

Bellows Family

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanakh Learning Program

In loving memory of our father and grandfather Israel I. Altman
By Ellen and Stuart Shaffren and family

Perek 3

Central to Zechariah's prophetic visions are two visions which parallel each other: the first focuses on Yehoshua ben Yehotzadak, the high priest, and the second deals with Zerubavel, the governor of Judah. These two people are mentioned together in several places in Sefer Chaggai as the two leaders, religious and political, of those who returned to Zion.

1.

"And He showed me Yehoshua, the High Priest, standing before the angel of the Lord. And Satan was standing on his right, to accuse him." The first vision, which centers on Yehoshua, the high priest, is divided into three stages: Satan (1-2), the changing of the clothes (3-5) and the words of the angel to Yehoshua (6-10). The vision opens with a description of the heavenly court, with God as the judge and Satan as the prosecutor. This vision is full of symbols. In order to understand the meaning of these symbols we will compare them to similar symbols in other places in Tanakh.

a | Like the description of the vision of the horses in the first vision of Zechariah, here too there is a similarity to the story at the beginning of Sefer Iyov: Satan prosecuting the righteous man. Compare the reaction of God to Satan's accusation of Iyov (Iyov 1) to God's reaction to the accusation of Satan here (these are the only two places in which Satan appears as an independent character).

b | In order to better understand the role of Satan, see the historical background in Ezra 4:1-6 (note the word "an accusation" – in Hebrew *sitna* – in pasuk 6). See the **Ibn Ezra** here:

And Satan – an adversary, as Sanballat and the enemies of Judah were. And there (Ezra 4:6) it is written "*they wrote an accusation*" (*sitna*), for they were an adversary (*Satan*) to Yehoshua, because they did not want the Temple to be built and Yehoshua to become the

Zechariah 3-4

high priest.

And (the Lord) said - God should remove every adversary who accuses (*satan soten*) and will not build the Temple, and then the Temple will be able to be completed.

And the reason it says **“Is this one not”** (*ha’lo*) – is by way of a parable: They have had enough troubles escaping the exile. How can you accuse them and not have them injured by the fire? The explanation of the parable is: you can accuse him only after he has been saved from the exile.

2.

“Now Yehoshua was wearing filthy garments and standing before the angel.” (3)

a | There is a remarkable similarity between this vision and the inaugural prophecy of Yishayahu in perek 6. There, as well, the prophet stands before God in his impure state and an angel is sent to purify him. The purifying angel says, *“Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity shall be removed, and your sin shall be atoned for”* (Yishayahu 6:7), while in our text the angel says, *“See, I have removed your iniquity from you.”* (Zechariah 3:4) [Additionally, in both cases a coal is mentioned – in the prophecy of Yishayahu a coal (*ritzpah*) is taken from the altar to purify Yishayahu’s lips, and here Yehoshua is called a *“brand plucked from fire”*] In light of this comparison, try to understand the meaning of the symbolism of the changing of the clothes, which parallels the purifying of Yishayahu’s lips. Think about the different roles of these two people and the general significance of the two occasions.

b | In the first stage, Yehoshua stood before the angel and Satan interrupted him, and now he stands before him and his filthy garments interfere. What is the common denominator of the symbolism in the two stages? See the **Ibn Ezra**:

And the truth is that he did not have dignified clothing, for they only had the altar upon which to give sacrifices, but they had no Temple and no covering (of the ark) or curtain or golden altar or golden clothes of the priests. The clothing represents the fact that there is no honor or glory.

3.

In the third section the angel turns to Yehoshua and tells him about the future. Follow the stages of the message: On whom does the first stage focus (7)? Why is he the beginning of the process? Whom is the angel referring to in the words *“my servant, the branch (Tzemach)”* (8) and what is the stage which is described here? For further depth see Yirmiyahu 33:15 and the prophecy of the shoot (*choter*) in Yishayahu 11:1. See also the description given later in Zechariah’s prophecy (6:12).

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Zechariah 3-4

Perek 4

The perek begins with a new vision which centers on a unique and wonderful description of the Menorah in the Temple. This is followed at first by a general explanation of the meaning of the vision (4-10) and then by a more detailed explanation (11-14). This vision is closely related to the previous vision, and the symbolism of alluding to the stone and to Zerubavel in the previous perek is explained here.

4.

The description of the Menorah in the Temple is slightly different than the Menorah described in the Tabernacle (Shemot 25). What is unique about the Menorah described here? What does the Menorah symbolize in the Temple? (Remember that the Second Temple had no ark of the covenant.) Who is responsible for the operation of the Menorah in the Tabernacle and who in Zechariah's vision? How is the meaning of the vision affected by God's statement in pasuk 6? Use the **Radak**:

As you have seen the work of the Menorah, that it was done of itself, and without any man or thing arranging the lamps, or pouring oil into them, thus shall the building of the Temple be effected without the power of man, solely by the Spirit of God, blessed be He, and by his good pleasure.

5.

Which of the problems which the returnees to Zion had with rebuilding the Temple are hinted at in this prophecy? See pesukim 7 and 10 and the description of the dedication of the Temple in Chaggai 1. What is the divine response to these problems (pasuk 10)?

6.


The last section (11-14) connects the vision in perek 3 to the vision in our perek. "*The two anointed ones*" (14) are apparently Zerubavel and Yehoshua, who are both anointed with oil. What is their role as "anointed ones" in the vision of the Menorah, and what is the symbolic meaning of this? Try to explain this in light of Zechariah's words in the continuation of the book – 6:13.

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Zechariah 3-4

APPENDIX – The Visions of Zechariah and the Seal of the State of Israel

Two almost polar forces sought to dictate the character of the seal – the religious values and the secular ones... The version of the seal as we know it seems to show that in this struggle between the secular camp, which wanted to emphasize the socialist and democratic present and the future, and the religious camp, which wanted to emphasize the glory of the past and the tie to the God of Israel – the secular camp came out ahead. However this is not accurate. The motifs of the Menorah and the olive branches ... were thought to be two separate motifs which were placed together in order to give over the complicated message of the vision of the State of Israel as a fulfillment of the Zionist dream. However, this presentation of these two components together has historical precedents, visual representations where the Menorah and the olive branches were presented as one metaphor. This metaphoric combination is based on a known textual source – one of the prophet Zechariah's visions. Zechariah's vision which took place about two years after the renewal of sacrifices tells, first and foremost, about the Menorah, a holy vessel meant for the highest ritual in the Temple. The two olives on either side of the bowl are meant to provide oil into the bowl. The oil alludes to the two leaders of the nation, Yehoshua ben Yehotzadak the high priest and Zerubavel ben Shealtiel the governor. The Menorah enlightens us about the building of the Temple. The Menorah is even a symbol of Divinity itself. The anointed ones which Zechariah sees ... nourish the heavenly Menorah and protect the earthly image of the Menorah and the Temple that it is in. Zechariah's vision transforms the roles of the priest and the governor into mysterious, cosmic roles. The vision which he sees exists in the upper spheres and will soon be realized in the physical world. With the building of the Temple, under the political conditions of the period, the Jewish nation realized its dreams to build itself a ritual center. The modern interpretation of Zechariah's vision of the Menorah sees the two olive branches – the two anointed ones – as the figures of the secular ruler and the high priest, the representative of religion. Each of them, in his own way, nourishes the Menorah, which epitomizes the divine light which symbolically guides the renewal of the physical and spiritual life of the nation of Israel. Zechariah's description is the first detailed description of the Menorah in the Temple built by Zerubavel. This Menorah was destroyed by Antiochus. It was replaced by Yehudah the Maccabi, and that was the Menorah which was taken to Rome by Titus. The Menorah, therefore, is also a symbol of continuity ... In the Cervera Tanakh, a manuscript from the fourteenth century, there is a representation of the vision of the Menorah in Zechariah. The eschatological characteristics in this representation of the Menorah and the olive branches indicate that the illustrator aspires to see the Temple restored to Jerusalem with the coming of the Messiah. This visual presentation of Zechariah's vision was created over 600 years before the seal of the State of Israel was designed. In the designing of the seal of the State of Israel Zechariah's vision was transferred to the Zionist idea

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Zechariah 3-4

of building the State of Israel. According to this view, the establishment of the state parallels the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem in the period of the return to Zion and is a symbolic fulfillment of the vision. The two olive branches seem to have had a very important role in the concept of the new state in which religion and state stand side by side to realize the Zionist vision.

(A. Mishori, Menorah veAnfei Zayit – Korot Itzuvo shel Semel Medinat Yisrael, 46)



An interpretation of the vision of the Menorah as described by Zechariah the prophet, from the Cervera Manuscript, 1299.



The seal of the State of Israel

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