



Holy Disruption: Ancient Prophets for Modern Times—Zechariah
 Rev. Dr. Glenda Hollingshead; August 9, 2026
 Zechariah 8:1-8; Ephesians 3:14-21

Have you ever driven past an abandoned lot where the grass has grown tall—the building that once stood there is long gone? Weeds push through cracked pavement. Maybe an old foundation is all that is left behind. Most of us glance at it and think, “What a shame. That looks so sad.” We see what has been lost. But if you ask an architect to stand there—or a landscape designer—or a child, their response may be quite different. The architect may describe a new building with windows and porches. The landscape designer imagines flowering trees and gardens. The child sees a place to run and play—just as it is. Everyone is looking at the same piece of ground. The difference isn't eyesight. It's imagination. I think faith is often like that. To have faith is not to deny what is right in front of us. It's learning to see what God sees. That is exactly where the prophet Zechariah begins. While others look at Jerusalem and see ruins, God looks at the same city and sees children laughing in the streets.

There's a reason we don't hear much from the prophet Zechariah. In fact, the fourth-century biblical scholar Jerome called it "the most obscure" book in the Hebrew Bible. Much of Zechariah is filled with strange visions—flying scrolls, horses of many colors, lampstands, olive trees, and mysterious figures. It belongs to a style of writing known as *apocalyptic*, a word that simply means "revelation." Like the books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation, Zechariah uses vivid images and to reveal what God is doing beneath the surface of history. If you've ever wandered through the pages of *The Chronicles of Narnia* or *The Lord of the Rings*, where ordinary landscapes become places of deep spiritual meaning, then you have some sense of how apocalyptic literature works. Yet for all its mystery, Zechariah is deeply practical because underneath it all, is a question nearly every generation eventually asks: How do we keep believing when the future looks smaller than the past?

To understand today's passage, we have to remember where God's people are. Jerusalem had fallen decades earlier—with the Temple reduced to rubble and families carried into exile in Babylon. Everything that once gave the people identity is shattered. Then, under the Persian king Cyrus, some of the exiles are finally allowed to return home. However, home doesn't look anything like it once did. Stones are scattered where walls once stood and drought has scorched the land. To make things worse, resources are scarce and neighboring nations oppose their efforts to rebuild. Even so, they manage to build an altar and lay the foundation for a new Temple before discouragement settles in. Ultimately, their high hopes give way to exhaustion, and the Temple foundation sits unfinished for nearly twenty years.

Perhaps the people wonder if God has forgotten them. If so, Zechariah is just the prophet they need because his name literally means, "Yahweh has remembered." God has not forgotten. God is not finished. And through prophets like Haggai and Zechariah, God speaks words of encouragement to people whose imagination has been taken captive by disappointment. That may be the greatest danger disappointment brings. It doesn't simply break our hearts; it shrinks our imagination. We begin to believe that tomorrow can only be a smaller version of today. We stop anticipating grace and we stop believing that God can make all things new. That's why today's passage is so important and so beautiful, because rather than giving the people architectural plans or military strategies, God gives them a vision.

"I have returned to Zion... old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem... and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing." Notice what God describes. Not a magnificent Temple or military strength, but a neighborhood: children laughing, elders resting without fear, people belonging, safety replacing violence, and joy replacing grief. God's dream is not simply to rebuild a building. God's dream is to rebuild a community. There is something wonderfully ordinary about this vision. No fireworks. No dramatic miracles. Just grandparents sitting outside in peace while children chase one another through the streets.

Sometimes we assume God's greatest works must be spectacular, but Zechariah reminds us that God's kingdom often looks like ordinary life finally becoming what God always intended it to be. A neighborhood where people know one another's names—a city where no one lives in fear—a community where every generation is valued. That is what restoration looks like in God's imagination.

Then comes a critical question. After describing this seemingly impossible future, God asks, "Even though it seems impossible to the remnant of this people... should it also seem impossible to me?" What a wonderful question. It may seem impossible to you and me, but is it impossible to God? That question echoes down through the ages. When a diagnosis changes everything...when relationships fracture...when communities become divided...when nations grow increasingly polarized, God gently asks, "It may seem impossible to you, but should it seem impossible to me?"

I wonder if that's a question many churches need to hear today. Across the country, congregations are anxious. Membership has declined. Budgets are tighter. Buildings need repairs. Volunteers grow older. The influence churches once enjoyed has diminished. It's easy to spend all our energy asking, "How do we survive?" But Zechariah asks a different question altogether: "What kind of community is God imagining?" That's not the same question. While one is driven by fear, the other is driven by hope. One asks how we preserve what we have. The other asks what God longs to create among us. You see, the measure of a congregation has never been its size. It's been its faithfulness. The question we need to ask is not, "How impressive are we?" but "Are we becoming the kind of people through whom others glimpse the love of God?" Follow up questions might be: Can children laugh here? Do older adults know they're treasured here? Can strangers find welcome here? Can those who have known rejection discover belonging here? Do people breathe a little easier because they've encountered Christ among us?

These are Zechariah-like questions, and they are still God's questions. That is why Paul's prayer in Ephesians feels like such a beautiful companion to Zechariah's prophecies. Paul kneels before God and prays that believers may be rooted and grounded in love. He prays that they may know "the breadth and length and height and depth" of Christ's love—which is too vast to measure and too deep to comprehend. Then he concludes with those familiar words: "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine..." Notice what Paul says. God is able to accomplish more than we can imagine. Even if our imagination is limited, God's imagination is not.

When a church looks around the sanctuary and sees empty pews, God sees lives waiting to be touched by grace. We see dwindling numbers while God sees relationships yet to be formed. We see scarcity, but God sees abundance. We see an aging congregation while God sees wisdom waiting to bless younger generations. We see children and God sees future disciples, future teachers, future servants, and future peacemakers. We see what is. God sees what can become. That doesn't mean every church becomes larger or that every problem disappears—wouldn't

that be nice! Rather, it means that God's future is never determined by our present limitations. And that's the difference between optimism and hope. Optimism says things will probably work out. Hope says God will remain faithful no matter what happens. Hope doesn't ignore reality; it simply refuses to believe that what we call reality is the whole story.

This morning, I want to leave you with an invitation. Before you leave worship—either during the offertory or as you depart—take a moment to complete the sentence on the note card tucked inside your bulletin. Then place it in the offering plate. The card reads: Imagine God's Future: "Because God is not finished with us, I hope our church becomes a place where..." Pay attention to what that sentence doesn't ask. It does not ask how many members we want or what we want our budget to look like. It asks what kind of community God is calling us to become. Maybe you'll answer, "Because God is not finished with us, I hope our church becomes a place where every person knows they belong...or where children discover that church is a place of joy...or where those carrying grief find companions...or where our neighbors encounter compassion...or where differences become opportunities for deeper love."

Imagining God's future for our church is a meaningful exercise because it reminds us that the future of the church has never depended solely on human effort. It has always depended on the God who remembers—the God who restores—the God who keeps imagining life where we see only ruins—the God who is able to accomplish infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. So, friends, lift your eyes from the rubble and don't allow what appears to be limitations to have the final word over your imagination. Instead, dare to see through the eyes of God. For the God who once imagined children laughing again in the streets of Jerusalem is still imagining communities of peace, belonging, justice, mercy, and joy. And by the grace of Christ, and through the power already at work within us, we are invited to become part of that sacred story. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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