

Zechariah 3:1-10 – Joshua and the Branch

Zechariah chapters 1 and 2 contained the first 3 of 8 visions. In the first vision the earth was at rest. That was not good because the nations who harmed Israel needed to be judged. God promised that he would return to Jerusalem and that the temple and the city would be built. In the second vision, Zechariah saw four horns and four craftsmen. This vision was a confirmation that the nations which scattered Judah and Israel would be judged. Chapter 2 contained a vision and an oracle. The vision was of a man who went out to measure Jerusalem. God basically said that Jerusalem would be too large to measure and that God would protect the city and dwell in it.

Read Zechariah 3:1-5.

The first part of Zechariah's fourth vision involved Joshua the high priest. Who was Joshua? In the prophetic books of Haggai and Zechariah, he was called Joshua. In the historical books of Ezra and Nehemiah he was called Jeshua. See Haggai 1:1, 12, 14; 2:2, 4, Ezra 2:2, 36; 3:2, 8-9; 4:3; 5:2. From verse 1, who else was in the vision besides Joshua? Most commentators see in this verse a picture of a court scene where Joshua is the defendant and Satan is the prosecuting attorney. Almost all translations have "Satan" while a rare few have "the Accuser" or "the Adversary". (3:1)

What does God say to Satan, the prosecuting attorney? How was Joshua described at the end of verse 2? Most commentators understand Joshua as the brand plucked out of the fire and that it is a reference to Joshua's release from exile. (3:2)

In verse 3, what did the filthy garments symbolize? The word "filthy" here and in verse 4 are the only occurrences of the word in the OT. The related noun can mean "excrement" or "vomit" [Anthony R. Petterson, *Haggai-Malachi; Apollos Old Testament Commentary Series, Volume 25*]. (3:3)

What were the instructions of the angel to those standing before him? ESV, NIV, among others translate "he" as "the angel". Other translations like KJV and NASB translate the word as "he" and leave it to the reader to determine who "he" refers to. Is this an angel speaking or is it God? What did the removal of the filthy garments signify? As Mark 2:7 says, "who can forgive sins but God alone?" (3:4)

In verse 5, what did Zechariah suggest? What did the clean turban and "pure vestments" represent? See Haggai 2:13. (3:4-5)

Read Zechariah 3:6-10.

In verse 6 there is debate over whether the angel of Yahweh “solemnly assured” Joshua or whether Joshua was “charged” / “admonished”. The Hebrew word can have either meaning. ESV has “solemnly assured”. NASB has “admonished”. NIV has “gave this charge”. KJV has “protested”. (3:6)

In verse 7 there is debate over whether there are 2 or 4 conditions for Joshua to meet before receiving any promises. ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV all understand the verse as having 2 conditions. The conditions are what follow “if” and come before “then”. What are the two conditions Joshua was charged with? What was Joshua promised if he kept the conditions at the beginning of the verse? Note that the first two promises / privileges can only take place if the temple is built. (3:7)

What is the “right of access”? KJV has “places to walk”. NIV has “a place”. Who are “those standing here”? Some commentators understand the end of verse 7 as referring to the Day of Atonement when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year. Others understand it to mean access to the heavenly council. (3:7)

In verse 8, who are the “friends” who sit before Joshua? ESV and NASB have “friends”. KJV has “fellows”. NIV has “associates”. Most commentators believe that these friends are Joshua’s fellow priests. Joshua and his friends are a sign. What are they a sign of? NIV has “symbolic”. NKJV has “wondrous sign”. Who is “my servant the Branch”? This is from Anthony R. Petterson. “The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel each liken the house of David to a tree cut down or severed in the judgment of the exile, and from which a new growth will come and grow into something vast (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5–6; 33:14–18; Ezek. 17:3–6, 22–23).” It is interesting to note that this verse ties together a priest and a Davidic king suggesting that the “Branch” will have a priestly function. (3:8)

The stone in verse 9 is difficult to interpret. Is this a stone to be placed in the new temple? Is this a gem to be worn on Joshua’s priestly garments? We are not told what the inscription is although some believe that the inscription is found at the end of verse 9. This stone is tied to the promise of God that he “will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day”. While this may invoke thoughts of the Day of Atonement, the fact that this event is tied to “the Branch” looks forward to something greater. How was this prophecy fulfilled? See Zechariah 13:1 and 12:10. (3:9)

The Day of Atonement is a day of fasting. The day mentioned in verses 9 and 10 is not the Day of Atonement. What does verse 10 signify? See 1 Kings 4:25 and Micah 4:4. (3:10)