

Zechariah 04 - Vision of the Lampstand & Olive Tree; Vision Interpreted

II. Eight Night Visions (Zech 1:7—6:15)

(5) Lampstand and two olive trees (4:1-14)

(A) Vision described (4:1-3)

(a) Lampstand with seven lamps (4:1-2)

(b) Two olive trees (4:3)

(B) Interpretation (4:4-14)

(a) God's strength (4:4-7)

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(c) God's anointed servants: Zerubbabel and Joshua (4:11-14)

Zechariah's fourth vision (Zech 3) pictured the removal of sin from the returned remnant. This vision is about God's resources available for God's work. What God orders, He pays for. It's also a reminder that Joshua and Zerubbabel were especially appointed by God and are especially energized and empowered by God. It's a reminder of the source of energy that is available to rebuild the temple, and encourage the two leaders as they encountered the pushback from the Jews as well as from the surrounding peoples. In God's strength alone, they would overcome opposition and accomplish His purposes.

Zechariah 4

(5) Lampstand and two olive trees (4:1-14)

(A) Vision described (4:1-3)

(a) Lampstand with seven lamps (4:1-2)

1 Then the angel who had been speaking with me returned and woke me, like a person who is awakened from his sleep.

1 Then the angel who was speaking with me returned and roused me, as a man who is awakened from his sleep.

1 Then the angel who had been speaking with me returned and woke me up as if I had been asleep.

1 And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep,

- The angel roused Zechariah from his slumber. Apparently after the last vision ended, Zechariah remained in a sleep-like condition.

2 And he said to me, "**What do you see?**" And I said, "I see, and behold, a **lampstand** all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its **sevenlamps** on it with seven spouts *belonging to each of* the lamps which are on the top of it;

2 He said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it;

2 Then he asked me, "What do you see?" So I said, "I have been watching—and look!—there is a menorah made completely of gold with a bowl on top of it. And there are seven lights on it, along with seven feeder channels to the lamps, which are also on top of it.

2 And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which *are* upon the top thereof:

- "...What do you see?" - verb of perception, indicating the beginning of a new vision

- "...lampstand" - Reformed Theology immediately sees lampstand here, then goes to Rev 1:12,20 and Phil 2:15 to state that this lampstand refers to the Church. The problem is that the Church is not a matter of prophecy in the OT. The first mention of the Church in the Bible is in Matt 16:18.

— Inserting the Church here as the the symbol for the lampstand confuses the Israel/Church distinction (which is explicitly clear throughout Scripture). It also brings in a symbol which is nowhere else described anywhere in the OT, and is completely out of context in this passage.

- "...seven lamps" - refers to the seven-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit (see notes on Is 11:2)

— So Zechariah is seeing the complete ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the fact that this ministry is never extinguished. It speaks of a constant supply of God's resources to do God's work, in the midst of a community of returnees who had become so discouraged that they stopped building the temple and let it languish for 15 years.



The Lampstand in this Vision

While the lampstand in the Tabernacle had to be filled with oil by the priests, the lampstand in this vision was automatically filled with an endless supply of oil.

1. A bowl for storing oil was suspended over the lampstand (v2)
2. Oil was transported by gravity from the bowl through seven channels or conduits to each of the seven lights of the lampstand (v2). While not obvious in English, but in Hebrew the numbers are repeated, meaning there were seven pipes apiece or 49 total.
3. The lampstands were each flanked by an olive tree which were tapped by two gold pipes through which golden oil flowed constantly into the bowl (v3,11-12)

(b) Two olive trees (4:3)

3 also two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side."

3 also two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side."

3 Two olive trees are near it, one on the right side of the bowl and one on the left."

3 And two olive trees by it, one upon the right *side* of the bowl, and the other upon the left *side* thereof.

- The olive oil that would be produced by the two olive trees is typically a depiction of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20,27; Ps 133:2)

— Human maintenance of the lamps was unnecessary since the oil flowed from the trees to the bowl, then to the lamps

(B) Interpretation (4:4-14)

(a) God's strength (4:4-7)

4 Then I said to the angel who was speaking with me, saying, "What are these, my lord?"

4 Then I said to the angel who was speaking with me saying, "What are these, my lord?"

4 Then I asked the angel who had been speaking with me, "Sir, what are these?"

4 So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What *are* these, my lord?

- When Zerubbabel asked this question, he did not mean that he did not understand what the lampstand was. He was obviously familiar with the furniture of the tabernacle and Solomon's Temple. He was inquiring what the whole vision of v2-3 signified.

5 So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord."

5 So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord."

5 The angel who had been speaking with me answered by asking, "You don't know what these mean, do you?" So I responded, "No, sir."

5 Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord.

- The angel implies that Zechariah *should* know what this vision means (Cf. v13)

— Twice in this chapter God expects His people, who have enough information, to figure it out on their own

6 Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel, saying, '**Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,**' says the LORD of armies.

6 Then he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts.

6 Then he replied to me, "This is this message from the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by valor nor by strength, but only by my Spirit,' says the LORD of the Heavenly Armies.

6 Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This *is* the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.

- "...Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit" - something that believers will learn, then re-learn, multiple times throughout their Christian life because it's completely counter-intuitive to how we operate in our sin nature.

— Our sin nature is all about independence from God and doing things our own way. People get saved, then say, Well I'm now going to go to work for God in the same way I worked before I was a Christian. And when we start doing the work of God through our own power, we fail.

— This message was especially pertinent to Zechariah's audience because they had become discouraged and lacked vision for rebuilding the temple. They were doing the temple project through their own power, and when we do that, we get very tired and very discouraged very fast, because we take on God-sized burdens that we're not designed to carry.

— The only way to get through a God-sized burden is to tap into God-sized resources like the energy of the Holy Spirit described in this vision

— We can't do God's work through human power, but only through the energy provided by the Holy Spirit. And according to this vision, this energy is always available, it's never lacking, and it's never offline. The problem is that we don't take advantage of it.

Acts 2:47: ...And **the Lord** was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Matt 16:18: **And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.**

What happens if we step out and do God's work our own way? Kadesh-Barnea.

After God miraculously removed them from Egypt, stuck down their enemies, parted the Red Sea, and gave them the Law at Mount Sinai, all the Exodus generation had to do was trust God for 11 days and they would've entered the Promised Land. But they got to Kadesh-Barnea, 10 of the 12 spies reported giants in the land, and the people refused to go in.

So God said that he was going to let them wander for 40 years until they all died, then work with their children to enter the Promised Land. When they heard this, they didn't like it, so they suddenly got brave and attempted to go into the land anyway, and the "giants" in the land beat them back (Num 14:45). It was a pathetic attempt after the fact, and they paid the price.

If they had trusted in God's resources, they would have been in Canaan in 11 days. But since they didn't trust in God's resources, He removed the resources and gave them to the next generation.

Jer 17:5: This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD.

7 'What are you, you **greatmountain**? Before Zerubbabel *you will become* a plain; and **he** will bring out the **topstone** *with* shouts of "**Grace, grace to it!**"

7 'What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel *you will become* a plain; and he will bring forth the top stone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"

7 'Who are you, great mountain? You will become a plain in Zerubbabel's presence, and he will position the capstone, exulting over it, "How beautiful! How beautiful!"

7 Who *art* thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel *thou shalt become* a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone *thereof with* shoutings, *crying*, Grace, grace unto it.

- This verse explains the results if the people and leaders will tap into the power and resources of the Holy Spirit (v6) to accomplish their work: God will remove the largest obstacles in their way to accomplish His work.

- "...great mountain" - a metaphor for the largest of obstacles (Cf. Is 40:4; 41:15; 49:11; Matt 17:20; 21:21; Mark 11:23; 1 Cor 13:2)

— The whole process of temple reconstruction seemed like a mountainous job to the few exiles who returned from captivity. In addition, there was much opposition to building (Ezra 4:1-5,24), and the Israelites themselves were unwilling to persevere (Haggai 1:14; 2:1-9). Nevertheless, God would reduce this "mountainous task" to a flat plain.

- "...he" - Zerubbabel

- "...top stone" - the capstone, the last stone to go in to a building. The "foundation stone" or "cornerstone" is the first stone to go into a building.

- "...Grace, grace to it!" - grace (help, unmerited favor); the phrase means "God's grace (help) built it!" The same grace that saved you is the same grace that will sustain you.

-- God's work will not be accomplished by their efforts, but by His Spirit. When God accomplishes what we cannot, all the glory is His.

— Any work that seeks to carry out God's will in the world will succeed only by God's grace (help) that the Lord would provide by His Spirit (Cf. Gen 1:2; Ex 15:8,10; 28:3; 31:3; Num 11:17-29; Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6,19; 2 Sam 22:16; Ezek 37:1-14).

Gal 3:3: Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

- Essentially, the Galatians were thankful for God's grace in salvation, to get them to heaven, but then went out and lived their lives under their own power. Paul calls this "foolish."

(b) Zerubbabel to reconstruct the Temple (4:8-10)

8 Also the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

8 Also the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

8 Then this message from the LORD came to me again:
8 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,
- A fresh prophecy given to Zerubbabel, within the same vision

9 "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will finish *it*. **Then you will know** that the LORD of armies has sent me to you.

9 "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will finish *it*. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.

9 "Zerubbabel's hands have laid the foundation of this Temple, and his hands will finish it, so that you will know that the LORD of the Heavenly Armies has sent me to all of you.

9 The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you.

- Zerubbabel put in the foundation stone in 536 BC (Ezra 3:8-11; 5:16)

— The prophecy is that the same man (Zerubbabel) who laid the foundation stone is the same man who will set the capstone. This prophecy was fulfilled (Ezra 6:14-18). God is not into incomplete projects (Phil 1:6).

- "...Then you will know" - the people will know that Zechariah was a prophet from God when his prophecy comes true. God vindicates Himself by writing history before it happens.

— When Zerubbabel put in the capstone of the temple, the people would know that the LORD sent Zechariah as a prophet. The guidelines were initially laid down to determine the authenticity of a prophet of God in Deut 18:15-22.

— Jesus talked about this in the Upper Room; He gave the disciples a couple of short-term prophecies so that they would know He is the Messiah when they see the prophecies come true (John 13:19; 14:29)

John 13:19: **From now on I am telling you before *it* happens, so that when it does happen, you may believe that I am *He*.**

John 14:29: **And now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe.**

10 For who has shown contempt for **the day of small things**? But **theseseven** will rejoice when they see the **plumbline** in the hand of Zerubbabel—they are the eyes of the LORD roaming throughout the earth."

10 For who has despised the day of small things? But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel—*these are* the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth."

10 For who has despised the time of insignificant things? They will rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. These seven lights represent the eyes of the LORD, which are looking throughout all of the earth."

10 For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel *with* those seven; they *are* the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.

- "...the day of small things" - the temple they were building was much smaller and less ornate than Solomon's temple. Thankfully, God does not measure success by the size of the buildings or the crowds that come in to it.

— This is one of the reasons that the people got discouraged...the older men remembered the glory of Solomon's temple, and when they began to see this temple being built, became discouraged and wept (Ezra 3:12-13; Haggai 2:3).

— When we enter heaven, we won't hear "Well done good and successful servant." We'll hear, "Well done my good and *faithful* servant."

- "...these seven" - God's omniscient eyes (Cf. 3:9; 2 Chr 16:9)

- "...rejoice" - the people will not be happy about getting back to work on the temple, but GOD WILL BE HAPPY.

— Everyone was complaining that the temple is too small, but God says, I love it!

Bible history is the record of God using small things. When God wanted to set the plan of salvation in motion, He started with a little baby named Isaac (Gen 21). When He wanted to overthrow Egypt and set His people free, He used a baby's tears (Ex 2:1-10). He used a shepherd boy and a sling to defeat a giant (1 Sam 17) and a little lad's lunch to feed a multitude (John 6). He delivered the Apostle Paul from death by using a basket and a rope (Acts 9:23-25). Never despise the day of small things, for God is glorified in small things and uses them to accomplish great things. [Warren Wiersbe]

(c) God's anointed servants: Zerubbabel and Joshua (4:11-14)

11 Then I said to him, "What are these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand and on its left?"

11 Then I said to him, "What are these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand and on its left?"

11 Then I asked the angel, "What are these two olive trees, one on the right of the menorah and one on the left?"

11 Then answered I, and said unto him, What *are* these two olive trees upon the right *side* of the lampstand and upon the left *side* thereof?

12 And I responded the second time and said to him, "What are the two olive branches which are beside the two golden pipes, which empty the golden *oil* from themselves?"

12 And I answered the second time and said to him, "What are the two olive branches which are beside the two golden pipes, which empty the golden *oil* from themselves?"

12 I also asked him a second question: "What are these two olive branches on either side of the two golden feeder channels that carry the golden oil to the seven lights?"

12 And I answered again, and said unto him, What [be these] two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden [oil] out of themselves?

13 So he answered me, saying, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord."

13 So he answered me, saying, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord."

13 The angel replied, "You don't know what these are, do you?" I responded to him, "No, sir."

13 And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these *be*? And I said, No, my lord.

- The second time in this vision (Cf. v5) that God expected Zechariah to know what the vision meant. The interpreting angel did not want to give an explanation if Zechariah could figure it out himself.

— Normally, God does not provide additional information until we have done all we can to discover His meaning. To do so would be to discourage human effort toward God.

14 Then he said, "These are the **two anointed ones**, who are standing by the Lord of the **whole earth**."

14 Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth."

14 He said, "These are the two anointed ones, who stand continuously beside the Lord of the whole earth."

14 Then said he, These *are* the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.

- "...two anointed ones" - Zerubbabel and Joshua; "anointed ones" literally means "sons of oil"

— So the olive trees represent a continuous supply, via the Holy Spirit, of the lighting of the menorah, but they also represent God's two servants during this era: Zerubbabel and Joshua

- "...whole earth" - speaks of a worldwide ministry; may be an allusion to the Two Witnesses during the Tribulation period

— The Two Witnesses will have a worldwide ministry during the Tribulation, and they will be "sons of oil" just like Zerubbabel and Joshua

Rev 11:3-4:

3 And I will grant *authority* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."

4 These are the **two olive trees** and the **two lampstands** that **stand before the Lord of the earth.**

The point of this vision, and its accompanying oracles, was the Lord's ability to bring a seemingly impossible project to completion—successfully and gloriously—through His anointed servants and His supernatural enablement (Cf. 2 Cor 12:9). The lesson is applicable to any project that God has ordained and called His people to execute, including rebuilding the Temple and building the Church (Matt 16:18). [Constable]

To recapitulate, the chief features of this message to Zerubbabel were:

1. The insufficiency and inadequacy of all human strength and resources.
2. The all sufficiency of the power of the Spirit of God for the accomplishment of the work of God.
3. The unceasing, abundant, and inexhaustible supply of this power as his (Zerubbabel's) and our, disposal.
4. The assurance of the obliteration of all hindrances to the rebuilding.
5. The heartening hope of the completion of the work by the one commencing it.
6. The importance of the entire work of building as a prefiguring of the activity of the Messiah in the future.
7. The delight of God in the construction of the Temple.
8. The positions of privilege of both Joshua and Zerubbabel as the media whereby the testimony of God is transmitted to people.
9. The typifying of the ministry of the Messiah in both religious and civil offices.

[Charles L. Feinberg]