

---

## OUTLINE

# 3

## THE FOURTH VISION Justification of the church, 3:1-10

### 3.1 The object of justification: 3:1-5

Repeatedly there is a strong mutual connection between Zechariah's night visions. It is especially remarkable that every consecutive vision draws on the previous one so that there is an elaboration and explanation of what had been said before.

In the third vision it was said that there would be an immense growth of the church so that Jerusalem would be inhabited like villages without walls because of the multitude of men and cattle in it. But now the question arises: Can that be done without any further ado? The situation of the church is not good at all! Had the LORD forgotten that? Not only God's people might ask that question but also God's adversary: can this be done without any objection? Thus, Satan presents himself here as the accuser of the brethren.

This vision is shown in heaven where the heavenly council has its meeting.

It is a council of angels and archangels together with the LORD of hosts and a lawsuit is to be held.

Joshua, the high priest, is standing before the angel of the LORD, the Son of God, with the physical appearance as is described in the Old Testament. Satan is standing at the right hand of Joshua and ready to accuse him. Joshua is not accused as a private person but his name as an office-bearer is mentioned. He is accused as the high priest. If a high priest is accused, there are consequences. Then the whole priesthood is involved. We may even say, then the whole people of Israel are involved.

In the assessment of requirements, Satan points to the filthy garments of Joshua. These filthy garments are symbolic of the guilt of the whole church.

Actually, how can such a priest enter the temple of the holy God? How can he approach the LORD to reconcile the sins of the people?

At this time there was much corruption, much human folly among

the people! Did all that change after the exile? How can God have communion with this disobedient and sinful people?

Satan saw all these things: the marriages with heathen women, and the slackness of the temple construction. The people needed to sacrifice something for this. They themselves lived in panelled houses among all kinds of luxury and comfort (cf. Haggai 1:2,4,9).

Be aware of the fact that Satan definitely had access to heaven at that time. Since Christ's death and resurrection and ascension all that has changed.

When the Saviour was still on earth He had already said to His disciples, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). That means: he is going to lose the battle, including the right of accusation. When we take a look at the last book of the Bible, we read there about the great and red dragon, that ancient serpent, namely, Satan, who is thrown down from heaven by Michael and his angels. That happens when the child, Christ Jesus, is caught up to God and His throne (Rev. 12:7-10). It means that Satan is going to lose the battle completely. One thing, however, does not change. Just like Joshua was standing before God with filthy garments, so the church is still standing before God. Also the Reformed church is standing in that clothing before God, with many and manifold sins. Compare in this respect Heid. Cat. Lord's Day 23 (Q.&A. 60). If we then also think: How can we exist?, then this vision will also comfort us. The LORD says to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan!" God connects this with the fact that He has chosen Jerusalem (cf. ch. 1). Thus, the LORD does not derive reasons from His people, from men, in order to save them. No, He only derives reasons from Himself when He reveals His grace. God says, "I will save only for the sake of My own good pleasure!"

Bear in mind what Joshua is called here: a brand, plucked from the fire. Just as firewood will burn in the fire, so Joshua would be destroyed. Yet, God plucked him from the fire. Joshua could not save himself from the fire but in His election the LORD pulled him out. In the background we have to see the horrible judgment of God that has just passed, the terrible judgment of the exile. When Judah had been transferred to Babylon, everybody thought that this was the end of David's house. This is also the end of the priesthood. It is even the end of the people of Israel! There was the cry of Rachel, "They never will come back, all of them will perish!" (cf. Jeremiah 31:15).

Fortunately it was not true. At the very last moment, when everybody thought it was finished, the priesthood was plucked from the fire. Now the LORD grants new office-bearers. The LORD grants a future for His people. The angel says to the angels standing in front of Joshua, "Remove the filthy garments from him." This means: he is recognized as an office-bearer. He may administer his office on earth again as a priest. It is very positive now. The LORD says, "Behold, I have taken away your

iniquity from you.” That means, Joshua, you are acquitted. And then, he is clothed with rich apparel.

They put a clean turban on his head. In other words, the garments of the office-bearer come back. Joshua receives an official functional rehabilitation. We read in Exodus 28 that the high priest had to wear a gold plate made out of pure gold and that he had to engrave on it (like the engraving on a signet) “Holy to the LORD.” And the LORD said, “You shall fasten it on the turban by a lace of blue. It shall be on the front of the turban” (cf. Ex. 28:36-38).

We find the same theme here in Zech. 3. God will cover the sins of His remnant. The priest will be seen in grace, the people of God will be accepted, the future of the Messiah is disclosed because God has chosen His people. In the background of this night vision of Zechariah both the sacrifice and the intercession of the Angel of the LORD Jesus Christ is to be considered. He knew no sin and was holy and pure in the eyes of God. He bore the white garments of innocence. Yet, for the sake of those who are His, He was made to be sin. He covered Himself with the filthy garments of the sins of His people, so that in Him they might become righteous in God (2 Cor. 5:21). Then the great miracle will happen: His people will be clothed with the white garment of Christ’s innocence and holiness.

### **3.2 The condition of justification: 3:6 & 7**

Thus, the LORD will justify Joshua and the office-bearers. However, there are conditions attached to it. These conditions do not precede the justification but succeed it. Joshua may not say that the LORD maintained him in the office and therefore everything is all right now and nothing can happen to him anymore. No. The LORD says, “My condition is: 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.” Joshua has to rule the office-bearers of the temple. He also has to keep an eye on the whole service so that no idolatry will enter the courts of the temple. In that case, Joshua will be blessed in his ministry. But only in that case! If Joshua will execute his assignments exactly, he can be a true and faithful watchman upon the walls of Zion. Then he can administer his office with authority. Bear in mind what is said in verse 7, “I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here.” The King James version is clearer here than the RSV. We read there, “I will give thee places to *walk* among these that stand by.”

What does it mean that Joshua receives places to walk among the angels?

Well, there was one room in the temple that was closed, namely, the holy of holies. This room is also to be called the Paradise room of the King’s palace. He who would enter that room would be walking among

the angels for the cherubim are there, embroidered on the walls, and they are also upon the ark of God's covenant. Now the LORD promises Joshua that he may walk among the angels, that he may have access to the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement. Joshua and his successors are comforted here since Satan could not take away this access to the place of the angels, i.e., where God has His throne. The Day of Atonement, when the High Priest may enter the holy of holies, will be continued. That also means: the day of Christ's atonement, His sacrifice is also guaranteed against the accusations of Satan. Here is a foretaste of Christ's reconciliation!

In the New Dispensation, however, we do not need the high priest who may walk among the angels in the holy of holies anymore. We now have our great High Priest in heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ, who has passed through the heavens (Hebr. 4:14). He is now our Advocate with the Father and the expiation of our sins (1 John 2:1,2). Therefore, in the preaching of God's Word we may repeat the proclamation of our reconciliation with God again and again.

### **3.3 The privilege of justification: 3:8-10**

The angel of the LORD did not only admonish Joshua, but he comforted him as well, "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends (those are his colleagues) who sit before you, for they are men of good omen . . . ."

We can also translate: men who *testify* of good omen. That good omen, that sign, is then the guarantee from the side of the LORD.

What is that good omen, that sign and seal of the LORD? It is said in the second part of verse 8, "Behold, I will bring my servant the Branch." That means that the LORD promises a new shoot to the tree which was deprived of branches. This prophecy of the Branch is connected with the kingdom of David. The Messiah will be from David's generation. There is a great perspective for the kingship of David. The King will be the servant of the LORD who executes the divine assignments. Thus, the King of David's dynasty will certainly come.

Then there is a clear summons to *see*, "Behold, upon the stone which I have set before Joshua, upon a single stone with seven faces, I will engrave its inscription," says the LORD of hosts.

What is meant by that stone? There are many explanations. Again we have to see the connection with Exodus 28. According to God's law the stones might not be missed on the garment of the high priest when he appears before the LORD. These stones are called onyx stones. On these stones the names of the sons of Israel are engraved (Ex. 28:9). When the LORD looks at the high priest He sees these stones. This means: then He looks upon His people Israel in mercy. Now, in this night vision, the LORD gave to Joshua a precious stone. The LORD God pays full attention to that stone. He also asks attention for the inscription on it.

What is the inscription? Although there are many theories about it, the explanation is given in the night vision itself, namely, in verse 9, “I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day.” The eyes of the LORD are concentrated on this inscription. It is the promise of the acquittal of debts and punishments. God grants forgiveness of sins. On one single day the one sacrifice for sin will be brought. The seven eyes of the Holy Spirit are concentrated on that fact. The LORD will think about that again and again when the high priest appears before Him yearly on the Day of Atonement. He will think about the sacrifice that will be brought on that one single day.

This engraving has a twofold meaning. In the first place it is said that the LORD will remove the guilt *of this land*. That means, the holiness is not limited to the priests but the whole land is involved in it. In the second place, the LORD will do that *in one day*. This means: once and for all. It will not occur by the service of the priests throughout many days nor by the service of the high priests year after year. It will only occur by the high priestly service of Him after whom Joshua has been called, namely, Jesus Christ. That will happen on that one single day at Golgotha, that one Good Friday, when the one, great and sufficient sacrifice will be offered. It is the one Day of Atonement when the temple of stones is dismissed and the spiritual temple will arise, i.e., the church, bought by the blood of the LORD Jesus! Even this guarantee is not sufficient. In verse 10 it says, “In that day, says the LORD of hosts, everyone of you will invite his neighbour under his vine and under his fig tree.” That has a far-reaching implication. When the ripe fruits had to be guarded, the farmer with his family in Canaan lived for a while in simple cottages in the vineyards which were figyards at the same time. Then it was the time of ripeness, of peace and rest (See also Micah 4:4).

That is the sign of the coming peace all over the world, the great reconciliation. It is not just a reconciliation of heart and life but of the whole world, universally; for Christ will be the eternal Prince of peace (cf. Is. 9:6) whose kingdom will have no end. The new heaven and the new earth are coming into view! Not only David but also Solomon receives his fulfilment. There is a time coming in which they will say to one another: Come and let us enjoy the great peace in the communion of saints. Peace with God and peace with one another; peace with the whole cosmos!

### 3.4 Some questions

1. *Could both the accusations of Satan concerning the service of the priests and Haggai's complaint concerning the service of God's temple (1:2,4,9) be made concrete in our times?*
2. *Are we allowed to speak of conditions of God's covenant?*

3. *Is accurate service of office-bearers (cf. Zech. 3:7) not also a prerequisite of the church today?*
4. *Can more examples of texts be located in the Scriptures in which the number seven points to fulness and completeness?*
5. *How should the fulfilment in verse 9 be viewed? Note especially the fulfilment with respect to the removal of guilt “in a single day.”*
6. *What is the difference between the cosmic reconciliation (see verse 10) and the universal reconciliation which is promoted by Arminians and others?*

### **3.5 Literature**

See Outline 1.

C. Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, Van den Berg, Kampen, 1986 (esp. in view of Exodus 28).