

# The Vision of Zerubbabel

The book of Zechariah is filled with odd and unusual visions. One of the strangest can be found in chapter 4:

**Zechariah 4:4:** “And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep.

2 And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold **a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof:**

**3 And two olive trees by it**, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.”

We can immediately see that this is one of the most complicated visions in the Bible. Normally visions consist of seeing just one object – like a man on a red horse (Revelation 6:4) or a flying roll (Zechariah 5:2). This vision, though, has a lot of parts. Zechariah sees a candlestick, a bowl, seven lamps, seven pipes, and two olive trees.

If we just randomly guessed what this vision meant we could probably come up with all sorts of different interpretations. However, I don't think we would ever come up with the interpretation that Zechariah was given:

**Zechariah 4:4:** “So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, **What are these, my lord?**

5 Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these

be? And I said, No, my lord.

6 Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, **Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit**, saith the Lord of hosts.”

I am sure that you could spend *days* thinking over the candlestick, bowl, lamps, pipes, and trees, and not arrive at the interpretation of “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit”. This, incidentally, is why it is so important to *use the Bible to interpret Biblical symbolism* instead of just deciding for yourself what something means. The actual answer can easily be something you would never have guessed.

This interpretation, while illuminating, still leaves a lot of questions. How on earth does a candlestick, a bowl, some lamps, some pipes, and some trees symbolize *that*? What is the connection?

I looked up the passage in a number of commentaries and found wildly different interpretations. Apparently there isn’t a lot of agreement here – which is to be expected, given the cryptic nature of these verses.

The chapter does give us one further clue. We find it a few verses later:

**Zechariah 4:11:** “Then answered I, and said unto him, **What are these two olive trees** upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof?

12 And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves?

13 And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord.

14 Then said he, **These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord** of the whole

earth.”

The two olive trees are the “two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord”. That alone is newsworthy – after all, did you know that two anointed ones stand by the Lord? Just who are these anointed ones and what do they do? This passage doesn’t say, but the book of Revelation has the answer. It turns out that the two anointed ones are the two witnesses:

**Revelation 11:3:** “And I will give power unto my **two witnesses**, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

**4 These are the two olive trees**, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.

**5** And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.”

The two witnesses are one of the most famous parts of the Tribulation. During the first half of the seven-year Tribulation these two witnesses will testify on behalf of God. The Lord will grant them power to smite the Earth and kill their enemies. At the end of their ministry the Beast will overcome them and kill them, and their dead bodies will lie in Jerusalem for three and a half days. At the end of that time the Lord will raise them back to life and they will ascend into Heaven.

There is a great deal of speculation about just who these two witnesses are. Some scholars think that they are two random Jews, while others believe that they represent Moses and Elijah. In my opinion I think that Moses and Elijah are the most likely candidates. Moses represents the Law and Elijah represents the prophets. Moses and Elijah were both on the mount of Transfiguration, and Malachi 4:5 says that the Lord would send

Elijah back to Earth before the Tribulation began. If you were going to send two people to Israel to testify on behalf of God, it would be very difficult to find two candidates who were better than Moses and Elijah.

So that unravels part of the mystery: the two anointed ones are the two witnesses from Revelation. But what about the rest of the vision?

From what I can tell based on the passage, it seems that the bowl is on top of the candlestick. The olive trees supply oil to the bowl, and the oil is then routed through the pipes and to the lamps in order to supply the lamps with the oil they need to keep burning. It's an automatic system that does away with the need to manually refill the lamps (which was one of the Temple duties in the Old Testament).

In the Bible, oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Jesus once told a parable about ten virgins, and in that parable five of the virgins ran out of oil for their lamps. In this system that would never be a problem because the lamps are directly connected to the source of oil and will never run out.

I think that the answer to this vision can be found in the middle of the chapter. We skipped a key verse:

**Zechariah 4:7:** "Who art thou, O great mountain? **before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain:** and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it."

In the system of pipes and bowls and trees, the bowls have an endless supply of oil. They don't have to worry about running out; that's not an issue. They will always have everything that they need to keep burning.

In verse 7 God tells Zerubbabel that he will be unstoppable. The task that he is facing seems insurmountable, but it won't be because God is with him. Perhaps the vision is intended to show him that God is supplying him with a constant stream of

His Spirit. God has connected him to the Source, and his lamp will never run out. Zerubbabel will have everything that he needs to turn that mountain into a plain (or to rebuild the Temple, which was his actual goal). After all, it will be done “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit”!

