

## ***Overcoming Obstacles in Building the House of Prayer (Zech. 3-4)***

### **I. THE CONTEXT OF REBUILDING THE HOUSE OF PRAYER IN 536-515 BC**

- A. The dramatic story of rebuilding the house of prayer in the days of Zerubbabel from 538-515 BC is a powerful encouragement to those seeking to build a house of prayer. The drama started when God told Jeremiah that Israel would go into captivity for 70 years (606-536 BC), but then He would visit them and help them to return to Jerusalem to build the temple (Isa. 44:28; Jer. 29:10).
- B. From God's view, the temple in the past and future is the "**house of prayer**" (Isa. 56:7). Jesus affirmed this highlighting its main purpose as being a place of prayer and worship (Mt. 21:13).
- C. This story is told in three passages (Ezra 1-6; Hag. 1-2; Zech. 1-8) as it highlights four leaders who worked together in Jerusalem to help the remnant build the house of prayer. They are **Zerubbabel** the governor, **Joshua** the high priest, and the two prophets, **Haggai** and **Zechariah**.
- D. Approximately 50,000 exiles returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 1-2). After arriving in Jerusalem, they lost their zeal within about two years. Because of opposition (Ezra 4:1-5) and economic pressures (Hag. 1), they **quit for 16 years** (Ezra 4:24; 535-520 BC). About 16 years later, God sent prophets to stir up the leaders to start building the temple again (Ezra 5:1-2, 24). After about five years (520-515 BC) of hard work, they completed the temple (Ezra 6:15-16).
- E. In one night (Feb. 15, 519 BC), Zechariah received eight prophetic visions (Zech. 1-6). In the first three visions, the Lord promised Israel the fullness of blessing and victory (Zech. 1-2). Zechariah was commanded to proclaim the message of God's zeal and mercy for His people and purpose as He builds His temple (house of prayer) in Jerusalem (Zech. 1:14-16). The revelation of God's zeal was the core message. God has zeal or burning desire for His people and purpose. His zeal is manifest in Jesus as an affectionate Bridegroom, powerful King, and righteous Judge who intervenes to remove everything that hinders love. Run with this as your life message.
- <sup>14</sup>Proclaim, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal..."<sup>16</sup> Therefore thus says the LORD: "I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house [the temple] shall be built in it." (Zech. 1:14-16)***
- F. The question arises, how can such a weak and sinful people as Israel walk in such promises? The Lord answered this in the next two visions (Zech. 3-4) which reveal the abundance of His grace. In Zechariah 3, He promises to *cleanse our heart leading to wholehearted obedience* (v. 3-7). In Zechariah 4, He promises to *help us in our work as we are diligent in small things* (v. 6-10).
- G. Zechariah addressed two of the main obstacles for anyone seeking the fullness of God's promises for their life (Zech. 3-4). First, he addressed the problem of being sinful people (Zech. 3). Next, he spoke to the problem of our work being small and difficult (Zech. 4). How are weak and sinful people to walk in confidence that God enjoys them and values their work when it's small?

## II. OVERCOMING OBSTACLE #1: GOD'S GRACE CLEANSSES OUR HEART (ZECH. 3)

- A. The vision has four parts: the heavenly scene (v. 1-2), a symbolic act (v. 3-5), an exhortation to wholeheartedness (v. 6-7), and the messiah in the Millennium (v. 8-10).
- B. In this heavenly scene (Zech. 3:1-2), Zechariah saw a vision of Joshua, the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord (the pre-incarnate Christ). Satan presented a case against Joshua accusing him of not being qualified for leadership. The Lord showed Zechariah how He sees His leadership through the lens of grace. This is how He sees Israel, the Church, and all His people.
- <sup>1</sup>Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose [accuse; NAS, NIV] him. (Zech. 3:1)***
1. Satan is described as the one who continually accuses God's people (Rev. 12:10).  
***<sup>10</sup>The accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. <sup>11</sup>And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (Rev. 12:10-11)***
  2. The problem was that Joshua was in fact guilty as charged (v. 4).
- C. The Lord did not receive Satan's accusation against Joshua, but rebuked Satan twice (v. 2). The Lord will not tolerate Satan's accusation against us. Neither should we. We must make this same declaration of truth over our heart day by day. God rebuked Satan, not because the accusations are not true, but because of God's gracious love for and choice of Israel. This truth of receiving God's righteousness is developed in the New Testament (Rom. 3-5; Gal. 2-5; 2 Cor. 5:17-21).
- <sup>2</sup>And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" (Zech. 3:2)***
- D. The Lord described Joshua (and Israel) to Satan as a brand plucked from the fire. Joshua was like a burning stick that God pulled out of a fire and saved from total destruction. Israel had just been delivered from the fire of Babylonian captivity from which Israel was almost destroyed. Israel has almost been destroyed several other times in history such as in 70 AD and in the holocaust. But at seemingly the last moment, God plucked them out of the fire of destruction (Amos 4:11).
- E. This implies that if Israel deserved such a severe judgment that her very existence seemed to be threatened and if God was willing to intervene in His mercy to save her, then Israel could be sure that God has chosen her and that she would survive every difficult period.
- F. ***The Lord who chose Jerusalem:*** The God who chose Jerusalem is the God of grace who chooses weak and sinful people who have no power, resources, or beauty in themselves (1 Cor. 1:27). God answered Satan's accusation against Joshua's by sinful weakness by saying He is the God who chooses to redeem the helpless, even as He has chosen weak and sinful Jerusalem. The message is that Israel's destiny in God's promises rests on His unchangeable zealous character. The Lord relates to Joshua, Israel, and every believer in His kingdom in the same way.

### III. RECEIVING GOD’S GRACE: THE SYMBOLIC ACT (ZECH. 3:3-5)

- A. This passage describes God’s free grace (v. 4-5) and the glory of the work of the cross. It is one of the clearest pictures in the Scripture of grace. Through the symbolic action of taking Joshua’s dirty garments and giving him new ones, we see the truth of receiving Jesus’ righteousness.

*<sup>3</sup>Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. <sup>4</sup>Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes." <sup>5</sup>And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by. (Zech. 3:3-5)*

- B. The glorious truths of the finished work of the cross (2 Cor. 5:17, 21) and the gospel of grace are set forth in this passage. Joshua received rich robes that are symbolic of God's righteousness.

*<sup>21</sup>He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:21)*

### IV. AN EXHORTATION TO WHOLEHEARTEDNESS (ZECH. 3:6-7)

- A. The Lord admonished Joshua to walk in wholehearted obedience in response to freely receiving His grace (v. 6-7). Wholeheartedness is the only reasonable response to God’s extravagant grace. The Lord gave him two exhortations (godly character and diligent service) with three promises.

*<sup>6</sup>Then the Angel of the LORD admonished Joshua, saying, <sup>7</sup>"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'If you will walk in My ways, and if you will keep My command [perform My service; NAS], then you shall also judge My house, and likewise have charge of My courts; I will give you places to walk among these who stand here." (Zech. 3:6-7)*

- B. To walk “among these” spoke of the angels standing there. This includes nearness to God, access to the heavenly council, and the angelic realm, and thus, a greater experience of God’s presence.

### V. THE COMING MESSIANIC KINGDOM (ZECH. 3:8-10)

- A. The Lord showed Zechariah that Joshua and his leadership team were to be a prophetic picture to give *insight* into the messiah’s glory and to *inspire* others to experience what they experienced. They were to “hear” that they were “a sign” that would give insight into what God is like and inspiration to others to experience the deeper things of God. The message is that other weak people can experience the deep things of God. In other words, what we are called to is doable.

*<sup>8</sup>Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they are a wondrous sign; for behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH. <sup>9</sup>For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua: upon the stone are seven eyes...and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. (Zech. 3:8-9)*

- B. These were prophetic signs pointing to the coming of Jesus as the “Branch” and the “Stone” (foundation stone; Mt. 21:42). The seven eyes here symbolize Jesus’ omniscience (Rev. 5:6).

## VI. OVERCOMING OBSTACLE #2: GOD'S GRACE HELPS US IN THE WORK (ZECH. 4)

- A. Zechariah spoke to the problem of the work being small and difficult (Zech. 4). Even in our weakness and small impact, we can have confidence that God enjoys and values our work. God promises to help His people in their work (ministry assignment) in context to their diligence in the days of smallness (Zech. 4:6-10). We are to believe God for His continued help and to believe in His value of the work while it is small.

*<sup>6</sup>This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD of hosts. <sup>7</sup>"Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'"... <sup>9</sup>"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands shall also finish it...<sup>10</sup>For who has despised the day of small things? These seven [eyes] rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the Lord..." (Zech. 4:6-10)*

- B. **Mountain**: This speaks of the obstacles that stand in the way. We speak "Grace" to them.
- C. **Capstone**: This speaks of the dedication stone that is put in place when the building is complete.
- D. **Plumb line**: A plumb line is a tool that is used during the *early stages* of a building when the foundational structures are being put in place. There is a plumb line season in God's work.
- E. **Rejoice**: God rejoiced to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand. The eyes of Lord watch with rejoicing in the process. He sees all the details of our needs and deficiencies. He sees our needs, but also our labor, effort, sweat, tears, and sacrifice (Heb. 6:10).
1. The Lord sees the value of our work when it is small and difficult. We must focus our attention on seeing what He sees. We must not be offended by the smallness of our work.
  2. Can you feel Him rejoicing over you and the work in its smallness and remoteness? We must feel His pleasure when we run. There will be delays, setbacks, and surprising developments in building the prayer movement. He wants His people to feel His pleasure in the days of smallness while contending for fullness.
  3. How we see the smallness of our work now is a reflection of how we see the bigness of God's eternal purposes.
- F. We walk in the tension of being faithful and grateful in the days of small beginnings while contending for God's fullness of His power.
- <sup>17</sup>Because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities. (Lk. 19:17)*
- G. We do not measure our work by man's standards. We do not compare our labors and impact to others. We must be grateful even when the circumstances are not optimum. We stay steady in our work (assignment) and are not to be distracted by opportunities or by our lack of resources.