

Mr. Clean

And the Blazing Brand Plucked from the Fire

- ¹ Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.
- ² And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?"
- ³ Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments.
- ⁴ And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments."
- ⁵ And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by.
- ⁶ And the angel of the LORD solemnly assured Joshua,
- ⁷ "Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here.
- ⁸ Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch.
- ⁹ For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the

LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.

¹⁰ In that day, declares the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree."

Zechariah 3:1-10

The History of the World

THE BBC TELLS THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD through thousands of archeological artifacts all located on one website. J.M. Roberts tells the history of the world in one fairly long book. Mel Brooks managed to tell it in a 92 minute movie. But God beats them all, for he incredibly summarizes the history of the world in a single chapter of the Bible. And God's take on it is quite different from the others, for his take talks about the things that truly matter.

In this amazing chapter we are swept up in the Grand Drama that runs from Genesis to Revelation, from the Garden of Eden to the Celestial City. We learn of evil and good—Satan and the Savior, sinners and saints, judgment and justification, sacrifices and being sanctified. Here we see heaven and earth, angels and men, the divine council and human judges, heavenly justice and earthly rule. Priests are here along with temples, baptism and clerical clothing. The Son is accompanied by the Spirit. There is law and

there is gospel, prophecy and fulfillment, accusations and rebukes, pardons and forgiveness, temporary reprieve and eternal peace and prosperity. The beginning and the end and everything that matters in between can be found in one incredible chapter of the Bible. We do well to read it, to hear it, to know it, to think on it, and to be changed by it.

Zechariah 3 stands as the centerpiece of Zechariah's night visions. It is the **fourth of seven visions**.¹ These seven visions happens to be parallel one another in the form of a magnificent, ever narrowing chiasm:

- A.** Nations of the World (1:7-17)
- B.** Judah and Israel (1:18-21)
- C.** Zion-Jerusalem (2:1-13)
- D.** **Holy of Holies (3:1-10)**
- C¹.** Zion-Jerusalem (4:1-14)
- B¹.** Judah and Israel (5:1-11)
- A¹.** Nations of the World (6:1-8)

As the night visions spiral their way into increasingly narrow geographical circles, from the world, to Israel, to Jerusalem, they find **their center in the Holy of Holies**.

¹ Some count eight, with there being two separate visions in ch. 5.

Then, the visions begin to recede away from the Holy of Holies, **back out** to Jerusalem, to Israel, and finally the world. Thus, the centerpiece of the seven visions also happens to take place in the very place where a person meets with God.²

Very curious to me is how two NT books, both written by the same author, follow this same pattern, but only when viewed as a whole. The Gospel of **Luke** begins with Jesus' birth in the context of world history and Roman rule. Then we find Jesus in Galilee. Then he moves down into Samaria and Judea. Finally, he goes to Jerusalem. His sequel, the book of **Acts**, begins with the church assembled in Jerusalem. From here they spread out, first to Judea, then Samaria, then the ends of the earth.³ This is deliberate by Luke, who I would argue even has this idea as his thesis statement in **Acts 1:8**.

This all means that the center of Luke-Acts is the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. This, for Luke, is the most important part. Curiously, this parallels Zechariah's center, and the focus of vision four, in some

² You can find this chiasm explained in Kline, *Glory in our Midst*, 95-96.

³ See Craig Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 142-43.

very remarkable ways. You can think of both as if they were an **hourglass** where the sands of history are all squeezed and funneled through the Lord Jesus Christ. But whereas Luke is looking backwards in time, Zechariah is looking forward, which makes it all the more remarkable.



Not only is Zechariah 3 narrowing in on the central moment of history, it begins and ends on histories edges. Like the chiasm that begins and ends at the far ends of the earth, this vision takes us to the far ends of the Bible. There are ideas at the **beginning** that remind us very much of Genesis. Perhaps the most prominent one is the appearance of Satan. There are ideas that reminds us of the very **end**. The last verse of the passage begins, “**In that day,**” and then gives us an image that reminds us of the bliss and peace that will be the age to come in the new heavens and new earth. These edges not only extend **horizontally** like a timeline, from the beginning and end of history. They also extend

vertically, taking us from heaven to earth and back to heaven again.

Setting Up the Law: The Heavenly Courtroom Scene

Let's take a look at the setting of the vision and try to grasp its relationship to the Garden of Eden and to heaven and then make application. It begins, "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him" (Zech 3:1). There are five people here. The First is Zechariah, who is being shown this vision by the now familiar "angel who was talking with me" from the previous visions.

Third is "Joshua the high priest." Ezra and Nehemiah, who are contemporaries of Zechariah, call him "Jeshua" (Ezra 2:2; 3:2; Neh 7:7; etc.), which is an alternate spelling for Joshua son of Nun as well (Neh 8:17). The LXX translates the name as Jesus (Ἰησοῦς) the high priest, which is, of course, completely fascinating in the sovereignty of God. Along with Zerubbabel, who we will meet in the next chapter, Haggai tells us, "And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of

Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God” (**Hag 1:14**). So Joshua was the Aaron’s successor in the days of Zechariah, a very important person, the high priest of Israel. But the temple had not yet been built.

If there is no temple, where is Zechariah seeing Joshua standing and why is he standing? First, **the where**. He is “**standing before the Angel of the LORD**,” who is the fourth person in this verse. Zechariah has stood before the Angel of the LORD before, so that doesn’t help us identify the place. But it does force us to see that here again we have the **preincarnate Jesus Christ** in a vision of Zechariah. That makes twice in four people that we have talked about the Lord Jesus. Finally, the fifth person—**Satan**—is standing at his right hand to accuse him (**Zech 3:1**). Satan and the Angel together allow us to see both where and why he is standing, if we know what we are looking at. If you know the setting, you know Joshua is standing as well.

The Divine Council

Joshua is standing because **he is on trial**. This is a **court room setting**. It is a *heavenly* courtroom setting. The scene takes place in heaven. Using different biblical language, this is a **divine council** scene. Listen to the judicial language as **Psalm 82:1** begins, “... God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment” (**Ps 82:1**). Look at the courtroom described by Daniel, “As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened” (**Dan 7:9-10**). Isaiah describes the place further. “... I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple” (**Isa 6:1**). The divine council holds its meetings in the heavenly temple, in the **Holy of Holies** where God himself sits.

It is **filled with heavenly beings**. Isaiah continues, “Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet,

and with two he flew” (2). (These beings stand near a searing hot altar, doing their priestly service in the temple [6]). The prophet Micaiah refers to Daniel’s thousands and thousands as the “host of heaven” when he was lifted up to the place (1 Kgs 22:19). He also describes there being “spirits” here (21). Psalm 82 again refers to “gods” (*elohim*) being here, and a little later in that same Psalm refers to them as the “sons of the Most High” (Ps 82:6). This is simply a twist on a different phrase used of the same beings in Job 1-2, in a passage that is very similar to ours. “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them” (Job 1:6; also 2:1). Every one of these passages are divine council scenes, and in every single case there are heavenly beings, and there is some kind of court scene taking place.

The divine council is, according to Bible dictionaries, the place where heavenly beings, particularly the ruling heavenly beings—the *elohim*—administer the affairs of the cosmos.⁴ Of course, if there’s some kind of a crime taking

⁴ Michael S. Heiser, “Divine Council,” in Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings (ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns; Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 112; E. Theodore Mullen Jr., “Divine

place, part of this administration means doing the business of a court. When Satan, or more literally the *satan*, is in the picture, we know that we are in for a first rate episode of *Law & Order: DCU* (Divine Council Unit). Why?

Satan and the Court

Between the OT and the NT, the term “satan” came to be used as a proper name for the archenemy of God. And so this is who we find the NT identifying as the person in the Garden (2 Cor 11:3, 14; Rev 12:9), even though Genesis never calls him Satan, but the Nachash (The Serpentine Shining One). In Eden we find all kinds of heavenly beings: The LORD (who I believe is the Angel of the LORD), Cherubim, “stones of fire” (from Ezek 28), and again Satan. What are they all doing here? This is actually the very first divine council scene.

But here we also find Adam, for God “put”⁵ him here. Why would God put Adam in the midst of so many heavenly beings in the Most Holy Place of that time? Because God gave Adam *dominion* over the earth, and dominion is a function of the council. Psalm 8, reflecting

Assembly,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 213; etc.

⁵ This term comes up in Zech 3:5 when Joshua is clothed and the turban is put on his head. The verb is often used in religious and cultic contexts.

on the heavens and stars and heavenly beings says that God made man a little lower than the *elohim*, yet crowned *him* with glory and honor, giving him dominion (**Ps 8:5-6**). This is council talk that Hebrews will take up, and we will return to it later in Zechariah as well.⁶ This dominion included serving and guarding the Eden, the Most Holy Place, and these Hebrew terms are used again and again for priestly duty. So think Joshua and the Most Holy Place and Satan in Zechariah 3 and you have a great parallel.

In Genesis 3, we find Satan doing what he does—testing and tempting, tricking and deceiving and all at the sovereign discretion of God. This is what Satan does throughout the book of Job, behind the scenes. But before Satan became a proper name, *satan* simply meant an **accuser**. This is what he does at the beginning of Job. In **Zechariah 3:1**, the word appears twice, once as a noun (Satan or the *satan*) and the second time as a verb (“to accuse”).

Properly speaking, *satan* is a **function** rather than a title in the OT. It is what someone “does.” For example,

⁶ In the Bible, this theme begins to be teased out in **Deut 32:43** (LXX; see the ESV) where God commands the angels to “worship him.” Again in **Ps 97:7** God commands the *elohim* to “worship him.” See the end of the sermon.

humans can be called the *satan*: (**Psalm 109:6**). The Angel of the LORD can be called the *satan* (**Num 22:22**). It is always “the” *satan* because it is *the* accuser.⁷ The *satan* has a unique role on the divine council in that his job is to be a kind of **prosecuting attorney** before the court of heaven. Because of this, someone has pointed out that, “**When Satan talks to us about God, he lies, but when he talks to God about us, he tells the truth!**”⁸ He has to. He is standing before the Throne of Heaven.

Joshua and the Court

OK, so we have a courtroom scene and Satan has taken up the prosecution’s case. **Why is Joshua the focus?** The answer is because Joshua, as high priest, **represents the people**. This was evident from the clothing that the high priest was to wear. He had something called the Breastpiece of Judgment that he wore over his ephod. It had 12 gemstones on it which represented the twelve tribes of Israel (**Ex 28:21**). The high priest was a representative. And here we have the idea of covenant representation

⁷ Perhaps only in 1 Chron 21:1 is *satan* a proper name, but even this is disputable, as its parallel in 2 Sam 24:1 is the LORD.

⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Heroic*, “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: ChariotVictor Pub., 1997), 98.

explicit in the Bible.⁹ The very same idea is found in Eden with Adam.

What would the accusations have been in Zechariah 3? Though speculative, it is probable that it would have focused on the fact that Joshua, like all of Israel, had **broken covenant** with Yahweh. This is symbolized in **vs. 3** with Joshua's "**filthy garments.**" Joshua and his people were sinners and they had acted in treachery against the Court of Heaven, and particularly Yahweh who was their God and who sits as King of the council. He may also have shown how **God had judged them** all guilty through earlier prophets and thus condemned them to the curses of the covenant by sending them into exile.¹⁰ And perhaps there were other particular sins that he knew about that he could have brought before the court.

Verse 1 concludes the "law" section of the chapter. Poor Joshua, the priest and representative of Israel. What chance does he have with Satan accusing him? The same as Adam and Eve had, both in the heat of temptation and before the throne of God. Before continuing on, it is

⁹ The parallels between Adam and the high priest show that Adam, likewise, was representing a people.

¹⁰ See Kline, 99.

imperative that you understand that **Joshua is you**. Joshua's roots go back to Adam the Priest, and from Adam springs the fountain of death to all of his posterity. All in Adam die.

This first verse is not only meant to get an Israelite thinking about their own past behavior. It is meant to get the church thinking too. The dirt and filth that is sin, and in the present evil days this sin knows virtually no bounds, is unacceptable in every sense in the eyes of the LORD. To anyone not trusting in Christ by faith alone, you stand before the court of heaven trusting in yourself alone, and woe to the person who thinks they will stand on that day.

Listen just three lists from the NT among many: “**The works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God**” (**Gal 5:19-21**). “In the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not

loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” (2Ti 3:1-5). And finally, the one the Apostle begins Romans with, “Their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men ... God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless” (Rom 1:26-31). Is there anyone present who can say they have no engaged in such behavior? Then you are dirty, wearing filthy garments and unfit for the Most Holy Place. You must, like Adam, be cast out. The result is death, both physical and spiritual. And it is forever.

Here Comes the Gospel

The purpose of this is to bring you low, to drive you to your knees, to make you understand and acknowledge your sin. But behold, the **Gospel of Jesus Christ**. After Satan concludes his speech, the prosecuting attorney sits down and the defense attorney begins. The content of his speech begins with a sharp rebuke. “**And the LORD said to Satan, ‘The LORD rebuke you O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!’**” (**Zech 3:2**).

The LORD rebuking Satan is very similar to the LORD **rebuking the waves** and waters (where Leviathan lives). “**Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, by my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a desert; their fish stink for lack of water and die of thirst**” (**Isa 50:2**). “**Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?**” (**Isa 51:9-10**). In the NT, it is Jesus who rebukes the waves and the wind. “**Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?**”

Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm” (Matt 8:26).

What’s so interesting about this to me is how it says, “The LORD said to Satan, ‘The LORD rebuke you, O Satan.’” Do we have two Yahweh’s here again? Jude (using a passage from a lost Pseudepigrapha that itself is using Zechariah) says that “Michael would not dare to bring a blasphemous charge against the Devil, but instead said, ‘The LORD rebuke you’” (Jude 9). My tendency is to think there are two Yahwehs, for it is the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem, and choosing is normally the job of the Father, though I also know that Christ does his own rebuking, and so there may only be one Yahweh in this verse.¹¹ Such is the ongoing mystery of Yahweh in Zechariah.

¹¹ **Going Deeper:** I don’t want to make too much of this distinction, since Jesus and the Father are both God, though Jesus does talk about having a people given to him by the Father. The question in Zechariah 3:2 is, does the Angel Yahweh refuse to do the rebuking, even though he is Yahweh, instead, giving that job to the Father? Or, is the Angel Yahweh the one who is the rebuking Yahweh? The later would fit with Jesus rebuking in the waters and wind. The other question is whether Michael is the proper name for the Angel of the LORD (Kline, etc.) or merely a created angel (Heiser, etc.). Jude seems to see Michael as separate from Yahweh, since he would not bring a charge personally against the devil. However, if Zechariah 3:2 has two Yahweh’s in mind, that would fit Zechariah, and Michael would still be the Angel of the LORD. If Michael is not the Angel of the LORD, then it is strange that there would be a comparison between him and the Angel Yahweh from Zechariah. But either way, it doesn’t help us solve the question of whether there are two Yahweh’s in Zech 3:2.

At any rate, the LORD shows his great power over The Accuser. And this is important, for when we come to the NT, we find that in the work of Christ, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God” (Rev 12:10), or as it says in John, “I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged” (John 16:10-11). Judgment. Sounds like something that courts do. Because Satan has been judged, he can no longer accuse on a legal basis before the Court of Heaven anyone who trusts in the one who defeated him. The work of Christ on the cross was the great *Christus Victor*—to free people from the captivity and dominion of the devil.

But that’s only the beginning of the good news. The defeat of Satan which removed his legal authority over the nations is just the start. And make no mistake, what we are about to see is all about the work of Christ at the cross, this time not just as *Christus Victor*, but as the great *Substitutionary Atonement*. It begins, “Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?” (Zech 3:2). The language reminds us of Isaiah in the heaven council having a hot coal from

the altar of heaven touch his mouth. But this is no coal. It refers to Joshua himself. He is the brand plucked from the fire—the fires of God’s wrath. How so?

It tells us, “Now Joshua was standing before the Angel, clothed with filthy garments” (3). These refer to the tattered and torn priestly robes that had been dragged around during 70 years of captivity. Symbolically, they represent sin. “And the Angel said to those who were standing before him [that is, the host of heaven in the court], “Remove the filthy garments from him” (4). By what authority? By his own authority. But on what basis? Simply because he rebuked Satan? No, Satan’s rebuke came about because of something else.

“Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.’ And I said, ‘Let them put a clean turban on his head.’” (4). First, just note that *the Angel* is taking away his iniquity. But who can forgive sins, except God alone (Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21)? Yet, here the Bible plainly teaches that the Angel can forgive sins, and the Bible approves of it (see also Ex 23:21).

Second, the picture here of being clothed with new garments is essentially the picture of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a work called “justification.” Justification is

where a person is **declared not guilty** in a court of law. It is forensic, legal. They are guilty, but they are declared not guilty. It also happens to be the doctrine upon which the Reformation was built. Luther said, “**If this article [of justification] stands, the church stands; if this article collapses, the church collapses.**”¹²

Justification is not according to our works, for our works are filthy, like Joshua’s garments. Rather, it *leads* to good works. It is not sanctification, but it *leads* to sanctification. It is not a righteous life, but it *leads* to a righteous life through union with Christ. It does so because through good news God changes our hearts and declares to those who trust in Christ alone that they are declared not guilty. This is all grace. Thus, the Angel in **Zechariah 3:7** says to Joshua after he has received forgiveness and the new garments, “**Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here.**” Do you hear how this is **not before he was forgiven, but after.**

¹²WA 40/3.352.3. Cited by Justin Taylor, *LUTHER’S SAYING: “JUSTIFICATION IS THE ARTICLE BY WHICH THE CHURCH STANDS AND FALLS,”* *The Gospel Coalition* (August 31, 2011), <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2011/08/31/luthers-saying/>, last accessed 7-17-2015.

So with Martin Luther you ought to say, “Let us confess that all our works and righteousness ... are nothing but loss and refuse. And let us tread underfoot and utterly abhor, as a polluted garment and the deadly poison of the devil, all the power of free will, all the wisdom and righteousness of the world...”¹³

Third, this is essentially the Angel of the LORD recommissioning Joshua the high priest according to the ordination ceremony of **Exodus 29**. It mentions forgiveness. There were **sacrifices** to be offered in that ceremony. It mentions clothing. There is a **clothing** in that ceremony. It was done at the prerogative of God, not the man. Same thing here. About the only thing not mentioned here explicitly from that ceremony is the washing/**baptism**, but the clean clothes does imply to some degree a kind of washing, as does having his sins forgiven.

All of this is done by the heavenly court attendants, in much the same way that the Seraphim touched Isaiah’s mouth with the hot coals and cleansed him in his divine council experience. Meanwhile, the Angel of the LORD was standing by (**Zech 3:5**), overseeing the whole thing. As they are clothing him, after his sins have been forgiven,

¹³ *Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, p. 41; translated by Jaroslav Pelikan.

after his priestly work is symbolically reinvested with divine authority from heaven, the Angel solemnly assured Joshua (6). In other words, he **reconfirmed the covenant promises** anew, which is something all Israel needed after coming out of captivity, having been sold and put away by the LORD for breaking the covenant. Jesus also does this for his people when they gather together to take the Supper, for it is covenant renewal for people who have broken covenant.

Again, looking at the language, we see him say, “**If you walk in my ways and keep my charge.**” This is language that goes back to **Abraham and Isaac**. In another covenant renewal Isaac was told, “**Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws**” (**Gen 26:5**). Any reading of the story of Abraham will show you that he only did this, at best, sporadically. But the life he lived he lived **by faith**, and believed God who counted it as righteousness (**Gen 15:6**). That, again, is justification.

After this, the promise ensues, “**Then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here.**” This is an amazing promise and returns us again to Adam

being given a seat on the divine council. For that is where we are at in this vision. Giving Joshua charge of the courts is not merely an earthly right, for “don’t you know that we will judge angels” (1 Cor 6:3)?

Remember again, God made man a little lower than the angels, but crowned him with honor and gave him dominion (this time see Heb 2:7 as it quotes Ps 8:5-6). Now, the Angel promises this right to judge even the heavenly beings of the divine council if he will walk in his ways and keep his charge. Joshua the high priest will have access to heaven itself, to the house and throne of God, and to all those who stand in attendance in the Court of Heaven.

Promise of the Future

But Proverbs says, “He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD” (Prov 17:15). Joshua is wicked. Israel was wicked. You and I are wicked. He is only being pronounced clean. So how can the Angel justify a wicked man and not be wicked in doing so? This is the vital question. All of our religion hangs on it.

What is so important and amazing about all of these things done to Joshua is that as we read it with the rest of Scripture, we know that **Joshua as a high priest is actually a type of Christ himself**. They bear the same name. They bear the same title. In other words, we get here snapshot of the New Testament life and ministry of Jesus—amazingly not only a type of Joshua, but actually the Angel of the LORD who forgives Joshua made human flesh. And this becomes the justification (pardon the pun) for how the Angel could justify Joshua without the Justice of the High Court and its Judge being compromised. The vision views the future, and the future allows him to justify Joshua. Let's think about this as it unfolds.

“Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch” (**Zech 3:8**). Who are these “men” with Joshua? They are most likely the other **priests** he was serving with, men listed in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 8. They may also have included **Zerubbabel** who will show up in the next chapter, and who was the governor of Judah descended from the line of David.

How would these men serve as signs? As for the priests, it is their very existence and renewed work in the temple that now serves as a sign of divine favor towards the people. One commentator writes, “The priests then were the signs of the coming messianic age” and another (S. R. Driver, 197) says, “The restored priesthood is a pledge of the approach of the Messianic kingdom.”¹⁴ Why, because the Messiah would be the ultimate perfect Joshua-Jeshua-Jesus, the High Priest of Israel.

As for Zerubbabel, perhaps if he is in attendance, he would also serve as a sign of something else—God’s promise to David that he would have a seed sit on the throne forever. This is the meaning of the word “branch.” This word “branch” was used throughout the ANE and in the Bible to refer to kings.¹⁵ Isaiah says, “Here shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse [father of king David], and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and

¹⁴ Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, vol. 32, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 200.

¹⁵ On the ANE see George L. Klein, *Zechariah*, vol. 21B, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), 144 and John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): The Minor Prophets, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 217–218.

might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear” (Isa 11:1-3). The Spirit rested upon our Lord at his baptism, which was his high priestly ordination equivalent to Joshua’s (but without sin). And after his baptism, the Lord Jesus began his judicial ministry judging rightly in many ways regarding the law, sin, disputes, uncleanness, demon-possession, and more.

Jeremiah is also important. He says, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness'” (Jer 23:5-6; cf. 33:15-16). Jeremiah predicts that the LORD himself will be this Branch. To put that in Zechariah 3 terms, the Angel who is clothing the high priest Joshua would become the High Priest Jesus Christ. What an amazing thing Zechariah 3 is from so many perspectives.

Zechariah sees things so clearly, his vision is pristine. “For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on

a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.” This “single day” refers to Jesus’ death for sin on the cross as both the priest and the sacrifice. That is the day his death made atonement for sin once-for-all. No other sacrifice would be needed. The temple in Jerusalem would obsolete, and the High Priest went into the very place we are seeing him in Zechariah 3, into heaven itself to offer his sacrifice in the Heavenly House (**Heb 9:24**).

But Zechariah sees even beyond this. He sees these “seven eyes.” Revelation, which has so much to say about Zechariah 3, but which we do not have time to look at today, interprets these eyes saying that the “seven eyes ... are the seven spirits of God” (**Rev 5:6**). We will see them again in the next chapter of Zechariah where they are associated with the Holy Spirit. At the very least it is a way of talking about God’s “omniscience [and] especially divine sovereignty, ‘that he may strongly support those whose heart is completely his [**2 Chron 16:9**].”¹⁶

¹⁶ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 355.

The stone here gets us thinking about the eyes of the Spirit. This particular stone probably refers to **the turban** that was put on Joshua's head. In Exodus, Moses was instructed very meticulously how to make the priestly garments. We've seen that he had twelve stones woven into his breastpiece to represent the tribes of Israel.

On his crown or turban, there was a **golden plate**. This plate may have been shaped like a blossom, as the word "plate" and "blossom" and "crown" (*sîs*) are all the same thing. Amazingly, "**Ps 132:18 ... foretells the blossoming (verb *sîs*) of the crown of the Messiah whom God makes to branch from David's line.**"¹⁷ Engraved on this plate, **as if it were itself a stone being engraved**, was the phrase, "**Holy to the LORD**" (**Ex 28:36**). The idea is that any time the LORD **saw with his eyes** the priest stand before him doing his holy work in the house of God, he would be acceptable. This seems to be what is going on as Zechariah is using the same language of the stone "**set before**" Joshua.¹⁸ The language of this engraving on this stone and crown is also very similar to "**The LORD is our Righteousness.**"

¹⁷ Kline, 122.

¹⁸ The same verb *ntn* is used in Exodus 29:6, "**put** the holy crown on the turban" and Zech 3:9, "... on the stone that I have **set** before Joshua."

The purpose of the eyes, therefore, is connected to this Heavenly counterpart of the temple, where the LORD is enthroned, even as he was in Jerusalem before he left in the exile. Kline writes, “‘Eyes of the king’ was a title for certain officials in Persia and elsewhere whose duty was to be informants. Often they would be accusers, a [human counterpart] of Satan. But in their general function of surveillance these royal officials provided a model ... with a view to ordering all things for the good of his people (2 Chr 16:9; Ezra 5:5; cf. Zech 4:10; 1 Kgs 8:29; Ps 11:4; Jer 24:6; 1 Pet 3:12). In Zechariah 3 the seven eyes of the Lord submit to the Angel-Judge a counter-report to that of Satan. [According to Rev 5:6 it is Christ, the Lamb, who has the seven Spirit-eyes and according to Zech 1:10, 11 it is the messianic Angel who sends the surveillance agents on mission and to whom they report.] Satan’s eyes fastened on Joshua’s soiled garments but the seven eyes of Yahweh look on the stone on Joshua’s forehead, the stone that wins acceptance before the throne in heaven.”¹⁹ To put it in terms of the prophecy of the verse, the seven eyes sees the coming Messiah and are pleased with him.

¹⁹ Kline, 123.

The last verse of the vision carries us on into the time of Pentecost and beyond. Pentecost is, of course, when the Lord Jesus sent his Spirit to his people. Thus, the “eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him” (2Ch 16:9). He becomes their sign and seal (1Co 1:22; Eph 1:13) and they are baptized and clothed with Christ. Therefore, “In that day, declares the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree” (Zech 3:10).

This verse recalls the height of the Davidic kingdom under Solomon. “And Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon” (1Ki 4:25). But it looks forward to the reign and rule of the Priest-King Messiah Jeshua. Today, it speaks spiritually to us upon whom the fulfillment of this vision comes. We rest in Christ, we come to him for rest. He gives us peace in our hearts, forgiveness of sins. He justifies us and sends us his Spirit. “Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died-- more than that, who was raised-- who

is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (Rom 8:33-34).

Tomorrow, when he returns, he will judge his enemies one last time. He will give his people the full realization of his kingdom in the new heavens and earth. He will make us judges of angels, and bring us back to the council and the seat that he won in his victory at the cross. For as a man it speaks of him, “Let all God's angels worship him” (Heb 1:6). Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire. Men will receive their new bodies. Some will go to paradise, others to perdition. This is all of history woven into a single amazing chapter of the Bible, beginning in Eden, funneled through our Savior, and extending back out to the far ends of the world through the proclamation of the Gospel so that people will come running to Christ for refuge. By God’s will, predicted all those years before hand, at the work of the Angel who became flesh, who was our Priest and who offered himself for us, and by his Holy Spirit who sees and knows all things, it will be done.