

ZECHARIAH

Chapter 4

The Gold Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees

Then the angel who talked with me returned and wakened me, as a man is wakened from his sleep. ² He asked me, “What do you see?” I answered, “I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights. ³ Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.” ⁴ I asked the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” ⁵ He answered, “Do you not know what these are?” “No, my lord,” I replied. ⁶ So 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 Almighty. ⁷ ‘What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘God bless it! God bless it!’” ⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁹ “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands will also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you. ¹⁰ “Who despises the day of small things? Men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.” (These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range throughout the earth.)” ¹¹ Then I asked the angel, “What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?” ¹² Again I asked him, “What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?” ¹³ He replied, “Do you not know what these are?” “No, my lord,” I said. ¹⁴ So he said, “These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth.”

4:1–14 The fifth vision. The Jews are encouraged to rebuild the temple by being reminded of their divine resources. The light from the lampstand in the tabernacle/temple represents the reflection of God’s glory in the consecration and the holy service of God’s people —made possible only by the power of God’s Spirit (see v. 6; the oil, v. 12). This enabling power will equip and sustain Zerubbabel in the rebuilding of the temple (vv. 6–10). And in the performance of their offices, Zerubbabel and Joshua (as representatives of the royal and priestly mediatorial offices) will channel the Spirit’s enablement to God’s people (vv. 11–14). (CSB)

4:1 *wakened me.* On the same night. (CSB)

The angel roused the prophet, who then compared his visionary experience to being suddenly awakened from sleep. (TLSB)

After the prophet had been a witness of the first four visions, he was so overwhelmed by the revelations vouchsafed him that he fell into a trancelike condition, somewhat like Peter and his companions on the Mount of Transfiguration. Cf. Luke 9, 32; Matt. 17, 5. 6. (Kretzmann)

4:2 *What do you see?* See 5:2. The vision here was probably of seven lamps arranged around a large bowl that served as a bountiful reservoir of oil. The “seven channels to the lights” conveyed the oil from the bowl to the lamps. But the text is also open to a different interpretation, namely, that the “channels” are “lips” or “spouts” that hold the wicks of these oil lamps, and that each of these lamps had seven of them (thus a total of 49 flames). In any event, the bowl represents an abundant supply of oil, symbolizing the fullness of God’s power through his Spirit, and the “seven ... seven” represents the abundant light shining from the lamps (seven being the number of fullness or completeness). (CSB)

lampstand. Hbr *menorah*. Its seven branches would have at once reminded Zechariah of an important furnishing kept in the Holy Place of the original tabernacle (Ex 25:31–40) and later in the temple. The lampstand in Zechariah’s vision has several unique features that reveal details about the temple rebuilding project. (TLSB)

bowl on the top. Just how this bowl was positioned on the lampstand is not altogether clear, though its function is. Priests had to fill the temple lampstand with oil each day, but this bowl contained an ever-flowing supply from the two olive trees (v 3). (TLSB)

seven lamps ... seven lips on each. Each of the seven lamps had seven lips into which wicks were placed. Each wick produced a flame, fed by the oil, creating a lampstand of 49 lights in all. Archaeologists have found such seven-lipped lamps. (TLSB)

4:3 *two olive trees.* Cf. Rev 11:4. The two olive trees stand for the priestly and royal offices and symbolize a continuing supply of oil. The two olive branches (v. 12) stand for Joshua the priest (ch. 3) and Zerubbabel from the royal house of David (ch. 4; cf. v. 14). These two leaders were to do God’s work (e.g., on the temple and in the lives of the people) in the power of his Spirit (v. 6). The combination of the priestly and royal lines and their functions points ultimately to the Messianic King-Priest and his offices and functions (cf. 6:13). (CSB)

. Live olive trees supplied the oil needed for lamplight. In v 14 we learn that these olive trees represent the two men holding offices through which God works for His people. (TLSB)

4:4 *these.* The two olive trees of v. 3, as v. 11 makes clear. The answer to the question is postponed until v. 14. (CSB)

Though Zechariah was familiar with the lampstand as such, he failed to understand the meaning of the special features. The angel’s question shows how vital it is for Zechariah (and us) to grasp the meaning of these unique features: the anointed men will continuously serve the people. (TLSB)

4:5 NO, MY LORD – He was surprised that a man of Judah, and he of priestly descent, should not find some meaning in the vision of such a candlestick. (Kretzmann)

4:6 *the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel.* Before the interpreting angel explained the meaning of the vision to Zechariah in vv 10b–14, he spoke to Zerubbabel, the civil governor of Judah under the Persian king (Ezr 2:2; Hg 1:1). (TLSB)

Not by might nor by power. Even though Zerubbabel does not possess the royal might and power that David and Solomon had enjoyed. (CSB)

by my Spirit. Interprets the symbolism of the oil (v. 12). The angel encouraged Zerubbabel to complete the rebuilding of the temple (vv. 7–10) and assured him of the Spirit's enablement. (CSB)

Zerubbabel, burdened with the heavy duty of superintending the rebuilding of the temple, needed a divine reminder to depend on God's Spirit rather than human power and might to get the job done. (TLSB)

The candlestick of the Tabernacle was a type of the congregation of the Old Testament, which was supposed to be a light shining in the darkness of the world. Its oil was a type of the Holy Ghost, and the high priests of the Old Covenant received the strength for the performance of the duties of their office from the Spirit symbolized in the light of the great candlestick. Thus the candlestick of the vision was a type of the Church of God to be established anew in the midst of Judah. Moreover, Zerubbabel, the governor of the people, was to be informed that the great work which he was to perform could be carried on only through the Spirit of the Lord. (Kretzmann)

4:7 *mountain ... level ground.* Faith in the power of God's Spirit can overcome mountainous obstacles. The figurative mountain probably included opposition (Ezr 4:1–5, 24) and the people's unwillingness to persevere (Hag 1:14; 2:1–5). Cf. the same or similar imagery in Isa 40:4; 41:15; 49:11; Mt 17:20; 21:21; Mk 11:23; 1Co 13:2; 2Co 10:4. (CSB)

Symbol of all the difficulties encountered during the temple rebuilding project. (TLSB)

become a plain. The Lord of hosts promises to smooth the way. (TLSB)

capstone. The final stone to be put in place (see Ps 118:22), marking the completion of the restoration temple by Zerubbabel (see v. 9). (CSB)

Final stone in the structure, a figure of speech indicating that Zerubbabel would bring to completion the building project that he is overseeing. (TLSB)

God bless it! God bless it! Repeated for emphasis (see 3:2; see also **note** on Isa 40:1). (CSB)

People would call on the Lord to bless the new temple as if to say, "May it enjoy Your favor and never again be destroyed!" (TLSB)

That is, May God grant grace to this stone and to the building which it represents, so that it may stand forever! But the Temple of Zerubbabel was only a type of the true Temple of Jehovah, the Church of the New Testament. (Kretzmann)

4:9 HANDS OF ZERUBBABEL – Used figuratively. Zerubbabel was in charge of the rebuilding but did not necessarily do the actual work. (TLSB)

laid the foundation. In 537–536 B.C. (Ezr 3:8–11; 5:16). (CSB)

complete it. In 516 (Ezr 6:14–16). (CSB)

The entire situation has a deeper significance than that of a mere earthly temple, namely, that the Lord Jehovah, in the Word that was made flesh, was coming to the temple of His Church. (Kretzmann)

sent me to you. Fourth time this statement is made (2:8, 9, 11). Completing the temple would be a sign to the people that the Lord of hosts had sent Zechariah. (TLSB)

4:10 *day of small things.* Some thought the work on the temple was insignificant (Ezr 3:12; Hag 2:3), but God was in the rebuilding program and, by his Spirit (v. 6), would enable Zerubbabel to finish it. (CSB)

Humanly speaking, Judah's status as a subjected nation and the inferiority of the second temple to the first are well described as "small things." But God was at work preparing the way for great events that would cause people to rejoice. Christ's coming in the flesh is one such great event. (TLSB)

It seemed indeed that the days in which Judah was then living were days of insignificant things, when the entire nation was living in deepest poverty and contempt; yet these days were the forerunners of the most momentous period in the history of the world. (Kretzmann)

plumb line. The meaning of the Hebrew for this phrase is uncertain. If "plumb line" is correct, the text states that the people would rejoice when they saw this implement in Zerubbabel's hand to complete the task. But the Hebrew for these words may also be rendered "separated (i.e., chosen) stone," referring to the capstone of v. 7. (CSB)

Weighted string used to determine if the walls were being built straight up and down. (TLSB)

seven ... eyes. God oversees the whole earth and is therefore in control of the situation in Judah. (CSB)

Interpreting angel resumes his explanation (v 5) of what Zechariah's vision means. Seven lamps, each with seven lips, symbolize the Lord's seven eyes, keeping watch over all the earth (3:9; 9:1). (TLSB)

But if the eyes of God's majesty rest upon this building with such evident joy and satisfaction, it surely must be a Temple of the greatest importance, and the days in which it is being built must not be despised. (Kretzmann)

4:11 LAMPSTANDS – The candlestick was in the center with its arms extended on either side, and next to these arms stood the two olive-trees which were puzzling the prophet. (Kretzmann)

4:12 TWO OLIVE BRANCHES – literally, “ears,” because they were bunched to resemble ears of grain. (Kretzmann)

Branches and pipes from the olive trees on either side of the lampstand (v 3) furnish a continuing supply of fresh oil for the burning lamps. (TLSB)

PIPES...GOLDEN OIL – These were special spouts, or funnels, placed under them, so that the oil was fed directly from the trees into the pipes connecting with the reservoir of the candlestick. (Kretzmann)

4:14 The meaning of the vision is now explained. (CSB)

two ... anointed. Zerubbabel from the royal line of David and Joshua the priest. The oil (v. 12) used in anointing symbolizes the Holy Spirit (v. 6). The combination of ruler and priest points ultimately to the Messianic King-Priest (cf. 6:13; Ps 110; Heb 7). (CSB)

Israelite high priests (Ex 40:13) and kings (2Sm 2:4) were anointed with oil. Zechariah heard from the angel that the high priest Joshua and the governor Zerubbabel had been chosen as leaders to “stand by the Lord of the whole earth.” As leaders, they were to supply the oil to complete the temple rebuilding project. Jesus Christ is the ultimate Anointed One (Messiah), who as Prophet, Priest, and King supplies the oil of joy to all believers (Is 61:3). (TLSB)

They were symbols of Zerubbabel and of Joshua, the temporal and the spiritual leader of the people, respectively, anointed by God for the performance of the work of their office. The meaning for our day and age is clear. The Church is the Lord's candlestick, Matt. 5, 14, and therefore has a great and important duty to fulfill in this world. This duty may not be performed by the power and might of men, but solely and alone through the Spirit of the Lord given to His Church and to its ministers in and through the Gospel. (Kretzmann)

Lord of all the earth. The master of the circumstances in which Zerubbabel and the people found themselves. (CSB)

4:1–14 God used earthly leaders like Joshua and Zerubbabel to accomplish His work in this world. Rebuilding the temple was a most important project for the Jerusalem community of believers, many of whom had returned from exile in Babylon. God continues to use earthly

leaders to build His kingdom of believers, the communion of saints. Yet no pastor, teacher, or layperson can keep the lamp of faith and holy living alight by his or her own efforts. The Holy Spirit gives life and strength to believers through Word and Sacrament to build God's holy temple of living stones (1Pt 2:5). • Holy Spirit, open my eyes to see how You are at work in our world. Make me strong in faith so that I may better serve as one of Your instruments. Amen. (TLSB)