



[Zechariah 3:1-5](#)

(1) And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. (2) And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? (3) Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. (4) And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. (5) And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by.

King James Version

Zechariah 3 shows a future fulfillment of the [Day of Atonement](#). This book was written after Judah's return from Babylon. Even after that national chastening, the people were still carnal, just as Israel is today. Here, the prophet receives a vision of the high priest, Joshua. Notably, the chapter contains the same elements and sequence as Leviticus 16. It starts with the cleansing of the high priest and ends with the cleansing of the nation. What is missing is the sacrificial animals, and this is because, here, [God](#) is providing the atonement through a different means.

The essential function of the high priest was to represent the nation to God, which is part of why the Golden Calf incident was so appalling—the nation's representative was directly involved in the [sin](#) of idolatry. Similarly, in [Zechariah 3:3](#), the high priest is depicted in filthy garments, yet in verse 4, the filth and iniquity are taken away. The high priest receives rich robes, symbolic of righteousness from God Himself (compare [Revelation 19:8](#)).

The high priest's defilement shows that the nation had been completely unclean. But God restores the high priest, giving His explanation in verses 8-9:

Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they are a wondrous sign; for behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH. For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua: Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription, says the LORD of hosts, and *I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.*

Zechariah makes no mention of animal sacrifices. This removal of iniquity can only come through the Messiah, the Branch mentioned in verse 8 (see also [Isaiah 4:2](#); [11:1](#); [Jeremiah 23:5](#); [33:15](#); [Zechariah 6:12](#)).

[Leviticus 18:28](#) speaks of the land becoming defiled and vomiting out its inhabitants. The Day of Atonement is an annual type of bearing away of sin, out of the land, so the land and its people become clean before God. This national cleansing of land and nation, however, did *not* happen at Christ's first coming. Though the *means* of that true cleansing was created through His sacrifice, it has not yet been applied. God's cleansing of the land and people of Israel is still future.

The beginning of this vision (verses 1-2) contains another significant factor. Note that God rebukes [Satan](#) before He cleanses the nation. There is a possible connection here with Satan's binding ([Revelation 20:1-3](#)): In other instances of God rebuking a party, it typically goes beyond divine words and involves divine action (see [Psalm 9:5](#); [68:30](#); [Isaiah 17:1-3](#)). God's rebuke may find its fulfillment in Satan's binding, and Israel's cleansing follows it.

The critical point is that atonement—expiation, satisfaction of the legal debt—can come only through Christ's removal of guilt, not through anything that happens to Satan. The nation is cleansed by God removing the iniquity, not through rebuking the accuser. In this vision, if Satan were only rebuked—and in parallel, if Satan were just bound—the nation would remain in its defiled state, still separated from God, unatoned.

— David C. Grabbe

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