

# Zechariah 4:1-7

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*Zechariah sees a golden lampstand with two olive trees on each side. He asks the interpreting angel to explain the vision to him. The angel tells Zechariah that the LORD's Spirit will remove obstacles to the rebuilding of the temple, so that Zerubbabel will complete its reconstruction.*

This passage records Zechariah's fifth vision. The prophet recalled how the interpreting angel gave him the revelation: *Then the angel who was speaking with me returned* (vs 1). The verb translated *return* denotes a movement back to a previous location or condition, such as when Jacob *returned* to the land of his parental origin after a twenty-year sojourn with Laban in Haran (Genesis 31–35). In our passage, the verb suggests that the *angel* had departed from the prophet and has now returned to provide further guidance.

Although all the visions apparently came to Zechariah in a single night, there was probably a pause between episodes to give him enough time for meditation and reflection. Now the *angel returned* to disclose the fifth vision to the prophet, so he *roused* him.

The verb translated *rouse* means “to excite” or “to stir up.” That is, to make someone or something active. Often, Yahweh is the one who causes this activation, which begins in the interior of the person in question. For example, “The LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom” to allow the exiles to return to their homeland (Ezra 1:1).

Similarly,

“The LORD stirred up (*roused*) the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God.” (Haggai 1:14)

Here in our passage, the interpreting *angel roused* Zechariah, *as a man who is awakened from his sleep*. At first glance, it might appear that Zechariah was sleeping. But the comparison suggests that the prophet was instead thinking about what he saw in the previous scenes. And while Zechariah was meditating on the meaning of the previous visions, the *angel* interrupted his thoughts and called his attention to a new one.

As the *angel* roused Zechariah, interrupting his deep thoughts, he asked him a question, saying, *What do you see?* (vs 2). Zechariah replied, *I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it.* (vs 2).

The guiding angel showed Zechariah an item and asked him to identify it. The prophet rightly described it as a golden *lampstand*. The Hebrew term for *lampstand* is “menôrah.” It derives from a verb that means “to flame.” In biblical times, *lampstands* generally held removable

lamps. In the book of Exodus, for instance, God commanded His covenant people to make a *lampstand* to give light to the priests as they worked in the tabernacle (Exodus 25:31–40).

In Zechariah's vision, the *lampstand* had a *bowl on the top of it*. It had *seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on top of it* (vs 2). Each of the *seven lamps* had *seven spouts* around its rim.

Also, there were *two olive trees by the lampstand, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side* (vs 3). In ancient Israel, *olive trees* were essential to daily life. They produced olive oil, which was used for cooking and hygiene as well as fuel to light lamps (Deuteronomy 24:20). People would pick the *olives*, shake them, and beat them from the tree with a long pole. The Bible often describes the use of *oil* for lighting lamps (Exodus 27:20; Leviticus 24:2). It is also used for anointing and refreshing (Exodus 30:29–30). In Zechariah, the *olive trees* fed the *lamps* by pouring oil out of themselves.

Although Zechariah correctly identified the images, he did not know their meaning. For this reason, he asked the angel for an explanation: *What are these, my lord?* (vs 4). The Hebrew term for *lord* is “’ādôn.” It conveys the idea of someone in a position of authority. The Bible often uses it to refer to a human master (Genesis 18:12; 24:12; 31:35). The prophet Zechariah used the term to refer to the *angel*. He humbly asked the messenger to explain the meaning of these images to him.

The interpreting *angel* knew that Zechariah, as a Jew, could recognize a *lampstand* since it had a longstanding tradition in the Bible and the history of Judaism. He also knew the prophet could identify the *olive trees* since they were common in ancient Israel. It seems the angel is taken aback that Zechariah does not know what these figures symbolize. Apparently surprised, *the angel who was speaking with him answered, ‘Do you not know what these are?’* Then Zechariah replied, *“No, my lord.”* (vs 5).

Having heard Zechariah's negative answer, the *angel said to him, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel.”* The prophet Zechariah is being given a message to take to the political leader of Judah, *Zerubbabel*. The Hebrew term for *LORD* is Yahweh, the covenant name of God. The name speaks of God's relationship with His people (Exodus 3:14). The *word of the LORD* refers to Yahweh's revelation (1 Kings 6:11; 16:1).

To Zechariah, Yahweh disclosed a message of encouragement to *Zerubbabel*, saying, *Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit, says the LORD of Hosts* (vs 6). It seems that the apparatus Zechariah saw had oil feeding lamps without aid of human work. Although oil was flowing into the bowl from the branches, there was no human laborer beating the olives from the trees, gathering them into vats, and pressing them to create oil. The oil was flowing directly from the tree.

In like manner, God would see that the obstacles to reconstructing the temple will be removed, without Zerubbabel having to cause it to come to pass. It would not be by the *might* of Zerubbabel, or any *power* from an army of Judah, but rather by God's *Spirit* that the opportunity

to rebuild the temple will take place. This would have been a welcome message for Zerubbabel, since the population of Judah was small and without meaningful material capability.

The Hebrew term for *might* is “Chayil.” It often refers to military strength. Sometimes, it is translated as “army,” as in Exodus 14:4, 9; 15:4. The Hebrew term for *power* is “kōaḥ.” It denotes human strength, such as the physical strength of Samson (Judges 16:5, 6, 9). Together, the terms *might* and *power* encompass all human efforts. The Jews had only lately returned to their homeland, they had not been there long enough to rebuild and repopulate Judah. They did not have much in the way of *might* or *power*.

In Zechariah’s day, the returning exiles of Judah started the rebuilding of the temple. Under the governance of Zerubbabel and with the permission of Cyrus, the Persian King, the Judeans began reconstructing the temple in 536 BC (Ezra 3:8–13). They planned to complete the project but stopped working on it for about sixteen years because of the hostile intrigues of their adversaries.

But the LORD’s plan was for His people to rebuild the temple so they could worship Him there. Thus, He gave this message to *Zerubbabel*, informing him that they would complete the rebuilding project. However, it would not be done by their physical strength, *but by My Spirit*.

When the *Spirit* of the LORD works in people’s lives, He empowers them to accomplish great things. For instance, the LORD called Bezalel by name and “filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge,” enabling him to do “*all kinds* of craftsmanship” when building the wilderness tabernacle (Exodus 31:1–3). Later in Israel’s history, the prophet Isaiah explained,

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD and the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn.”  
(Isaiah 66:1–2)

Jesus read this passage from Isaiah, stopping at “favorable year of the LORD” while in a synagogue, and told the listeners that this passage was fulfilled in their hearing (Luke 4:18-21). The Spirit of the Lord was proclaiming the good news of God through Jesus. In Zechariah, the *Spirit* of the LORD would enable *Zerubbabel* and the Judeans to overcome all fears and obstacles to finish what they had started (Haggai 2:5).

After the *angel* gave the message to Zechariah for *Zerubbabel*, he added the prophetic formula *says the LORD of hosts*. The phrase *the LORD of hosts* often describes God’s power as a warrior leading His angelic army to defeat His foes (Amos 5:16; 9:5; Habakkuk 2:17). Here in Zechariah, it demonstrates God’s power as the supreme warrior who has complete control over all human affairs. Indeed, *the LORD* is the all-powerful God. His *Spirit* would empower His covenant people to complete the building project.

The interpreting *angel* continued with the message begun in the previous verse. He asked a rhetorical question—that is, a question he asked not to receive an answer but to punch up a point.

He stated, *What are you, O great mountain?* (vs 7). In biblical times, mountains often served as natural barriers that readily became geographic and political boundaries (Joshua 15:8–16). Here in Zechariah, the term *mountain* represents the political difficulties Zerubbabel and the people of Judah faced. Despite such challenges, the angel reassured Zechariah that God's people would triumph when he stated, *Before Zerubbabel, you will become a plain* (vs 7). What seemed to them an insurmountable obstacle would be removed by God's Spirit.

In geography, the term *plain* refers to a flat expanse of land. It contains a smooth path because it does not change much in elevation and is therefore easy to traverse. It is the opposite of the term *mountain*, which is not passable for any sort of transport (Isaiah 40:4). For this reason, Isaiah and Zechariah used both terms, *mountain* (obstacle) and *plain* (removal of obstacle) to describe God's intervention in human affairs.

In preparation for the Messiah's coming, Isaiah declared,

“Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley.”  
(Isaiah 40:4)

This refers to God removing obstacles for the Messiah. Similarly, the interpreting *angel* in Zechariah announced that there would be no *mountains* of opposition against Zerubbabel. Any obstacles as *great* as *mountains* would disappear suddenly. For the *Spirit* of the LORD would empower Zerubbabel, and he will bring forth the top stone with shouts of “*Grace, grace to it!*” (vs 7). The *top stone* refers to the foundation brick in the temple building and restoration. The term translated as *grace* is “*hēn*” in the Hebrew language. It speaks of God's favor bestowed on someone or something. In our context, it refers to God's favor on the rebuilt temple.

The temple completion would be an act of God's grace toward the returning exiles, accomplished by His Spirit. The people will recognize God's favor, as evidenced by their *shouts* of *Grace, grace to it!* The repetition of *grace* is for emphasis, that God's *grace* abounded to them. It is commendable that they recognized this, because the people were asked to do their part, led by Zerubbabel.

The angel did not answer Zechariah's question directly, as Zechariah had asked *What are these, my lord?* referring to the trees and lamps. By inference, however, the angel's answer is telling Zechariah that this lamp being supplied oil from the trees without human labor stands for God's Spirit working on their behalf. This would infer further that the *lamps* represent God's Spirit. This will be confirmed in verse 10, which speaks of the seven lamps seeing everything upon the earth.

## **Biblical Text**

<sup>1</sup>Then the angel who was speaking with me returned and roused me, as a man who is awakened from his sleep. <sup>2</sup>He said to me, “What do you see?” And I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it; <sup>3</sup>also two olive trees

by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side.”<sup>4</sup> Then I said to the angel who was speaking with me saying, “What are these, my lord?”<sup>5</sup> So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” And I said, “No, my lord.”<sup>6</sup> Then he said to me, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.”<sup>7</sup> “What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel *you will become* a plain; and he will bring forth the top stone with shouts of “Grace, grace to it!””