

CHAPTER 3

The vision in the foregoing chapter gave assurances of the re-establishing of the civil interests of the Jewish nation, the promises of which terminated in Christ. Now the vision in this chapter concerns their church-state, and their ecclesiastical interests, and assures them that they shall be put into a good posture again; and the promises of this also have an eye to Christ, who is not only our prince, but the high priest of our profession, of whom Joshua was a type. Here is,

I. A vision relating to Joshua, as the representative of the church in his time, representing the disadvantages he laboured under, and the people in him, with the redress of the grievances of both.

1. He is accused by Satan, but is brought off by Christ (v. 1, 2).
2. He appears in filthy garments, but has them changed (v. 3-5).
3. He is assured of being established in his office if he conduct himself well (v. 6, 7).

II. A sermon relating to Christ, who is here called “The branch,” who should be endued with all perfections for his undertaking, should be carried triumphantly through it, and by whom we should have pardon and peace (v. 8-10).

III ZECHARIAH 3:1-7

JOSHUA RESISTED AND UPHELD

There was a Joshua that was a principal agent in the first settling of Israel in Canaan; here is another of the same name very active in their second settlement there after the captivity; Jesus is the same name, and it signifies *Saviour*; and they were both figures of him that was to come, our chief captain and our chief priest. The angel that talked with *Zechariah* showed *him Joshua the high priest*; it is probable that the prophet saw him frequently, that he spoke to him, and that there was a great intimacy between them; but, in his common views, he only saw how he appeared before men; if he must know how he stands before the Lord, it must be

shown him in vision; and so it is shown him. And men are really as they are with God, not as they appear in the eye of the world. He stood *before the angel of the Lord*, that is, before Christ, the Lord of the angels, to whom even the high priests themselves, of Aaron's order, were accountable. He *stood before the angel of the Lord* to execute his office, to minister to God under the inspection of the angels. He stood to consult the oracle on the behalf of Israel, for whom, as high priest, he was agent. Guilt and corruption are our two great discouragements when we stand before God. By the guilt of the sins committed by us we have become obnoxious to the justice of God; by the power of the sin that dwells in us we have become odious to the holiness of God. All God's Israel are in danger upon these two accounts. Joshua was so here, for *the law made men priests that had infirmity*, ^{<807>}Hebrews 7:28. And, as to both, we have relief from Jesus Christ, who is made of God to us both *righteousness and sanctification*.

I. Joshua is accused as a criminal, but is justified.

1. A violent opposition is made to him. *Satan stands at his right hand to resist him* to be a *Satan to him, a law-adversary*. He stands at his right hand, as the prosecutor, or witness, at the right hand of the prisoner. Note, The devil is the accuser of the brethren, that *accuses them before God day and night*, ^{<620>}Revelation 12:10. Some think the chief priest was accused for the sin of many of the inferior priests, in marrying strange wives, which they were much guilty of after their return out of captivity, ^{<491>}Ezra 9:1, 2; ^{<433>}Nehemiah 13:28. When God is about to reestablish the priesthood Satan objects the sins that were found among the priests, as rendering them unworthy the honour designed them. It is by our own folly that we give Satan advantage against us and furnish him with matter for reproach and accusation; and if any thing be amiss, especially with the priests, Satan will be sure to aggravate it and make the worst of it. He *stood to resist him*, that is, to oppose the service he was doing for the public good. He stood *at his right hand*, the hand of action, to discourage him, and raise difficulties in his way. Note, When we stand before God to minister to him, or stand up for God to serve his interests, we must expect to meet with all the resistance that Satan's subtlety and malice can give us. Let us then resist him that resists us and he shall flee from us.

2. A victorious defence is made for him (v. 2): *The Lord* (that is, the Lord Christ) *said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee*. Note, It is the happiness of the saints that the Judge is their friend; the same that they are accused to is

their patron and protector, and an advocate for them, and he will be sure to bring them off.

(1.) Satan is here checked by one that has authority, that has conquered him, and many a time silenced him. *The accuser of the brethren*, of the ministers and the ministry, *is cast out*; his indictments are quashed, and his suggestions against them as well as his suggestions to them, are shown to be malicious, frivolous, and vexatious. *The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan! The Lord said* (that is, the Lord our Redeemer), *The Lord rebuke thee*, that is, the Lord the Creator. The power of God is engaged for the making of the grace of Christ effectual. “*The Lord* restrain thy malicious rage, reject thy malicious charge, and revenge upon thee thy enmity to a servant of his” Note, those that belong to Christ have him ready to appear vigorously for them when Satan appears most vehement against them. He does not parley with him, but stops his mouth immediately with this sharp reprimand: *The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan!* This is the best way of dealing with that furious enemy. *Get thee behind me, Satan.*

(2.) Satan is here argued with. He resists the priest, but let him know that his resistance,

[1.] Will be fruitless; it will be to no purpose to attempt any thing against Jerusalem, for *the Lord has chosen* it, and he will abide by his choice. Whatever is objected against God's people, God saw it; he foresaw it when he chose them and yet he chose them, and therefore that can be no inducement to him now to reject them; he knew the worst of them when he chose them; and his election shall obtain.

[2.] It is unreasonable; for *is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?* Joshua is so, and the priesthood, and the people, whose representative he is. Christ has not that to say for them for which they are to be praised, but that for which they are to be pitied. Note, Christ is ready to make the best of his people, and takes notice of every thing that is pleadable in excuse of their infirmities, so far is he from being extreme to mark what they do amiss. They have been lately in the fire; no wonder that they are black and smoked, and have the smell of fire upon them, but they are therefore to be excused, not to be accused. One can expect no other than that those who but the other day were captives in Babylon should appear very mean and despicable. They have been lately brought out of great affliction; and is Satan so barbarous as to desire to have them thrown into affliction again? They have been wonderfully delivered out of the fire, that God might be

glorified in them; and will he then cast them off and abandon them? No, he will not quench the smoking flax, the smoking fire-brand; for he snatched it out of the fire because he intended to make use of it. Note, Narrow escapes from imminent danger are happy presages and powerful pleas for more eminent favours. A converted soul is a *brand plucked out of the fire* by a miracle of free grace, and therefore shall not be left to be a prey to Satan.

II. Joshua appears as one polluted, but is purified; for he represents the Israel of God, who are all *as an unclean thing*, till they are washed and sanctified *in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God*. Now observe here,

1. The impurity wherein Joshua appeared (v. 3): *He was clothed*, not only in coarse, but in *filthy garments*, such as did very ill become the dignity of his office and the sanctity of his work. By the law of Moses the garments of the high priest were to be *for glory and for beauty*, ^{<150>}Exodus 28:2. But Joshua's garments were a shame and reproach to him; yet in them *he stood before the angel of the Lord*; he had no clean linen wherein to minister and to do the duty of his place. Now this intimates, not only that the priesthood was poor and despised, and loaded with contempt, but that there was a great deal of iniquity cleaving to the holy things. The returned Jews were so taken up with their troubles that they thought they needed not complain of their sins, and were not aware that those were the great hindrances of the progress of God's work among them; because they were free from idolatry they thought themselves chargeable with no iniquity. But God showed them there were many things amiss in them, which retarded the advances of God's favours towards them. There were spiritual enemies warring against them, more dangerous than any of the neighbouring nations. The Chaldee paraphrase says, *Joshua had sons who took unto them wives which were not lawful for the priests to take*; and we find it was so, ^{<150>}Ezra 10:18. And, no doubt, there were other things amiss in the priesthood, ^{<301>}Malachi 2:1. Yet Joshua was permitted to *stand before the angel of the Lord*. Though his children did not as they should, yet the covenant of priesthood was not broken. Note, Christ bears with his people, whose hearts are upright with him, and admits them into communion with himself, notwithstanding their manifold infirmities.

2. The provision that was made for his cleansing. Christ gave orders to the angels that attended him, and were ready to do his pleasure, to put Joshua

into a better state. Joshua presented himself before the Lord in his filthy garments, as an object of his pity; and Christ graciously looked upon him with compassion, and not, as justly he might have done, with indignation. Christ loathed the filthiness of Joshua's garments, yet did not put him away, but put them away. Thus God by his grace does with those whom he chooses to be priests to himself; he parts between them and their sins, and so prevents their sins parting between them and their God; he reconciles himself to the sinner, but not to the sin. Two things are here done for Joshua, representing a double work of divine grace wrought in and for believers: —

(1.) His filthy garments are taken from him, v. 4. The meaning of this is given us in what Christ said, and he said it as one having authority, *Behold, I have caused thy iniquity to pass from thee.* The guilt of it is taken away by pardoning mercy, the stench and stain of it by peace spoken to the conscience, and the power of it broken by renewing grace. When God forgives our sins he *causes our iniquity to pass from us*, that it may not appear against us, to condemn us; it passes from us *as far as the east is from the west.* When he sanctifies the nature he enables us to *put off the old man*, to cast away from us the filthy rags of our corrupt affections and lusts, as things we will never have any thing more to do with, will never gird to us or appear in. Thus Christ *washes those from their sins in his own blood* whom he *makes to our God kings and priests*, ^{<60>}Revelation 1:5, 6. Either we must be cleansed from the pollutions of sin or we shall, *as polluted, be put from that priesthood*, ^{<61>}Ezra 2:62.

(2.) He is clothed anew, has not only the shame of his filthiness removed, but the shame of his nakedness covered: *I will clothe thee with change of raiment.* Joshua had no clean linen of his own, but Christ will provide for him, for he will not let a priesthood of his own instituting be lost, be either contemptible before men or unacceptable before God. The change of raiment here is rich costly raiment, such as is worn on high days. Joshua shall appear as lovely as ever he appeared loathsome. Those that minister in holy things shall not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well; God will make them wise, and humble, and diligent, and faithful, and examples of every thing that is good; and then Joshua is clothed with change of raiment. Thus those whom Christ makes spiritual priests are clothed with the spotless robe of his righteousness and appear before God in that, and with the graces of his Spirit, which are ornaments to them. *The righteousness of saints*, both imputed and implanted, is the fine linen,

clean and white, with which *the bride, the Lamb's wife*, is arrayed,
⁶⁹⁸Revelation 19:8.

III. Joshua is in danger of being turned out of office; but, instead of that, he is reinstated and established in his office. He not only has his sins pardoned, and is furnished with grace sufficient for himself, but, as *rectus in curia* — *acquitted in court*, he is restored to his former honours and trusts.

1. The crown of the priesthood is put upon him, v. 5. This was done at the special instance and request of the prophet: I said, “*Let them set a fair mitre upon his head*, as a badge of his office. Now that he looks clean, let him also look great; let him be dressed up in all the garments of the high priest.” Note, When God designs the restoring or reviving of religion he stirs up his prophets and people to pray for it, and does it in answer to their prayers. Zechariah prayed that the angels might be ordered to set the mitre on Joshua's head, and they did it immediately, and *clothed him with the priestly garments*; for no man took this honour to himself, *but he that was called of God* to it. *The angel of the Lord stood by*, as having the oversight of the work which the created angels were employed in. He stood by, as one well pleased with it, and resolved to stand by the orders he had given for the doing of it and to continue his presence with that priesthood.

2. The covenant of the priesthood is renewed with him, which is called God's *covenant of peace*, ⁹⁵²Numbers 25:12. Mr. Pemble calls it *the patent of his office*, which is here declared and delivered to him before witnesses, v. 6, 7. The angel of the Lord, having taken care to make him fit for his office (and all that God calls to any office he either finds fit or makes so), invests him in it. And though he is not *made a priest with an oath* (that honour is reserved for him who is a priest after the order of Melchisedek, ³⁰²Hebrews 7:21), yet, being a type of him, he is inaugurated with a solemn declaration of the terms upon which he held his office. The angel of the Lord protested to Joshua that, if he would be sure to do the duty of his place, he should enjoy the dignity and reward of it. Now see,

(1.) What the conditions are upon which he enters into his office. Let him know that he is upon his good behaviour; he must *walk in God's ways*, that is, he must live a good life and be holy in all manner of conversation; he must go before the people in the paths of God's commandments, and walk circumspectly. He must also *keep God's charge*, must carefully do all the

services of the priesthood, and must see to it that the inferior priests performed the duties of their place decently and in order. He must *take heed to himself, and to all the flock*, ^{<408>}Acts 20:28. Note, Good ministers must be good Christians; yet that is not enough: they have a trust committed to them, they are charged with it, and they must keep it with all possible care, that they may give up their account of it with joy, ^{<514>}1 Timothy 6:14.

(2.) What the privileges are which we may expect, and be assured of, in the due discharge of his office. His patent runs, *Quamdiu se bene gesserit* — *During good behaviour*. Let him be sure to do his part, and God will own him.

[1.] “*Thou shalt judge my house; thou shalt preside in the affairs of the temple, and the inferior priests shall be under thy direction.*” Note, The power of the church, and of church rulers, is not a legislative, but only a judicial power. The high priest might not make any new laws for God's house, nor ordain any other rites of worship than what God had ordained; but he must judge God's house, that is, he must see to it that God's laws and ordinances were punctually observed, must protect and encourage those that did observe them, and enquire into and punish the violation of them.

[2.] “*Thou shalt also keep my courts; thou shalt have oversight of what is done in all the courts of the temple, and shalt keep them pure and in good order for the worship to be performed in them.*” Note, Ministers are God's stewards, and they are to keep his courts, in honour of him who is the chief Lord and for the preserving of equity and good order among his tenants.

[3.] “*I will give thee places to walk among those that stand by, among these angels that are inspectors and assistants in this instalment.*” They shall stand by while Joshua is at work for God, and shall be as a guard to him, or he shall be highly honoured and respected as an *angel of God*, ^{<404>}Galatians 4:14. Ministers are called *angels*, Revelation 1. 20. Those that *walk in God's ways* may be said to *walk among the angels* themselves, for they do the will of God as the angels do it that are in heaven, and are their *fellow-servants*, ^{<660>}Revelation 19:10. Some make it a promise of eternal life, and of a reward of his fidelity in the future state. Heaven is not only a palace, a place to repose in, but a paradise, a garden, a place to walk

in; and there are walks among the angels, in society with that holy and glorious company. See ^{<308>}Ezekiel 28:14.

^{<308>}ZECHARIAH 3:8-10

ADVENT OF CHRIST PREDICTED

As the promises made to David often slide insensibly into promises of the Messiah, whose kingdom David's was a type of, so the promises here made to Joshua immediately rise as far upward, and look as far forward, as to Christ, whose priesthood Joshua's was now a shadow of, not only in general, as it kept up the line of Aaron's priesthood, but especially as it was the reviving of that happy method of correspondence between heaven and earth, to which a great interruption had been given by the iniquity and captivity of Israel. Christ is a high priest, as Joshua was, for sinners and sufferers, to mediate for those that have been under guilt and wrath. And it was fit that Joshua should understand the priesthood of Christ, because all the virtue of his priesthood, its value and usefulness to the church, depended upon and was derived from the priesthood of Christ. See,

I. To whom this promise of Christ is directed (v. 8): "*Hear now, O Joshua!* Thou hast heard with pleasure what belongs to thyself; but, behold, a greater than Joshua is at hand. *Hear now* concerning him, *thou* and the rest of the priests, *thy fellows, who sit before thee*, at thy feet, as learners, but whom thou art to look upon as *thy fellows*, for all you are brethren; let the high priest, and all the inferior priests, take notice of this, for they are *men wondered at*." They are set *for signs*, for types and figures of Christ's priesthood. What God now did for Joshua and his fellows was a happy omen of the coming of the Messiah promised, and would be so interpreted, with a pleasing wonder, by all that had understanding of the times. Or they are men *wondered at* for their singularity, hooted at as strange sort of people, because they *run not with others to the same excess of riot* (^{<400>}1 Peter 4:4), or for their strange afflictions and surprising deliverance out of them, as ^{<470>}Psalms 71:7, *I am as a wonder unto many*. They are *men of wonder*; they are a wonder to themselves, are amazed to think how happily their condition is altered. God's people and ministers are, upon many accounts, men wondered at. The high priest and his fellows here (as the prophet and his children,

²¹⁸⁸Isaiah 8:18) are for signs and for wonders. But men's wonder at them will cease when the Messiah comes, as the stars are eclipsed by the light of the sun; for *his name shall be called Wonderful*.

II. The promise itself, which consists of several parts, all designed for the comfort and encouragement of Joshua and his friends in that great good work of building the temple, which they were now engaged in. An eye to Christ, and a believing dependence upon the promises relating to him and his kingdom, would carry them through the difficulties they met with in that and their other services.

1. The Messiah shall come: *Behold, I will bring forth my servant the branch*. He has been long hid, but the fulness of time is now at hand, when he shall be brought forth into the world, brought forth among his people Israel. God himself undertakes to bring him forth, and therefore, no doubt, he will own him and stand by him. He is God's servant, employed in his work, obedient to his will, and entirely devoted to his honour and glory. He is the branch; so he was called ²¹⁸⁹Isaiah 4:2, *The branch of the Lord*. ²¹⁹⁰Isaiah 11:1, *A branch out of the roots of Jesse*. ²¹⁹¹Jeremiah 23:5, *A righteous branch*; and ²¹⁹²Jeremiah 23:15, *The branch of righteousness*. His beginning was small, as a tender branch, but in time he should become a great tree and fill the earth, ²¹⁹³Isaiah 53:2. He is the branch from which all our fruit must be gathered.

2. Many eyes shall be upon him. He is *the stone laid before Joshua*, alluding to the foundation or chief corner-stone, of the temple, which probably was laid, with great solemnity, in the presence of Joshua. Christ is not only the branch, which is the beginning of a tree, but the foundation, which is the beginning of a building; and, when he shall be brought forth, *seven eyes shall be upon him*. The eye of his Father was upon him, to take care of him, and protect him, especially in his sufferings; when he was buried in the grave, as the foundation-stones are under ground, the eyes of Heaven were still upon him, buried out of men's sight, but not out of God's. The eyes of all the prophets and Old-Testament saints were upon this one stone; Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day, and he *saw it and was glad*. The eyes of all believers are upon him; they look unto him and are saved, as the eyes of the stung Israelites were upon the brazen serpent. Some understand this *one stone* to have the seven eyes in it as the wheels had in Ezekiel's vision, and think it denotes that perfection of wisdom and

knowledge which Jesus Christ was endued with, for the good of his church. *His eyes run to and fro through the earth.*

3. God himself will beautify him, and put honour upon him: *I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts.* This stone the builders refused, as rough and unsightly; but God undertakes to smooth and polish it, nay, and to carve it so that it shall be the *head stone of the corner*, the most beautiful in all the building. Christ was God's workmanship; and abundance of his wisdom appears in the contrivance of our redemption, which will appear when the engraving is perfected. This stone is a *precious stone*, though laid for a *foundation*; and the *graving* of it seems to allude to the precious stones in the breast-plate of the high priest, which had the names of the tribes *graven* upon them, as the *engraving of a signet*, ⁽¹²⁸⁾Exodus 28:21, 22. In that breast-plate there were twelve stones laid before Aaron, and for aught that appears those were lost; but there shall be one worth them all laid before Joshua, and that is Christ himself. This precious stone shall sparkle as if it had seven eyes; there shall appear a perfection of wisdom and prudence in the oracles that proceed from the breast-plate of judgment. And God will *engrave the engraving thereof*; he will entrust Christ with all his elect, and he shall appear as their representative, and agent for them, as the high priest did when he went in before the Lord with the names of all Israel engraven in the precious stones of his breast-plate. When God gave a remnant to Christ, to be brought through grace to glory, then he *engraved the graving* of this *precious stone*.

4. By him sin shall be taken away, both the guilt and the dominion of it: *I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.* When the high priest had the names of Israel engraven on the precious stones he was adorned with he is said to *bear the iniquity of the holy things* (⁽¹²⁸⁾Exodus 28:38); but the law *made nothing perfect*, ⁽³⁰¹⁾Hebrews 10:1. He bore the iniquity of the land, as a type of Christ; but he could not remove it; the doing of that was reserved for Christ, that blessed *Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world*; and he did it *in one day*, that day in which he suffered and died; that was done by the sacrifice offered that day which could not be done by the sacrifices of ages before, no, not by all the days of atonement which from Moses to Christ returned every year. This agrees with the angel's prediction (⁽²⁰²⁾Daniel 9:24): He shall *finish transgression and make an end of sin*. And some make the engravings wherewith God engraved him to signify the wounds and stripes which were given to his blessed body,

which he underwent for our *transgression*, for our *iniquity*, and by which we are healed.

5. The effect of all this shall be the sweet enjoyment which all believers shall have of themselves, and the sweet communion they shall have with one another (v. 10): *In that day you shall call every man his neighbour under the vine and the fig-tree*, which yield most pleasant fruit, and whose leaves also afford a refreshing shade for arbours. When iniquity is taken away,

(1.) We reap precious benefits and privileges from our justification, more precious than the products of the vine or the fig-tree, ~~<811>~~ Romans 5:1.

(2.) We repose in a sweet tranquillity and are quiet from the fear of evil. What should terrify us when iniquity is taken away, when nothing can hurt us? We sit down under Christ's shadow with delight, and by it are sheltered from the scorching heat of the curse of the law. We live as Israel in the peaceable reign of Solomon (~~<102>~~ 1 Kings 4:24, 25); for he is the prince of peace.

(3.) We ought to invite others to come to partake with us in the enjoyment of these privileges, to *call every man his neighbour* to come and sit with him, for mutual converse, under the vine and fig-tree, and to share with him in the fruits he is surrounded with. Gospel-grace, as far as it comes with power, makes men neighbourly; and those that have the comfort of acquaintance with Christ themselves, and communion with God through him, will be forward to court others to it. *Let us go unto the house of the Lord.*