

3. Like 8:31-32, verses 33-34 may be treated as a distinct sub-context within the larger passage (8:31-39). The primary indication of the distinctness of these two verses is their conspicuous repetition of the pattern Paul established in the preceding two verses. This passage, too, is introduced with an overarching rhetorical question followed an immediate response in the form of a second question. Furthermore, in both cases the second question is composed as a greater-to-lesser argument having virtually identical referents and content. Finally, the third statement of each pair of verses serves to clarify and expand upon the preceding argumentation (although the former presents this explanation in the form of another question).

The two pairs of verses are pointedly parallel, and yet there is clear movement from the first pair to the second. But this movement is not at all discontinuous; rather, it is progressive and developmental. That is to say, the parallelism of verses 33-34 serves to unfold and advance the corresponding ideas in the preceding two verses. For example, Paul carried forward the concept that “*God is for us*” by the corresponding declaration, “*God is the one who justifies.*” Similarly, the idea of being “against us” is explained by the corresponding question, “*...who is the one who condemns?*”

By this progressive parallelism, Paul was constructing a linguistic “staircase” that would ultimately reach its pinnacle in the all-encompassing, summary proclamation of verses 38-39. Thus the concluding nine verses of chapter eight must be read as a cohesive unit, but not in the sense that they are static and flat. In his own consideration of the gospel, Paul’s heart was filled with a rising exultation, and he was careful to express that emotion by his literary style. To miss the dynamic escalation in this passage is to fall short of Paul’s desire that his readers would sense and share in his own jubilation in the gospel.

- a. The larger question introducing this pair of verses is: “*Who will bring a charge against God’s elect?*” At first glance, it may appear that Paul was simply recognizing the truth that Christians are routinely subjected to slander and all sorts of accusations by the unbelieving world. Certainly he knew this as well as anyone. But the import of his question is much more significant, for it is directed toward the appointed day of final reckoning.
 - 1) The first evidence for this conclusion is Paul’s use of the future tense with his verb, “will bring a charge.” It is true that this tense can indicate simply the possibility of some future event (hence, some possible generic accusation against a believer), but the verb itself suggests otherwise. The reason is that this term has a strong legal sense. It refers to a *formal* charge or accusation, usually brought in the context of a summons before a constituted tribunal or law court (cf. Acts 19:38-40, 23:26-30, 26:1-7).
 - 2) A second point of evidence is the subsequent clarifying question raised in 8:33b-34a. Here it is obvious that Paul was concerned not with general accusations leveled against believers, but the specific matter of their justification and condemnation before God.

- 3) The third evidence for this conclusion is Paul's reference in his question to the *elect*. This terminology points back to verses 28-30, since predestination presupposes election – God foreordains the salvation of those He has chosen, and election itself presupposes foreknowledge – God sets apart those who are the objects of His covenant love (ref. Ephesians 1:3-6). Thus the language of election moves Paul's argument out of the realm of "charges" associated with everyday hostility, to the overarching realities of God's judgment regarding men. It is precisely because they are "God's elect" that believers will stand vindicated in the day of judgment. Douglas Moo comments: "*In a sense, then, this manner of designating Christians [as 'elect'] in the question itself is the only answer required.*"

Concluding, then, that Paul was referring to the final judgment, the question arises as to whom Paul had in mind as bringing a charge on that day? Satan is one possibility, for he is supremely the "accuser of the brethren" (Revelation 12:1-10). Others may argue that the believer's own sin and unrighteousness will accuse him. *But Paul left the "who" unidentified for the simple reason that it is irrelevant.* Regardless of who the accuser might be, Paul's point is that his accusation cannot stand. Whatever the charge and whoever the one bringing it, it is empty and harmless because it is directed against "*God's elect.*"

- b. Like the preceding context, the present passage begins with a summary question followed by Paul's answer in the form of a second question. Thus Paul answered his question, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect," with the follow-up question, "*God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?*" As Moo observed, the simple fact of the believer's election is sufficient proof that no charge against him will stand on the day of judgment; if God is for him, who can be against him? But the specific reason God's elect are exempt from accusation is that they have been chosen to be *justified* in Christ.

As before, Paul's response takes the form of a greater-to-lesser argument having God as the referent of the "greater." Just as it is self-evident that no one can be against those whom God is for (8:31b), so also it is equally evident that no one can *condemn* those whom God justifies (being Himself the "justifying one").

This language continues the same law court connotation introduced by the previous verb, "bring a charge." God's act of justification is a forensic reality, and the same is true of its opposite, namely *condemnation*. In speaking of someone being able to condemn, Paul was not referring to censorious or fault-finding words leveled by one person against another; he was referring to a binding, judicial verdict of condemnation handed down by a court of law. Specifically, he had in mind God's tribunal at Christ's return (cf. Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:11-15). In the end, this is the only judgment seat that has any ultimate significance, for Christ is the Judge and His verdict will stand for all eternity (John 5:19-30). Thus Paul's point: if the Judge Himself has satisfied His own justice against the accused, *who is there that can seal his condemnation?*

4. As remarked earlier, 8:34b serves to expand upon Paul's statement that God is the one who justifies. Specifically, God's justification of men is grounded in the death of His Son, so that God's justifying activity points directly to Christ Jesus as the "one who died." God as the "justifying one" points to Christ as the "dying one."
 - a. But Christ's death was not ultimate: the One who died is "much rather" the One who was *raised* from the dead: "*Christ Jesus is the one who died, yes, rather who was raised...*" In this context Paul was clearly indicating the Father as the One who raised the Son. Most importantly, the Scripture insists that, by raising Christ from the dead, God testified that Jesus' atoning work had been fully accomplished (ref. 1 Corinthians 15:12-22; also Acts 2:22-32; Hebrews 1:1-3; 1 Peter 1:3). The resurrection was the Father's "amen" to the Son's dying words, "It is finished."
 - b. As the purpose for Christ's crucifixion was that death should be "swallowed up in life," so Calvary finds its immediate goal in Jesus' resurrection. And yet the resurrection did not complete God's purpose for His Son: Christ's resurrection found its own goal in His *ascension*. The resurrection attested to the satisfaction of divine justice against human unrighteousness, and the Son's triumph in justification was rewarded with His exaltation. Jesus was raised in order to be glorified, and Paul here reveals that His glorification embodies two distinct yet inseparable aspects: His **enthronement** "*at the right hand of God,*" and His **high-priestly ministration** as the One who "*intercedes for us.*"

These conjoined concepts are integral and foundational to biblical revelation as a whole, and yet they are not often understood or even considered by Christians. Their significance is seen in the fact that the *kingdom of God* is the core theme that binds together the entire Bible, and that theme finds its own focal point in the kingship/priesthood concepts. This can be demonstrated in numerous ways, but perhaps the most succinct approach is to examine a context in the book of Zechariah and then consider its implication for these and other crucial kingdom themes.

- 1) The context in question is Zechariah 6:9-15. The entirety of Zechariah's prophecy converges on this passage, as the overall structure of the book makes clear. The book consists of four sections conjoined by three corresponding "hinges" (3:1-10, 6:9-15, 11:1-17). The book is divided in half by the middle hinge, and each half is further subdivided into two sections by its respective hinge. There are several things that identify these hinge passages, but the primary matter is their sharply messianic character. More precisely, *all three focus their messianic content in a divine commissioning act that implicates both a royal and a priestly obligation.*

And because this king-priest messianism is the common theme in the three hinge passages, it effectively becomes the "glue" that holds the entire book together. This means that Zechariah's prophecy as a whole must be read through the lens of this thematic perspective. One final observation is that – consistent with the book's symmetrical structure – the king-priest theme is most pronounced in the middle hinge. For this reason it is eminently suited to the present consideration.

- 2) The historical setting for the prophecy is the return of the Judean exiles from their captivity in Babylon and their efforts in rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. As promised by His prophets, God had sent Judah into exile in Babylon as punishment for her covenant unfaithfulness. But He had also promised that, when their punishment was complete, He would bring them back and reestablish them in the land of Israel. Now that God had fulfilled His promise and brought them back, the recovered exiles were seeking as their first task to rebuild Yahweh's house on Mount Zion (Ezra 1:1-6:15). It was in the context of this activity that God called upon His prophet Zechariah (cf. Zechariah 1:1 and Haggai 1:1).
- 3) In the passage under consideration, God's prophetic word to the recovered exiles was to come through a physical sign. Zechariah was to take an offering of silver and gold from the people and used it to make a crown (6:10-11). Then Zechariah was to take the crown, set it on the head of Joshua the high priest in the sight of the people, and make a proclamation by which God would interpret for the exiles the meaning of Joshua's symbolic coronation (6:12-13).
- 4) The radical nature of this coronation must not be missed: from the inauguration of the Israelite theocracy God had established an indelible separation between the kingly and priestly lines in Israel. Through the mouth of Jacob God had identified *Judah* as the progenitor of the kings of Israel (Genesis 49:8-10). So also God had determined that Israel's priests would all be taken from the tribe of *Levi* (Numbers 3:1-10). In this way God insured that there would never be a king-priest in theocratic Israel, and His outrage at kings who assumed the priestly role punctuated this imposed distinction (cf. 1 Samuel 13:1-14; 2 Chronicles 26:1-21). *The implication of this genealogical separation of Israel's kings and priests is that Zechariah's crowning of the high priest necessarily pointed to a reality that existed outside of the Old Covenant theocracy.*
- 5) This fact was reinforced and clarified by God's identification of the crowned high priest with "a man whose name is Branch." By referring to this symbolic king-priest as "Branch," the exiles understood that God was linking him with the prophetic figure of that name introduced earlier by Isaiah and Jeremiah. They had shown this individual to be both the promised *Davidic king* and the Isaianic *Servant of Yahweh* (ref. Isaiah 4:1-6, 9:1-7, 11:1-16, 42:1-9, 49:1-53:12; Jeremiah 23:1-8, 33:1-18; cf. also Zechariah 3:1-10).

The importance of Zechariah's declaration is profound, for in it *three core "streams" of messianic prophetic content are merged together and shown to converge in one individual.* The first stream pertains to **David's royal seed** in whom God would establish His kingdom and build His house (ref. 2 Samuel 7:1-16; also Isaiah 11:1ff; Jeremiah 23:1-8, 33:14-17). David had established at the *typological* level the kingdom promised to Abraham, and no sooner had he done so than God promised that He would establish David's dynasty and kingdom forever in a son to come from him. Solomon was the initial referent of the promise, but David knew it looked beyond him (2 Samuel 7:18-19; Acts 2:22-31).

The second stream is associated with the revelation of the **Servant of Yahweh**. It is within the flow of this prophetic content that the Davidic heir known as “Branch” was revealed to be Yahweh’s Servant and appointed sin-bearer – the true Israel in whom Israel and the nations of the earth would be redeemed (cf. again Isaiah 4:1-6, 11:1-16, 42:1-9, and 49:1-53:12).

The final stream incorporates the previous two. It is the **king-priest** motif associated with Melchizedek. This stream was formalized in Psalm 110, which acts to ascribe prophetic significance to the person of Melchizedek as *king* of Salem (Jerusalem) and *priest* of God Most High (Genesis 14:18). It is this theme that is in the forefront of Zechariah’s present prophecy.

What had previously remained unreconciled in the development of messianic revelation was now brought together in Zechariah’s symbolic crowning of the high priest: the promised royal seed of David was also the suffering Servant of Yahweh; *the Servant who would make atonement as a priest would also reign on the throne of His father David* (ref. Matthew 12:15-23). What was impossible in the Old Covenant kingdom would be realized in **one man** in the kingdom of the New Covenant; Branch would rule as a priest upon His throne (6:13).

- 6) Finally, Zechariah’s prophecy revealed that Branch, the king-priest, would build the house of Yahweh. Recall again that this prophecy occurred during the time that the recovered exiles were rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. They would indeed rebuild the physical structure, but even that second temple would not fulfill God’s promise to David. God promised that David’s son would build His house, and in Solomon the first-level fulfillment of the promise had been realized. Solomon’s temple, however, had been destroyed, and yet God’s promise remained that He would build His house and establish His kingdom forever through a son of David.

Zechariah specifically had that promise in view, and his prophecy found a contemporary point of reference in the exiles’ labors in rebuilding Solomon’s temple. Up until that time they may have speculated that a rebuilt temple implied the imminent emergence of a Davidic king to lead the nation. But Zechariah’s words removed that hope and served to project God’s promise to David *beyond* the building of the second temple and the Old Covenant Israelite theocracy.

This is obvious first in that God’s proclamation was that *Branch* would build Yahweh’s temple – the same Branch who was just revealed to be the king-priest. At that time no such king-priest existed in Israel, nor could one ever exist as long as the Old Covenant continued. *This meant that the “temple” God was referring to was a different temple altogether that was to be built at a future time when the present order of things had been altered.* It is further evident from God’s prophetic word that “*those who are far off will come and build the temple of the Lord*” (6:15). This act of drawing upon the nations to contribute in the building of God’s house was certainly not the case with the second temple (Ezra 4:1-3).

Finally, this conclusion is reinforced by correlating Zechariah's prophecy with that of his contemporary Haggai (ref. esp. Haggai 2:1-9). Even more so than Zechariah, Haggai's prophetic ministry had its point of reference in the construction of the second temple. Interacting with the discouragement of the exiles, Haggai affirmed that the rebuilt temple would be nothing in comparison with Solomon's temple, and yet Yahweh had ordained a superlative glory for His house that would transcend even the glory of the former temple. The ultimate glory of Yahweh's house would be realized in the ingathering of the wealth of the nations. Most importantly, the latter house would be characterized by Yahweh's *peace*. This glory never did characterize the second temple, but was realized in the One who declared *Himself* to be Yahweh's sanctuary; the One who builds the Lord's house, fills it with the abundance of the nations, and has brought it peace (cf. John 2:13-21; also Matthew 16:13-18; 1 Peter 2:4-6).

These great themes – themes that are so foundational to the Old Testament's portrait of the kingdom of God and its coming King – find their fulfillment in the New Testament in the person of Jesus Christ:

- He is the regal *Lion of Judah*; the promised Root and Branch of David appointed by God to build His house and rule over His kingdom forever (ref. Acts 2:22-36; also cf. Psalm 89, 132; Isaiah 4:1-6, 9:1-7, 11:1-12:6, 55:1-5; Jeremiah 23:1-6, 30:1-33:26; Ezekiel 34:1-31, 37:1-28; Hosea 3:1-5; Amos 9:11-15; Matthew 22:41-46; Luke 1:26-33, 67-79; Romans 1:1-3; Revelation 5:1-14, 22:16).
- He is the *Servant of Yahweh*; the self-sacrificing and interceding priest in whom men find forgiveness, cleansing, restoration, and life (Isaiah 49-55).
- Therefore, He is the singular *King-Priest* according to the order of Melchizedek; a priest "who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (cf. Hebrews 5:1-10 with Psalm 2; also esp. Hebrews 6:13-10:14).

Thus Paul's brief characterization of Jesus is an exquisite word of hopeful exultation. In the day of judgment, no one in all the creation will be able to accuse God's elect. God Himself has justified them through the sacrifice of His Son, and He has attested to the full satisfaction for sin by raising Him from the dead. But Christ, the Son of David, was raised in order to be enthroned at God's right hand, where He exercises all authority with all things in subjection under His feet (cf. Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:22-36, 7:51-56; Ephesians 1:18-23; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:1-4, 8:1-2, 10:11-13). And as the sovereign King who rules by virtue of His having made purification for sin, He reigns as a Priest upon His throne – the promised King-Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, (Psalm 110). He is the *King of Kings* who has all authority in heaven and earth. But He is also Yahweh's Servant and *Righteous One*; the One who, from His throne, sovereignly pleads His own righteousness on behalf of His own. This is why no one can accuse God's elect; this is why foreknowledge necessarily ends in glorification. Because Christ is *the King-Priest*, those who belong to Him are made "kings and priests to their God" (Revelation 5:1-10; 1 Peter 2:9-10; cf. also Jeremiah 33:14-26).