

THE ANGEL JUDGE-ADVOCATE

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In Zechariah's fourth vision we find the principle actors in the great controversy: Joshua the high priest, the heavenly council of angels, Satan the accuser, and the Angel of the Lord. In the great court scene Joshua is the defendant. Satan is the accuser. The Angel of the Lord is the Judge.

The high priest Joshua is a representative of the covenant people of Israel. He bears in his priestly vestments the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. They are engraved on the precious stones located on the shoulder straps of the ephod and also in the gems in the breastpiece (Ex. 28:9-12, 21-29). As representative of Israel he appears in court defiled by sin. He is "clothed with filthy garments" (Zech. 3:3).

The accusations of Satan are not specified, but they may be deduced from the scene. The people have broken the covenant and hence have been exiled. They are a guilty and condemned people, repudiated as a nation. Jehovah says, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Zech. 3:2. The Lord has restored them from exile.

Zechariah 3 is a scene of the heavenly council on a day when the court is in session. Satan is present and assumes the role of accuser of man, but his chief purpose is to offer a blasphemous challenge to the enthroned Lord. God cannot snatch from Satan the prey he seized. Joshua's religious profession is false. He is a hypocrite. Therefore God is not justified in restoring him from exile.

A parallel case is found in Job. Confronted by God's claim that Job was his loyal servant, a faithful family priest (Job 1:5, 8), a trophy of his redeeming grace, Satan contradicts: No—Job is no true servant. The prophetic gospel-decree of Genesis 3:15 is not being realized in Job or anyone else. God cannot snatch from Satan the prey he seized at the Fall. Job's religious profession is false. He is a hypocrite, using a pretense of piety as the price of prosperity and God is guilty of complicity in this pious fraudulence (Job 1:9-11). God's boast of Job's devotion to him is an empty lie.

The trial by ordeal that follows is designed to test the validity of Satan's accusations against Job and in that sense Job is on trial. But clearly the larger issue concerns the truth of the gospel, the validity of God's claim to be the Savior of his elect from Satan, sin, and death.

Under contention ultimately is the identity of Yahweh as true God, the God of truth, and so the rightful One to be Judge of heaven and earth.

Job serves then as the champion of God's name. Through Job's trial by ordeal God triumphs in the trial by ordeal between himself and Satan. The vindication of Job is the vindication of the Lord, Job's sovereign Savior. The silencing of Job's accuser is the victory of the divine Judge and his rebuke of Satan.

But both these priests figure in the accounts as sinners saved by the grace of God. Both are examples of the efficacy of God's redemptive wisdom and program. In Zechariah 3, no less than in the prologue to Job, Satan is then attacking the Lord for accepting the ministry of an allegedly unfit priest at his altar-throne. Posing as a cherub-guardian of the sanctity of God's sanctuary, Satan challenges the presence of Job and Joshua; filthy and false, they defile the holy temple. To challenge them was in effect to call into question the holiness of the God who consorts with such sinners, welcomes their presence and delights in the worship they offer.

By establishing the fact that Joshua was unclean, unacceptable on the holy hill of Zion (cf. Psalm 15), Satan would demonstrate that God's announced program of redemption had proven a failure. Further, he would make the case that the Angel of the Lord was not worthy to sit as judge in the heavenly council, for in countenancing the priestly service of defiled Joshua he was responsible for the contamination of God's holy courts.¹

The messianic Angel would thus be guilty of the very failing that had resulted in the expulsion of the first Adam from Eden's holy garden and would thereby be disqualified for any future mission as the righteous Servant, a second Adam, a savior of sinners. Would the strategy succeed with the Angel of the Lord as it had with Adam? The answer was not long in coming.

"Yahweh rebuke you, O Satan" (Zech. 3:2a). The Angel of the Lord dealt directly and decisively with the accuser and his blasphemous challenge. Yahweh's thunderous rebuke does more than parry the thrust of the opponent; its effects are devastating.

¹ "He seeks to accuse and condemn God and all who strive to carry out His purposes in this world in mercy and love, in compassion and forgiveness." *COL* 167.1.

The Angel of the Lord's rebuke silenced the accusations, but further it constituted a condemnation of the accuser himself, repulsing him from the station he presumed to occupy in the divine council. It was a scornful repudiation of the devil's pretensions to throne on the mountain of God.

Messiah's rebuke of Satan in Zechariah 3 was tantamount to a verdict rendered in favor of the Joshua-community (vv. 4, 5).² For Satan's assault on God's throne came disguised as a feigned concern for the sanctity of heaven's holy court, a concern expressed in the form of accusations against the sinners God would welcome there.

Before the foundations of the world a covenant was sealed in heaven. The Father covenanted to grant the Son a kingdom of glory as the just reward for the accomplishment of an earthly mission. Through incarnation the Son was to undertake the office of a second Adam and fulfill all righteousness in behalf of an elect people, securing for them justification and earning for them title to heaven's glory. By the obedience of this One, the many were to be made righteous (Rom. 5:19) and Satan vanquished.

The Angel-Judge rejects the charge of Satan and proceeds to justify Joshua on the basis of what he, the messianic Angel, was one day to do. He would become flesh and perfectly discharge the office of second Adam in faithfulness to his everlasting covenant with the Father, thereby becoming the mediator of a covenant of grace to his redeemed. The salvation-kingdom covenanted unto him by the Father he would in turn covenant unto his people as his co-heirs (cf. Luke 22:29, 30), conferring it on them as a gift of grace. Satan is rebuked because he reduced the judicial picture to the dimension of the first Adam and ignored the second Adam. He pointed the finger at Joshua and discounted the Angel-Judge, the Redeemer-Advocate of Joshua-Jerusalem.

What Satan would conceal, the Angel-Judge cited as telling evidence: "Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" (Zech. 3:2). From the consuming curse of the exile-judgment God had saved a remnant. That divine act of redemption attested to the truth that a

² A pronouncing of this rebuke-curse on the devil is cited in Jude v. 9. If Jude v. 9 refers to Zechariah 3:2, it clearly identifies the Angel of the Lord by the name Michael.

principle of grace was operating in the trial of Joshua as the decisive factor that must result in a verdict of justification.

The accusing serpent, he with the power of death (Heb. 2:14), was overcome by divine rebuke because the messianic Servant would give his life as a ransom, the One for the many (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45), to redeem them from the lake of fire, the second death (Rev. 2:10, 11; 12:11; 20:6). Joshua overcame in judgment because of the atoning blood of the Lamb, the priestly self-sacrifice to be offered unto God by the Christ of whom the high priest was a type (Zech. 3:4-10), the Judge before whom he stood (Zech. 3:1, 3; 2 Cor. 5:10).

The Re-investiture of Joshua.

In the trial scene in Zechariah 3, the Angel's favorable verdict, which results in Joshua's reinstatement as high priest, is traced to God's choice of Joshua/Jerusalem (v. 2).

In the performance of his office the priest finds himself standing at the place of judgment. For the temple is God's royal court where he is enthroned between the cherubim. Ministering there the priest comes under the direct scrutiny of the holy Judge of heaven and earth. Freedom from sin is therefore a prime prerequisite of the priestly calling. In the post-Fall world, priestly vocation requires first of all a restoration of righteousness to the sinner by the removing of the guilty stains which would otherwise prove his fiery undoing when he stood before God's face.

The soiled clothing of Joshua serves as the symbolic equivalent of the defiled flesh in the priestly installation ceremony of Zechariah 3. The removal of Joshua's soiled clothes—a variant of the laundering treatment—is the equivalent of the washing of the body which was the first step in the ceremony prescribed for the consecration of the priests.

The cleansing of Joshua clearly has forensic significance. Removal of his offending clothes answers to the rejection of Satan's accusations and therefore symbolizes the clearing of all recorded offenses from his judicial transcript. Explaining the act of divestiture, the Angel of Yahweh tells Joshua: "See, I have caused your iniquity to pass from you" (v.4b). It is the forgiveness of sins.

The key features we have noted in the episodes involving Aaron and Joshua are met again in the vision of Revelation 7:11-17. Induction into priestly ministry, the heavenly court setting, the symbolism of priestly clothing, and judicial washing accomplished through atoning sacrifice—all these elements come together in the imagery of the

redeemed myriads, white-robed, standing before the throne and the Lamb, appointed to serve God in his temple day and night, and identified as those who “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (v. 14).

Strange detergent, staining blood. But such is the forensic chemistry of the justification of God’s chosen priesthood. Jesus, lamb of God, must pour out his blood in the baptism-judgment of his crucifixion that there might be a baptismal laver filled with blood, a fountain opened where sinners lose all their guilty stains (cf. Zech. 13:1). By this blood the accuser of the brethren is overcome in the court of heaven (Rev. 12:10, 11). “Unto him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev. 1:5b, 6; cf. 5:9, 10).

In Zechariah 3, where the dirty clothing is removed rather than laundered, a second, separate step is needed to complete the process—an act of reclothing. Explaining to Joshua the meaning of the removal of his offending garments (v. 4b), The Angel appends the promise that he will reclothe him in new apparel (v. 4c). As Zechariah watches the visionary drama unfold and recognizes that the new garments are high priestly vestments, he interjects the prayer that the high priest’s mitre in particular be placed on Joshua’s head (v. 5a).

This regalia in which the high priest Joshua is being clothed is ornate in appearance and elegant finery. These are garments of a special ornate character that would be kept in mint condition. Removal of the unclean clothing symbolized the legal blotting out of sins, the rebuttal of Satan’s accusations, forgiveness, the imputation of the sins of God’s elect to Christ. As the complementary act to that, the reclothing will signify the judicial declaration of their righteousness, justification through the imputation to them of the righteousness of the messianic Servant, the righteousness of his active obedience. Joshua’s reclothing was his vindication as the one who was in the right in the sight of the heavenly Judge in the case of Satan against God’s elect. “I will greatly rejoice in Yahweh, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has put on me a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns himself like a priest” (Isa. 61:10).

We have in this symbolical representation the means of determining the occasion when the high priest stood there before God to intercede for Israel. On the tenth day of the seventh month, according

to the law of Moses, the high priest entered alone into the most holy place for the sins of all Israel. Lev. 16; Heb. 9:7. When he had finished his intercession in that place, he changed all his raiment, including the mitre, which was especially designed to bear the iniquity of the holy things. Lev. 16:20-24; Ex. 28:36-38. This work in the most holy place represents the final work of Christ before the ark in the temple in heaven when the sins of the people of God will be blotted out (Acts 3:19, 20; Rev. 11:19).

“And the angel of the LORD protested [admonished] unto Joshua, saying.” Zech. 3:6.

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways.” Zech. 3:7. This commandments indicates worship of Jehovah alone, in contrast to idolatry. Not to walk in God’s ways is identical with idolatry. As in the case of Manasseh “he walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them.” 2 Kings 21:21. This commandments stresses sole obedience and devotion to God—Joshua’s personal piety.

“And if thou wilt keep my charge.” Zech. 3:7. This refers to Joshua’s priestly role. Joshua is admonished to keep his official life, similarly to his private one, unattained by idolatrous influence.

The first task is: “Then thou shalt also judge my house.” Zech. 3:7. Joshua is to exercise judgment over the people who serve in My sanctuary. If their practices deviate from the religious practices outlines by the Lord, he is to chastise them.

“And shalt also keep my courts.” Zech. 3:7. Here Joshua is given authority of custodial care and maintenance of the Lord’s house.

“And I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.” Zech. 3:7. To be accorded entree among the angelic attendants standing by the Lord is to be admitted into the heavenly court, into the very presence of God and a close, confidential relationship with him. That prerogative was the supreme privilege vouchsafed to prophets. Zechariah was experiencing this exalted privilege as he received the night visions. But on the occasion of his entering the holy of holies the high priest also enjoyed this entree into the presence of the Lord enthroned between the cherubim standing by the ark-throne.

“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.” Zech. 3:8. Here we learn the peculiar signification of the blessing promised to Joshua. He and his companions were to serve as *signs*. Joshua and his fellows were to

serve in the priesthood as signs of the Messiah, here called the Branch.

The designation “my servant” summarizes the sublime Isaianic message of the suffering Servant of the Lord. The Zechariah 3:8 announcement, “behold, I bring forth my servant” recalls the introductory “Behold, my Servant” in Isaiah 42:1 and 52:13. As delineated in Isaiah’s climactic passage (52:13-53:12), the Servant’s ministry is priestly: he presents an offering for sin, he sprinkles many nations, he makes intercession for transgressors. Central to the portrait is his passive obedience unto death during his state of humiliation as he fills the role of priest and sacrifice.

The name-title, “the Branch” brings out more distinctly the royal dimension of the Servant title to which it is joined in Zechariah 3:8. For this title encapsulates the teaching of previous prophets concerning Messiah as scion of the stock of king David, son of Jesse. Isaiah used such plant imagery: “A shoot shall come forth from the stump of Jesse and a branch from his roots will bear fruit” (Isa. 11:1).

As seen by John in apocalyptic vision (Rev. 5:5, 6), Jesus was both the slain lamb (cf. Isa. 53:7) and the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David. “And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.” Rev. 5:5, 6.

“For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua.” Zech. 3:9. The golden plaque was also called a nezer, “consecration” and “crown” (as a sign of consecration). Its significance as an emblem of sanctification to God’s service was spelled out in the inscription “Holy to Yahweh” which was engraved on it like the engravings of a signet-stone (Exod. 28:36; 39:30). The mitre being placed on Aaron’s head, its frontal diadem would be positioned on his forehead (Exod. 28:38). There it must be whenever he came before God bearing the iniquity of Israel, so that the Lord’s eyes might fall at once on the holy seal of consecration and accept the priestly ministry.

“Upon one stone shall be seven eyes.” Zech. 3:9. In Zech. 4:10 we read: “Those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth.” The sevenfold spirit of God are His eyes which act as informants. They function as God’s reconnaissance

agents throughout the earth. They submit to the Angel-Judge a counter-report to that of Satan. Satan's eyes fastened on Joshua's soiled garments but the seven eyes of Yahweh look on the stone on Joshua's forehead, the stone that wins acceptance before the throne in heaven. God's fastening his gaze on the stone on Joshua's forehead leads to the promise that he will remove the iniquity of the land in one day.

"Behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts." Zech. 3:9. The engraving of that stone took place when the word was made flesh. This work must be wrought by Christ by means of his act of taking upon Himself our nature and dying for us, and then interceding for us as our High Priest. The Incarnation of Christ qualified Him to be both sacrifice and High priest on behalf of His people.

"And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." Zech. 3:9. The work of Joshua on the great day of atonement, described in the first part of this chapter, was a sign of the final work of Christ in blotting out the sins of his people at the end of his service as High Priest. The expression "in one day" points to a ceremony which takes place in one day. Based on this definition, the only day known in the Old Testament when God removes the sins of His people is the annual Day of Atonement. The "iniquity of the land" is naturally connected with Joshua's "iniquity" (vs. 4), pointing to a link between the removal of Joshua's guilt and the guilt of the land. Joshua's cleansing prepares the way for the Day of Atonement and the cleansing of the land.

The Father has so loved us, unworthy sinners, that He gave us His only Son, a gift for eternity. He is the "brother born for adversity" (Prov. 17:17), and our "Friend closer than a brother" (18:24). Jesus will forever remain what He was given to be—one of us, the Son of God but now forever, the Son of man. As He sits at the Father's right hand in heaven, He feels lonely there, for His heart is with us.

He can never forget His divinity nor can He forget His humanity; He is one. He has promised to come again the second time, visibly, personally, literally; but not only does He want to keep His promise, He wants to come on His own—that His people may be with Him, one with Him (cf. John 14:1-3). The reason? He loves them!

That means He is lonely in heaven; He has loved every individual believer since the world began, vast multitudes now sleeping in the grave; He loved each one individually and He longs to bring us

together in the resurrection morning. Think of the joy that awaits *Him!* Only someone infinite could experience a joy that will be infinite in itself!

We have often thought of the joy that will be *ours* in that glad morning; but let us enlarge our hearts a bit and think of the joy that will be *His!* And think how He longs for that day to come, yet He has been disappointed time and again as His own people have in various ways postponed the joyous day.

We are living in the time when God's people are to grow up "unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). The church is many individuals, but it is to become the Bride of Christ at the "marriage of the Lamb." All who "grow up" in the Lord are "guests at the wedding" (don't turn that invitation down!). But as a *corporate body*, the church becomes the Bride of the Lamb (cf. Rev. 19:7, 8).

The Chinese have said that a picture is worth a thousand words; here's the picture (Song of Solomon 5:2-7). The girl whom the Bridegroom loves has gone to bed; He has been on a journey; He has come "home" to her; it's night; it's raining; He's hungry; but most of all He longs for her; she is snug in bed, warm and cozy; He is knocking at her door (the Hebrew text says He is banging on the door); she doesn't want to give up her comfort and let Him in—she snuggles closer; He keeps on banging; finally, she "grows up" enough to forget her selfish comfort and thinks of Him out there in the rain and cold and decides to let Him in.

But when she opens the door, *He is gone*. That's another portrait of the church that Revelation says is Laodicea (cf. 3:14-21).

The "one day" promised here is "that day" of Israel's corporate repentance, when her people will look on Him whom they have pierced. "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." (Zech. 12:10).

In the vision of Zechariah 3, Joshua, by being re-invested with the radiant high priestly regalia, is transfigured into the brilliant Glory-likeness of the messianic Angel of the Glory-Presence before whom he stands. The church-bride, ready for the marriage of the Lamb, is arrayed in fine priestly linen (Rev. 19:7, 8). Other details of priestly dress are interwoven in the description of the bridal adornments in

Revelation 21 and 22. As seen in this final portrait, the bride-church appears clothed in priestly glory, a replica of the likeness of Christ as he is delineated in the opening epiphany, with transfigured high priestly robes, invested with the Glory-Spirit (Rev. 1:13-16).

“In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbor under the vine and under the fig tree.” Zech. 3:10.

Zechariah’s picture of the coming day is drawn from the prosperity of Solomon’s days, when “Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree” (1 Kgs. 4:25). It is a picture of tranquility and rest, since sin has been pardoned and removed. This domestic scene of everyone sitting under his own vine and fig tree is the epitome of contentment and happiness.

In one day, God will so move on His people that the church will confess her sins and be forgiven by God in a single day.