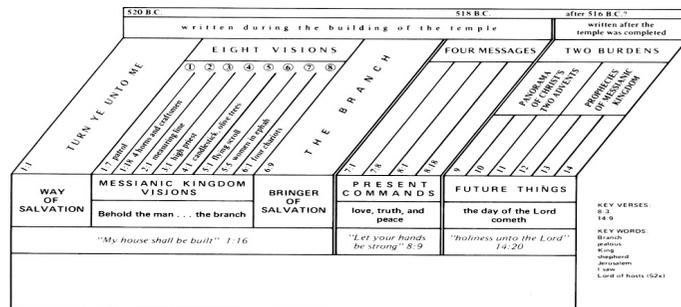


“HIS ROBES FOR MINE” (Zechariah 3:1-10)

The fourth and fifth visions are found in Zechariah 3-4. They have a more personal focus and are directed to Joshua and Zerubbabel, who represented the political and spiritual leadership of the Jews in Jerusalem. The Jews were spiritually weak at this time. Hence, Haggai and Zechariah’s strong messages of repentance (Haggai 1:1-11; Zechariah 1:1-6). However, some of them may have even began to doubt that God would ever want them back and that the promises of a glorious future in prophecies like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel etc would not be realised. But they had forgotten that God is a God of grace who does not deal with repentant people according to what they deserve. MacArthur explains,

“They came back to the land which is still rubble for all intents and purposes by Zechariah’s time, and the efforts to rebuild the temple are moving along a little faster now, but there isn’t much progress there. And the people are somewhat discouraged, and somewhat despairing, and somewhat wondering whether their country will ever be what it once was and ever again know the glories of Solomon. And God comes along and says, in those first three visions, “I want to comfort you with the promise your city will be rebuilt, your people will be restored, your enemies will be judged, both now and in a great future fulfillment.” But the question that immediately arises is how can God do this to a sinful people? Are there no conditions involved? How can a holy God restore a sinful, unbelieving people and be consistent with His own righteous character in so doing? Well, the fourth vision answers that question.



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. (v1)

Zechariah’s attention is first drawn to the spiritual leader – the high priest Joshua. We don’t know much about Joshua (his name means “Jehovah saves”) Interestingly, the name “Joshua” is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek name “Jesus.” He was a Levite from the descendants of Aaron and the son of Josedech. Joshua is listed as one of the first of those returning from Babylon (Nehemiah 7:7). As the High Priest, Joshua was the representative of the people for the Jews were called to be a holy nation of priests unto the Lord (Exod. 19:5-6).

Joshua stood before the Angel of the Lord (who is the Lord Jesus Christ in a pre-incarnate form). The Angel of the Lord is the heavenly Judge. The idea of this expression “standing before the angel of the LORD” is that he as priest is attempting to minister in the temple before God (cf. Gen. 41:46; Deut. 10:8; Judges 20:28; 2 Chron. 29:11; Ezek. 44:15).



The High Priest was traditionally clothed in a spotless robe, but Joshua is clothed with filthy garments, which represents his own sins and the sins of the nation. The Hebrew word for “filthy” in v3 means covered in human waste and filth. It is a horrible picture. Steve Cole notes,

“You may wonder, “Why didn’t he put on his finest, clean robes before he went to minister before the Lord?” Perhaps he did. But what looked clean to men on earth did not look so clean when it came into the brilliant light of God’s holy presence. When we compare ourselves with ourselves, our good deeds may seem adequate to commend us to God. But in God’s sight, even our most righteous deeds are as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6, where the Hebrew word pictures soiled menstrual rags). If we come before God on the basis of any human merit, we are doomed from the start. We have nothing to offer God except filthy, excrement-covered deeds!”

A third person is mentioned in the vision. For the first time the devil is in view. Satan (whose name means “accuser” or “adversary”) is seen accusing Joshua of sin and pointing out his unworthiness. The filthy robes are the evidence that Satan uses to accuse Joshua.

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? (v2)

This is a tense moment. The devil has a good point. For Joshua cannot be in the presence of God in filthy garments. Even Joshua doesn’t defend himself. He knew he was guilty as charged. Will Joshua now be rejected? Will Israel be rejected?

Although Joshua couldn’t defend himself, the Lord could defend Joshua, “And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan.” Now this defence was not on the basis of Joshua’s worthiness but on the basis of God’s sovereign grace in choosing Joshua, “even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?” The Lord does not dispute Joshua’s sin (as representative of the Jewish people), but rebukes Satan for attempting to denounce those He has sovereignly chosen to rescue from destruction for His own purposes. Cole explains,

“The Lord did not rebuke Satan by pointing out Joshua’s finer qualities. He didn’t read the list of Joshua’s good deeds over the years. Instead, the Lord rebukes the devil on the basis of something that the devil cannot contend against, because it lies in the very nature of God as the Sovereign of the universe. God points Satan to His sovereign choice of Israel. Jerusalem (which stands for Israel) is mentioned rather than Joshua personally because he represents the nation in this vision. But clearly, God’s sovereign choice of the nation included His choice of specific individuals in Israel, such as Joshua. Many Scriptures, both in the Old and New Testaments, show that God sovereignly chooses individuals for salvation, not just an impersonal group. That’s how God works in His plan for the ages, by His sovereign choice.”



Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. 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. 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. (v3-5)

The Lord then deals with the problems of the filthy garments, “*And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him.*” They are exchanged for spotless new clothes, “*And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.*”



This is an act of sovereign unconditional grace to Joshua. The priest has no part to play in contributing to this exchange. Joshua doesn’t help the Lord out. It is solely the work of God. Charles Feinberg rightly observes, “It is clearly God’s work without any help from man.” When God looks upon Joshua (and the Jewish people) He sees them as clothed in spotless robes and acceptable to be in His presence.

This, of course, has a deeper application to all of God’s elect people from every age. Matthew Henry comments: “Christ loathed the filthiness of Joshua’s garments, yet did not put him away, but put them away. Thus God by his grace does with those whom he chooses to be priests to himself; he parts between them and their sins, and so prevents their sins parting between them and their God; he reconciles himself to the sinner, but not to the sin.”

And the angel of the LORD protested unto Joshua, saying, 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. (v6-7)

The Lord gives a solemn charge to Joshua. He delivered him (and the elect Jews) as, “*a brand plucked out of the fire*” to serve the Lord. Every one that God saves, He saves for service. They are to walk in God’s ways as a holy people and they will be rewarded in the future. Cole points out,

“The application for us is that God pours out His abundant blessings on those who walk in His ways and who minister as priests before Him in worship and prayer. Although it will not be ultimately fulfilled until the Millennium, we can experience a foretaste of it now. When we are right with God through faith in Jesus Christ, walking in holiness before Him, we will be at peace in His house, in our own homes, and with our neighbors. Peace with God is the key for peace with one another.”

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. 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. (v8-9)

Joshua (and the other priests, “*and thy fellows that sit before thee*”) here is revealed to be a type of the great Priest of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Saviour is pictured here by two other images – a branch and a stone. The branch is a familiar image of “*my servant*” the Messiah (cf. Isa. 42:1; 53:11; Jer. 23:5; 33:15). The Lord Jesus Christ is the root or branch of the lines of King David and Abraham.



The stone is a familiar image used also to describe the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Psa. 118:22; Isa. 28:16; Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:6). The Messiah is the One who is the Chief Cornerstone that the Church is built on but He also is the Stone that crushes His enemies. The seven eyes on the stone likely refer to the omniscience of the Messiah. By the means of the Servant Branch and Stone of Christ, the Lord promises, “*I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.*” This is by the

means of the Cross and will ultimately be fulfilled by the salvation of the Jews at the end of this age,

And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. (Zechariah 12:9-10)

This great day of salvation for the Jewish people has yet to be realised. But it is a consistent promise in Scripture,

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the father's sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. (Romans 11:25-29; cf. 2 Cor. 3:15-16)

In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree. (v10)

The final future of the Jews is a glorious one. God didn't bring them out of the Exile in Babylon to set them aside. A great future transformation will happen spiritually and physically to the nation of Israel. Salvation is followed by deliverance from their enemies and then the millennial reign of Christ on the earth for a thousand years. This era will be one when Jesus will rule with a rod of iron to maintain truth and righteousness. It will be one where the Jewish people will again be light to the Gentile world. Israel will be a holy nation and the Jews will be God's priests in the world. Today that is not true. The majority of the Jews reject Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Many aren't even religious.

In this future era, Jerusalem will become the centre of worship and Government, *"the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously."* (Isa. 24:23b) Jesus shall reign from David's throne with His saints. The resurrected glorified saints will be resurrected and then rewarded by ruling with Christ to enforce God's Word and adjudicate disputes. They also *"shall be priests of God and of Christ,"* (Rev. 20:6) as they lead in corporate worship and teach God's will. This earthly Millennial reign of Christ and His saints is not a new revelation. The Gospels explicitly point to it as a future event,

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. (Luke 1:32-33; cf. Acts 2:30; Isaiah 9:6-7)

And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matt. 19:28; cf. Daniel 7:27; Acts 1:6-8; 1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:9-10)

The reign of Christ over the earth from Jerusalem as Prince of Peace will bring a spiritual transformation over the earth. It will be a worldwide display of His glory like never before. Peace and justice will be ever present (Isaiah 2:2-4).



As the Prince of Peace is reigning, even the animal world will be greatly affected, *"The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD."* (Isaiah 65:25) John MacArthur sums up the radical changes,

"Politically and socially, the rule of Christ and His saints will be universal (Ps. 2:6-8; Dan. 2:35), absolute (Ps. 2:9; Isa. 11:4), and righteous (Isa. 11:3-5). Spiritually, their rule will be a time when the believing remnant of Israel is converted (Jer. 30:5-8; Rom. 11:26) and the nation is restored to the land God promised to Abraham (Gen. 13:14-15; 15:18). It will be a time when the Gentile nations also will worship the King (Isa. 11:9; Mic. 4:2; Zech. 14:16). The millennial rule of Christ and the saints will also be marked by the presence of righteousness and peace (Isa. 32:17) and joy (Isa. 12:3-4; 61:3, 7). Physically, it will be a time when the curse is lifted (Isa. 11:7-9; 30:23-24; 35:1-2, 7), when food will be plentiful (Joel 2:21-27), and when there will be physical health and well-being (Isa. 33:24; 35:5-6), leading to long life (Isa. 65:20).

For centuries mankind has spoken of an ideal society *utopia*. Man has failed to achieve that by man's efforts. Only the Perfect Man will bring true peace, justice, and rest. That will be when the Prince of Peace and King of Kings has defeated the Tribulation foes and rules in righteousness over this planet, *"And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one."* (Zech. 14:9; cf. Habk. 2:14)