

Joshua the High Priest

A Priest in Filthy Clothes and the Grace That Made Him Clean

Every message in Haggai is addressed to two leaders. One is Zerubbabel, the governor. The other is Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Zerubbabel led the people in their public life. Joshua led them in their worship. This guide introduces the second man, who is easy to overlook and whose story holds one of the clearest pictures of forgiveness in the Old Testament.

Who He Was

- **Not the Joshua you may be thinking of.** The Joshua who led Israel into the promised land lived many centuries earlier. This is a different man with the same name.
- **His name** means “The LORD saves.” In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah it is spelled Jeshua. It is the same Hebrew name that comes into English, through Greek, as Jesus.
- **His family.** His father Jehozadak was carried into exile when Jerusalem fell (1 Chronicles 6:15). His grandfather Seraiah was the chief priest whom the king of Babylon put to death (2 Kings 25:18-21). Joshua came from a line of high priests who, for a whole generation, had no temple to serve in.
- **His role.** High priest, the one man who represented the whole nation before God.

What He Did

Joshua came home with the first group of returning exiles, side by side with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2). The first thing the two of them did was rebuild the altar, so that sacrifices could be offered again, even before there was a building around it (Ezra 3:2-3). When Haggai preached, Joshua obeyed along with the governor and the people, and God “stirred up the spirit” of all three (Haggai 1:12, 14).

The Vision of the Filthy Clothes

The fullest picture of Joshua comes from Haggai's fellow prophet. In Zechariah 3, Zechariah sees a vision.

1. Joshua the high priest is standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan is standing at his right hand to accuse him (verse 1).
2. Joshua is wearing filthy clothes (verse 3). The high priest was supposed to stand before God in spotless garments. He represents the people, and their sin is on him.
3. The LORD does not answer the accusation by saying Joshua is innocent. He rebukes the accuser, and calls Joshua “a brand plucked from the fire” (verse 2).
4. The filthy clothes are taken away. God says, “See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes” (verse 4). A clean turban is set on his head.

Joshua does nothing in this scene. He does not defend himself or clean himself up. He is accused, and he is forgiven and clothed by someone else. It is one of the plainest pictures in the Old Testament of what the New Testament calls grace.

A Priest With a Crown

Later, Zechariah is told to make a crown of silver and gold and set it on Joshua's head (Zechariah 6:11-13). In Israel that was unheard of. Kings came from the tribe of Judah and priests from the tribe of Levi, and the two offices were kept apart.

The crown was a sign pointing ahead. Zechariah speaks of a coming man called “the BRANCH” who will build the temple of the LORD and will be “a priest on His throne.” One person would someday be both priest and king.

How Joshua Points to Jesus

- He shares His name. Joshua, Jeshua, and Jesus are the same name: “The LORD saves.”
- He shows our need. Even the high priest stood before God in filthy clothes and had to be made clean.
- He wears the crown that belongs to another. Jesus is the priest and king that Joshua's crown pointed to (Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:1-3).
- He was a priest who needed forgiveness. Jesus is the high priest who had no sin of His own and gave Himself for ours (Hebrews 7:26-27).

What We Can Learn From Joshua

- Worship comes first. He rebuilt the altar before there were walls.
- Leaders need grace too. The most religious man in the nation needed clean clothes.
- When the accuser speaks, God's answer is the last word.
- We are not made clean by trying harder. Someone else removes the filthy garments.
- God often pairs people for His work. Joshua and Zerubbabel are named together every time.

All Scripture references follow the New King James Version (NKJV) unless noted otherwise.