

Zechariah Chapter 3 — Joshua Cleansed and the Coming Branch

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Zechariah Chapter 3 is one of the clearest Old Testament pictures of guilt, accusation, cleansing, restoration, and the coming Messiah.

The chapter opens like a courtroom scene.

Joshua the high priest stands before the angel of the Lord.

Satan stands nearby to accuse him.

Joshua is wearing filthy garments.

He has no defense to offer.

Yet the Lord intervenes.

Satan is rebuked.

Joshua's filthy garments are removed.

His guilt is taken away.

Clean garments are placed upon him.

Then God gives Joshua a charge to walk faithfully and introduces one of the great Messianic titles of Scripture:

The Branch.

This chapter moves from **accusation** to **cleansing**, from **cleansing** to **service**, and from **service** to **Messianic hope**.

Its central message is powerful:

Satan accuses, but God cleanses and restores those whom He has chosen.

I. JOSHUA BEFORE THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

Zechariah 3:1

“Then the Lord showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan was standing at his right hand to accuse him.”

Zechariah sees Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord.

Joshua represented the priesthood and, in an important sense, the people of Israel.

But Satan was also present.

His purpose was accusation.

The name **Satan** means adversary or accuser.

This scene reveals something Scripture teaches elsewhere:

Satan attacks God's people not only through temptation, but also through accusation.

He points to guilt.

He points to failure.

He points to sin.

He tries to use what is true about our failures to produce hopeless condemnation.

Cross References in Simple American English

Job 1:6 — Satan appeared among the heavenly beings before the Lord and challenged Job's integrity.

Revelation 12:10 — Satan is called the accuser of believers, accusing them before God day and night.

Psalms 109:6 — An accuser is pictured standing at a person's right hand to bring charges.

Spiritual Lesson

Satan's strategy often includes accusation.

Application

When conviction leads you to repentance, it is from God.

When accusation tells you there is no hope, no forgiveness, and no way back, remember that Christ provides an answer to condemnation.

Zechariah 3:2

“The Lord said to Satan, ‘The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man like a burning stick snatched from the fire?’”

Joshua does not defend himself.

God defends him.

This is crucial.

The Lord does not say Joshua is innocent.

The filthy garments in the next verse prove otherwise.

Instead, God appeals to His own choice and His rescuing grace.

Joshua is described as:

“a burning stick snatched from the fire.”

The picture is of something nearly consumed but rescued before destruction.

Judah had experienced devastating judgment.

Jerusalem had burned.

The temple had been destroyed.

The people had gone into exile.

Yet God had preserved a remnant.

Joshua represented a people rescued by grace.

Cross References in Simple American English

Jude 1:9 — Michael the archangel said to the devil, “The Lord rebuke you.”

Amos 4:11 — God described some of His people as being like a burning stick pulled from the fire.

1 Corinthians 3:15 — Paul describes someone being saved as through fire, even though much is lost.

Key Truth

God's people are saved because of His grace, not because they can prove themselves innocent.

Application

When Satan reminds you of what you were, remember what God has rescued you from.

Zechariah 3:3

“Now Joshua was clothed in filthy garments as he stood before the angel.”

The filthy garments symbolize guilt and defilement.

Joshua was the high priest.

Under normal circumstances, the high priest wore holy garments designed for service before God.

But in Zechariah's vision, Joshua's clothing was polluted.

This was not merely a personal problem.

As high priest, he represented the spiritual condition of the nation.

The people had sinned.

The priesthood had been defiled.

The nation needed cleansing.

Cross References in Simple American English

Isaiah 64:6 — Human righteousness, apart from God's grace, is like filthy clothing.

Revelation 3:4 — Some believers are described as not having stained their garments and therefore walking with Christ in white.

Isaiah 6:5 — Isaiah recognized his own uncleanness when he stood before the holiness of God.

Spiritual Lesson

Sin is not merely an action.

It produces guilt and defilement before a holy God.

Application

We cannot cleanse ourselves by pretending our garments are clean.

We need God to remove the guilt.

Zechariah 3:4

“The angel said to those standing by, ‘Take off his filthy clothes.’ Then he said to Joshua, ‘See, I have taken away your sin, and I will clothe you with fine garments.’”

This is the turning point of the chapter.

Joshua does not remove his own garments.

God commands that they be removed.

Then the meaning is explained:

“I have taken away your sin.”

This is a picture of divine forgiveness.

God does more than expose sin.

He removes guilt.

Then Joshua receives fine garments.

This represents restoration, righteousness, and renewed fitness for service.

Cross References in Simple American English

Isaiah 61:10 — God clothes His people with salvation and covers them with righteousness.

Revelation 7:14 — The redeemed are pictured in robes made clean through the blood of the Lamb.

Luke 15:22 — The father of the prodigal son orders the best robe to be placed on his returning son.

Key Principle

God does not merely forgive the sinner.

He also restores the sinner.

Application

Forgiveness is more than having guilt erased.

In Christ, the believer receives a new standing before God.

Zechariah 3:5

“I said, ‘Put a clean turban on his head.’ So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the Lord stood by.”

The clean turban completed Joshua's restoration to priestly service.

The high priest's turban had special significance.

According to the Law, a gold plate was attached to it bearing the words:

“Holy to the Lord.”

Joshua had been defiled.

Now he was restored to holiness and service.

Notice that the angel of the Lord remained present throughout the process.

Cross References in Simple American English

Exodus 28:36 — The high priest wore a gold plate engraved with the words “Holy to the Lord.”

Ezekiel 44:18 — Priests were instructed concerning proper priestly head coverings.

Isaiah 61:10 — God's salvation is pictured as being clothed in beautiful garments.

Spiritual Lesson

God cleanses His servants so they can serve Him.

Application

Grace does not merely rescue us from judgment.

Grace prepares us for useful service.

II. GOD’S CHARGE AND PROMISE TO JOSHUA

Zechariah 3:6

“The angel of the Lord gave this solemn command to Joshua.”

Cleansing was followed by responsibility.

Joshua had been forgiven and restored.

Now he was charged to live faithfully.

This order is important.

God did not tell Joshua to obey in order to earn cleansing.

He cleansed Joshua first.

Then He called him to obedience.

Cross References in Simple American English

1 Timothy 5:21 — Paul gives Timothy a solemn charge before God and the angels.

Numbers 3:8 — Priests and Levites were entrusted with responsibilities connected with God's sanctuary.

Leviticus 8:35 — Priests were required to remain faithful to God's instructions concerning their service.

Principle

Grace comes before service.

Application

We do not obey God in order to become accepted.

We obey because He has shown us grace.

Zechariah 3:7

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: If you walk in My ways and keep My charge, then you will govern My house and have charge of My courts, and I will give you a place among those standing here.”

Joshua's continued usefulness in priestly service required faithful obedience.

Two responsibilities appear:

Walk in My ways.

Keep My charge.

The first concerns personal conduct.

The second concerns faithful service.

God promised Joshua authority and access if he remained faithful.

Cross References in Simple American English

1 Kings 2:3 — David told Solomon to walk in God's ways and keep His commands.

Hebrews 3:6 — Christ is faithful over God's house, and believers belong to that house.

Revelation 3:21 — Christ promises the overcomer a place with Him in His rule.

Key Truth

Spiritual privilege carries spiritual responsibility.

Application

Those who lead God's people must first learn to walk faithfully before God.

Zechariah 3:8

“Listen, High Priest Joshua, you and your associates sitting before you, who are symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring My servant, the Branch.”

Now the vision moves beyond Joshua.

Joshua and the priests were **signs** pointing toward something greater.

God announces:

“I am going to bring My servant, the Branch.”

The title **Branch** is Messianic.

It refers to a coming descendant of David who would rule in righteousness.

Joshua's priesthood pointed forward.

The coming Messiah would fulfill God's saving purpose perfectly.

Cross References in Simple American English

Isaiah 4:2 — The Branch of the Lord is described as beautiful and glorious.

Jeremiah 23:5 — God promised to raise up a righteous Branch from David who would reign wisely.

Jeremiah 33:15 — God promised a righteous Branch who would carry out justice and righteousness.

Christ Connection

The Branch is Jesus Christ.

He is the promised Messiah.

He is the righteous King.

He is also the great High Priest who perfectly represents His people before God.

Application

Every earthly priesthood points beyond itself.

Our final hope is not in human religious leadership.

It is in Christ.

Zechariah 3:9

“See, the stone I have set before Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,” declares the Lord Almighty, “and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.”

This is one of the most profound verses in the chapter.

God introduces a **stone**.

In Scripture, the Messiah is often pictured as a stone.

The **seven eyes** symbolize perfect knowledge and complete divine awareness.

Then comes the remarkable promise:

“I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.”

This language points strongly toward the once-for-all work of Christ.

At the cross, Jesus offered Himself as the sacrifice for sin.

The work was decisive.

The sacrifice was sufficient.

Cross References in Simple American English

Isaiah 28:16 — God promised to place a tested and precious cornerstone in Zion.

Revelation 5:6 — The Lamb is pictured with seven eyes, representing the fullness of the Spirit and complete knowledge.

Hebrews 9:26 — Christ appeared once to remove sin by sacrificing Himself.

Key Doctrine

Christ's sacrifice is sufficient to deal with sin.

Application

The gospel does not teach that we must repeatedly provide payment for our guilt.

Christ's sacrifice accomplished what human effort never could.

Zechariah 3:10

“In that day each of you will invite your neighbor to sit under your vine and fig tree,” declares the Lord Almighty.”

The chapter ends with peace.

The image of sitting under one's own vine and fig tree was a common biblical picture of security, prosperity, rest, and blessing.

After cleansing comes peace.

After judgment comes restoration.

After guilt is removed, fellowship becomes possible.

Cross References in Simple American English

Micah 4:4 — In God's kingdom, people will sit under their vines and fig trees without fear.

1 Kings 4:25 — During Solomon's peaceful reign, Judah and Israel lived securely under their vines and fig trees.

John 1:48 — Jesus told Nathanael that He saw him under the fig tree.

Spiritual Lesson

God's salvation ultimately leads to peace.

Application

The peace God gives is deeper than comfortable circumstances.

It begins with peace between the sinner and God.

III. MAJOR THEMES OF ZECHARIAH 3

1. Satan Is the Accuser

Satan stands ready to accuse.

He points toward guilt and failure.

But accusation is not the final word for those whom God has cleansed.

2. God Is the Defender

Joshua had no defense of his own.

The Lord rebuked Satan.

Salvation rests upon God's intervention.

3. Sin Defiles

The filthy garments reveal the seriousness of sin.

Sin cannot simply be ignored or covered by human effort.

4. God Removes Guilt

Joshua's dirty garments were removed.

God declared:

“I have taken away your sin.”

Forgiveness originates with God.

5. God Clothes His People

God did not leave Joshua exposed after removing the filthy garments.

He clothed him in clean garments.

This points toward the righteousness God provides.

6. Grace Leads to Obedience

Joshua was cleansed first.

Then he was commanded to walk faithfully.

Biblical obedience is a response to grace.

7. The Priesthood Points to Christ

Joshua and his companions were signs.

Their ministry anticipated the coming Branch.

8. The Branch Is the Messiah

The Branch is a clear Old Testament title for the coming Davidic Messiah.

Jesus fulfills that hope.

9. Sin Will Be Removed

God promised to remove sin in one day.

The cross provides the decisive fulfillment of that promise.

10. Salvation Leads to Peace

The final picture is one of rest beneath the vine and fig tree.

God's redemptive purpose ends in peace, fellowship, and security.

IV. CHRIST IN ZECHARIAH 3

Zechariah Chapter 3 is saturated with themes that point toward Jesus Christ.

1. Christ Answers the Accuser

Satan accuses.

But Christ is the believer's Advocate.

The believer's answer to condemnation is not personal perfection.

It is the finished work of Jesus Christ.

2. Christ Removes Our Filthy Garments

Joshua could not clean himself.

God removed his garments.

Likewise, sinners cannot remove their own guilt.

Christ cleanses.

3. Christ Clothes Us in Righteousness

The clean garments picture a new standing before God.

The believer is accepted because of what Christ has done.

4. Christ Is the Branch

Jesus is the righteous descendant of David promised by the prophets.

He fulfills God's covenant promises.

5. Christ Is the Stone

Scripture repeatedly identifies Christ as the cornerstone.

He is the foundation of God's redemptive work.

6. Christ Removes Sin

Zechariah promises:

“I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.”

At Calvary, Jesus offered the once-for-all sacrifice for sin.

V. THE GOSPEL PICTURE IN ZECHARIAH 3

This chapter presents the gospel in picture form.

The sinner stands guilty.

Joshua is wearing filthy garments.

The accuser brings charges.

Satan stands ready to condemn.

God intervenes.

The Lord rebukes the accuser.

Guilt is removed.

The filthy garments are taken away.

Righteousness is provided.

Clean garments are given.

The cleansed person is called to serve.

Joshua receives a new charge.

The Messiah is promised.

God announces the Branch.

Sin is removed decisively.

God promises cleansing in one day.

This is the movement of grace:

Guilt → Grace → Cleansing → Righteousness → Service → Hope.

VI. KEY LESSONS FROM ZECHARIAH 3

1. Satan accuses, but God defends.

The believer's security rests in God's grace.

2. Sin cannot be hidden before God.

Joshua's filthy garments revealed his condition.

3. God alone can remove guilt.

Joshua did not cleanse himself.

4. God restores those He forgives.

The filthy garments were replaced with clean ones.

5. Grace leads to obedience.

Joshua was cleansed before he was charged to serve.

6. Spiritual leadership requires faithfulness.

Joshua was called to walk in God's ways and keep His charge.

7. The Branch points to Jesus Christ.

The Messiah is the ultimate hope of God's people.

8. Christ's sacrifice deals decisively with sin.

God promised to remove sin in one day.

9. God's salvation produces peace.

The chapter ends with people resting securely under vine and fig tree.

VII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Zechariah 3 challenges us to ask:

Am I listening more to Satan's accusations than to God's promises?

Am I trying to clean myself rather than trusting God's grace?

Have I forgotten how serious sin is?

Do I understand that forgiveness should lead to obedience?

Am I walking faithfully in the responsibilities God has given me?

Is my confidence resting in Jesus Christ, the Branch?

Do I believe Christ's sacrifice is sufficient for my sin?

Am I living like someone who has truly been cleansed?

VIII. QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Who was standing before the angel of the Lord?

Answer

Joshua the high priest.

Question 2

What was Satan doing?

Answer

He was standing beside Joshua to accuse him.

Question 3

How did the Lord respond to Satan?

Answer

The Lord rebuked Satan and defended Joshua as one whom He had rescued.

Question 4

What did the burning stick represent?

Answer

It represented someone rescued from destruction. Joshua and the restored community had been preserved by God's grace.

Question 5

What did Joshua's filthy garments represent?

Answer

They represented guilt, sin, and spiritual defilement.

Question 6

Who removed Joshua's filthy garments?

Answer

God commanded that they be removed.

Question 7

What did the clean garments represent?

Answer

They represented forgiveness, restoration, and a new standing before God.

Question 8

Why was the clean turban important?

Answer

It represented Joshua's restored priestly holiness and readiness to serve.

Question 9

What responsibility did Joshua receive after cleansing?

Answer

He was commanded to walk in God's ways and faithfully carry out his priestly responsibilities.

Question 10

Who is “the Branch”?

Answer

The Branch is the promised Messiah, ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Question 11

What does the stone represent?

Answer

It points toward God's appointed foundation and, in the broader biblical witness, toward the Messiah as the cornerstone.

Question 12

What is significant about the phrase “in a single day”?

Answer

It anticipates the decisive removal of sin accomplished through Christ's once-for-all sacrifice.

Question 13

What does sitting under the vine and fig tree symbolize?

Answer

It symbolizes peace, security, blessing, and fellowship under God's rule.

Question 14

What is the central message of Zechariah 3?

Answer

God answers Satan's accusation, removes the guilt of His people, restores them for service, and promises the coming Messiah who will deal decisively with sin.

IX. FINAL THOUGHT

Zechariah Chapter 3 begins with an accused man wearing filthy garments.

It ends with a promise of peace.

That transformation happens because God acts.

Joshua does not defeat Satan.

God rebukes him.

Joshua does not remove his guilt.

God takes it away.

Joshua does not provide clean garments.

God clothes him.

Joshua does not create his own future.

God promises the Branch.

This is grace.

The believer's hope is not that Satan has nothing to accuse.

Our hope is that God has provided an answer to the accusation.

Jesus Christ is that answer.

He is the Branch.

He is the righteous One.

He is the great High Priest.

He is the cornerstone.

He is the sacrifice for sin.

And through Him, filthy garments are exchanged for righteousness.

So when the accuser speaks, remember who speaks louder.

When guilt overwhelms you, remember who removes sin.

When failure makes you feel unusable, remember that God restores.

When the future seems uncertain, remember the Branch.

And when you wonder whether your sin can truly be forgiven, remember the promise:

God can remove sin in a single day.

At the cross, Jesus Christ accomplished the sacrifice that makes forgiveness possible.

Key Verse

**“See, I have taken away your sin, and I will clothe you with fine garments.” —
Zechariah 3:4**

Key Phrase

Satan accuses, but God cleanses, restores, and points us to Christ.