

Lesson 5

Chapter 3

Zechariah 3 reminds me of Psalm 119:162 - "I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil." Once we go beneath the surface of this chapter, we will uncover wonderful lessons and assurances from God that explain why this is one of my most favorite chapters in the Bible.

Zechariah 3:1

1 And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.

This is Zechariah's fourth vision: the vision of Joshua.

"And he showed me Joshua." Who was Joshua?

First, this Joshua is not the famous Joshua. Instead, this Joshua was the current high priest, and this is not the only time we will see Joshua in this book.

Haggai mentions Joshua in the first verse of his book and also tells us that he was the high priest. As high priest, Joshua held the highest religious office among the returned exiles.

So we have answered our first question: who was Joshua? And that question was easy. The next question is more difficult - **why** did God show Joshua to Zechariah? And especially when Zechariah could have walked around and seen Joshua in person had he wanted to. Why did God show him Joshua in a vision?

We have two options. First, this may be a vision that is about Joshua himself. Second, Joshua may appear in this vision only as a figure for something else or someone else. So what is the answer?

I think we can rule out the first option. I think it is almost certain that this vision is not about Joshua the person, although some commentaries make valiant efforts to argue otherwise.

While the office of high priest was certainly significant, Joshua the person did not seem to have any

particular significance apart from his office as far as we can tell from the text.

Also, we will later see Joshua receive a crown in Zechariah 6:11, which we know must be figurative of someone else because Joshua is from the tribe of Levi rather than the tribe of Judah. And that figurative appearance in Chapter 6 likely suggests that his appearance here in Chapter 3 is also figurative.

I think the context of this book and of this vision demands that we look beyond Joshua the man and instead look for something or someone who is being shown here using Joshua the High Priest as a figure.

So who or what is Joshua representing? We have two likely possibilities.

Either Joshua is representing the Jewish people or Joshua is representing Jesus, the perfect High Priest who was to come. Let's leave this question open for now until we have read more of the text.

But one thing we can say right now is that the high priest certainly acted as a representative for the people. He prayed for the people; he entered the Holy of Holies on behalf of the people; he bore the guilt of the people (Hebrews 9:7).

The high priest bore the names of the twelve tribes on his breastplate, which showed that he represented the people of Israel before God.

Exodus 28:29 - And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually.

So we should not be surprised if Joshua is being shown here as a representative for the people.

Another thing we can say at this point is that Joshua's name may itself be a clue - his name means "God saves." But let's keep reading before we make up our mind.

Who else do we see in verse 1? We see the Angel of the Lord again - and again, it is possible that this is a preincarnate appearance of Jesus, in which case "angel" would just mean "messenger." We will have more to say on that point when we get to verse 2.

We also see Satan. What is Satan doing here?

The text says that Satan is "standing at his right hand to resist him," meaning that he is standing next to Joshua to accuse him.

Revelation 12:10 tells us that Satan accuses God's people before God day and night. And that description of Satan reminds us at once of the opening chapters of Job.

Whenever we sin, we should picture Satan rushing off to tell God what we just did! Satan is an accuser of God's people.

And Satan is the father of lies, and so there is no telling what lies Satan is telling God about us.

John 8:44 - Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

But we shouldn't be worried - God is an all-knowing, righteous judge. And we have another before him who is pleading our case.

1 Timothy 2:5 - For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

The scene here in verse 1 with Joshua and Satan reminds us of Psalm 109:6.

Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand at his right hand.

How will God respond to Satan's accusations? Let's keep reading.

Zechariah 3:2

2 And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?

Verse 1 told us that Joshua was standing before the Angel of the Lord, and verse 2 begins with a statement by the Lord directed at Satan.

This statement in verse 2 by the Lord creates another question - the **Lord** says, "the **Lord** rebuke thee." Is the Lord referring to himself there? And, if so, why doesn't he just rebuke Satan himself?

The most likely explanation is that "the Lord says" in verse 2 is an abbreviation for "the Angel of the Lord says." That makes sense from the context here, as well as the context of the previous verse in which the Angel of the Lord is introduced to the scene. Most commentaries agree:

Almost all expositors agree that the angel of Jehovah is the Speaker here who takes the name of Jehovah because of the intimate and mysterious relation he sustains to Him.

This would seem to be a strong indication that the Angel of the Lord here is divine, but I suppose it is possible that the phrase "the Lord said" in verse 2 is just shorthand for "the Lord said through his messenger." But I lean toward the view that we are seeing both God the Father and God the Son in these visions.

One reason I lean that way is because of another verse in the Old Testament where we see one Lord talking to another Lord, the first verse of Psalm 110, which is the most often quoted Old Testament verse in the New Testament.

Psalm 110:1 - The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

We know with certainty that those two Lords are God the Father and God the Son because of what Jesus said about that verse in Matthew 22:45 and Mark 12:37. And here in verse 2 we also see two Lord's. That is strong evidence!

In any event, the rebuke in verse 2 is a double rebuke from God, which means that it is a very harsh rebuke! God is not going to listen to anything Satan has to say about his people!

We have said already that a big reason Zechariah was written was to provide comfort and encouragement to the returned exiles. And they must have received tremendous comfort and encouragement from these verses. And I think we can, too.

In the previous chapter, God described his people as the apple of his eye. Here, God describes his people as having been chosen and as having been a brand plucked out of the fire.

They had been very close to total destruction, but God had chosen them and saved them like

someone would pluck a burning brand out of the fire to keep it from being consumed. And now when Satan shows up to accuse their high priest, God makes it very clear that he is not going to listen to any of it.

That is how God responds to Satan's accusations, but God's response in support of Joshua here must have seemed very surprising. Why? Let's keep reading.

Zechariah 3:3-4

3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. 4 And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.

Verse 3 tells us something very unexpected about Joshua - he was clothed with filthy garments. And that was very unexpected for at least two reasons.

First, the high priest was supposed to be the very essence of purity. Under no circumstances was he to ever become defiled or unclean.

Leviticus 21:10-12 - And he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes; Neither shall he go in to any dead body, nor defile himself for his father, or for his mother; Neither shall he go out of the sanctuary, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the crown of the anointing oil of his God is upon him: I am the Lord.

As an aside, do you recall a situation where that command not to rend his clothes was violated by the high priest? At the trial of Jesus in Matthew 26:65.

Second, the English word "filthy" in verse 3 does not even come close to what is being described here. The Hebrew word suggests the most vile of conditions. It literally means "befouled with excrement and vomit."

One commentator described the situation this way:

"Few verses in the Old Testament portray a more graphic or repugnant scene than verse 3."

The high priest's garments were supposed to be most holy, but Joshua's garments are pictured here as being soiled and defiled beyond imagination. This vision would have been extremely shocking and disturbing to those who heard about it and to Zechariah who saw it.

But look at what happens in verse 4. In verse 4, we have the beautiful picture of Joshua having his filthy garments taken away so that he can put on a change of clothing. And we also see in verse 4 something that we likely already suspected - these filthy garments are figurative of sin. "I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment."

The filthy garments being taken away is a figure for iniquity being taken away. And the word "filthy" that is used here graphically makes the point that these sins could hardly have been any worse - and yet they are taken away. Joshua receives a change of clothing.

And if we think our robes apart from Christ would look any better than Joshua's robes, then we don't understand anything about sin! We too are cleansed, and we too change our garments and put on something new.

Galatians 3:27 - For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Romans 13:14 - But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

Satan was likely telling God that these sins were so bad that they could never be forgiven, that the people could never be trusted, that they would fall away quickly - but God was having none of that.

Zechariah 3:5

5 And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by.

Verse 5 is interesting - Zechariah is not just watching the vision; Zechariah is participating in the vision! Zechariah is the speaker in verse 5.

Leupold: "This is eloquent testimony to the eagerness with which Zechariah shared in all that was being revealed and to the graciousness of God who does not rebuke such zealous

participation. The prophet is not made to feel that he has become guilty of unwarranted and presumptuous interference."

Why does Zechariah suggest that a mitre be placed on Joshua's head? The priestly mitre that was normally worn by priests bore the inscription, "Holy to the Lord."

Exodus 28:36-37 - And thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, HOLINESS TO THE Lord. And thou shalt put it on a blue lace, that it may be upon the mitre; upon the forefront of the mitre it shall be.

Commentaries offer numerous and sometimes elaborate explanations for this mitre, but perhaps the best explanation is the simplest explanation: Zechariah was concerned that the priest be fully outfitted from head to toe!

Zechariah had just witnessed a very shocking scene involving the high priest, and he wanted to see things put right as quickly as they could be!

Let's now go back to our earlier question - who is Joshua representing in this vision?

As we said, we really have only two choices - either Joshua is being used as a figure for the returned exiles or Joshua is being used here as a figure for Jesus, the perfect high priest who was yet to come.

We might think we can rule out Jesus immediately because of the filthy garments that represent iniquity.

Hebrews 4:15 - For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, **yet without sin.**

How could this figure of the filthy garments ever be used for the sinless Christ? Perhaps Paul answers that question.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - For **he hath made him to be sin** for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

That is, the filthy garments could depict **our** sin, which the sinless Son of God bore for us on that cross.

But there are two problems with the view that Joshua is being used as a figure for Christ - a first problem that we can already see and a second problem that we will see in the next two verses.

First, the problem we can already see is that if Joshua is depicting Christ, and if the Angel of the Lord is the preincarnate Christ - then we are hearing Jesus talk to himself in these verses, and that would seem odd.

But the second problem in saying that Joshua depicts Jesus is even harder to overcome (and in fact *impossible* to overcome) - Joshua is *admonished* in the next two verses.

Zechariah 3:6-7

6 And the angel of the LORD protested unto Joshua, saying, 7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.

Joshua is admonished to walk in God's ways and to keep God's charge in verse 7. I think verse 7 answers the question of whom Joshua is representing.

The "if then" admonishing statement in verse 7 is certainly something that would be directed to the people of God, but that is not something that could ever be directed to the Son of God.

Joshua, a high priest for the people of God, is being used here in Chapter 3 as a figure for the people of God. Joshua, the high priest, was their representative in life, and Joshua, the high priest, is their representative in this vision.

If the people walk in the ways of God and keep the charge of God, then the people will continue to enjoy God's gracious favor, just as the high priest would continue in his office, unlike many of his failed predecessors who had turned their back on God and on his people.

The final phrase in verse 6 ("I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by") likely refers to the special access that the high priest had in the temple when he officiated on behalf of the people.

So I think that Joshua in verses 1-7 represents the people of God - the people who had sinned horribly, the people who had been exiled and almost destroyed, the people who had been snatched

out of that situation as a brand being plucked from the fire, and the people who now once again found themselves in Jerusalem.

They must have been filled with guilt and regret over what they had done. They were standing among the ruins of their city and their temple - ruins that had come about because of their disobedience. They must have wondered how such a sinful people could ever be used by God to bring about the wonderful blessings and promises that they were hearing about from Haggai and Zechariah.

This vision is an answer to that question. God had saved them, God had chosen them, and God had cleansed them. God had plucked them out of the fire and given them clean garments. All was as before; the relationship had been restored. The temple was being rebuilt and soon the city would be rebuilt as well.

The people needed a message of encouragement, and it would be difficult to imagine a more encouraging message than this one!

Zechariah 3:8-10

8 Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH. 9 For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. 10 In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree.

We see a big shift in verse 8 that is indicated by the phrase "hear now" that begins verse 8. We also see a clue to this shift in verse 10, which begins with the phrase "in that day." Earlier, we talked about the importance of that phrase in this book for letting us know when there has been a shift forward in time.

Verse 8 tells us that Zechariah has a message for Joshua and for the other priests ("the fellows that sit before thee"). Why did the priests need a special message?

To anyone (such as Haggai) who still remembered the old temple, it must have seemed that the glories of the priesthood were just a thing of the past. Could these priests ever again rise to the heights they had once enjoyed?

The situation was similar to that found in Isaiah 11, but there the focus was on the lowly house of David, whose glories seemed all but extinct. God through Isaiah assured them that that would not be true forever.

Isaiah 11:1 - And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.

And the message here to Zechariah and his fellow priests about the priesthood is the same message that Isaiah received in Isaiah 11 about the house of David - **a branch is coming!** "I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH."

A branch is coming from the stem of Jesse in Isaiah 11:1, and a branch is coming out of the priesthood in Zechariah 3:8. We also see this same connection in Jeremiah 33.

Jeremiah 33:15 - In those days, and at that time, will I cause **the Branch of righteousness** to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.

Jeremiah 33:20-21 - Thus saith the Lord; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; **and with the Levites the priests, my ministers.**

When Jesus came he would revive the glory of the house of David when he sat upon the throne of David as King of kings and Lord of lords, and Jesus would revive the glories of the priesthood when he became our perfect high priest.

Hebrews 7:26 - For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

Of this wonderful fact, Joshua and his fellow priests were continual reminders or "wonder-signs" as verse 8 calls them. Here is how the ASV translated verse 8.

Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit before thee; **for they are men that are a sign:** for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the Branch.

Let's look now at verse 9, which is one of the most difficult and debated verses in the entire Bible.

■ "For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes."

What is the stone in verse 9? I have yet to find any two commentaries that agree on the answer to that question. Here are some answers that have been proposed.

- The stone is a foundation stone of the temple.
- The stone is a stone crowning the temple structure.
- The stone is a stone that took the place of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies.
- The stone is a symbol of Zion.
- The stone is a precious stone in the crown worn by Zerubbabel. (We will meet Zerubbabel in Chapter 4, but for now just note that he was the grandson of King Jehoiachin, and thus he was in the royal line of King David, but he was not a king.)
- The stone is a precious stone that adorned one of Zerubbabel's royal garments.
- The stone is some sort of amulet.
- The stone is a signet in the ring of the Almighty himself.
- The stone is a stone of remembrance such as those found on the breastplate or shoulder of the high priest.

None of those suggestions really jumps out to me as the best answer.

The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself, so let's put the commentaries aside and look at the clues the text itself provides: "upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." So what do we have?

- A stone.
- Seven eyes on the stone.

- An engraving on the stone engraved by God.
- The iniquity is removed in one day.
- And we have the time frame from verse 8: "I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH."

Let's look first at the hardest of those clues - the seven eyes. We will see them again in Zechariah 4:10, when we meet Zerubbabel.

For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; **they are the eyes of the Lord**, which run to and fro through the whole earth.

We also see that same figure in Revelation 5:6.

And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and **seven eyes**, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

Eyes usually depict knowledge and the number seven depicts perfection, so perhaps the seven eyes depict the perfect knowledge of God - God knows everything that can be known.

If we recall that horns depict power, then the seven horns in Revelation 5:6 likely denote the perfect power of God. And so Revelation 5:6 is using the seven horns and the seven eyes to say that Christ the Lamb has perfect knowledge and perfect power.

The main thing to take away from Revelation 5:6 is that the seven eyes were there applied to Jesus - and we saw Jesus here in the prior verse of Zechariah 3 - "I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH."

What about the engraving? Let me ask a related question: What do we do when we have something important that we don't want to lose? Don't we write our name on it?

I think that is what we are seeing here with this engraved stone. Where else do we see God writing his name on something?

2 Timothy 2:19 - Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this **seal**, The Lord

knoweth them that are his.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 - Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also **sealed** us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

That seal is an indication of ownership. God deals us. Why? "The Lord knoweth them that are his." God sets his seal upon us to show that we are his.

You may already see where I am headed here, so let's cut to the chase - what does the stone mean here? I think Daniel answers that question for us.

Daniel 2:34 - Thou sawest till that a **stone** was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces.

Daniel 2:44 - And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

So what is the stone? I think the stone in Zechariah 3 is the same as the stone in Daniel 2. I think this stone represents the body of Christ, the church of Christ, the eternal kingdom of Christ.

Why seven eyes on the stone? The seven eyes are a symbol for the perfect knowledge of Jesus, who is the head of the church. Remember that we just saw Satan standing by the people of God to accuse them. Isn't it comforting to know that Jesus has perfect knowledge?

Why is there an engraving on the stone engraved by God? We just talked about that. The church belongs to Christ; it is the church of Christ. (And that is not our name! It is our description! We are the Lord's church - the church built by Christ; the church bought by Christ; the church owned by Christ; the church of Christ.) God has placed his seal on us. We are God's people. We are not our own.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 - What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

If the seven eyes represent the Holy Spirit, which some suggest and which is certainly possible, then the seven eyes and the engraving show that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 1:13 - In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.

#Zechariah