

Construction or Destruction

Ps. 74: 5, 6; Zech. 1: 18-21; Mark 6: 3; 2 Cor. 13: 10.

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In this vision given to Zechariah we see two forces at work which we venture to speak of as "destruction" and "construction." That is the order in which they are given; one characterized by breaking down, and the other characterized by building up. We do well to ask ourselves, "Which of these two features characterizes me?" That we are capable of both is true, and one would be exercised as to whether the course one is pursuing is having the effect of building up the saints, or tending to destroy their usefulness in their service for God. Are we on the line of building up the saints in the local companies to which we belong, or are we guilty of conduct which tends to distress and scatter them? This is a testing question for all to face, and the descriptive passages which have been read bring this matter definitely before us.

The setting of the vision given to Zechariah is found in the book of Ezra. The four horns referred to represent the four enemies which held sway over the people of God, and whose power was used to diminish them. At the time of this vision only two had arisen, Babylon and Persia, but the whole course of Gentile dominion appears to be involved.

They are all seen as horses earlier in Zechariah ch. 1. As *horses* they are representative of powers in this world, but as *horns* they are pictured as destructive powers set against the people of God. The four carpenters obviously appear to represent Haggai, Zechariah, Zerubbabel and Jeshua, who are all seen together in one place, Ezra 5: 1, 2. It is interesting to see them there, each one concerned as to the construction of the temple; hence they are shewn as carpenters, constructive men. They were surrounded by enemies bent upon their destruction, but nevertheless the constructive work went forward. This vision gives us the divine view of the matter.

A horn is bestial, altogether lacking in intelligence; whilst a carpenter is a man of wisdom and skill able both to repair and to build up. Moreover it is very evident from this vision that the carpenters by construction negated the elements of destruction. The best way to deal with adverse powers is by methods of construction. Note that the prophet says, "And the LORD shewed me four carpenters," as though He would fix the attention of the prophet upon them. It does not say the LORD shewed him the four horns; he lifted up his eyes and saw them there; but the LORD *shewed* him the carpenters. Evidently the LORD particularly wanted him to see these; He had obviously raised them up specially. Such are the two forces depicted here, and the serious question again confronts us, are we each one characteristically a horn or a carpenter? Is our conduct in the local meeting to which we are attached on the line of breaking down or building up the company? Are we using our power to attract people into the meeting, or are we instrumental in driving them away? These are serious reflections for each one of us, and one is feeling the increasing need of this challenge today.

In Psalm 74 we have a plaint of Asaph concerning the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. He tells us that at one time a man was accounted famous as going to Lebanon and, with an axe, hewing down trees; and with a hammer shaping them for the ornamentation of the temple. He used destructive weapons in the right way, for you will remember that in the construction of the temple neither of these tools was used *in the house itself*. We learn from this Psalm that they were used *outside the house* in order to secure material for its construction. There have been famous men in our

own day who, by the gospel, cut men down from their lofty places in this world, and were thus instrumental in producing spiritual material for the house of God. But Asaph goes on to say that the axes and hammers were now being used *inside* the temple — not *outside* — and the skilled work of others was being destroyed.

Brethren, it is much easier to drive people out than to get them in. One has had the sad experience of seeing men active in sowing discord in the gatherings, and as a consequence people have been driven away. How much more blessed would it have been to labour in seeking men's conversion, and helping them in view of their becoming material to beautify the house of God. Brethren, is it to be said of any one of us that we have driven people away, and have not been active in seeking to get them in? Destruction or construction, which is true of us?

I read that verse in Mark to shew that our Lord took up a constructive occupation whilst here, He was called a carpenter. He could never have been a horn! This is the constructive work of which we are speaking, and we do well to follow after Him. Some years ago a brother spoke on this verse in a very touching way, pointing out that a carpenter does two things. He produces *new things*, and he repairs *broken ones*; this our Lord was ever doing whilst in this world. Any one can be a horn, senselessly destroying; only a man of skill and wisdom can be a carpenter. Oh! for more carpenters and fewer horns.

Lastly, in 2 Cor. 13 Paul speaks of these two features in relation to himself. He is speaking of the power which the Lord had given to him, and of which he rightly says, "which the Lord hath given me to edification and not to destruction," 2 Cor. 13: 10. He doubtless refers to his apostolic calling and power, but we also, in a lesser way, are in the same position. We belong to the Christian company and to some local gathering. Are we sure that we are bending our efforts to edification and not to destruction — building up, not pulling down? Brethren, let us see to it that we are marked by the character of the *carpenter*, and not that of the *horn*. Let us seek help to be instrumental in building up the saints and, it may be, recovering them; let us eschew the feature of distressing and scattering the people of God.

We each have power for edification; let us, through the supply of grace from our Lord, use that power to the edifying of our brethren, especially in the local companies to which we belong.