

Watching the Gospel Play Out

Jonathan K. Dodson | Zechariah 3 | Outline

We're looking at the visionary literature of Zechariah which is meant to expose ingrained patterns of thinking and jolt us into a different way of living. God is trying to peel back the wallpaper on reality to help us see what's really there and live accordingly. In the first three visions we get a heavenly survey of what God was doing to create a new Jewish community by rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. In our passage, the vision zooms in from a panoramic view of the city to an up close look at its chief architectural feature—the temple and its God. Inside, we meet a cast of characters: A couple angels, Joshua, Satan. I'll introduce each one, but if we're to grasp reality, to put the big three in the order, you'll need to: 1) Put yourself in Joshua's shoes 2) Heed the Angel's Words 3) Watch Joshua's World Transform.

Cast of Characters

In literature there is often a turning point, a passage, a sentence that changes the direction of the plot. This chapter is that turning point. Many consider this vision the theological center of the book, and it comes in two parts, continued in chapter six. Our opening scene gets the characters onto the stage. These characters are like actors today in that they are historical people but in the vision play a role: “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. 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?” Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments.” The angel points to *Joshua*, the high priest at the time, who represented the people to God in sacrificial

service and temple administration. He is standing before the *Angel of the Lord*, a Christ figure who, together with the Lord of Hosts (YHWH) is God and the main speaker. *Satan* is also standing by. The word translated Satan is actually adversary. The identity of the accuser is unclear but his presence is certain. He stands next to Joshua like a lawyer ready to make his case against him.

Put Yourself in Joshua's Clothes

Now, into the play. Put yourself in Joshua's shoes/clothes. You're in this celestial temple-throne room, a satanic-like accuser to your right, the embodiment of Holiness directly ahead, and you are clothed in filthy garments. The word filthy is actually used for vomit and excrement. It's not that you didn't show up to court with your suit on; you've come before the Judge reeking of human waste, an image of your moral impurity. Your guilt goes before you wafting up to the Judge. You're dirty; it's an image of sin, guilty before the Judge. Now today it's not popular to talk in terms of **guilt**. It's common to see guilt as a kind of fiction. After all, guilty feelings are actually inaccurate (a person feeling guilty for being abused). We try to compassionately ward guilt off of people. It's not your fault. As a society, we avert guilt. When my son was caught throwing dye soaked sponges at the school wall, he was quick to indict his friends. But so and so. When caught, siblings will often will say, "But my sister..." Now, a good parent will press their guilt by saying something like, "I'm not talking about your sister I'm talking about *you*." We might insist on our children's guilt. So, even if our feelings of guilt may be misplaced, the fact that we all attempt to justify ourselves shows we believe in guilt, that it's not a fiction. Otherwise, why even make the effort? So what do we do with the dirty clothes, with guilt-stained character? Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard says it is

tempting to “**shove guilt away from ourselves onto existence.**” What does he mean? He means that, in the end, we’ll admit guilt but just blame it on finitude. We’ll say things like, “Nobody’s perfect; we all make mistakes; everybody’s broken.” We almost trivialize guilt by accepting it as part of our finitude. To exist is to be guilty. So sue me. But Kierkegaard says, guilt does not stem from our finitude **but how we live our finitude.** Guilt is attached to reality, to real action that transgresses real holy Being. Which is why we tell our kids, I’m not talking about *your sister*; I’m talking about *you*. To insist on guilt is to help them to be responsible and to contribute not detract from society. Can you imagine a society where no one felt guilt? *Clockwork Orange*, *The Purge*. We need guilt. Guilt is a gift from God, and an indicator there is a Guilt-Free Being who is not guilty. Secular former journalist for Harper Magazine, Stephen Glass. A fabulist, fabricator about being a phone-in psychic. “**I deeply regret my lies and misconduct...what I did was wrong on every level and I am truly sorry...\$10,000. I want to make right that part of my many transgressions...I recognize that repaying Harpers will not remedy my wrongdoing, make us even, or undo what I did**” A secular journalist reaching for theological vocabulary, for guilt, and acting accordingly, in step with reality. If it doesn’t remedy his wrongdoing what will?

Heed the Angel’s Words

Now, heed the angel’s words: “**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.” 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.” Standing in guilt, Christ says to the angelic council around him: “Remove the filthy garments from him.” In other words, your guilt is gone. You’ve been set free. Guilt removed, like a change of clothes. The meaning is plain: I have taken your iniquity—your sin, your guilt, not your mere imperfection, nor your slight brokenness, or unfortunate finitude. No, *our iniquity*, the sinfulness of sin, guilt before a holy God, is taken away. How is this possible? Where did it go? Our filth is put on Christ.: “**He who knew no sin became sin so that we might become the righteousness of God**” (2 Cor 5:21). The Judge wrapped up in our sins. Guilt dealt with on every level. A Great Transfer. And the Savior wrestles those sins to the grave, and puts them to death by his dirty garment death, a remedy for Glass’s wrongdoing for our wrongdoing. No fiction at all. **Only when the ingrained belief guilt-is-bad and to be avoided is snapped can we enter into the reality of grace**, the reality of this vision, a Savior who changes garments with us: our filth for his righteousness. The Angel of the Lord, “**clothe him with pure vestments and put a clean turban on his head.**” The word translated “**pure**” describes “**especially fine, white garments.**” These are the priestly requirements, an ephod with stones on the chest, a robe pure white, and a turban also decorated with jewels, representing the glory of Christ to the Judge. Turban and vestment, in other words, **we are clothed from head to toe in the righteousness of Christ**, faultless to stand before the throne, made more than even, made righteous. But, to take in the Lord’s forgiving and accepting words—to heed the Angel—we have shed ingrained, distorted views of God which make him out to be disinterested deity, an unfortunate master, a controlling father and reorient them around his revelation. We must replace our thoughts with his thoughts. But the Adversary is standing by, ready to accuse—you’re not guilty;

you're nothing. You'll never measure up. Or you're more mature than most of these people. If so and so would just show up, serve. The adversary does hurl condemnation in our minds, but if we can get our heads in the clouds, our minds into this vision of reality, we'll find that Satan can't even get a word in! He just stands there! He has no hearing with God. His accusations can't stick. So heed this reality in Christ, we have to quiet our busy lives and hearts to hear his words. JD. Notice his talk: powerful, constant, good. Christ stands above us, issuing commands left and right, all in our favor: Remove the filth! Clothe in purity! Put on clean! And notice verse 5: [And the angel of the Lord was standing by](#). He does not avert his eyes or turn his head. He stands by, taking in our filth, to transfer his glory. His eyes are on you. He is not ashamed. As I tell my kids, "God is nuts about you...because of Jesus." He can't take his eyes off of you. Will you snap the so-called fiction of guilt with the reality of Grace?

Watch Joshua Transform

Put yourself in Joshua's Shoes, Heed the Angel's Words, now Watch Joshua Transform.

If we get God right, and God's righteousness onto us, we'll put the community and city in their proper place—we will add value to the city and love others. We see this happen with the Joshua figure who transforms from a representative of the people into the Great High Priest, Christ himself. [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](#). He's essentially saying Christ's perseverance, his coming perfect life, death, a resurrection, will result his return to the heavenly temple, where he will rule all things and sit with the angels. And if we follow him, cling to him, then we too will enter on his robes, in

his robes, into the celestial city and bathe in the light of his glory. What about his friends (8), if we his friends cling to Christ, we will create a community that will be a sign to the world. A sign that points to the Branch or a Shoot, an image frequently used of ancient kings to indicate their fruitful reign. Under this Branch-King there will be a kingdom so plentiful everyone has their own vine and fig tree. This phrase is repeated in prophetic literature to describe a time with the nations will stream to the cosmic mountain, where YHWH sits on his throne, accepting cultural gifts from men and women who honor **him as Lord of the mountain, king of the city, where the light never goes out and guilt is never admitted**, where finite people enjoy Christ' infinite acceptance. Essentially, if this is your King and this is his kingdom, it should be visible now. In how you love your neighbor, serve your fellow churchman, welcome your wife back from the retreat, and in how you bless the city with faithful, creative work, dignifying acts of mercy and goodness, words of encouragement to others, and testimony about Christ? Why? Because of how he talks about us. When you have a God who deals with real guilt and gives you real, never-ending grace, you're compelled to love, serve, and encourage others the same way he has you, to help build a beautiful city. Because the Branch is the Lord of the city, and Joshua the Savior of the Soul. See, what you believe about God forms your reality. So tell the world and tell your neighbor, tell your son and tell your daughter, about the Priest who takes away your filth and clothes you in fine white garments.