

Not by Might but by My Spirit

Zechariah 4:1-9

Let's begin with the remarkable story of how God's people — weary from exile yet renewed by hope — rebuilt the house of the Lord.

Because of their idolatry, moral corruption, and rejection of God's prophets, the nation of Judah fell to Babylon and was carried into exile for seventy long years — just as Jeremiah had warned (Jeremiah 25:11–12). But God's mercy was already woven into their judgment. In 539 BC, the mighty Babylonian Empire fell to King Cyrus of Persia. Within a year, in fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy, the Lord stirred Cyrus's heart to allow the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of the Lord (Ezra 1:1–4).

Those who returned came willingly, bringing offerings of silver, gold, livestock, and gifts to support the work (Ezra 1:6). Cyrus even ordered that the sacred temple vessels—once stolen by Nebuchadnezzar—be returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:7–11). The generosity was astonishing: the people gave over 1,100 pounds of gold and nearly three tons of silver toward the rebuilding effort (Ezra 2:69). In all, about 50,000 people made the long journey home (Ezra 2:64–67). When the seventh month arrived, the people gathered in their towns, and Jeshua (Joshua) the high priest and his fellow priests rebuilt the altar of the Lord. There they offered sacrifices once again and worshiped God who had brought them home (Ezra 3:1–6).

The next year, in the second month of their second year back in the land, they laid the foundation of the new temple (Ezra 3:8–9). As the priests stood in their robes and the Levites lifted their cymbals, the people sang with joy:

“He is good; His love toward Israel endures forever!” (Ezra 3:11).

But not everyone rejoiced. When the surrounding peoples heard that the exiles were rebuilding the temple, they set out to discourage and intimidate the people of Judah. They bribed officials to frustrate their plans and sow fear (Ezra 4:4–5). The opposition was so strong that the rebuilding came to a standstill—and for nearly fifteen years, the unfinished foundation lay silent.

Imagine for a moment how you would feel. You've spent seventy long years in exile — a foreign land, far from home — because of your nation's sin and rebellion against God. Yet in an act of pure grace and covenant faithfulness, God moves the heart of a pagan king, Cyrus, to send you home. Not only that, but He commands that the temple of the Lord be rebuilt! What a glorious day that must have been — to walk through the gates of Jerusalem again with nearly 50,000 fellow exiles, your heart bursting with hope and gratitude. You see the altar rebuilt, the foundation laid, and as the people sing praises — “He is good; His love endures forever!” — tears of joy fill your eyes.

But then, the singing stops. Opposition rises. Letters fly, bribes are paid, fear spreads — and the sound of worship fades into silence. Year after year, the unfinished foundation sits in

silence. Grass begins to grow where the stones should rise. The excitement fades, replaced by weariness and disappointment. You begin to wonder: was this really God’s plan? Did He bring us this far only to stop here? Your dreams of a restored temple — of worshiping again in God’s house — seem to crumble into dust. Now, with these feelings and emotions in mind — the excitement of new beginnings, the sting of disappointment, the weariness of waiting — let us turn to Zechariah 4:1–9, where God speaks hope into the hearts of His discouraged people. In these verses, the Lord reminds them — and us — that His work is not accomplished by human strength or determination, but by His Spirit alone.

Awaken to God’s Light

In that moment of discouragement, when human effort had failed and hope was fading, God opened Zechariah’s eyes to a vision unlike any other — a vision that radiated both beauty and mystery. Before him stood a golden lampstand, gleaming with divine brilliance. It resembled the menorah once used in the Tabernacle and later in Solomon’s Temple¹ — a sacred symbol of God’s light among His people. Yet this lampstand was different. It was not the work of human hands, nor did it rely on a priest to tend its flame.

In the Tabernacle, the high priest had to trim the wicks and refill the oil morning and evening, ensuring that the light never went out. But in Zechariah’s vision, the lampstand was sustained without human effort. Above it hung a large golden bowl, a reservoir of oil that supplied the lamps continuously.² From this bowl flowed seven channels leading to each of the seven lamps — forty-nine conduits in all³ — a network of divine provision ensuring that the flame would never flicker or fade. And beside the lampstand stood two olive trees, one on the right and one on the left, their branches continually pouring oil into the bowl. It was a breathtaking vision of unbroken supply — a living reminder that the light of God’s work never burns by human effort, but by the ever-flowing power of His Spirit.

Yet God never gives a vision without a purpose. Every lamp, every channel, and every drop of oil carried a message — a divine story of how God’s Spirit would supply what His people could never produce on their own.

¹ Micah Fries, Stephen Rummage, and Robby Gallaty, [*Exalting Jesus in Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 121.

² Micah Fries, Stephen Rummage, and Robby Gallaty, [*Exalting Jesus in Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 121–122.

³ F. Duane Lindsey, [*“Zechariah.”*](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1555.

This vision was meant to encourage two weary leaders, Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor, as they struggled to rebuild the temple amidst fierce opposition and fading hope. The golden lampstand symbolized the people of God⁴ — first Israel and later the church⁵ — called to shine as lights to the nations, bearing witness to the glory of the Lord. The forty-nine channels flowing from the bowl to the lamps pictured God’s continual and abundant supply, a reminder that the work before them, though humanly impossible, would be sustained by divine strength. And the oil represented the fullness of God’s power through the Holy Spirit,⁶ the unending resource by which His purposes are accomplished.

Imagine how Zechariah’s heart must have leapt for joy as he beheld this vision! For over a decade the dream of a restored temple had seemed beyond reach — but now God Himself had shown that the success of His work would not depend on human might or human power, but on His Spirit alone. Who could possibly stand in their way now?

Depend on the Spirit

As Zechariah stood gazing at this mysterious vision, he longed to understand its meaning. And in verses 4–6, God’s messenger reveals the heart of the vision — the divine answer to human weakness: “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord Almighty. The rebuilding of the temple would not hinge on human strength, military force, or political influence — but on the sovereign, unstoppable work of the Holy Spirit.⁷ The same Spirit who shaped creation and sustains the universe (Colossians 1:16) was now moving to accomplish God’s purpose in Jerusalem. From the beginning, He has been the unstoppable force of divine power:

- He hovered over the waters at creation, bringing life and order out of chaos (Genesis 1:2; Job 33:4).
- He inspired the writers of Scripture, guiding them into all truth (2 Peter 1:21; John 16:13).
- He anointed Jesus, empowering His earthly ministry with divine authority (Luke 4:18; Matthew 3:16).
- He convicts the heart of sin, drawing people to repentance and salvation.

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, [*The Minor Prophets: An Expositional Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 509.

⁵ Hermann J. Austel, [*“Zechariah,”*](#) in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 692.

⁶ Kenneth L. Barker, [*“Zechariah,”*](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 629.

⁷ Micah Fries, Stephen Rummage, and Robby Gallaty, [*Exalting Jesus in Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 121.

- John 16:8; Acts 2:37
- He gives new birth, transforming dead hearts into living temples of God.
 - John 3:5–6; Titus 3:5
- He shapes believers into Christ’s likeness, producing the fruit of the Spirit.
 - Galatians 5:22–23
- He unites the body of Christ, creating true fellowship and oneness in faith
 - 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:3
- And He raised Jesus from the dead, the ultimate display of His life-giving power.
 - Romans 8:11

Through this revelation, God reminded Zechariah — and us — that His work is never limited by what human hands can do. When strength fails, when resources run dry, when obstacles seem immovable, the Spirit of God steps in to accomplish the impossible. Zechariah learned that the same power that breathes galaxies into being is the very power that enables God’s people to rise, rebuild, and endure.

While the Holy Spirit is a divine Person—fully God and part of the Holy Trinity—Scripture also describes Him as the wind that moves with sovereign power.⁸ Jesus said, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). Though invisible, His presence produces unmistakable and miraculous results.⁹ But to experience the wind’s strength, the conditions of the heart must be right. Just as a sail must be lifted to catch the wind, so our hearts must be lifted to catch the Spirit’s breath — only then are we carried by His power. We cannot move forward by our own effort; we must learn to catch the wind of His will. Jesus said, “Apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5), reminding us that only those who walk in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25) experience His divine direction and strength.

It was through listening to and obeying the Spirit of God that Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor would receive the wisdom, courage, and endurance needed to complete the temple—a task left unfinished for more than a decade. And the same is true for us today: when we turn our hearts toward the wind of God’s Spirit, His power fills our sails, and what once seemed impossible begins to move.

⁸ Micah Fries, Stephen Rummage, and Robby Gallaty, [*Exalting Jesus in Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 119.

⁹ Micah Fries, Stephen Rummage, and Robby Gallaty, [*Exalting Jesus in Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 120.

But catching the wind of the Spirit doesn't mean we sit back and do nothing — it means we position ourselves to move where He leads. There are no shortcuts in walking with God.¹⁰ The Spirit fills those who are open, obedient, and ready to act when He moves. We are His royal priests, ambassadors, and the very hands and feet of the One who sustains our every breath. God's work still advances the same way — one stone, one prayer, one act of faith at a time. Too often we long for the blessings of the Lord without embracing the obedience in which those blessings dwell.¹¹ We desire new heights of discipleship, yet we resist removing what distracts us — the noise, the busyness, the self-reliance — so that we might pray, meditate on His Word, fast, and “be holy, for He is holy” (1 Peter 1:15). It is by resting beside the still waters of His presence (Psalm 23:2) that our souls are strengthened for service.

If we are to see the fulfillment of Christ's promise — that we will do works even greater than these — then our labor must flow from lives fully surrendered to His Spirit, for in His presence “better is one day in Your courts than a thousand elsewhere” (Psalm 84:10). And may we, like the prophet Isaiah, when we hear the Spirit's call and feel the wind of His movement, respond with willing hearts:

“Here am I. Send me.” (Isaiah 6:8)

Flatten Mountains with Grace

When we walk in step with the Spirit, His power doesn't just sustain us — it overcomes the obstacles that stand before us. The Jews who returned from exile knew this struggle well. Though King Cyrus had decreed that the temple be rebuilt, fierce opposition arose from their enemies. More than a decade passed, and only the foundation had been laid. When God gives us a task to accomplish, we should expect resistance from what Apostle Paul calls “the rulers... the authorities... the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). These battles cannot be won with logic or muscle. When pressure mounts and progress feels impossible, discouragement slips quietly into the soul.¹² The obstacles in our path can feel like towering mountains — massive, immovable, and beyond our reach.

To keep us from being the hands and feet of Christ, the enemy places mountains in our way: mountains of financial hardship, mountains of past failure, mountains of addiction, mountains

¹⁰ James Montgomery Boice, [*The Minor Prophets: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 510.

¹¹ I am not sure where I got this quote: might have been from either A. W. Tozer or Charles Spurgeon.

¹² Micah Fries, Stephen Rummage, and Robby Gallaty, [*Exalting Jesus in Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 122.

of guilt and shame, and mountains of fear about the future.¹³ Each one looms large, whispering that obedience is too costly or that victory is out of reach. Yet the angel of the Lord looked upon the mountain that stood before Zerubbabel and asked, “What are you, mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground” (Zechariah 4:7a).

When God calls us to serve, we often face our own “mighty mountains.” From our human perspective, we allow the enemy to plant fear, doubt, helplessness, and weakness in our hearts. As we shrink back from our calling, frustration, shame, and a sense of isolation from God can settle in — not because He has left us, but because we have stopped walking in step with His Spirit. In those moments, we must remind ourselves — and remind Satan — who we truly are: children of the living God, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who is greater than the one who is in this world (1 John 4:4). With faith as small as a mustard seed, we can say to the mountains before us, “Move from here to there,” and they will move. For in the power of the Spirit, as Jesus promised, “nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20).

Finishing by Grace

We all know what it feels like to live with unfulfilled dreams, unfinished goals, and half-built hopes. It can be discouraging to sense God’s call on your life, yet stand before a mountain so large that even the smallest step feels impossible. But the angel reminded Zechariah, “Who dares despise the day of small things? The Lord rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel” (Zechariah 4:10).

God delights more in faithfulness than fame, more in obedience than outcome. Though we are called to run the race set before us (1 Corinthians 9:24–27), it is rarely accomplished in great leaps. More often, it is through steady, small steps of daily obedience — one act of faith, one prayer, one surrender at a time. And even when progress seems invisible and fruit unseen, we keep pressing forward, crawling if we must, knowing that our labor in the Lord is never in vain. One day, those who have fought the good fight and finished the race will hear the Lord say, “Well done,” and will receive the crown of righteousness He has promised to all who long for His appearing (2 Timothy 4:7–8).

Conclusion

From the laying of the foundation to the finishing of the capstone, Zechariah’s message echoes through the centuries: *“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord*

¹³ Micah Fries, Stephen Rummage, and Robby Gallaty, [*Exalting Jesus in Zephaniah, Haqqai, Zechariah, and Malachi*](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 123.

Almighty. The same Spirit who filled the lampstand, who empowered Zerubbabel to rebuild, now fills and empowers **us** — the living temples of God. The mountains that once loomed before us are leveled by His grace; the small beginnings we've doubted are precious in His sight.

So do not despise the day of small things. Keep laying each stone of faith, one act of obedience at a time. When the winds of opposition blow, lift your sails to catch the breath of the Spirit. When your strength fades, remember that His power is made perfect in weakness. For the God who began the good work in you **will carry it on to completion** until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

May we, like Paul, run with endurance and finish the race.

May we, like Isaiah, answer, "Here am I — send me."

May we, like Zerubbabel, set the final stone with shouts of "Grace! Grace to it!"