
OUTLINE

4

THE FIFTH VISION

Preservation of the church, 4:1-14

4.1 The power of preservation: 4:1-7

Probably during the same night, Zechariah receives a vision again like the other ones. The interpreting angel appears again and wakes up Zechariah. Zechariah seems to be like a man who is wakened out of his sleep. Zechariah then sees a golden lampstand with a bowl on top of it. Above the bowl are seven lamps with seven lips on each of the lamps. A strange vision? It reminded Zechariah directly of the good old days. The prophet knows the golden lampstand as it stood in the tabernacle and later the 10 lampstands which stood in the temple of Solomon (cf. Exodus 25:31-40 and 2 Chron. 4:7 and 20). Zechariah also knows that this lampstand had to be filled every night by one of the priests. Once this was accomplished it would burn throughout the whole night. The high priest was responsible for the continual burning of the lampstand in the tabernacle and later on in the temple. The LORD gave *promises* in that way. These were the promises that the church would not perish but would be gathered throughout the ages. The promises that God would preserve His church in the world.

The lampstand itself pointed to the church. Is not the church of God the light in this world? The lampstand had to spread its light among the people.

In the temple of Solomon it had been the whole lampstand of pure gold that gave light. Unfortunately though, that had been a long time ago. The temple of Solomon had been destroyed, the lampstand had disappeared. It had perished in the fire. The LORD had been angry with His people. He Himself had finished the glorious times of Solomon by sending the people into exile. Now it is all gone, it had passed away

Yet, the old picture comes back before the eyes of Zechariah. He sees it again, that old lampstand, inseparably connected with the temple. It means that the LORD did not finish His work with the church! So it is the old lampstand which Zechariah discovers. The old lampstand is a lit-

tle bit different, however. Bear in mind that Zechariah gives the following description: "A lampstand . . . with a bowl on top of it." That bowl was a kind of crown. The word that is used in Hebrew actually means a roll. When something is rolled it gets a round or artistic shape. Thus, it means: Zechariah sees a lampstand made out of gold with a crown in its top. Seven lamps are in this crown and there are seven mouths serving as connections between the lamps and the lampstand.

Therefore, it is not a simple lampstand but a lampstand with seven arms of which the lamps have seven openings. Investigations have shown that these kind of lamps actually existed in Canaan.

Something more remarkable arises in this vision. Zechariah discovers not only this beautiful lampstand but he also sees two olive trees, one on each side of the bowl.

Here we have a difficult point. Being the son of a priest, Zechariah knew very well of course what the lampstand meant. Right away he understood that this lighted temple lampstand meant the restoration of the temple! A lampstand which is spreading light in this particular way with seven lamps is only possible in the temple. That means that there will be a new temple with a new liturgy for the temple. Everything that reminds Zechariah of the temple of Solomon and the tabernacle of former days is very well understood by him.

But there is only one problem. What about the combination of the lampstand with the two olive trees on the right and left side of the bowl? Hence, he asks the angel, "What are these, my LORD?"

After the repetition of the question the answer is given, "This is the Word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts."

Let us be aware of the fact that the answer is like an *exclamation*, in a short sentence, without even a verb: No might, no power, only My Spirit!

It is a word of great comfort in the situation of the church in those days. The building up of the temple did not continue as it should have gone. There were the foreign Samaritans who fought against it. From the inside there was a lack of faith and a wavering. They said to one another: How can we ever finish this work? Actually we do not have anything. We do not have any power nor do we have any influence. We do not have a big organization and large numbers on which we can count. We do not have much money.

But when they are thinking in this way about the preservation of God's church, the God of hosts is coming. Bear in mind that He is called here the God of hosts. It means that He is the God of legions and of the millions. He says: It does not work through might or enormous amounts of money. Neither does it work through power (that means through a very big organization) nor many, many people. No, it works only through My Spirit. I will do it Myself, says the LORD. I will finish it by My Spirit.

In this way the preservation of the church is guaranteed. It is only through the oil of the Spirit that the lampstand spreads light, otherwise it does not give any light at all!

When the Spirit is not there, when He does not work, then you can do what you want and you can organize what you want, says the LORD, but the church will not be preserved because I withdraw My own power.

The opposite is also true. When the LORD is working with His Spirit in the church, then everybody will be surprised at what can happen. Nobody understands where all the money is coming from and everyone is surprised at how well things are organized. It seems to be a miracle that everything is alright. However, the secret is that the Spirit of the LORD is at work. He *can* do the work and He is also willing to do the work. Thus, He will do it. That is emphasized in verse 6.

The Holy Spirit is the motor behind human activities. This text is often misused. The Spirit must do it! For many people this meant: we can just wait with folded arms. Then the people became (spiritually speaking) very lazy and they did not do anything.

This is not the thesis of the book of a fatalist, though, but a firm guarantee of the LORD to His church: the Spirit *will* indeed do it!

It means that He is the proper Worker; He is the Author Himself.

Neither the light nor the oil of the lampstand is ours but it is all His! He will light the lampstand. He will finish the building up of the temple, the dwelling place of God in the Spirit; both the one of the Old Dispensation and the one in the New Covenant (cf. Eph. 2:22).

That is a great comfort for the church in Jerusalem. It is also a great comfort for us today. Isaiah 42 shows us the style of the Servant of the LORD who does not appear with enormous propaganda and impressive numbers. "He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick till He brings justice to victory. In His Name will the Gentiles hope." In Matt. 12:15-21 our LORD Jesus Christ applied this style to Himself and He proclaimed how this prophecy had been fulfilled. That is the meaning of: Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

God Himself uses the secret weapon in the fight for His kingdom. It is a weapon not to be conquered by any power neither by any adversary. The secret weapon of the Spirit is the proclamation of God's own Word. It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith (cf. Rom. 1:16). In this way, the Holy Spirit is at work in the church. He enters the life of God's church with the power of preservation.

While these words are words of comfort, they are words of pointed warning at the same time.

When the LORD says "My Spirit" it means no might or power and therefore I have to faithfully expect everything from God's Spirit. Then I have to work daily with complete dependence on the Spirit of the

LORD. Of course, many resistances and obstacles may appear. Yet, with faith, they do not have any significance anymore. One can look up to something like a high mountain. When one stands in faith, though, that mountain will disappear right away. It is the meaning of verse 7. "What are you, O great mountain?" That also means: What are you, O great mountain of sorrows and troubles? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! The Spirit of the LORD will lift up every valley and every mountain and hill He will make low (cf. Is. 40:4). Zerubbabel may say to that mountain, "Be taken up and cast into the sea!"

Zerubbabel will also bring forward the top stone amid shouts of, "Grace, grace to it!" That was an old custom when the top stone had been placed. Everybody would come and offer congratulations, "Grace, blessed is this stone!"

4.2 The means of preservation: 4:8-10

When we see how the Holy Spirit is working in the church we also see right away that the members of the church have to go to work. The LORD grants power of preservation to His church but He does not work without means. He uses men as His instruments. That is what it says in this fifth night vision of Zechariah in a separate revelation (vv. 8 and 9). It says there that the people of God will experience that Zechariah is a faithful prophet of the LORD. It also says that we have to do something, that we even have to work very hard in the church. We have to put our shoulder to the wheel!

The Spirit of the LORD will do it. Of course! But two times we read here about the *hands* of Zerubbabel. It means that he is a fellow worker. Of course he works in a human manner and not in a divine manner. Sure, the LORD could do the work without him. God could miss the human help. Yet, God does not *want* to miss human help! In the preservation of His church He uses men as means in His hands. He makes them His fellow workers. His Spirit is going to mobilize His people. It may be with a defective organization. Possibly with only a few men. But the work grows and it will be finished! The Holy Spirit Himself is at work.

Of course, the result is sometimes not spectacular, especially not in the beginning. Maybe the people of the church also have their comments and they will say, "Oh, it is only a very few!" But that is exactly what the LORD says to the prophet, "Whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice!" Who considers the building up of the temple as insignificant? Surely not the LORD Himself! He says: Look at Zerubbabel crossing the square of the temple. See the plummet in his hands. He examines the walls of the temple. It means that the temple will be finished.

Although the people may say that it is only a defective thing, i.e., the whole matter of the rebuilding of the temple, the LORD says, "Nevertheless, I rejoice!"

The seven eyes of the LORD which see everything and range

throughout the whole earth rejoice. God is glad when He sees that small but faithful beginning. God's seven eyes radiate because the day of small things is at the same time the day of great operations of the Holy Spirit!

The eyes of God are twinkling when they look at the simple faithfulness of His people. If we do our work simply and faithfully the LORD will use it. It is really ecumenical. It has universal significance.

4.3 The source of preservation: 4:11-14

We always have to go back from the means to the source. God uses instruments. Behind these instruments we have to discover the source itself. That is what we read in the verses 11-14. Zechariah did not understand everything. He asks, "How is that possible that the olive trees are not exhausted? How is it possible that the lampstand is burning all the time?"

The answer is, "These are the two anointed who stand by the LORD of the whole earth." He is not only the God of His covenant but He is also the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. The olive trees are also created by Him and they are preserved by Him. That is the secret of the lampstand which is burning all the time by means of the oil given by the Holy Spirit. The lampstand is living by means of the olive trees and the olive trees are living from the heavenly source.

So, sources of heaven are opened up. From them the Spirit of the LORD comes down out of heaven into the temple of God.

It is a beautiful image. The people of the LORD are the lampstand and must radiate the light into this world. They have a strong connection with heaven, being nourished by the Word of God by means of the office-bearers. Joshua and Zerubbabel, the two office-bearers, nourish the people of God.

We find this image back in the Scriptures (Rev. 11). There are two witnesses who have the power of prophecy. John writes about them, "These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the earth." (v. 4) That means: they are not separated anymore but united, i.e., the people and the office-bearers together. They may all prophesy. There is no distance between the office-bearers in the church and the other members of the church. These two witnesses are not exhausted. They do not have an easy life. They are isolated from many things. They have to burn out to the very end.

Just as the great Office-bearer Himself, Jesus Christ, burned out on Golgotha during that dark hour, these office-bearers also have to burn out. The world did not spare Jesus Christ. Shall they spare the servants of the LORD?

Yet, they have to continue to prophesy to the very end until God Himself will finish the history of the church.

If the world says, "Let the church bleed to death," then we believe in God who lets our lamps shine. We may stand in this world both as His

witnesses, as a lampstand, but also as an olive tree anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit. In the last boycott and the ultimate isolation this will be the firm comfort of the church: God preserves His church until the very end!

4.4 Some questions

1. *“The Spirit must do it,” is a slogan which is heard often in the circles of false passivism. Is there any reason that this can be derived from Zechariah 4?*
2. *In what context did our Saviour say that His kingdom is not of this world?*
3. *Does “the day of small things” also have to do with the reformation of the church? How is the connection to be made with Zechariah 4:10?*
4. *Could there be any connection between the day of small things and, e.g., our work in young people’s societies?*
5. *What consequences can be derived from the fact that in the New Dispensation the lampstand and the olive trees are united? Note this especially with respect to the matter of testifying as spoken of in Revelation 11.*
6. *Is it possible to fulfill the task of mission and evangelism in times of many adversities? How long do we have to continue that calling?*

4.5 Literature

See Outline 1.