

# Zechariah

## Chapter 4

### VII. Vision 5: The Golden Candlestick - Zechariah 4:1-14

**4:1** And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, **4:2** And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick 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: **4:3** And two olive trees by it, one upon the right [side] of the bowl, and the other upon the left [side] thereof. **4:4** So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What [are] these, my lord? **4:5** Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. **4:6** 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. **4:7** 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. **4:8** Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, **4:9** 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. **4:10** 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. **4:11** Then answered I, and said unto him, What [are] these two olive trees upon the right [side] of the candlestick and upon the left [side] thereof? **4:12** 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? **4:13** And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these [be]? And I said, No, my lord. **4:14** Then said he, These [are] the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.

This vision, the fifth of eight that Zechariah had on the same night, is probably the most difficult to interpret. The symbology is very difficult in places, however, the truths taught in this vision are applicable to any age although their primary reference is to the time of Zechariah.

#### **Zechariah 4:1**

As we have seen in the visions presented so far, an angel, whom we have designated as the interpreting angel, introduces Zechariah to each vision and explains it's meaning.

The wonderful truth of the previous vision, which depicted the cleansing of the nation of Israel, no doubt caused Zechariah to bow his head in worship and meditation. Also, since it was night, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that Zechariah "dozes off" between each of these visions and as a result must be "wakened". This is something we cannot be dogmatic about.

### **Zechariah 4:2-3**

The subject of this vision is described in these two verse as being a golden candlestick. The appearance of this candlestick was much like that of the golden menorah that stood in the temple with a couple of differences. First, there was a golden bowl on top of it filled with oil. Secondly, each of the lamps had a golden pipe that went to that bowl and through which the oil flowed. This gave each of the lamps an unlimited supply of oil from the golden bowl on the top of the menorah.

As a side note, it is also possible to translate these two verses to indicate that each lamp had seven pipes to the bowl. This would give forty-nine pipes instead of seven. Although this is an interesting possibility, we cannot be sure about it. The important point to make is that each lamp had unrestricted access to the oil and as such, had no danger of going out.

Verse three gives two additional elements to the subject of this vision, namely two olive trees. Furthermore, the two olive trees were the source of the oil in the golden bowl as indicated in verse 12.

Note that a golden candlestick and two olive trees would be very familiar objects to someone living in Israel at that time. God always uses familiar objects to teach his truths. This should tell us that it is not God's desire to hide truth, but to reveal it.

In summary, therefore, we can describe the subject of this vision as being a golden seven-branched lampstand with a large golden bowl on top. From the bowl ran seven (forty-nine?) pipes through which oil flowed to the seven lamps. Standing by the side of the candlestick was two olive trees which served as the source of oil in the large golden bowl on top.

The meaning of the candlestick is almost universally accepted as referring to Israel. In the Old Testament, Israel was to be God's "light" to the world. Look at the following verses in support of this: Isaiah 60:1-3, Isaiah 62:1. In Romans 2:19 Paul points out that the religious Jew considered himself to be a "light to them which are in darkness".

The oil, which is seen flowing into the golden bowl and which serves as the fuel for the lamps, is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Again, there is almost universal agreement on this. In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, oil may be seen as the presence of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the Old Testament, oil was used to anoint men for special services such as kings (David and Saul), priests (Aaron and his sons), and prophets. It is the Spirit of God that empowers the light within us.

### **Zechariah 4:4-5**

These two verses give us insight into an interesting dialogue between the interpreter angel and Zechariah. The initiator of this dialogue is Zechariah who asks the question "What are these?". The interpreter angel responds to this question with another question "Don't you know?", to which Zechariah answers "No". At this point, the interpreter angel precedes to tell Zechariah the significance of this vision.

From this dialogue we can glean the following couple of points:

1. From an analysis of this dialogue, we can infer that the angel was surprised that Zechariah would miss the meaning of the vision. Although we may side with Zechariah in ignorance, this only proves that we need to be diligent in our study of the word so that we will not be classed with the dull. Another interesting example of this point is Christ's dialogue with Nicodemus in John 3. Note specifically Christ's question to Nicodemus "Are you a teacher in Israel and yet you don't know these things?".
2. Although God is "surprised" by our ignorance at times, he will always reveal himself to the one who asks sincerely with a seeking heart. It is God's nature to reveal himself to those who are receptive to his truths.

We should be careful not to read too much into these two verses, but we must also be careful to realize that they are put here for a reason. God does not waste words in the scriptures.

#### **Zechariah 4:6-7**

This vision differs from the previous four in that the main point of this vision is not to the nation as a whole, but to a single man, Zerubbabel.

As we have already noted in the previous vision, Zerubbabel was the civil leader of the Jews during the times immediately after their return from captivity. We have also noted that Zerubbabel was in the Davidic line and as such had the right of rule. If there had been a monarchy established, he would have been the king.

The interpreter angel addresses the interpretation of this vision to Zerubbabel. Note the following elements:

1. It was not by might, which refers to military force, nor by power, which referred to strength, but by the Spirit that Zerubbabel would succeed in his God appointed task. We often think that we need to "call the calvary" when faced with difficult tasks when in reality we need to depend on the power of the spirit. Paul echoes this verse to some extent in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 where he points out that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual.
2. The above statement points out to Zerubbabel the need for him to depend on the Lord for success in his endeavor to rebuild the temple. He was attacked on the outside by enemies and on the inside by sloth and laziness. If he was to be victorious, it would not be through external force, but through the power of the Spirit. We often fall to the temptation to fight our battles in our own power instead of in the power of the Spirit. This is the main reason we fail so often.
3. Verse seven further drives home the point that with the power of God on our side, the mountains that block our way become plains. There is no obstacle that can deter the man of God when that man is dependent on the Spirit as his source of strength.
4. Not only will the mountains of adversity facing Zerubbabel become plains, but Zerubbabel will ultimately succeed in placing the headstone of the temple in it's rightful place. We know from history that this took place some

four years later. Although it looked bleak for Zerubbabel and Israel, God would ultimately triumph through his Spirit and give them the victory.

#### **Zechariah 4:8-10**

The interpreter angel gave Zechariah the message to Zerubbabel. Now, God gives Zechariah an additional message, not to Zerubbabel personally, but to the recipients of this prophecy.

The first part of this message is the promise that Zerubbabel will finish the temple. His hands laid the foundation, and his hands will assist in the placement of the capstone thus finishing the work. God reinforces the fact that what he intends to do, he will accomplish. Nothing can stand in the way of God's purpose and plan.

The fact that Zerubbabel will finish the temple is used by God to prove that Zechariah is a true prophet (verse 9). One of the marks of a true prophet was that whatever they predicted came true. If a man supposed to be a prophet and missed out on one prediction, that man was to be stoned to death. (That would take care of a lot of supposed psychics and prophets today!)

Verse ten contains a most interesting statement by God, "Who has despised the day of small things?". We often overlook the small and insignificant events of life when observing the major agents of change in history. It was a small and insignificant couple that gave birth to the Messiah. It was on a small and insignificant hill that salvation was purchased for every man. It was on a small and remote island that John penned the wonderful book of Revelation. It is by the foolish, weak, and base things of the world that God confounds the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). It was by 300 men, pitchers, and lamps that God destroyed the army of Midian. It was by a tent peg that the nation of Israel was delivered from the Syrians. Throughout the Bible we see God using the small and insignificant things of life to bring about his eternal purposes. God is telling Israel that the seemingly insignificant events of their time will be used to bring about his eternal plan.

The phrase "... those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the whole earth." is a very difficult phrase to deal with. At first reading it does not appear to fit in this verse. Although we cannot be firm about its meaning, the following points are worth noting:

1. The only other reference to "seven eyes" is found in the fourth vision. In that vision, the seven eyes are on the engraved stone which we have already identified as a messianic reference.
2. The context of this passage is the completion of the temple. Furthermore, the completion of the temple is signaled by the placement of the capstone. In a sense, the completion of the "heavenly temple" of which we are "living stones" is completed by Jesus Christ, the "precious cornerstone". (1 Peter 2:4-7)
3. What we then can infer, although we cannot be dogmatic, is that Zechariah is indicating that the eyes of the Lord, which are an indication of his presence, is over the work of Zerubbabel. God is actively insuring that the completion of the temple will take place and that the capstone will be laid.

#### **Zechariah 4:11-14**

What we have been given in the way of interpretation is that this vision is showing the fact that it is by God's Spirit (the oil), that the witness (the light) of Israel (the menorah) will be seen by all men. Additionally, that witness will be verified by the re-establishment of the temple and the reinstatement of temple worship. What Zechariah asks now is the significance of the two olive trees.

In Zechariah's questions, we get some additional information regarding the candlestick and the olive trees. Namely the fact that the two olive trees have two golden pipes coming out of two branches which serve as a source of oil for the golden bowl on top of the menorah. (We have already noted this point above, however, it is only here that we are given these details.) In any case, Zechariah asks the interpreter angel to give him the meaning of the two olive trees and the two branches which serve as the source of oil for the golden candlestick.

Note at this point that the dialogue between Zechariah and the angel is similar to that of verses six and seven. For any relevant comments, refer to that section above.

The interpreter angel does not give us a direct answer as to the meaning of the two olive trees. However, we can infer their identity by the following information from the vision and from the interpreter angel himself:

1. The olive trees are a source of oil for the candlestick.
2. The olive trees are designated as "the two anointed ones which stand before the Lord".
3. The oil, which comes from the olive trees, is the source of light that we have already identified as referring to the national testimony of Israel.

Therefore, we can identify the two olive trees as referring to Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest. Note the following:

1. Both Zerubbabel and Joshua were anointed for the tasks to which God had called them.
2. It is through godly leadership that the Spirit is freed to work in a national sense in Israel. Whenever Israel had godly leaders, they were a testimony to all around. On the other hand, when the leaders were corrupt, the nation was corrupted and the testimony of the Lord was tarnished.

In a more general sense, many interpreters of this passage have made the identification of the two olive trees as being the offices of priest and king. Thus, they interpret the immediate significance being that the trees refer to Zerubbabel and Joshua, and the ultimate significance in that they refer to Christ.