

Zechariah 4 • The Work of the Spirit

Introduction

Zechariah's first three visions focused on the work of God the Father, the fourth on the work of God the Son, and now this fifth vision on the work of God the Holy Spirit. These chapters in Zechariah are one of the elegant ways by which Scripture teaches about the tri-unity of the Godhead. It is also a powerful way of teaching how the Godhead is simultaneously working toward the same end and provides believers with a healthy jolt to their faith knowing how God is at work on multiple levels in their life to accomplish what He has called them to participate in. In each of these instances we are shown how the Godhead is engaged simultaneously in both heaven and on earth to fulfill every promise and bring about the completion of God's will with the participation of the humble efforts that meager humans can contribute. Throughout history very great things have been realized from very humble beginnings because of the greater work of the Holy Spirit through them.

¹Then the angel who was speaking with me returned and roused me, as a man who is awakened from his sleep. ²He 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; ³also two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side."

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

⁵So 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."

⁶Then 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. ⁷What 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!"

⁸Also the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 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. ¹⁰For 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."

[Read v.1-10]

Q: Why might Zechariah's awakening sound familiar?

A: This occurred with Daniel (Dan. 8:18; 10:9) as well as the disciples during the Transfiguration (Lk. 9:32).

Point: *If the revelation of such Truth is so overwhelming even to the righteous, how much more for those who reject the Truth?*

Q: Why might it be important that the lampstand is made of gold?

A: Sin is associated with bronze (the things in the outer Temple) and silver with redemption (the things in the Holy Place) – both of which tarnish, but gold is what is found in the Holy of Holies which does not tarnish and represents the eternal and incorruptible. (Note: *In the New Heaven and New Earth in Revelation there is no bronze or silver, only gold.*)

Q: What does the lampstand represent?

A: The Holy Spirit. We know this not only because of other lampstands in Scripture which also describe the Holy Spirit, but because of what is stated in v.6, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit".

Q: Why are the two olive trees described as being on either side of the bowl?

A: Most scholars believe what is being described is the trees emptying their oil into the large bowl serving as a kind of oil reservoir which combines to describe the automatic and spontaneous supply of oil without human agency. (Note in v.12 it states they "empty the golden oil from themselves".) In other words, whereas the golden lampstand in the earthly Temple needed the priesthood to constantly refill it, the heavenly lampstand needs no such attending to.

Q: In the historical context of what was taking place in Zechariah's day, why would the message in v.6-7 be particularly powerful in its focus on Zerubbabel?

A: He is leading everyone in the work of rebuilding the Temple which has been temporarily halted by the numerically superior opposition. In spite of earthly appearances to the contrary, what Zerubbabel and the people of that day are being told is that nothing is going to come about because of the work of their hands but because of being empowered by the Holy Spirit. They will experience success far greater than they are capable of because God is working something far greater than just erecting an earthly building.

Zechariah 4 • The Work of the Spirit, Page 1 of 4

Q: What is it that is being referenced as “O great mountain” in v.7?

A: Scripture repeatedly uses mountains as a metaphor describing what would appear to be insurmountable obstacles. What appears to be insurmountable from a human point of view is no challenge for God to deal with. In fact God says what presently appears to Zerubbabel to be a mountain “*will become a plain*”.

*“Let every valley be lifted up,
And every mountain and hill be made low;
And let the rough ground become a plain,
And the rugged terrain a broad valley;
— Isaiah 40:4*

Application: *How might this apply to every believer of every age? From the worldly perspective believers are always outnumbered and the object of persecution, but through us comes the much greater accomplishments of the Holy Spirit. It is a variation of Gideon, or God’s choosing of Israel, or any number of biblical examples of the victory of a faithful remnant over the unfaithful numerical superiority of the world.*

Q: Why would the promise “he will bring forth the top stone” be particularly powerful to the people of that time?

A: They had barely completed the foundation when the work was brought to a halt and, from their earthly point of view, seemed would never see completion. The top stone is the very last, architecturally ornate stone which crowned the top of the building and signaled its completion. It is a very powerful way of stating that what seems impossible now will surely come to pass.

Q: And when it comes to pass, to what will they attribute success?

A: According to v. 7, God’s grace.

Q: What is the greater spiritual meaning behind this promise for the completion of the earthly Temple?

A: We know that this Temple, although not as physically attractive as the one before it, will actually produce the greater beauty of God’s glory by the fact that it will be visited by the Messiah. It foreshadows the earthly Temple being replaced by the Church as Christ’s Temple, growing into Christ the Head.

And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

— 1 Peter 2:4–5

Q: What is the specific promise being made in v.9-10?

A: Even though work on the Temple was halted and from an earthly perspective seemed to be over, it would be completed in Zerubbabel’s day. This will confirm not only Zerubbabel’s standing before God, but confirm Zechariah’s office as prophet. (“*Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.*”) In effect God is confirming both His work and His Word.

Q: What is meant by the rhetorical question, “For who has despised the day of small things”?

A: Every great work for God began small. In “*the day of small things*” the critics are numerous and often vicious, the resistance stiff. Every worker in God’s Kingdom faces ridicule. In spite of such naysayers, Zerubbabel pressed forward with the help of those of like faithfulness to complete something which during its meager beginnings attracted a lot of ridicule and resistance. Likewise for believers it reflects that it is faithfulness in the small things which leads to being included in the bigger things, so they should not be trying to skip to the end, so to speak, to fulfill the work of their calling.

Q: How does the reference to God’s eyes in v.10 contrast with the entire situation Zerubbabel and the people find themselves in?

A: It is the contrast of the earthly view versus the heavenly. Man’s eyes are limited both in what they see and the overall time frame they see things in; God sees with perfect knowledge all that transpires in both the smallest details and broadest eternal terms. He rejoices in seeing “*the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel*”, the biblical way of stating that everything is coming about in perfect alignment with God’s Word and will.

“For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.”

— 2 Chronicles 16:9

Application: Biblically a lamp is often the metaphor for God’s Word and oil the anointing of the Holy Spirit. When combined with the repeated use of a plumb line to represent something being measured against the standard of God’s Word, we see that Holy Spirit is at work bringing everything into alignment with God’s Word and ways in spite of how it may appear from an earthly perspective. Being more concerned with quality than quantity, it is faithfulness in the small things which lead to accomplishing the greater achievements of the Kingdom.

¹¹Then I said to him, “What are these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand and on its left?” ¹²And 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?”

¹³So he answered me, saying, “Do you not know what these are?”

And I said, “No, my lord.”

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

[Read v.11-14]

Q: What is particularly unique about the olive tree in what it provides? What is the greater spiritual allusion?

A: The oil from an olive tree provides both food and light, two of the most common biblical metaphors for the Word of God. It both feeds and illuminates.

Q: Who exactly are “the two anointed ones”?

A: This issue is the subject of almost endless speculation among scholars leading to a wide spectrum of answers. But let us first and foremost highlight that the phrase “*two anointed ones*” literally refers to two individuals so that we do not have to entertain all the proposals that they represent things other than individuals such as “the Jewish church vs. the Gentile church” or “the Old Covenant vs. the New Covenant”.

The first and most literal answer is that in Zechariah’s time they apply to Zerubbabel and Joshua who are not only in charge of rebuilding the Temple, but have been the repeated subjects of many of the visions provided to Zechariah. Through Zechariah God has clearly made the case that these men, in the pursuit of the work given them in their day, are anointed by God to complete His work.

Zechariah 4 • The Work of the Spirit, Page 3 of 4

It is obvious, however, that it has greater spiritual implications because of the fact that the phenomena of two witnesses is recurrent over and over again throughout Scripture.

Q: What are scriptural examples of “two anointed ones” or a pairing of witnesses?

1. The two angels sent to evaluate Sodom and Gomorrah.
2. Moses and Aaron.
3. Joshua and Caleb.
4. The two men sent by Joshua to spy out the land.
5. Elijah and Elisha.
6. Daniel and Ezekiel.
7. The disciples sent out in two's.
8. Moses and Elijah appearing at the Transfiguration.
9. The two angels appearing at Jesus' empty tomb.
10. The two men on the road to Emmaus.
11. The two angels appearing at Jesus' ascension.
12. Paul and Barnabas/Paul and Silas.
13. The two witnesses in the End Times. (Rev. 11)
14. Others?

Q: How does Zechariah's vision of the two witnesses feeding into the lampstand teach something about the way God works?

A: It seems that although He sees everything that happens on earth, He often chooses to supplement His eyes with those He anoints for a special work as His personal witnesses. What we see repeated throughout history in such pairings foreshadows the ultimate pair of witnesses to come, but also speaks of how He works during every age of history.

Application: *Just as God the Son was depicted in the previous vision in His dual work in both the heavenly and the earthly realms, so here the work of God the Spirit is likewise illuminated. That there is an anointing of the Spirit is sometimes an extension of His role to ensure that God's work is brought to completion.*

Overall Application

What is seen here is a microcosm of Scripture's overall, greater teaching of the role of the Holy Spirit to always point to Christ and see to the completion of His Word and ways. The anointing of the Spirit illuminates God's Word and ways, feeds believers through God's Word and ways, and ultimately empowers the completion of all that is intended by God's Word and ways. Through the Spirit we are ensured of not just operating within God's will but participating in the work of His Kingdom. What the world might see as meager and smallish efforts will realize multiplied results when conforming to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.