

Zechariah Chapter Three

Vision Four: Joshua the High Priest (3.1-10) Divine Pardon

Position: Visions four and five (4.1-14) are the *central* focus of the eight night visions. The spotlight falls on two prominent individuals – Joshua, the high priest and Zerubbabel, the prince. Both represent the nation *and* foreshadow a greater Priest-King who will remove iniquity in Israel (3.9) and reign over all the earth. **Purpose:** If Israel would enjoy the blessing of God's presence (2.11) they must be cleansed from the filth of their sin. *Dennett: In Zechariah 2 the Lord has revealed His purposes of grace in the future restoration both of Jerusalem and of His people; Zechariah 3... explains how He will accomplish His purposes consistently with His righteousness.* **Priesthood:** This vision presents the restoration of Israel (represented in their high priest) as a kingdom of priests. *Exodus 19.5-6: Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.* As such, Israel should have been the channel through which God's name and word was proclaimed to mankind. They were to be a preaching, proclaiming and witnessing nation. But, Israel failed. They did not obey God or keep His covenant. Nevertheless, Israel shall be restored as a priestly nation in the millennium, serving under the new covenant. *Isaiah 61.6: Ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: Men shall call you the Ministers of our God.* The church is God's priesthood today (1 Peter 2.5, 9).

The Choice of Jerusalem (vv.1-2)

v.1: It is likely 'he shewed me' refers to the Lord (2.13), not the interpreting angel whose role it was to explain rather than introduce the visions (cf. 4.1, 13-14). This vision depicts Joshua attempting to minister 'before' the Lord in his priestly function, likely on the Day of Atonement. Note. Some see this as a judicial courtroom scene – Joshua is the *defendant* before God, the *Judge*, with Satan acting as counsel for the *prosecution* and the Angel of the Lord as counsel for the *defence*. Joshua was the grandson of Jehozadak, the final high priest of the temple before its destruction (1 Chronicles 6.14-15; Haggai 1.1), and grandfather of the infamous Eliashib (Nehemiah 12.10). The high priest had the responsibility of representing the nation of Israel before the Lord (as symbolised in the stones on his shoulders and breastplate). He was to make atonement for the people in order that they might be ceremonially clean and acceptable before Him (Leviticus 16.30). The acceptability of the people therefore depended on the acceptability of the high priest. Joshua is dressed in 'filthy' garments, thus Satan (Hebrew for 'adversary') stands in the place of accusation (Psalm 109.6; cf. Job 1). Although silent, he is clearly ready to make the case that Joshua, and the people he represents, are in a guilty, sinful state and must be condemned – they are disqualified from functioning as a nation of priests. This is a critical scene. Either Joshua (and therefore Israel) is *convicted* and *judged* (permanently set aside), or he is *forgiven* and *restored*. Satan is still the accuser of the brethren today (cf. Revelation 12.10) and seeks to remind us of our unworthiness to serve God. But, who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect? God has justified us (Romans 8.33). **v.2:** Before Satan can open his mouth, he is 'rebuked' by the Angel of the Lord who is plainly identified as Jehovah (cp. Matthew 17.18; Mark 4.39; 9.25; Luke 4.35; 9.42). Satan did not account for Divine love and grace. Thus, God will not hear the accusation, but vindicates His people on the basis that they have been **chosen**. Satan is silenced by God's choice. The matter did not depend upon Israel's faithfulness or they would have been cast off long ago! Read Deuteronomy 7.6-9. Israel was chosen by God because He loved them (cf. Psalm 33.12) and desired that all nations might be blessed through them. God's choice does not alter nor change – the future of Israel is as sure as the immutable character of God (Romans 11.29). Furthermore, if Israel were of no value to God He would have left them to be consumed in the fire of Babylonian captivity. The restored remnant is like a piece of wood, hastily and eagerly snatched from the fire (cf. Amos 4.11). The vivid picture is characteristic of the nation – they were delivered from the fires of Egypt (Deuteronomy 4.20) and will yet be delivered from the fire of tribulation wrath (Jeremiah 30.7).

The Cleansing of Joshua (vv.3-5)

v.3: 'Filthy' describes the condition of the nation. The word is the strongest expression in the Hebrew language for filth of the most vile and loathsome character (two associated nouns refer to *vomit* and *human excrement*). Joshua is silent in the presence of the Angel (Romans 3.19). Guilty. It is not just sinful *acts* in view, but the underlying condition and *state* of sin in which the nation resides ('iniquity' is singular, v.4). The picture represents the whole gamut of Israel's apostasy and infidelity. **v.4:** But God's grace was greater than Israel's guilt. The Angel commands the attending angelic servants to 'take away from *upon* him' (as a pressing burden) the filthy garments. The iniquity of the nation is entirely removed through the agency of the Angel. Whilst this would have been a great encouragement to the remnant in Zechariah's day – despite the sin of a past generation and defilement of Babylonian captivity, they were fit to serve God in a rebuilt temple – ultimately this looks ahead to the salvation and cleansing of the entire nation, the fulfilment of the Day of Atonement (cf. Isaiah 4.3-4; 61.10; Ezekiel 36.16-32). *I hear the accuser roar, Of ills that I have done; I know them well, and thousands more; Jehovah findeth none.* Not only is Joshua judicially cleansed but clothed in a 'change of

raiment' (rich garments of state, cf. Exodus 28.2, 40), symbolic of righteousness. **v.5:** Zechariah is tuned to the thoughts of God and expresses such as prayer (1 John 5.14). The 'fair (clean, pure) mitre' probably refers to the turban of the high priest. On the front of this turban was a golden plate with the words engraved 'holiness to the Lord' (Exodus 28.36; 39.30) and signified the dignity of his office and qualification to make atonement for the people. All this implies Israel's future glory and re-instatement to the priestly office (cf. Romans 8.30), at the direction of the Angel of the Lord.

The Charge of the Angel (vv.6-7)

v.6: With such a position comes responsibility. Israel must live and serve in a way which befits their dignified position before God. Thus, the Angel of the Lord 'protested' or 'solemnly declared' the conditions of His blessing. By application, clothed in the righteousness of God, we are fit to serve Him as priests. But, we must show ourselves worthy of the calling, otherwise God cannot entrust us with the service of His sanctuary. The *forgiven* saint must prove to be the *faithful* saint. **v.7:** Note *two* conditions and *three* blessings of service. **1.** Way of life. To walk in God's ways involves obedience to His word. It includes clinging to God by loving and serving Him in total devotion (Deuteronomy 10.12; Joshua 22.5). **2.** Priestly function. To 'keep my charge' was a call to faithfully fulfil official priestly duties. Are we faithful to our duties as holy priests (entering in to worship) and royal priests (going out in service)? The blessings of such faithful service were threefold. **1.** Judge or govern God's house (temple). Israel would have responsibility in administering the affairs of the temple and maintaining the proper testimony of the house of God. This involved teaching the word of God and judging difficult matters (Deuteronomy 17.9-12; Malachi 2.7). **2.** Keep my courts, i.e. to guard from defilement and idolatry (2 Chronicles 23.19; Ezekiel 44.23-24). **3.** Places to walk (access) among these that stand by (i.e. angelic attendants, v.4). Thus, Joshua is being promised free and uninhibited access into the presence of God as the angels (cp. Revelation 21.3). What a contrast to life under the old covenant! As the priesthood today, believers enjoy all these blessings and more. It is our responsibility to administer the affairs of the house of God, to guard it from defilement and error and enjoy unimpeded access into the presence of God (Hebrews 10.19-22).

The Character of Messiah (vv.8-10)

v.8: Joshua and his 'fellows' (the priesthood) were to be observed as prophetic signs, or types of future events. The deliverance of Joshua and the priesthood from Babylon is typical of a greater deliverance of the nation in a coming day. Joshua and the priesthood *anticipate* Israel forgiven and restored as a nation of priests. All will be effected by the One who is: **Servant, Shoot (Branch) and Stone.** The **Servant** recalls the songs of Isaiah concerning One who came to do His Father's will. Having made full atonement for sin (Isaiah 53), He will destroy His enemies (Isaiah 50), restore the nation of Israel (Isaiah 49), and set justice in the earth (Isaiah 42). The **Branch (semah)** refers to a tender shoot springing from the root (lineage) of David, to become the future Messianic ruler (cf. Isaiah 4.2; Jeremiah 23.5; 33.15). *Semah* suggests *humiliation* (growing up from the earth, cf. Isaiah 53.2), *growth* and *fruitfulness*. His entrance into the world at Bethlehem was small and seemingly insignificant, but He will rise to power and great glory. Another word translated 'Branch' (*neser*, Isaiah 11.1) completes a *fourfold* picture of the Christ which parallels the gospel records. He is a royal Branch (Jeremiah 23.5); my Servant, the Branch (3.8); the Man, the Branch (6.12) and the Branch of Jehovah (Isaiah 4.2).

v.9: The *submissive* Servant and *tender* Shoot is also seen in the figure of a strong, secure and powerful **Stone.** The stone 'laid' in the presence of Joshua could be a reference to the foundation stone of the second temple. Even so it clearly points forward to Christ (cf. Isaiah 8.13-15; 28.16; Psalm 118.22-23; Daniel 2.35, 45; Matthew 21.42; Ephesians 2.19-22; 1 Peter 2.6-8), the firm foundation of the nation's blessing. All that is built upon Him shall stand unshaken. **JND:** The foundation-stone that was laid before the eyes of Joshua was but a feeble image of that true stone, the immovable foundation of all the blessing of Israel, of all the government of God in the earth. Two further expressive details concerning the Stone are given. First, upon it are 'seven eyes', likely signifying the One who is omniscient and will govern the world in perfect justice and wisdom (cf. 2 Chronicles 16.9). Revelation 5.6 further suggests the fullness of Christ's *knowledge* (seven eyes) and *power* (seven horns) to execute God's government in the earth. The sevenfold power of the *Spirit* will rest upon Him (Isaiah 11.2). Second, the Stone is engraved with an inscription. Often foundation stones bore inscriptions attesting to the *builder* (6.12) and *purpose* for building. Perhaps the inscription reads: "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." Alternatively, the Talmud (Rabbinic writings) says the foundation-stone of the second temple had the name 'Jehovah' (YHWH) graven upon it. Undoubtedly all the attributes of God's character are manifested in Christ (Exodus 23.21). The purpose of the Messiah is the removal of iniquity. The foundation was laid once and for all at Calvary, the blessing of which will be made good to Israel at His coming (12.10-13.1). 'One and the same day' does not necessarily refer to a 24-hour period but speaks of a 'once and for all' cleansing in contrast to the continual repetition of animal sacrifices (cf. Hebrews 7.27; 9.12; 10.10). **v.10:** The ensuing millennial day will be a period of rest, security, joy, peace and prosperity as expressed in the 'vine' and 'fig'. (cp. 1 Kings 4.25; Isaiah 36.16; Micah 4.4). According to the Talmud, after the duties of the Day of Atonement were accomplished, the people of Israel invited their family and neighbours to a time of festal celebration and rejoicing. The 'vine' and 'fig' are emblems of Israel (Isaiah 5.7; Luke 13.6), now restored to a position of fruitfulness.