

## Zechariah Chapters 3-4 – John Karmelich

1. We left off with the main character receiving a series of visions from God. The purpose of the visions is to encourage the Israelites to build God's temple. Remember the situation: that nation was kicked out of their land as their parents and grandparents turned from God. Now that they are back in that land, Zechariah's saying in effect, "We're here, let's do what God calls us to do!"
  - a) My big question is "so what?" Zechariah wanted to show that when they finished building the temple, God will once again accept them as His people. For Christians today, let's be honest: Who cares? It's nice ancient history, but how does that affect us today?
  - b) That leads us to the second way these two chapters can be read: They describe the mission and the purpose of Jesus coming into our world as well as Holy Spirit. If we just read the chapters as reintroducing temple rituals, we miss the main point: Zechariah is using the two visions he got in this chapter to teach us: 1) What Jesus did for us on the cross 2) What will God's spirit do for as a we make a difference for Him and 3) How those of us who believe Jesus is God and died for all our sins will rule the world one day. I don't know about you, but I'd say that's a pretty ambitious project, to interpret all of that through a pair of pretty strange visions that God gave Zechariah in these chapters.
  - c) Well then John, that's all nice and good, but we're all Christians and we already believe all this stuff. Whether you right or wrong about your interpretation of dreams Zechariah had over 500 years before Jesus came on the scene, the truth is most of us already do accept all of that "stuff" as fact. So therefore, why should we study all of this "weird stuff"? To start, it's another way to prove to us that every aspect of Jesus' life, purpose and ministry was predicted centuries before Jesus came on the scene. The next reason is God always wants us to learn more about Jesus, which is a key reason to study our bible.
  - d) Let me put it this way: If we will spend eternity worshipping Jesus and serving Him, we should never stop learning about Him. The more we know about Him, the better it is that we can do what God calls us to do: Be a living witness for Him. Each of us are called to be a witness for Him. Thee great joy of life, is using the gifts and time God's given us to make a difference for Him. That again is why we're called to study His word in the first place.
2. OK then with that lofty introduction completed, welcome to my study of Zechariah Chapters 3-4. Let me quickly go over these chapters and hopefully we can all learn a little more of how God's relationship with us works and how we can better serve Him with that information. These two chapters are two separate visions that Zechariah received from God.
  - a) The first vision involved a number of interesting characters: The Israel high priest at the time who Zechariah knew personally, the Angel of the Lord, who I'd argue is Jesus in His "incarnate" state, Satan and God the Father. I don't know about you, but I'd say either Zechariah had some bad pizza and a really weird dream, or since we're reading the bible, he got the privilege of seeing something spectacular.
  - b) Of course I'll explain all of that when I go through my verse by verse commentary, but for now realize we're dealing with the "big guns" and whatever is happening it appears to be a lot more than just ordaining the current high priest of Israel. As a clue to why I'd argue this is a prediction of what Jesus did for us, realize in Hebrew the word Joshua and Jesus are the same word. By the way, this is not Joshua of the "Book of Joshua". This is roughly 1,000 years after that Joshua.
    - i) Anyway, most of this short 10-verse chapter deals with the ritual of making Joshua the official high priest and doing what God commands to do. I'll just say based on the fact the "big guns" (as I like to call them) appear on the scene, this scene is a lot more than just the anointing of the latest high priest in a vision.
    - ii) The ritual Zechariah describes has clues that indicate this vision ties to the Messiah coming into the world. That will be obvious as we go through the text.

- iii) The chapter ends on a strange note. The focus moves from this anointing ritual to state the fact that each of us will sit under our own fig tree or vineyard when all of this takes place. Yes, that's strange. Two of the main staples of Israel's economy is the growing of grapes and fig trees. It's essentially saying those who'll live under the rule of this High Priest, will be blessed. Yes I need to explain that better and I'll do so in the verse-by-verse commentary coming up after this introduction.
  - c) Before we do that, I need to say a few words about Chapter 4. Remember that the chapter breaks were not added until millenniums later. Still, it's a good place to insert this break as Chapter 4 starts a new vision. (The visions run until Chapter 6 ends, so hang in there.)
    - i) The vision in chapter four opens with the comment that Zechariah sees this as if he just woke out of a deep sleep. Yes it means it's hard to comprehend what he saw was God ordained, but Zechariah wants us to accept this vision as is.
    - ii) The specifics is Zechariah saw a seven-branch oil lamp, somewhat like what is the light source of God's temple. One of the priest's jobs was to keep oil in the lamps to keep them burning. In this vision, Zechariah saw two olive trees that appear to be part of this light system, as if to say, "This light source is self-sufficient".
    - iii) Zechariah was confused what this vision meant. He did the right thing and asked. He was told of two "powers" are at work here, the high priest and the leader of the government and what each of those people represent. Ever Since Israel first began as a nation, they always separated the government and the religious leaders:. It's the idea that God ordained both to rule and they should never mix. However, when the Messiah comes those two functions will be combined into one ruler!
  - d) Ok John, that's neat and that's very Jewish. Why should we care? Because it reminds us of our ultimate future, with Jesus ruling over the world both as our priest and as our guide as to how to live our lives. Assume we know that. Why should we care? Because the two chapters are a wonderful picture of what Jesus did for us by taking our sins, by being our guide to how God the Father wants us to live. By showing us by these strange illustrations Zechariah is reminding us why we were created in the first place, to serve God by being a good witness for Him. By having this high priest who's name is the same as Jesus putting on high priest clothing, it's a model of how He intercedes for us. The Temple itself is a model of what Jesus does as interceding for our sins. (That's why Satan's a part of that picture to show God's power as being greater than his.) Once that function is established, (Jesus as our high priest), the Holy Spirit's role comes into play to guide us as to how we are to make a difference for Jesus. I believe the purpose of the oil lamp is to be a light. It is like God guiding us ("lighting the way") to make a difference for Him.
  - e) I realize that was long and confusing. Shorter version is these chapters are a model for us to realize that Jesus did it all for us, and out of gratitude for that payment, God expects us to use our life as a witness for Him. That's these two strange chapters in a nutshell.
  - f) Ok and my lesson title is "Understanding the two levels of Zechariah's visions".
3. If you're thoroughly confused, at this point, simply realize that God gave Zechariah two visions in this lesson. The reason these visions are part of the bible is they teach us a lot about God's desire for our lives and what are His eternal plans for us. With that said, let's get started:
4. Zechariah Chapter 3, Verse 1: Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. <sup>2</sup> The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"
- a) As I stated earlier, Chapter 3 opens by introducing the cast. As you can tell, this isn't your ordinary scene even for the bible. When it starts with the LORD (the most holy name for God the Father), Satan and Joshua the high priest, you know this is serious. What appears to be happening here is the LORD is rebuking Satan who's accusing the high priest of not being worthy of that role. Anyway, that's how the scene is set up.

- b) To explain this better, we need to recall something from the book of Haggai. That book along with Zechariah were written soon after the Israelites came back to the land of Israel. They were in captivity for 70 years by the Babylonian Empire. Israel as "real estate" was basically empty for that time period. Another empire conquered Babylon and the leader of that new empire give a decree for the Israelites to return home. The point as it relates to Zechariah is that the latest high priest was named Joshua. Roughly a 1,000 years earlier a man named Aaron was made the first high priest and his oldest son was the next one. For the most part, this line continued and now Joshua is that guy. Anyway, the scene is now about 520 BC. We are in the city of Jerusalem again. The Israelites are now in the process of rebuilding the temple. That means the next order of business is preparing the high priest to start doing his job as there hasn't been any temple work done there since the last temple was destroyed about 70 years earlier. The bottom line is Chapter 3 explains in a strange way, the "behind the scenes" action of the new high priest preparing for his job.
- c) OK John, we get all of that. Why have this weird vision involving that man Joshua, along with God Himself and Satan? Why are two "big wigs" involved in this vision?
- i) Let's start with the villain of the story: Satan. When you study the bible we figure out that he can't be everywhere at once, but apparently can travel quickly all over the world and has access to the throne in heaven. God allows him to do all of this as to show us that God Himself is far more powerful than he is and that he serves a purpose in history. That purpose here is to accuse us before God. Think of Satan as the prosecuting attorney. He's the one who tells God, "here's all the sins that the person standing here has committed. How can you let that person be with you for all of eternity in heaven?" God's response is in effect, "You're right no human does deserve that privilege. However, because I love people I'm willing to forgive them if they're willing to let Me myself pay the complete price for their sins."
- ii) While I'm explaining strange theological questions, why does he keep it up? Since Satan knows this is God's plan, why keep being the prosecuting attorney? It is to delay as long as possible the inevitability of losing. By constantly saying, "look how bad this one or that one is", Satan's trying to delay whoever is the last person to be a part of God's kingdom. Realize the number of people in heaven is fixed. It also means there has to be a final believer. By Satan working that "job" he's trying to delay as long as possible that final number from occurring.
- iii) OK then, if God is God, why doesn't He just say, "Cut that out, I'll save who I want to save, so deal with it?" Why do we each have to be judged individually? It is for our sake. It's so we know what we're guilty of. It's so when we spent all of eternity in heaven or hell, we'll know why we got what we deserve. When we go on trial, the key is to not defend our bad actions, but to realize the only way we get in is by God's grace for all our sins, and not trying to defend our good works.
- d) All right John, most of us know that. Why bring all that up here? Because we're about to watch the "trial" of the latest high priest named Joshua. The fact that Joshua happens to be the same name as Jesus in the original Hebrew is "no coincidence". As I said to begin this study, one can read this lesson on two levels: Level 1 is about the current high priest being prepared for his job as high priest again. Level 2 is as a "type" of Messiah being prepared to pay the full price for our sins. If you have doubts about this, let's read further and see if the shoe fits as that old expression goes.
5. Verse 3: Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. <sup>4</sup> The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you."
- a) Just when you think Zechariah can't get any weirder, it always does. Get used to that. In this scene, the high priest is for some reason dressed in filthy clothes. In the Hebrew, this is worse than that: To keep it as clean as I can, he had "excrement" all over his clothing.

- b) Remember we're seeing a vision. I can't picture anyone wanting to dress that way for any occasion. The reason we get this picture is Zechariah is doing his best to describe how our sins are seen by God. A word picture of "excrement covered clothing" being replaced with clean clothing is a strong visual picture of being made clean in God's presence.
  - c) By the way, if this isn't strange enough so far, realize the angel is "THE" angel of Lord. As I said in my discussion of the first two chapters, many bible scholars argue that "the" angel is a pre-incarnate Jesus. Let me make my case for this: If that is true, how can Jesus be a picture of both the "angel" and Joshua? Good question. Think of the angel as the one who takes away our sins. Obviously only God can forgive our sins by definition. By having "The" angel be the one putting clean clothing on Joshua the High Priest, that's a picture of the "Angel" cleaning Joshua. It means "the" angel is responsible for Joshua to be wearing clean clothes (i.e., "sin free") in God the Father's presence.
  - d) Yes this is strange and we're not done yet. By having the high priest named Joshua, (there is an old Jewish expression that "Coincidence is not a Kosher word) it is also a picture that Joshua is being "cleaned" by God Himself so He can perform the rituals of the high priest.
  - e) I can just see my religious Jewish friends hearing all this and saying, "John your nuts. It's just a picture of the high priest being cleaned and it doesn't tie to Jesus". If that's true, why is the priest named Joshua? My point is it's easy to read this on two levels, and as that old saying goes "Coincidence is not a kosher word". I'll continue to make this case as we go!
  - f) As further proof I'm not making this up, notice the last line of Verse 4 says, " I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you." In other words, it's not just putting a set of clean clothes on the high priest, the scene involves taking away Joshua's sins, so that he can perform his duties as the high priest.
  - g) Coming back to "level 1" for the purpose of this vision, the temple hasn't been finished yet as of the date of this vision. By this vision, Zechariah is trying to encourage the Israelites to keep building as God's preparing the High Priest for that job once the temple is done!
  - h) We got to admit, Zechariah is a strange book, and we've only had four verses so far in this lesson. Now that we accept that, we can move on to Verse 5.
6. Verse 5: Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by.
- a) Remember that Zechariah is watching this whole vision. Apparently, he has the ability to speak in this vision and he says to put a clean "hat" on. It's as if the angel in this vision, is saying, "Good suggestion Zechariah, let me do that".
  - b) That leads to more difficult theological questions: Can we contribute to our own ability to be sin free? Does God take suggestions from the gallery? I'd say no. By allowing "Zech" to make that suggestion, it shows that it should be our desire for God's people to be "holy" before Him. Let me explain that one. Yes on "Level 2", Joshua represents Jesus. Since we expect and believe Jesus is fully separated for the purpose of taking away our sins, as well as being our high priest He is by definition "holy". That just means He's separated to be used by God for some purpose. A "priest" by definition is someone who represents others before God. One would want a priest in that role to be separated for God's purpose.
  - c) I'm not saying human priests are perfect. That's why we had the whole scene of really bad clothing being replaced with clean clothing. Having Zechariah make a suggestion for even more clean clothing is like saying, "We approve of what God's doing here, keep it going!"
7. Verse 6: The angel of the LORD gave this charge to Joshua: <sup>7</sup> "This is what the LORD Almighty says: `If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.
- a) I'll say this one more time and I won't repeat it again for this lesson, just when we think it can't get any weirder, it does. All I ask of you is to consider the logic of my interpretation. Compare it to actual history and Christian theology and you can decide for yourself if I'm on shaky ground, or if I'm describing the Gospel Message from an Old Testament view.

- b) Now that I've made that statement, let's look at what these two verses actually say: Notice God the Father is telling the angel what to say to Joshua. Consider that having God speak through "The" angel solidifies my picture that "The" angel speaks on God's behalf. That is another way to realize that Jesus speaks on God the Father's behalf.
  - c) Enough of that, let's talk about the actual orders themselves. It essentially says that only if Joshua obeys all of God's commandments and performs his duties correctly will he get his place "among those standing here". Remember we're watching a courtroom drama vision with no other than God the Father and Satan as characters in this vision.
    - i) That lead me back to my "Level 1 and Level 2" discussion. On "Level 1" this can be interpreted as saying if the high priest does his job, he'll be admitted into heaven. I would be nervous about that. It's implying I have to be perfect in my job as the top priest or else I won't make it into heaven. That alone is one good reason to accept the Christian principal that trying to be good enough to please God is impossible, and shouldn't be tried in the first place. It doesn't mean we should avoid trying to be pleasing to God. It means we do good works out of gratitude, and not to prove our worth to Him by our actions. Hopefully, that priest did his best to perform his duty not to prove his worth to God, but only because that's the role he was called to perform and do it to the best of his ability.
    - ii) As to "Level 2", if we see this as Jesus being our high priest on our behalf, (that just means we accept Him paying the price for our sins and we see Him as interceding on our behalf before God the Father), then Jesus would get "his place among those standing here" as the text says in Verse 7.
    - iii) The main point I am trying to make here is we can see the Gospel message woven in this strange vision of God the Father, Satan as the accuser, Joshua (Jesus) as the High Priest and Zechariah himself as the "audience" watching this.
    - iv) With that said, we're ready for the next two verses:
8. Verse 8: " `Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. <sup>9</sup> See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the LORD Almighty, `and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.
- a) First if you have any doubts that Zechariah understand that these visions have two levels of meaning, notice the phrase "symbolic of things to come". I don't know if Zechariah got the full meaning of what he saw, but I'm sure he got the fact that this goes deeper than the anointing of the high priest to start the temple worship.
  - b) With that said, I need to pause to discuss a few terms associated with the Messiah:
    - i) The first is the "Branch". Isaiah and Jeremiah compare the Messiah to a branch. It is the idea of a "dead tree with a branch shoots up to form new life". It's the idea of a descendant of David coming from a "dead line of kings" (as in no more king was ruling in Israel) and a "branch" pops up to be the Messiah. (Jeremiah 33:5 is a good example of this language as is Isaiah 11:1.) The point is Zechariah didn't start this "branch" metaphor to tie that word to the coming Messiah.
    - ii) Next, we have a stone with seven eyes. Yes, that's strange. Whenever you read of the number seven in the bible, one should associate it with "completeness or rest" as God rested on the seventh day. My simple point is the seven eyes represents an object that sees all things. So why a stone? Why not just say God sees all things? In Jewish thought, a stone is associated with God. That's because the first mention of a stone (not made of bricks but a natural one) was when Jacob used a stone as a pillow on a long road trip, and then God appeared to him. In Genesis 28:22, Jacob said that stone shall be a pillar of God's house. Since "God's house" is being built in Zechariah, it's a "Jewish thing" to associate a foundation stone with it. The idea of "seven eyes" is a symbol of the perfection of God seeing this project.

- iii) OK John, this is weird. Come back to the "second level". What's the point? It's the idea of Jesus as "The" stone, removing all our sins as the text says. I know this is a strange way of thinking to our ears, but it's the idea of Jesus as a perfect entity that always existed and always will exist coming to pay for our sins.
  - c) Finally, let me talk about "removal of the sin from the land in a single day". It can refer to the cross as that took away all sin. I'd argue it also refers to some future day when Israel as a nation will be forgiven. One of the most fascinating verses in the New Testament is in Romans (11:25-26) that states when the "fullness of the Gentiles comes in then all of Israel will be saved". What that means is there's a specific unknown number of non-Israelites to be in heaven. If you think about it logically, it makes sense. Heaven will have a finite and not an infinite number of people. Therefore, there has to be a last one. Whenever that last non-Israelite gets saved, that's when God works on the next phase of His salvation plan. I would argue that's when all of Israel gets saved as stated in Romans 11:26 and Zechariah Chapter 3, Verse 9. Anyway, that's what that phrase means here in Zechariah.
- 9. Verse 10: " `In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree,' declares the LORD Almighty."
  - a) We got to admit, just when you think Zechariah can't get any weirder, he never fails to let us down. What I suspect this verse refers to, is the "day" when Israel will be at peace from the Messiah ruling there and the country's sin of rejecting Jesus gets forgiven, that means it'll be a time of great peace. That's why we have this idea of everybody kicking back with their friends at home. Remember that Israel is a farming community. Peace is the idea of working at home and not worrying about foreign invaders.
  - b) Before I move on, you might notice the similarity to something Jesus said. He said that He saw the disciple Nathanel "sitting under a fig tree". Of all things Nathanel declared Jesus to be the Son of God and King of Israel because Jesus said He saw him there. Notice Jesus didn't deny that claim. All I'm saying here is I suspect Nathanel was thinking about or studying this passage here in Zechariah as they both deal with "sitting under a fig tree" in a time where one's sins have been forgiven. Could I be wrong? Sure, but there is no other biblical connection between sitting under a fig tree in the Old and New Testament. (Oh I was quoting John 1:48-49.)
  - c) On that strange note, let's move on to Chapter 4.
- 10. Chapter 4, Verse 1: Then the angel who talked with me returned and wakened me, as a man is wakened from his sleep. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left."
  - a) As you can see, Zechariah doesn't lighten up in his strangeness. I'm reminded of a famous quote from a generation back. "When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro". (Hunter Thompson). I'm not saying Zechariah was a weird guy, but you got to admit, his visions do count as weird. OK then onto the vision itself.
  - b) Apparently, this vision came in the same night as the Chapter 3 vision. So why does it start with the fact that Zechariah was told "wake up and concentrate"? Maybe he was in a deep sleep and God wanted him to realize this wasn't a dream, but was another vision. Maybe Zechariah remembered the part about being woken up and that is why he wanted to write it down later as he realized these visions were God ordained.
  - c) Before I start on this vision, let me discuss God, dreams and visions. I do not believe that every dream is a special vision from God. Sometimes dreams is just how our minds are keeping busy at night. Yes, there's the bad pizza way, but I'm tired of that running joke.
    - i) Dreams are biblical. Jesus' step father Joseph had a number of visions in his sleep as told in Matthew's gospel. There's a classic joke that the reason God speaks to us in dreams is that's the only time we're quiet enough to pay attention and listen!

- ii) All I'm saying is God could speak to us that way, but not all dreams are messages from God. A "clue" is whether or not that dream violates any biblical principal.
  - iii) Finally, please don't e-mail me that you had a dream where God told you to go do "this or that", so here you are! As I like to say, God hasn't lost my phone number. If He has a message for me or you, He's more than capable of telling us directly. If you have a strange dream and think it's God ordained, I've found that God will find some way to validate that's what He wants us to do. Again, if that dream isn't a violation of any of His laws, it should be considered and that's all. For example, if I had a dream to go steal something of yours you know that's not God ordained!
  - d) OK enough of that nonsense, onto Zechariah's actual dream. Time to get "Jewish". If you have ever seen a seven branch Jewish menorah, that's sort of the picture here. If you have never seen one, picture a brass candlestick with three branches on one side and another three on the other side. The idea of a seven-branch source of light is it is "complete" in it is enough light to perform it's function. The one that Zechariah saw was solid gold. It had two olive trees providing the oil for the lamp to keep burning. I'm not sure what all of this meant, but I get the impression it's supposed to be "self-sufficient". It'd be like a car, that only ran on batteries and those batteries never wore out nor did that car ever break down.
    - i) Well then, we know the light source of the original temple was a seven-branch oil lamp, but what does this strange contraption represent? Zechariah was wondering that himself and asked that question in the next verse.
11. Verse 4: I asked the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?"
- a) The one new thing we learn here is that there was an angel talking to Zechariah about the vision of the "candelabra". More on the angel in a bit, but I suspect he's the "The" angel we read about in the last vision in Chapter 3. The "these" refers to the olive trees.
12. Verse 5: He answered, "Do you not know what these are?" "No, my lord," I replied. <sup>6</sup> 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.
- a) Remember how I said these two chapters can be read on two levels? The "Jewish thing" is about the light of the temple being restored and God providing the "light" needed as to illuminate His Spirit upon it. God's spirit (a.k.a., "The Holy Spirit) works to help people understand what He expects of us and draws close to Him.
  - b) I admit, it's hard to have a discussion about the Spirit because most of the references to God's spirit is about "Him" working to illuminate either the Father or the Son in our lives. Since I'm in the neighborhood, let me take a quick stab at trying to explain God's spirit, His function and why He's part of the Christian Trinity.
    - i) The short version is the Spirit represents God's power to work in our world and in our lives. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 that just as we don't know which way the wind blows so we don't know how the Spirit of God moves among us. In the original Hebrew, "wind" and "spirit" is the same word so it's a play on words!
    - ii) As I stated, the basic function of the Holy Spirit is to draw us to God and closer to Him when we pray or even read our bible. The Spirit is the one who draws us to God the Father in any act of worship. It's not a special feeling, it's just Him as He's working in the background of our life.
    - iii) So why can't we just say God's "spirit" is a part of Him? Why a separate entity? The short version is we don't know how and when it moves on people so we call it a separate entity for that reason. God is one, but manifested in three entities.
  - c) OK, all that strange theology leads us back to Zechariah. What does the text mean by the phrase "not by might or power" but by My Spirit. That's God saying we can't force Him to act a certain way or force Him to do anything. It's only the Spirit working in the lives of a believer that causes us to make a difference for Jesus. That's why God's Spirit rests in us so we can be led by Him to make a difference for Him.

- i) That's confusing. Should we pray for the Spirit to guide us what to do? Yes. We rarely get specific instructions to go do this or that. I see it as doing what we want to do assuming it's not a violation of God's will. If we do take on a project for God because we can't stand not doing it, or our church is involved in that project, that's a way the Spirit works in our lives. I'd argue Christians are free to do whatever it is we want to do as long as it's not a violation of His word. When we do things as to make a difference for Jesus, that's the Spirit working in our lives. I'm not saying we have to be perfect or can't have down time. I'm saying the most valuable thing we own is our time and God loves when we use some of it for His glory. That is why God only moves through "His Spirit" and not by human might or power.
13. Verse 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!'"
- This is one of those verses where one is not sure whether to take it literally or figuratively. Isaiah 2:2 says that Jerusalem will be lifted up as the highest mountain. There are also references in the bible to a major earthquake that will split the "Mount of Olives" which is where the Temple traditionally stood. (By the way, there is an earthquake fault line under that mountain so it's just a matter of when God says "when"). We'll get to this in Zec. 14.
  - Anyway, as to how the geography actually changes when Jesus returns, I'm sure it will be obvious enough when it happens so we'll just wait and see how that occurs.
  - In the meantime, Zechariah's other point is effectively to say, "Mountain, who cares about a mountain? The final stone will be laid at this temple site with shouts of "God Bless it" at that time". So is that referring to the historical time (a few years after Zechariah wrote this section) when the temple was completed or when Jesus returns to set up a millennial one in the future? I suspect it's both. I'm sure the Israelites had a big party to celebrate the fact that temple was finished and I'm also sure Israelites will shout for joy when the Messiah is finally back in Israel to start His reign over the earth.
  - I suspect the reason this is part of the bible so we recognize whatever major geography changes do occur in Israel at the time era around Jesus return. This is one of them.
14. Verse 8: Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>9</sup> "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.
- Meanwhile back around 520 BC, Zechariah along with Haggai (the other prophet that was around at that time) are encouraging the Israelites to complete it. The book of Ezra which was also written around this time, states it was completed a few years after this date.
  - This leads us back to Zerubbabel. In case you forgot, he's not the high priest, but the head guy as in the civil leader and effectively in charge of the construction project. Apparently, Zerubbabel did the ceremonial laying of the first stone on the temple site. Zechariah does desire to complete the project, which is one reason why God gave him these visions.
  - A little more history might help here. The Israelites first came back to that land about 16 years earlier if memory was correct. They were harassed by locals as they tried to build it and stopped as they figured it wasn't God's will to build it yet. God sent Zechariah and Haggai to motivate everyone and that's where we're at. By the way, the book of Ezra explains all of that history if you want to study that book.
  - OK John, as you said in the introduction, "so what"? So the Israelites worked to rebuild the temple. That's ancient history. What does this mean to us? The good question to ponder is what difference can each of us make for God? These Israelites were asked to rebuild the temple. I love to pray with the question, "OK God, my time is Yours, what do You have on the agenda? Often it is to do what's logical. Sometimes our church or community may be involved in a project and needs our help. Sometimes it's what we're good at and often it is just a matter of asking "Hey, how can I help?" Remember that God's not interested in our ability as much as He wants our availability. OK then, back to Zechariah.



15. Verse 10: "Who despises the day of small things? 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.)"
- a) As I read this verse, my first question is what's the "small things"? It refers to the building of the temple again. Let me put this in perspective. Remember that the Israelites who did come back from being in captivity, had probably seen great temples built to the false gods where they had lived. Now that about 50,000 made the journey back to Israel, less than 20 years earlier, they watched this temple being built and it wasn't as fancy as others they had seen when living in captivity. Since they believed as we do that their God is the only true God, shouldn't this building be something fancier?
  - b) God's response in effect is "Watch me work". Since God knows all things (expressed with the concept of the "Seven eyes that range all through the world") He is well aware of what we are capable of doing and can't do.
  - c) That leads us of all things back to their civil leader, Zerubbabel. A plumb line is a device used to make sure walls are straight. It's a weight on a string and it uses gravity to tell if a wall is straight. If you've ever seen a yard (or meter) stick with a small liquid tube within it, that "tube" has an air bubble. Both devices are used to make sure something is straight.
  - d) So why will people rejoice when they see their leader using this? I suspect it's because the people will realize God's blessing our efforts to make a difference for Him. If there is one thing I've learned as a Christian is that we can't "out give God". That does not mean if we give say a dollar at church, God now owes us 10. It means our lives will be joyful when we use them for His glory. Be it a building project, a ministry we're involved with or any effort we go through to make a difference for God, I've found that the joy we experience in being involved in that project far outweighs the struggle we go through in order to be a part of it in the first place.
  - e) That in effect is what's going on here: The temple was a significant part of the worship of God in that culture. It wasn't a matter of saying, "Hey, this temple is "nothing" compared to what Solomon built centuries earlier or what the pagan nations have built. It's a matter of making an effort to make a difference for the true God. He promises to bless that effort by making our lives filled with great joy when we make Him the center of our lives.
  - f) Let's be honest, it's the opposite of how the world trains us to think. The "world" in effect says work hard, cheat if necessary and do what you have to do to get ahead in life. God is saying in effect, make Me the center of Your life, and I'll give your life far greater joy and peace than anything and everything the world has to offer. I'm not saying we have to quit our jobs or turn our back on our families. The issue is always about making God the main focus of our lives and He promises to guide us through whatever we're dealing with.
  - g) The reason I'm getting all "philosophical" on you, is that's what Zechariah is doing here too. He is trying to say in his own way, "God's going to bless your efforts because you're putting Him first in your life. God knows all things. He sees the effort your making here and He promises that no effort made for Him is ever wasted."
  - h) Meanwhile, that's enough lecturing on this point. Time to get back to Zechariah's vision:
16. Verse 11: Then I asked the angel, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?" <sup>12</sup> Again I asked him, "What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?"
- a) Here was Zechariah describing the temple construction process when all of a sudden he wants to come back to the strange menorah with the olive trees feeding directly into it. I'd say Zechariah was thinking, "Wait a minute, I understand the importance of building this temple. I understand God's presence will be there. I get having a menorah there in order to have light there, but what's the deal with the two olive trees? I suspect he wondered if God wanted the Israelites to plant a couple of trees in the temple? Anyway, that aspect of this vision puzzled Zechariah so it was time to ask that question.

17. Verse 13: He replied, "Do you not know what these are?" "No, my lord," I said. <sup>14</sup> So he said, "These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth."
- a) The first thing we read here is the angel who showed Zechariah this vision effectively said "Hey Zech, you're trained as a priest, don't you realize the purpose of these olive trees is to supply olive oil for the light?" To state what should be obvious, Verse 14 tells us these two trees are something "far bigger" bigger than two literal trees.
  - b) Believe it or not, the chapter ends this way. The first verse of the next chapter doesn't help at all as Zechariah starts up on another vision. Therefore, we're forced to speculate about what these two olive trees represent simply by reading this verse.
  - c) As I have been stating all through this lesson, there are two levels one can read Zechariah. The first is the "immediate" way based on the situation at hand. The two names referenced a few times in these chapter are the high priest named Joshua. The second is the leader of the 50,000 who came back to Israel or the "civil leader" for short: Zerubbabel. Remember that the high priest was a descendant of the original high priest and "next in line" to be the official high priest. The civil leader was a descendant of King David just like all the kings who ruled over the Southern Kingdom. The point is both of these men are their leaders and the Israelites have to deal with it. While I can't prove it, I think the idea is that God wants the temple rebuilt and through the leadership of these two men, it'll get done as that's what God desires.
    - i) Just as olive trees are the "source" of olive oil used to light lamps, so these two men are the "source" of leadership to rebuild the project.
  - d) OK John, as you said when we started this lesson, "so what"? Yes on the surface these two chapters deal with visions about rebuilding the temple. As I love to state, that temple was built and later destroyed. Another temple was built centuries later when the Romans did rule that area and even that one was destroyed. Did Zechariah write all of this just so we can learn ancient history? Of course not. The essential purpose of the bible is to teach us "His story" as it flows through history. That includes all the events leading up to His First Coming as well as understanding what will happen at His Second Coming so we'll know it when it occurs, whenever that will be.
  - e) Speaking of His Second Coming, realize Verse 14 is quoted in the Book of Revelation. If we're going to get "weird" in these visions, we might as well go all the way and tie what's written here with something equally as strange in Revelation, Chapter 11:3-5 that read:
    - i) "And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." They are "the two olive trees" and the two lampstands, and "they stand before the Lord of the earth." If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die.
    - ii) If you've read this entire lesson, you have to admit a lot of Zechariah's imagery in the last chapter is pretty similar to what we have in Revelation 11.
    - iii) Before I move on I should share an old Christian rule about bible interpretation:
      - a) "The Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed and  
The New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed".
    - iv) My point is while we don't grasp what Zechariah was getting at in the last 2 verses of Chapter 14, Revelation "helps us" by explaining it further.
  - f) Remember how I said these two chapters in Zechariah can be read on two levels? I'd say that Revelation 11 gives us a big clue what the "Second Level" is all about. It's that what it is that Zechariah saw regarding these two olive trees has something to do with the Second Coming of Jesus. That's because Revelation 11 tells us the two "olive trees" are really two men who witness for God during the time frame of world wide destruction occurring as it is predicted in Revelation. To summarize a lot of Revelation, while those who oppose the rule of God are doing their worst and war's happening, God's got two guys on His side!

- i) I can see there is no way to explain this without giving a quick Revelation course:
    - a) The first thing to realize about Revelation is that it is written in "code". All that means is the book has hundreds of references to the Old Testament. If we understand the cross references, it helps us to understand what it is that the book of Revelation is talking about at any given moment.
    - b) One of those "codes" is Revelation 11:3-5 refer to Zechariah's vision that he gave in Chapter 4. Therefore, whatever these two men are that witness for God in Revelation Chapter 11 also happen to be the two "olive trees" that is the focus of the last few verses of Zechariah 14.
  - ii) Confused? Let me make it worse. Christian seminaries are filled with many thesis papers over who are these two "olive tree" men. Revelation 11 goes on to say that one of those two men has the power to shut the sky so no rain will fall. In the Old Testament the only person who ever did that miracle was a man named Elijah. He lived hundreds of years earlier. Revelation 11:6 goes on to say that the other man has the power to turn water into blood and strike the earth with plagues. I'd say that's very "Moses" like. My point is many scholars see that scene which takes place in Revelation 11 as involving the return to earth of Moses and Elijah. Back in the gospels, there's a scene with Jesus speaking to a "very alive" Moses and Elijah. (See Matthew 17, Mark 9 and Luke 9). My point is simply that "staff meeting" is a preparation for whenever Revelation Chapter 11 literally plays out in the future.
  - iii) We don't know for sure that Revelation 11 speaks of Moses and Elijah as those two are not mentioned by name in that book. However the plagues they do there are very "Moses and Elijah" like, and thus seminary papers are full of theories on this.
  - g) Well, now that I've gotten totally weird in this lesson, let's bring it home and wrap us this lesson. The last sentence of this verse reads, ""These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth". When Moses died, Deuteronomy 34:6 specifically makes the point that no one knew where Moses was buried. When we read about the end of Elijah's life in 1st Kings 2:1. He didn't die, but was "raptured" to heaven. My simple point is I believe God called these two men to great things. Since the bible says we don't know the locations of either of their bodies, God's not through with them. They both appear in the Gospels with Jesus and I'll argue they appear again in Revelation.
    - i) If you get one thing out of this lesson, it's to realize that the bible is an "integrated message system" with 66 books written over a few thousand years by 40 different authors tied together to form a single story. Hopefully, I've convinced you of that in my comparison of verses from a bunch of bible books.
    - ii) The final thing to realize is that this book as well as the bible as a whole, has lots of levels of meaning. That's why we can spend a lifetime studying the bible and not run out of things to learn and remind ourselves about as we read it. In this lesson, I tried to teach "two levels" of these two visions. One level is about what happened in Israel roughly 2,500 years ago. Another level explains the Gospel Message and a few admittedly strange things about what will literally occur in the future when Jesus returns for "Round 2" one day in the future. A reason why God wants us to know all of this is not only to recognize it when it occurs, but also to realize what's in store for us as part of our eternal future with Him.
  - h) OK then, as the old expression goes, "When you dig yourself into a hole, the first rule is to stop digging. I've done enough digging for one lesson. Time to wrap this up in prayer.
18. Heavenly Father, about one third of the bible is predictions. As we read sections that have these predictions, may we interpret the bible with the bible and read it as You desire we read it. May what we teach and learn be pleasing to You. More importantly, help us to take what we have learned here and apply it to our lives. By Your power, since we know the game plan, help us to use our time and our lives for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.