



# THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

SERMON SERIES 2022

2.27.2022 | 11TH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH



## THE SPIRIT AND THE KINGDOM: ZECHARIAH 4

PASTOR ANTHONY FERGUSON

Zechariah describes the kingdom of God in detail with eight-night visions in Zechariah 1-6. As we've studied these visions, we've learned a lot about God and his kingdom. We've known most of these truths before but hadn't seen them illustrated by the events of the sixth century BC. I hope that our love for God has deepened as we've seen these truths. Perhaps we've seen new truths. Let's recap. In the first night vision, we learned that God's jealousy – his desire for the devotion of his people – moved him to choose Jerusalem once again (1:7-17). This declaration that God will choose Jerusalem again is an announcement that God's kingdom will break into this world through his people, and in light of the exile, this choice is despite God's people. This coming glorious kingdom, however, will break into this world in unexpected means: through four craftsmen according to the second-night vision (1:18-21). Despite the kingdom's apparent weakness, its coming will be glorious and a fulfillment of God's original plan for creation – God will dwell amid his people in prosperity (2:1-12). We saw that in the third-night vision. The fourth-night vision was profoundly glorious (3:9). God's glorious kingdom comes into this broken world through the Branch who removes the sins of his people in a single day.

In the fifth night vision, we see another glorious aspect of the coming kingdom. **God's people *will certainly* accomplish God's work by God's Spirit.**

This truth has many implications, and we will talk about them throughout this sermon.

Let's now investigate this important idea together.

### **The Spirit and Zerubabel: Zechariah 4:1-7**

In the fourth night vision, Zechariah sees a golden lampstand (2). This lampstand had a pedestal, and on top of it, there was a bowl (2). Seven lamps are found around this bowl and on each lamp, there are seven wicks (2). To the left and the right of the lamp is an olive tree (3).

Like us, Zechariah is confused. He doesn't understand the meaning of this vision – the lampstand or the olive trees – as evident in verses 4 and 5 so he asks the angel, “What are these?” And after the angel replies, Zechariah confirms that he doesn't know what this vision represents (5). Thankfully, the angel explains the vision's meaning in verses 6-7, and the meaning is significant.

From the beginning, let's again point out the important fact that this vision is symbolic. That is, the vision is not fundamentally about olive trees and lamps. Rather, these items point beyond themselves to something greater, and that reality is truly significant.

The meaning of these items is described in verses 6-7. Zechariah 4:6-7 says,

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!’”

So this vision of a lamp and two olives trees is a message: **God’s people *will* accomplish God’s work by God’s Spirit.** Let’s point out several important details here about this vision. First, this vision concerns Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel is the governor of Judah and a Son of David (Haggai 1:1; Matthew 1:12). He and Joshua – the person Zechariah sees in the fourth-night vision – are the leaders of God’s people and the advancement of God’s kingdom in this world depended on them. This is evident in the book of Haggai. For example, Haggai directs his prophecy to Zerubbabel and Joshua in Haggai 1:1, and it is only when Zerubbabel and Joshua are strong and brave that kingdom work begins (Haggai 2:4-9).

Second, Zerubbabel is commissioned to rebuild the temple (7). Although God’s people returned to the land about twenty years earlier, they had neglected the temple. A foundation had been laid and an altar was used for sacrifice, but the temple had not yet been rebuilt. This detail is significant because, in the OT, the temple is the place where God promised to experience community with his people. This is the place where sacrifices were made and this is the place where all nations were to come for help amid their needs.



In short, the temple is the place in the OT where God promised to care for the broken, and despite the gravity of this promise, God's people neglected to rebuild it! In the fifth night vision, Zerubbabel is commissioned to build the temple, a significant kingdom task.

Third, this kingdom's work of rebuilding the temple cannot be accomplished by power or might (4:6). Judah is insignificant economically, politically, and socially. They have little food (Haggai 2) and are not independent nations. Moreover, their neighbors to the north constantly made fun of them and bribed the Persian officials to mistreat them (Nehemiah 1-4). Judah has a mission. Her mission is to bring God's kingdom into this broken world so that all the families of the earth might be blessed in Judah (Genesis 12:1-3). Judah is insignificant but they have a significant mission. How can they achieve this significant mission? They will not achieve it by their power or might.

Fourth, Zerubbabel's work of bringing God's kingdom into this world is accomplished by God's Spirit (4:6). If God's kingdom is going to break into this world through Judah – and God has promised that it will – this act will depend completely on God. This truth is a window again on the glorious truth that we continue to see in Scripture. God uses his strength for the good of his people. This idea was repeated constantly in the book of Matthew. We saw Jesus use his energy to heal the sick, care for the outcast, and to save the sinful. Matthew even told us that Jesus came to bear our sickness and disease (Matthew 8:14-17), and Mark tells us that Jesus came not to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45). Now again we see the glory of our God displayed in caring for his people. Zerubbabel is powerless to rebuild the temple, but God is not.

Fifth, Kingdom work looked doomed to failure (4:7). When you look at all the difficulties facing kingdom advancement, we see a “great mountain” (4:7). For Zechariah, this mountain included their poverty, social problems, political weakness, and their spiritual poverty. Everyone looking at Zerubbabel at this day laughed at them and considered them inconsequential (Nehemiah 4). Yet, God’s Spirit can make “great mountains” into “plains.” Let’s be clear: kingdom work is a task of making mountains into plains, and our strength is insufficient for this task.

Sixth, kingdom work done by the Spirit of the Lord produces profound joy (7). When God uses people to extend his kingdom, the result is joy. In this context, when the temple is complete, people rejoice (7). The same is true today. Whenever we overcome sin because we love Jesus, don’t we have joy? When we see loved ones come to trust in Jesus – children, grandchildren, friends – don’t we rejoice? When we use our strength to build God’s kingdom, we will be frustrated and discouraged. When God’s Spirit works through us to build his kingdom, we will have incredible joy.

In the fifth night vision, Zechariah sees a vision of a lamp and two olive trees. According to verses 6-7, that means Zerubbabel will accomplish kingdom work by God’s very Spirit for the joy of the people.

### **The Spirit and the Citizens: The Zechariah 4:8-14**

As is typical of prophecy, Zechariah repeats the point of verses 1-7 in verses 8-14. This feature is typical of Hebrew prophecy and key to interpreting it properly.

Hebrew loves to repeat itself but not exactly. Rather, Hebrew authors repeat ideas from slightly different angles (See Gentry, How to Interpret the Biblical Prophets). The key to interpreting Hebrew prophecy then is this: notice the similarities and the differences when Hebrew repeats itself. So, let's do that together.

In verses 8-14, the following idea is repeated: **Zerubbabel accomplishes Kingdom work for the joy of the people.** We see this in verses 9-10. In verse 9, the Lord says, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it," and "the plumb line (is) in the hand of Zerubbabel" (10). Zerubbabel accomplishes kingdom work: the temple is going to be rebuilt. Moreover, this kingdom's work will lead to joy (10). A few months earlier as described in Haggai 2, work had been done on the temple and when this work was complete some people mourned because this temple was insignificant when compared to the former temple. This temple seemed like a small thing, but kingdom work done by the Spirit turns mourning into joy (10). Zechariah 9-10 repeats the idea of verses 1-7.

Verses 8-14, however, do not merely repeat verses 1-7, they develop these verses. This new direction is evident in verses 10, 11, 12 when the meaning of other details of the vision are identified and explained. In verse 10, for example, the angel identifies the meaning of the seven lamps (10) which the angel identifies as the eyes of the Lord that go forth over the earth. Then, Zechariah asks about the olive trees (11) and the two branches (12). The angel identifies them – the trees and the branches – as the anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth (14).

Now, the details about the seven lamps and the olive trees develop our understanding of the fifth-night vision. Here's how: notice the phrase "the whole earth" in verses 10 and 14. These phrases are extra. What I mean by that is that you can eliminate them from the sentences and the sentences would still make sense. So, for example, the Lord could have just described the seven lamps as "his eyes" in verse 10 or he could as just described himself as the Lord in verse 14. But he didn't. He adds the phrase "the whole earth."

Let's remember that in verses 1-7, we learned about God bringing his kingdom into the world through his Spirit, not by man's might and strength. This process looks doomed from the beginning. Verse 7 told us that the kingdom work to be done was like making a mountain into a plain, and let's remember how insignificant Judah is. Here's the point. The Lord who is promising to accomplish his plan through Judah is the Lord of the entire world (10, 14), and before him, Joshua and Zerubbabel stand. The officials of Persia, Greece, and Samaria do not stand before the Lord, but Joshua and Zerubbabel – leaders of an insignificant kingdom in the eyes of the world – have access to God because God has chosen his people once again (1:17). The point, in my mind, of verses 8-14 is this: **God's people *will certainly* accomplish God's work by God's Spirit for the joy of the people.** How do we know? Because he is the Lord of the whole earth.

### **Application**

The lampstand of the fifth-night vision reminds the reader of the lampstand Moses constructed for the tabernacle (Exodus 25:31; 37:17) and the ten lampstands Solomon constructed for the first temple (1 Kings 7:49; 2 Chronicles 4:7).



These lamps provided light for the tabernacle (see Exodus 27:20-21 and 1 Samuel 3:3) and symbolically indicated that community with God existed. In other words, God's kingdom existed among the people. The lampstand that Zechariah sees functions similarly: it demonstrates that the functions of the temple are operating. God is once again dwelling with his people, hearing their prayers, and forgiving their sins. Church family, life with God, and work in God's kingdom depends on God's strength, not ours (4:6).

Are we trying to accomplish God's mission on our power and strength? Right now, we are looking for a music minister, and we are rightly thinking through the process, strategizing, and discussing this process. All of this is good, but if we are not praying, then all our discussions, processes, and strategizing are expressions of human strength, not God's strength.

What about conflict and disagreement? This is inevitable because of several factors: sin, mistakes, and just differences among us. As we go about kingdom work, there will be conflict. We know that God's Spirit is moving among us not when conflict is absent, but when amid conflict we show patience, gentleness, and love to one another. Disagreement that causes harshness, unkindness, disrespect, a lack of submission, or gossip flows from attempts to build God's kingdom from human strength.

Here's the point: whenever we do what we think is right in a way that is not loving, unkind, or disrespectful, we are doing kingdom work by our might and or strength.

Church family, as we go about building God's kingdom together, the fifth-night vision tells us that God's people will certainly accomplish God's work by God's Spirit. Yet we lose this confidence when we replace God's strength with our own. Let's be a people who build God's kingdom by the Spirit.

Most of us have probably engaged in building God's kingdom by our strength. I'd like for us all to spend time confessing this sin to the Lord and repenting of it. Also, I don't want us to conceive of God as harsh, but as one who delights in forgiving us, even when we try to build his kingdom with our strength. Let's go to the Lord in confidence that he hears us and desires to heal us.

Non-Christian, I would ask you to come to Jesus today by turning from your sin and trusting in Jesus. Would you trust that Jesus did what he needed to do to save you – he died on the cross for sinners? Would you confess him as Lord today? If that's you, would you reach out to us? We'd love to disciple you on this new journey.

### **Prayer**

God give us the grace to build your kingdom with your strength, not our own. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

