

Zechariah 3:8-10

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The prophet Zechariah tells Joshua that his associates are signs of the Messiah, the future great King, through whom God will cleanse His people and restore peace and security in their land.

In the fourth vision, Zechariah saw an adversary (Satan) about to accuse the high priest Joshua before the heavenly tribunal. The angel of the LORD, however, rebuked Satan and the LORD forgave Joshua's sins. Then, He vested him in clean garments, representing imputed righteousness, and admonished him to live an obedient life before Him. He also admonished Joshua to display a genuine character before the people of God through the performance of his priestly duties (vv. 1–7).

After the admonition, the prophet Zechariah spoke on God's behalf to tell Joshua that his cleansing and privileges foreshadow the transformation of the entire Israelite community. This scene can be seen as a prophetic glimpse of Jesus as our High Priest, whose ministry is to bring righteousness to humanity for all who believe (Romans 4:3). Verse 8 tells us that Joshua is a symbol.

Zechariah began with a call to attention, giving a glimpse of a future scene where the priests and all the people who put their trust in God will live a sinless and peaceful life: *Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you* (vs 8). The verb translated as *listen* is "Shema" in the Hebrew language. It describes the mental activity of hearing and its effects (Deuteronomy 6:4; Hosea 5:1; Amos 5:1). The one who hears should pay careful attention to what is said. The hearing should be such that obedience follows the act of hearing.

The man *Joshua* was the religious leader of Judah, who returned to Jerusalem with the exiles (Ezra 3:2). He represented the people of Judah before the LORD. Joshua's *friends* who were *sitting in front* of him are probably other priests of lower rank who sat before *the high priest* like pupils sitting in front of a teacher in a classroom setting (2 Kings 4:38; Ezekiel 8:1). It was the assigned job of the priests both to learn the law as well as to teach it to the people (Deuteronomy 33:10). Joshua and his associates were to give undivided attention to the message.

Speaking on God's behalf, the prophet Zechariah then told *Joshua* that his companions *are men who are a symbol* (vs 8). That means that they foreshadowed future events (Ezekiel 12:6; 24:24). The rest of the verse indicates that Joshua's companions were symbolic of better days ahead, days that will include the coming of the Messiah. The LORD announced His course of actions using the particle *behold*, which draws attention to the importance of the message. *For behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch* (vs 8).

In the Old Testament, the term *servant* sometimes refers to specific people such as Abraham, Moses, Caleb, and David that the LORD used in a special way to carry out His purposes (Genesis 26:24; Numbers 12:7; Numbers 14:24, and 2 Samuel 7:5 respectively). But the ultimate *servant* is the Messiah (Isaiah 53:11). He will fulfill God's redemptive plan for humanity. The

Messiah is called God's Servant in a number of "Servant Songs" in Isaiah (Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12.) Here, the Servant is called *the Branch*.

The word *branch* ("šemaḥ" in Hebrew) refers to that which sprouts (i.e. "growth"). The verb derived from this root is often used for growth, as in Genesis 19:25, which speaks of the growth of cities. It is also used for something that springs from something, as in Psalm 56:10, which speaks of the blessing that springs from rainfall. In Jeremiah 23:5, God speaks of the promised Messiah as a "šemaḥ"—translated *Branch*—a sprout of a descendant from the kingly Davidic lineage, which is Jesus (Matthew 1:1).

According to Jeremiah, the LORD "will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land" (Jeremiah 23:5). This righteous *Branch* is the Messiah, who would come from the Davidic line (Jeremiah 33:15). He will reign with all power and majesty (Daniel 2:44). Here in Zechariah, the word *Branch* is a technical term referring to a rightful heir of an established Davidic family, a future king and Messiah who would fulfill the prophecy and restore the kingdom monarchy in Israel.

The prophecy of the Messiah Son of David reestablishing the kingdom of David has been fulfilled in part through Jesus, who was granted all authority over earth, as a result of His obedience to His Father (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:8). However, instead of taking over as the ruling political authority, Jesus ascended to heaven, and commanded His followers to be His witnesses until His return (Acts 1:6-8). We now await His return, at which time this prophecy in Zechariah will be completely fulfilled (Matthew 19:28).

As the meaning of the vision unfolds, Zechariah again used the particle *behold* to point to a specific stone. He quoted God directly and begins, *For behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua* (vs 9). The *stone* is a translation of the Hebrew word "eben." This word appears nine times in Zechariah, and is variously translated:

- Stone(s) (Zechariah 3:9, 5:4, 9:15-16, 12:3)
- Top stone (Zechariah 4:7) (in other translations, capstone or headstone)
- Plumb line (Zechariah 4:10)
- Weight (Zechariah 5:8)

The word "eben" (*stone*) refers to stones in a crown (vs 9:16) and stones to shoot from a sling (vs 9:15). So the meaning of "eben" depends on the context.

In this case, the *stone* might represent the cornerstone of the founding of the temple, which was reconstructed by Zerubbabel. This seems likely in part because here there is only *one stone* referenced. In this case, the cornerstone would prophetically point to the Messiah, who is called the cornerstone which was rejected (Matthew 21:42).

The prophet further declared, *On one stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave an inscription on it* (vs 9). The number *seven* is the number of perfection and completeness. Thus, the *seven eyes* likely symbolize omniscience and wisdom. That means that the Messiah would have full intelligence to rule His kingdom (Isaiah 11:2). It also indicates the divinity of the Messiah, that

He will be all-seeing and all-knowing, as the image of *seven eyes* indicates. Jesus is depicted as a lamb with seven eyes in the book of Revelation (Revelation 5:6). This image of *seven eyes* on *one stone* supports an interpretation of the *stone* as representing Jesus, the chief cornerstone (Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:10). Although Jesus the Messiah is divine, He is also human. He learned obedience (Philippians 2:8), and submitted to the future knowledge of His Father (Acts 1:7).

The Lord says *I will engrave an inscription on it* (vs 9). In the book of Exodus, we read, “You shall also make a plate of pure gold and shall engrave on it, like the engravings of a seal, ‘Holy to the LORD’” (Exodus 28:36). The *stone* in Zechariah might have a similar inscription.

Zechariah added the prophetic formula *declares the LORD of hosts* to confirm the source of his message. The term *LORD* is the covenant name of God, as given to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14–15). The phrase *the LORD of hosts* describes God’s power as a warrior leading His angelic army to defeat His enemy (Amos 5:16; 9:5; Habakkuk 2:17). Here in Zechariah, the phrase demonstrates the LORD’s power as the supreme God who will bring all things to pass.

After the prophetic formula, Zechariah resumed his speech, quoting God again: *I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day* (vs 9). The prophet associated the *stone* with the removal of sin. This likely refers to Jesus; He was the chief cornerstone that was rejected (Matthew 24:32). Because He was rejected, He died on the cross. The work of Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary fulfilled the divine promise in Zechariah. Indeed, Jesus went to the cross and took away “the sins of the world” (John 1:29). Jesus was a stumbling block to Israel, but His rejection became salvation for the world (John 3:14-15; Romans 11:9-11). All the sins of the world were nailed to the cross, and taken away *in one day* (Colossians 2:14).

An additional fulfillment of this promise will take place during the Messianic kingdom when Jesus will reign for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6). There will come a time when Israel accepts its Messiah. Then all the inhabitants of Israel will look upon Jesus “whom they pierced” (Zechariah 12:10; John 19:37). It will come to pass that “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26).

‘In that day,’ declares the LORD of hosts, ‘every one of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and under his fig tree’ (vs 10). This now speaks of *that day* instead of *one day* (vs 9). The *one day* would seem to fit the day Jesus died for the sins of the world. The phrase *in that day* would seem to fit the time when Israel will be restored. During that time, Jesus will reign, and the harmony of nature on earth will largely be restored (Isaiah 65:24-25). Death will be rare (Isaiah 65:19-20). There will be peace on earth, which will allow people to dwell on their property without fear, and enjoy engaging with their neighbors (Micah 4:3-4).

In biblical times, the *fig tree* was one of the most common domesticated plants. It had delicious fruits and deeply lobed leaves, which produced a welcome shade (Micah 4:4; John 1:48). It symbolized the good life: joy, peace, and prosperity (Isaiah 36:16). Similarly, the *vine* depicts blessings and restoration. A prosperous household would expect to have figs and vines. The prophet Jeremiah, foreshadowing such prosperity and blessings, comforted the people of God, who would soon endure great difficulties. As the prophet Jeremiah stated, “Again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria; The planters will plant and will enjoy them” (Jeremiah 31:5).

The expression *sit under his vine and under his fig tree* depicts security and peace (1 Kings 4:25; 2 Kings 18:31). It implies an earthly blessing such as an abundance of crops, weather, livestock, produce, and food. That means there will be peace and security in the messianic kingdom (Micah 4:4). Everyone will enjoy a good life, without fear or stress. O, what a glorious day that will be!

Biblical Text

⁸ Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you—indeed they are men who are a symbol, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch. ⁹ For behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave an inscription on it,’ declares the LORD of hosts, ‘and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. ¹⁰ ‘In that day,’ declares the LORD of hosts, ‘every one of you will invite his neighbor to *sit under his vine and under his fig tree.*’”