JESUS BUILDS THE HOUSE

Studies in the Book of Zechariah

Part 1



"Not by might, nor by power,
but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts."

— Zechariah 4:6 (ESV)

THE STORY BEHIND ZECHARIAH

Before we can understand Zechariah, we need to understand the world into which he was speaking. For hundreds of years, God had patiently called Israel and Judah to listen to His prophets, turn from their idols, and return to Him. Again and again, they were warned. Again and again, they were given opportunities to repent. Where had they gone wrong? What was the issue that led them off course? They treated the House of God with irreverence. They thought that if the House of God, the temple, functioned mechanically, they would be ok. But the primary purpose of the House of God was never the mechanics. God wanted to dwell with people who wanted to dwell with Him. But their love of the various cultures around them and the disdain for connecting with the heart of God made the House of God pointless. Eventually the consequences arrived. The northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria in the eighth century BC. The people were scattered throughout the nations. Later, Judah and Jerusalem were conquered by Babylon. Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple was burned, and many of the survivors were carried away into exile. This was devastating on every level. The temple, the dwelling place of God among His people, lay in ruins.

Why would God allow this? The prophets had repeatedly explained that Israel's rebellion had consequences. God was not indifferent to their unfaithfulness. Yet judgment was not the end of the story. God intended the exile to accomplish something. He would use it to bring His people to repentance and eventually restore them. The destruction of the temple was therefore not the cancellation of God's purposes. It was part of a larger story.

A question to consider

What happens to your faith when something you know was a promise from God is suddenly taken away? The people of that time had to wrestle with exactly that question. They had seen the temple destroyed. They had experienced exile. And yet God had not forgotten them.

A NEW HOPE: REBUILDING BEGINS

God had known all along that the exile would not last forever. Long before the events occurred, God spoke through the prophets about what would happen. Isaiah spoke of a future ruler named Cyrus who would allow the Jewish people to return and rebuild Jerusalem. Isaiah even named Cyrus long before he rose to power (Is 44–45). Jeremiah prophesied that the Babylonian exile would last seventy years (Jer 25:11). And so it all happened. The

Babylonian empire fell. Cyrus of Persia came to power. The Jewish exiles were permitted to return. God had kept His word. A relatively small community returned to Jerusalem. Most of the Jewish people remained scattered throughout the Persian Empire, but those who returned came with a purpose. They were going to rebuild the house of God.

The excitement of a new beginning

Ezra 1:5–8 describes the people responding to God's call. Ezra 3:8–11 describes the work of rebuilding the foundation of the temple. There was excitement. There was hope. The people were beginning again. Why did God want the temple rebuilt? The temple represented God's dwelling among His people. Rebuilding it was therefore about more than construction. God was telling His people, in effect: The story is not over. The temple had been destroyed, but God's presence had not been destroyed. The people had failed, but God's covenant purposes had not failed. The exile had happened, but restoration was beginning.

Consider this

Have you ever started something you believed the Lord called you to do with great excitement? Maybe you began a ministry. Maybe you stepped into a new responsibility. Maybe you decided to obey God in an area where you had previously struggled. Beginning something with God can be exhilarating. But what do you do when, after walking through unprecedented open doors, you suddenly find all the doors shut? That's what Israel was about to face.

WHEN THE WORK STOPS

The rebuilding of the temple did not go smoothly. Ezra 4 tells us that surrounding peoples did everything they could to stop the work. Eventually, opposition reached the Persian government. A letter was sent to King Artaxerxes arguing that Jerusalem had a long history of rebellion and that allowing the Jews to rebuild would not be in the king's best interest. They were essentially bringing up old sin. The accusations were effective. The king ordered the work to stop. The temple project was shut down. Imagine what that must have felt like. The people had returned because God had called them. They had begun rebuilding. They had worshiped. They had laid the foundation. And now the doors were closing. But did God tell then to stop?

When circumstances contradict the calling

After experiencing enough closed doors, it is natural to begin wondering: Did I really hear God correctly? That is one of the most difficult questions in

faith. Sometimes the difficulty is a test of perseverance. Sometimes God wants us up against the impossible for the sake of revealing His glory. But the people of Zechariah's day caved to the pressure. Can you think of biblical examples of people being called by God to something only to run into impossible obstacles—but who trusted God instead of giving up? What happened to those people?

Encouragement comes

Ezra 5:1–2 tells us that God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the people. The work began again. This tells us something important: Delay is not necessarily cancellation. A long interruption - even one caused by our own sin or lack of faith does not automatically mean that God has abandoned His purpose for us. Sometimes what we need most is not a new assignment but renewed courage to continue the assignment we already received. That very passage in Ezra also informs us of the purpose of the book of Zechariah: Get back to work building the house of God.

THE BUILDERS POINT TO SOMEONE GREATER

Zechariah's message is about rebuilding the temple, but the temple itself is not the ultimate subject. Two people become especially important in the book: Joshua the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the governor. Neither man was a king in the full Davidic sense. Yet together they represented two important offices: priesthood and kingship. And Zechariah begins using them as signs pointing toward someone greater.

The Branch

> *"Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch. For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. In that day, declares the Lord of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree."*
>
> — Zechariah 3:8–10 (ESV)

God tells Joshua and his companions that they are symbolic of things to come. Then God introduces a person called the Branch.

The Branch is connected with the removal of iniquity. The result is a picture of restored fellowship, peace, and security. But who is the Branch?

> *"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of*

> *wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins."*
>
> — Isaiah 11:1–5 (ESV)

> *"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."*
>
> — Jeremiah 23:5 (ESV)

The picture becomes clearer. The Branch is a promised Messianic ruler.

The builders point beyond themselves

This means that Zechariah's readers were not simply watching two men oversee the rebuilding of a building. Joshua and Zerubbabel were participating in a story much bigger than themselves. The temple was being rebuilt. But the builders themselves were signs pointing toward the Messiah. The physical house was pointing toward a greater house. The work of rebuilding was pointing toward a greater work of God. And the leaders were pointing toward the One who would ultimately bring God's purposes to completion. But the purpose would never change throughout the ages. Whether the House of God is Eden, the Tabernacle, the Temple, Believers in the New Testament era, or Christ physically sitting on His throne in Jerusalem after His return, the purpose is Emmanuel, the purpose is God with us, God dwelling with those who want to dwell with Him.

THE BRANCH: PRIEST, KING, AND BUILDER

Zechariah takes the picture even further in chapter 6.

> *"Take from them silver and gold, and make a crown, and set it on the head of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. And say to him, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both."' And the crown shall be in the temple of the Lord as a reminder to Helem, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Hen the son of Zephaniah. And those who are far off shall come and help to build the temple of the Lord. And you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. And this shall come to pass, if you*

will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God."

— Zechariah 6:11–15 (ESV)

That is a strange instruction. Why? Because Joshua was a priest. He was not a king. In Israel, priests came from the tribe of Levi, while Israel's kings came from the tribe of Judah. Joshua could not simply become a normal Davidic king. So what is God communicating through this prophetic act? Something bigger.

A priest wearing a king's crown

The picture combines two offices that normally remained separate: priest and king. Then, in verse 12, God identifies the person represented by the crown: the Branch.

The Branch will build the temple of the Lord. He will bear royal honor. And he will serve as a priest upon His throne. This is an extraordinary picture. The promised figure is both priest and king. He is also the builder.

Joshua and Jesus

There is another fascinating connection. The name Joshua and the name Jesus are related forms of the same Hebrew name. Both carry the meaning associated with: "Yahweh saves." So when Zechariah places a crown on Joshua's head, he is not predicting that Joshua will become king. The prophetic act points beyond Joshua. It points toward the Messiah. It points toward Jesus.

THE CROWNED PRIEST AND THE COMING KING

Zechariah's picture of the Branch is intentionally larger than the immediate historical situation. Joshua was a real high priest. Zerubbabel was a real governor. The temple was a real building. But these things were also pointing forward. The New Testament presents Jesus as the fulfillment of the priestly and royal hopes woven throughout Scripture. He is the King. He is the mediator. He is the one who brings forgiveness. He is the one who makes access to God possible. And He is the one who builds God's house.

Now or later?

Is Zechariah describing something that happens now, or something that happens at Christ's return? The answer is both. Christ's kingdom has already begun. His saving work has already been accomplished. The Spirit already dwells among God's people. The church is already described as God's

dwelling place (should we actually unite together like the building blocks of the temple). And yet Scripture also points forward to the ultimate completion of God's kingdom and the fullness of His presence with His people. What has begun will one day be completed.

WHO BUILDS THE HOUSE?

Here is where the message becomes personal. Zechariah 6:12 is explicit: the Branch builds the house. 6:15 says that people from far away will come and help build the house of God. Those who were once far from God. So who builds the house? The answer is both simple and profound: Jesus builds the house—and we get to help. That distinction matters.

> *"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain."*
>
> — Psalm 127:1 (ESV)

Building for Jesus versus building with Jesus

There is a difference between saying: "I am going to build something for God." and saying: "Jesus is building something, and He has invited me to participate." The first approach can easily become centered on our plans. The second begins with dependence. "God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs" -Matt 5:3 (NLT). The first approach asks God to bless our work. The second asks: "Lord, what are You doing, and how can I faithfully join You?" That is the posture Zechariah calls us toward.

Consider

What would change if you stopped thinking of yourself as the owner of the project and started thinking of yourself as a participant in Jesus' project? Your role would still matter. Your obedience would still matter. Your work would still matter. But the pressure to make everything happen would no longer belong to you.

Jesus says, "...on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." -Matt 16:18 (ESV). HE will build HIS church! Did you know that this is the first time in scripture the word church is used? How come nobody asked Jesus what the word meant? It's because the word He uses in Greek, ekklēsia, was familiar. It was a democratic gathering for making governmental decisions. So when Jesus says He will build His church, He is not talking about church buildings with a Sunday morning message, youth group, kids church, and demographic groups. That's stuff we build and

ask Him to help us with. But what He builds and asks us to help Him with is so much more transformative for the world - and will be a real threat to the gates of hell.

NOT BY MIGHT OR POWER

Zechariah 4:6 contains one of the best-known statements in the book:

> *"Then he said to me, 'This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.'"*
>
> — Zechariah 4:6 (ESV)

Zerubbabel had a massive task in front of him. There were obstacles. There were opponents. There were limited resources. There was discouragement. Yet God did not tell him to find greater human strength. He told him to depend upon God's Spirit.

What would building by "might and power" look like?

It could look like relying on money, influence, prestige, personality, pressure, social media numbers, popularity, organizational strength, or sheer determination. Most of those things aren't inherently wrong. The problem comes when we treat them as the source of God's work.

What does Spirit-built work look like?

Spirit-built work begins with dependence on God. It seeks obedience rather than image. It values faithfulness rather than applause. It trusts God with the results. It does not reject planning or hard work. Instead, it places planning and hard work underneath God's direction.

Consider

What might a modern church look like if it were built primarily by might and power? It might have impressive resources. It might have strong personalities. It might have large programs. It might appear successful. But what would a church built by the Spirit look like? It would be marked by dependence on Jesus. It would be shaped by Scripture. It would produce the fruit of the Spirit. It would prioritize the presence of Jesus. It would serve people because of compassion instead of obligation. It would pursue holiness. It would make Jesus—not the ministry itself—the center of attention. The difference is not necessarily visible in a building. It is visible in the life of the people.

WHAT IS THE HOUSE OF GOD TODAY?

> *"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"*
>
> — 1 Corinthians 3:16 (ESV)

> *"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."*
>
> — Ephesians 2:19–22 (ESV)

The New Testament applies temple language to God's people. God's people are described as His dwelling place. The Spirit of God dwells among them. "I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith." (Phil 3:1b) The house of God is therefore not ultimately about bricks, a particular address, or influence. It is about God dwelling with His people.

A living temple

This changes how we think about church. The people are the church. A house can become a place where Jesus is Center. A friendship can become a place where Jesus is Center. A congregation can become a place where Jesus is Center. A ministry can become a place where Jesus is Center. Two or more believers gathered in His name can become an expression of His kingdom. Jesus can be Center at coffee shops, kitchen tables, the hood, the yacht club, the pickleball court, in pain, in sorrow, in joy, in romance, in laughter.

What is the benefit of the house?

If you build it, He will come. And only He is the Hope of this world. So make sure what you build, He's building.

A HOUSE FOR JESUS

This is the central idea of this study. The house of God is: a dwelling place for Jesus, where Jesus is worshiped according to Jesus' Word, where Jesus is taught according to Jesus' Word, and where Jesus expresses His kingdom by the power of Jesus through the Spirit. It is for Him. It is by Him. And it is sustained by His Spirit. That means the most important question is not: "How impressive is what we are building?" The more important question is: "Is Jesus actually at the center?" Consider What would happen if we stopped measuring the house by its size or influence and started measuring it by its

center? If Jesus is the center, the building can be small or big. It doesn't matter. The ministry can be unknown. The resources can be limited. The group can be unimpressive by worldly standards. Or impressive. If He is Center, God will be doing something eternal and His House will light up the world.

FAITHFUL SUBCONTRACTORS

Think about a construction project. There is a master plan. There is a builder. There are workers with different assignments. One person lays electrical lines. Another installs plumbing. Another frames walls. Another finishes the interior. No subcontractor owns the house. But every subcontractor has an important job. That is a helpful picture for the Christian life. Jesus is the Master Builder. We are invited to participate in His work.

Four questions for the subcontractor

Do I let resources stop me from what Jesus has called me to do? Sometimes we assume that if we do not have enough money, people, equipment, time, or influence, we cannot obey. But Zechariah reminds us that God's work does not ultimately depend on our resources.

Does the house I am building prioritize service to people or service to God? The house is for God. Once God is welcomed and comes to dwell, His presence compels us to serve others. But reversing that order will have us working in our own strength and missing the purpose of life: the Lord dwelling with us. Serving people flows from His presence; it does not replace the priority of welcoming Him.

Is the fruit of what I am doing brought forth by the Spirit or by effort alone? Effort matters. Faithfulness requires work (most of that effort is dying to self). But spiritual fruit cannot simply be manufactured. We need the Spirit. Teaching is useless, evangelizing is useless, social reform attempts are useless without the Spirit. But with the Spirit, God can do more than you can possibly imagine.

Is the glory going to the ministry—or to Jesus? This may be the most revealing question. It is possible to build something that appears to be for God while gradually making the ministry, the leader, or the organization the center. "You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead." -Rev 3:1b (ESV) Jesus must remain the center.

THE CRAFTSMEN AND THE BREAKING OF NATIONS

Now we return to one of Zechariah's earlier visions. "And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four horns! And I said to the angel who talked with me, 'What are these?' And he said to me, 'These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.' Then the Lord showed me four craftsmen. And I said, 'What are these coming to do?' He said, 'These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no one raised his head. And these have come to terrify them, to cast down the horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter it.'" — Zechariah 1:18–21 (ESV)

The book begins by addressing God's purposes for Jerusalem and the nations that oppressed His people. The final part of the vision introduces craftsmen. Why craftsmen? Why not warriors? Why not armies? Why not kings? The image is intentional.

Those who build the house defeat the enemy

In this book about rebuilding the house of God, this vision shows that the craftsmen—the builders—are the ones who terrify and cast down the horns of the nations. I may be wrong about this but I understand it to mean that those who build the house of God are the ones who defeat the enemy. The work of building is itself the means by which opposition is broken. God's people, engaged in the construction of His dwelling place, become the instruments through which hostile powers are overthrown. The nations may appear powerful. They may seem untouchable. They may appear to have overwhelming strength. But God accomplishes His purposes through those who faithfully build His house. The builders are not spectators waiting for someone else to fight; they're not spiritual warfare zealots binding the fallen angels over certain nations and casting them to hell; No! Their faithful labor of partnering with God to build what He calls His House (He calls it a House of Prayer, by the way) is the very activity that breaks the horns of oppression. We don't need to be impressive. We just need to build a house for the One who is. His presence is the solution.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Am I actively following Jesus' lead in building a dwelling place for Him? How so?

Does fear of not having enough keep me from obeying what God has actually asked me to do?

Where am I tempted to build by image, pressure, or personal strength?

When people see what I am building, who receives the glory?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. List the two main historical figures Zechariah uses as signs pointing to the Messiah, and name the offices they represent.
2. Identify the key phrase in Zechariah 4:6 that summarizes how God's work is accomplished.
3. Recall what the craftsmen in Zechariah 1:18–21 come to do to the horns of the nations.
4. State the central idea of this study in one sentence.
5. Explain why placing a royal crown on the high priest Joshua was a strange and significant prophetic act.
6. Describe how the physical temple in Zechariah functions as a sign pointing beyond itself to a greater reality.
7. Interpret the difference between "building something for God" and "joining what Jesus is already building."
8. Summarize why the builders of the house, rather than warriors or kings, are the ones who cast down the horns of the nations.
9. Apply the principle "not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit" to one area of ministry or responsibility where you currently feel limited by resources or opposition.
10. Demonstrate how welcoming God's presence first, rather than prioritizing service to people first, changes the way you approach a specific relationship or ministry task this week.
11. Design one concrete step you can take this month to participate more faithfully as a "subcontractor" in what Jesus is building, rather than treating a project as primarily your own.
12. Act on the insight that those who build the house defeat the enemy: choose one ordinary act of building God's House (a House of Prayer made up of believers in unity around Jesus) and record the testimony that results from that.
13. Am I actively following Jesus' lead in building a dwelling place for Him? How so?
14. Does fear of not having enough keep me from obeying what God has actually asked me to do?
15. Where am I tempted to build by image, pressure, or personal strength?
16. When people see what I am building, who receives the glory?
17. Take time to thank Jesus that He is faithful even when we're not.

NOTES

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Thoughts, prayers, observations, questions, and Scripture references.