

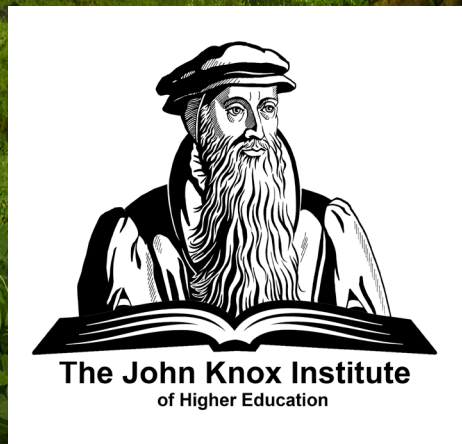
The Visions of Zechariah

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. William Macleod

Lecture #5

Joshua the High Priest



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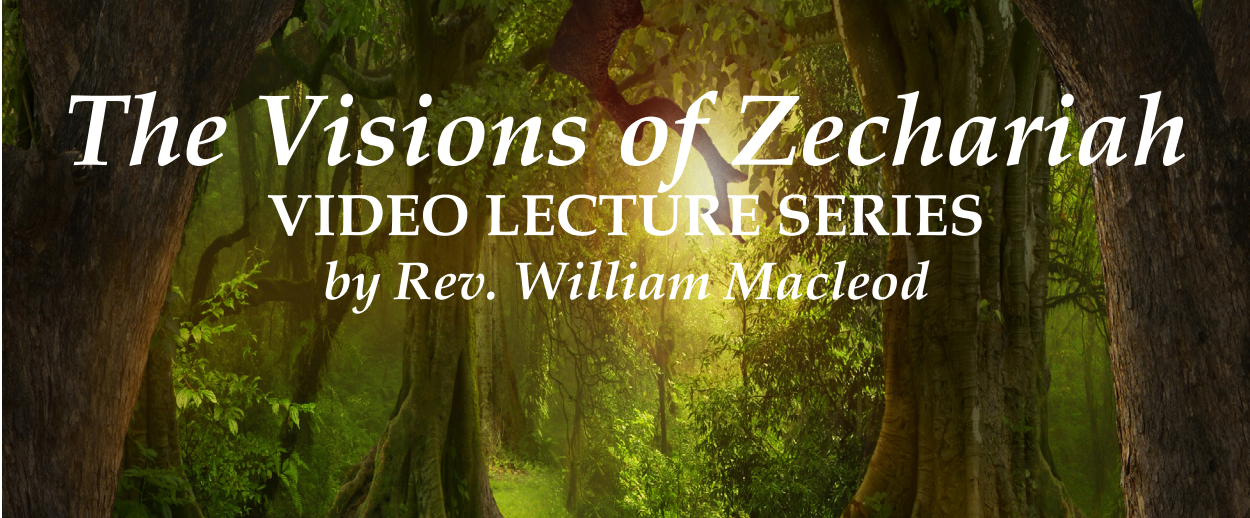
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The Visions of Zechariah

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

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Lecture #5 – Zechariah 3

Joshua the High Priest

Today we come to our fifth lecture on Zechariah's visions. This one is concerned with "Joshua the High Priest," and it is to be found in Zechariah chapter 3. So in Zechariah chapter 3, we have the fourth vision given to the prophet. It is quite different from the previous three, but at the same time it is also very encouraging. We all have one great problem and that is our sin. As a result of the sin of Adam we are all born sinners. Sin is natural. It's easy for us to break God's law. Sadly, we sin constantly in thought, word, and deed. The psalmist says concerning himself, and it is true of us all, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me"—Psalm 51, verse 5. In this, he is not referring to the act of procreation. There is nothing sinful in that, for it is written, "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled"—Hebrews 13, verse 4. Rather, it's a statement with regard to our moral condition from the very beginning of our existence. We sinned in Adam and fell with him in his first transgression. So even before our conception or actual existence, we were sinners because we were included in the covenant made with Adam. In the original covenant that God made with all mankind, Adam acted as the representative of all those who would descend from him by ordinary generation. As a result of Adam's first sin, the nature of every man and woman is fallen and depraved. Thus Paul asserts concerning himself and the Ephesian Christians, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." That's Ephesians 2, verses 1 to 3. Our condition by birth is one of total depravity and total inability. We begin life dead to God and wallowing in our sin.

Salvation is the work of God from beginning to end. To him must go all the glory. God planned it, sent his Son to earn it for us on the cross, and now sends his Spirit into our hearts to apply it to us. Thus Paul, having spoken of our helpless condition of being dead in our sins, proceeds to describe God's intervention for us: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he

loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast”—Ephesians 2, verses 4 to 9. Praise be to God for our salvation! It is all his work from beginning to end, and all glory must be given to him.

However, even after our conversion, sadly, we still sin and sin. Yes, there has been a huge change. We are no longer dead in sin. Sin bothers us—we hate it. It does not rule over us, yet we must constantly battle against it. When Paul describes the struggles of himself and other Christians, “When I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”—Romans 7, verses 21 to 24. The Christian life is one of constant warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The vision here is given to the prophet to encourage him and to encourage us. Yes, we are sinners; we deserve hell. But God loves us and has made provision for us. Satan says, “You are a disgrace. Don’t try to pray. God hates you because of your sin. Stay out of his presence. There is no hope for you. You might as well go on sinning.” But Satan, the cunning serpent, is a liar when he says God hates us, and that there is no point in us praying to God. We must not let sin be the barrier to us drawing nearer to God. There are many encouragements given to us to repent, confess our sins and draw near to God. “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him”—Romans 5, verses 8 and 9. John assures us, “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”—1 John 2:1. Further, he writes, “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin...If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”—1 John 1, verses 7 and 9. The vision before us illustrates these truths in a very graphic way.

So first of all, we’re introduced to Joshua the High Priest, verse 1—“And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.”

The high priest was the one who, in Old Testament times, led the worship of God’s people. Satan is the great enemy of God, and therefore the enemy of God’s people too. He stands at the priest’s right hand to resist him, mock him, and accuse him. Because Satan cannot attack God directly, he does all he can to trouble and hurt the people of God. He knows that God loves his people, so if he can get God’s people to sin, or if he can stop God’s people from worshipping him and serving him as they should, he thinks he hurts God. But God cannot be hurt. He is the blessed and happy One. He sees the end from the beginning. Satan will be punished forever and God will be glorified in the salvation of his people despite all Satan’s cunning. Satan will be crushed. His doom is rapidly approaching.

So verse 2, Satan Rebuked—“And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?”

God has a special relationship with his people. He has chosen them from all eternity, not because of anything good in them. He has loved them with an eternal love. His love is infinite, and it is like himself—unchangeable. We can be confident of this, “That he which hath begun a good

work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”—Philippians 1, verse 6.

Satan points to Joshua’s sins and to our sins. Joshua is not only carrying his own personal sin and guilt, but also as the high priest, he carries the sin of the people of the nation. Satan says, “You deserve to be punished in hell forever,” and he is right. But we can point to Calvary and say to Satan that Christ is our substitute, and has stood in our place, and carries all our sins, and has borne the punishment which we deserved. When Satan accuses us of the worst of sins, we can say, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus”—Romans 8, verse 1; and also, “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”—Romans 5, verse 1. And we can further challenge Satan with the words, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us”—Romans 8:33 and 34.

Here, God says to Satan, “The LORD...rebuke thee,” Satan. Jerusalem was a most rebellious city, but yet it was the city God chose out of all the cities of the earth to place his name there. Joshua and Jerusalem stand together. The high priest stands for the city and nation. A great statement is made here: “Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?” That was true of Joshua, and it was true of Jerusalem and it is true of the church today. Joshua was spared. He was to be destroyed by a righteous and holy God, but another took his place. Similarly Jerusalem was destroyed by the Chaldeans but it is now emerging from the ashes like a brand plucked from the fire. We look at the church today. It is so weak. The world has infiltrated and invaded it and taken it over. The church is so dead that it appears to be doomed. But God picks the brand from the fire. God will have his church. The gates of hell will not prevail against it. To man, the situation seems hopeless, but it is never so to God. When all hope is lost, he steps in and shows that he cares deeply, and he has a great plan for his people. We must never despair.

Verse 3, Joshua’s Filthy Garments—“Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel.”

The angel here is the Angel of the Covenant. It is God, the second person of the Trinity, and he is the One who appears in all the theophanies in the Old Testament. The High Priest’s clothes are described as filthy. The word used here is very strong. His clothes are, as it were, covered with dung. What priest would dare appear before God at the altar with such filthy clothes? Satan stands at his right hand to accuse him. Surely Satan is right. Joshua is a disgrace. But was there ever a high priest who could draw near in his own righteousness. Every high priest from Aaron onwards was a sinner, and in that sense, totally unfit for approaching God. The only One who was “holy, harmless undefiled, separate from sinners,” was the Lord Jesus Christ—Hebrews 7:26—Jesus, a priest after the order of Melchisedec, the final and greatest High Priest, the Priest whom we need, and of whom all other priests were simply types.

Take off the Filthy Garments, verse 4—“And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.”

Here we have a wonderful truth set before us. The filthy garments are taken off Joshua. They are placed instead upon our Lord Jesus. He takes our rags and gives to us his pure white robe of his righteousness. We are taught here the great Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone. In every other religion, priests and men stand before God in their own righteousness, self righteousness. No provision is made for sinners. Priests must try very hard to impress God with their clean garments. Sadly, however, the very best of men are sinners. We all sin in thought, word,

and deed constantly. In the eyes of an infinitely holy and just God, we are clothed in defiled and stinking garments. Jesus taught us, when we have achieved our very best, and tried our hardest, “When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do”—Luke 17, verse 10. The moment we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we are perfectly justified and accepted as righteous in the eyes of our holy God, and the Lord Jesus says to us, as he said to the notorious sinner woman in Luke 7, “Thy sins are forgiven thee... Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace”—Luke 7:48 and 50.

The word used here in the Hebrew for “change of raiment” has the idea of festive garments and joyous, celebratory clothes. How wonderful! One moment Joshua is clothed with dirty garments and is standing there in shame with Satan laughing at him, and in the next moment, he is covered in beautiful, clean, celebratory robes. Now it is Satan’s turn to be ashamed. The accuser of the brethren has nothing to say. In the book of Revelation we find the words, “And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night”—Revelation 12, verse 10. Satan is called the “accuser of the brethren,” but he is cast down.

Verse 5, Clothe Him Afresh—“And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by.”

The Aaronic high priest had a mitre, or a kind of turban, with a solid gold plate on it which had the words engraved on it, “HOLINESS TO THE LORD”—Exodus 28:36. Where does this holiness come from? Again, it comes from Christ. He imparts holiness to us, and by his Spirit, we are sanctified. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”—1 Corinthians 1, verses 30 to 31. Christ earned it all for his people. Christ is our sanctification, and Paul exhorts us, “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof”—Romans 13, verse 14. Helped by the Spirit of God, we are to put off our sins and clothe ourselves with Christ. No one can get into heaven without the wedding garment—Matthew 22:11 to 13.

Now coming to verses 6 and 7, The Lord’s Encouragement—“And the angel of the LORD protested unto Joshua, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.”

These are solemn words. Joshua has been justified, and now he has the duty to live a holy life. Yes, we, as God’s people, have been justified, and all our sins past, present, and future, have been pardoned, but now we must walk in his ways. The priest and the people have a great obligation laid upon them. We must not think because our sins are forgiven that we can continue to sin. To do that would demonstrate that we have never been born again. It would show that our nature has not been changed, and that we are still unconverted. It would demonstrate that we never really believed in Jesus with saving faith. Actually, faith in Christ is impossible until we are regenerated. Paul wrote to the Romans, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”—Romans 6, verses 1 and 2. A person who is converted has experienced a huge change. Someone who is born-again hates sin. Paul exhorted the Philippians, “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”—

Philippians 2, verses 12 and 13. We must work at saving ourselves, but at the same time, we must remember that it is God who is working in us, giving us the desire and the ability. The promise is made to Joshua the son of Josedech that if he will obey the Lord he will judge God's house and keep his courts and lead his people and be given his place among the courtiers of heaven.

Verse 8, The Branch—“Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the Branch.”

Interestingly, there were actually no seats in the temple. The priests were constantly ministering and offering sacrifices which could never take away sin—Hebrews 10:1 to 2. Their work never was finished. But the priests here gathered before Joshua have completed their work, and therefore they are seated. The one great sacrifice has made atonement for sin forever. It is finished. They are seated. “Men wondered at,” that is because they are types of Jesus Christ, the great High Priest, who having made atonement for our sins sat down at the right hand of God.

“For, behold, I will bring forth my servant the Branch.” What we have here is a very clear prophecy of the coming Messiah. He is called “my servant”. This is in line with the servant songs of Isaiah. The most famous begins, “Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high”—Isaiah 52, verse 13. Interestingly, you also get a picture of the Branch or Shoot in this servant's song: “For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him”—Isaiah 53, verse 2. He is the rejected One, despised, wounded, bruised, chastised, and “he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken”—verse 8. “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand”—verse 10. The Lord was pleased with his Servant because he carried out his will for the salvation of the elect—“he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors”—verse 12.

So the Branch here is the Son of David, who is also David's Lord: “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies”—Psalm 110, verses 1 and 2. According to his humanity, he is a child of David, but he is also the Son of God. He needed to be divine as well as human, to carry out his great work of redemption. As he himself said, “I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star”—Revelation 22, verse 16. He is the root of David as God, and he is the shoot or Branch of David as the man and David's son. He is the fruitful Branch who has many children. His travailing will not be in vain, “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities”—Isaiah 53, verse 11.

Verse 9, The Stone—“For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.”

The picture is changed from the Branch to a Stone. These men were building the temple. Here is the most critical stone of all, “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner”—Psalm 118, verse 22. So the Stone is another representation of the one who is the Branch. The Lord Jesus was rejected in his day by the Pharisees and the Sadducees, but he is become the chief cornerstone. He is the great stone which holds the building together. The true and lasting temple is based on him. The stone has seven eyes and these are the seven spirits of God, or the Holy Spirit in the fullness of his power who equipped Christ for his work. The stone

is engraved, like the plate on the mitre, on the priest's mitre, with "HOLINESS TO THE LORD". He removes the iniquity of Israel in one day and the end result is heaven. So here we have then a wonderful prophecy of Christ and his work.

And then verse 10, Peace—"In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree."

The Lord here is disclosing the future to the prophet and to Israel. There are wonderful days coming. The One who is the Branch and the Stone shall come. There shall be an age of great peace and prosperity. We have here the idyllic picture of every man calling his neighbor to sit and talk with him under his vine and under his fig tree. It surely speaks of glorious times ahead for the church of God, but especially of the promised land of heaven above. Amen.