

Zechariah 3

## Undeserving Israel, but Merciful God

Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformer, one night was suffering from great depression, because he was overwhelmed with a great sense of condemnation for his many sins, his lustful flesh, and lack of prayerfulness.

Then in the night, during this agony of his soul, he was given a vision of the source and cause of his agony. Satan appeared to him with a long scroll, in which were carefully written the many sins and transgressions of which he was guilty from his birth.

And Satan, the accuser, began to read the list to Luther, mocking all the while, that such a sinner as he should ever think of being called to do service for God, or even of escaping from hell.

As the Long list was being read, Luther's terror grew, and his agony of soul increased.

At last, however, God's truth broke into Luther's mind, and he jumped up and exclaimed: "It is all true, Satan, and many more sins which I have committed in my life which are known to God only.

But write at the bottom of your list, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin."

And grasping the inkstand on his table Luther threw it at the devil who fled from his presence.

To this day, that black ink stain can be seen on the wall of that room in Wartburg, Germany.

That experience of Martin Luther, is very similar to a vision that the prophet Zechariah had during the night, a vision that is recorded for us in Zechariah 3.

***Zechariah 3:1, "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him."***

Joshua was the high priest of Israel who returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel and the first colony of 49,000 Jewish exiles who had returned to the land of Israel sixteen years earlier. He was still serving as the high priest in Zechariah's day.

Here in verse 1, Joshua is seen by Zechariah in this vision standing before the Angel of the Lord. The expression, "*standing before*," means standing in the role of his official capacity as high priest. The role of the high priest was to represent the whole nation of Israel when he stood before the Lord.

So, Zechariah sees Israel's representative standing before God.

All that Joshua the high priest is going to experience in this vision is prophetic of what the Lord is going to do for the nation of Israel.

I am not your priest; I am your pastor. What is the difference between a priest and a pastor?

A priest is one who comes before God as a representative for other people who, because of their sin, are not allowed to come into God's presence.

Before Jesus had died on the cross to take away our sin, God appointed priests, who were given permission to come to God on behalf of sinful people, and then to return and speak to the people on behalf of God. Priests were a mediator between God and man.

But since Jesus died on the cross, there is no longer any need for a priest to serve believers—because of the blood of Jesus Christ which has cleansed us from our sin, each of us who believe in Jesus, can come boldly into the presence of God and speak to Him ourselves.

We Christians have all become priests (1 Peter 2:9)—and we all come before God on behalf of unbelievers who are separated from God, and we pray for them.

Now, in the New Testament, we have pastors, who are chosen by God to give spiritual leadership to a group of priests.

I lead priests who all have equal access to God. Your prayers are just as effective as mine. You are just as capable of hearing from God as I am.

But I am called to give my time more fully than most of you are able, to teaching the word of God, and to prayer.

The high priest (representing Israel) is standing on behalf of Israel, before the Angel of the Lord, who is an Old Testament appearance of Jesus Christ.

And there with them is Satan, known as our adversary, the devil, also called the accuser.

**Revelation 12:10**, the Devil, or Satan, is described as "... *the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night....*"

The Bible reveals that behind the scenes, it is Satan who is motivating all the anti-Semitism all over the world.

There is no nation that is so hated by the world as Israel. There is no logical reason for such hatred, it is spiritually stirred up by demonic forces in the world.

But why is this happening?

Satan is at work, through his captive humans who are under his control, to stir up anti-Semitism.

Satan knows that God has promised to bless the nations of the world through Israel, so he does all he can to frustrate God's plans, and if possible, to exterminate the Jewish people.

Satan works to accuse, not just the Jews, but all of us who are children of God—he draws attention to our sin and our failure.

This tactic, however, has no effect on God. Satan can accuse us, but he can't condemn a child of God.

**Romans 8:33–34**, "*Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? [Both Israel and the Church are God's elect.] It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.*"

So, *if God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)* Why then does Satan bother to continue to accuse us before God?

Because he accuses us in our presence. God is in us, so Satan doesn't have to go to heaven to accuse us—his accusations are in our presence—they are in our mind.

His accusations are often discouraging, demoralizing, humiliating and depressing to the people being accused, so Satan keeps it up, knowing it hurts us.

This is why we need to know the scriptures; we need to know the truth of what Christ has done for us; we need to know our right standing and our new identity in Christ, and we need to know that God accepts us, so that we can resist the wiles of the devil.

Satan's hatred of us is great but God's love for us is greater.

**Romans 8:38–39**, "*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, <sup>39</sup>nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

When Satan accuses us today of our sins and tries to condemn us and to fill us with discouragement over our failures, we need to acknowledge that we have sinned, but then declare to him that "...*the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.*" (1 John 1:7)

**Zechariah 3:2**, "*And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!"*"

Included in God's rebuke of Satan is a reminder that the Lord has chosen Jerusalem.

This is why there is so much heated contention over the city of Jerusalem to this day—because of God’s plans for that city—it will be the location of Christ’s throne when He returns to rule the world. Jerusalem will be the capitol city of the world-wide Kingdom of God.

To this day the United Nations do not recognize Israel’s right to occupy Jerusalem and therefore most countries maintain their embassies in Tel Aviv.

In fact, many countries do not even officially recognize Jerusalem as belonging to the nation of Israel. Why? Because they are under the influence of Satan.

But the Lord has chosen Jerusalem.

Why did God choose Jerusalem and Israel in the first place? Was it because of their righteousness or their faithfulness above all other people?

**Deuteronomy 7:6–8**, *“For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.”* <sup>7</sup>The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; <sup>8</sup>but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers...

**Deuteronomy 9:5–6**, *“It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land [the land of Israel], but ... that He may fulfill the word which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”* <sup>6</sup>Therefore understand that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people.”

So, it is all about the faithfulness of the Lord to keep His word and the promises He has made. It has nothing to do with the Jews being worthy.

Therefore, those who say God is done with Israel, because of Israel’s chronic rebellion, miss the whole point of God choosing Israel.

God’s faithfulness to rebellious, stubborn Israel is an object lesson of the grace of God toward all of us. If God refuses to reject Israel because of His covenant promises to them, in the same way, He will not reject us believers, who have entered into covenant with Him.

Look now at the last part of verse 2, *“...**Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?**”*

A brand is a stick that has been partly charred by the fire. It represents people who have suffered much harm from their enemies and from the fires of judgment because of their sin, but by the mercy of God, they have been rescued before they were completely destroyed.

There is a sense in which each one of us are a brand that has been mercifully plucked by Jesus from the fire of our own sin and of the wrath of God.

**Zechariah 3:3**, *“Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel.”*

The wording in the original language implies that the garments were not just dirty, but they were covered with the most disgusting type of uncleanness. (David Levy, p. 35) so that he was totally unfit to serve as priest before a Holy God.

This uncleanness of the filthy garments seems to represent the wickedness of the Jewish people and is described by the prophet Isaiah.

**Isaiah 64:6**, *“But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags...”*

Satan’s accusations, whatever they are, are right—Israel is unfit to represent God to the nations; they are unfit to stand in God’s presence; their sin disqualifies them from being a holy people.

**Zechariah 3:4-5**, *“Then He [the Lord] answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, “Take away the filthy garments from him.” And to him [Joshua the priest, standing as a*

representative of all Israel] *He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."*<sup>5</sup> *And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the Lord stood by."*

The rich robes are believed to refer to the special robes worn by the high priest. And these being put onto Joshua, who represents all of Israel, indicates two things:

First of all, the high priest's robes symbolized being clothed with the righteousness of God. This was a demonstration that the people of Israel will be pardoned of their sin, and they will be justified before the Lord, and made acceptable to Him.

Secondly the rich priestly robes indicate that Israel as a nation will be reinstated and consecrated once again to their priestly calling as a nation. (*David Baron, p. 99*)

This vision therefore prophetically indicates that once again the nation of Israel would be purified, and restored to their originally intended ministry of serving as a priestly representative of the Lord to the nations of the world during the Millennial Kingdom.

*Exodus 19:6, "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."*

*Zechariah 3:6–8, "Then the Angel of the Lord admonished Joshua, saying, <sup>7</sup>"Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'If you will walk in My ways, and if you will keep My command, then you shall also judge My house [you, people of Israel, who have been made righteous by the grace of God, will have privileged authority over My Temple], and likewise have charge of My courts; I will give you places to walk [privileged access to the Holy places of God] among these [referring to the angelic beings] who stand here [serving in the presence of God (*Baron, p. 105*)]."<sup>8</sup> 'Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you [refers to the ordinary priests who serve under the leadership of the high priest], for they are a wondrous sign..."*

They symbolize Israel being restored to their function of mediating blessings from God to the people of the world.

Verses 6 to 8 all describe the people of Israel, functioning in a place of tremendous privilege in the highest places of honor in the Kingdom of God.

*Zechariah 3:8b, "...for behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH."*

*My Servant*, is a common title of Jesus Christ the promised Messiah.

*The BRANCH*, is another title of Jesus Christ (*Zech. 6:12*)

*Jeremiah 23:5–6, "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. [This refers to Jesus Christ at His second coming, when He returns to earth as King]*

*"In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS"*

Here we are told when the Lord will cleanse Israel of their sin and restore them to their high calling as a holy and priestly nation.

It will happen at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

*Zechariah 3:9, "For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua: Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription," says the Lord of hosts, 'And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day."*

The stone is another prophetic symbol of Jesus Christ. *Ephesians 2:20* tells us that *Jesus Christ Himself is the chief cornerstone*.

Zechariah's reference to the stone is taken from Isaiah's prophecy, *Isaiah 28:16*, "Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I lay in Zion [to lay in the ground—alluding to Christ's burial] a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation..."

The seven eyes, in Zechariah 3:9, are believed to symbolize the all-seeing, all-knowing nature of God.

He sees the sin (the filthy garments) of Israel, He knows their rebellion, He is not oblivious, or ignorant of it. And yet He is removing their sin.

In *Revelation 5:6*, this all-seeing, all-knowing nature of God is connected to Jesus Christ.

"And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain [Jesus, the Lamb of God], having seven horns [absolute power and authority] and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth [they are the Lamb's eyes—meaning it is part of His nature—He is the perfect, all-knowing God]."

**"Behold I will engrave its inscription,' says the Lord..."**

The flogging which furrowed the back of Jesus before His crucifixion, the thorns which pierced his brow, the nails which were driven into his hands and His feet, the spear which was thrust into His side, are the inscription of Israel's sin, engraved by God upon the body of their rejected Messiah.

Now let's read Zechariah 3:9 again, inserting all this information:

***Zechariah 3:9*, "For behold, the stone [Jesus the chief cornerstone] that I have laid [crucified and buried] before Joshua [representing all of Israel—they were all witnesses at the cross]: Upon the stone are seven eyes [the Holy Spirit of God was upon Jesus—the stone]. Behold, I will engrave its inscription [all of our sins were painfully engraved in the body of Jesus at the cross], says the Lord of hosts, 'And I will remove the iniquity of that land [the land of Israel] in one day.'"**

And it was through this engraving that the sin of the land of Israel was fully paid for in one day. But this prophecy also reveals that not only did Jesus, in one day on the cross, once and for all time pay the penalty for Israel's sin, but in one day, all the land of Israel will repent and experience the removal of their sin.

That day will be at the second coming of Christ and is further described in *Zechariah 12:10-11* "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me [when Jesus returns] whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. <sup>11</sup> In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem."

This describes a national day of repentance as the whole nation of Israel puts their faith in their Messiah.

***Zechariah 3:10*, "In that day,' says the Lord of hosts, 'Everyone will invite his neighbor under his vine and under his fig tree.'"**

This refers to the customary celebrations that would follow very special occasions.

It points to a great future celebration that will kick-off the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom, when all of Israel is saved, Christ is ruling from His throne in Jerusalem, and all the nations of the world, the neighbors of Israel, are being greatly blessed by God through the chosen people of Israel.

Does the nation of Israel deserve this place of special favor and blessing? Absolutely not.

Is God done with Israel? Absolutely not!

The fulfillment of the great promises of the Lord toward Israel are not based on their own merits or worthiness, but on the unchangeable nature and promise of God.

The same is true of each of us, none of us are going to be able to say, “I deserve this great blessing and salvation from God.”

It is all a gift of God’s grace. And God’s grace toward undeserving Israel is for all of us, a sign of God’s grace toward undeserving Me.

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