

IX. Zechariah in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel According to Zechariah
“Vision #5: The Golden Lampstand”
Zechariah 4

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
February 5, 2023 • Sunday Evening Sermon

This is our ninth study in Zechariah and we have arrived at the fifth vision. We have a ministry at our church called Embers to a Flame where we try and encourage Gospel, healthy churches with church revitalization and that ministry has morphed into what we call the Lampstand Conference where we show Gospel healthy churches that are represented by a church that is represented in the Bible as a lamp stand. This Lampstand ministry is rooted in the text we will be looking at in this study – Zechariah 4. It is the vision that Zechariah had of the golden lampstand. Remember, Zechariah is having eight visions all in one night and we have walked our way through four of them. In the last study we looked at the Gospel in Zechariah, through the wonderful study that we could have of Joshua, the High Priest and what happened on the Day of Atonement. The picture there with Joshua, the High Priest is not the last day judgment, it was the judgment upon the Messiah in the Day of Atonement and that glorious solidification of the Gospel.

Now we look at Zechariah 4 and there's another vision that is going to come – the vision of the golden lamp stand. We will be looking at a couple of other texts of Scripture as well but let's start by looking at the opening paragraph in Zechariah 4:1-7 which says [1] *And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me, like a man who is awakened out of his sleep. [2] And he said to me, “What do you see?” I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. [3] And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.” [4] And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” [5] Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” [6] Then 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 of hosts. [7] Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’”*

Here we have the Angel of the Lord, once again rousing Zechariah in this eventful night with another vision. By the way, there are evidences here that Zerubbabel is a great preacher because he is honest when he doesn't know something but he would like to know so he's a learner. Zerubbabel is the governor over the exiles who have returned under the edict of Cyrus and now under the decree of Darius and Zerubbabel is to hear this message. We have to go back into the context. So the edict had come from Cyrus in the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah that after 70 years the people would be sent back. The Medo-Persian Empire has conquered the Babylonian empire. Nabonidus, the last Babylonian emperor has been set aside and then Cyrus, the Persian is rules this empire that is a congruence of the nation of Media and Persia, the Medo-Persian Empire. Cyrus has passed on and now Darius is in place.

When the people returned, in the first years, they laid down the foundation of the temple, began to do the work on the altar, but then all of the resistance began to come. Their walls are down, the gates are down. Jerusalem is just a byword for the nations. All of these tribal entities and small nations are constantly bringing warfare. Any time they need something extra, they just

march through Jerusalem and get it, so much so that the city is as the text says like a mountain of rubble and Zerubbabel is the governor over all of this. As he sees all this happening as governor he is contemplating, 'what in the world am I going to do?' Somewhere between 20000 to 40000 of God's people have returned from the Babylonian captivity under the Medo-Persians. They had a good start rebuilding the temple but discouragement is rampant. Now, the adversaries hold them down and now it's just a mountain of rubble there on the Temple Mount, where they want to see, not a mountain of rubble, but to see the temple rebuilt. They are at the end of themselves.

Those who are there in Jerusalem are Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, who is of the line of David, appointed as governor under Cyrus and Darius. If you want even more history or background of what is happening here then read the book of Ezra and Nehemiah for I believe the book of Ezra was written in concert with the book of Nehemiah. In fact, the way to see this in the history of Israel is I and II Samuel, then I and II Kings, then I and II Chronicles. The end of II Chronicles was the reality that Israel had been conquered and Cyrus was ruling and reigning. Then you pick up on Ezra and the first 6 chapters of Ezra give us all that we're studying in the book of Zechariah. In the opening chapters of Zechariah, Ezra is not there, but he is writing about what's there. Now is this the writer of Chronicles that's providing it or not? We just don't know for sure, but we know that the Spirit of God has a sacred account of what is happening from the edict of Cyrus on and the first 50 years. The book of Ezra covers about 100 years. Then you pick up with Nehemiah. The Book of Ezra is covering this time of Joshua, Zechariah the Prophet and Haggai the Prophet.

Then in Ezra 7 is about 50 years after chapter one in Ezra. Ezra 7 there is what some have called the memoir of Ezra as Ezra's ministry is picked up in Ezra 7 through the end of the chapter. So the commentary on the what we're studying in Zechariah and Haggai, you'll find in the first six chapters of Ezra and now as we do the dive into Zechariah, we find out this fifth vision is there to encourage the governor, Zerubbabel and to give him a promise. There's the foundation covered with the mountain of rubble for the Temple of God. God is saying 'I'm moving that mountain, that rubble is going to be gone and when I get through, not only is there going to be a foundation, but there's going to be a capstone. My temple will stand and Zerubbabel, as you're surrounded with the adversaries, know this; It's not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord.'

He is giving Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest Zechariah's prophecy and this vision will be augmented by the prophecies of Haggai. He is giving him the encouragement that he needs to know and here's what it is – you need to know that My covenant people will stand like a lampstand and the power that maintains the light in the lampstand cannot be diminished. It cannot be stopped. You cannot extinguish it. So to understand this, we need to understand the metaphor itself – the lampstand.

The lampstand doesn't just simply appear here. It's already been appearing among God's covenant people. It has occupied a very important place in the history of redemption. This lamp stand that is bring described probably is best understood by going back to understand the lamp stand that had already been prescribed for them and that is found in the book of Exodus. So let's look at Exodus 25. Here, the people are in the wilderness. God's presence is going to go with them in the holy of holies, within the tent of meeting and that tent of meeting is going to lead to the temple on Mt. Zion when they get to the Promised Land, but right now it is what God is using in making His presence known as the Pillar of Fire and cloud would come down among the temple and the Shekinah glory of God would be there and God would lead His people through His presence in the temple.

Then He outlined how the temple was to be built and as He does this we have this glorious picture of the furnishings inside the holy place. Remember that the holy place is completely closed in so it would be pitch black dark. So how can one move around and what would the priest do as he enters into this darkness? There are not a lot of furnishings. Here is God's solution. Exodus 25:31-40 says [31] *"You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work: its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it. [32] And there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; [33] three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on one branch, and three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. [34] And on the lampstand itself there shall be four cups made like almond blossoms, with their calyxes and flowers, [35] and a calyx of one piece with it under each pair of the six branches going out from the lampstand. [36] Their calyxes and their branches shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it a single piece of hammered work of pure gold. [37] You shall make seven lamps for it. And the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it. [38] Its tongs and their trays shall be of pure gold. [39] It shall be made, with all these utensils, out of a talent of pure gold. [40] And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.*

The almond was the picture of life in the life of Israel. So God is giving this picture of His presence among His people and the place that they would meet for the Word, prayer, teaching and worship. There is the place that the mediatorial work of the priest would be done and it is there where the presence of God is. In this holy place that's absolutely dark He takes care of the light with a lampstand. This is not a candelabra. This is not a candlestick. It's a stand with lamps that is made out of one talent of gold and it is made out of one piece. Separate pieces are not made and attached. It's made out of one piece. It is absolutely unified. It's hammered work which is what is meant here. They have the gold and they hammer it out into this picture of a tree. Almond blossoms sit the lamps. The lamps have one little pinch in it and clearly from other texts, the priests job was to keep the wicks nurtured and the oil in the lamps. This lampstand was placed right into the holy of holies.

The picture clearly is a tree. Now, if you don't mind me being a little controversial, I know that many of you have seen, "menorahs", replications of this, and almost all of them have the three branches curving up. In my opinion, that's not the way it is. I think there were three branches that were sticking straight out like branches. I don't believe they were curved symmetrically. I believe there were three branches sticking out with the blossoms at the end of the three branches, plus the blossom on top of the centerpiece. So that would give you seven places for the lamps to sit and they have uncovered many of these lamps that are made like this throughout Israel. In fact, I used to have a couple that I brought back from one trip in Israel of these lamps that would lay in that calyx and in that almond blossom.

So when Zechariah is speaking, this isn't something new and now we're being given a New Covenant prophecy of how the Old Covenant lampstand as a tree of light is pointing back to the garden and the tree of life. What will it look like in the New Covenant? Zechariah will receive that New Covenant promise. In the Bible, according to my count, I'm willing to be challenged, but according to my count, the New Covenant people of God, the Church of God, which Jesus purchased with His own blood, is depicted for us with ten metaphors. The church is called an army, a bride, a family, a vineyard, a temple, the building, a field, etc. There are these ten metaphors, that is word pictures of the church to teach us something about the church.

The last one that is given to us in the Book of Revelation is the church as a lampstand. Zechariah not only has its roots back in Exodus, but it's going to point us into the Book of Revelation. I believe it's probably the key book in the Old Testament to understand the Book of Revelation. Now let's look at Revelation 1 where we see this picture of the ascended Christ. Revelation 1:9-11 says [9] *I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. [10] I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet [11] saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."*

There were probably about 13 churches that we know of by this time had been planted in Asia Minor but these seven are on the trade route that comes from Miletus and Ephesus. As one worked their way right up the trade route and that's how they had gotten planted under the leadership of the apostle Paul. Now John is here. Paul is already dead. I believe the Book of Revelation is written and sometime between 90 to 95 A.D. John is the last living Apostle and is giving this picture of the seven churches and one might call it a presbytery – local churches together as a church in terms of a presbytery. Let's continue in the passage.

Revelation 1:12-16 says [12] *Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, [13] and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. [14] The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, [15] his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. [16] In his right hand he held seven stars (pastors of the churches), from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.*

As we go to the New Testament we see the risen Christ who has purchased the church with His own blood, and we see a specimen of seven churches with Christ in the middle. Now, if Christ is in the middle, what does that tell you about the configuration of the seven churches? These seven churches are in a circle. What does that tell us? There is that church, regional presbytery related to Jesus, together, and then each church has direct access to Jesus as He is in the midst of His people. He calls them lampstands and now, you know, it's not the lampstand in Exodus, it's the lampstand of the New Covenant Church in Zechariah. And what does that look like? So now let's go back to Zechariah 4.

I want to show you a couple of things from Zechariah 4. The lampstand in Zechariah has changed somewhat radically. We read how the lampstand was put together for the tabernacle. When they come into the land of Israel and the Solomonic Temple is built, they will replicate that lampstand with ten golden lampstands that will line the Solomonic temple. All of that will be taken away in the Babylonian captivity and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Now they have returned under this Cyrus edict under the protection of Darius the Mead. They are going to work on the temple and as the place of God's dwelling in the midst of His people is described, here comes a vision. The vision is a radically different, though the same, golden lampstand.

Zechariah 4:2 says [2] *And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. That meant instead of one wick in one lip of the lamp, now there are seven lips in seven wicks, which would mean greater light. So there are*

seven lamps with seven lips in each of them and seven wicks. Therefore, greater light is coming from this.

A second radical change is now there is a large basin, and the text doesn't give us definitive information on its location. The way it's described it seems to be that there is a bowl on the top of it, but there's no description of how the bowl is connected to it. When the lampstand comes up, it has the centerpiece, then the six branches, they're pieces with the seven lamps, but there is nothing there to hold this basin up that's on top of it. Perhaps one could force the Hebrew to say that the basin was in front of it, but I think the right translation is what the ESV has put here, and that is the basin is on top of it. Well, what is holding it up? We don't know. Perhaps we're not to know because it's the hand of the Lord that is holding up the basin from which the power for this increased light is now being given. So now we have a tree of light pointing to the tree of life and the light in the New Covenant is greater.

Now there's a third thing that's radically different - two mature olive trees are there. They are heavy laden with olives, and the olives are pouring their oil down the branch into two golden pipes that filled the basin. From the basin comes seven fluted or seven conduits to each lamp for each one of the lips. In other words, 49 pipes are coming out of the basin. Two fluted or two conduits are filling the basin with the supply of the oil that cannot be fathomed through those two pipes into the basin and then from the basin are 49 pipes – seven go to each lamp, one to each of the seven lips in each lamp, and that's how the picture is given to us. When I saw our elders after reading this passage I said to them “You all are about to get an assignment. I want you to draw this lampstand for me between now and next Sunday night. I will collect it just to see how well you do and write your name on it. Be proud of this.” Let's see how this is described for us in Zechariah 4.

Zechariah 4:8-10a says [8] Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, [9] “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. [10a] For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

Basically, Zerubbabel is being told that the mountain of rubbish will be cleared out, the foundation is laid, it will be built upon and the Lord is going to even put the capstone on it and it will happen under his leadership. We see this in Ezra 1 through 6. Then go read what happens when Ezra comes 50 years later in Ezra 7 through 12. I know they're looking at this foundation of the Zerubbabel temple, and they're saying, ‘But we remember the days of Solomon. Listen, do not despise the day of small things. The glory of this house will ultimately be greater than the glory of the Solomonic temple.’ And Haggai will augment that promise as well. God is going to measure out a kingdom that is beyond your comprehension. He has a temple coming that this one is pointing to that's going to be even greater – it's Jesus.

John 1:14 says [14] *And the Word became flesh and dwelt (templed, tabernacled) among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* The tent of meeting, the tabernacle, the Solomonic temple, the Zerubbabel temple – it's all pointing to the Word that becomes flesh and the glory of the Lord tabernacles in our midst. Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, full of grace and glory, not measured, full of grace and glory. So here is a New Covenant coming where Christ Himself will fulfill this and then go to a cross and purchase His church that will be on this earth, the reflection of Him – the Body of Christ, the golden lampstands. Praise God for the light in the Old Covenant, but this Light is even greater, seven times greater in each and every lamp. Now you see not the shadows being dispelled with one lampstand, now you're seeing the tree of light pointing to the Tree of Life, Christ, that He

places there and He gives it the power that we need in order to serve Him. Let's continue in Zechariah 4.

Zechariah 4:10b-14 says [10b] *"These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth."* [11] *Then I said to him, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?"* (Zechariah is a learner for this is his third question.) [12] *And a second time I answered and said to him, "What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the golden oil is poured out?"* [13] *He said to me, "Do you not know what these are?"* I said, *"No, my lord."* (Zechariah is not only a learner but he is honest.) [14] *Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth."*

What are those two olive trees? If you do a deep dive into Old Testament commentaries to figure out what these two olive trees are, probably most would tell you they are Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest and I understand why they would say that, but I've come to the conviction in my study that's not what the two olive trees are. The olive trees supply power for the light so that the lampstand can do its job and notice they're called the anointed ones. They've been poured out into our presence for a reason and they bring power. They are called here and in Revelation 11, His witnesses, standing by the Lord. Who are they? There are fanciful interpretations everywhere, but minds not too fanciful. I believe that one olive tree is the Spirit of God and the other is the Word of God who bear witness to Jesus and who keep the power on in His church. They are the anointed ones.

What does the Word of God do? You search the Scriptures and you think that in them that you have eternal life but the Scriptures bears witness of Me (John 5:39). What do the olive trees do? They bear witness of the Lord – His Word and His Spirit. Do remember what Jesus said before He ascends? Jesus says in Acts 1:8, [8] ***But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*** He says we will receive power to be His witnesses and He is basically telling His church they have an impossible task, but God, who not only does the difficult specializes in the impossible. He says "I'm giving you two unstoppable, inextinguishable, unfathomable sources of power that you might be My lampstand to show people the way of life in Jesus Christ." I am pretty confident where I am right here and the Lord will correct me one day if I'm wrong on the two olive trees.

Now, remember those two pipes that are coming out of the branches into the basin, what are they? They're the conduits for the Word and the Spirit, aren't they? This is where I'll conclude in this study. There was a time in the early church when the lampstand had been placed in Jerusalem and it was powerfully moving the church in Jerusalem. People were coming to Christ every day. Then all of a sudden internal conflict came up. There were all kind of charges against the leaders of the church. Most of all, they were being charged with racism and prejudice. Here were these unbelievable resources that the people were bringing. People were selling property and the Christians who were of Gentile background, the Hellenistic Christians, noticed there was an out of proportion inequitable ministry of Mercy to the Hebrew widows that weren't happening to them. They took this problem to the elders who listened to the bleeding of the sheep, but they didn't let bleeding diagnose it. They prayed about it and then received a solution. Their solution was called seven Deacons so that we do not have to neglect two things.

What are the two things? How did this church get here? This church got here through prayer and the Word. To do a better job of research and distribution of mercy ministry they said they would have to neglect prayer and the Word, but they knew if they neglected prayer and the

Word, there won't be a mercy ministry or resources or even a desire for this. They knew they couldn't solve this by creating bigger problem. They knew they must not neglect prayer and the Word and so then the diaconate is raised up and ordained under the oversight of the elders to accomplish that. I just want you to see something. These elders know this church is here for Christ by the power of the Word and the power of the Spirit, the two conduits of the Word and the Spirit is the ministry of Prayer and the Word. We cannot neglect prayer and the word.

In fact, our great reformer, John Calvin, will say the marks of the church are prayer, the Word and sacrament. So, what about sacrament? Sacrament is contingent upon prayer and the Word. So I'll just go first with prayer and the Word. How was the church at Jerusalem conceived? The church at Jerusalem is conceived in a prayer meeting – Acts 1. How is the Church at Jerusalem birthed? The Church at Jerusalem was birthed with a sermon from Peter in Acts 2. It was conceived and birthed by prayer and the Word. How did it grow and keep adding and adding? Acts 2 says they gave their attention and devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking of the bread and the prayers – prayer and the Word which are the two conduits.

I'm hoping to follow that because I've had the privilege to work us through the three texts on the series Project Andrew – bring them to Him, be the light of the gospel that people might come to Christ who is the tree of Life. Now that we have laid out the predicate of Andrew, what would I go to in the next study on that series? Jesus has already told us, 'Pray that the Lord of the Harvest will send forth labors' – prayer and the Word. Now what is it that saturates it? It's prayer. The one olive tree is the Spirit of God. The other olive tree is the Word of God, and their power comes from the heavens through prayer and the Word – the preaching of God's Word and the prayers of God's people – the persistent, passionate pleading of a pulpit and the persistent, passionate, pleading of the prayer life of God's people. There the power flows. There the lamp stand shines in all of its glory, united in Christ, hammered out of one piece of gold – King Jesus. Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for this glorious, wonderful vision that you have so laid before us. Father, bless Your people as they reflect on this and think through it. Bless us as a people as we considered the implications for us. Oh, God, we need Your Word, we need Your Spirit. Make us men and women who love to hear the Word and who love to call upon You in prayer. Grant us the ministry and service of prayer and the Word. Do something in us. Do something through us, and may the lampstand shine. Oh, God, the warnings to the seven churches of 'I will remove the lampstand from you.' Please O God, may this lampstand and the Shekinah glory shine for Jesus. Make us men and women, boys and girls who call upon You in pleading, passionate, persistent prayer and who preach that Word with persistence, pleading and passion, in Jesus' Name I pray, Amen.