

## The Book

- Zechariah's ministry took place in the time of Israel's restoration from Babylonian captivity.
- Approximately 75 years had passed since Habakkuk and Jeremiah had predicted the invasion of Judah by the Babylonian army of King Nebuchadnezzar.
- When their "hard service" (Isa 40:2) in Babylonia was completed, God influenced Cyrus, the Persian king, to allow the Hebrews to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple (Isa 44:28).
  - According to Ezra 2, a large group (about fifty thousand) did return in 538–537 b.c. under the civil leadership of Zerubbabel (the governor) and the religious leadership of Joshua (the high priest). This group completed the foundation of the temple early in 536 b.c. (Ezra 3:8–13). But several obstacles arose that slowed and finally halted the construction.
  - The rebuilding seems to have been hindered from 536 to about 530
  - The construction was resumed in 520 b.c., and the temple was finished in 516 b.c.
- During the years 519–518 B.C., while the Temple was being restored, **Zechariah's ministry took various forms**. He was **granted eight visions** which were designed to counter the feelings of weakness and hopelessness that sapped the effectiveness of the covenant community.
  - The visions showed that the Lord had not forgotten his people, and that he would protect them, overthrow their enemies and provide for all the needs of his own people.
- The third aspect of Zechariah's ministry was a response to a question from some Jews who were wondering how they should act in the changed circumstances of restoration to the land.

## The Occasion

Approximately **fifty thousand former exiles** had arrived in Jerusalem and the nearby towns in 538–537 b.c., with high hopes of resettling the land and rebuilding the temple.

- Immediately they set up the altar of burnt offering (Ezra 3:1–6).
- They resumed worship and restored the sacrificial ritual that had been suspended during the seventy years of exile in Babylonia.
- The people then laid the foundation of the temple in the second month of the second year of their return (Ezra 3:8–13).

- But their passion and activity soon met with opposition in various forms.
- So the reconstruction of the temple ground to a halt and did not begin again till 520 b.c. (Ezra 4:24).

**The Purpose of Zechariah** was to rebuke the people and motivate and encourage them to complete the rebuilding of the temple.

### **Zechariah's visions apparently shifted from**

1. A **valley outside Jerusalem** ( 1:7–21)
2. To an **observation point within the city** (third vision, chap. 2)
3. To the **courts of the temple** itself (fourth and fifth visions, chaps. 3–4).

The first **three** visions **pictured Israel's external deliverance from Captivity.**

- Her **expansion**, and the **material prosperity** of the land.
- The **fourth vision** (chap. 3) deals with Israel's internal cleansing from sin and reinstatement into her priestly office and functions.

### **Context**

The temple had three parts: the outer court, the inner court, and the holy of holies. The holy of holies was completely surrounded by a thick veil.

- Only one person on one day of the year was allowed to go into the holy of holies: the high priest of Israel on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.
- **Zechariah was experiencing a vision from the center of the temple**, inside the holy of holies, and he saw Joshua the high priest standing before the Lord on Yom Kippur.

An enormous **amount of preparation** took place for the Day of Atonement.

- A week before the high priest was taken away from his home and into a place where he was completely alone.
- Clean food was brought to him, and he'd wash his body and prepare his heart.

The **night before** the Day of Atonement he didn't go to bed.

- He stayed up all night praying and reading God's Word to purify his soul.

Then on Yom Kippur he bathed head to toe and dressed in pure, unstained **white linen**.

- Then he went into the holy of holies and offered an animal sacrifice to God to atone, or pay the penalty for, **his own sins**.

After that he came out and bathed again, and **new white linen was put on him**.

- And he went in again, this time sacrificing for **the sins of the priests**.

He would come out **a third time**, and he bathed again from head to toe and they **dressed him in brand-new pure linen**.

- And he went into the holy of holies and atoned for the sins of all the people.

This was all **done in public**.

- The temple was crowded, and those in attendance watched closely.
- There was a thin screen, and he bathed behind it
- They saw him bathe, dress, go in, come back out.
- He was their representative before God.
- They're cheering him on.
- They were very concerned about making sure that everything was done properly and with purity because he represented them before God.

## **Zechariah 3:1-7**

**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**.

### **Joshua**

- The high priest at the time of the Return.
- His grandfather had been high priest at the time of the capture of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.
- His father had been taken captive to Babylon.
- Joshua himself was born in Babylon and returned to Palestine.
- He represented all the priesthood of Israel, and he also represented the people of Israel.

### **Angel of the Lord**

- He represents the Lord; indeed, he is the Lord.
- His presence sanctifies (Ex. 3:5; Josh. 5:15).
- He speaks as God (Gen. 22:12)
- He is identified with God (Judg. 13:22)
- He accepts divine worship (Josh. 5:13–15; Judg. 6:20–22; 13:19–21).
- The Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ.

## Satan

- Satan' means 'an adversary' or 'accuser' (Rev 12:10)

When people think of the Devil, they think of the Tempter, but **that's not ordinarily the way the Bible thinks of the Devil**. That's really **not** what the Bible teaches is his main job. His **main job is to be an accuser**.

- The word Satan means **prosecutor, a prosecuting attorney**.

**There is a courtroom.**

The reason we're so **deeply insecure** is there is a courtroom and **there is an accuser** and there is a **bar of justice** and we **actually are being accused there**.

Your **own experience tells you**.

- Why is it, do you think, that **old sins and failures** flashback with such **vividness sometimes?**

Our **guilt is not just a memory**. Somebody **alive** is **continually telling about us**.

- Somebody is actually bringing it up again and again
- Deep down inside **we know we should be perfect**, and somebody keeps telling us.

There's a **court before** which **we all stand**.

- There's a **justice with which we all must deal**.
- There's a **standard we've all violated**, and we **all know it**.

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?"

- The Angel of the Lord rebuked Satan, not because Satan's accusations were false, but because of God's gracious love for His people Israel.

- Although the attack is against his people, in **reality it is the Lord himself who is being challenged.**

### Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?

- Joshua and the people have been undergoing the horrific **experience of being in the fire, which symbolizes divine punishment.**
- They were **not able to remove themselves from the fire.**
- They **would have been totally consumed had not the hand of divine mercy been outstretched to rescue them** before they were burned to ashes.
- Those **recently snatched from the fire are like a charred stick.**
  - The Jews had picked up many sticks like this as they cleared the rubble from the Temple site.

### Stick out of the fire

- Once the fire is out, the stick is still pretty dirty and smudgy when you touch the stick, but the fact is the stick's fire is gone.

### What does that mean?

- If a stick is in the fire, it stays burning.
- If you pull a stick out of the fire it may burn for a while, but it can't keep burning on its own. It will go out.
- Once it goes out it's still charred, it's still polluted, but the fire is out.

Jesus is saying **"I have taken this one out of the fire of sin."**

- The **condemnation** is gone.
- The **guilt** is gone.
- The **pollution** remains.

That means the **guilt of sin** is gone, the **condemnation of sin** is gone, but the **presence of sin** is still **there.**

You have to realize what Jesus is saying is, **"Yes, there's still sin in your heart, but it no longer can bring you into condemnation.**

**When the high priest went before God,** there wasn't a speck on him; he was as pure as pure can be.

- Only if you understand that do you realize why the next lines of the prophecy in Zechariah 3 were so shocking: Zechariah saw Joshua the high priest standing before the presence of God in the holy of

holies—but Joshua’s garments were covered in excrement. He was absolutely defiled. Zechariah couldn’t believe his eyes.

God was giving Zechariah a prophetic vision so that he could see us the way **God sees us**.

- In spite of all our efforts to be pure, to be good, to be moral, to cleanse ourselves, God sees our hearts, and our hearts are full of filth.

**3** Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with **filthy garments**.

- Filthy’ is a very strong word that *indicates ‘smeared with human excrement’*.
- Leviticus 22:3 commanded that an unclean priest was to be cut off
- The official dress of the high priest had been divinely designed to give him dignity and honour. Ex. 28:2
- He is unfit to stand before the Lord and worship him. ***And if that was true of their representative, then it was equally true of the people.***
  - How could the Holy One accept the worship of rebels? They are unworthy to appear before the Lord and to receive his blessing.
- Satan was seeking to thwart God’s purpose, or to suggest that in some way the divine choice of Jerusalem was wrong.
- God had given them great promises, but they were painfully unaware of their own unworthiness to inherit those promises and of the inability of the priests to rectify the situation on their behalf.

This concept of **filthy garments** is trying to get across the fact that **all of us are deeply insecure about whether or not we’re acceptable**.

**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.

- The word **‘sin’, or iniquity,**= what was twisted or bent away from the truth.
- **‘Turban’** is not the usual word for what the high priest wore on his head.
  - It denotes something grander.

- The usual headdress consisted of a linen strip wound round the head and tied to it was a plate of pure gold with the inscription: Holy To The Lord (Ex. 28:36).
- The prophet requested this addition so that **there would be no doubt about Joshua's acceptability as the one presenting the offerings of the people.**
- The Angel—does not dismiss or minimize the disruption and pollution caused by sin.

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.

- This language which suggests that Joshua's **sense of guilt had been a burden weighing him down**, and now that it is declared removed he **knows where he stands in relation to God** and is able to **serve him effectively**
- The Angel of the Lord takes action that Joshua (and Israel) cannot take for themselves.

## Pointing to Jesus on the Cross

### Ray Dillard:

- Centuries later, another Joshua showed up, another Yeshua.
- Jesus, Yeshua, Joshua—it's the same name in Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew.
- Another Joshua showed up, and he staged his own Day of Atonement.
- One week beforehand, Jesus began to prepare.
- And the night before, he didn't go to sleep—but what happened to Jesus was exactly the reverse.
  - Instead of cheering him on, nearly everyone he loved betrayed, abandoned, or denied him.
  - And when he stood before the Father, instead of receiving words of encouragement, the Father forsook him.
  - Instead of being clothed in rich garments, he was stripped of the only garment he had, he was beaten, and he was killed naked.
- God clothed Jesus in our sin. He took our penalty, our punishment so that we, like Joshua, the high priest, can put on Pure linen—perfectly clean—without stain or blemish.