

Zechariah Chapter 4 — The Golden Lampstand and God's Spirit

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Zechariah Chapter 4 contains one of the most memorable statements in the entire Old Testament:

“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit.”

The people of Judah had returned from exile, but the work before them was difficult.

The temple still needed to be completed.

Opposition remained.

Resources were limited.

Discouragement was real.

Zerubbabel, the governor, had begun the work, but the task looked overwhelming.

Into that setting, God gave Zechariah a vision of a golden lampstand supplied continually with oil from two olive trees.

The message was unmistakable:

God's work must be accomplished in God's power.

Human strength was not enough.

Political influence was not enough.

Financial resources were not enough.

Natural ability was not enough.

What Zerubbabel needed was the empowering presence of the Spirit of God.

This chapter teaches us that when God calls His people to accomplish something, He also supplies what is necessary to complete it.

I. THE VISION OF THE GOLDEN LAMPSTAND

Zechariah 4:1

“Then the angel who talked with me came back and woke me, as one is awakened from sleep.”

Zechariah had been receiving a series of visions.

Now the interpreting angel returned and awakened him.

This does not necessarily mean that Zechariah had been physically sleeping. The language may describe his condition after the intensity of the previous vision.

He was brought back to full alertness so that he could receive another message from God.

Cross References in Simple American English

Daniel 8:18 — Daniel fell into a deep condition during a vision, and the angel touched him and helped him stand.

Daniel 10:9 — Daniel fell into a deep sleep-like state while receiving a revelation.

Ephesians 5:14 — Believers are called to wake from spiritual sleep and live in the light of Christ.

Spiritual Lesson

There are times when God's people need to be spiritually awakened.

Application

It is possible to become spiritually dull even while surrounded by spiritual things.

Ask God to awaken your heart to hear His Word clearly.

Zechariah 4:2

“He asked me, ‘What do you see?’ I replied, ‘I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl on top, and seven lamps on it, with seven pipes to the lamps.’”

Zechariah saw a golden lampstand.

This image would remind Jewish readers of the lampstand in the tabernacle and temple.

The lampstand represented light.

But this lampstand was unusual.

It had a bowl above it and a system of pipes feeding oil into the lamps.

The picture is one of continual supply.

The lamps did not depend upon repeated human effort to keep them burning.

Oil was being provided constantly.

Cross References in Simple American English

Exodus 25:31 — God commanded Israel to make a lampstand from pure gold for the tabernacle.

Revelation 1:12 — John saw golden lampstands representing churches.

Revelation 4:5 — Seven lamps of fire burned before God's throne, symbolizing the fullness of the Spirit of God.

Key Truth

Light requires continual supply.

Application

The believer cannot shine spiritually through yesterday's strength.

We need continual dependence upon God.

Zechariah 4:3

“There are also two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on the left.”

Two olive trees stood beside the lampstand.

Olive oil was commonly used to fuel lamps.

Instead of workers repeatedly pouring oil into the lampstand, the trees themselves appear to provide the supply.

This is a picture of uninterrupted provision.

God was showing that His work would not depend upon human resources alone.

Cross References in Simple American English

Revelation 11:4 — Two witnesses are described as two olive trees and two lampstands standing before the Lord.

Psalms 52:8 — David compared himself to a flourishing olive tree in God's house.

Romans 11:17 — Paul used the olive tree as a picture connected with God's covenant blessings.

Spiritual Lesson

God does not command His people to serve Him without providing spiritual resources.

Application

If God has called you to a task, depend upon His supply rather than your own strength.

Zechariah 4:4

“I asked the angel who talked with me, ‘What are these, my lord?’”

Zechariah did not understand the vision.

Once again, he asked.

This pattern appears repeatedly in his visions.

He did not pretend to know what he did not know.

Cross References in Simple American English

Daniel 12:8 — Daniel heard a revelation but did not understand it, so he asked for explanation.

Ezekiel 37:3 — Ezekiel admitted that God alone knew the answer to what he was seeing.

Revelation 7:13 — John was questioned about the meaning of a vision and received an explanation.

Principle

A teachable heart is willing to ask questions.

Application

Do not be embarrassed when you do not understand a difficult passage.

Study.

Pray.

Ask.

Seek understanding.

Zechariah 4:5

“He answered, ‘Don’t you know what these are?’ And I said, ‘No, my lord.’”

The angel's question emphasizes that the vision required interpretation.

Zechariah responded honestly.

“No, my lord.”

Spiritual understanding begins with humility.

Cross References in Simple American English

Acts 8:31 — The Ethiopian official admitted that he needed someone to help him understand Scripture.

John 3:9 — Nicodemus asked Jesus how the things He described could happen.

Daniel 8:16 — Daniel needed angelic explanation to understand what he had seen.

Spiritual Lesson

God teaches those who are willing to admit their need.

II. NOT BY MIGHT, BUT BY MY SPIRIT

Zechariah 4:6

“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.”

This is the central verse of the chapter.

Zerubbabel faced a massive task.

The temple needed to be rebuilt.

Opposition had slowed the work.

Resources were limited.

Humanly speaking, the project looked too difficult.

God's answer was not:

Work harder.

Find a larger army.

Gain more political influence.

Become more powerful.

Instead, God said:

“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit.”

The word **might** can refer to collective strength, armies, resources, or human forces.

The word **power** can refer to individual strength or ability.

God was telling Zerubbabel that the completion of the temple would happen through divine empowerment.

Cross References in Simple American English

Psalms 20:7 — Some trust in chariots and horses, but God's people trust in the name of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:27 — God often chooses what appears weak in order to shame what appears strong.

2 Corinthians 12:9 — God's power is made perfect in human weakness.

Key Principle

God's work cannot be accomplished merely through human strength.

Application

You may have talent.

You may have education.

You may have resources.

You may have experience.

But none of those can replace dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

Zechariah 4:7

“What are you, mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’”

The **mighty mountain** represents overwhelming opposition.

To Zerubbabel, the obstacles looked like a mountain.

To God, they were nothing.

God promised that the mountain would become level ground.

Then Zerubbabel would bring out the capstone.

The capstone represented completion.

The same man who had started the temple would see it finished.

And when it was completed, the people would shout:

“Grace, grace to it!”

Why grace?

Because everyone would recognize that the work had been completed by God's favor and power.

Cross References in Simple American English

Isaiah 40:4 — God promises that mountains and hills will be made low and rough places made smooth.

Isaiah 45:2 — God promised to go before His servant and level obstacles.

Psalms 118:22 — The rejected stone became the chief cornerstone.

Spiritual Lesson

What looks like a mountain to us is not a mountain to God.

Application

Do not judge an obstacle only by its size.

Judge it in light of God's power.

Zechariah 4:8

“Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying:”

The vision now becomes a direct prophetic promise.

God was not leaving Zerubbabel with a vague encouragement.

He was about to give a specific assurance.

Cross References in Simple American English

Ezra 3:10 — Zerubbabel and the people had already begun laying the temple foundation.

Haggai 2:4 — God told Zerubbabel and the people to be strong and continue working because He was with them.

Philippians 1:6 — God is faithful to continue and complete the good work He begins.

Principle

God's promises give strength for difficult assignments.

Zechariah 4:9

“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you.”

This is a direct promise of completion.

Zerubbabel had begun the temple.

Zerubbabel would finish it.

The project would not die halfway through.

God's promise guaranteed the outcome.

The completion of the temple would confirm the truth of the prophetic message.

Cross References in Simple American English

Haggai 2:9 — God promised that the glory of the rebuilt temple would be great.

Nehemiah 6:15 — Another major rebuilding project in Jerusalem was later completed despite opposition.

John 17:4 — Jesus spoke of completing the work the Father had given Him.

Key Truth

When God truly begins a work according to His purpose, He is able to bring it to completion.

Application

Do not abandon an assignment simply because progress is slow.

Faithfulness often requires perseverance.

Zechariah 4:10

“Who dares despise the day of small things? These seven—the eyes of the Lord that range throughout the earth—will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.”

Some people looked at the rebuilding project and saw something small.

Compared with Solomon's temple, the new temple appeared unimpressive.

It was easy to become discouraged.

God warned them not to despise small beginnings.

The **plumb line** represented construction in progress.

God rejoiced to see the work moving forward.

The seven eyes represent the fullness of God's knowledge and observation.

He sees everything.

Cross References in Simple American English

2 Chronicles 16:9 — The eyes of the Lord search throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are devoted to Him.

Amos 7:7 — Amos saw the Lord standing with a plumb line, representing careful measurement.

Job 8:7 — Though a beginning may be small, the end can become very great.

Key Principle

Small does not mean insignificant.

Application

Never despise:

A small ministry.

A small church.

A small beginning.

A small opportunity.

A small act of obedience.

God often begins great works in small ways.

III. THE TWO OLIVE TREES

Zechariah 4:11

“Then I asked the angel, ‘What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?’”

Zechariah now returned to the two olive trees.

He understood that they were important but still wanted a clear interpretation.

Cross References in Simple American English

Revelation 11:3 — God appoints two witnesses to serve Him during a future period of judgment.

1 Kings 6:23 — Olive wood was used in the temple.

Exodus 25:32 — The lampstand in the tabernacle had branches extending from its sides.

Spiritual Lesson

God uses symbols to communicate spiritual truth, but the symbols must be interpreted in context.

Zechariah 4:12

“And again I asked, ‘What are these two olive branches that pour out golden oil through two golden pipes?’”

The olive branches were directly supplying oil.

The picture emphasizes continuous provision.

Oil is frequently associated in Scripture with consecration and anointing.

In this vision, the oil most naturally points toward God's Spirit supplying what is necessary for His work.

Cross References in Simple American English

Exodus 27:20 — Pure olive oil was used to keep the lamp burning continually.

Psalms 133:2 — Oil poured upon Aaron pictured consecration and blessing.

James 5:14 — Oil appears in connection with prayer and ministry.

Key Truth

God's servants require continual spiritual supply.

Application

Ministry cannot survive on past anointing.

We need fresh dependence upon God.

Zechariah 4:13

“He replied, ‘Don’t you know what these are?’ I said, ‘No, my lord.’”

Again, Zechariah admits that he does not know.

His humility remains consistent.

Cross References in Simple American English

Mark 4:13 — Jesus questioned His disciples when they did not understand a parable.

Luke 24:25 — Jesus corrected His disciples for being slow to understand what Scripture had revealed.

John 16:12 — Jesus told His disciples that there were things they were not yet ready to understand.

Spiritual Lesson

Understanding often comes gradually.

Application

Do not become discouraged if you do not understand everything immediately.

Continue studying.

Zechariah 4:14

“So he said, ‘These are the two anointed ones who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.’”

The two olive trees represent **two anointed ones**.

In the immediate historical context, these most naturally point to **Joshua the high priest** and **Zerubbabel the governor**.

Joshua represented priestly leadership.

Zerubbabel represented royal or civil leadership from the line of David.

Both had been appointed by God for the restoration of His people.

Together they served under the authority of “**the Lord of the whole earth**.”

Cross References in Simple American English

Revelation 11:4 — Two witnesses are described as olive trees standing before the Lord of the earth.

Deuteronomy 19:15 — Two witnesses establish reliable testimony.

1 Samuel 16:13 — David was anointed, and the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him.

Christ Connection

Joshua and Zerubbabel together point forward to Jesus Christ.

Joshua represents priesthood.

Zerubbabel represents royal authority.

Jesus fulfills both.

He is our great High Priest.

He is also the King from David's line.

Application

God's servants do not stand in their own authority.

They stand before the Lord of the whole earth.

IV. MAJOR THEMES OF ZECHARIAH 4

1. The Holy Spirit Provides the Power

The dominant message is unmistakable:

“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit.”

God's work requires God's power.

2. God Provides Continual Supply

The lampstand was continually supplied with oil.

God does not call His servants to live on empty spiritual reserves.

3. Obstacles Are Not Final

The mountain would become level ground.

No obstacle is greater than God's ability.

4. God Completes His Purposes

Zerubbabel began the temple and would finish it.

God's promise guaranteed completion.

5. Small Beginnings Matter

God warned His people not to despise small things.

What looks insignificant to humans may be important in God's plan.

6. God Sees the Whole Earth

His eyes range throughout the earth.

Nothing escapes His attention.

7. God Uses Anointed Servants

Joshua and Zerubbabel had distinct roles, but both served God's purpose.

V. CHRIST IN ZECHARIAH 4

Zechariah 4 points toward Christ in several important ways.

1. Christ Is the Perfect Spirit-Anointed Servant

Jesus carried out His ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Messiah would not accomplish God's work by mere human force.

2. Christ Is the True Light

The lampstand represents light.

Jesus declared:

“I am the light of the world.”

He is the ultimate source of spiritual light.

3. Christ Is Both Priest and King

Joshua represented the priesthood.

Zerubbabel came from David's royal line.

Jesus combines both roles perfectly.

He is Priest.

He is King.

4. Christ Completes the Father's Work

Zerubbabel would finish what he began.

Jesus could say to the Father that He had finished the work given to Him.

At the cross He declared:

“It is finished.”

VI. A THEOLOGY OF “NOT BY MIGHT”

Zechariah 4:6 does not teach that human effort is unnecessary.

Zerubbabel still had to build.

Workers still had to labor.

Stones still had to be placed.

Leadership still mattered.

Planning still mattered.

The point is not:

Do nothing and wait for God.

The point is:

Do God's work in dependence upon God's power.

There is a great difference.

Human responsibility and divine empowerment work together.

We labor.

God supplies the strength.

We obey.

God produces the fruit.

We serve.

God receives the glory.

VII. THE DANGER OF SELF-RELIANCE

One of the greatest dangers in Christian service is replacing dependence upon God with dependence upon human ability.

We can begin to trust in:

Money.

Education.

Technology.

Organization.

Influence.

Buildings.

Talent.

Personality.

Programs.

Political power.

None of these things is necessarily wrong.

But none of them can replace the Holy Spirit.

A church can possess tremendous resources and still lack spiritual power.

A preacher can possess great communication ability and still lack spiritual effectiveness.

A ministry can appear successful outwardly and still accomplish little of eternal value.

Zechariah 4 reminds us:

God's work must be done God's way through God's power.

VIII. DO NOT DESPISE SMALL THINGS

Zechariah 4:10 is especially important for discouraged believers.

We naturally admire what is large.

Large crowds.

Large churches.

Large ministries.

Large budgets.

Large influence.

But God does not measure significance the way humans do.

A small beginning can become part of a great work.

Moses began with a shepherd's staff.

David began with sheep.

The disciples were a small group.

Bethlehem was a small town.

Jesus was laid in a manger.

Never despise something merely because it appears small.

The question is not:

How large is it?

The question is:

Is God in it?

IX. KEY LESSONS FROM ZECHARIAH 4

1. God's work is accomplished through His Spirit.

Human strength cannot replace divine power.

2. God supplies what His servants need.

The olive trees continually supplied the lampstand.

3. No obstacle is too great for God.

Mountains become level ground before His purposes.

4. God finishes what He begins.

Zerubbabel would complete the temple he started.

5. Grace deserves the glory.

The completed work would produce shouts of:

“Grace, grace!”

6. Small beginnings should not be despised.

God often works through seemingly insignificant beginnings.

7. God sees everything.

His eyes range throughout the whole earth.

8. God uses different servants for different roles.

Joshua and Zerubbabel served in different capacities but toward the same divine purpose.

X. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Zechariah 4 challenges us to ask:

Am I depending upon my own strength more than God's Spirit?

What mountain am I allowing to intimidate me?

Have I become discouraged because progress seems small?

Am I tempted to quit something God has called me to finish?

Do I give God the glory when He brings success?

Am I trying to serve God without continual spiritual dependence?

Have I despised a small ministry, opportunity, church, or beginning?

Do I truly believe God can finish what He has begun?

XI. QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What did Zechariah see in the vision?

Answer

He saw a golden lampstand with seven lamps, a bowl, pipes supplying the lamps, and two olive trees beside it.

Question 2

What did the lampstand symbolize?

Answer

It pictured God's light and the work sustained by the continual supply of His Spirit.

Question 3

What is the central message of Zechariah 4:6?

Answer

God's work is accomplished not through mere human strength or resources, but through the power of His Spirit.

Question 4

Who was Zerubbabel?

Answer

He was the governor of Judah and a descendant of David who led the rebuilding of the temple.

Question 5

What did the great mountain represent?

Answer

It represented the major obstacles and opposition standing before Zerubbabel and the rebuilding work.

Question 6

What would happen to the mountain?

Answer

God promised that it would become level ground before Zerubbabel.

Question 7

What did the capstone represent?

Answer

It represented the completion of the temple.

Question 8

Why would people shout “Grace, grace”?

Answer

Because the completed work would demonstrate that God's grace and power had made it possible.

Question 9

What promise did God give Zerubbabel?

Answer

The same hands that laid the foundation of the temple would also finish it.

Question 10

What does it mean not to despise the day of small things?

Answer

It means we should not treat small beginnings or limited progress as insignificant when God is working through them.

Question 11

What do the seven eyes represent?

Answer

They symbolize the complete knowledge and watchfulness of God over the whole earth.

Question 12

Who were the two anointed ones?

Answer

In the immediate context, they most naturally represent Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor.

Question 13

How do Joshua and Zerubbabel point toward Christ?

Answer

Joshua represents the priestly role and Zerubbabel represents the royal Davidic line. Jesus perfectly fulfills both offices as Priest and King.

Question 14

What is the central lesson of Zechariah 4?

Answer

God accomplishes His work through the power of His Spirit, removes obstacles, values faithful beginnings, and enables His servants to complete the work He gives them.

XII. FINAL THOUGHT

Zechariah Chapter 4 begins with a lampstand and ends with two servants standing before the Lord of all the earth.

Between those pictures comes one of the greatest principles of Christian service:

“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit.”

Zerubbabel had a temple to build.

He had opposition to face.

He had limited resources.

He had discouraged people.

He had every reason, humanly speaking, to believe the task was too great.

But God did not tell him to focus on the mountain.

God told him to depend upon the Spirit.

The mountain would fall.

The temple would be completed.

The capstone would be placed.

And the people would shout:

“Grace, grace!”

That is how God's work should end.

Not with praise for human greatness.

Not with celebration of human power.

But with recognition of divine grace.

So when the task seems too large:

Depend upon the Spirit.

When the opposition looks like a mountain:

Trust God to level it.

When the beginning seems small:

Do not despise it.

When progress feels slow:

Keep working.

When God brings completion:

Give Him the glory.

The lamp can continue burning because God continues supplying the oil.

Key Verse

**“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord Almighty. —
Zechariah 4:6**

Key Phrase

God's work must be accomplished through God's Spirit, for God's glory.