

Purification of Priest, Prophet and People: A Comparative Study of Zechariah 3 and 13¹

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ABSTRACT

The book of Zechariah articulates different theological themes or perspectives. One of these themes is the purification or cleansing of the priest, prophet and people of Jerusalem. This article will compare two prominent chapters in Zechariah, paying particular attention to the theme of purification. The question posed by this article is: what are the differences and similarities between Zech 3 and 13? There are several differences between these two chapters. Chapter 3 forms part of the eight night visions and focuses more on the purification of Joshua, the high priest (3:1). Chapter 13 is part of the second oracle in Deutero-Zechariah and focuses more on the purification of the “house of David” and the people of Jerusalem (13:1). Different Hebrew words are even used to describe the sin and impurity of the people. In Zech 3 YHWH replaces the filthy clothes with a clean turban, but in Zech 13 the unclean spirit and prophets will be removed from the land. Despite all the differences, both chapters use the expression “on that day” (3:10; 13:1–2) and emphasise that the leaders have a significant responsibility. YHWH cannot purify Jerusalem (3:2; 13:1), the land (3:9; 13:2) and the people with unclean leaders (priests, prophets and shepherds). Both chapters close on a positive note, describing the effect of purification: there will be peace amongst the people (3:10) and the acknowledgement that YHWH is their God (13:9).

A INTRODUCTION

There are many different theological themes and motifs in the book of Zechariah: God’s presence and the rebuilding of the temple in Zion; repentance and obedience; God’s grace, love and forgiveness; realised eschatology; the diarchic model of leadership; the day of the Lord; universal kingship of YHWH; the shepherd motif, *etcetera*.² Mason³ emphasises that the purification or cleansing of the community is one of the themes that occur in both Zech 1–8 and Zech 9–14. One can also say that the theme of purification links with several of the

¹ A shorter version of this article was delivered as a paper at the SBL International Meeting in St. Andrews, United Kingdom (7–11 July, 2013).

² Ben C. Ollenburger, “The Book of Zechariah,” *NIB* 7: 733–840; Paul L. Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Daniel F. O’Kennedy, “Sagaria 1–8: ’n Algemene Oorsig,” *NGTT* 49/1-2 (2008): 66–79.

³ Rex Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 79.

above mentioned themes. There are at least six passages⁴ in Zechariah related to the theme of purification, but chs. 3 and 13 deserve special attention. I shall therefore focus on these chapters and pose the question: what are the differences and similarities between Zech 3 and 13? The article will shortly discuss the historical and literary dimension of each chapter. Thereafter I shall investigate the theological dimension of purification. Finally, I shall summarise the possible differences and similarities between Zech 3 and 13.

B ZECHARIAH 3

1 Historical and Literary Dimension

Zechariah 1–8 or Proto-Zechariah⁵ originated during post-exilic times in the Jerusalem-based community of the Persian province Yehud.⁶ Zechariah’s ministry began at a time of great turmoil in the Persian Empire. The text of Zech 1–8 portrays its historical setting between the second and the fourth year of Darius, the Persian king (520–518 B.C.E.).⁷ Darius spent the first two years of his reign putting down a series of rebellions throughout the empire. The specific circumstances of the Jerusalem community are difficult to tell. We can accept that the post-exilic economy was not strong and bad crops and possible reluctance of the people had impeded progress on the rebuilding of the temple.⁸

Zechariah 1–8 can be divided into three distinct literary units: 1:1–6 (summons to repentance); 1:7–6:15 (eight visions interspersed with oracles) 7:1–8:23 (features of the time of salvation). Chapters 3 and 4 may be seen as the literary and theological core of Zech 1–8.⁹

⁴ Zech 3:1–9; 5:1–11; 10:9; 12:10; 13:1–2; 14:20–21. Cf. Mason, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 79.

⁵ The terms Zech 1–8, Proto-Zechariah or First-Zechariah can be seen as similes. This article will mainly use the terms Zech 1–8 and Zech 9–14.

⁶ Different names are given for this community and its people: Judah; Judahites; Judeans; Yehud; Yehudites; Jews; Israelites. All these terms can be used, but in the strict sense of the word we are talking about the Jerusalem-based post-exilic community that lived in the Persian province Yehud.

⁷ Cf. Zech 1:1, 7; 7:1.

⁸ Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (AB 25B; New York: Doubleday, 1987), 510–513; Julia M. O’Brien, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (AOTC; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 164–166; Al Wolters, “Zechariah, Book of,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 889.

⁹ Daniel F. O’Kennedy, “Zechariah 3–4: Core of Proto-Zechariah,” *OTE* 16/2 (2003): 386–387.

Scholars have divergent opinions concerning the structure of Zech 3 and some scholars see vv. 8–10 as a supplementary oracle.¹⁰ There is a possibility that the oracles in vv. 8–10 are later additions, but one cannot ignore the relationship between these verses. Visions in the OT frequently included oracles. In the visions of Zechariah the oracles are incorporated in such a way that one could not separate the one from the other. In v. 6 the text portrays that the angel proclaims what YHWH has spoken and the speaker never changes until the end of the chapter; therefore I do not agree with some scholars who separate vv. 8–10 from vv. 6–7. The expression “YHWH /Lord of hosts” is frequently used in these verses (vv. 7, 9–10). There is also a direct relationship between vv. 9 and 10 through the expression “on that day.”

What is the structure and division of Zechariah 3? Floyd¹¹ proposes an interesting viewpoint concerning the division of ch. 3. He argues that this chapter be divided into three main acts: (1) Dismissal of the charge against Joshua (3:1–2); (2) Purification of Joshua (3:3–5a); (3) Joshua’s commission to head the restored temple cult (3:5b–10). Floyd’s structure emphasises the purification of Joshua as the center or core of this chapter.

In the light of the above mentioned structure I suggest the following division:

A	Dismissal of the charge against Joshua	3:1–2
1	Introductory description of the scene	3:1
2	Speech of YHWH rebuking Satan	3:2
B	Purification of Joshua	3:3–5a
1	Introductory description of scene	3:3
2	Cleansing and forgiveness by YHWH via messenger	3:4
3	Compliance of background figures with the prophet’s directive	3:5a

¹⁰ Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, 222; Henning G. Reventlow, *Die Propheten Haggai, Sacharja und Maleachi* (ATD 25/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 54. Redditt’s viewpoint differs from the previous mentioned scholars. According to Redditt vv. 8 and 10 sound messianic and he therefore treats these verses as additions. Cf. Paul L. Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 62–63. Petersen comes to the conclusion that the vision report originally consisted of 3:1–5 and that there were three additions: vv. 6–7, 9 and vv. 8 and 10. Cf. David L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 202.

¹¹ Michael H. Floyd, *Minor Prophets* (vol. 2; FOTL 22; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 371.

C	Joshua’s commission to head the restored temple cult	3:6–10
1	Pre-conditions for Joshua’s task	3:6–7
2	Divine promises for Joshua and friends:	3:8–10
	• Coming of servant, the Branch	3:8
	• Stone will be engraved	3:9a
	• Forgiveness will be granted to the whole land	3:9b
	• Consequences for the people	3:10

2 Theological Dimension of Purification

It is not the aim of this article to provide a detailed discussion of every verse in this chapter. I shall focus on the dimension of purification, especially in vv. 3–5.

2a Purification of Joshua¹²

Verse 3 says that Joshua, the high priest, was dressed in “filthy clothes” and in v. 4 the angel says: “Take off his filthy clothes.” These verses are the only references in the HB where the adjective **צוֹאִים** (filthy) is used. This adjective connotes more than merely dirty or soiled, for its related nouns refer to human excrement or even vomit. The noun **צֹאֵן** occurs twice (Deut 23:14 [13];¹³ Ezek 4:12) and the noun **צֹאֵן** three times (Isa 4:4; 28:8; Prov 30:12) in the HB. We also find the noun **צֹאֵן** in the *qere* readings of 2 Kgs 18:27 (28) and Isa 36:12.¹⁴ Such uncleanness is obviously inappropriate for a high priest in the presence of a deity. The use of the specific Hebrew term in Zech 3:3–4 appears to be an extreme description of filth, but it highlights the purification of Joshua.¹⁵

The removal of the filthy clothes does not focus on the literal meaning. From the context of these verses, the word “filthy” clearly has moral rather than hygienic overtones, since the removal of the filthy clothes parallels the removal of sin or guilt (**טָוַן** v.4). The word is used as a metaphor depicting sin.¹⁶

¹² According to the book of Ezra, Joshua was the leader of the first group that returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian exile (Ezra 2:2 = Neh 7:7). He was the son of Jozadak (Ezra 3:2), who was, in turn, the son of the last reigning high priest of the first temple (2 Kgs 25:18; 1 Chr 6:15; Jer 52:24).

¹³ The NRSV text will be put into brackets if it differs from the MT. The sequence of the MT will be used when referring to the different biblical books.

¹⁴ The NRSV translates these Hebrew terms as follows: excrement (Deut 23:14 [13]); human dung (2 Kgs 18:27 [28]; Isa 36:4; Ezek 4:12); filth (Isa 4:4); filthiness (Prov 30:12); and filthy vomit (Isa 28:8).

¹⁵ Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets* (vol. 2; BerOl; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 596; Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004), 252.

¹⁶ Thomas E. McComiskey, “Zechariah,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (ed. Thomas E. McComiskey; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker

It is difficult to determine the exact nature and origin of the guilt, sin and uncleanness, because the text does not provide us with any clues. The priest's utter filthiness need not signify moral or ethical transgressions on the part of Joshua. It is reasonable to suppose that Joshua's uncleanness is related to his exile in Babylon, as v. 2 emphasises with its saying "plucked from the fire" (cf. Amos 4:11).¹⁷ The implications for a priest's life in exile can be ascertained from a passage in Amos 7:17 where it refers to Babylon as "an unclean land." On the other hand one can say that the issue is not so much one of mere ritual disqualification, but of sin in general. The sin of the high priest must be taken away, because he represents his people before God.¹⁸

Zechariah 3 portrays that Joshua does not remain dressed in his filthy clothes. Verse 4 refers to festal apparel (מְהַלְצוֹת) while v. 5 refers to a clean turban (צִיָּיִט). It is significant that the cultic word for "clean" (טָהוֹר) is used when the turban is described.¹⁹ The specific Hebrew word used for turban in v. 5 (צִיָּיִט) is rare in the HB and connotes an elaborate headdress associated with royalty (only Isa 3:23; 62:3; Zech 3:5; Job 29:14). This term is not the usual technical term for the high-priestly turban. The parallel Hebrew term מְצַנְפֶּת is more commonly used (cf. Exod 28:4; 39:28; Lev 8:9, 16:4; etc.). Although Zechariah uses a different Hebrew term, he may allude to the turban which the high priest was to wear at all times so that God will accept the people of Israel (Exod 28:38).²⁰ Perhaps one must not make too much of the differences in technical terms, because Zech 3:3–5 is more interested in Joshua's purity than in the investiture.²¹

The Pentateuch emphasises that the high priest should change his garments on two occasions: at his inauguration day and at the Day of Atonement. These ceremonies provide a backdrop for the imagery and rituals encountered in Zech 3. Both highlighted the act of clothing the high priest and were concerned with the removal of sin (Exod 28:38; Lev 16:21; Zech 3:4, 9). Both cer-

Academic, 2009), 1070; Michael R. Stead, *The Intertextuality of Zechariah 1–8* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 158–159.

¹⁷ James C. VanderKam, "Joshua the High Priest and the Interpretation of Zechariah 3," *CBQ* 53 (1991): 555; Thomas Pola, "Form and Meaning in Zechariah 3," in *Yahwism after the Exile: Perspectives on Religion in the Persian Era* (ed. Rainer Albertz and Bob Becking; Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2003), 163–164.

¹⁸ Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Exegetical Commentary* (Richardson: Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 122.

¹⁹ In several passages the word טָהוֹר seems to be transitional between cultic and moral impurity (Num 5:28; Hab 1:13; Ps 12:7 [6]; Prov 30:12; Eccl 9:2). Cf. Richard E. Averbeck, "טהר," *NIDOTTE* 2: 338–353.

²⁰ Petersen, *Haggai*, 197–198; Andrew E. Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (TOTC 28; Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 150.

²¹ Pola, "Zechariah 3," 164.

emonies made it possible for YHWH to dwell with his people through a consecrated mediator (Exod 29:44–46) and sanctuary (Lev 16:16).²²

Zechariah 3 depicts that the restoration of the priesthood after the exile begins with a specific high priest, Joshua. His guilt is taken away and he is clothed with festal apparel and a clean turban. Joshua is purified and forgiven in a rite performed in the divine council, not in some standard purification ritual. The change from filthy to pure clothing symbolises the shift in the priest’s status from the mundane world to the sanctified or holy realm. As high priest Joshua is the one who connects the earthly human realm with the divine heavenly realm.²³

2b Purification and Forgiveness

There is a close link between purification and forgiveness in this chapter. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between these two concepts.²⁴ The removal of guilt in vv. 4 and 9 can be depicted as purification and forgiveness. Zechariah 3 does not merely focus on the contrast between the filthy clothes and clean turban. It refers to another sharp contrast, namely the contrast between Satan as accuser and YHWH as the One who is granting purification and forgiveness.²⁵ The passage starts in vv. 1–2 with Satan accusing the high priest as representative of the people and concludes with YHWH granting forgiveness and a new future (vv. 9–10).

Zechariah 3:9 emphasises the power of YHWH’s purification and forgiveness. He can remove the guilt of the land in one day. In v. 4 the forgiveness is described in mild terms but in v. 9 we hear stronger words: “taken away” (v. 4) compares to “remove in one day” (v. 9); forgiveness of the individual high priest (v. 5) compares to forgiveness of the whole land (v. 9).

The chapter ends on a positive note. The technical term “on that day” as well as the reference to the vine and the fig tree points to the new age of peace and prosperity. Zechariah 3 announces a new day for Joshua as he is purified

²² Boda, *Haggai*, 253; Stead, *Intertextuality*, 159.

²³ Petersen, *Haggai*, 204; Robert Hanhart, *Sacharja* (BKAT 14; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1998), 218; Floyd, *Minor Prophets* 2, 384.

²⁴ The Hebrew verbs טָהַר (*pi’el*; clean, purify) and כִּבַּשׁ (*pi’el*; cleanse) are used to convey the meaning of forgiveness. Cf. Johannes P. J. Olivier, “סָלַח,” *NIDOTTE* 3: 259–264.

²⁵ Hanson believes that the accusations by Satan and the reference to the filthy clothes stem from the growing conflict between the so-called temple and prophetic parties. According to Hanson the prophetic or visionary party have accused the Zadokite candidate for high priest of being defiled. But Joshua is absolved completely. Satan, the real accuser is rebuked and YHWH granted forgiveness to Joshua. Cf. Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of the Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 254.

from the filthiness of exile and installed as priest of the temple, instrumental for removing guilt from the land.²⁶

C ZECHARIAH 13

1 Historical and Literary Dimension

Scholars are uncertain about the exact dating of Zech 9–14, because there are no historical headings as in Zech 1–8. There are different dating hypotheses that vary from the eighth century B.C.E. until the second century B.C.E., from pre-exilic times until the time of the Maccabees in 166 B.C.E. We can possibly date chs. 9–14 after Zech 1–8 due to the fact that major issues of the early post-exilic times are ignored (e.g. the rebuilding of the temple). A possible date is the middle of the fifth century B.C.E. in the context of the Persian–Greek wars and also changes in Persian policy towards Jerusalem.²⁷

Zechariah 9–14 may be divided into two main literary units due to the use of the Hebrew word *נִשְׁאָר* (oracle): 9:1–11:17 (First oracle); 12:1–14:21 (Second oracle). Many modern scholars²⁸ argue that Zech 12:1–13:6 (or 9) forms a literary unit. The phrase “on that day” is a structural marker and occurs nine times (12:3, 4, 6, 8 [2x], 9, 13:1, 2, 4). These verses focus on the salvation, repentance and purification of Judah and Jerusalem. In Zech 9:1–11:17 the word “Jerusalem” is used only twice (9:9 and 10) while it occurs eleven times in 12:1–13:9 (12:2, 3 [2x], 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11; 13:1).

The NEB and a few scholars (Mitchell, Rudolph and Mason)²⁹ believe that vv. 7–9 serve as a conclusion of the shepherd narrative and place it after 11:17. However, there is not enough evidence to reorganize the MT. The shepherd in 13:7–9 cannot be identified with the worthless shepherd in 11:15–17.

Most modern scholars agree that ch. 13 can be divided into two or three smaller units. There is a definite shift after v. 6. Verse 7 is introduced with an imperative (“Awake, O sword”) and is written in poetry. According to Hill³⁰ the purification of God’s people will take place in three stages that structures the chapter:

²⁶ Boda, *Haggai*, 253.

²⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the dating of Zech 9–14, see Daniel F. O’Kennedy, “Sagaria 9–14: ’n Algemene Oorsig,” *NGTT* 49/1-2 (2008): 80–91, 81–83.

²⁸ Cf. David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 105; Floyd, *Minor Prophets* 2, 493–494; Sweeney, *Twelve* 2, 684; Boda, *Haggai*, 47); et al.

²⁹ Hinckley G. Mitchell, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912), 316–317; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Haggai–Sacharja 1–8–Sacharja 9–14–Maleachi* (KAT 13; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1976), 213; Mason, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 11.

³⁰ Hill, *Haggai*, 250.

- A fountain of purification will be opened (v. 1)
- God will banish idols and false prophets (vv. 2–6)
- God’s leader (shepherd) will be struck down, the people (sheep) scattered and judged, and a remnant will be refined (vv. 7–9)

2 Theological Dimension of Purification

2a A Fountain of Purification will be Opened (v. 1)

Verse 1 says the following:

On that day a fountain (מְקוֹר) shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin (תַּאֲטָף) and impurity (הִדָּף).³¹

Zechariah 13 has drawn terminology from the Pentateuchal sources, but the “waters” of these passages has been replaced by the cosmic fountain opened by YHWH.³² The use of the fountain image bears eschatological overtones. Jerusalem is here treated as the center from which the future world will be purified (cf. Joel 3:18; Ps 46:4). One may assume that the fountain mentioned in this verse was thought to be located at the temple. The explicit description of Jerusalem’s waters as washing away impurity is distinctive here. However, there is a possible link with Ezek 47, which emphasises that the waters that flow from Jerusalem will return the world to the status of creation.³³ According to Hill the fountain of purification may foreshadow the forgiveness of sin in the new covenant era (cf. Jer 31:34; Ezek 36:25).³⁴

Water was used in ancient Israelite rituals so that an unclean person could be purified (e.g. Lev 15:5; Ezek 36:25) and a fountain was an important source of fresh water needed for this ritual purification (Lev 14:5, 50). Zechariah 12, the previous chapter, is concerned with lamentation and death. In the light of this Petersen³⁵ asks whether purification of corpse-engendered uncleanness can be effected by water. The salient rituals indicate that water is, in fact, the appropriate purificatory agent (Num 19:11–12). The words of v. 1 is

³¹ The MT תַּאֲטָף translated as “cleanse from sin” is pointed as a feminine noun in the *status constructus* (construct state) with the particle הֵ. This would be a very improbable form before the *waw*. The text-critical apparatus of BHS suggest that it must be read as a *status absolutus* (absolute state). Cf. Carol L. and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14* (AB 25C; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 364. We do not find a verb used together with the words for sin and impurity in this sentence but most commentators and Bible translations reckon that a verb is implied.

³² Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, 367.

³³ O’Brien, *Nahum*, 267.

³⁴ Hill, *Haggai*, 251.

³⁵ Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 123–124.

in some measure, a response to the foregoing lament. God will cause flowing water to remove sin and impurity.

The phrase "house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem" appears in tandem three times in ch. 12 (vv. 7, 8, 10). The expression "house of David" has several connotations in the HB: the reigning David king; the Davidic dynasty; and David's household and family. In Zech 12:5 these words occur in connection with "leaders (אַלְפֵי)³⁶ of Judah," but in the following verses one only finds the phrase "house of David" (cf. 12:7, 8, 10; 13:1). It appears that the phrase "house of David" has replaced "leaders/chiefs of Judah" as a descriptive term for Judah's leaders. These leaders refer to the dynastic rulers and royal bureaucracy, probably including priestly officials.³⁷

The Hebrew term נְדָה (impurity) often describes sexual and ritual impurity. It refers to the state of impurity incurred during menstruation or childbirth (Lev 12:2,5; 15:19–33; 18:19; Ezek 18:6–8; 36:17) or in touching a corpse (Num 19:9, 13, 20, 21; 32:23). Occasionally it is used figuratively to indicate impure effects of idolatry (cf. Ezek 36:17, 25; Ezra 9:11; 2 Chr 29:5).³⁸ It is significant that the Hebrew term for fountain (מְקוֹר) is also used for the flow of fluids connected with childbirth and menstruation (Lev 12:7; 20:18; Prov 5:18). In these cases the fountain caused impurity while in Zech 13:1 the fountain brings purification.³⁹ Impurity is the result of an action or state of being that disrupts one's relationship with the holy God and renders one unfit to appear at the altar of the temple, the holy center of creation. The purification process restores this relationship.⁴⁰

The term חַטָּאת is one of the most frequent words referring to sin and sin offering. It occurs 290 times in the HB, but only three times in the book of Zechariah. Besides Zech 13:1 it only appears in 14:19 where it refers to the sin of Egypt and the sin of the nations. The two terms sin (חַטָּאת) and impurity (נְדָה) are found together in only one other context in the HB where they are also linked to water (Num 19:9).⁴¹

Zechariah 13:1 uses comprehensive technical terms to include different people and sins. It emphasises that God would open a fountain for royal officials and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to purify themselves from sin (general

³⁶ The NRSV follows the suggestion by the text-critical apparatus of BHS and translate it into clan (אַלְפֵי). The MT uses the Hebrew term אֲלֵפִים that can be translated into "leader" or "chief."

³⁷ Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, 364, 398; McComiskey, "Zechariah," 1211.

³⁸ Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, 366; McComiskey, "Zechariah," 1218; Hill, *Haggai*, 251.

³⁹ Boda, *Haggai*, 489.

⁴⁰ Sweeney, *Twelve* 2, 692.

⁴¹ Boda, *Haggai*, 490.

human misconduct) and impurity (ritual violations).⁴² This passage emphasises that the people and their leaders are not only purified of their disobedience to God, but also of the uncleanness that their disobedience created.⁴³

2b God will Banish Idols and False Prophets (vv. 2–6)

Klein⁴⁴ believes that the prophecy in v. 2 reprises Zechariah’s earlier quotation in ch. 3:9, “I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day.” Verse 2 continues the close association with the language of impurity already encountered in v. 1. The phrase “the unclean spirit” occurs nowhere else in the HB. However, the word *הַמְּאֵץ* (unclean) appears 36 times in the Bible and refers mostly to the state of ritual impurity (cf. Lev 7:20–21; Jer 2:23; Ezek 22:3; 23:7). The biblical understanding of uncleanness arises largely from Leviticus where the Torah delineates divine edicts concerning the manner in which God would allow his sinful creatures to approach him. In Zech 13 the unclean nature of this spirit arises out of the “lies in the name of the Lord” and other sinful actions that the false prophets admonished their adherents to embrace. Verse 2 forms an introduction to the next four verses that portray a scathing condemnation against false prophets. Even their fathers and mothers “shall pierce them through” when they prophecy (v. 4).⁴⁵

It is uncertain whether *רוּחַ* (spirit) refers to an actual spirit that drove the false prophets to lie (1 Kgs 22:22–23) or their mental attitude. The text depicts the “unclean spirit” as the motivating force behind the false prophets’ deceptive words.⁴⁶

2c God Refines and Tests his Scattered Sheep (vv. 7–9)

Verse 7 refers to “my shepherd” and “my associate” but it is difficult to determine their real identity. Both phrases use the possessive pronoun, emphasising the close relationship between God and the one who is struck by the sword. The words “my associate” supposes a close relationship between God and the shepherd.⁴⁷ Scholars have divergent opinions concerning the identity of “my shepherd,”⁴⁸ but there is a possibility that this shepherd figure is placed within the

⁴² Redditt, *Haggai*, 134.

⁴³ McComiskey, “Zechariah,” 1218.

⁴⁴ George L. Klein, *Zechariah* (NAC 2aB; Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), 375.

⁴⁵ Redditt, *Haggai*, 135; Boda, *Haggai*, 490; Klein, *Zechariah*, 377.

⁴⁶ McComiskey, “Zechariah,” 1220.

⁴⁷ Boda, *Haggai*, 512.

⁴⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the different hypotheses see Daniel F. O’Kennedy, “The Shepherd Imagery in Zechariah 9–14,” *OTE* 22/2 (2009): 404–421. The hypotheses differ from a priestly leader to a Davidic leader.

context of a more positive messianic expectation (cf. Zech 3:8; 6:12–14; 9:9–10; 10:4).⁴⁹

Zechariah 13 concludes as it began, addressing the theme of purification and forming a thematic inclusion. The purification of the people which began in 13:1 as a positive image, ends in 13:7–9 on a more somber note. The community is divided into thirds: two-thirds “shall be cut off and perish” and one-third “shall be left alive” (cf. also Ezek 5). The restoration of the people “on that day” will be not merely a washing away of sin but a violent destruction of more than two-thirds of the whole. Only a small remnant will be left to proclaim their bonds with YHWH. The final third survives but undergoes further discipline.

In Zech 13:9 this final third is refined, using terminology drawn from the practice of metallurgy, a common image in prophetic liturgy (e.g. Isa 1:25; Jer 6:27–30; Ezek 22:18–22). Two verbs are employed to develop the metallurgy metaphor conveying the process of purification. The first verb is refine (צרף) which frequently describes the process of melting metals in order to purify the metal by removing any impurities (Isa 1:21–26; 48:10; Jer 6:27–30; 9:6; Ezek 22:17–22). The second verb is test (בחן) which has even broader application in the HB. The very logic of refining and testing assumes that something positive will happen, namely that a residue of worth will emerge.⁵⁰

Zechariah 13:9b reveals the concluding conversation between YHWH and the people who have survived the refining process: “They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The Lord is our God.’” The covenant relationship between God and his people will be restored. Calling on God’s name is used for several types of interchange between God and his people, including sacrifice, thanksgiving and petition, but also for general seeking of God. Having been refined by God, they will now seek him, and to this people God promises to respond. He will declare them “my people” while they affirm that He is “our God.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Stephen L. Cook, “The Metamorphosis of a Shepherd: The Tradition History of Zechariah 11:17 + 13:7–9,” *CBQ* 55/3 (1993): 461.

⁵⁰ O’Brien, *Nahum*, 270; Klein, *Zechariah*, 392.

⁵¹ Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14*, 131–132; Boda, *Haggai*, 513–514.

D DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN ZECHARIAH 3 AND 13

The separate discussion of Zech 3 and 13 leads one to summarise the following differences and similarities between these two chapters. The possible differences are the following:

- Zechariah 3 forms part of the night visions in Proto-Zechariah and ch. 13 forms part of the second oracle (Zech 12–14) in Deutero-Zechariah. Therefore, these chapters originated during different times and form part of different literary units. Zechariah 3 is written in prose and the last section of Zech 13 (vv. 7–9) is written in poetry.
- Although Zech 3 refers to the “removal of the guilt of the land” (v. 9) it focuses on a specific historical person, namely the high priest Joshua. Chapter 13 does not mention a specific person and focuses more on the “house of David” (v.1) or the leaders of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem (v. 1), the false prophets (vv. 2–6), the shepherd and the associate (v. 7) and the remnant of God’s people (vv. 8–9).
- In Zech 3 one finds references to figures that are not human beings. There are several references to the angel of the Lord (vv. 1, 4, 5, 6) and three references to Satan as the accuser (vv. 1–2). In v. 8 there is also a reference to a messianic figure, the Branch. Zechariah 13 refers only to earthly beings, no heavenly beings or messianic figures.
- Both chapters use different Hebrew words and phrases describing the sin and uncleanness of the people. Zechariah 3 uses a very strong word (צוֹאִים) to convey the filthiness of Joshua’s clothes and a well-known term to describe his guilt or sin (עוֹן). The cultic term טְהוֹר is used to refer to the cleanness of the turban which replaced the filthy clothes (vv. 4–5). Zechariah 13:1 employs the Hebrew nouns הַטְּאָת (sin) and נִדְהָ (impurity) but does not use a verb in this sentence. In 13:2 the term טְמֵאָה (unclean) is used to describe the “unclean spirit” of the prophets.
- Zechariah 3 refers to “festal apparel” and a “clean turban” that will replace the filthy or unclean clothes. Chapter 13 does not refer to anything that will replace the uncleanness. The purification process described in this chapter is more drastic: the names of the idols will be cut off; the prophets and unclean spirit will be removed from the land; the shepherd will be struck with the sword; the sheep will be scattered; two-thirds of the people will be cut off from the land; and the remnant will be refined and tested.
- Zechariah 13 portrays a “double process” of purification. Verse 9 refers to purging or refinement on top of the purification discussed in vv. 1–6.

There is no "double process" in ch. 3. God will immediately take the guilt away from Joshua (v. 4) and will remove the guilt of the land in a single day (v. 9). The use of the above mentioned phrases reveals a closer relationship between purification and forgiveness in Zech 3 than in Zech 13.

- Chapter 3 summons Joshua to "walk in the ways" of YHWH, but in Zech 13 we find no appeal to live in obedience. There are only announcements of judgment and wrath.

The possible similarities can be summarised as follows:

- In both chapters the epithet **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת** (Lord of Hosts) is used when referring to God (3:7, 9, 10 and 13:2, 7). The purification process does not merely involve people and rituals. Ultimately it is the almighty God who purifies sinful human beings and grant them forgiveness.
- The expression "on that day" is used in both chapters, at the end in ch. 3 (v. 10) and three times in ch. 13 (vv. 1, 2 and 4). In both chapters it speaks about the new and glorious future. In Zech 3 this future will lead to peace, prosperity and good relationships (3:10). In Zech 13 the future will be marked by purification (v. 1) and removal of idols and false prophets (vv. 2, 4).
- Both chapters emphasise that the leaders of the people must take responsibility in the purification process: Joshua; leaders of Judah; prophets; and shepherd. Although Zech 3 focuses on Joshua it does not exclude other people. The high priest is seen as a representative or leader of his people. If he is purified, he can lead his people in this purification process. On the other hand, if a leader is unclean he/she can make the whole people unclean. That is why Zech 13 speaks about the false prophets that will be removed (vv. 2–6) and the shepherd that will be struck by the sword (v. 7).
- Zechariah 3 and 13 indicate that purification is not restricted to a few people. The whole land must be purified. Therefore, one finds four references to "land" in these chapters (3:9; 13:2 [2x], 8). The guilt of the whole land will removed (3:9), the land will be purified from idols and false prophets (vv. 2) and two-thirds of the land will be cut off (v. 8). Some scholars argue that Joshua was filthy and unclean, because he lived for a while in Babylon, the unclean land.
- Both chapters refer to clothes worn by the leaders. Zechariah 3:5 refers to the festal apparel and turban of the high priest and Zech 13:4 refers to the "hairy mantle" of the prophet.

- Zechariah 3 and 13 close on a positive note, describing the effect of purification: there will be peace amongst the people (3:10) and the acknowledgement that YHWH is their God (13:9). God does not purify his people so that they may remain where they are. The ultimate goal of the purification process is the restoration of the relationship between God and his people and the mutual relationship between people. One can therefore say that the themes of purification, renewal and forgiveness are related to one another. It is God’s wish that there will be a positive outcome. This is what the texts of Zech 3 and 13 portray.

There are several differences between these two chapters, but the similarities between chs. 3 and 13 have something to say for the study of the relationship between Zech 1–8 and Zech 9–14. It may suggest that there was a continuing tradition where the theme of purification played an important role.

E CONCLUDING REMARKS

The theme of purification cannot be typified as the central theme in the book of Zechariah. However, the study of this theme in chs. 3 and 13 emphasises that it cannot be ignored. The post-exilic community in Jerusalem that forms the socio-historical background to this book, needed to be purified by God.

There are several differences between these two chapters. Chapter 3 focuses more on the purification of Joshua, the high priest while ch. 13 focuses more on the purification of the leaders and people of Jerusalem. Different Hebrew words are even used to describe the sin and impurity of the people. In Zech 3 YHWH replaces the filthy clothes with a clean turban, but in Zech 13 the unclean spirit and prophets will be removed from the land.

Despite all the differences, both chapters use the expression “on that day” (3:10; 13:1–2) and emphasise that the leaders have a significant responsibility. YHWH cannot purify Jerusalem (3:2; 13:1), the land (3:9; 13:2) and the people with unclean leaders (priests, prophets and shepherds). Both chapters close on a positive note, describing the effect of purification: there will be peace amongst the people (3:10) and the acknowledgement that YHWH is their God (13:9). The ultimate goal of the purification process is the restoration of the relationship between God and his people and the mutual relationship between people.

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