always occurred from within, requiring many years. Rarely were major cultural changes forced from outside.



Consider the case of Turkey. It can be argued that it and its forerunner, the Ottoman Empire, has been making attempts to Westernize for perhaps as much as a century or more, especially so under Mustafa Kemal, its founder — Attaturk — since the middle 1920s.



Haghia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey

Yet, today, it remains a developing nation with a fundamentally Islamic society. Virtually 100% of its population is Muslim. It is still considered a developing economy by the World Bank and other such transnational agencies.

The type of transformation that is therefore required in Iraq in order to be able to control and commandeer the world economy, would take much more time than could be allowed by Christ's indication of a "generation." Assuredly, as mentioned, what the Bible prophecies will surely happen no matter how unlikely and impossible it may seem. However, let's be reasonable. At the very earliest, something as unlikely as a revived Babylon would take many, many decades if it is to fit the descriptions found in Revelation 18. On that logical basis, we must conclude that the Tribulation Period is still 50 years or more in the future at the earliest.

Yet, revived Israel is on the scene today. We would then have to agree that a generation must be at least 100 years if not much more. Also, if a revived Babylon were to occur any quicker, we must then consider that apocalyptic events would be needed to change the

order of the world that rapidly. Yet, apocalyptic events of this scope prophesied anywhere in the Bible of yet future events do not take place any earlier than in the Tribulation Period.

Finally, we consider one more argument that rules out a revived city of Babylon as the world's future economic node. Babylon the Great of Revelation 18 is not in fact a city. In fact, endtime Babylon the Great is never called a city in the Bible. To be technically correct, the "commercial" Babylon of Revelation 18 is always called the "great city." Six times in the book of Revelation, it is never called a "city," only a "great city." This is significant. (See the April 2007 issue of *Midnight Call* for a more in-depth explanation.) The term "great city" most likely refers to something bigger than a single or normal city. There are strong arguments to be made that it refers to a systemic, global commercial regime, rather than a single city.

#### Points to Ponder – Part II

We conclude our review of the visions of the strange, flying scroll and the transported ephah. If we have fol-

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lowed their literal, common-sense meanings, we may now understand some very important prophecies that in some cases have been opaque to many readers for thousands of years.

It is prophecy in the form of symbols that is intended to convey a specific meaning, not an allegorical one. Often, prophecy of this type can contain things or concern events which are not understandable to the prophet relative to the conditions of the time during which they lived. While the two visions do in fact concern concepts that would have been impossible to understand 2,800 years ago, they do not refer to strange technology but rather to futuristic, systemic forms. Zechariah is not referring to intercontinental ballistic missiles or satellites or any other such inventive thing. He is referring to an endtime period of massive and idolatrous commercialism that will envelop the world.

The ephah of wickedness will indeed be taken to Shinar — the land of Babylonia — and become an astonishment. It speaks of the end, not a beginning.

It fits hand-in-glove with the conditions that will fully be realized in the Tribulation Period:

“The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be



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saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness” (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

We now live during that time when we can see such conditions develop before our eyes. For how long will the Lord yet tarry?

The curse is already upon the land and the world. Economic inequities and injustices are waxing great. Man’s wealth and commercial systems are exploding into prominence above all else.

Yet, we Christians must face this flood of iniquity and stand firm. Admittedly, it is near impossible. Even as we strive not to participate in the world’s materialistic orgy, we can identify with Jeremiah, who complained, “Alas, my mother, that you gave me birth, a man with whom the whole land strives and contends! I have neither lent nor borrowed, yet everyone curses me” (Jeremiah 15:10). 

#### ENDNOTES

1. Harrison, Lawrence E., *The Central Liberal Truth: How Politics Can Change a Culture and Save it From Itself*, Oxford University Press, 2006.