



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

The Jewish People, Jesus Christ, and World History

Zechariah 5:5-11

“The Woman in the Ephah and Babylonianism”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Heavenly Father, we approach Thee in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the Scriptures and their revelation concerning him. We thank Thee that the name of our God is a strong tower and that the righteous may run to it and be safe. We thank Thee for the finished work of the Lord Jesus and for all of the spiritual blessings that are ours by virtue of what he has accomplished. We thank Thee for the merits of his saving work, which have been imputed to us. And we rejoice in the acceptance that we have before Thee. As the apostle has put it, we are accepted in the beloved, and we thank Thee Lord for that. We thank Thee for the assurance that it gives us and for the sense of well being communicated to us by the Lord God.

We ask now, as we look again into the Scriptures that Thou will give us guidance and direction. Enable us to understand and profit from these portions from the word of God that we read and comment upon. May our thoughts and our words be acceptable unto Thee, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Returning tonight to Zechariah chapter 5 in our continued study of this book and of the theme of "The History of Israel as the Clue to World History," and our

subject for tonight is taken partially from Zechariah 5:5 through 11, but I have taken the liberty to add to it a word or two. So, the title for the message tonight is "The Woman in the Ephah and Babylonianism." We touch with chapter 5, verse 5 through verse 11 of Zechariah one of the most important, one of the most astonishing, and really one of the most neglected subjects of the Bible. And of course, as you probably have guessed if you have read ahead, it has to do with Babylon. And if you didn't read ahead, you would gather from the title, Babylonianism. The origin, the persistence, and the catastrophic destruction of the city of Babylon are implicit in what Zechariah has written here.

I don't know whether you've thought about this or not, but the subject of Babylon looms very large in the Bible, as early as Genesis chapter 10, and then Genesis chapter 11 particularly, Babylon comes to mind. Then as you read through the Old Testament in the Books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, we have entire chapters devoted to Babylon. And when we come on into the New Testament, we have two chapters of the Book of Revelation devoted to Babylon. And other verses in that book devoted to the subject. In fact, and now this may surprise you, but more is devoted to Babylon and its fall than to any other secular occurrence recorded in the Bible. I say secular occurrence, because there is an aspect in which the fall of Babylon is a secular occurrence. That is, it's the destruction of a city, which evidently is a real city upon the earth, and in that sense a real secular occurrence. But as we note tonight, and as we probably would note in studying this subject, a great deal of spiritual truth is related to Babylon; its origin, its persistence, and then ultimately its destruction.

We have seen in the study of Zechariah and in the recent chapters, for example chapter 3 and chapter 5, in the first part of chapter 5, that God has two methods of dealing with sin. He deals with sin on the basis of grace. And in chapter 3, in verse 1, in the fourth of the night visions of Zechariah recorded there, Joshua the high priest is seen standing before the angel of the Lord, and he was clad in filthy garments, and stood before the angel, and God called upon an angelic being to take away the filthy garments

from him. And to him he said, "Behold I have caused your iniquity to pass from you, and I will clothe you with change of raiment." And then the passage goes on to speak of the tremendous change that is to take place in the nation Israel. "Her iniquity will be removed, and the iniquity of that land, in one day." Well, that's one way in which God deals with sin, and uncleanness. He deals in grace.

But there is another way in which he deals with sin, and we saw that last week, and I think we shall see that also here, and that is the way of judgment. He, it is true, removes sin through grace, but he also judges sin. And that's what comes before us now; God's dealing with sin on the basis of judgment. And the flying scroll symbolized the removal of sinners from the land, and judgment upon them. And now the woman in the Ephah signifies the removal of sin itself. As we read back in chapter 2, in verse 12, "And the LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again," so, in order for Israel to enter into her blessings, there must be the removal of sin. So, God deals with sin in grace, and he cleanses the nation for the inheritance of the promises, but he also deals with sin in judgment, and he judges that which is contrary to his will. Now, we know that, of course, from the New Testament, it's not an Old Testament teaching alone. But in the New Testament we are very plainly told that he deals with us in grace, but he also deals with men in judgment. And if we do not respond to grace, then we may expect that God will deal with men in judgment. That's why it's so important that we respond to the grace of God as seen in Christ.

Well, let's read these verses, and I want you to notice just one word in the last verse, and I'll call attention to it. That will launch us out in our study for tonight. Now, this is the seventh of Zechariah's night visions. There is one more of the eight visions, and we may expect that this too, like the others, will have a great deal of symbolism in it. For it is almost like apocalyptic literature, but we'll just call it symbolic visions. Verse 5, "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." Well, I'll stop just for a moment and say, in order to acclimate you to this particular passage, an ephah, of course, was a unit of measurement. But it was associated with a certain container, so an ephah would be a measurement, and might be associated with something like a barrel. And in some cases, scholars feel that it was about five gallons in size. Some others have suggested about eight gallons in size. One might think it should be larger, because a woman is in the ephah, but then when we saw the story or the vision of the flying roll, the flying roll was a very large flying roll. It was thirty by fifteen feet in size, and so this may be an especially large ephah. Let's think of a barrel, in which a person might be put.

"This is an ephah that goeth forth. He said moreover, This is their resemblance through all the earth." Now, in Hebrew text this word, "their resemblance" is literally "their eye", like this, "their eye." The term eye in the Old Testament has a number of different meanings, and when we say "their eye" well that doesn't make a whole lot of sense to us at the beginning. And so we search around for the various meanings that this term may have in its uses in the Old Testament. Resemblance is one, likeness is one. The Greek translators, when they translated the Hebrew Old Testament here, they translated it as if it were the word iniquity. And as a matter of fact, not only did the Greek translators do it, but the Syriac translators also. So, they translated it something like this. This is "their iniquity through all the earth." That may be right. And while the Hebrew text does not support it, it may be right, because evidently those translators of the Greek Old Testament and the Syriac had a text before them that may have been this. You must remember that in the tradition in the handing down of manuscripts, we do not have the original manuscripts of the Old Testament or the New Testament. We have only copies, and scribes are just like you and I are. We make mistakes in copying. Sometimes you can tell from the number of manuscripts the mistakes that were made. Sometimes it's difficult. We need not go into the reasons why we can and cannot, and the degree to

which we can be sure concerning readings. But in this case it's obvious it's possible that those Greek translators had a Hebrew text before them that had the word "iniquity." Iniquity and eye are very close together in the Hebrew language, so it's possible this is "their iniquity" is what Zechariah wrote.

At any rate, let's go. In a moment we'll say a bit more about iniquity. "And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead." Now, that would be a large unit of measurement, particularly if it would be a talent of gold it would be very, very precious. And this is a woman who sitteth in the midst of the ephah. So, evidently on top of the barrel, there was the talent of lead. And the lead that lifted up disclosed a woman in the midst of the ephah. And he said, "This is wickedness;" ha rish`ah. That word is a word that means wickedness in the sense of rebellion, so, rebellious wickedness. That's one reason why that it's possible that above in verse 6, "this is their iniquity through all the earth," may be what Zechariah wrote. At any rate he said, "This is wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah."

In other words, it's almost as if the woman was trying to get out of the ephah, but she was thrown back in by the angel. "And he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof." So, the woman could not get out. "Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out two women." That is, not out of the ephah, but evidently from the surrounding terrain. "And, behold, there came out two women, and the wind was in their wings." And again, remember the word wind in both the Old and New Testaments is the word that can also be translated "spirit". The Greek word pneuma means both wind and spirit. And the Hebrew word ruwach also means wind and spirit. So, we always have to ask ourselves, "Is this wind or is this spirit?" So, the wind was in their wings; it might be the spirit in the sense of the Holy Spirit. But we'll say a little bit about that later.

"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?" That is, this unit of measurement, this barrel with this woman who is wickedness in it. "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." And the word that is translated "to set" is the word that means literally to cause to rest there, and the idea back of it is the helplessness of the woman inside the ephah to do anything about it. So, "It shall be established, and set there upon her own base."

Now, what's the significance of this? If we are Bible students and read the Bible a lot, we might remember that Shinar has been used in other passages of the Bible. Let's turn back to, first of all, the Book of Genesis chapter 10. Genesis is the beginning of so many things in the Bible. That's why it's such an important book. That's why I think it's safe to say that one could not understand the Bible if he did not understand the Book of Genesis.

And these simple things that are said in the Book of Genesis often turn out to be extremely important things as the ages unfold. And here is one, and we read in verse 10; and remember in Genesis chapter 10 we have the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, Japheth, and where they were scattered over the face of the earth. In chapter 11, and we'll read that in just a moment, we learn why they were scattered over the face of the earth, but here we read that they were scattered over the face of the earth. And there are some interesting words beginning with verse 8 of Genesis 10. "And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth." Nimrod, that very name comes from the Hebrew word that means to rebel. So, we're not surprised at the kind of person Nimrod turned out to be. "He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel," that's Babylon, of course, "and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar." So, there it is, Shinar is Babylonia. So Shinar is another term for Babylon or the Babylonian territory. So when we read about Shinar in Zechariah 5, and we read that the

ephah would be carried back to the land of Shinar and established there, and set there upon their own base, we should think of the carrying back of the ephah to Babylon.

Now, when we turn back to chapter 11, and I'm going to read chapter 11, because you've already got your Bible open to chapter 10, so let's read the nine verses of chapter 11. This tells us why men were scattered over the face of the earth. There was a time when "the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech." And that was southern English. [Laughter]

"And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. (We'd say thoroughly) And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. (This is anthropomorphic language, remember. God doesn't have to come down to see anything, but the language is the language of men.) And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; (Now, in verse 2, it's called the land of Shinar.) Babel because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth."

Well, that's kind of background for our study tonight in Zechariah chapter 5. What I'd like to do is to rather briefly trace the origin and nature of Babylonianism, and

with Genesis chapter 10 and Genesis chapter 11, particularly in mind. And then we'll talk about the history and mystery of Babylonianism. And then we will come to this particular section here, and we'll deal with it rather briefly as the future of Babylonianism. Now, when we think about Babylonianism, we go back to Genesis chapter 10 and Genesis chapter 11. Babylon was the father of a city, of a system, and Nimrod, in a sense, was the beginning, the great hero of Hamitic civilization. Nimrod, marath, the word from which Nimrod comes is a word that means "to rebel." The targem, the Hebrew paraphrase of the Old Testament at this point translates these words concerning Nimrod as, "He was a mighty, not hunter, but a mighty rebel before the Lord." So the idea of Nimrod being a rebel, and opposed to the truth of God is found in the tradition of the biblical revelation very early.

What is Babylon? Well, as you read Genesis chapter 10 and Genesis chapter 11, what stands out is the fact that Babylon is the origin of organized rebellion against God. Well, you might say, "Did rebellion not take place in the Garden of Eden?" Well, yes of course it did. Man fell there. Adam rebelled against the Lord, and Eve rebelled against the Lord. And later Cain rebelled against the Lord, and so on, but those were individual cases. Here we have organized rebellion against the Lord. We have a whole group of people who live in the land of Shinar who rebel against the Lord. So, Babylon is the source of organized rebellion against God. It's an idolatrous church-state institutional embodiment of the society of Satan that is those who rebel against the Lord. So, when we think of Babylon we should think of that.

G. Campbell Morgan, the famous British expositor of the word, speaking about the rebellion of the individuals in Babylon about which we've read in Genesis 11, he said, "Their purpose was unity. Their program was united effort. And the principle of their activity was human glory." What they were really working for was a king of counterfeit of the kingdom of God. They were saying, "Let us make ourselves a name here in the earth. Let's build a city. Let's build a tower. Let's make us a name lest we be scattered abroad

upon the face of the whole earth." Now, just for a few moments think about what they were really doing. It might not seem to be very significant at first. But first of all, they wanted a city. In verse 4, "Let us build us a city;" verse 6 we have, "And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they want to do."

The idea of a union in a particular city, so the fellowship that they were interested in, notice is not a fellowship with God, but it is a kind of one world order united in faith. What they would like to have is a kind of paradise, but without God. Notice the emphasis on we and us, verse 3, "Let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly." Verse 4, "Let us build us a city and a tower;" "Let us make us a name lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth;" so, the idea of being interested in the city of God, that future city, the city in which they would forever have communion with God was far from their minds. What they really wanted was a city down here on the earth, a kind of paradise upon the earth, upon which they would feel secure, but their security would not be in the Lord God, but in their own strength and power.

Now, they also want to build a tower. Now, tower, in this kind of society, as we know from Babylon, was a kind of stepped pyramids, a ziggurat, and frequently in the ziggurats there would be on the top a place for the worship of the false gods, and so the idea was to build something like a gigantic altar. But the stepped pyramid would be designed to represent the continuity of heaven with earth, but not with the true God as the mediator between the two. God and man one apart from a mediator would be the idea of the tower. Now, when we turn to the Book of Proverbs and read in chapter 18, verse 10 words like this, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." One can see the contrast between what was in their minds, and what is set out in Scripture. Our tower, our strength is never to be found in what we do here upon the earth, but in the provision made by the Lord God.

And then the third thing that they want to do is to make for themselves a name, we read in verse 4, "Let us build a city and a tower; let us make us a name, lest we be

scattered abroad upon the face of the earth." That was the worship, the name, that which gives source and meaning, that which gives definition to things. What do we mean when we say, "the name of the Lord?" Have you thought about that? When we say the name of the Lord, well of course we mean the Lord, don't we? But we mean the Lord the way in which he's revealed in holy Scripture. In other words, the name of the Lord is the Lord as he is defined in the word of God. They would like to substitute for that their name, "Let us make us a name." And it was a kind of name that obviously was to be a name in contrast to the name of God. The name of God gives definition to everything, because God gives definition to everything. We know what things are by virtue of God's revelation of what they are. In other words, the Scriptures give us inspired definition of reality. But they would like to make themselves a name. They would like to assume that position.

And then in verse 4 he says, "Lest we be scattered abroad." Notice that the peril that they feel is not the peril of departing from the Lord. The peril they feel is the peril of disunity. They want to be together. They feel that their sufficiency is in themselves. They feel that their sufficiency is in unity. You know, that's the shriek of politicians. That's the shriek of Ecclesiastics. It's the shriek of human nature apart from God. Let there be no division. But there are times when division is a good thing. As Edward John Carnell, the professor of Fuller Seminary, said some years ago, "It's much better to be divided by truth, than united in error." And what we see in almost all of the cries for unity is, "Let us plaster over the bases of division, and let us have unity for unity's sake. And so, let us do these things, a city, a name, a tower; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the earth."

The ecumenical movement is living illustration of all of this. They don't seek any union in the biblical sense. They cite texts of Scripture like John 17, where Jesus prayed that they might be one, but they look at John 17 and those little texts, because it suits their particular program. Our Lord did not mean one for the sake of unity. He meant one

in the truth for the sake of unity. So when the ecumenical theologians speak about union, their kind of union is not union in Christ. It's union in mankind, for most of them do not even believe that it is possible for an individual to be lost forever. They are almost all Universalists in doctrine that everybody is ultimately going to be saved, and the idea of spiritual development and maturity is to be one, not one in Christ.

O, they may even use the term occasionally, one in Christ, but not in the Christ as Scripture sets him forth. Not in the truth as set forth in the word of God. Not in the Christ as the Son of God. Not in Christ as the second person of the divine trinity. Not of Christ as the atoning Christ through whom alone we have salvation through the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross; no, just one in mankind. If we can just all be one. Well, we cannot be one. You know why we cannot be one? Because we are disunified by sin; all of us are sinners, all of us therefore are interested in number one. And therefore, we fight and bicker and war and we will do as long as the human race is upon the earth. Does that sound pessimistic? Yes, pessimistic so far as human nature apart from the redeeming work of Christ is concerned. But in Scripture, of course, we have a marvelous unfolding of the future of the time when God is going to bring a unity in Christ through the Lord Jesus and his work and his Second Advent and kingdom.

So, what then is Babylonianism? Babylonianism is the symbol of human autonomy and idolatrous defiance of God. It's what the Scriptures speak of as the mystery of iniquity. And Paul will speak in 2 Thessalonians 2, and he will say, "The mystery of iniquity is already working. But there is a time coming when the Lord Jesus is going to come, and the mystery of iniquity will be unfolded for what it is and overthrown in the completion of the work of the Son of God. So, that's the beginning of Babylonianism. It's the beginning of the mystery of organized human autonomous rebellion against the Lord God, and it is at work in the world, Babylonianism.

Now, let me think secondly about the history and the mystery of Babylonianism. You know as you read the Bible that Jerusalem is God's choice for the home of the truth

from the earliest times. One can go back to Genesis chapter 14, in verse 18, see that. And that never changes in the word of God. The word of God from the beginning to the end sets Jerusalem as the place where the truth of God shall ultimately reign. And we read in Ezekiel chapter 5, in verse 5 years after the Book of Genesis, the Lord God saying, "Thus saith the Lord GOD; This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her." So, Jerusalem is the place where the truth of God shall ultimately prevail. Babylon is the natural and persistent enemy of Jerusalem. Babylon is the home of apostasy. Babylon is the home of rebellion. Babylon is the home of departure from the word of God. Jerusalem is the home of revealed truth, and the home of the work of God through the Lord Jesus Christ, and ultimately it is to be the home of God himself. And you know, of course, as you read the Book of Revelation, how the Book of Revelation reaches its climax in the heavenly Jerusalem that comes down from above, and the Lord God and the saints dwelling in the city.

It's not surprising then that in the Book of Genesis in chapter 14 we have Jerusalem, and then over in chapter 10 we have Babylon. And they're in fairly close conjunction. And then in the Book of Revelation, as the divine revelation reaches its conclusion, what do we have there? Well, we have again in Revelation 17 and 18, two whole chapters devoted to Babylon. And then in the conclusion of the book, chapters devoted to the heavenly Jerusalem. So, these two are in opposition. One is the natural and persistent enemy of the other; Babylon, the home of apostasy; Jerusalem, the home of truth.

When we think about the political history of Babylon, we think of it simply as a great world empire which world the ancient east on two occasions over a considerable period of time. But after the second of the ruling of the nations, Babylon faded. But it survived into the Christian era. Now, that's important to not, because the prophets said that Babylon would be destroyed in one day. Now, the history of Babylon is not the history of the destruction of a city in one day. As a matter of fact, about the time of our

Lord there are indications that Babylon was still in existence. Reference is made to the city, and so the idea that Babylon was destroyed in one day in ancient times is not really true to history. Therefore, we conclude hesitantly, because prophetic students differ over this, and students of the Bible scholars differ over it, a bit hesitantly but it does seem that the prophecies of the Old Testament with reference to historical Babylon were not fulfilled as the Scriptures had set them forth. Babylon has faded into a time of non-existence.

In fact, I think some years ago there was a train that went from Baghdad to another place in Iraq, which is the land of Shinar, very interesting isn't it? That's the land of Shinar, Iraq. And when Babylon is reached there, there's just a stop that say, "Babylon halt." Passengers on the train can be picked up there. So, the idea that Babylon was to be a great city is something in the future. Reference has been made to Babylon in history a number of times. Napoleon made reference to it, and he even had plans for rebuilding the city of Babylon. And others have also thought about it, even in relatively recent times. The thing I'm trying to stress is that Babylon was not destroyed as the prophecies set out in ancient time. But we read in Revelation chapter 18 that "then the city will be destroyed suddenly." So, it's rebuilding, and evidently its ultimate destruction is going to be unfolded in our history." So, Babylon then had an important political history, and evidently it's to have an important history in the future. It's difficult to be real strongly dogmatic about this, because good Bible students have differed over this, and I don't want to say they are all wrong, and I am right. I'm just surmising from my study that Babylon is to be rebuilt in the future.

But let's talk now about the religious mystery of Babylonianism, because that is, if anything, more important than the other. The origin of early religion which spread over the east can be traced to the lands of India, and Persia, and Egypt, and Greece, and Rome. And if we had time we could talk about the ways in which they are developed in ancient times, traditionally associated with Nimrod incidentally. How they are developed

the of individuals such as, that is traditional images of persons such as Semiramis, and Tammuz. Semiramis, a female goddess, and Tammuz her son; and how this is also represented in not simply in the areas of the far east, but also in Egypt and other places under different names like Isis and Osiris, and so on. So the idea of the worship of a virgin goddess and child is something that is found in ancient religious tradition.

In fact, Semiramus is traditionally the wife of Nimrod, and Tammuz was traditionally her son. One can, and this is a bit more speculative, and I want you to understand that it is speculative. It's very interesting, but it is speculative. One can sense, in the development of the ancient religion in the near east, a kind of system of truth that ultimately found its way to the city of Rome via Pergamum. And the Lord Jesus calls Pergamum in the letter to the church at Pergamum, the seat or the place where the throne of Satan is at that time. So what seems to be developing over the years is the worship of a goddess and a son, and that began to spread all over the ancient near east and finally made its way to Rome.

What is striking about it is the fact that so many of the aspects of that ancient eastern religion are aspects that later were found in Roman Catholicism. That is, the idolatrous forms of Roman Catholicism; for example, confession of sins, baptismal regeneration, infant baptism, purgatory, kissing the toe of an image. In fact, one student of the Scriptures, a very fine student of the Scriptures has traced twenty-nine institutions or practices of the Roman Catholic Church to ancient near eastern religions which were brought into the Christian church later on. I'm sure that you understand and know the history of Constantine and how Constantine came to be, I want to put this in quotes, "converted" to Christianity. And how all of this developed, one of the most vivid treatments of it is a treatment made by an old friend of mine, and he has written in a book about it, and I will take the liberty of reading a few sentences that he has written.

"In the early part of the 4th century the monarch of the Roman Empire was Constantine. Constantine's predecessor died, leaving the question of succession in

dispute. The leader of the forces of the west marched with his army toward the leader of the forces of the east, and near a little river in northern Italy, in a place called the Milvian Bridge the two armies bivouacked over against each other waiting for the coming day and the order of battle. The western general, who was Constantine, had come in some minor contact with Christianity, and that night he made a vow. If he won the battle, he would become a Christian. Later tradition added a great bit to this. Some say he saw a vision of a cross in the sky with the Latin inscription in hoc signo vinces or 'In this sign you shall conquer.'"

Now, we can ignore all of that, because that's a monkish secretion to the truth. "The stark fact remains," this teacher says, "that the Constantine made a bargain with some supernatural power to join the church organization if he won his battle. Succeeding events would indicate that the bargain was made with the prince of this world, the god of this age, the spirit that blinds the eyes of men that they should believe the lie." Constantine was "converted." There was no evidence that he was born again. Gibbon, who was a bitter foe of Christianity, says of the first Christian emperor, 'the sublime theory of the gospel made a much fainter impression on his heart than on his understanding. As he gradually advanced in a knowledge of truth, he proportionately declined in the practice of virtue.' And the same year of the rain in which he convened the Council of Nicea, was polluted by the execution, or rather murder, of his eldest son.

What happened is that the Christian church exalted the virtues of Constantine, because he made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, and they forgot about the other things that he had done. In fact, they even added to his name the title, "Equal to the apostles." Well what would you do if you had a lot of heathen religions, and a lot of priests of heathen religions, and you were one of those heathen religions, and the emperor, who is number one, should say, "Now we're all going to become Christians." So what would you do? You're a priest of an ancient eastern religion. It's idolatry. It's contrary to Christianity, but you get your living from it, so what would you do? Well, you

would do? Well, you would do what they did. They went forward to be baptized in order to become "Christians." And so what happened to the Christian church when Constantine affirmed that it was the religion of the Roman Empire was that the world came into the church. The church was already weak by the 4th century, but now it is particularly weakened, because the world has come into the church. It's the same attitude, you know, that people have today when they say, "Should you really refuse membership to a person in a church, when he's not a believer, but he wants to be a member of the church? Why shouldn't we bring him in, so we can influence him now that he's in?" It's the same error. And what happens, of course, is that iniquity will ultimately destroy that which is true.

Haggai writes about that. He says, iniquity spreads, righteousness does not. Iniquity spreads naturally. It's like that stuff that you put in your rolls when you are cooking them, leaven, it just spreads. But righteousness does not, that's what Haggai says. That's why Paul says, "Put out, do away with the leaven." So anyway, that's what happened, and what really happened was that Babylonianism, Babylonian religion came into the church of Jesus Christ. John Wesley said, "I have long been convinced from the whole tenor of ancient history that this very event, Constantine's calling himself a Christian and pouring a flood of wealth and honor upon the Christian church, was productive of more evil to the Christian church than all the ten persecutions put together. Think of that. Now that's from a man who wasn't even a Calvinist. [Laughter] John Wesley, godly Arminian. Emanuel Deutsch referred to this transformation as the time when the gods of Greece and Rome went into exile either degraded into evil spirits or promoted into Christian saints, and so many of them were promoted into Christian saints.

Well, now we come, our time is about up, we don't have the Believers Bible Study tonight, so we can just go on and on tonight, you understand, [Laughter] So let's turn now to our Zechariah passage, and I just want to make the point that seems to be made by this unusual vision. Just think of Babylonianism as systematic organized rebellion

against God. Think of the past history of Babylonianism. Let's keep speculative in our minds the relationship between eastern religion and how it came into the Christian church. I think it can be documented. Incidentally, there is a British author who wrote a very, very famous novel. Many consider it to be the finest novel in the English language, Charles Reeds, *The Cloister and the Hearth*. And in it you have a very full exposition of these things, and evidently that British author, that very famous author, believed that this was a true history of the relationship between Babylonianism and the Christian church.

Now, this passage is one of the two passages that show the return of the system of Babylonianism to the mother city of Babylon. And furthermore that Babylon will eventually be a vast, religious and commercial political empire controlling the world. But Babylon is to be destroyed, the religious arm first, according to Revelation 17, and the political arm last. Zechariah is one of the two passages. The other passage, of course, is Revelation 17 and 18, which spells out the final overthrow of human rebellion, religious and political, in the home of anti-Christ, the restored Babylon. But we just want to look at the Zechariah passage, which seems to tell us that there is going to be a restoration of Babylon, and furthermore it will be the seat of iniquity in the last days. Now, remember that these visions that Zechariah has been giving are visions of the future. And so, I'll read through it again, just make a few comments as we go along, because it seems to teach the final removal of Israel's sin of Godless commercialism from the land and a restoration to the land of Babylon.

What is so interesting about this to me is that, if we had read this perhaps forty years ago and had studied it, we might have imagined what would be true of the near east today, but as you know, of course, the near east, now has been seen to have the largest oil reserves in the world. Forty percent of the known deposits of oil are in this area that surround what is ancient Babylon. Even Iraq has three great oil fields, as you probably know. They're concentrated in the Persian Gulf area, and it is in this region that world power will evidently have its center. We know of Kuwait, that little country at the

head of the Persian Gulf, only two hundred miles from ancient Babylon. Look in the other direction, and still in the distance from ancient Babylon is also small. Think two hundred miles, that's the distance between Dallas and Austin. So this area, this area of what was ancient Babylonia, today Iraq, engaged in the death struggle with Iran, is the area of which we are speaking. Iraq is the place within which Babylon's ruins are.

Now, he says, "Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what it is this that goeth forth. And I said, What is it? And he said, This is an ephah that goeth forth." This was the largest Jewish measure for dry good, a symbol for commerce. So the nation, evidently, has turned from its pastoral activity, its pastoral nature as it began, to a mercantile people. And the result, of course, is the development of theft and perjury and all of the other kinds of things associated with a Godless kind of commercialism. So we would gather from this that there is some justification for believing that the nation would become a commercial power. Well, of course, we know what Jewish people have done in the commerce of the world. There may be some relationship to it.

Verse 7, "And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah." The woman, suggestive of the woman of Revelation chapter 17, of course, and the vision there, the system of evil religion represented by the woman; one thinks of Eve, the temptress. One thinks of other aspects of this. Now, it is true that wickedness is feminine, and for that reason some commentators say that since wickedness is feminine, then wickedness is represented by a feminine person. That's possible. But at any rate, the other males will be possible as well. So we read, "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. 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." Two women, now we have to speculate a bit, and this is

speculation; I'm warning you, if you come up with a better interpretation, let me know. I suggest to you that these two women represent apostate Christianity, and apostate Judaism. And that these two are they that are carrying the wickedness back to Babylon to set it there. And I think it's striking, too, that we read that these two women had "wind in their wings, and they had wings like the wings of a stork."

Now, obviously this is a symbolic picture, because women don't have wings. And women don't have wings like a stork either. What's characteristic of a stork? Well, one of the great characteristics of a stork, besides the use that has been made of it for the explanation for human birth, is the fact that they are characterized by a tendency to go back to where they began their life. That's characteristic of a stork, did you know that? And so it's very fitting that wickedness, as represented here, should be represented as two women that have the wings of a stork, and the wickedness is going back to Babylon where wickedness began. That is, organized rebellion against God, back again to Babylon.

Now, we read on in verse 9 there, "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." In other words, wickedness will find its culmination, ultimately, in Nimrod's city. And I suggest to you, again speculating a bit, that seen in this is the greed of the beast of the last days, the anti-Christ, and of the kings that are associated with him in world rule all over the earth. When you read Revelation 17, and then Revelation 18, what you see is, of course, a vast world wide empire ruled by one man who is religious leader and political leader. He has associated with him, of course, those who organize the worship of the beast. But he is also a political ruler, and associated with his political rule is his Godless commercialism. Read Revelation chapter 18 to get the full picture, commerce and religion, false religion, united to glorify man.

Now, that it seems to me is what the prophet is telling us. He's telling us, in effect, that Babylon has a future, and that furthermore, Babylon has a future as the head of the godless empire opposed to the kingdom of God. And the Book of Revelation, of course, fills in many, many more details. I suggest that if you're interested, read Revelation 13. Read Revelation 17 and 18 and of course, particularly the story of how Babylon is ultimately overthrown, and the great, marvelous words of Revelation are proclaimed. "Babylon the Great is fallen is fallen." And then we read about the New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven, and the kingdom of God upon the earth.

Let me close with just one comment. I've been reading a new commentary on Zechariah, a more recent commentary, as I've been thinking about Zechariah again. And this commentary is written by a person who is not really a strong student of the prophetic word. It's a woman. She's a good scholar. She teaches in a theological college in England, and she has made an interesting comment concerning verse, well she's made a couple of interesting comments, but particularly the one about "they had wings like the wings of a stork." Now, the word for stork is the word, chacydah.

Now, you've probably heard some of the teachers here at the Chapel use the expression, the Hebrew word, checed, and that's word that means something like loving kindness or loyal love, something like that. Now this word is very closely related to it, chacydah. As you can see, it's a feminine noun, well you might not see it was a feminine now, but it's a feminine noun, and it's based on that same root. In fact, the term stork means something like "faithful one." And she has suggested that perhaps in this reference to the stork we have some indication of the fact that it is an act of God's grace to purge the land of Israel from sin and wickedness by causing the iniquity represented by the woman to go back to the land of Shinar. So that the head of Godless religion, and Godless commercialism, and the Godless last world empire of men, is in Babylon. And it is the grace of God preparing Jerusalem for its ultimate place as the place where God rules in his marvelous grace.

“The Woman in the Ephah and Babylonianism” by S. Lewis Johnson
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Well, that's somewhat of a difficult section to go through, but I hope it has at least whetted your appetite for reading about Babylon in the word of God. Let's bow in a closing word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these magnificent prophecies, difficult for us to understand, but nevertheless which point us to the ultimate consummation of the plan and program of God. We are grateful for the goodness that Thou hast shown us through Jesus Christ. And Lord, as we continue to ponder the word of God, give us light and enable us to be fruitful servants of Thine in the age in which Thou hast set us and our lives. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.