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*"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"*

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*Editor:* A. McDONALD REDWOOD

# The Bible Student

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NEW SERIES

APRIL, 1948

VOL. XIX. No. 2

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## FROM FUTILITY TO FULNESS

### A MEDITATION ON ZECHARIAH 3

The first requisite is to read the chapter (A.V. and R.V.) in a prayerful spirit and with desire to hear the Holy Spirit's voice in the prophetic vision.

Historically, the prophecy has its setting in the events described in Ezra, chapters 1 to 6 (see ch. 5:1 & 2); the date being about B.C. 520-518. The captives who returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel were being encouraged to the task of rebuilding the Temple, but the response was tardy and half-hearted at first though finally effective.

Prophetically, this and the previous three visions seen by the prophet (they all occurred on the one night) look forward to a day *still future*, when God shall gather His scattered people from the ends of the earth in abounding blessing under the dominion of Messiah, the BRANCH (mentioned in this book four times, and deserving of study).

But the visions contain an immediate spiritual application also, to which we direct attention. The believer today may find lessons here to enable the spiritual life and testimony to flourish in victory and fruitfulness. The same Lord (here named "the Angel of Jehovah") is in the midst of His people now as in Zechariah's day. The spiritual principles of His dealings with us are the same as then. His purposes of blessing have not changed—He is the abiding, covenant-keeping GOD. Do not fail to hear His voice, calling us to examine ourselves and live the life more abundant (Jn. 10:10).

1. Look first at *the Angel of Jehovah*—seen in the vision as the *Judge-Advocate* in the *midst* of His people, but also at the

right hand of God *for* them. His portrait in the New Testament is seen as "the Advocate with the Father" (in Jn. 2:1), and again as "THE Great High Priest" of Heb. 5:14, greater than Joshua and of that which he represents here. A still fuller description of Him is found in Rev. 1:11-16, the One who "walketh in the midst of the golden lampstands" (see also ch. 2:1), which describes His present constant ministry of appraisal and discipline of His people. No Judge so penetrating in reading "the thoughts and intents of the heart"; no Advocate so ready to plead our cause, to forgive confessed sin, to restore to fulness of blessing (1 Jn. 1:9).

2. Then *the Adversary*, see where he stands and why (v. 1). Ever accusing (see Rev. 12:10), alert, vindictive, unceasing in his efforts to bring us down to dust in despair. Alas, how often we give him cause to triumph over us! Peter learnt this in bitterness of heart, though forewarned (see Luke 22:31, 32, R.V.): "Simon, Simon, behold Satan *asked* to have you, that he might *sift* you. . ." Hence the cogency and urgency of his own warning to us concerning "your Adversary the Devil" in his first letter (1 Pet. 5:8-9). Paul speaks of the "many adversaries" waiting at the door of every new spiritual adventure and advancement (see 1 Cor. 16:9): They still lurk around the doors of our opportunities and desires, intent on hindering and cut short our possible victories of faith. But Zechariah heard Jehovah's voice of rebuke: "Jehovah rebuke thee, O Satan; yea, Jehovah rebuke thee" (v. 2). Take courage then, for the same prevailing Voice still speaks to assure us of His presence and speedy help in every time of need and *despair*.

3. Next we see the *Accused*: "Joshua the high priest": How vivid his portrait! Prophetically, he represented the Jewish nation in all their unworthiness, a ready target for Satan's hostility. But having delivered them from Babylon, God sees them as "a brand plucked from the burning", not to be flung back helplessly to the Enemy, but to be restored to a position of great exaltation in the day of the Lord's final triumph. To this glorious culmination, also in vindication of Jehovah's word of promise given in ages past first to Abraham, Moses, and the subsequent prophets, God is continuing to work.

Remember that Israel (as a *nation*) was ever intended to

function as the living Representative of Jehovah among the Gentile nations. The Temple was the outward visible symbol of God's presence in the midst. Its ritual and sacrifices expressed the then true way of approach to God in worship. And the high priest was the highest "administrator" and "mediator" of all that ministry. He stood between God and His people, as the nation stood for God before the Gentiles. His ministry *within* the Temple (and Tabernacle) before God was on *behalf of the tribes*; and *outside* at the brazen altar was for the people on *behalf of God*. The symbolism in the vision, therefore, is of the highest significance—Joshua represents a position and ministry for God and before God of the holiest character, greater than that of kings, rulers and leaders of armies.

It follows that the spiritual and typical teaching for the believer in this day is also of the greatest importance and value. It recalls the N.T. teaching that all true believers are now by God constituted to be, as Peter is led to express it, "a *holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God" (1 Pet. 2:5; but the whole passage to verse 9 should be studied in order to get the full scope of its meaning). This "holy priesthood" indicates our present privilege to "minister within the sanctuary (not built with hands, but heavenly) before God." The N.T. does not teach any other kind of priestly service or priesthood, except, of course the High Priesthood of Christ Himself—as in the epistle to the Hebrews. But Peter goes on to declare: "ye are an elect race, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." For what purpose? "That ye should show forth the excellencies of Him who hath called you," etc. This refers to our vocation "outside", in the world, where our ministry is to "tell out" the saving power and glorious worth of our Saviour God. But note the *order* observed by the apostle: first, "*within* the holiest" as worshipping priests, "to offer up spiritual sacrifices;" our whole testimony, if it is to be effective at all, *begins there*—just where Joshua stood, "standing before the LORD". It is then we move *out* to proclaim a Saviour for all men. Do we observe God's order in this priestly ministry? It is again indicated, in this same sequence, and with equal appeal, in Hebrews 10:19 to 25, which deserves careful study also.

Our Joshua is ever fulfilling *His* high-priestly ministry for us at the right hand of God (see Heb. 4:14-16)—are we, as priests, fulfilling our ministry in His presence as “the true worshippers?”—for “*such* doth the Father seek to be *His worshippers*” (Jn. 4:23-25) as the Lord Himself stated.

4. There follows *the Accusation* (see v. 3). “Now Joshua was clothed with “*filthy garments*”—the description is vivid in its terseness. It was a pitiable picture, and it represented the reality of things as they were. But the question arises, “was Joshua *aware* of the fact?”. Surely not, otherwise he could and would never have entered the divine presence in such attire; neither did the people recognise it. This is the point of the tragedy: both he and the people he served failed to recognise their true state of heart, as God saw it. It reminds us of the similar tragedy told regarding the Church in Laodicea in Rev. 3:14-22 (which none should omit to read in this connection): “*Thou knowest not* that thou are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked!”

God’s purpose was far otherwise, for in giving Moses instruction for clothing Aaron the high priest he was told to make garments “for glory and beauty” (see Exod. 28, specially vs. 2 and 40). They were “for glory” in recognition of God’s glorious presence, where Aaron had to minister in the holiest: They were “for beauty” as symbolical of the holy character of the ministry offered, as the Psalmist describes it, “O worship the LORD in the *beauty of holiness*” (Pss. 96:8, 9 and 29:2).

But here God saw very differently, and the real character both of the man and his ministry could only be described as “*filthy rags*.” Isaiah’s eyes were opened to the same condition in an earlier day, for it had been a *continuing* state unrecognised by the rank and file; “We are all become as one that is unclean and all our righteousnesses are as *filthy rags*” (or, as R.V. “polluted garments.” Isa. 64:6).

For us the lessons to be learnt contain also the promise of blessing if we apply them aright. We are all conscious from time to time of failure, coldness, formality, futility, perhaps even of “filthiness” of the flesh. But it is not to encourage a continual state of self-conscious, unhealthy introspection, that we speak, which

only unnerves our moral energies and sometimes leads to real and final disaster. Rather, it is to encourage a sane and courageous self-examination, in the presence of the Lord and *by His help* in the Holy Spirit, on occasions and as we detect the beginning of drift. Such is the spirit and motive found in the Psalmist's prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my ways" (Ps. 139:23, 24). Mark specially the strong note of faith he strikes as he goes on to add: "*My defence is of God!*" If He is Judge, He is also Advocate: "If any man sin we have an Advocate (a Paraclete) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and HE is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:1; but read also ch. 1:9).

5. Finally consider *the Verdict* (vs. 3-8). "I will clothe thee with *rich apparel*" (R.V.)—that is a real N.T. word, as used by Paul in Ephesians, "the exceeding *riches of His grace*" overflows our every failure in cleansing power and restoring mercy (Eph. 1:7, 8; and 2:7). "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound"!

The LORD adds in the vision, "Set a fair mitre upon his head"—the full significance of which can only be appreciated by reference to Exod. 28:36-38, where we read that God commanded Moses to place on the forefront of the high priest's mitre (or turban) a plate of pure gold engraved with the words "Holiness to the Lord". It expressed in symbol and phrase the vital essential of *all* ministry, peculiarly that ministry of priestly character given to every true child of God. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the passions and lusts thereof" (Gal. 5:24)—the "filthy garments" must be put off, and the "garments for glory and beauty" put on, with the "fair mitre" of holy aspirations and a mind sanctified to God. The miracle of transformed lives, of revitalised service and testimony, has not ceased. Those who know this by experience tread afresh the shining way from condemnation, through mediation, to sanctification and fruitfulness.

Zechariah's vision and its spiritual lessons for us today can be contained within the compass of five simple words: We are *chosen* (v. 2), *cleansed* (v. 3), clothed upon (v. 5), crowned (v. 5) and finally commissioned (v. 7). Here is "the life that is Life indeed," which the apostle exhorts Timothy to "lay hold of" with concentrated devotion and holy zeal (1 Tim. 6:19, R.V.)—let us do so!

A. McD. R.