

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Zechariah 4:1-14

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, June 22, 2014

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, June 22, 2014**, is from **Zechariah 4:1-14**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is usually posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Zechariah 4:1-14

(Zechariah 4:1) The angel who talked with me came again, and wakened me, as one is wakened from sleep.

Haggai and Zechariah worked together to encourage Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem beginning in 520 B.C. They completed rebuilding the temple in 515 B.C. Haggai's prophecy was fulfilled yearly: God met all of the people's needs and blessed them as they rebuilt the temple; so, God's faithfulness brought everyone encouragement as they worked. Whereas Haggai did not describe how the word of the LORD of hosts came to him, Zechariah said an angel talked to him. Perhaps Haggai and Zechariah compared with one another how God gave them His word and the message each was to share. After many years of exile, as prophets of God they became two witnesses to the people that God did want them to start rebuilding the temple without any more delays or excuses.

(Zechariah 4:2) He said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it; there are seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it.

The angel showed Zechariah a lampstand or pedestal made of gold. Based on his description, it seems the bowl at the top would have seven lamp bowls attached to it (perhaps attached in a circle around the bowl). Each bowl would have seven lips that the burning lamp wicks would rest upon as they rested in the oil in the bowl. In the Bible, light often means truth, God's truth. Jesus said that He was the light of the world and the truth (John 8:12, John 9:5, and John 14:6). The lamp had seven times seven lights

(or 49 burning wicks) that gave great light. In the Old Testament, seven is a perfect number. The angel came to Zechariah to reveal to Zechariah the perfect truth of God perfectly (7 times 7) to the leaders and people in Jerusalem. In the Book of Revelation, John saw Jesus in heaven standing with 7 lampstands that represented 7 churches (Revelation 1:12-20). Jesus provides the truth for churches, the light for the lampstands in churches, and He will remove the lampstand from any church that disregards the truth and disobeys Him (Revelation 2:5). God removed His light from the temple in Jerusalem in 586 B.C. when the Babylonians destroyed the temple because the people would not repent. From Zechariah's vision we learn that if the people who heard Haggai and Zechariah preach would rebuild the temple, then God's presence and light would shine in their midst once again. Just as an angel told Zechariah the word of God; so in the Book of Revelation an angel tells John the word of God. Many comparisons can be made between Zechariah and Revelation.

(Zechariah 4:3) And by it there are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left."

Zechariah also saw two olive trees, one on each side of the lampstand. The angel would not immediately tell Zechariah the meaning of the lighted candlestick or the meaning of the two olive trees. The olive trees could provide all of the oil that would be needed for the lamps on the candlestick in Zechariah's vision (as well as food).

(Zechariah 4:4) I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?"

Zechariah answered the angel's question and told him what he saw; then, Zechariah asked the angel a question. He wanted to know the meaning of what he saw. The angel would not tell Zechariah the meaning of what he saw until he asked for the meaning. There are truths in the Bible that people will not understand until they ask God for the meaning of what they have heard or read. The angel would be Zechariah's teacher.

(Zechariah 4:5) Then the angel who talked with me answered me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord."

As his teacher, the angel answered Zechariah's question with a question. The angel's question implied that Zechariah should have known the meaning of what he saw; he should have known what the symbols of the candlestick, the lights, and the two olive trees meant. But the angel would not answer Zechariah's question until after he proclaimed the word of the LORD to Zechariah, an important word meant for Zerubbabel. Hearing and obeying God's word is more important than most theological questions and an interest in visions. Hearing and obeying God's word must come first (the Word of God made flesh, Jesus, and the Word of God written, the Bible). Humble obedience to God's Word, Jesus and the Scriptures, is essential to learning the most important theological truths and the meanings of some symbols in the Bible. God will not reveal more truth to us until He sees us believing, trusting, and acting on the truths we know.

(Zechariah 4:6) 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 of hosts.

The angel told Zechariah to tell Zerubbabel, the governor in Jerusalem, that he would not accomplish his assigned task of rebuilding the temple by commanding a mighty army or by the power of a multitude of workers (as in the days of King Solomon). Zerubbabel knew what he lacked to rebuild the temple, and he knew how much material and how many workers King Solomon had used to build the first temple. The LORD of hosts, the LORD of an angelic multitude, wanted to encourage Zerubbabel by telling him that even though he lacked the power and the might to rebuild the temple that the temple would be rebuilt by the work of God’s Spirit through God’s people (Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the small remnant that remained in Judea) no matter how poor they were or how weak they were or how few they were as they began to obey God and began to rebuild the temple. The completion of their task in a variety of ways proved that God’s Spirit directed, empowered, guided, and completed the work through people. God did not need a multitude of angels to do what He would do by His Spirit through His people.

(Zechariah 4:7) What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring out the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’”

The prophecy of God continued. The great mountain might be the mountain of rubble all around the old temple grounds, on top of the mountain of opposition they would face from their neighbors, on top of the mountain of daily problems they would encounter as the temple was rebuilt step by step. God promised that by His Spirit through His people, the rubble would be cleared away and the grounds would become a plain ready for rebuilding the temple. We know from history that their opponents were ordered by King Darius to pay tribute to complete the work. The temple was completed because God’s Spirit gave everyone a spirit of cooperation and wisdom to solve all of their problems as they arose. The Word of the LORD predicted, promised, and commanded Zerubbabel to direct when the top stone of the temple would be laid marking the completion of the temple. Furthermore, through His word of promise, God wanted Zerubbabel to anticipate the people shouting joyfully and praising God for His grace that enabled them to do His will and provided all the means and encouragement they needed to be faithful to God in rebuilding the temple. The people would pray for God to fill His temple once again with His presence and grace.

(Zechariah 4:8) Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

The word of the LORD came to Zechariah as a promise to both Zerubbabel and him. Zechariah encouraged everyone by telling the people that God had a message for their governor that God expected him and them to obey. In their obedience, God would be with them, bless them, and work with them until they saw the temple completed and shouted joyfully and honestly that they had only obeyed God and completed the work by God’s grace.

(Zechariah 4:9) “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.

The Bible teaches that you will know a true prophet of God if what he says comes true, after God fulfills his prophecy. “You may say to yourself, ‘How can we recognize a word that the LORD has not spoken?’ If a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it” (Deuteronomy 18:21-22). Before the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians and Zechariah prophesied, Jeremiah referred to Deuteronomy 18:21-22 and said, “As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet (Jeremiah 28:9). After their time of exile in Babylon, Zechariah prophesied peace between the LORD of hosts and God’s remnant people, and he predicted that by the grace of God they would complete their task of rebuilding the temple. Zechariah prophesied that Zerubbabel would lay the temple foundation and also supervise the placing of the top stone. Everything happened as God said through Zechariah; therefore, Zechariah, Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the people knew that the LORD of hosts had sent him. Zechariah was a true prophet of God and His book deserves a place in the Old Testament. All of God’s people everywhere need to believe, read, and study the words of the prophet Zechariah, and the Book of Revelation by John indicates his deep study of this amazing prophet.

(Zechariah 4:10) For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel. “These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth.”

Some look down upon (despise) the small things that others do. Some would look down upon (despise) the slow rebuilding process of the temple and consider it a small thing; however, everyone would rejoice when they saw Zerubbabel taking charge of the work and eventually bringing it to completion. After telling Zechariah the word of the LORD, the angel began to answer his previous questions. The lampstand in some way represented the presence of the LORD with His people, and the lamps represented His eyes that see what is happening throughout the whole earth. God would be present in Jerusalem and God’s eyes would be overseeing the work of rebuilding the temple. God would make certain that the temple was completed correctly as His Spirit guided Zerubbabel and all the workers.

(Zechariah 4:11) Then I said to him, “What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?”

Next, Zechariah asked about the two olive trees in his vision. He asked the question twice and further described what he saw with his second question.

(Zechariah 4:12) And a second time I said to him, “What are these two branches of the olive trees, which pour out the oil through the two golden pipes?”

The two olive trees provided oil for the lamp, but God does not need any created beings or things to meet His personal needs or to help Him see throughout the earth. However, God uses all that He has created to do His will and achieve His purposes. In the vision, the lampstand and the olive trees are connected together with pipes. Since Zechariah saw three objects connected and working together, perhaps they represent three persons working together. From further study of the New Testament, perhaps the three are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (we do not learn from Zechariah or the angel's answers). We do not learn from Zechariah's vision and the words of the angel all that we would like to know. We must wait for the New Testament to learn more about the character and nature of God. We can learn from Zechariah's experience that God does not tell us all that we would like to know about everything. God does not always immediately answer all of our questions about spiritual matters. God does not reprimand us for asking questions, and God does reveal all that we need to know. The people living in Jerusalem at that time only needed to learn from Zechariah that God was watching and God sees everything; that God was present with them; that God would work with Zechariah and them to do His will; that they would rejoice when they completed rebuilding the temple.

(Zechariah 4:13) He said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.”

The angel wanted to make certain that Zechariah did not know the answer to his question before he asked it and the angel answered it, perhaps implying that Zechariah should have known the answer. Perhaps wanting to make sure Zechariah asked an honest question and was not just curious about something he did not really care about.

(Zechariah 4:14) Then he said, “These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.”

The angel answered and indicated that where the Lord of the whole earth is present, the two anointed ones are present with Him. The LORD of hosts was present with His people and His Spirit helped them rebuild the temple. They would not be able to rebuild the temple by their might and power alone without the help of God's Spirit. The angel did not tell Zechariah who the two anointed ones were, so all guesses are speculation. Keeping what little we truly know about the two anointed ones in mind, there are some truths we can think about that may relate to the two anointed ones. The LORD of hosts would give His people eternal light, unchanging truth, and sufficient power to do whatever He asked of them. In the Old Testament, the prophet Samuel anointed with oil the first two kings, Saul and David. The Messiah was to be a king, “the Anointed One.” The title Messiah means “the anointed one.” Jesus, the Son of God, came as the Messiah, and He was the Anointed One before He came to earth in human flesh. A priest is also anointed with oil and set apart for the work of the LORD, and Jesus is also our High Priest, Who intercedes for believers. The two anointed ones were holy and may be identified with the Son of God and the Holy Spirit (God's Spirit empowered God's people to rebuild the temple), but we cannot really understand who these anointed ones are apart from the teachings of the New Testament, praying for deeper understanding,

and further revelation from God which we may not receive until we personally meet the Lord Jesus.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How did Haggai and Zechariah receive their revelations from the LORD? How do most Christians receive their revelations from the LORD today?
2. When did the angel tell Zechariah the meaning of the candlestick and the two olive trees? What might we learn from his perfect timing?
3. If God wants us to do something in obedience to Him and we know that we do not have the resources to do what He wants us to do, what verse from Zechariah can encourage us to begin obeying God with what we have?
4. Compare God's word to Zerubbabel through Zechariah in Zechariah 4:7 and Jesus' word to His disciples in Matthew 17:20. What did God do to Zerubbabel and Jesus to His disciples mean by a mountain? How does Zerubbabel's success in moving the mountain help you understand the meaning of what Jesus told His disciples?
5. How would the people know that God had sent Zechariah to Zerubbabel to tell him to rebuild the temple?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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