

OPEN BIBLE CHURCH

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SERMON TITLE New in 2022, part 4

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KEY SCRIPTURE Zechariah 4

SYNOPSIS Don't despise small beginnings. God is doing something new and he rejoices when we join him and get started.

HIGHLIGHTS



☞ New in 2022 part 4, New Beginnings

Zechariah 4

Then the angel who talked with me returned and wakened me, as a man is wakened from his sleep. 2 He asked me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights. 3 Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." 4 I asked the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" 5 He answered, "Do you not know what these are?" "No, my lord," I replied. 6 So 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 Almighty.** 7 "What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of 'God bless it! God bless it!'" 8 Then the word of the Lord came to me: 9 "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands will also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. 10 "Who despises the day of ☞ small things? (***Do not despise these small beginnings...*** NLT). Men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. "(These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range throughout the earth.)" 11 Then I asked the angel, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?" 12 Again I asked him, "What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?" 13 He replied, "Do you not know what these are?" "No, my lord," I said. 14 So he said, "These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth."

Background:

Zechariah was a prophet and a priest. He began his ministry in 520 B.C., shortly after Haggai had begun his prophetic work. Earlier prophets had promised a glorious restoration of the nation. However, the reality for those who returned fell far short of these expectations. Their endeavors to rebuild the city, the temple, and their community life were frustrated at many levels. Nearly 20 years after returning from the Babylonian exile in the time of Cyrus, God's people were discouraged. The foundation of the temple had been laid shortly after the initial return, but powerful opposition had prevented any further progress on rebuilding the temple. And, there was little evidence of the kind of spiritual renewal that the earlier prophets had anticipated. Jewish sovereignty had not been restored. A moral reformation of the people had not occurred. Jerusalem was still only partially rebuilt and had no significance among the surrounding nations. Under the circumstances, many people concluded that theirs was a "day of small things" in which God was absent from his people. Many viewed faithful obedience as useless. It seemed to make more sense to forget God and to pursue the best life possible.

Let's make some initial comparisons to our day. The overall Church in America has been in decline for decades now. While many prophetic voices have been predicting a great revival, it has yet to be seen. Two years after COVID disrupted everything, churches across the nation are still struggling to find solid ground. 75% of American churches are still running only around half of what attendance was before COVID. While things in the church are somewhat getting "back to normal," it's a long way off from what many had hoped. There is plenty of discouragement going around and many have given up on church altogether. This is the kind of situation to which God speaks through Zechariah in order to encourage the people.



☞ **The Vision: (cf. image)**

In the vision there is 1 stand, 1 bowl, 2 trees, 2 branches, 7 lamps, and 7 channels to each lamp. The trees are producing olive oil, which is dripping into the bowl, and from there is feeding the 7 lamps, which are ablaze.

Zechariah asked what I think anyone would ask in verse 4... “what are these, my Lord?” Then, the angel says, “don’t you know?” When Zech reiterates that he doesn’t know, the angel then follows with a cryptic answer. Then, in verses 11 and 12, Zechariah tries again to get an explanation, this time adding more detail to his question... “what are these 2 olive trees, and what are these 2 olive branches?” And again, the angel replies with, “don’t you know?” And Zech, again says, “no.”

Wouldn’t you like to know what the images in the vision stand for? Don’t you already know? I’ve done a ton of research on this, and the scholars make a lot of suggestions, but in truth, nobody knows for certain what this all means. So, I’m going to take a stab at it today and you can judge for yourselves whether it seems right or not.

☞ Let’s start with **New Beginnings**

First, here’s what I’m confident about: this vision is an encouraging word from the Lord, that **he is up to something new**. This fits for us today as we have been talking about New in 2022. In fact, in verse 10, the Lord explicitly references the day of small beginnings. The Lord wants to encourage us as well. While it might seem that things are small, they are beginning anew. God is up to something fresh and he is rebuilding his people.

The imagery also speaks of new beginnings. There are a total of 49 pipes from the bowl to the lamps; 7 to each lamp. Some have disputed this, but in the original language, it literally says there are 7 lamps and 7, 7 pipes to the lamps. Several bible translations clarify that there are 7 spouts or pipes to each of the 7 lamps. That makes 49, which speaks to the idea of new beginnings. I’m referring to the year of Jubilee in the OT.

The word “jubilee” is defined in Leviticus 25 as the sabbatical year after seven cycles of seven years (49 years). The fiftieth year was to be a time of celebration and rejoicing for the Israelites. The Year of the Jubilee involved a year of renewal... all prisoners and captives were set free, all slaves were released, all debts were forgiven, and all property was returned to its original owners. In essence, it was a “reset” for the nation; it was a new beginning.

☞ **The Lamps**

☞ Next, the lampstand and 7 lights can represent God’s people and **his influence** in this dark world. In Revelation 1:20, the 7 golden lamps are defined as the churches. Here, the 7 lamps are all attached and fed from the 1 bowl. This speaks of **unity** in the churches. Then, in John 8:12 Jesus said that he is the light of the world. As his followers, he calls us to also **be a light in this world**. (Matthew 5:14) So, the lamps are God’s people; you and me.



☞ The Oil

This one should be obvious. Oil is very frequently used in Scripture to refer to the Holy Spirit. Oil was used in the bible for consecration and anointing, which is the work of the Holy Spirit.

☞ Just like the oil fed the lamps to keep on burning, so the **Holy Spirit empowers** us. And, as oil makes machinery run smoothly, so the anointing of the **Holy Spirit eases the work of ministry**.

We can also see this empowering in the 7 pipes to each lamp. Several times in the book of Revelation there is a mention of the 7 spirits of God. And in Isaiah 11, we find more clarity with ☞ this description: The **Spirit of the Lord** – it's his power, not ours. The Spirit of **wisdom** – again, his, not ours. The Spirit of **understanding**. The Spirit of **counsel**. The Spirit of **might**. The Spirit of **knowledge**. The Spirit of the **fear of the Lord**.

When we lack power, wisdom, understanding and so on, we need to look to the Spirit of the Lord. He supplies all these and more to us. It's not our wisdom that makes us shine in this world. It's not our knowledge or power. It's his that must flow through us. We need the oil of the Spirit.

☞ The Olive Trees

There's a lot of debate about what the olive trees represent in this vision. But let's start simply with this. There is a direct flow of oil from the trees to the bowl which feeds the lamps. This is distinct from the OT tabernacle and temple in which the priests had to keep on filling up the lamps with oil so they would not go out.

It's the same in the Spirit. For our lights to shine, we need the oil of the Holy Spirit to fuel and empower us. In our own strength and ability, we tend to run down, get tired, and potentially ☞ allow our light to go out. But, **God's Spirit is an endless supply of everything we need**. All we have to do is stay connected to his unceasing flow.

So, what are these trees? The same thing that Zechariah wondered. In my research, the scholars are all over the map on this one. In Zechariah's time, most think the trees represented Zerubbabel and Joshua, the leader and priest of the people at the time. Others say they indicated Haggai and Zechariah who were the two prophets encouraging Zerubbabel and the people at the time. But what about an application for us?

Some say the Old and New Testaments. Since the word is compared to a tree of life and the bible has two main sections, this could fit, and it is included in the next suggestion.

Some say the Word and prayer. The wisdom of God's Word is likened to a tree of life in Proverbs, and Jesus often went to the Mount of Olives to pray. Thus, we can possibly see **Bible ☞ reading and prayer**.

☞ Bob Sorge suggests the trees represent the **Word and the Spirit**. He says *we need both the Word and Spirit, mixed together and flowing into our hearts if we're to build the kingdom*



*through the power of God. **When the Spirit of God illumines us with revelation from his word, we come alive with holy fire!***

These all make sense and are good advice. We need the constant flow of the Holy Spirit and Bible reading, with prayer anointed by the Spirit will help us stay spiritually vibrant.

Here's what I see. Since the trees are clearly supplying the constant flow of oil, they indicate something about receiving a constant supply of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. This reminds me of Ephesians 5:18-20 where it tells us to keep on being filled with the Spirit by ☞ singing songs to the Lord and giving thanks to God. So, I can see **praise and gratitude** here.

The bottom line is that we need to keep on being filled with the Spirit if we are to be of any spiritual value to this dark world.

☞ **Not by Might**

Probably the most important verse here is number 6, where God says, "not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty." This is key and the entire vision is reinforcing this idea. To accomplish anything of value in the Kingdom of God, we must be empowered by the Spirit.

It's not the might of a vast number of people, nor the power of one influential person that will make an impact on this world. It's the Spirit of God working through the people of God that will light up this dark world. There's a partnership between God and his people that we keep coming back to. Zerubbabel laid the foundation of the temple and also completed it, but not in his own ability. It was God working behind the scenes that made it possible.

Likewise, today, it's not our abilities; it's not our church building; it's not our t-shirts; it's **not our talents; not our brilliant ideas; not our efforts... it's God working in us and through us that will make a difference in our community and this world.** When the work of ministry is done in this manner, then no mountain can stand in the way.

Warren Wiersbe... What "mountains" was Zerubbabel facing? Discouragement among the people, opposition from the enemies around them, poor crops, an unstable economy, people not obeying God's Law... problems not too different from those the people of God have faced throughout the centuries.

No mountain of opposition can prevent God's work. No mountain of past failures can stop it. ☞ No mountain of nay-sayers can stop it. As I said last week, **God always wins and Jesus never fails.**

☞ **Small Beginnings**



Circling back to where we started, it may seem like there's not much happening spiritually right now. It may seem much "less-than" it used to be. But God is at work behind the scenes. He is **☞ up to something new. So, don't despise these small beginnings.**

☞ Philippians 1:6

he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Warren Wiersbe... Bible history is the record of God using small things. When God wanted to set the plan of salvation in motion, He started with a little baby named Isaac (Genesis 21). When He wanted to overthrow Egypt and set His people free, He used a baby's tears (Exodus 2:1-10). He used a shepherd boy and a sling to defeat a giant (1 Samuel 17) and a little lad's lunch to feed a multitude (John 6). He delivered the Apostle Paul from death by using a basket and a rope (Acts 9:23-25). Never despise the day of small things, for God is glorified in small things and uses them to accomplish great things.

God will continue the work in and through us as we stay connected to his life-giving flow, and the day will come when his plans will be completed. Then we will rejoice wholeheartedly. God is already rejoicing as we are just beginning these new things.

☞ Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty.

Don't despise these small beginnings.

Let's be New in 2022.