

Zechariah Chapter Four

Vision Five: Lampstand and Two Olive Trees (4.1-14) Divine Privilege

The *fourth* vision (3.1-10) presented the *cleansing* and *restoration* of Israel as a kingdom of priests. In this *fifth* vision, the nation is portrayed as a lampstand divinely supplied with fresh oil. This is Israel, in the exercise of her priesthood, fulfilling her original divine purpose of shining as the light of *witness* and *testimony* for God. Note the practical lesson in the order of the visions. Salvation (cleansing) is followed by testimony (witness).

Describing the Vision (vv.1-3)

v.1: The interpreting angel comes again to 'stir-up' the prophet that he might be in a fit state to receive divine revelation. It is likely the first four visions so exhausted him that he resembled one who was asleep (cp. Daniel 10.9; Luke 9.32). Believers need a similar spiritual awakening. Lives are so busy and soul-consuming that we are spiritually lethargic, being *inattentive* and *insensitive* to the word of God (Romans 13.11). **v.2:** Zechariah saw a golden lampstand with seven lamps. Above the lampstand was a 'bowl' or receptacle for oil from which seven pipes (or spouts) were directed to seven lamps.



Archaeological findings dating to c.600BC in the ancient city of Dothan (2 Kings 6.13) have unearthed lampstands with a single seven-spouted lamp (see left), and some with multiple lamps arranged around the edge of a bowl (see above). This allows for the possibility of the lampstand holding seven or 49 lamps (the Hebrew reads 'seven and seven spouts' which could mean seven spouts for *each* lamp). Either side of the lampstand was an olive tree (**v.3**), the top-most branches of which were laden with olives and supplied 'golden oil' via two 'golden pipes' to the bowl of the lampstand (v.12).



Whilst mention of a lampstand is a reminder of the golden menorah in the tabernacle and temple (Exodus 25.31), this appears to be different, e.g. the 'bowl' and 'olive trees'. This lampstand represents the light giving testimony of the nation of Israel. She is God's chosen witness to give spiritual light to the world by communicating God's word (Deuteronomy 4.5-6; Romans 3.2) and engaging in His worship (Isaiah 43.21). Sadly, the nation failed to proclaim, either by word or action, the truth and character of God (cf. Ezekiel 5.5-8). But, her light shall shine again (see Isaiah 42.6; 43.10-12; 49.6; 60.1-3; 62.1-2). Ultimately, the Light of the world is the Lord Jesus (Luke 1.78; 2.32; John 8.12). In the millennium, Israel shall shine like the sun in full fellowship with their manifested Messiah.

Where is God's lampstand today? The testimony of the nation of Israel was destroyed when they crucified the Light of the world and the temple was raised to the ground (AD70). The church is God's witness to His truth today (Ephesians 5.8; Philippians 2.15). The seven lampstands of Revelation 2-3 *collectively* represent the spiritual unity of the church which is His body, and yet *individually*, the independent testimony of each local church. At the rapture, God's witness shall again be assumed by 144,000 of the nation of Israel. The result of their witness is 'a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations' – a multitude of believers having received the 'testimony of Jesus' (Revelation 12).

Discerning the Teaching: Historically (vv.4-10)

v.4: Zechariah has a healthy interest in understanding the word of God and so asks the angel of the meaning of 'these things'. Zechariah is probably referring to the entire vision (vv.2-3). The angel reveals the significance of the vision in order of appearance and in two phases (vv.4-10; 11-14). **v.5:** The mild rebuke is to remind the prophet that understanding Divine revelation requires spiritual insight (1 Corinthians 2.13-14). *The Scriptures give many obvious details which can be understood, even by unbelievers, but the deeper sense will always escape the natural man (Rossier).*

v.6: The vision contains a message for Zerubbabel, the governor and civil leader of the nation (Haggai 1.1; 2.2). Israel could not be a shining testimony for God without the temple (representing the throne and presence of God), and the temple could not be re-built apart from Divine agency. Zerubbabel may have been greatly discouraged by the spirit of the people and state of the re-building project (Haggai 2.3-4), but success did not depend on human resources. It is not by 'might' or 'power', words that together speak of military power, human wealth, physical strength and mental ability. The temple must be built by the exercise of supernatural power – 'my Spirit' – i.e. the **oil!** *Dennett: It is only the man of faith who can labour on amid discouragements, who can trust to a power not seen to uphold and prosper, and is assured that the Spirit, who is invisible in His working to the natural eye, is even more mighty than manifested power.*

When will we learn the lesson? Great works of God are always attended by the power of the Spirit. For example: creation (Genesis 1.2), crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 15.8), labouring in God's house (Exodus 28.3; 31.3), delivering the nation (Judges 3.10; 6.34), or powerful preaching (Ezekiel 2.2). In Acts we read of Peter *filled* with the Spirit, Philip *led* by the Spirit, Agabus *speaking* by the Spirit, Saul *separated* by the Spirit and *wisdom* imparted by the Spirit. This is normal Christian living. AW Tozer: *The Spirit filled life is not a special, deluxe edition of Christianity. It is part and parcel of the total plan of God for His people.* Surely we desire our witness for God to flourish? We therefore need believers who are Spirit driven and Spirit filled. See Ephesians 5.18. With what are we filled? The world? Self? Materialism? Sport? Family?

v.7: God's *power* (v.6) invokes a series of *promises* (vv.7-10). The 'mountain' is a metaphor for the overwhelming and insurmountable obstacles that prevented completing the temple (cf. Ezra 4-5). But the mountain would be levelled by the power of the Spirit, becoming a 'plain' (large, level, open land) before Zerubbabel. In fact, he would have the privilege of setting the 'headstone' (capstone) of the temple in its place, thus signifying its completion (cf. 1 Peter 2.7). This would be accompanied by the cheers of the people (cf. Ezra 3.11-13) and cries of 'grace' (Ezra 6.16) which may be a description of the beauty of the finished structure or a prayerful request for God's continued gracious favour to rest upon it. **v.9:** Thus, not only had the hands of Zerubbabel laid the foundation of the house (*seventeen* years previous), but he would also finish the building – a prophecy which was fulfilled in 516BC (*three* years hence, Ezra 6.14-16). The fulfilment of this prophecy would be sure evidence that the Lord had sent His messenger to Zechariah, i.e. the Angel of the Lord (cp. 2.8-9, 11). He will consummate God's plans.

v.10: Some in Israel, judging by outward appearance and human estimation, were scornful and contemptuous of the work in Jerusalem. They called it a 'day of small things' (Haggai 2.3). It might appear as such to some in Israel, but God was at work. But from the divine standpoint, this was the start of great things on earth. Little is much when God is in it! 'The seven shall rejoice when they see the plummet in the hands of Zerubbabel' (MacArthur translation). 'The seven' (definite article) refers to the 'seven eyes' of 3.9. The eyes of Divine omniscience sweep the earth in the interest and care of the Lord's people. God has His eye upon the remnant in Jerusalem and indeed rejoices to see the 'plummet' (symbol of building and construction) in the hand of Zerubbabel. God was taking pleasure in the consummation of His purpose. God was rejoicing and so should His people. Why so much delight over something so 'small'? This temple and this governor foreshadowed a greater temple and Governor to come (6.12-13)! Let us not be scornful of *apparent* small things in which God is at work. Many would disparage a baby laid in a manger born to a peasant maid in Bethlehem as a 'small thing'. Many today would speak in derisory terms of a small company of Christians gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus. 'Tread it down' (despise) if you like, but this is God's delight – a little oasis of divine order and honour.

Discerning the Teaching: Prophetically (vv.11-14)

v.11: Zechariah requests explanation of the two olive trees (called 'olive branches' in **v.12**) on either side of the lampstand. The word 'branches' literally means 'ears', usually ears full of grain. It seems that two especially fruitful branches full of olives were abundantly supplying 'golden oil' through 'two golden pipes' to the lampstand. 'Golden oil', describing colour and value, is a beautiful picture of the Spirit of God (cf. v.6). Not only does it suggest His deity and glory, but oil is a substance used for *healing* (Psalm 23.5; Luke 10.34), *lighting* (Luke 12.12; John 14.26; 1 Corinthians 2.13-14) and *warmth* (John 14.26; Acts 9.31). It was also used for *anointing* (1 John 2.27) and is associated with *joy* – an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit (Hebrews 1.9; Galatians 5.22). This is suggestive of an unlimited and abundant supply of the Holy Spirit's power to build the temple and is prophetic of that yet to be poured out upon the nation (Joel 2.28-29).

v.13: The two trees 'are the two anointed ones' or 'sons of (fresh) oil' (**v.14**). Both *kings* (1 Samuel 16.13) and *priests* (Leviticus 8.12) were anointed with oil symbolising that God would endow them with His Spirit. The two trees are therefore the *priestly* and *kingly* offices in Israel, represented by Joshua and Zerubbabel. It was these two offices that would maintain the lampstand of Israel in the power of the Spirit. Their responsibility was to direct the nation under God in its *spiritual* and *civil* affairs (involving the building and regulating of the temple), that it might be a proper and effective witness to the nations of the earth. They 'stand by the Lord of all the earth' – a position of great privilege and nearness (1 Kings 22.19) – constantly ready to act at His direction and in accordance with His word and will. Testimony will only be maintained by *spiritual* individuals *near* to the Lord.

The 'Lord of the whole earth' suggests a greater *prophetic* thought (Micah 4.1, 13). Both Joshua and Zerubbabel speak ultimately of Christ who combines the offices of King (rule) and Priest (cleansing). Israel shall yet shine as a light for God but only in their close association with Him. *Isaiah 60.1-3: Arise, shine; for thy light is come, And the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And gross darkness the people: But the LORD shall arise upon thee, And his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, And kings to the brightness of thy rising.* Christ will be Israel's limitless source of the Spirit's power for witness and testimony. *Isaiah 60.19: The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light and thy God thy glory.*