

Zechariah 4:1–14

“Not by Might nor by Power” – God’s Work in God’s Strength

Zechariah 4 records the next vision the prophet receives. It is a powerful reminder that the work of God cannot be accomplished by human strength, strategy, or pressure, but only by the presence and power of the Spirit of God.

1. The Golden Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees (Zechariah 4:1–3)

Zechariah writes:

Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, “What do you see?”

So I said, “I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left.”

In the tabernacle and later in the temple, the lampstand (or menorah) was to burn continually. The priests were responsible to refill the oil every day so the light never went out. The lampstand symbolized God’s light shining through His people in a dark world.

In this vision, however, the lampstand is connected directly to two olive trees. Oil flows continually through pipes from the trees to the lamps. There is no need for constant manual refilling. The supply is steady, unbroken, and abundant.

In Scripture, oil is consistently used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit—especially in visions, parables, and prophetic imagery. The message is simple and profound:

God Himself will provide a continual flow of His Spirit to sustain His work and keep His people shining.

2. The Message to Zerubbabel: Not by Might nor by Power (Zechariah 4:4–7)

Zechariah asks what the vision means:

So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, “What are these, my lord?”

Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, “Do you not know what these are?”

And I said, “No, my lord.”

Then comes the central message of the chapter:

So he answered and 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 of hosts.

‘Who are you, O great mountain?

Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain!

And he shall bring forth

The capstone

With shouts of “Grace, grace to it!”””

Zerubbabel was the governor overseeing the rebuilding of the temple. The work had stalled. Opposition, discouragement, and sheer exhaustion had all taken a toll. The project looked impossible—a “great mountain.”

God’s word to him is not, “Try harder,” but “Trust deeper.” The temple will not be completed through human schemes, committees, pressure, or force. It will be finished by the Spirit of God.

“Not by might” speaks of organized human strength and resources.

“Nor by power” speaks of raw force and human effort.

“But by My Spirit” turns Zerubbabel’s eyes from his own limits to God’s limitless sufficiency.

The “great mountain” that stands in the way will become “a plain.” What looks completely immovable will be leveled by the Lord. Zerubbabel will one day set the capstone—the finishing stone—on the completed temple, and the people will shout, “Grace, grace to it!” In other words, when the work is finished, everyone will know it was the grace of God from beginning to end.

3. Do Not Despise the Day of Small Things (Zechariah 4:8–10)

The message continues:

Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying:

“The hands of Zerubbabel

Have laid the foundation of this temple;

His hands shall also finish it.

Then you will know

That the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you.

For who has despised the day of small things?

For these seven rejoice to see

The plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

They are the eyes of the Lord,

Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth.”

Zerubbabel had already laid the foundation, but discouragement had crept in. Some of the older men remembered the glory of Solomon’s temple and wept when they saw how small this new foundation seemed in comparison. Their sadness discouraged those who were building.

The Lord addresses this directly:

“Who has despised the day of small things?”

God is not impressed with size the way we are. His concern is not how impressive something looks, but whether it is built in obedience, humility, and dependence on Him. He rejoices to see Zerubbabel with the plumb line in his hand, faithfully measuring and building, even when the work looks small and unimpressive.

In every generation, many believers are tempted to despise “small things”—quiet acts of faithfulness, hidden service, unseen obedience. Yet God often starts His greatest works modestly. If we refuse to be faithful in the small, we will never be ready for the greater responsibilities we think we want.

4. The Two Olive Trees and the Two Anointed Ones (Zechariah 4:11–14)

Zechariah still has questions:

Then I answered and said to him, “What are these two olive trees—at the right of the lampstand and at its left?”

And I further answered and said to him, “What are these two olive branches that drip into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains?”

Then he answered me and said, “Do you not know what these are?”

And I said, “No, my lord.”

So he said, “These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.”

The “two anointed ones” (literally “sons of oil”) likely refer, in Zechariah’s immediate context, to Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest—God’s chosen leaders in that day, through whom He was working by His Spirit.

More broadly, the image points to this truth:

God raises up people, filled with His Spirit, through whom He supplies what His people need. The lampstand (God’s people shining His light) is sustained not by human brilliance, but by the ongoing work of the Spirit flowing through those God appoints.

Later Scripture connects similar imagery with God’s witnesses and servants in future days, but the central lesson here is timeless: God’s work among His people flows from a continual supply of the Spirit, not from human talent alone.

Practical Application

1. **God’s work must be done in God’s power.**

You may be deeply involved in ministry, service, or simply trying to live a faithful life in your home, workplace, or neighborhood. The message of Zechariah 4 is that effort alone is not enough. Planning has its place, but without the Spirit, we are just pushing tired programs and forcing fruit that does not last.

2. **God can level the “mountains” in front of you.**

There are seasons when the obstacles in your life—personal, spiritual, relational, or practical—look like towering mountains. God’s word to Zerubbabel applies to you: “Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain.” Trust that the Lord can go ahead of you, remove barriers, and make a way where you see none.

3. **Do not despise small beginnings.**

Maybe what you are doing for the Lord feels insignificant: teaching a small class, serving behind the scenes, praying faithfully when no one sees. God does not measure value by numbers or applause. He delights in faithfulness. The “day of small things” is often the training ground for deeper usefulness later.

4. **Stay connected to the source of the oil.**

The lampstand stayed lit because it drew oil from the olive trees. In the same way, your spiritual life and service will only stay bright if you live in dependence on the Holy Spirit—through prayer, the Word, and ongoing surrender to God. If the supply feels dry, it is not the source that has failed; it is often that we have stopped drawing near.

A Challenge for Believers

- Are you trying to do God's work in your own strength—pushing, forcing, and exhausting yourself—instead of relying on the Spirit?
- Have you allowed the “day of small things” to discourage you, making you think your obedience doesn't matter because it doesn't look big or impressive?
- Is there a “mountain” you are staring at in fear, instead of bringing it to God in trusting prayer?

Today, take time to:

- Confess where you have been relying more on your might and power than on God's Spirit.
- Ask the Lord to fill and lead you by His Spirit again.
- Renew your commitment to be faithful in whatever He has given you to do—no matter how small it seems.

An Invitation to Non-Believers

The heart of this chapter points us to the way God truly changes lives: not by human effort, but by His own power.

On our own, we cannot remove our guilt, heal our hearts, or make ourselves right with God. That is why God sent His Son, Jesus Christ. He came into this world and lived without sin. Then, in love, He shed His blood on the cross to pay for our sins. On that one day at Calvary, He took the judgment we deserve.

On the third day, He rose from the dead. His resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord. He is alive, and He is able to forgive, restore, and make all things new.

You cannot save yourself by your own “might” or “power.” You cannot build your way to God by good works, religion, or moral effort. You need what only His Spirit can do in you—a new heart, a new start, a new life.

Today, you can respond to Him:

- Admit honestly that you are a sinner and cannot save yourself.
- Believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose again.
- Ask Him to forgive you, to come into your life, and to be your Lord.

You can speak to Him in your own words. If you turn to Him, He will not turn you away. The same God who told Zerubbabel, “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” can begin a new work in you today—one that is built not on your strength, but on His grace.