

Jesus came as the promised Davidide (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 1:26-33, 67-75), and the implication was that the time had come for the Lord's house to be built, even as His presence meant that the prophesied kingdom was at hand. True, the second temple had stood on Mount Moriah for five hundred years, but at the time it was being erected Zechariah had declared that that structure didn't constitute the everlasting divine dwelling promised in the Davidic Covenant. The Branch of David would build that house at His coming.

Yahweh had stipulated that the son of the covenant would build His house, but the prophet Isaiah revealed that the Davidic seed would also somehow form the cornerstone of that true sanctuary (cf. 28:16 with Matthew 21:33-42; Acts 4:8-12; Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Peter 2:4-7). The son of David would build the Lord's house, but He would build it upon Himself (Matthew 16:13-18).

Thus the point: If it is true that Jesus came into the world to establish His Father's kingdom by a great work of redemption, recovery, and renewal, and that by doing so He would restore all things to God, thereby building Yahweh's "house," then it was equally true that He is the true temple. He could not build His Father's dwelling place without also being the chief cornerstone promised by Isaiah.

Jesus is the fulfilled temple – the fulfillment of sacred space as the realm of divine-human interaction and communion. Beyond the Incarnation itself, this is affirmed in various titles and imagery that implicate not only Christ's person, but also the work He came to accomplish on His Father's behalf. Given John's emphasis on the temple theme as a key point of Christological fulfillment, it's not at all surprising that his gospel is rich in these titles and images.

- 1) The first of those is John's association of Christ with the principle of *light*. The introduction to his gospel account emphasizes this as a central theme, and he refers to it repeatedly throughout its length (1:1-9, 3:1-21, 5:33-36, 8:12, 9:1-5 with 9:35-41, 11:1-10, 12:20-46). Being true deity, Jesus is the true light that has come into the world (cf. 1 John 1:5) – a world characterized by the darkness of alienation and unbelief. And interjecting Himself as light into the darkness, He came to illumine the world of men; Jesus came to those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death in order to illumine their way and thereby set their feet on the path of life and peace (ref. Luke 1:76-79; cf. also Isaiah 9:1-7 with Matthew 4:12-17).

Starting again from the biblical premise that Jesus' person and work constitute the fulfillment of all the Scriptures – a truth that the gospel writers labored to demonstrate – one would expect that John's emphasis on the relationship between the Savior and light would reflect back upon the Old Testament's revelation of Yahweh's promised salvation. Once again, this is precisely the case. In particular, that arena of revelation falls into two broad categories: light as expressing God's *creational* presence, and light as expressing His *relational* presence.

With respect to the former, the place to begin is the creation account itself, for it is there that the concept of light is first introduced. The Scripture first presents the created earth as uninhabitable (“formless”) and uninhabited (“void”), which qualities it closely associates with *darkness* (Genesis 1:1-2). The indication from the outset is that God’s goal for His creative work was to produce an ordered habitation filled with life. And, just as darkness expressed the initial creative state of chaos and emptiness, so light was to be the first point of ordering and filling; *the entrance of light was to be the foundation for the emergence of life.*

This was certainly true in the realm of the physical creation, but, more importantly, it would also mark the spiritual, **new** creation. That is, what was true of the first creation would also be true of the second creation that is the renewal of all things in connection with the New Adam.

- Thus the priest Zacharias associated the day of salvation – that is, the emergence of life out of death – with the dawning of the “*sunrise from on high,*” and Simeon saw in Yahweh’s salvation “*a light to illumine the Gentiles*” as well as the radiant glory of the sons of Israel (Luke 1:76-79, 2:27-32).
- Similarly, John could proclaim that the One who Himself is light and life has come to shine upon men in order to give them the light that both brings and is itself true life (John 1:1-4, 8:12).
- Taking up these themes of light and life, Paul showed the Corinthians how their operation in the first, physical creation prefigured the fulfillment to come in the new creation. The same God who, in the beginning, had commanded light to shine forth and vanquish the darkness of the chaotic creation (Genesis 1:3) was now causing the light of the renewing knowledge of His full glory in Jesus Christ to rise in and dispel the spiritual darkness that fills the hearts of men (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 with 3:1-18).

The concept of light is central to God’s creative presence, but inasmuch as both the first and new creations find their ultimate purpose in divine-human relationship, it’s not at all surprising that the Scripture makes light a key theme in God’s *relational* presence. This, too, is evident in the first verses of Genesis which present the Spirit of God hovering (“brooding”) over the face of the deep in the context of the primordial dark and empty chaos of the newly established earth. Even before any living thing existed, God was present in the midst of His creation. And having consummated His creative work in man, His image-son, God took Adam and placed him in His own garden-sanctuary that he should dwell with Him in perfect communion (Genesis 2:1-15). Determined by that intimacy, Adam’s race was to carry the divine presence and rule throughout the entire earth.

- Later, when the time had come to redeem His covenant “son” according to His promise to Abraham (Genesis 15:12-14), Yahweh brought darkness upon the whole subjugating nation while causing His people to dwell in unceasing light (Exodus 10:21-23). So also, after accomplishing His great redemption, Yahweh led His “son” – as a shepherd leads his sheep – by the light of His own perpetual presence manifested in a luminescent pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:17-22).
- And when He had made His covenant with Abraham’s seed, the Lord established His presence in Israel’s midst by His Shekinah – His *glory-cloud* – in the Holy of Holies. And outside the veil in the Holy Place, the perpetual light of the lampstand testified that the endless day of Yahweh’s dwelling place was the result of the radiant splendor of His presence and not the luminaries of the natural creation (cf. Exodus 25:31-37, 27:20-21, 40:33-38).
- Then, in the day of judgment, the Lord withdrew His presence from the covenant people; His Shekinah departed the sanctuary in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 10:1-11:23), and soon after He brought a desolating army against the city and sanctuary where He had put His name. Though the temple was later rebuilt by the restored Judean remnant, the Lord’s glory-cloud remained painfully absent from it; *the second temple was merely a lifeless religious edifice whose empty existence served to punctuate the enduring promise of the return of Yahweh’s glory in His Servant, the appointed “messenger of the covenant”* (Haggai 2:1-9; Malachi 3:1-4).

The light of the divine presence would return only in the One who is the “true light” that enlightens the whole world. And now having entered the world of men, everyone who beholds this light and comes to Him becomes himself a “son of light” (John 1:4-13, 3:14-21, 8:12, 11:5-10, 12:23-36). These words of fulfillment, proclaimed by the manifest, incarnate Light, hearkened back to the Lord’s visionary revelation to Zechariah.

Along with Haggai, Zechariah was Yahweh’s prophet in Jerusalem shortly after the first Judean exiles returned from Babylon. During the time of the temple reconstruction he was given a mysterious vision in which he saw a lampstand – like the one God had specified for His sanctuary – burning brightly and being filled with a perpetual supply of golden oil flowing from two olive trees standing on either side of it (4:1-14). Mystified by what he saw, Zechariah sought an explanation from the attending angel. That explanation, clear enough for the Lord’s Israelite prophet, becomes comprehensible to the contemporary reader only when the vision and its meaning are considered within the historical and prophetic context in which they were disclosed.

The **historical context** for Zechariah's vision was the frustrated circumstance of the restored exiles as they sought to rebuild the temple. They undertook that monumental project immediately after returning to Jerusalem, but soon found their efforts thwarted by outside opposition (ref. Ezra 3-4). Added to that was the discouragement of many of the Jewish laborers who lamented over the inglorious quality of the emerging structure in comparison with Solomon's temple (Haggai 2:1-3).

Opposition and discouragement plagued the rebuilding project, and in the second year of the Persian king Darius it was halted altogether. It was during that time that Yahweh sent His prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the restored exiles to resume and complete the construction of the second temple (cf. Ezra 4:24 with Haggai 1:1 and Zechariah 1:1). Haggai's prophecy is explicit in this regard (ref. 1:1-2:4), but the same intention lay behind Zechariah's prophetic ministry. *Both prophets were called to strengthen the resolve of the builders by affirming to them the Lord's commitment to bring fruition to their labors.*

The recovered exiles were to give themselves to their task with the confident assurance that Yahweh was again in their midst, even as He had been at the founding of the covenant nation (cf. Haggai 1:13-14, 2:4-5). He would secure the successful outcome they sought; the temple would be completed (Ezra 6:14-15). And, however inglorious it may have appeared to the disillusioned Israelite remnant, they could be assured that the Lord would convey His glory upon this latter sanctuary. It, too, would know the divine glory, but not in the way the tabernacle and first temple had.

This is where the larger **prophetic context** comes into play. Those former sanctuaries had known Yahweh's glory in His luminous Shekinah, *but the latter sanctuary would enjoy a superior glory associated with the ingathering of the precious value of the nations* (Haggai 2:5-9). Haggai's contemporary Zechariah revealed further that that human ingathering involved the convergence of men from the four corners of the earth to contribute to the Davidic Branch's work of constructing the Lord's sanctuary – a holy and enduring dwelling that He would build for Yahweh as His priest-king (6:9-15).

With these historical and prophetic details in place, the meaning of Zechariah's vision and its contribution to the subject at hand – namely, the theme of light as it speaks to the fulfillment of sacred space in Christ – becomes clear and profoundly glorious.

- As noted previously, in his vision Zechariah saw a lampstand like the temple menorah with two olive trees, one on either side. When asked by the angel if he understood the meaning of what he was seeing, the prophet confessed his perplexity.

- The angel responded that this was Yahweh’s word to *Zerubbabel*, leader of the restored exiles and overseer of the building project (Ezra 2:1, 3:1-8; Haggai 1:12-2:23). And His word was this: “*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts*” (4:1-6). However great the obstacle to the work of building the Lord’s house, it would fall before the effectual work of His Spirit. The top stone would indeed be laid, and at that climax the shout of praise would go up: “*Grace, grace to it!*” (4:7). Zerubbabel’s hand had begun the work, and the Spirit would complete it through him. And in that day when the prophet’s word was fulfilled, the remnant in Jerusalem would know that Yahweh had sent him (4:9).
- Having the Lord’s sure promise of the Spirit’s presence and power for building His house, the workers were to take heart and look past its insignificant beginning and present lamentable state; the seven – that is, the Lord’s seven eyes (also associated with the stone of verse 3:9) – would rejoice when they saw the plumb line in Zerubbabel’s hand and knew the top stone had been laid (4:10).
- With this explanation, Zechariah inquired about the meaning of the two olive trees – specifically, the oil-producing branches – and the angel answered that they represented the Lord’s two anointed ones (“sons of oil”) standing by His side (4:11-14). Whoever these persons might be, the imagery highlights the Spirit’s use of human instruments in His work of building and sustaining His sanctuary.

Set in the historical context of the construction of the second temple, the visionary menorah corresponded to the emerging house of the Lord. Zerubbabel presided over that building project and he, in turn, is shown to be a type of Jesus Christ (ref. Haggai 2:21-23). Jesus was a descendent of Zerubbabel, who himself was descended from David – both through the regal line of Solomon and the line of Nathan, the ancestor of Jesus’ mother Mary (ref. Matthew 1:12-16; Luke 3:27-31).

Thus the vision looks prophetically to the building of Yahweh’s true sanctuary by His regal and priestly Servant who is the Branch of David (cf. 3:1-6 with 6:9-15). And as with the physical temple built under Zerubbabel’s oversight, the true temple constructed by the antitypal Zerubbabel was to come to realization through the attending power of the Spirit and not human power or might. The Lord’s true dwelling – signified by the menorah – would be constructed by the provision of the Spirit of Jesus, and that same Spirit would also fuel its everlasting, radiant light. Supplied by His Spirit, the stones in Yahweh’s sanctuary would radiate the light of the true Light to the ends of the earth. In that way, the Lord would finally complete His eternal design to build Himself an everlasting dwelling, forever attended with undying shouts of “*Grace, grace to it!*”