



Zechariah - Chapter Four

I Zechariah 1:1-8:23 - Oracles and Visions (continues)

I.b Zechariah 1:7-6:15 - Eight Night Visions and a Coronation (continues)

Summary of Chapter Four

Zechariah sees lamps on a golden lampstand, a symbol of God's watchfulness and power to fulfil his promises to David's house, represented by Zerubbabel.

I.b.vi Zechariah 4:1-14 - Fifth Vision: The Lampstand and Olive Trees

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ The angel who talked with me came again, and wakened me, as one is wakened from sleep. ² He said to me, 'What do you see?' And I said, 'I see a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it; there are seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. ³ And by it there are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.'

Zechariah 4:1-3

The fifth vision consisted of a solid gold lampstand flanked by two olive trees. A lampstand or *menorah* is almost always a ritual object, especially one made of gold: there was a single golden lampstand in the tabernacle (Exodus 25:31-40) and ten in Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 4:7 and 4:20). God gave Zechariah a vision of the golden lampstand that was meant to stand in the temple. Since Zechariah and his people were there to rebuild the temple, it made sense that God spoke to them in images related to it.

As one is wakened from sleep. Zechariah had that woozy feeling that one often gets if awakened suddenly from a deep sleep. This may be the way that Daniel felt

when he was awakened from his trance: <<*While he was speaking to me, I was in a deep sleep, with my face to the ground. Then he touched me and raised me to my feet*>> (Daniel 8:18 NIV).

The lampstand supported a bowl, which served as a reservoir for the oil. Arranged around the bowl were seven lamps, each of which had seven lips, i.e. spouts. Individual seven-spouted lamps have been uncovered by archæologists, but the combination of seven around a single bowl is unmatched. The result would be forty nine wicks to give light, a kind of super-menorah.

One of the more tedious duties of the temple service was the constant care of the lamps on the golden lampstand. They had to be continually refilled with oil, cleaned of soot, and their wicks had to be maintained. In this vision, Zechariah sees 'self-filling' lamps, fed directly from two olive trees. In the temple, the lamps were fuelled by pure, specially prepared olive oil. The lampstand Zechariah saw in his vision was fed straight from the trees!

⁴ I said to the angel who talked with me, 'What are these, my lord?'

⁵ Then the angel who talked with me answered me, 'Do you not know what these are?' I said, 'No, my lord.'

Zechariah 4:4-5

Zechariah asked the angel, 'What are these, my lord?' and he responded with an oracle explaining the message of the vision. Zechariah saw the vision, but did not understand what it meant. What he saw was unusual but simple - a lampstand with lamps supplied with oil directly through pipes coming from two olive trees.

Do you not know what these are? At the same time, it was important for Zechariah to know, and the angel makes sure that Zechariah knows that he must come to understand the meaning of this vision.

⁶ He said to me, 'This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts. ⁷ What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring out the top stone amid shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"'

Zechariah 4:6-7

This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel. The oracle is addressed directly to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, who along with Joshua the high priest had been charged by the prophet Haggai with the task of rebuilding the temple: <<*Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set out to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of*

God, helping them>> (Ezra 5:2), and: *<<In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest>>* (Haggai 1:1). The work of rebuilding the temple had stalled, and Zerubbabel needed encouragement to carry on the work. God's word to him is a reminder that the obstacles that face him in the rebuilding task will not be overcome by conventional resources of might or power. Instead, the resources will come from an outpouring of God's Spirit: *<<Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear>>* (Haggai 2:4-5).

Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts. In this fifth vision God spoke to Zerubbabel about the issue of purity. However, purity alone is not enough to accomplish the work of God - the work of God needs resources, and not the resources of human might or power. Might focuses on collective strength, the resources of a group or army. Power focuses on individual strength. God says, 'not by the resources of many or one, but by my Spirit. It will not be by your cleverness, your ability, or your physical strength that the temple will be rebuilt, but by the Spirit of God.'

This was the Spirit - the breath - the *ruah* of the Lord which worked in creation (Genesis 1:2); at the Red Sea, to open and close it (Exodus 15:8-10); that gave life to dead bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14); and would raise Jesus from the dead: *<<If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you>>* (Romans 8:11).

By my spirit. Here are some reasons why oil is a good representation of the Holy Spirit:

- Oil lubricates when used for that purpose - there is little friction and wear among those who are lubricated by the Spirit of God.
- Oil heals and was used as a medicinal treatment in Biblical times: *<<He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him>>* (Luke 10:34) - the Spirit of God brings healing and restoration.
- Oil lights when it is burned in a lamp - where the Spirit of God is there is light.
- Oil warms when it is used as fuel for a flame - where the Spirit of God is there is warmth and comfort.

- Oil invigorates when used to massage - the Holy Spirit invigorates a believer for his service.
- Oil adorns when applied as a perfume - the Holy Spirit adorns believers and should make them more pleasant to be around!
- Oil polishes when used to shine metal - the Holy Spirit wipes away grime and smoothes out rough edges.

With that assurance of divine aid, the great mountain of difficulties that stands in the way of rebuilding, whether practical, political or spiritual, is cut down to size. All these obstacles will become a plain in front of Zerubbabel, something confirmed by the words of an earlier prophet: *<<Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain>>* (Isaiah 40:4).

He shall bring out the top stone amid shouts of “Grace, grace to it!” This is God assurance to Zerubbabel that not only will the work be finished, but Zerubbabel shall finish it, setting the capstone and declaring that it was all a work of grace. When the work is done through human might or power those undertaking the work can take credit for it, but when the work is done by the continual supply of the Spirit, then it is all to the glory of God’s grace.

It would be God who would place the ultimate capstone - the Messiah: *<<Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: “Look! I am placing a foundation stone in Jerusalem, a firm and tested stone. It is a precious cornerstone that is safe to build on. Whoever believes need never be shaken>>* (Isaiah 28:16 NLT), and quoted by Peter in reference to Jesus: *<<For it stands in scripture: ‘See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame’>>* (1 Peter 2:6).

⁸ Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ⁹ ‘The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. ^{10a} For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel.

Zechariah 4:8-10a

His hands shall also complete it. Just as Zerubbabel had commenced the work when he laid the foundation, so too he would bring it to completion when he brought out *<<the top stone>>* (v.7) of the building. The people would respond to Zerubbabel’s action by invoking God’s blessing upon the building, with shouts of ‘Grace, grace’ (v.7).

See the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel. Although the work was empowered by the Spirit of God, Zerubbabel still needed his plummet or plumb line. He still needed to get to work. God could have given Zerubbabel a shortcut and instantly, miraculously finished the work. That is not God's way of doing things, because his work in the life of Zerubbabel was as important to him as his work through Zerubbabel.

Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. The people had started to return from exile some seventeen years earlier and, despite much effort, the temple still lay in ruins. The work would now resume in earnest and be completed by Zerubbabel within the next four years; its completion would vindicate the prophet's authenticity

The progress of the building begun under Zerubbabel would be a challenge to those who thought of their times as a day of small things. God's work may start in small and unobtrusive ways, yet reach a glorious conclusion: <<*He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches'*>> (Matthew 13:31-32).

Spurgeon spoke to the need for courage in the day of small things in the church: "To me, it seems that it should be your glory to join the poorest and weakest churches of your denomination, and wherever you go, to say, 'This little cause is not as strong as I should like it to be; but, by the grace of God, I will make it more influential. At any rate, I will throw in my weight to strengthen the weak things of Zion, and certainly I will not despise the day of small things.' Where would have been our flourishing churches of today if our forefathers had disdained to sustain them while they were yet in their infancy?"

^{10b} 'These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth.' ¹¹ Then I said to him, 'What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?' ¹² And a second time I said to him, 'What are these two branches of the olive trees, which pour out the oil through the two golden pipes?' ¹³ He said to me, 'Do you not know what these are?' I said, 'No, my lord.' ¹⁴ Then he said, 'These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.'

Zechariah 4:10b-14

A number of the vision's details remain to be clarified. The seven lamps on top of the lampstand are the eyes of the Lord, representing his watchfulness and awareness of everything that is going on through the whole earth. This

watchfulness results in blessing for his faithful people: <<*For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the entire earth, to strengthen those whose heart is true to him. You have done foolishly in this; for from now on you will have wars*>> (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Some of the details of how the two olive trees on either side of the lampstand are connected to it are obscure. Whatever the precise nature of the branches and the golden pipes, their function is to transmit olive oil from the inexhaustible source of the two olive trees to the bowl of the lampstand, ensuring that the lamps will never go out.

The two olive trees are the two anointed ones, Hebrew *bene hayyitshar* or 'sons of new oil.' *Yitshar* indicates 'new oil,' one of the marks of the fertility that flows from God's blessing: <<*And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the soil produces, on human beings and animals, and on all their labours*>> (Haggai 1:11). These trees are thus characterised by endless fertility, which means unlimited amounts of oil for the lampstand, and they stand by the Lord of the whole earth as members of his heavenly court.

Most interpreters think these two anointed ones represent Zerubbabel the governor, who was descended from David, and Joshua the high priest. They stand in the Lord's presence and receive his favour and protection. Other possibilities are that they represent Haggai and Zechariah who, as prophets, had entrance into the heavenly deliberations; or the angels, who act as God's agents in supplying unlimited divine assistance to the restored temple.

God had a special work for these two anointed ones. They would be uniquely anointed to work together and to accomplish the work of God. God often called two men to work together:

- Moses and Aaron.
- Joshua and Caleb.
- Elijah and Elisha.
- Peter and John.
- Paul and Barnabas.

God promises to raise up two more witnesses, anointed ones to preach the Gospel to the world immediately before Jesus' return (Revelation 11:3-13). Revelation 11:4 specifically says of these witnesses: <<*These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth*>>.