

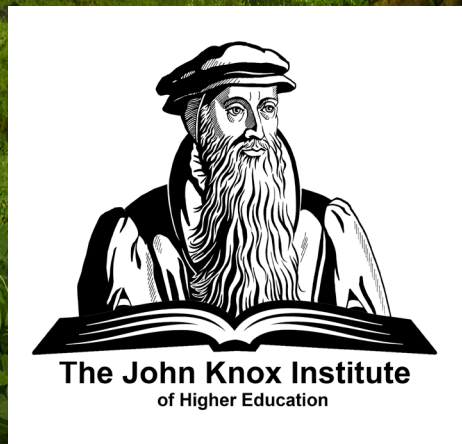
The Visions of Zechariah

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. William Macleod

Lecture #6

The Golden Candlestick



John Knox Institute of Higher Education

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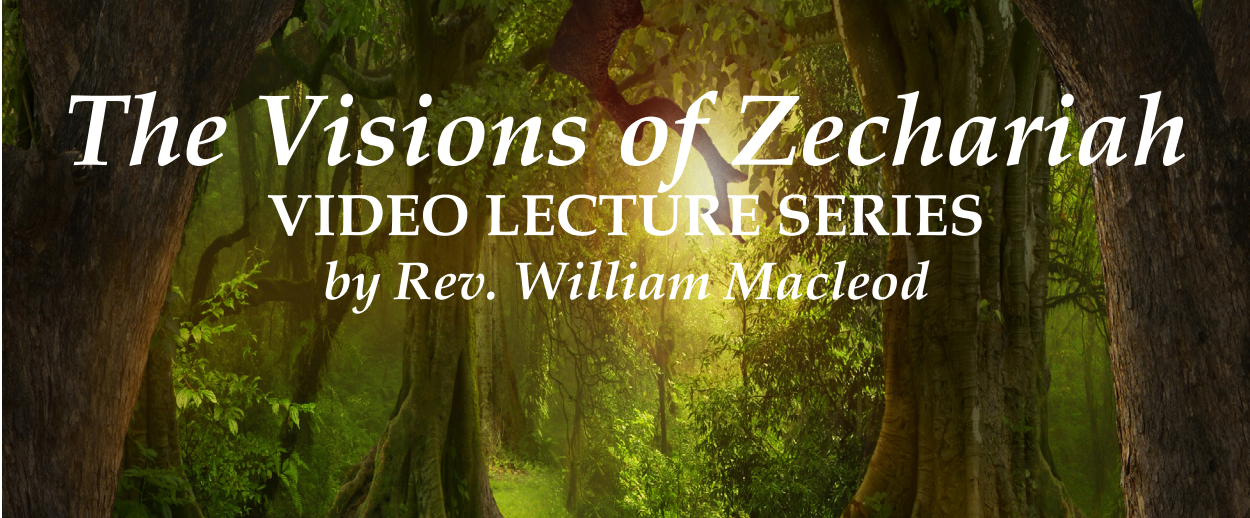
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The Visions of Zechariah

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

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Lecture #6 – Zechariah 4

The Golden Candlestick

Today we come to lecture 6 in our series in Zechariah's visions. This one deals with the golden candlestick in Zechariah, chapter 4. Of all Zechariah's visions this is my favourite one. In these days in Scotland and indeed in the whole Western world, it is easy to become discouraged. Church attendances are small. The vast majority of the population shows no interest in God. We have the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, telling how God became man to save us, how he died on the cross in our room and stead, bearing our sins and the punishment due to us, how he rose again on the third day having completed the work of atonement, and how he now calls all men and women to repent and believe, and so to be saved, be adopted into God's family, and have a place with him in heaven when we die.

But most people show no interest. Many no longer believe in God. The theory of evolution is accepted as explaining how everything came into being following the "big bang", so called. People have comfortable lives with no great financial needs. They are doped by entertainment and have little time or clarity of head to think seriously. If there is a God, the churches generally portray him as a God of love who is no threat to anyone. There is little preaching of hell, so there is no fear of God's wrath. The church's message, for example, on sexual behaviour, is generally confused and woolly, and therefore ignored.

Man is self-righteous and thinks of himself as relatively good, so that even if there is a hell, he thinks, "God surely won't send me there. There's lots of people worse than me around." Oh, what a need there is then for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, to convict and convert, to "reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" to come—John 16, verse 8. We need God to intervene and to shake men and women out of their apathy. We cry with Isaiah of old, "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down"—Isaiah 64, verse 1.

This chapter, though, encourages us. It tells us that God will build his church. We are to look up to heaven and to rejoice in the sovereign Lord, who is over all, and who is working out his promises, and his purposes for the salvation of his people.

First, in verses 1 to 3, The Church Pictured— "And the angel that talked with me came again,

and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep. And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.”

The angel returns to Zechariah to show him more visions. Here, it seems to him that he is wakened out of this sleep, and he is asked what he sees. First, he sees a candlestick, or rather a lampstand made of gold. It would remind him of the lampstand, the menorah in the tabernacle and later, in the temple. It was, of course, a type of Christ, who is the light of the world. But it also it symbolizes God’s people, the Israelites in the Old Testament, and the church today. Christ shines through his people. He says, “I am the light of the world”—John 8, verse 12. But he also says to his followers, “[You] are the light of the world”—Matthew 5, verse 14. You are not the source of light, but rather you are to transmit my light. Be a candlestick to the world. Jesus said, “Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”—Matthew 5, verses 15 to 16. There is no light in us of ourselves, but we are to reflect the light of Christ to mankind.

The church is the body of Christ, and the church existed in the Old Testament too. The Jews were the church in Zechariah’s day. Our understanding of this is clarified in the book of Revelation. There we come across the lampstands again, when the Apostle John is given a vision of Christ: “And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man”—Revelation 1, verses 12 to 13). This vision is then explained, “The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches”—Revelation 1:20. So here we are specifically told that the candlesticks represent the seven churches of Asia.

The church of God is composed of the elect who have come to faith in Christ. In the Old Testament, they looked forward in faith to the One who was to come, and to be the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world. In the New Testament age, we look back in faith to Calvary, and to the finished work of Christ on the cross. This is, “the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood”—Acts 20:28. Patriarchs like Abel, Enoch, and Noah belonged to the church. It was first organized separately in the days of Abraham, when he was told to circumcise his children and place upon them the token of the covenant—Genesis chapter 17. The sign of circumcision is later described as “a seal of the righteousness” which is by faith—Romans 4:11. It was a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, and marked out the church of the Old Testament just as baptism marks out the church of the New Testament.

The world lies in the darkness of ignorance and sin. It is dominated by the prince of darkness, the devil. The church gives light. It transmits the light of Christ who is “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world”—John 1, verse 9. Our light is not from ourselves. By nature, we have no light in us. It is only as Christ, by his Spirit, comes to reside in our hearts that we can truly shine forth. God said, “Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour”—Isaiah 43, verses 10 and 11.

The lampstand here is all of gold. This speaks of its value. In the eyes of the world, the church is despised, but God sees his church as really precious. He says, “They shall be mine, saith the

LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him”—Malachi 3, verse 17. Gold has a durability about it. Iron will rust, and silver tarnish, but gold continues to shine. There is a certain purity about gold, and so, God’s church, washed in the blood, is without spot or blemish.

Further, this candlestick has seven lamps. Seven is the number of the church, and the number of perfection. There are two olive trees by the lampstand, one on the right side and the other on the left. These produce a constant supply of oil for the lamps so that they keep shining.

Verses 4 to 6, The Power of the Church—“So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord? Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.”

What a contrast there was between the days of Zechariah and that of David and Solomon. When the first temple was built, the wealth that David and Solomon had gathered was immense. Solomon had a huge labor force at his disposal and many highly-gifted craftsmen. The temple, in earthly terms, was truly magnificent. Zerubbabel and Joshua could not hope to build anything like it in glory. There was this huge project before them, and it was easy to be paralyzed by the immensity of the challenge. When we struggle to build God’s church today, we are conscious that we do not have great Reformers like Luther, and Calvin, and Knox with us. We do not have deep theologians like Owen, and Edwards, and Warfield. We do not have mighty preachers and evangelists like Whitefield and Spurgeon. We are few in number, and none of us are particularly gifted. But we must remember what is said here: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.” It is not human gifts which makes the difference, but divine blessing. “Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?”—Isaiah 2, verse 22. Do not look to man to provide the answers. Man at best is feeble. Isaiah records, “The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever”—Isaiah 40, verses 6 to 8. Do not trust in man. Look up! Put your faith in God. Seek the help of his Spirit. Human might and power will fail, but when the Spirit of God begins a work, he will finish it: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”—Philippians 1, verse 6. Here, then, there is a tremendous encouragement for us in our weakness. It does not depend on us, but on God. We look to God to revive his church. God promises miracles, and the impossible becomes possible: “Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children”—Isaiah 66, verse 8. Yes, God assures us, a nation can be born again in a day. Let us labor in prayer for this.

Verse 7, Obstacles Overcome—“Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.”

It was hard for the returning exiles to build the temple. Mountains of rubbish had to be cleared away before the work could begin. New stones and timber had to be gathered and prepared. The Samaritans opposed the work and tried to stop it. For a while they succeeded. Some pessimists among the Jews felt sure that the enterprise would be a complete failure. They discouraged the

workers. It is the same today. There are many enemies—politicians, the media, the philosophers, leaders in education, social workers, “woke”¹ campaigners, and the courts. Secularists and humanists are actively promoting their agenda. False religions and cults of every sort abound. There are mountains blocking our way. It seems that there is no way the church can be built up. But look at the promise here: “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” The mountains that in the way are removed by God. Jesus said, “Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith”—Mark 11:22 and 23. If we have faith, even as small as a mustard seed, we can overcome every obstacle. We can overcome mountains of problems, and we can cast these mountains into the sea.

God is here assuring Zerubbabel that the work of the temple will be successful. Unbelieving people say that it will never be completed, but Zerubbabel shall “bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.” The copestone, or final stone, will be placed. When that is done, it will not be a matter of, “See the great work that I have done! Aren’t I great?” But rather, “Grace, grace unto it—to God be all the glory!” Nothing would have been achieved without him. Praise be to God! And of course, it’s like that in building God’s church. All the glory must go to God. Nothing of lasting value is achieved without him.

Turning now to verses 8 and 9, Assured Success—“Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you.”

The hands of Zerubbabel, the governor, laid the foundation of the second temple, and God assures both him and the people that his hands shall place the last stone in position. This is the word of the Lord, and he never tells lies. His Word will never fail, and his promises are sure. When the Jews shall see the temple completed, they will have to confess that a prophet of the Lord has been amongst them. What tremendous encouragement this was for the struggling builders. We too have the words of an even greater Prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ—Matthew 16:18: “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” One day, a New Testament church, a New Testament temple, will be complete. John tells us of the revelation he received of the church of God in her final perfect state. The angel showed it to him, and said, “Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb”—Revelation 21, verses 9 to 14. This is the church of God. This is the spiritual temple. John says he saw no temple in heaven. That is because it’s all temple. Success in building God’s church is assured.

¹ “Woke” is an adjective derived from African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) meaning “alert to racial prejudice and discrimination.” Beginning in the 2010s, it came to encompass a broader awareness of social inequalities such as racial injustice, sexism, and denial of LGBT rights. It has also been used as shorthand for some ideas of the American Left involving identity politics and social justice. (Wikipedia.org)

Coming to verse 10, Sinful Pessimism—“For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.”

Zechariah’s day was a day of small things in that the Jews were weak and poor. Because they were few in number and not gifted, some pessimists said that nothing would be achieved. They were wasting their time trying to build a temple. Sometimes you and I feel that we are failures and are overwhelmed by the difficulties of building God’s church. Even the Messiah is prophesied as saying words which many a minister has used, “I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain”—Isaiah 49, verse 4. But our Lord goes on to say, “Yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.” Then God assures him: “And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth”—Isaiah 49, verses 5 and 6. The Messiah would restore the tribes of Jacob and even gather the Gentiles into the church. Later, Isaiah declares, “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities”—Isaiah 53, verse 11.

We must not despise the day of small things. Though it appears to us at times that very little is achieved, we must remember that with the Lord, one day is as a thousand years. God is working out his purposes, and they will not fail. The plummet is in the hands of the heavenly Zerubbabel, and the building work is progressing, even if only a stone or two that are laid in our lifetime. Every stone adds to the building. We are encouraged to be, “stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”—1 Corinthians 15:58. Anything done for the Lord is worthwhile.

We are then told of the seven, which is interpreted as “the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth.” What are these seven? Again the book of Revelation is helpful. In the introduction, we find the words, “Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead”—Revelation 1, verses 4 to 5. Here, the three persons of the Trinity are referred to, and the Holy Spirit is called “the seven Spirits before his throne.” God’s Spirit works on earth applying redemption to God’s people, striving with sinners, and sanctifying, and equipping the Lord’s people for their work. With the aid of the Spirit, great things are done.

We come now to verses 11 to 14, An Unlimited Supply of Blessing—“Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the LORD of the whole earth.”

The lampstand in the tabernacle had to be filled with oil each morning. But this one receives a constant supply of oil from the two olive trees. Because of this, it constantly shines and gives its light. But what do the two trees represent? They are described as the “two anointed ones, that stand by the LORD of the whole earth.” The word “anointed” refers to the Messiah, in the Hebrew of the Old Testament, or the Christ, in the Greek of the New Testament. So the reference

is clearly to Christ as the source of oil. His atoning work earned this for his church. Paul tells the Ephesians, “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men”—Ephesians 4, verse 8. When Christ ascended, he sent the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to abide with the church and equip her for her ministry. Oil is often used as a picture of the Spirit. But why are there two anointed ones rather than just one? The two anointed ones at that time were Zerubbabel the governor—Zerubbabel himself, and Joshua the High Priest. They were types of Christ. And so, this refers to the offices of Christ. He was anointed a King and a Priest. He also has the office of Prophet, but prophets were not normally anointed. So our Lord Jesus Christ is set before us here as our great Priest and King, who has earned for us the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who is the Comforter, the Encourager, the Advocate, and the Empowerer. The Spirit is God with us. Praise be to the Lord Jesus Christ, who earned salvation for us, and who earned for us the mighty work of the Holy Spirit. Amen.