

JOSHUA THE HIGH PRIEST (Zech. 3:1-10)

Shortly after the Israelites had come back from Babylon, their excitement turned into discouragement, and they might well have wondered, Hath God cast away his people? (Rom. 11:1) ... Previously by the rivers of Babylon, they had grieved over their beloved Zion, **Ps. 137:4** How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land? ... They had longed to return. However, most of them were born and reared in the idol-worshipping Babylon and they had no knowledge of how life had been in Jerusalem during its glory days. Their knowledge of the Law of Moses was scant-to-non-existent, and worshipping God as in the days of Solomon was alien to their mindset. Sadly, their dream of returning to Jerusalem was severely impaired by their 'rose-tinted glasses'. Consequently, when they did return, it was like nothing they imagined. Had they been brought back to their beloved city to 'wilt away' and evaporate in front of the nations? ... God forbid, wrote Paul to the Romans, adding, **Rom. 11:25** For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. **26** And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: **27** For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

In Zechariah's first three visions, God gave His people three promises, - they will be restored, their enemies will be judged, and their city will be rebuilt. To a degree, these promises had a 'partial fulfilment' during Zechariah's time and onwards to Ezra and Nehemiah. Progress was made, but it was nothing like the illustrious glory described in the visions. This means the 'complete fulfilment' was yet to take place in the future.

At the time of Zechariah, the Jews were living under Medo-Persian occupation, followed by the Greeks, and then the Romans, until in 70 AD Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman general Titus and the Jews were

dispersed across many nations. This continued throughout the centuries in the *Diaspora*. A change began in 1897 when the first Zionist Congress convened in Basel, Switzerland, chaired by Theodor Herzl. Under the Ottoman Empire, the first movement of Jews back to Israel, - *aliyah* - occurred 1882-1903 when approximately 35,000 returned to the land. The second was between 1904-1914 when 35-40,000 returned. Under the British mandate, the third (1919-23) returned 40,000 Jews. The fourth (1924-29) returned 82,000 Jews, and the fifth *aliyah* (1929-39), - with the rise of Nazism, - prompted 250,000 to arrive home. Today, almost 6.7 million Jews live in Israel which is 47% of the total Jewish population worldwide (i.e. 14.7 million). ... Over two-and-a-half thousand years earlier, Zechariah was receiving these promises which prophesied the future transformation of Israel from sinfulness to righteousness in their own land.

In the fourth vision, Zechariah is shown by the interpreting angel Joshua the high priest (Haggai 1:1) *standing before* (a high priestly word describing 'service') the Angel of the Lord (v.1), Who is the LORD (v.2) for notice He forgives sin (v.4). ... For over two hundred years there had been no sightings of the Angel of the Lord, but now He has returned.

As high priest, Joshua was the mediator representing his people, the nation of Israel, before God. ... And when God was speaking to him, God was speaking to the nation.

Also appearing was Satan, and he was accusing Israel, as he did Job (cf. Job 1). However, the Lord defends Jerusalem, and describes its people as a brand plucked out of the fire (v.2) ... God saved them from being destroyed, and He is keeping them. They could easily have been subsumed in Babylonian society, but God kept them distinct and returned them to Jerusalem.

Next, Joshua is described as clothed with filthy garments, soiled with excrement (CJB, 'garments covered with dung'). He is representing the

defilement of Israel's sin, - their filthy and stinking sinful practice. And while Satan is accusing filthy Israel, filthy Israel is silent for he is all too aware of his condition. There is nothing he can say, for he knows his contamination! ... He was standing in filthy garment, and priests were to keep clean at all times, for if they did not, their uncleanness would be punishable by death, **Ex. 30:19** For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: **20** When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD: **21** So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, even to him and to his seed throughout their generations. ... Joshua was standing before God 'bearing shame and scoffing rude', condemned, guilty, vile, and helpless! The most extreme punishment was inevitable!

How could Israel become clean? There was only one way ... by the undeserved and unmerited grace of God Who instructed His angels, Take away the filthy garments from him (v.4). Israel did not discard his own filthy garments for it would have made him even filthier. Instead, his filthy garments were removed, *I* have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee – your sins are gone, I have taken them away ... completely removed and they were made righteous. ... Israel did not remove his own clothes, but by God's grace, they were removed. Nothing of human works, and nothing of the nation for *God* cleansed them, - He took off their old tattered garments, and He gave them new garments, *I* will clothe thee with change of raiment (v.4) ... **Is. 61:10** ... he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness ... And Satan had nothing further to say!

Then a clean turban was placed on Joshua's head, with its golden plate at the front, inscribed with the words, HOLINESS TO THE LORD (Ex. 28:36-38; 39:30-31). And he stood there before God, clothed in his new garments, - no stench, no stains, no shame. At this point in the ceremony, Joshua, the people, and their gifts were again acceptable before God, and while this was

happening, the angel of the LORD stood by (v.5). ... Wrote Paul of the same event, **Rom. 11:26** And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: **27** For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

After this, the Angel of the Lord ‘protested’ [*testified, publicly professed*] to Joshua, and through Joshua to Israel, **7** 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 [*the angels*] that stand by ... God promises to restore this chosen nation to serve Him, and serve Him they will for He has not expended all His efforts in vain for His will and His purposes to fail ... They will be achieved perfectly and completely, **Is. 2:2** And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. **3** And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ... It has not yet taken place, but it will for God will bring it about, and His people *will* honour Him for the Spirit of God will indwell them, **Is. 44:2** Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, *Jesurun* [*‘blessed one’, a synonym for the nation of Israel*], whom I have chosen. **3** For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring ... **Is. 46:10** Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.

It is as certain as if it is done! ... **8** Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows [*fellow-priests, the symbols of future Israel*] that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at ... the word for ‘wondered at’ means a ‘sign’, a ‘miracle’, a ‘special display of God’s power, relating to the future ... for, - it is now going to be explained, - *behold, I will bring forth my **servant** [*a Servant*]* the **BRANCH**. ... This is the same Branch also mentioned

elsewhere, **Zech. 6:12** Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: **13** Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest *la Priest/* upon his throne ... **Is. 4:2** In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth *la Man/* shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel ... **Is. 11:1** And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse *la King/*, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots ... **Jer. 23:5** Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a *King* shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth ... **Jer. 33:14** Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. **15** In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David *la King/*, and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. **16** In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely.

Then we are told to ‘*behold*’ the stone, which is another Old Testament image of the Messiah, **Zech. 3:9** For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua ... He is described by the psalmist as the *rejected* stone, **Ps. 118:22** The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. ... He is described by Isaiah as the stone of stumbling (Is. 8:14). Daniel prophesied how the Messiah will be a stone ... cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth (Dan. 2:34,35).

And upon the stone shall be seven eyes, relating to knowledge, and the number seven speaks of perfection ... perfect knowledge ... the omniscience of God, **Zech. 4:10** For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth. ... And on this stone, which refers to the Messiah, is engraved an engraving. We are not told what

it is but it almost certainly synonymous with the One Whose eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself (Rev. 19:12).

This vision is coming directly from “The LORD of hosts”, and furthermore He promises, I will remove *[future tense]* the iniquity of that land *in one day* ... As Isaiah explains, **Is. 66:8** Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth *in one day*? or shall a nation be born at once? ... It is impossible, but with God all things are possible, and the people of Israel, - the Jews, - will be brought to look upon and recognise the One they pierced at Calvary and they will believe, for Jehovah promises, **Zech. 12:10** 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 ... **13:1** In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.

And God will fulfil all these promises for **Zech. 3:10** In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree. ... There will be peace and security, which Israel longed for but had never found, **Is. 4:2** In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. **3** And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: **4** When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof ... **Is. 11:9** They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. **10** And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. ...

Now be the God of Israel blessed,
Who makes His truth appear;
His mighty hand fulfils His word,
And all the oaths He swore.

(Isaac Watts)