

## » STUDY 3

PRIEST, KING AND  
TEMPLE RESTORED

[ZECHARIAH 3-4 AND 6:9-15]

WE COME NOW TO THE central section of Zechariah's visions by night.<sup>1</sup> These particular visions lie at the very heart of the revelation the angel wants Zechariah to communicate to the people of Judah. Zechariah receives visions concerning a high priest (Joshua), a king (Zerubbabel) and a building project (the temple). So how should we read these visions as Christians? Is God speaking about *our* church ministers and leaders, and does he plan to bless *our* building projects? Or do these visions have a better and more profound fulfilment? Let's read on.

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**Read Zechariah 4:6-10.**

1. There are many **barriers on the road** to the rebuilding of God's temple. How does the angel's oracle in verses 6-7 help to deal with these problems?

**Barriers to building the second temple**

Ezra 4 summarizes the obstacles faced by the returning exiles as they seek to rebuild the temple. Sheshbazzar—a Jewish exile and younger son of King Jehoiachin (Judah's king defeated by the Babylonians)—is charged with starting the rebuilding. After conveying the temple vessels back to Jerusalem, setting up an altar and laying the foundations for the temple, it appears that Sheshbazzar returns to Persia. Opposition to the rebuilding then begins in earnest, notably from Samaritans with influence in the Persian imperial court, who view Judah as their territory. So for 15 years after work began, no further progress is made.

In verse 9 the angel says, "Then you [Zechariah] will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me [the angel] to you [*plural*, i.e. Judah]". That is, the angel gives Zechariah the oracle in verses 8-10 so that he can go on to proclaim it to the people of Judah.

2. Given the opposition just spoken of, why is seeing Zerubbabel with a plumbline<sup>2</sup> in his hand going to prove to Judah that God is working out his purpose?
  
3. Sure enough, the temple promised in these visions was completed as promised (see Zech 6:15 and Ezra 6:1-16).
  - a. How can God's hand be seen in the temple's completion?
  
  - b. What does the response of the people show about their attitude to Zechariah and his oracles (cf. Ezra 6:17-18)?

### Glory and temples

The temple in Jerusalem was not like a town hall, merely a useful symbol of civic pride for local inhabitants to meet in as the occasion required. Rather, it was a symbol that God himself, in all his glory, was right there in the midst of Israel. ►

ZERUBBABEL'S TEMPLE STOOD FOR about 250 years (see appendix 1: 'Key dates in the history of the temple'). But neither this temple nor Herod's subsequent temple are associated with any report of the **Lord's glory cloud** having filled it at any time. Anyone looking to Zerubbabel's temple and expecting a repeat of previous glorious temple dedications would have been bitterly disappointed (for a hint of just how disappointed, see the reaction to the temple's foundation in Ezra 3:11-13).

It would seem that the presence of God dwelling with his people, previously associated with true temple building, was still awaiting fulfilment by the time of the New Testament.

## No glory, but a vision of glory

In chapter 4, Zechariah sees a remarkable scene. Central to it is a lampstand which has seven arms—either in line, like a menorah, or radially, so that the lamps form a circle. Each of the seven arms holds a lamp. Each lamp is formed like an ashtray with seven lips. A wick is draped in each of the seven lips, so that the base of each wick dangles in the oil pool of the lamp. Suspended above the lampstand is a chamber from which oil is supplied to the lamps by two pipes, possibly looped to form a ring connecting all the lamps. The lampstand is flanked by two olive trees, which presumably supply the olive oil for the chamber. The whole scene is gleaming with light from the 49 flames glinting off the golden lampstand. The place is lit up like a Christmas tree!

Zechariah has already asked for the meaning of the vision (4:4-5), and has received as his answer two oracles, which he is meant to proclaim to the people. Now he again asks the angel to explain what he sees. In particular, he asks about the two olive branches flanking the lampstand.

The temple replaced the earlier tabernacle—the 'movable' temple—that Israel had built in line with the Lord's instructions (see Exod 25-40). The Israelite was meant to look at the temple and think immediately of God's glory.

### Optional question:

Look at the passages below and comment on what the tabernacle—and subsequently, the temple—shows about God's presence with his people (hint: pay particular attention to the coming of God's glory in a cloud!):

- Exodus 40:34-38
- 1 Kings 8:10-11
- 1 Kings 8:27-36

### Read Zechariah 4:12-14.

4. This is not the only place in Zechariah where a branch, two people, and gold are described in the same passage (you see it also in Zechariah 3:6-9 and 6:9-14).
  - a. What is the angel describing?

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- b. What part of the angel's description would be difficult for a Jew to accept?
5. The need for a strong king is obvious when seeking to re-establish a people in a land surrounded by hostile enemies. But why is the role of *priest* necessary for God to re-establish his people in the land and then dwell in their midst? (See also Zech 3:1-5, 10.)

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## The glorious vision fulfilled

THE PRIESTHOOD AND THE MONARCHY *do* merge into a single, priestly rule later in Judah's history (called the Hasmonean dynasty). The Hasmoneans are responsible for some remarkable military defenses that protect the nation of Israel from more powerful foes. But political compromise sets in,

especially when the Herod family takes power. Reality fails to match up to promise: the corruption and self-serving political manoeuvring of the ruling priestly family is a far cry from the glorious image of the united priest-king envisaged by Zechariah.

6. How does 1 Peter 2:4-8 suggest that Zechariah's prophecy is fulfilled? Specifically:
- a. What is the temple God's Spirit is building?
- b. What is the celebrated cornerstone?

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7. What do the following New Testament passages point to as being the fulfilment of Zechariah's vision?

- Matthew 17:1-2, 9-12
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Matthew 27:50-51 (cf. Zech 3:9)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Hebrews 7:14-16
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Hebrews 8:1-2

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## » Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group.)

- How do believers today participate in this fulfilment of Zechariah's vision? Can our *actions* (as well as our words) help people understand their need for a priest as well as a king (cf. 1 Pet 2:9)?

- Passages such as the ones concerning the temple in Zechariah have been used by many a church treasurer (with the pastor's blessing?) to raise funds for a bricks-and-mortar church building project. What cautions would you sound about using such passages for this purpose?
- How can Zechariah's fourth and fifth visions—that is, the ones we've looked at in this study—encourage Christians today, as they participate in Christ's work as builder of God's spiritual house?

## » Give thanks and pray

- Praise God that Jesus, as God's priest-king, perfectly fulfils Zechariah's vision.
- Thank God for the provision of his Spirit, by whom he guarantees the completion of his kingdom building no matter what obstacles we as 'junior builders' face.
- Pray about your personal efforts in, and your church's or group's corporate contribution to, proclaiming "the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet 2:9).

### Endnotes

1. Again, this study sees us moving backwards and forwards within Zechariah's visions in order to highlight the connections that are there within Zechariah's own structure (we touched on this in the sidebar 'Why fiddle with the order?' in the previous study). Zechariah 3-4, and the conclusion of the 'visions by night' section in 6:9-15, are the key to unlocking the oracles Zechariah is giving. So in this study we are dealing with these crucial sections together.
2. Hint for non-builders: builders use plumb-lines to measure whether walls are straight!