

III. Center Hinge

A. Framing the Prophecy

1. As indicated at the outset of the study, Zechariah's prophecy was composed as a *diptych*, meaning that it consists of paired panels conjoined by a center hinge. This structure characterizes the prophecy's sub-sections (the night visions and burdens), but it also characterizes the prophecy as a whole. That is, the prophecy consists of two primary panels – the night visions (1:7-6:8) and the burdens (9:1-14:21) – which are conjoined by the center hinge prophecy of 6:9-15. But each of the side panels is itself a diptych having its own center hinge (3:1-10, 11:1-7). As well, each of the two main panels is prefaced by an oracular introduction (1:1-6, 7:1-8:23).

Most importantly, the diptych nature of Zechariah's prophecy is thematic as well as structural. In other words, the three hinge passages connect their adjoining panels by highlighting key themes drawn from those panels. The outer hinges, in turn, have their own hinge in the book's center hinge. Thus the center hinge brings together the *priestly* and *regal* messianic themes which are the focal point respectively of the two other hinge passages (3:1-10, 11:1-17). Moreover, these parallel themes are united and highlighted in terms of the *sanctuary* theme which is central to both main panels (cf. 1:14-17, 2:1-13, 4:1-10, 14:1-11, 16-21) and the prophecy as a whole (ref. also 1:1-3, 7:1-7, 8:1-9, 20-23).

2. This center hinge passage is not only the centerpiece of Zechariah's prophecy, it is an absolutely critical component of the Scripture's prophetic literature. The Old Testament writings are, in their totality, christological and christocentric, and they build their case for the coming Messiah along two related revelatory paths: the priestly and the regal. Stated differently, Old Testament messianism (messianic revelation) was disclosed and advanced along two primary streams or paths – the priestly and the regal, each of which is fundamental to the person and work of the Messiah, and therefore to the Scripture's revelation of Him. Each of these themes advances independently for a period in the salvation history, but they then converge in relation to the person of *David*. Several considerations prove the point.
 - a. First is the fact that David was unique among the kings of Israel in being allowed to execute the priestly function. Both Saul, David's predecessor, and Uzziah, his descendent, were punished by the Lord and stripped of their reign because of attempting to act as priests (ref. 1 Samuel 13:1-14; 2 Chronicles 26:16-21). The union of the regal and priestly office and function was forbidden by God and made most explicit by the separation He forged between the kingship and priesthood by assigning them to two different tribes in Israel: Judah was the regal tribe (Genesis 49:8-10) and Levi was the priestly tribe (Numbers 3:11-51; cf. Exodus 4:14, 28:1). No one can be descended from two brothers; descent from Levi precluded descent from Judah and vice versa. By the oath given through Jacob and the prescription of the Law of Moses, God made it clear that there would never be a priest-king in the kingdom of Israel under the Mosaic economy.

David was the singular exception to this definition – not because of who he was in himself but because of who he typified: David was a descendent of Judah’s royal line, but he was also the king to whose descendent, by covenant oath (the Davidic Covenant – 2 Samuel 7), the scepter of Judah was to pass forever. David functioned as Yahweh’s king-priest (in the matter of enthroning Him on Mount Zion – 2 Samuel 6:12-15) to His approval and pleasure because he was the great prototype of the Messiah who would be the Lord’s true King-Priest.

- b. The second consideration is the intimate connection between David and the ancient king Melchizedek (“king of righteousness” – Genesis 14:17-24; Psalm 110). Melchizedek is the original prototypical king-priest, being designated by the biblical text as “the king of Salem (ancient Jerusalem) and priest of God Most High (Genesis 14:18). Outside of the Genesis narrative, the only other Old Testament appearance of Melchizedek is in Psalm 110 – a psalm of David that exalts Melchizedek as the counterpart of the Lord’s everlasting king-priest and which draws a close association between him, David and David’s messianic Son (cf. Psalm 110 with Matthew 22:41-46; Acts 2:22-36; Hebrews 4:14-7:28).
- c. The third consideration is the present context in Zechariah’s prophecy. This prophetic incident enjoys the place of preeminence in the sense that it makes absolutely explicit what all the other pertinent contexts only affirm implicitly. Zechariah’s prophetic act in the house of Josiah disclosed in undeniable fashion the Lord’s design to merge and bind together everlastingly the kingship and priesthood in the person of the Messiah, the Branch of David.

Its role as the center hinge of Zechariah’s entire prophecy highlights the preeminence of this prophetic event. It binds together the whole book, but its significance is far greater than that. For, if it’s true that the salvation history sets out two primary streams of messianic revelation, it follows that these streams must converge in the person of the Messiah. If they do not, they are not truly messianic. Such a convergence is suggested by the larger Old Testament witness, but only in Zechariah’s prophecy is it made explicit, and that in relation to the regal messianic figure, the Branch of David. This disclosure is critically important to the progress of scriptural revelation, but all the more so because this particular prophecy illumines the significance and purpose of this convergence. It is fine and good to learn that the priestly and regal streams of messianic revelation were to converge in the Branch; what is more important is the reason and goal in this. Why was it necessary that the priesthood and kingship be united in the Messiah? Why was it necessary that He be Yahweh’s unique King-Priest? This prophecy answers that question.

- 3. The first thing to note about this prophetic revelation is that it took the form of a *physical prophecy* and not a vision. That is, a physical event served as the framework for the revelatory content (cf. Jeremiah 13:1-14; Ezekiel 3:1-5:17; Hosea 1:2-3:5; etc.). Moreover, this prophetic event began with a directive from the Lord (6:9). Zechariah was directed to go to three of the exiles who’d returned to Jerusalem from Babylon and take up from them a collection of silver and gold. Apparently these men were not part of the original group that left Babylon, but had returned to Judah in the recent past (6:10).

The text provides no explanation for their having this wealth; it's quite possible the three had traveled to Jerusalem specifically to present an offering of silver and gold to be used in the temple project (cf. Exodus 25:1-3; 1 Chronicles 28:9-19). In that case, the Lord was directing Zechariah to accept their offering for His sanctuary, but use it instead to make a critical point concerning His house and the one who was going to build it (ref. again 4:1-9). Whether or not that scenario is correct, what does seem clear is that these men had brought this gold and silver with them from Babylon. *Thus their offering represented the wealth of Babylon*, and this will prove important to the prophecy's meaning, particularly as it focuses on the Branch's work in building Yahweh's sanctuary.

- a. Zechariah was to take this gold and silver and fashion an elaborate crown from it. Indeed, the text refers to *crowns*, indicating that this crown was to be composed of individual gold and silver bands (crowning rings) woven together into a single, glorious crown. (This conception is further supported by the fact that gold and silver are not melted together to form an alloy. They obviously can be used together, but in solid form so as to comprise a composite whole.)
- b. After fashioning this crown, Zechariah was to call for Joshua, the high priest (ref. 3:1-10) and set it on his head in a symbolic coronation (6:11). Though the text says nothing about the occasion of this coronation or its attendants, its prophetic role and the proclamation attached to it suggest that this was done in the presence of witnesses – at the very least, the four men Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Josiah.

B. The Prophecy Itself

Zechariah's crowning of Joshua had revelatory significance. It was a "word from the Lord" and Yahweh communicated its interpretation to His prophet along with the command to declare it to those present with him (and, by extension, to the recovered exiles in Judah). The Lord's interpretive word consisted of a pronouncement and instruction (6:12-15). Most importantly, it came to a people actively engaged in rebuilding the Jerusalem temple and it must be understood in the light of that activity and the presuppositions and expectations attached to it (cf. 4:1-9).

1. The first component of Yahweh's word was His pronouncement concerning Joshua himself (vv. 12-13). Joshua, the Lord's newly-crowned high priest, signified another individual: the *Branch of David* (ref. again 3:8).
 - a. As previously noted, "Branch" was a prophetic designation assigned to the son of David indicated in God's covenant with him. This "branch" wasn't merely a descendent of his or even a regal son who'd sit on his throne; "Branch" was the promised *covenant* son: the son chosen by Yahweh to build His house and the one in whom David's house, throne and kingdom were to be established forever; so also the singular son in whom David himself was to obtain the full realization of his own identity and significance as Yahweh's chosen son-king and the man after His own heart. Thus, from the point of the Davidic Covenant, the Lord repeatedly referred to this son of David under the name of *David* (cf. Isaiah 4:1-6, 11:1-10; Jeremiah 23:5-6, 33:15-22; Ezekiel 34:1-31, 37:15-28; Hosea 1-3).

Now crowned with the wealth of Babylon – the symbol of the world power set in antithesis to the Lord and His kingdom (ref. again 2:6, 5:5-6:8), Joshua signified the Branch of David – not merely as Yahweh’s high priest, but as His priest-king. What had only been suggested to this point in the salvation history had now become explicit: *The covenant son promised to David would fulfill his unique and everlasting kingship as the Lord’s high priest.*

- b. Joshua’s crowning signified the Davidic Branch and Zechariah articulated the particulars of that signification by declaring to Joshua on the Lord’s behalf (“thus says the Lord of Hosts”) four specific things regarding this individual:
- 1) First of all, he noted that the Branch was going to “branch out from where He is” (6:12b). This expression is rendered in various ways, but the best rendering is something like this: *He will sprout up from his place* (most literally, “He will sprout up from under himself”). This imagery is consistent with Isaiah’s portrayal (53:2) and it accords with the “branch” metaphor. It accords with that metaphor, but it also must be understood in terms of it. Thus one mustn’t conclude that Messiah was going to emerge from some nether region, but neither was this language intended to suggest Jesus’ humble origin and childhood. It’s possible, as some assert, that this expression was intended to allude to the fact that Messiah was to emerge from the Abrahamic people – i.e., the Branch was going to spring from His own soil, as it were. But it may also simply reflect the shoot imagery: Like a shoot that sprouts from the ground in its season, the Branch of David was going to appear at the time ordained by the Lord of Hosts.
 - 2) The second assertion was that this man “Branch” was going to build Yahweh’s sanctuary. This is the strongest affirmation that Zechariah was indicating the same person elsewhere identified as the Branch of David – the covenant son ordained by the Lord to build His house.
 - 3) Thirdly, the Branch was going to accomplish His building task in the context of reigning as Yahweh’s king, bearing His majesty and honor. This, too, accords with the Lord’s covenant oath to David and was first played out with Solomon who built the first temple after being enthroned as his father’s successor on Yahweh’s throne (1 Kings 5:1-6:1).
 - 4) Lastly, Zechariah was directed to declare that the Branch’s reign would involve the execution of the priesthood. *This was the most profound and critical disclosure in this prophetic episode*, for it moved the Branch revelation beyond the Davidic Covenant and the regal dimension of the construction of Yahweh’s house to a new priestly dimension. As noted, this dimension was suggested by David’s connection with the Melchizedek typology (Psalm 110) and by his own priestly role in installing the ark (symbolizing Yahweh’s throne) in the new sanctuary in Jerusalem, but nowhere was it stated or otherwise clearly indicated.

- c. Taken as a whole, the crowning of Joshua and the Lord's four-fold declaration concerning this act and its meaning represented a significant development in the progress of messianic revelation. It explicitly conjoined the priestly and regal streams of Israel's messianism by highlighting that the Davidic Branch was going to build the Lord's sanctuary as His enthroned and reigning High Priest. In this way, in the Branch, Yahweh was going to unify the kingship and priesthood, bringing the "counsel of peace" between them.

Some have taken this phrase, "counsel of peace between them," to refer to peace being secured between Yahweh and His people by virtue of Branch's ministration as the Lord's king-priest. This idea certainly isn't alien to the Scripture's revelation of the Messiah and the outcome of His work; the Branch – the Servant of Yahweh – was prophesied to reconcile, in Himself, the Lord and His people.

But the contextual emphasis is not on the reconciliation of God and man, but the unification of the priesthood and the kingship in the person of the Branch. To the modern reader, this union – the counsel of peace – may not appear to be of great consequence, but it was a profoundly radical idea to the ancient Israelites. The reason is that it was utterly foreign to the framework in which the Israelites lived in relation to their covenant God.

The Law of Moses – the covenant ratified at Sinai – defined and prescribed in minute detail Israel's identity and the nature and practice of the nation's relationship with Yahweh as His covenant "son." And at the heart of that relationship were the concepts of priesthood and kingship: *Israel was a regal and priestly people (Exodus 19:1-6) and these concepts were woven into the very fabric of their self-identity and covenant relationship with God as defined and prescribed in the Mosaic Law.*

Thus the Hebrews writer insisted that the Law of Moses (the Sinai Covenant) was imparted to Israel on the basis of the priesthood (7:11-12). That is to say, the priesthood was the fundamental premise behind the establishment of the formal covenant relationship between Yahweh and the nation of Israel. Without the priesthood, there could be no covenant – no Law. The result was that Israel could not imagine itself or its relationship with Yahweh apart from the fact and function of the Levitical priesthood.

But so also it was with the kingship. In the beginning, Israel was led by Moses and Joshua and then a series of judges. But through all of this Yahweh was King in Israel and the promise remained of a coming day when He was going to raise up a human king in Israel who was to embody His own rule by being a true and faithful "son of the covenant" (ref. Deuteronomy 17:14-20). The very nature and structure of God's purpose for the world – the purpose bound up in Messiah – demanded that the concept of kingship be integral to Israel's existence and relationship with God and that this concept find its substance in the promise that Yahweh was going to execute His own rule through a man of His choosing.

Priesthood and kingship were integral to the covenant relationship between Yahweh and His people; no Israelite could think of himself except in terms of the Law of Moses and he could not think of the Law of Moses apart from the concepts of kingship and priesthood. *At the same time, the Mosaic Law established an unbridgeable separation between the two offices by assigning the priesthood to Levi and upholding the Lord's previous assignment of the kingship to Judah.*

The Law of Moses precluded the possibility of a bona fide king-priest, and the children of Israel continued under this definition even in their exile and subsequent to their return to Judah. Both Zechariah and those with him in Jerusalem regarded themselves as under the Mosaic Law, so that the notion of a union of the kingship and priesthood would have been shocking to them. And yet, this is precisely what Yahweh was insisting upon in His proclamation concerning the Branch.

From this they should have recognized that the coming of Branch meant the introduction of a whole new order of divine/human relationship defined, prescribed and administered by a new covenant (Hebrews 7:12). And since that relationship had its centerpiece in the Lord's sanctuary – the place of divine-human interface and interaction, it followed that a change in the regal/priestly structure and the covenant associated with it would bring a corresponding change in the sanctuary itself. This was all the more the case since it was the Branch – the King-Priest – who was going to build Yahweh's true sanctuary.

When Yahweh at last restored David's house and kingdom, it wouldn't be by resurrecting the former order. Yet this is precisely what many in Israel expected, especially in the later centuries as the children of Israel dealt with Gentile domination and the suffering and sorrows of the diaspora. By the time Jesus was born, the general expectation in Israel of the coming kingdom was a national, temporal restoration of the theocracy that would see the overthrow of Rome and the reestablishment of the glory of David's dominion over the nations. This was the hope and goal of the Zealots, and also the mindset behind the Jews' perception and expectation of Messiah and His kingship (cf. John 6:14-15, 19:14-21).

The raising up of David's fallen tabernacle (Amos 9:11-15) would mark the inauguration of a new order of "kingdom": a new kingdom ordered by a new covenant founded on a new priesthood (Hebrews 6-8). This priesthood was to be a regal one – not in the sense of a regal, priestly *nation* (Exodus 19:1-6) which nonetheless separated these two offices in different tribes, but by virtue of a regal priestly *person*: a singular King-Priest in union with whom every man becomes a king-priest (cf. 1 Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 5:1-10; cf. also Jeremiah 33:14-22).

2. These premises lie back of the instruction that comprised the second part of Yahweh's interpretive word (6:14-15a). The marrow of that instruction was the Lord's insistence that the crown Zechariah had fashioned and set on the high priest's head was to serve a *commemorative* function. Joshua's symbolic crowning was a one-time, passing occurrence, but the symbolic significance of that act was to stand before the eyes and hearts of the exiles perpetually.

The Lord directed that, when the temple was complete (which itself was an assurance that the exiles' work would succeed – cf. 4:6-10; also Haggai 2:1-5) the crown was to be installed there. Thus it would perpetually remind the exiles that the sanctuary they'd built was not ultimate (cf. Haggai 2:6-9) and the Branch – to whom the crown belonged – had not yet come. Both the temple and the crown looked to a coming One – One whose coming was assured. *He* was going to build the Lord's sanctuary, but He would do so as His enthroned High Priest.

- a. Branch was going to build Yahweh's dwelling place, *but not alone*. Other men – those who are “far off” – were going to assemble at the Lord's sacred site and build His temple (6:15). At first glance this may seem to contradict Yahweh's previous insistence that Branch was to be the builder of His house (vv. 12-13). But a careful look at the Hebrew text resolves the apparent dilemma. The text states that Branch was going to *build* Yahweh's sanctuary, while other men will *build into it*.

The contextual implication is that these individuals – who were going to come together from distant realms – were to participate with Branch in the building process, much as the scattered exiles of Israel were returning and were engaged in rebuilding the Jerusalem temple. (Perhaps this word from the Lord, set in the context of the exiles' regathering and rebuilding, led some to expect that Branch's coming was imminent.) But the actual truth of Yahweh's declaration goes beyond what was readily apparent. Though it wouldn't become clear until Branch came, the fact is that men from all over the earth were going to “build into” the Lord's sanctuary both as *workers* gathering in and setting stones in it (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:1-8) and as *stones* laid up into it (1 Peter 2:4-10; cf. also Zechariah 2:11).

- b. When all these things came to pass – things which, in some respects, must have shocked, amazed and even baffled the exiles present with Zechariah, then there would be no doubt that this word of promise had come from the Lord Himself (whether the one bringing that message is viewed as Zechariah or the angel of the preceding visions). So also, by prophetic inference, the people of Israel were to recall and so affirm the truth of Yahweh's word when Branch at last came and accomplished the work here ascribed to Him (cf. John 1:1-11, 10:22-27, 15:20-25; etc.).
3. Lastly, the Lord concluded His prophecy with a word of *qualification* (6:15b). The qualification is that these things would be realized “*if you do indeed pay heed to the voice of the Lord your God.*” This qualification is troubling, for it seems to make the prophecy's fulfillment – i.e., the building of Yahweh's sanctuary by Branch – contingent on the obedience of men. In context, this refers to the people of Israel, but Israel would not – indeed, *could not* – pay heed to their God. Yet the fact remains that the prophecy's fulfillment *did* depend upon Israel's faithful obedience; indeed, the Lord's all-encompassing will for the world depended upon Israel being Israel in truth. And Israel *would* be Israel, but in the person of the True Israel who embodies Israel and fulfills Israel's identity and calling (cf. 3:7; Isaiah 49:1-13, 59:1-21; Galatians 3:16, 26-29).