

CHAPTER 4

In this chapter we have another comfortable vision, which, as it was explained to the prophet, had much in it for the encouragement of the people of God in their present straits, which were so great that they thought their case helpless, that their temple could never be rebuilt nor their city replenished; and therefore the scope of the vision is to show that God would, by his own power, perfect the work, though the assistance given to it by its friends were ever so weak, and the resistance given to it by its enemies were ever so strong. Here is,

- I.** The awakening of the prophet to observe the vision (v. 1).
- II.** The vision itself, of a candlestick with seven lamps, which were supplied with oil, and kept burning, immediately from two olive-trees that grew by it, one on either side (v. 2, 3).
- III.** The general encouragement hereby intended to be given to the builders of the temple to go on in that good work, assuring them that it should be brought to perfection at last (v. 4-10).
- IV.** The particular explication of the vision, for the illustration of these assurances (v. 11-14).

~~301~~ ZECHARIAH 4:1-10

THE VISION OF THE GOLDEN CANDLESTICK

Here is,

- I.** The prophet prepared to receive the discovery that was to be made to him: *The angel that talked with him came and waked him*, v. 1. It seems, though he was in conference with an angel, and about matters of great and public concern, yet he grew dull and fell asleep, as it should seem, while the angel was yet talking with him. Thus the disciples, when they saw Christ transfigured, were *heavy with sleep*, ~~412~~ Luke 9:32. The prophet's spirit, no doubt, was willing to attend to that which was to be seen and heard, but the flesh was weak; his body could not keep pace with his soul in divine contemplations; the strangeness of the visions perhaps stupefied

him, and so he was overcome with sleep, or perhaps the sweetness of the visions composed him and even sung him asleep. Daniel was in a *deep sleep when he heard the voice of the angel's words*, ⁽²⁷⁰⁾Daniel 10:9. We shall never be fit for converse with spirits till we have got clear of these bodies of flesh. It should seem, the angel let him lose himself a little, that he might be fresh to receive new discoveries, but then *waked him*, to his surprise, *as a man that is wakened out of his sleep*. Note, We need the Spirit of God, not only to make known to us divine things, but to make us take notice of them. *He wakens morning by morning, he wakens my ear*, ⁽²⁸⁰⁾Isaiah 50:4. We should beg of God that, whenever he speaks to us, he would awaken us, and we should then *stir up ourselves*.

II. The discovery that was made to him when he was thus prepared. The angel asked him, *What seest thou?* v. 2. When he was awake perhaps he would not have taken notice of what was presented to his view if he had not thus been excited to look about him. When he observed he saw a *golden candlestick*, such a one as was in the temple formerly, and with the like this temple should in due time be furnished. The church is a candlestick, set up for the enlightening of this dark world and the holding forth of the light of divine revelation to it. The candle is God's; the church is but the candlestick, but all of gold, denoting the great worth and excellence of the church of God. This golden candlestick had *seven lamps* branching out from it, so many sockets, in each of which was a burning and shining light. The Jewish church was but one, and though the Jews that were dispersed, it is probable, had synagogues in other countries, yet they were but as so many lamps belonging to one candlestick; but now, under the gospel, Christ is the centre of unity, and not Jerusalem, or any one place; and therefore seven particular churches are represented, not as *seven lamps*, but as seven several *golden candlesticks*, ⁽⁴⁰⁰⁾Revelation 1:20. This candlestick had one *bowl*, or common receiver, on the top, into which oil was continually dropping, and from it, by seven secret pipes, or passages, it was diffused to the seven lamps, so that, without any further care, they received oil as fast as they wasted it (as in those which we call *fountain-ink-horns*, or *fountain-pens*); they never wanted, nor were ever glutted, and so kept always burning clear. And the bowl too was continually supplied, without any care or attendance of man; for (v. 3) he saw *two olive-trees*, one on each side the candlestick, that were so fat and fruitful that of their own accord they poured plenty of oil continually into the bowl, which by two larger pipes (v. 12) dispersed the oil to smaller

ones and so to the lamps; so that nobody needed to attend this candlestick, to furnish it with oil (it tarried not for man, nor waited for the sons of men), the scope of which is to show that God easily can, and often does, accomplish his gracious purposes concerning his church by his own wisdom and power, without any art or labour of man, and that though sometimes he makes use of instruments, yet he neither needs them nor is tied to them, but can do his work without them, and will rather than it shall be undone.

III. The enquiry which the prophet made concerning the meaning of this, and the gentle reproof given him for his dulness (v. 4): *I answered and spoke to the angel, saying, What are these, my lord?* Observe how respectfully he speaks to the angel; he calls him *my lord*. Those that would be taught must give honour to their teachers. He saw what these *were*, but asked what these *signified*. Note, It is very desirable to know the meaning of God's manifestations of himself and his mind both in his word and by his ordinances and providences. *What mean you by these services, by these signs?* And those that would understand the mind of God must be inquisitive. *Then shall we know if we follow on to know*, if we not only *hear*, but, as Christ, *ask questions* upon what we hear, ⁴¹²⁶Luke 2:46. The angel answered him with a question, *Knowest thou not what these be?* intimating that if he had considered, and compared spiritual things with spiritual, he might have guessed at the meaning of these things; for he knew that there was a golden candlestick in the tabernacle, which it was the priests' constant business to supply with oil and to keep burning, for the use of the tabernacle; when therefore he saw, in vision, such a candlestick, with lamps always kept burning, and yet no priests to attend it, nor any occasion for them, he might discern the meaning of this to be that though God had set up the priesthood again, yet he could carry on his own work for and in his people without them. Note, We have reason to be ashamed of ourselves that we do not more readily apprehend the meaning of divine discoveries. The angel asked the prophet this question, to draw from him an acknowledgment of his own dulness, and darkness, and slowness to understand, and he had it immediately: *"I said, No, my lord; I know not what these are."* Visions had their significance, but often dark and hard to be understood, and the prophets themselves were not always aware of it at first. But those that would be taught of God must see and acknowledge their own ignorance, and their need to be taught, and must apply to God for instruction. To him that gave us the cabinet we must

apply for the key wherewith to unlock it. God will teach the meek and humble, not those that are conceited of themselves and lean on the broken reed of their own understanding.

IV. The general intention of this vision. Without a critical descant upon every circumstance of the vision, the design of it is to assure the prophet, and by him the people, that this good work of building the temple should, by the special care of divine Providence, and the immediate influence of divine grace, be brought to a happy issue, though the enemies of it were many and mighty and the friends and furtherers of it few and feeble. Note, In the explication of visions and parables, we must look at the principal scope of them, and be satisfied with that, if that be clear, though we may not be able to account for every circumstance, or accommodate it to our purpose. The angel lets the prophet know, in general, that this vision was designed to illustrate a word which the Lord had to say to Zerubbabel, to encourage him to go on with the building of the temple. Let him know that he is a worker together with God in it, and that it is a work which God will own and crown.

1. God will carry on and complete this work, as he had begun their deliverance from Babylon, not by external force, but by secret operations and internal influences upon the minds of men. *He* says this who is the *Lord of hosts*, and could do it *vi et armis* — *by force*, has legions at command; but he will do it, *not by human might or power*, but *by his own Spirit*. What is done by his Spirit is done by might and power, but it stands in opposition to visible force. Israel was brought out of Egypt, and into Canaan, by might and power; in both these works of wonder great slaughter was made. But they were brought out of Babylon, and into Canaan the second time, *by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts* working upon the spirit of Cyrus, and inclining him to proclaim liberty to them, and working upon the spirits of the captives, and inclining them to accept the liberty offered them. It was by the *Spirit of the Lord of hosts* that the people were excited and animated to build the temple; and *therefore* they are said to be *helped by the prophets of God*, because they, as the Spirit's mouth, spoke to their hearts, ^{
}Ezra 5:2. It was by the same Spirit that the heart of Darius was inclined to favour and further that good work and that the sworn enemies of it were infatuated in their councils, so that they could not hinder it as they designed. Note, The work of God is often carried on very successfully when yet it is carried on very silently, and without the assistance of human force; the gospel-temple is built, not by

might or power (for *the weapons of our warfare are not carnal*), but by the *Spirit of the Lord of hosts*, whose work on men's consciences is mighty to the pulling down of strong-holds; thus the excellency of the power is of God, and not of man. When instruments fail, let us therefore leave it to God to do his work himself by his own Spirit.

2. All the difficulties and oppositions that lie in the way shall be got over and removed, even those that seem insuperable (v. 7): *Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.* See here,

(1.) How the difficulty is represented; it is a *great mountain*, impassable and immovable, a heap of rubbish, like a great mountain, which must be got away, or the work cannot go on. The enemies of the Jews are proud and hard as great mountains; but, when God has work to do, the mountains that stand in the way of it shall dwindle into mole-hills; for see here,

(2.) How these difficulties are despised: "*Who art thou, O great mountain!* that thou shouldst stand in God's way and think to stop the progress of his work? Who art thou that lookest so big, that thus threatenest, and art thus feared? *Before Zerubbabel*, when he is God's agent, *thou shalt become a plain.* All the difficulties shall vanish, and all the objections be got over. *Every mountain and hill shall be brought low when the way of the Lord is to be prepared,*" ²⁴⁰⁶ Isaiah 40:4. Faith will remove mountains and make them plains. Christ is our Zerubbabel; mountains of difficulty were in the way of his undertaking, but before him they were all levelled; nothing is too hard for his grace to do.

3. The same hand that has begun this good work will perform it: *He shall bring forth the head-stone* (v. 7); and again (v. 9), *The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house*, be it spoken to his honour (perhaps with his own hands he laid the first stone), and though it has been long retarded, and is still much opposed, yet it shall be finished at last; he shall live to see it finished, nay, and *his hands shall also finish it*; herein he is a type of Christ, who is both the *author* and the *finisher of our faith*; and his being the *author* of it is an assurance to us that he will be the *finisher*, for, *as for God, his work is perfect*; has he begun and shall he not make an end? Zerubbabel shall himself *bring forth the head-stone with shoutings*, and loud acclamations of joy, among the spectators. The acclamations are not *huzzas*, but *Grace, grace*; that is the burden of the triumphant songs which the church sings. It may be taken,

(1.) As magnifying free grace, and giving to that all the glory of what is done. When the work is finished it must be thankfully acknowledged that it was not by any policy or power of our own that it was brought to perfection, but that it was grace that did it — God's good-will towards us and his good work in us and for us. *Grace, grace*, must be cried, not only to the head-stone, but to the foundation-stone, the corner-stone, and indeed to every stone in God's building; from first to last it is nothing of works, but all of grace, and all our crowns must be cast at the feet of free grace. *Not unto us, O Lord! not unto us.*

(2.) As depending upon free grace, and desiring the continuance of it, for what is yet to be done. *Grace, grace*, is the language of prayer as well as of praise; now that this building is finished, all happiness attend it! Peace be within its walls, and, in order to that, *grace*. Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon it! Note, What comes from the grace of God may, in faith, and upon good grounds, be committed to the grace of God, for God will not forsake the work of his own hands.

4. This shall be a full ratification of the prophecies which went before concerning the Jews' return, and their settlement again. When the temple is finished then *thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts has sent me unto you*. Note, The exact accomplishment of scripture prophecies is a convincing proof of their divine original. Thus God *confirms the word of his servant*, by *saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built*, ^{<240>}Isaiah 44:26. No word of God shall fall to the ground, nor shall there fail one iota or tittle of it. Zechariah's prophecies of the approaching day of deliverance to the church would soon appear, by the accomplishment of them, to be of God.

5. This shall effectually silence those that looked with contempt upon the beginning of this work, v. 10. Who, where, is he now that despised the day of small things, and thought this work would never come to any thing? The Jews themselves despised the foundation of the second temple, because it was likely to be so far inferior to the first, ^{<182>}Ezra 3:12. Their enemies despised the wall when it was in the building, ^{<1429>}Nehemiah 2:19; 4:2, 3. But let them not do it. Note, In God's work the day of small things is not to be despised. Though the instruments be weak and unlikely, God often chooses such, by them to bring about great things. As a great mountain becomes a plain before him when he pleases, so a little stone, cut out of a mountain without hands, comes to fill the earth, ^{<215>}Daniel 2:35. Though the beginnings be small, God can make the latter end greatly

to increase; a grain of mustard-seed may become a great tree. Let not the dawning light be despised, for it will shine more and more to the perfect day. The day of small things is the day of precious things, and will be the day of great things.

6. This shall abundantly satisfy all the hearty well-wishers to God's interest, who will be glad to see themselves mistaken in *despising the day of small things*. Those that despaired of the finishing of the work shall rejoice when they *see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel*, when they see him busy among the builders, giving orders and directions what to do, and taking care that the work be done with great exactness, that it may be both fine and firm. Note, It is matter of great rejoicing to all good people to see magistrates careful and active for the edifying of the house of God, to see the plummet in the hand of those who have power to do much, if they have but a heart according to it; we see not Zerubbabel with the trowel in his hand (that is left to the workmen, the ministers), but we see him with the plummet in his hand, and it is no disparagement, but an honour to him. Magistrates are to inspect ministers' work, and to speak comfortably to the Levites that do their duty.

7. This shall highly magnify the wisdom and care of God's providence, which is always employed for the good of his church. Zerubbabel does his part, does as much as man can do to forward the work, but it is *with those seven, those seven eyes of the Lord* which we read of ^{<38B>}Zerubabiel 3:9. He could do nothing if the watchful, powerful, gracious providence of God did not go before him and go along with him in it. Except the Lord had built this house, Zerubbabel and the rest would have *laboured in vain*, ^{<3C>}Psalm 127:1. These *eyes of the Lord* are those that *run to and fro through the whole earth*, that take cognizance of all the creatures and all their actions (^{<48B>}2 Chronicles 16:9), and inspire and direct all, according to the divine counsels. Note, We must not think that God is so taken up with the affairs of his church as to neglect the world; but it is a comfort to us that the same all-wise almighty Providence that governs the nations of the earth is in a particular manner conversant about the church. Those *seven eyes* that *run through the earth* are all *upon the stone* that Zerubbabel is laying straight with his plummet, to see that it be well laid. And those that have the plummet in their hand must look up to *those eyes of the Lord*, must have a constant regard to divine Providence, and act in dependence upon its guidance and submission to its disposals.

THE VISION OF THE OLIVE-TREES

Enough is said to Zechariah to encourage him, and to enable him to encourage others, with reference to the good work of building the temple which they were now about, and that was the principal intention of the vision he saw; but still he is inquisitive about the particulars, which we will ascribe, not to any vain curiosity, but to the value he had for divine discoveries and the pleasure he took in acquainting himself with them. Those that know much of the things of God cannot but have a humble desire to know more. Now observe,

I. What his enquiry was. He understood the meaning of the candlestick with its lamps: It is Jerusalem, it is the temple, and their salvation that is to *go forth as a lamp that burns*; but he wants to know what are these *two olive-trees* (v. 11), these *two olive-branches*? v. 12. Observe here,

- 1.** He asked. Note, Those that would be acquainted with the things of God must be inquisitive concerning those things. Ask, and you shall be told.
- 2.** He asked twice, his first question having no reply given to it. Note, If satisfactory answers be not given to our enquiries and requests quickly, we must renew them, and repeat them, and continue instant and importunate in them, and the vision shall at length *speak, and not lie*.
- 3.** His second query varied somewhat from the former. He first asked, What are *these two olive-trees*, but afterwards, *What are these two olive-branches*? that is, those boughs of the tree that hung over the bowl and distilled oil into it. When we enquire concerning the grace of God, it must be rather as it is communicated to us by the fruitful boughs of the word and ordinances (for that is one of the *things revealed*, which *belong to us and to our children*) than as it is resident in the good olive where all our springs are, for that is one of the *secret things*, which *belong not to us*.
- 4.** In his enquiry he mentioned the observations he had made upon the vision; he took notice not only of what was obvious at first sight, that the two olive-trees grew, one *on the right side and the other on the left side of the candlestick* (so nigh, so ready, is divine grace to the church), but he observed further, upon a more narrow inspection, that the *two olive-*

branches, from which in particular the candlestick did receive of *the root and fatness of the olive* (as the apostle says of the church, ^{<6117>}Romans 11:17), did empty the *golden oil* (that is, the clear bright oil, the best in its kind, and of great value, as if it were *aurum potabile* — *liquid gold*) *out of themselves through the two golden pipes*, or (as the margin reads it) *which by the hand of the two golden pipes empty out of themselves oil into the gold*, that is, into the *golden bowl* on the head of the candlestick. Our Lord Jesus emptied himself, to fill us; his precious blood is the golden oil in which we are supplied with all we need.

II. What answer was given to his enquiry. Now again the angel obliged him expressly to own his ignorance, before he informed him (v. 13): “*Knowest thou not what these are? If thou knowest the church to be the candlestick, canst thou think the olive-trees, that supply it with oil, to be any other than the grace of God?*” But he owned he either did not fully understand it or was afraid he did not rightly understand it: *I said, No, my Lord, how should I, except some one guide me?* And then he told him (v. 14): *These are the two sons of oil* (so it is in the original), *the two anointed ones* (so we read it), rather, *the two oily ones*. That which we read (^{<2181>}Isaiah 5:1) a *very fruitful hill* is in the original *the horn of the son of oil*, a fat and fattening soil.

1. If by the candlestick we understand the visible church, particularly that of the Jews at that time, for whose comfort it was primarily intended, these *sons of oil*, that *stand before the Lord of the whole earth*, are the two great ordinances and offices of the magistracy and ministry, at that time lodged in the hands of those two great and good men Zerubbabel and Joshua. Kings and priests were anointed; this prince, this priest, were *oily ones*, endued with the gifts and graces of God's Spirit, to qualify them for the work to which they were called. They *stood before the Lord of the whole earth*, to minister to him, and to receive direction from him; and a great influence they had upon the affairs of the church at that time. Their wisdom, courage, and zeal, were continually emptying themselves into the golden bowl, to keep the lamps burning; and, when they are gone, others shall be raised up to carry on the same work; Israel shall no longer be without prince and priest. Good magistrates and good ministers that are themselves anointed with the grace of God and *stand by the Lord of the whole earth*, as faithful adherents to his cause, contribute very much to the maintaining and advancing of religion and the shining forth of the word of life.

2. If by the candlestick we understand the church of the first-born, of true believers, these sons of oil may be meant of Christ and the Spirit, the Redeemer and the Comforter. Christ is not only the Messiah, the *Anointed One* himself, but he is the *good olive* to his church; and *from his fulness we receive*, ^{<4116>}John 1:16. And the Holy Spirit is the *unction or anointing* which we have received, ^{<4121>}1 John 2:20, 27. From Christ, the *olive tree*, by the *Spirit, the olive branch*, all the golden oil of grace is communicated to believers, which keeps their lamps burning, and without a constant supply of which they would soon go out. They *stand by the Lord of the whole earth*, who is in a special manner the church's Lord; for the Son was to be sent by the Father, and so was the Holy Ghost, in the time appointed, and they stand by him ready to go.