

A vivid dream  
zechariah 3:1-10  
essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Introduction The book of Zechariah is full of vivid imagery and peculiar visions that all help in the conveying of God's message. This paper will examine the specific vision described in Zechariah 3: 1-10. The intent of this essay is to examine the message of this vivid vision that Zechariah received and also to determine the application for readers at that time and for believers today. Compare English Versions The first step in studying this passage had been to read it over and over in multiple English translations to get a feel for how it could be interpreted in English.

While there is some difference in the wording of different English translations it does not seem to change what is being communicated in the text. Some interesting differences in v. 4b do appear when describing the new clothing that is given to Joshua, it is described as simply a "change of raiment" (King James) or more elaborately "pure elaborately" (ESV) and in the NRSV "festal apparel". The following verse describes the charge unto Joshua from the Angel of the Lord as being "protested" (King James) or "gave his charge" or even "spoke very solemnly" (Living Bible) which all seem much different than "assured" (NRSV).

There is obviously some discrepancy as to the tone of this charge. Overall, the different English translations all describe a very similar vision experience. Structural Outline 1. Clean clothes for Joshua (3: 1-5) 1. 1 Set the scene (3: 1) 1. 2 Rebuke of Satan (3: 2) 1. 3 Removal of iniquity (3: 3-4) 1. 4 Clean garments and turban (3: 5) 2. Promises from the Angel of the Lord (3: 6-10) 2. 1 Joshua's Commission (3: 6-7) 2. 2 Promise of a coming Servant (3: 8) 2. 3 In that Day (3: 9-10) Genre of the Text This section of text is from the Prophet of Zechariah which places it in the genre of prophetic literature;

however it also resembles apocalyptic literature like that found in the book of Revelation. What distinguishes this type of literature as apocalyptic is the obvious vision that is being described here (Miller 134). The scene for this vision is a courtroom with Joshua being on trial before the angel of the Lord. The vision then concludes with some messianic prophecy referring to the Messiah as “ the Branch” (v. 8) and a promise is made for that day when “ every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and his fig tree”. This is apocalyptic literature in the form of a vision conveying a messianic promise to those who will listen.

Research the Text When reading this genre of literature, understanding whom it was written by is important to fully interpret the text. Zechariah’s name means “ the Lord remembers” and is one of the most commonly used names in the OT (Miller 135). Zechariah’s name, along with his message, consistently reminded the nation that the Lord had made a covenant with Israel” (Klein 20). It is also a priestly name which could indicate Zechariah was a Priest as well as a Prophet (Miller 134) but this could also mean that he simply comes from a line of Priests (Klein 21).

The first two chapters develop Zechariah as a “ young man” (v. 4) who has an ear turned toward God in a difficult time in Israel’s history. It is also essential to understand the historical context that this text was written into. The book of Zechariah would fit into the Post-Exilic era of Israel’s history, after the return of God’s people to the city and the re-construction of the temple in Jerusalem had started. The message was directed to the “ struggling Jewish returnees” (Miller 134) who would have been largely affected by the time in exile in Babylon.

The Babylonians had recently been conquered by the Persian Empire and so great change for the nation of Israel was happening once again. Haggai and Zechariah (written at the similar time periods) both emphasize the everlasting Kingdom of God and the coming of a Messiah. The people of Judah would have been concerned about how their nation would survive in a world of such large superpower empires like Assyria, Babylon and now Persia. Would God ever demonstrate his power and establish his people as the most powerful of nations? Have the people paid their dues in exile?

Why had he allowed them to go and return to their land and rebuild the temple? These questions would have been on the minds of the people at the time when Zechariah received this vision. This vision describes a courtroom scene involving some specific characters. The first character is introduced simply as " he" (3: 1). This would be the same he as is mentioned in the previous chapter as " a man with a measuring line in his hand! " (2: 1), and this man continues to be a messenger declaring the coming of the Lord (2: 10) from his Holy dwelling (2: 13).

It seems as if it could be the same angel who " came again" in 4: 1. Other commentaries say it is more likely that " the Lord himself made the revelation since the fourth vision, unlike the former visions, does not identify an angelic interpreter" (Klein 131). It seems however that ch. 3 continues on from the vision in chapter 2 and all the visions so far have had an angel to guide Zechariah through what he is seeing not the Lord personally. The next difficult part of this text is the uncleanness of the High Priest named Joshua.

The rebuilding of the temple was occurring at this time in Jerusalem and the High Priest would have been needed to oversee the running of the temple when it was completed but here Zechariah receives the revelation that the high priest is not fit for this service. The scene is this; the Angel of the Lord is the judge, the High Priest is on trial and the 'adversary' or the persecutor is "Satan" who is accusing the High Priest (3: 1). The mention of the "filthy garments" (v. 3) was significant when referring to a Priest in particular as the clothing of the Priest was to be to very specific standards (Lev. 8: 5-9).

This indicates that Satan's accusations would have proved true. Yet, the Lord rebukes Satan. It seems that the Lord is asserting his authority and making the statement that he is the one who declares purity and innocence, he is the judge not Satan or the enemy or the adversary (the word Satan could be interpreted with any of those words). One commentator comments on this section that "Satan was reminding the Lord of the nation's past wretchedness (1: 2, 4-6) and its unworthiness" (Miller 163) another commentator emphasizes this point "If the high priest is so filthy, how much more the nation as a whole" (Klein 133).

Klein goes onto describe how this Joshua figure played a key role in the restoration of the returning community at this time in history and would have served as an excellent symbol to represent the returning remnant. So the beginning of this text paints a significant picture of the nation of Israel's guilt and the Lord's rebuking of Satan for being so audacious as to make such a claim. The Lord responds by declaring Joshua's innocence. In v. 4 the angel who is standing as Judge (most likely the LORD himself as he has the divine

authority to bring judgment) declares that the filthy garments shall be removed.

This reveals not the innocence of guilt but the pardoning of guilt. There is a demonstration of God's forgiveness happening in this vision. Another question that arises has to do with who the witnesses are that are surrounding this trial scene and assist with the redressing of Joshua the High Priest as his pure clothes (vv. 4&5)? They are also brought up in v. 8 as "your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign". Klein refers to them simple as the "unknown angels" (139). The imagery of the Priest being dressed in clean garments is a common imagery and is used in Ps 132: 9 "May your priests be clothed with righteousness".

The clean turban seems to be "the finishing touch. On the high priest's turban was a plate of pure gold inscribed with the words: "HOLY TO THE LORD" (Exod. 28: 36; 39: 30). All of this is witnessed by the "Angel of the LORD [who] was standing by" (3: 5b), adding to the legitimacy and importance of what is occurring. The Lord has sent his personal emissary to oversee what is occurring (Klein 141). The filthy garments have been removed and replaced with pure and clean clothes, now Joshua is ready to receive his commission. Now we arrive at the angel of the LORD's commission of Joshua in v. . The discrepancy in the English translation of the description of this commission (described above) is not commented by Klein or Miller. The best translation seems to be "solemnly assured" (ESV) as it raises the importance on what it about to be said and that it will be a positive commission, an assurance. The commission has three parts. The first part is a call to be obedient, the second part is the reward if he is

obedient which includes authority to rule in the temple, and the third part is the right to be included in the witnesses who surround them.

Klein comments on this second reward, that it will allow Joshua “ the high priest, whom the Lord exalts still higher, will have a direct access to the throne of God. Only the high priest could enter the holy of holies, and only once a year (Lev 16), but the declaration made to Joshua far surpasses this privilege by granting Joshua entry into the Lord’s heavenly throne room. ” The scene in the courtroom has now moved from one of accusation to a scene of forgiveness and of honoring the high priest and therefore also the people of Judah.

Next, the angel of the Lord prepares to make a promise (v. 8a) by calling Joshua to listen! “ The verbal form mirrors that found in the Shema in Deut. 6: 4, emphasizing the importance of the message to follow” (Klein 143). The message is to be directed to Joshua’s “ friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign” (3: 8a). It would seem reasonable that these friends of Joshua are fellow priests, or at least people who also hold a place of leadership among the returning community of Judah.

Klein comments that this sign is that “ Joshua’s fellow priests, however, symbolize good things the future will bring” (143). The future embodiment of this blessing will be in the servant who is the one called “ the Branch”. These titles “ servant” and “ the Branch” are very common in the OT. The title “ the Branch” links the messiah figure directly to the line of David (Miller 165) and the title of servant is reminiscent of the significant affirmation God gives to

characters such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Deut. 9: 27) and the same Hebrew word (ebed) is translated as “ servant of the Lord” (Klein 145).

The messianic imagery continues with the imagery of the stone as it has elsewhere in scripture, “ The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes” (Isa 8: 13-15; 28: 16). Other interpretation of this stone is that it is referring to the cornerstone that would be used to build the new temple (Klein 147). This entire passage however seems to be concerned with the messiah and continued representation of him seems to be more likely, especially when considering the temple was most likely already completed at this time (Klein 147).

The seven eyes on the stone would then represent the all-seeing and all-knowing power of this messiah. The concluding verse of this text affirms that this Messiah figure will bring about the desired peace and continued relationship that his people desire. The imagery of sitting under a vine and “ his fig tree” seems related to the title of “ the Branch” as well and links the time of well-being with the Davidic Messiah who is to come. The vision concludes with an image of peace, prosperity, community and relationship. Relate the Parts In the concluding image the main purpose of this vision seems to be captured.

The opening scene acknowledges the guilt of the accused and then removes that guilt, rebuking Satan, declaring that no one but the LORD is the judge. It welcomes the community to come around and participate in the removing of the guilt and the placing on of purity. However, the second section reveals



that there is a further command now to live a life worthy of these shiny new clothes. Then it all concludes with the revelation of the source of this forgiveness and acceptance, who is “ the Branch”, servant and stone, the messiah. The Theology How does this text reveal the nature of God?

The vision sets God up as the Judge, but what kind of judge? One who sees the guilt of his high priest and the people of Judah but removes that guilt. What gives him this kind of power? The prophets serve to remind God’s people of the covenant that they have with God and this should be kept in mind when considering who this Judge is. He made the law that the people are guilty of iniquity against. They sinned against him. Just as a debtor is the only one who can release someone from their debt, so the lawgiver is the only one who can forgive the lawbreakers.

What is the Judge’s reason then for pardoning his people? The iniquity of the priest would have prevented the coming of his people to worship at the temple. Here is a judge that longs to be part of his people’s lives. He will also provide the means for this to happen in the future with the coming of his servant, he wants to be directly involved, personally involved. The end result of all this sounds much like street party. Through the cleansing of our iniquity we gain the honor beyond or expectation and with our neighbor in a prosperous land (v. 10).

This is God’s reason for pardoning his people; this is the God we worship. Application How often have I worn the filthy clothes around this week? I constantly believe in the accusations of Satan, that I am a terrible friend, a terrible boyfriend that I simply use the people around me. What happens

then? I live like that. When I believe those accusations I lie in light of those accusations. The importance of believing that God has dressed me in clean clothes is undeniable; he has got me ready for a party and declared me worthy of that invitation.

Now it is time to live like I am heading to that party. I am who God declares me to be. Another application exists communally. Now the church knows who the messenger who was spoken of here is. We know Jesus and in this text in Zechariah he is once again emphasized as the one who came from God to bring about the peace and love of community when he comes. Should not the church also live as people free to enjoy the community of each other and of God? That is why Christ came, that is why he was sent.