



ZECHARIAH, Being the People of God

Empowered for Service

Lesson 4 Zechariah 4:1-14

FIFTH NIGHT VISION

4:1 “And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep,”

Because all of the visions recorded so far happened on the same night, this is often referred to as the fifth “night vision.” The same angel that Zechariah has been conversing with throughout the book speaks to him here, namely the angel of the Lord. I think Zechariah is seeing his visions in a dream, and this verse provides the transition between the fourth and fifth visions. The angel gets Zechariah’s attention suddenly as if he were being wakened from 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.”

Zechariah does not understand what he sees, but he describes it for the angel. His vision is that of a golden candlestick. It has a bowl on top of it to hold the oil that flows down by gravity through the pipes and burns in its seven lamps. There are seven pipes from the bowl of oil to each of the lamps through which the oil is provided, for a total of forty-nine pipes. This indicates not only an abundant supply of oil for each lamp, but there is often significance to the use of the number seven in the Bible and that seems to be the case in this night vision. The number seven is typically associated with the actions of God. This candlestick is different in appearance than the one kept in the Tabernacle, and later the Temple, in that those were filled by the priests from their resources, while this one is not filled by any human agent, and thus by implications draws from the limitless resources of God.

Although we are not told what the candlestick represents, it seems most probable that it is the light or witness to the world. In Scripture, we often see believers characterized as lights (Matthew 5:14, 16; Luke 12:35; Philippians 2:15), churches characterized as lampstands (Revelation 1:20), witnesses characterized as lampstands (Revelation 11:4), and Jesus characterized as the light of the world (John 1:4-5, 7-9; 3:10; 8:12; 12:35-36, 46). Israel was supposed to be a light to the Gentiles. (Isaiah 42:6). In chapter 3, the Fourth Night Vision, we read about the cleansing of Joshua the High Priest for service. Now, Judah is ready to again be a witness for God.

4:3 “And two olive trees by it, one upon the right *side* of the bowl, and the other upon the left *side* thereof.”

One tree is to the right of the bowl of oil and one is to the left of it. The olive trees produce the oil that powers the candlestick. We have to look to verses 6 and 14 to better understand the vision. Verse 6 will explain that the oil is the Holy Spirit. The olive trees, we are told in verse 14, are the “two anointed ones,” which contextually would point to Zerubbabel (the governor) and Joshua (the high priest), the leaders God has selected for Judah as it becomes a witness or light to the world.

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

As we have seen before, Zechariah reports what he sees, but does not always understand it. God is not trying to hide the message, but reveals it in the way He does to better communicate truth to us.

Zechariah asks the angel for help in understanding the vision. It is debated whether Zechariah is not asking about the candlestick or whether “these” refers to everything he sees.

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.”

The “angel that talked with me” is an expression Zechariah often uses throughout the eight visions he experiences in chapters 1 through 6. We are to understand that throughout these visions, the “angel that talked with me” is always the same angel, and he helps Zechariah understand the visions. The angel is the angel of the Lord (see Zechariah 1:12-13). The angel asks Zechariah whether he knows what the two olive trees represent and Zechariah responds that he does not. The reason for the question is to emphasize that Zechariah (and by application, us) cannot possibly understand the vision without God providing the explanation.

QUESTION

1. By what means can we learn truths about God? Can a person learn truths about God from the scientific method, meditation or introspection?
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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.”

Whereas chapter 3 focused on Joshua the high priest, chapter 4 focuses on Zerubbabel the governor. We must remember that one purpose of Zechariah’s prophecies is to encourage the people to rebuild the Temple. More broadly, he is to encourage them to be the people of God. We should not be surprised that specific parts of Zechariah’s prophecy focus on the political and religious leaders God has chosen to lead his people during this time. Accordingly, God has a message for Zerubbabel that will be delivered through Zechariah. The vision, Zechariah is told explicitly, is a medium for God to convey to Zechariah His message for Zerubbabel. And the message is as true for us as it was for him, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit.” If Zerubbabel is to successfully lead God’s people, his success will not be based on his own strength, but his dependence and yielding to God the Holy Spirit. As the explanation of the vision unfolds, we will see that the oil represents the Holy Spirit, which empowers both Zerubbabel and Joshua. As believers in Christ in this time, we are promised the indwelling permanent presence of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 8:9, 16; Galatians 3:14, 4:6).

QUESTIONS

2. Practically speaking, what is the difference between actions done based on an individual’s own “power” or “might” and actions done by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit?
 3. What are some ways God the Holy Spirit empowers believers?
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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.”

Because of Zerubbabel’s empowerment by the Holy Spirit, he is enabled to lead. The rhetorical question is asked, “Who art thou, O great mountain?” The imagery is that of Zerubbabel being able to remove a mountain. Figuratively, obstacles will fall before Zerubbabel, but this is not merely figurative language. Zerubbabel will be instrumental in the rebuilding of the Temple, which will require stones. He will take the cornerstone (or capstone or headstone) from the mountain and God’s people will cry “Grace, grace unto it,” essentially asking God’s blessing on the endeavor. They recognize that God is the provider of the supplies and that they need God’s blessing on the Temple construction

project. We should note that the promise of Zerubbabel placing the capstone on the Temple is the promise of its completion by his hands. Also, the language of a mountain becoming a plain is also has eschatological implications. Zerubbabel points forward to the future ruler, Jesus Christ, who is pictured in Zechariah 14 as returning and making mountains into plains.

QUESTION

4. How should Christians respond to obstacles? Does this verse teach us that all obstacles fall away for Christians?
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4:8 “Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, **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.”

The prior two verses were words transmitted from the Lord to the angel to Zechariah. Now, Zechariah says he received further words from the Lord. We are not told whether these words come through the angel or not. These are encouraging words for Zechariah to deliver to Zerubbabel, assuring him that he will be able to finish the task he had started some fifteen years earlier. Shortly after the return from exile in about 537/38 B.C., Zerubbabel oversaw the building of the foundation for the Temple. (Ezra 3:8-11, 5:16). God assures him he will see the project through to completion. And when he sees the Temple completed, he will know that Zechariah’s words were truly God’s words. We should not miss that these words are a call to action. God does not say that He will lay the stones down, but that Zerubbabel’s hands will do it, and by implication those under his charge. God always does the parts we cannot do, but expects us to do the parts we can. This prophecy gets fulfilled four years later in 515 B.C.

QUESTION

5. What is the division of labor between God and His people? What are some examples of how this division of labor plays out in daily life?
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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.”

The question asked is, “Who despised the small beginnings?” Some people remembered the Temple as originally constructed by Solomon (Haggai 2:1-5; cf. Ezra 3:12-13) and thought the new construction paled in comparison. God’s response to them is to rejoice. A similar promise is made here to Zerubbabel as was made to Joshua in 3:9:

3:9 “For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone *shall be* seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.”

The Temple will be completed under Zerubbabel’s leadership and God is its architect. The reference here, as in 3:9, to the seven eyes of the Lord is probably a reference to the Holy Spirit, which is consistent with the overall theme in chapter 4 of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (see Revelation 5:6). The reference to running to and fro through the whole earth is an expression of God’s total dominion and omniscience.

QUESTION

6. What should determine our attitude toward a particular ministry in the church? Is it most important that the ministry appears to have a large beginning, or is it something else?
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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?”

Zechariah questions the angel a second time for an explanation of the meaning of the two olive trees. It is interesting that he does not ask for an explanation for the other aspects of the vision. The reason may simply be that Zechariah believed he understood the symbol of the candlestick. It is the two trees and the oil that he is concerned about.

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?”

Zechariah focuses his question, and in so doing, provides us some additional information about what he sees. There are two golden pipes, presumably one pipe for each olive tree, which connect from a branch of each tree to the bowl of oil. In other words, the golden oil that fuels the lamps comes from the trees. Without the intermediary of a human agent obtaining the oil from the trees and filling the bowl, the point is that of an unlimited supply of oil. The resources of God are unlimited and always sufficient for us, and that is why verse 6 is so powerful. Also, note that the oil is “golden,” the very best available.

4:13 “And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these *be*? And I said, No, my lord.”

Again, the angel asks Zechariah whether he understands what he sees. Zechariah will need revelation from God to understand.

4:14 “Then said he, These *are* the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.”

From the context of chapters 3 and 4, the two anointed ones are Joshua and Zerubbabel. In a literal sense, to be anointed means anointed with oil. This makes perfect sense in the vision. These two people are pictured as olive trees from which golden oil flows and fuels the lamps. The olive trees are thus anointed with golden oil. What this means is that the two are anointed with God the Holy Spirit, empowered for the tasks of rebuilding the Temple and for leadership. That the golden oil represents the Holy Spirit is clear from the following:

- 1) Joshua and Zerubbabel are the trees that supply the golden oil that fuels the lamps.
- 2) In 4:6, we are told that the empowering of Joshua and Zerubbabel is by the Holy Spirit.

That the oil flows from the trees to the candlestick indicates that Joshua and Zerubbabel were channels for God the Holy Spirit to work through the nation of Judah. As will become more evident in chapter 6, their working in unity in this picture to serve and lead the nation, empowered by the Holy Spirit, point forward to the priest-king Jesus. These two stand by the Lord who has dominion over the entire planet, and this pictures their service to Him.