

Lesson 5

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.

Verse 5 is interesting — Zechariah is not just watching the vision; he is participating in the vision!

Leupold: *“This is eloquent testimony to the eagerness with which Zechariah shared in all that was being revealed and to the graciousness of God who does not rebuke such zealous participation. The prophet is not made to feel that he has become guilty of unwarranted and presumptuous interference.”*

Why does Zechariah suggest that a mitre be placed on Joshua’s head?

The priestly mitre normally worn by priests bore the inscription, “Holy to the Lord.”

Exodus 28:36-37 — *And thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, HOLINESS TO THE Lord. And thou shalt put it on a blue lace, that it may be upon the mitre; upon the forefront of the mitre it shall be.*

Commentaries offer numerous explanations for this mitre (including some that refer to Babylonian building practices), but perhaps the best explanation is the simplest: Zechariah was just concerned that the priest be fully outfitted from head to toe!

He had just witnessed a very shocking scene involving the high priest, and he wanted to see things put right as quickly as they could be!

Let’s now go back to an earlier question — who is Joshua representing in this vision?

We really have only two choices — either Joshua is being used as a figure for the returned exiles or Joshua is being used here as a figure for Jesus, the perfect high priest who was yet to come.

We might think we can rule out Jesus immediately because of the filthy garments that represent iniquity.

Hebrews 4:15 — *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*

How could that figure of the filthy garments ever be used for Christ?

Perhaps 2 Corinthians 5:21 is the answer: “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

That is, the filthy garments could depict our sin, which the sinless Son of God bore for us on that cross.

When Jesus said “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?,” he said that so that we would never have to say that ourselves.

But there are two problems with the view that Joshua is being used as a figure for Christ — one problem that we can already see and one that we will see in the next two verses.

First, the problem we can already see is that if Joshua is depicting Christ, and if the angel of the Lord is the preincarnate Christ — then do we see Jesus talking to himself in these verses? That would seem odd.

But the second problem is even harder to overcome (and, in my view, impossible to overcome) — Joshua is admonished in the next two verses.

6 And the angel of the LORD protested unto Joshua, saying, 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 that stand by.

Joshua is admonished to walk in God’s ways and keep God’s charge in verse 7.

I think verse 7 answers the question of whom Joshua is representing.

The “if then” statement in verse 7 is certainly something that would be directed to the people of God, but that is not something that would ever be directed to the Son of God.

Joshua, a high priest for the people, is being used here as a figure for the people. He is their representative in life, and he is their representative in this vision.

If the people walk in the ways of God and keep the charge of God, then the people will continue to enjoy God’s gracious favor; just as the High Priest would continue in his office, unlike many of his failed predecessors who had turned their back on God and on his people.

The final phrase in verse 6 (“I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by”) likely refers to the special access that the High Priest had in the temple when he officiated on behalf of the people.

So I think that Joshua in verses 1-7 represents the people of God — the people who had sinned horribly, the people who had been exiled and almost destroyed, the people who had been snatched out of that situation as a brand being plucked from the fire, and the people who now once again found themselves in Jerusalem.

They must have been filled with guilt and regret over what they had done. They were standing among the ruins of their city and their temple — ruins that had come about because of their disobedience.

They must have wondered how such a sinful people could ever be used by God to bring about the wonderful blessings and promises that they were hearing from Haggai and Zechariah.

This vision is an answer to that question. God had saved them, God had chosen them, and God had cleansed them.

All was as before; the relationship had been restored. The temple was being rebuilt and soon the city would be rebuilt as well.

8 Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH. 9 For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. 10 In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree.

We see a big shift in verse 8 that is indicated by the phrase “Hear now” that begins in verse 8.

We also see a clue to this shift in verse 10, which begins with the phrase “in that day,” the importance of which we have previously discussed.

Verse 8 tells us that Zechariah has a message for Joshua and for the other priests (“the fellows that sit before thee”). Why did the priests need a special message?

To anyone (such as Haggai) who still remembered the old temple, it must have seemed that the glories of the priesthood were just a thing of the past. Could these priests ever again rise to the heights they had once enjoyed?

The situation was similar to that found in Isaiah 11, but there the focus was on the lowly house of David, whose glories seemed all but extinct.

The message here to Zechariah and his fellow priests about the priesthood is the same message that Isaiah received in Isaiah 11 about the house of David — a branch is coming! Out of stem of Jesse in Isaiah 11:1, and out of the priesthood in Zechariah 3:8.

We also see this same connection in Jeremiah 33.

Jeremiah 33:15 — *In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.*

Jeremiah 33:20-21 — *Thus saith the Lord; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers.*

When Jesus came he would revive the glory of the house of David when he sat upon the throne of David as King of kings and Lord of lords, and he would revive the glories of the priesthood when he became our perfect high priest.

Hebrews 7:26 — *For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.*

Of this wonderful fact, Joshua and his fellow priests were continual reminders or “wonder-signs” as verse 8 calls them.

ASV: "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit before thee; for they are men that are a sign: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the Branch."

What is the stone in verse 9?

I have yet to see two commentaries that agree on the answer to that question. Verse 9 is a very difficult verse.

Here are some answers that have been proposed.

- A foundation stone of the Temple.
- A stone crowning the Temple structure.
- The stone that took the place of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies.
- A symbol of Zion.
- A precious stone in the crown worn by Zerubbabel.
- A similar precious stone that adorned one of his royal garments.
- Some sort of amulet.
- A signet in the ring of the Almighty Himself.
- A stone of remembrance like those found on the breastplate or shoulder of the high priest.

None of those really jumps out to me as the best answer.

Let's look at the clues the text itself provides: "upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day."

So what do we have?

- A stone.
- Seven eyes on the stone.
- An engraving on the stone engraved by God.
- The iniquity is removed in one day.
- And we have the time frame from verse 8: "I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH"

Let's look first at the hardest of those clues — the seven eyes.

We will see them again in 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.

We see that same figure again in Revelation 5:6.

And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

Eyes depict knowledge, so the seven eyes depict the perfect knowledge of God — he knows everything that can be known. That is what the number 7 means — perfection.

If we recall that horns depict power, then the seven horns in Revelation 5:6 would denote the perfect power of God. That is, Revelation 5:6 is saying that Christ the Lamb has perfect knowledge and perfect power.

The main thing to take away from Revelation 5:6 is that the seven eyes was there applied to Jesus — and we saw Jesus in the prior verse of Zechariah 3 — “I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH.”

What about the engraving?

What do you do when you have something important that you don’t want to lose? You write your name on it.

I think that is what we are seeing here with this stone.

Where else do we see God writing his name on something?

2 Timothy 2:19 — *Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.*

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 — *“Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”*

You may already see where I am headed here, so let’s cut to the chase — what does the stone mean here?

I think Daniel has answered that question for us.

Daniel 2:34 — *Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces.*

Daniel 2:44 — *And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.*

So what do we have?

A stone? I think it represents the body of Christ, the church of Christ, the eternal kingdom.

Seven eyes on the stone? The seven eyes are a symbol for the perfect knowledge of Jesus, who is the head of the church.

An engraving on the stone engraved by God? This church belongs to Christ; it is the church of Christ. God has placed his seal on us.

If the seven eyes represent the Holy Spirit, which some suggest and which is certainly possible, then the seven eyes and the engraving show that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 1:13)

The iniquity is removed in one day? That must be the cross, when the new covenant came into effect.

Hebrews 9:16 — *For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.*

Hebrews 9:26 — *But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

And we have the all-important time frame from verse 8: “I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH,” which is the same first century time frame in which the kingdom was established in Acts 2.

I think this “one day” is a rare example where we should take a number literally — there is no apparent figurative significance, and the context is pointing to the literal one day in which iniquity was removed.

So what is the stone of verse 9? I think it is the church of Christ.

God is telling these priests that they are more important than they could possibly imagine. Why? Because they are part of God’s plan to bless the world through the Messiah and to establish an eternal kingdom that would sweep away all of the kingdoms of this world.

And history tells us that the priesthood served as a backstop against the Greek culture that would soon threaten to consume Judaism. The Maccabees behind the Maccabean Revolt from 167 to 160 BC were priests.

What does verse 10 mean?

In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree.

Verse 10 confirms that we are correct in concluding that verse 9 is pointing to the church.

Why? Because verse 10 is painting a beautiful picture of peace, and that is what God brought to the world when he established his church.

Isaiah 2:4 — *and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*

Ephesians 2:14-17 — *For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might*

reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

So what is the message of the fourth vision?

The removal of the filthy clothes from Joshua was a message of comfort and encouragement to the people — God had not forgotten them. Instead, God had restored them to their former position, and he was prepared to bless them and protect them if they would walk in his ways.

The vision also included a message of comfort and encouragement to Joshua and the other priests. Their work was vital to the plan of God, and they were a sign of the perfect High Priest who would soon come to bless the entire world.

Questions about the fourth vision?

Chapter 4

1 And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, 2 And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: 3 And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.

Zechariah is awakened by the angel in verse 1, but he is not being awakened from sleep. Instead, we are told he was awakened “as a man that is wakened out of his sleep.” It was like he had been asleep, but we are not told he was actually asleep.

Leupold: *“Actual sleep would not be described thus. The prophet remained awake throughout this memorable night. What the words do convey is that the state of mind essential to appropriating divine visions is so much above the ordinary waking state in a man’s life as the waking state is above the state of sleep.”*

After Zechariah was spiritually awakened to the vision, the angel asks him in verse 2 what he is seeing.

What Zechariah sees is a lampstand, or in Hebrew, a menorah.

We are reminded at once of a similar lampstand in the Tabernacle.

Exodus 25:31 — *And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold: of beaten work shall the candlestick be made: his shaft, and his branches, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, shall be of the same.*

Ten lamp stands had been created for the first temple (1 Kings 7:49), and they had been carried off to Babylon (Jeremiah 52:19).

But this lampstand includes some features that were not present in the Tabernacle lampstand.

First, there is above it (literally, “over its head”) a rounded bowl.

Second, there are seven pipes running from this bowl to each of the seven lamps.

Third, there are two olive trees, one on either side of the bowl.

Before we look at each of those features, let’s look more closely at the seven pipes running to the seven lamps.

The KJV has the phrase “seven pipes to the seven lamps,” which sounds like one pipe to one lamp.

But the Hebrew better supports the view that there were seven pipes running to each of the seven lamps, meaning that there were a total of 49 pipes.

A literal translation would be “seven and seven pipes to the lamps.”

“Seven and seven pipes” is the Hebrew way of expressing the distributive idea of seven each.

We see that usage, for example, in 1 Chronicles 20:6.

And yet again there was war at Gath, where was a man of great stature, whose fingers and toes were four and twenty, six on each hand, and six on each foot: and he also was the son of the giant.

Just as our verse here uses “seven and seven,” the description of that giant uses “six and six,” which means on each hand and each foot there were six instead of five.

So each lamp had seven pipes running to it.

Yes, that makes for an unusual looking lamp, but perhaps it is intended to convey an unusual thought.

What we should not do is rewrite the text to make it more like what we would expect to see, which is what most translations (including the KJV) do here.

So what is being conveyed by these distinctive features? The bowl, the pipes, and the olive trees?

To understand what those features of the lampstand denote, we first need to understand what the lampstand itself denotes.

Have you ever found the perfect gift for someone far ahead of the event for which the gift will be given? You can’t wait for them to open the gift and enjoy the gift, but wait you must. It’s a Christmas gift, and you bought it in July! You give them a few hints — you found the perfect gift, they will love it, and the anticipation builds.

That is how God felt about the church in the Old Testament. God was longing for his people to see the wonderful kingdom that he was preparing for them. It was (so to speak) a present under our tree, but all we could see at the time were the outlines of the package. God showed us the package from different directions, but we could not open it yet. That day did not come until Acts 2.

This lampstand is the church.

What else could it be?

Even though it was modeled after the lampstand in the temple, we know the object of this figure was not something that existed under the old system. Why? Because it is deliberately shown as having features that are different from what would have been seen under the old system.

Plus we have the many New Testament descriptions of God's people to compare with this figure.

Matthew 5:14-15 — *Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.*

Luke 12:35 — *Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning.*

Philippians 2:15 — *That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.*

Revelation 1:20 — *The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.*

This lampstand is the church.

We haven't said too much about the false doctrine of premillennialism in our study of Zechariah, and I don't plan to say much. We will have more to say on that when we get to Revelation.

But we can say one thing now. Premillennialism is an insult to God.

The premillennialist denies that the eternal kingdom of Daniel 2 is the church, and denies that any of these wonderful images in Zechariah are showing the church.

Why? Because they say that the church is not wonderful enough to match those images. They must instead be pointing to something better than the church.

Remember my "gift in July" story? How would you feel when the great day finally came, the gift was opened at last, and the recipient said, "What a let down! I was expecting something much better than that! Did you keep the receipt?"

That is exactly what the premillennialist is saying to God! Did you keep the receipt?

Of all the ungodly features of premillennialism — and there are many — that one may be the worst.

Romans 1:21 — *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.*

If you're starting to think the answer to every question in this book is the church, you're not far wrong!

God wanted his people to know that something wonderful was coming — and, of course, that something wonderful cannot be separated from the someone wonderful who was coming to establish it, to redeem it, to shed his blood for it, and to be the head of it. The church of Christ is the body of Christ — you cannot separate the church from Christ.

Those who belittle the church are belittling Christ.

Back to the lampstand.

How do the three distinctive features (the bowl, the pipes, and the olive trees) depict the church?

Let's keep reading for answers to those questions.

4 So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord? 5 Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord.

Zechariah has the same question that we have — what are these?

We know from verse 1, that this angel (or messenger) is the same angel who had been speaking to Zechariah before, which suggests we are once again hearing from the angel of the Lord.

As we have now said many times, this may be a preincarnate appearance of Jesus. I think verse 5 adds some additional weight of evidence to that likelihood. How?

Look again at the question in verse 5 — “Knowest thou not what these be?” Doesn't that question remind you of someone?

Matthew 15:16 — *And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?*

Matthew 16:9 — *Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?*

Mark 7:18 — *And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him.*

Mark 8:17 — *And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened?*

Mark 8:21 — *And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?*

And then verse 5 here — “Knowest thou not what these be?”

Zechariah gives an honest and understandable response — No!

But that the question in verse 5 was asked tells us that Zechariah could have known, and perhaps even should have known, what these things were. Else, I don't think that question would have been asked.

How could he have known? Because although the Old Testament was not yet complete, it was almost complete — and every page of it was pointing to Christ and his coming kingdom.

If Zechariah was expected to understand it based only on a partial revelation, what must be expected of us?