

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

Lesson 8, Chapter 4 Continued

This fifth vision/oracle that opens chapter 4 is primarily about Zerubbabel, the Persian King Darius's choice to govern the province of Yehud, the former Judah. This vision organically connects to the one of chapter 3 that was all about Joshua the High Priest. When taken together we understand that in God's eyes the leadership over those Jewish exiles that were allowed to return to their former homeland legitimately rests in the hands of the 2 men Joshua and Zerubbabel, who govern in a co-operative fashion, but in reality it is Joshua that wields more power.

To close the prior lesson we discussed that how, exactly, a prophet like Zechariah was able to cognitively obtain these sorts of communications from Heaven that we clumsily call visions and oracles is mysterious and pretty hard to explain in words. A "vision", for instance, doesn't necessarily mean something that you actually see with your eyes, like you do with the appearance of an apparition. When we think about it, the way the human eye works is to receive light waves in varying frequencies and wavelengths and intensities that have bounced off of physical objects. Then, the optical nerve converts them into electrical impulses that are sent to a certain part of our brain called the Visual Cortex where electrical impulses are reassembled into something that goes on internally within our mind that gives us the sense of "seeing". But, that is not how a vision/oracle from Heaven seems to work. There are no light reflecting or emitting physical objects involved so the eyes and the optical nerve are bypassed because they serve no purpose. I suppose we could liken a vision/oracle to what happens when we dream; but at the same time, a dream is our subconscious at work as we sleep in a deep state, whereas a vision is a God created and initiated communication that happens when the receiver of it is in an awake state and quite aware. We are told here in Zechariah that the Prophet was actually in a heightened state of perception.

In a reappearance of the Interpreting Angel, he inquires of Zechariah what it is that Zechariah sees. It's a kind of rhetorical question for the purpose of establishing a dialogue and teaching a lesson because the Angel of course knows what it is that he sees, but wants Zechariah to describe it. Zechariah

responds that he sees a lampstand and then gives a somewhat detailed description of it. He says he also sees 2 Olive Trees, one standing on each side of the golden lampstand. That this is a representation of the Temple menorah is rather plain to grasp except that this is not actually in the form as it is described in the Torah for use in the wilderness tabernacle. It is the precise description of this menorah that we need to work through in order to disassemble the symbolic elements, examine them, and then reconstruct the picture in a totality in a way that leads us to the intended symbolic meaning or meanings.

Let's begin by re-reading Zechariah chapter 4.

RE-READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 4 all

There are some basic things to understand about this golden lampstand. Typically, this is called a menorah. Yet, the menorah as a term that is casually used by both Jews and the Bible is actually a composite of several functional pieces. Technically, the menorah is literally ONLY the lamp stand portion, but does not include the lamps themselves. Thus, as we follow the vision description of verse 2, we find it spoken of as consisting of 4 pieces. This is somewhat different than the original golden menorah for the Tabernacle and I'll explain why that is in a moment.

Besides the stand itself (referred to here as **menorah**), we read of a bowl at the top of it. In Hebrew this bowl is called a **gullah**. Then, we are told of 7 lamps (**nerot**) at the top of the stand, with 7 tubes or spouts (**mutsaqot**) leading from the bowl, 1 to each lamp. So, the idea is that the lamps are where the wicks are placed to be set alight and oil is burned to produce light. The oil is placed in the bowl where it acts as a reservoir and so, it is gravity-fed by tubes of some sort to constantly replenish the oil in each of the lamps.

Here, however, is what God told the Israelites that the Wilderness Tabernacle menorah is to look like and how it is to be made.

CJB Exodus 25:31-40 ³¹ "You are to make a menorah of pure gold. It is to be made of hammered work; its base, shaft, cups, ring of outer leaves and petals are to be of one piece with it. ³² It is to have six

branches extending from its sides, three branches of the menorah on one side of it and three on the other. ³³ On one branch are to be three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with a ring of outer leaves and petals; likewise on the opposite branch three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with a ring of outer leaves and petals; and similarly for all six branches extending from the menorah. ³⁴ On the central shaft of the menorah are to be four cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with its ring of outer leaves and petals. ³⁵ Where each pair of branches joins the central shaft is to be a ring of outer leaves of one piece with the pair of branches- thus for all six branches. ³⁶ The rings of outer leaves and their branches are to be of one piece with the shaft. Thus, the whole menorah is to be a single piece of hammered work made of pure gold. ³⁷ "Make seven lamps for the menorah, and mount them so as to give light to the space in front of it. ³⁸ Its tongs and trays are to be of pure gold. ³⁹ The menorah and its utensils are to be made of sixty-six pounds of pure gold. ⁴⁰ See that you make them according to the design being shown you on the mountain.

Immediately we see the differences between Zechariah's vision menorah and the original physical one prescribed in the Torah. And, one of the chief differences is that while the Tabernacle menorah is to be a single integrated object made from one large lump of hammered gold, Zechariah's menorah is made up of a few separate pieces. Why these differences?

Of the several likely reasons for this disparity, there are two most logical ones. First, the Exodus description that we find in our Bibles is itself quite problematic. Scholars would call it a textual transmission issue. That is, while we certainly have very ancient documents to research, going back to earlier than the time of Christ, the reality is that the exact meaning of the various Hebrew terms for describing what the menorah actually looked like are quite uncertain. The technical description of the menorah has no modern-day analogue, nor even one from 1600 or more years ago. And, since the Tabernacle menorah was long ago lost and likely melted down by the Babylonians, and later its replacement suffered the same fate at the hands of Rome, then we don't have a definite or detailed picture of what it looked like. Thus, as is the way we all operate, the humans doing the Bible translations

(even translations from many, many centuries ago) pictured this object on the basis of similar things found in their own culture. Even more complicating is that the same Hebrew terms that are meant to describe the same exact things often change. That is, the Bible can call the menorah simply a lampstand saying that it holds 7 lights, but then turn around and call it all a light (in the singular) as though there was only 1 lamp. It doesn't mean that at some point 6 or the 7 lamps went missing, it is just another way to talk about the same object that people of that particular era understood, but people of eras well into the future would have a more difficult time discerning exactly how to visualize it. We find the same thing in the New Testament when, for example, the terms Passover and Unleavened Bread are used interchangeably, yet technically they are 2 separate events.

The second reason for the different descriptions is that the Bible itself shows how the menorah in different eras seemed to have been envisioned and then fashioned, after each time it was taken and melted down by an invader or lost for some other reason. For example, even though the Torah prescribes but 1 menorah for the Wilderness Tabernacle, it seems that when Solomon built the Temple they increased that number to 10 simply because they decided to.

CJB 2 Chronicles 4:7 *He made the ten menorahs of gold in accordance with their specifications and set them in the temple, five on the right and five on the left.*

But, after Solomon died and a civil war ensued that split united Israel into two separately ruled kingdoms (Judah and Ephraim/Israel), we find that around 50 years later during the reign of Aviyah King of Judah, the Temple now housed only 1 menorah.

CJB 2 Chronicles 13:11 *...they burn to ADONAI every morning and evening burnt offerings and sweet incense; they arrange the showbread on the pure table, and they prepare the gold menorah with its lamps to burn every evening. For we observe the order of ADONAI our God. But you have abandoned him.*

What the menorah looked like when a newest version of it was made after the Jews returned from Babylon, and then later still when Antiochus Epiphanies plundered the Temple and Judas the Maccabee came onto the scene, it is likely that the menorah was not even the one from Zerubbabel's time. Bottom line: what exactly the menorah looked like is kind of up in the air and also depended on what time in Bible history we're talking about.

But then we also have to factor in that Zechariah's description is coming from a vision, and not from him standing in front of the actual Temple menorah, seeing it with his eyes and describing it from that. Zechariah's menorah is meant as a symbolic representation coming from God in order to communicate a message. It is not real or tangible, it is imaginary, but at the same time it is close enough to be totally recognizable as a Temple menorah. And, considering when Zechariah lived, and the reality that a Temple menorah was always housed in the secretive front chamber of the Temple, which no other than just certain of the priests were ever allowed to view, then there is no way that Zechariah ever saw it in person even if he may have been alive before the Babylonian conquest of Judah happened and he had gone to the Temple in his youth to observe sacrifices and ceremonies.

Now, I spent this extra time of explanation in order for you to get the idea that there are a number of situations like this in the Bible that translators must deal with. This is a difficult challenge that accounts for the different words we can find in various Bible versions for the same verses, and why we must be careful to allow for when certain details can be reliably taken as precise, versus when they can only be approximate, or even when they are simply best guesses. The result of ignoring this reality is often for a denomination to create fanciful and rigid doctrines that have no historical basis, or to assume an erroneous belief that the Bible contains a number of inaccuracies. Let's move on.

Verse 3 explains that on each side of the lampstand there is an olive tree. The meaning of these 2 trees and the lampstand is not obvious to Zechariah who asks the Interpreting Angel, "What are these, my Lord?" First: it is interesting that in the CJB and a few other Bible versions, we'll find the word "Lord" capitalized. And, when we find that in a Bible, it is the translator saying that

this is God. And we all ought to understand by now that for many centuries, among Christians the term "the Lord" is meant to be synonymous with Jesus and Christ. So, the translator of the CJB and some other versions is saying that this Interpreting Angel is Jesus. I cannot accept this and neither should you.

In Hebrew the word is **adon** and indeed it does mean "lord", but only in a generic sense that was used in the same way we might say "sir". It has no spiritual or divine element to it; it is just a term showing deference and respect. Thus, the majority of Bible versions will use the word "lord" but without capitalization (which is the correct way to look at it).

Second: what do these 2 olive trees actually represent? The Angel's response to that question doesn't help much. Especially since he expected Zechariah to quickly understand the meaning with having it explained to him, the answer the Angel gives is truly cryptic. He says:

CJB Zechariah 4:6 *Then he answered me, "This is the word of Yehoveh to Z'rubavel: 'Not by force, and not by power, but by my Spirit,' says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot.*

As we examine the response from the Angel, it becomes clearer that it really wasn't so much about the olive trees but rather about everything described... the lampstand, bowl, lamps, spouts and the trees... all together as a single symbolic representation. In the next several verses the Angel goes on to say more, which we'll discuss, but the first part of the answer in verse 6, then, isn't really so much about the identity of the olive trees as it is a personal message to Zerubbabel that Yehoveh is with him and will help him to govern in difficult circumstances. More pointedly, Zerubbabel is to understand that in whatever the results of the work he undertakes it won't be according to his human strength or efforts that matters, but rather it will be by the Spirit of God. I can imagine that Zerubbabel had felt himself between the proverbial rock and the hard place. He was a Jew, his heart was with the Jewish people, but he served as governor at the pleasure of a Persian King. His hope (however distant and unrealistic it may have seemed at the time) was for Judah to be reinstated as an independent Jewish state with a Judean king from

David's dynasty. Yet, Zerubbabel had utterly no means to advance such a hope. He had no army under his control, his overall authority was limited, and so Yehoveh is telling Zerubbabel that He doesn't want him to rebel and fight Persia. Rather, God's message to Zerubbabel is one of reassurance.

Verse 7 continues the dialogue between Zechariah and the Interpreting Angel.

CJB Zechariah 4:7 ***'What are you, you big mountain? Before Z'rubavel you will become a plain; and he will put the capstone in place, as everyone shouts, "It's beautiful! Beautiful!"'***

What is this big mountain? If we're going to understand this in the way that Zerubbabel was expected to, then, again we need to climb into our Way-Back Machine and think of this in terms of how life was in his era.. the 6th century B.C... and where this scene was taking place. On the surface, the big (or great) mountain likely refers to Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. After all, the first several chapters of Zechariah focus on rebuilding the Temple, which seems to be the overriding context, and Temple existed on Mt. Zion.

High places and Temples always went together. Yet, you had to have a flat-spot... a plain, if you would... to build that Temple upon. There were a lot of reasons that mountains were where Temples were built, chief among which was because of the belief that the gods lived up in the heavens... the sky. And, mountains reach up to the skies and thus came closer to the gods. In Mesopotamia and Egypt, two of the very earliest locations on planet earth where civilization arose and flourished, there were not high mountains for the most part so they built artificial mountains out of soil and mud bricks in the north, and they used large stones to build pyramids to the south in Egypt. We read of the Mesopotamian Nimrod and the high mountain (the Ziggurat) that he built with the idea that he would climb up and be nearer to God to challenge Him, thus being essentially His equal. But, in Israel, mountains were available, and Jerusalem with its mountains was where God chose to put His name, so the issue wasn't constructing the high place, it was in preparing it (preparing the mountain) to build a Temple on it by creating a flat platform area to lay the foundation.

Where this interpretation of the big mountain as Mt. Zion and how it will become a plain for Zerubbabel as the necessary place to build it runs into trouble is that, in Zechariah's time, the Judeans were *rebuilding* a Temple upon an already existing foundation. So, the enormous and expensive effort required to level a mountain top (to create a plain) and then build a foundation for the Temple was of no barrier for Zerubbabel. This thought brought about a 2nd and alternative theory. Mountains also represent power (like military or imperial power). So, some like Luther, Kimchi, the Church Father Jerome and others believed that this big mountain was referring to a great power that stood in the way... as an obstacle... to rebuilding the Temple on Mt. Zion. That is, an empire whose leaders prevents it. But, this too presents problems because by all accounts the Persians of Zerubbabel's time... the colossal imperial and military power of the day... were actively encouraging Zerubbabel to rebuild the Temple; they were anything but obstacles to it even if they didn't offer the Jews funds and materials to do the rebuilding with.

A third interpretation is that the mountain represents general but large troubles... a widespread and general barrier of chaos and resistance... to the rebuilding of the Temple. To smooth the mountain into a plain, then, is not literal but rather is symbolic of that barrier of chaos and resistance being swept aside such that it is no longer a problem. An offshoot of this interpretation is that *tzemach*, the branch or shoot, will be the one to fight through these barriers to bring about the perfect Temple. This also incorporates the view that Zerubbabel is the current earthly representative of the coming future branch or shoot from the House of David, and this future branch will appear at the End of Days. I think this notion of Zerubbabel himself as symbolic of the re-establishment of Davidic rule and even of the future king of God's worldwide kingdom is a basic premise and feature of Zechariah's prophecies. So, what we are encountering is what seems to be on the surface a few competing ideas of what the prophetic utterance means when it is fulfilled; and as is typical, theologians line up in favor of one idea as the only correct one, and are therefore discard all the other possibilities as not correct. I think this is rigid, shortsighted and misses the mark.

It is my sense of it that the prophetic utterance of verse 7 will, as is typical of Bible prophecies, have multiple fulfillments taking place at different times in

history under different circumstances. The truth is that each one of the possible symbolic meanings I described has merit. But, if you try to make one of the solutions fit multiple fulfillments of the prophecy, it quits working. The one fulfillment solution that has the most merit to be directly connected to the time of Zechariah is the one that says that the big mountain is symbolic of the general chaos and resistance that has been experienced at every turn in the attempt to rebuild the Temple, even causing the work to cease for 15 years! One of the chief instigators of this trouble was the Samaritans that had moved in and settled parts of Judah after the Judeans had been captured and hauled off to Babylon. When the Jews returned, the Samaritans weren't thrilled at the idea of a new Temple being built according to what the Jews wanted and they caused a great deal of turmoil that seemed insurmountable. So, God promises that the big mountain of troubles will be squashed down until it is but like a flat plain...symbolizing that the chaos and resistance have been dealt with and the Temple can be swiftly completed without opposition (which is more or less what happened). It was in the 6th year of King Darius's reign, under the governorship of Zerubbabel, that indeed the Temple was rebuilt and consecrated back into operation as solid evidence of this particular symbolic interpretation.

The 2 other symbolic meanings we discussed could both work at a later time of yet other fulfillments, and in fact either or both could easily apply to a Temple of the future, perhaps even the Millennial Temple when ***tzemach***... the branch or shoot... comes to rule over God's Kingdom on earth for 1000 years.

The next part of that prophecy concerns a cap stone, or a top stone, or an excellent stone, or even a headstone according to various Bible versions' interpretations. The prophecy is that Zerubbabel (or perhaps later another of the family of David whom Zerubbabel typifies) will provide this stone. If you recall, we talked a little about this stone, or perhaps it was a different one, during our study of chapter 3.

CJB Zechariah 3:9 *For look at the stone I have put in front of Y'hoshua: on one stone are seven eyes; I will engrave what is to be written on it,' says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot; 'and I will remove the guilt of this land in one day.*

The stone from chapter 3 had a connection to Joshua, while the stone from chapter 4 has its connection to Zerubbabel. The one we're looking at now in chapter 4 makes no mention of the 7 eyes as was associated with the stone from chapter 3, so I have to think we are encountering two different symbolic significances. I think this stone in chapter 4 has directly to do with the construction of the Temple, and it probably represents that the associated person (first, Zerubbabel) will be the one who has the honor to bring about the completion of the Temple and the laying of a symbolic final stone commemorating that completion, or something along those lines. To be clear: assuming that I'm correct, Zerubbabel is the first Davidic ruler to bring about this prophetic fulfillment will be the man in charge when the Temple is completed and ceremonially put into service. And then a long time into the future, an End-Times Davidic ruler will do the same with yet another Temple.

The final words of verse 7 are the exclamation of the regular people who are in attendance of the Temple completion ceremony. They shout (in Hebrew) "**chen, chen!**". This Hebrew term is translated several different ways from "right, right", to "grace, grace", to "beautiful, beautiful" and a couple of others. So, how do we choose what exactly is the intent and sense of it? A favorite biblical Hebrew idiom is "to find **favor** in the eyes of", with the word favor being the Hebrew **chen**. That said, this verse in Zechariah is the only place in the Bible that we'll find this word repeated (**chen, chen**) to form a special exclamation. The bottom line is that just as **shalom** is a condition of well-being that comes only from God, so is **chen, chen** something that denotes favor that comes only from God. Thus, what is being expressed first and foremost is that the people recognize that the new Temple that stands tall and gleaming in front of them is the result of God's grace, and not the efforts of man. Because this is an audience response coming from a religious ritual and ceremony, then we could even say that it is not unlike a modern-day excited expression within Evangelical Churches of "Amen, amen!".

So, what we can take from it all is that this is a prophecy that says there *will* be a completion of the Temple, God will Himself be sweeping the obstacles of resistance out of the way (when it would seem humanly impossible for this to happen), and many people will be coming in gratitude and with overwhelming

joy to a completion and consecration ceremony. It happened as predicted for Zerubbabel. And it will happen again at least once more, in the End Times when it is Yeshua, the branch, of the same Davidic line of Zerubbabel, who will come as both king and high priest to get that Temple of God built and put it back into service. And many will come and be praising God for it!

As we move into verse 8, the person to whom the prophecy is directed changes. In the first 7 verses it was to Zerubbabel. Now it switches to Zechariah when we read:

CJB Zechariah 4:8 *This message from Yehoveh came to me:*

It then continues with:

CJB Zechariah 4:9 *'The hands of Z'rubavel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will also finish it.' Then you will know that Yehoveh-Tzva'ot sent me to you.*

Verse 9 deals with the ongoing conundrum and just plain weirdness that surrounds the rebuilding of the Temple as far as the everyday Jews are concerned: it is the lack of an Israelite king to direct and preside over it. I have spent time, today, explaining to you the Near Eastern mindset of Temples, the high places they are built on, and in earlier lessons about this direct association made between kings and Temples. Israel's only real variation on this theme is that they have but one God, and they have but one Temple. Otherwise, you couldn't slip a piece of paper between what the Judeans thought about gods and god systems and Temples versus what other cultures and societies in their region of the world thought about it all. So, the Judeans had been uneasy about this whole Temple-but-with-no-king business.

Despite him not being a king in the eyes of the world, nonetheless it is Zerubbabel that laid the re-founding stone of the Temple, and it will be Zerubbabel that finishes the job says Yehoveh. Therefore, it is Zerubbabel's Temple just as much as the Temple built by Solomon was called Solomon's Temple, and way into the future the Temple rebuilt and greatly expanded by King Herod was thought of as Herod's Temple. God is making it clear that Zerubbabel was to be regarded of as if he were a king and that is how the

people are to mentally deal with it regardless of the actual circumstances of him technically being only an appointed Persian civil servant.

Because a Temple is all about an associated god, and a god is all about an associated king, then the triad of king, Temple, God is completed when Yehoveh says that it was He who sent Zechariah to Zerubbabel with this message. Problem solved, resolved, and put to bed as far as God is concerned.

But, say's verse 10, what about people who won't accept this edict the way God demands it be accepted?

CJB Zechariah 4:10 *For even someone who doesn't think much of a day when such minor events take place will rejoice at seeing the plumbline in the hand of Z'rubavel. So, these seven are the eyes of ADONAI that range about over all the earth."*

As I mentioned, a switch has occurred and God is addressing Zechariah directly. Before we go further to better understand what is meant with this verse, I must disagree with the way the CJB interprets the Hebrew, and draw your attention to what the most scholarly of Bible translators and biblical Hebrew experts say. It is this: the way that the CJB and the majority of Bible versions translate it cannot work within the rules of Hebrew grammar. Rather, this verse needs to be taken more in the way that the Jewish Publican Society approaches it:

TNK Zechariah 4:10 *Does anyone scorn a day of small beginnings? When they see the stone of distinction in the hand of Zerubbabel, they shall rejoice. "Those seven are the eyes of the LORD, ranging over the whole earth."*

Worded this way, this verse is far more understandable and makes more sense. That is, the verse starts with a rhetorical question, with the expected and implied answer to be, "no they don't". That is, no one scorns a day of small beginnings. I'll say this differently. No one who as the goal of accomplishing something extraordinary despises the day when the necessary series of small steps that will be needed to reach that goal, begins.

How many times have we seen pictures of officials of some organization with golden shovels in hand, turning over that first spade of dirt as a groundbreaking ceremony for a momentous project. It isn't anywhere near complete, but the mere fact that the first step to its fruition is happening is reason enough for great joy and heightened expectations.

God has made Zechariah confident that Zerubbabel is the appropriate person to both begin and complete the Temple project. Now Zechariah's job is to take this message to Zerubbabel so that he understands that even if the people aren't so sure about it right now, in the end they will gather together and rejoice. It is said that the impetus for the people finally seeing it God's way is when they see the "stone of distinction" in the hand of Zerubbabel. The Hebrew words being translated here as stone of distinction are **ha-eben habbedil**. Literally it means "the tin stone". This refers to some type of measuring device probably operating similarly to what we today call a plum line. That is, a string with a weight so that walls can be made vertically straight up and down. But the point is that Zerubbabel is to be regarded as the builder of the Temple (again, in a similar way that Solomon was), and when the people see the chief builder at work, they will rejoice even though traditionally this person would be a king and not a civil servant.

The "seven" that introduces the final part of verse 10, are said to be the eyes of Yehoveh. In the context of this overall vision/oracle, this is referring to the 7 lamps on the lampstand. This probably also corresponds to the 7 eyes on the stone that has to do with the High Priest Joshua in Zechariah chapter 3. We've already seen other symbols used to represent the all-seeing nature of Yehoveh in the 3 horses that roam the earth in chapter 1. What this is really meant to do in addition to highlighting the omniscience and omnipresence of Yehoveh, is to point out the presence of God as well as His supreme favor in the Temple building project, and in Joshua and Zerubbabel leading that effort.

We'll stop here for today, and begin next time when again the matter of the 2 olive trees and their meaning is brought up again because Zechariah still doesn't understand it.