

For Who Hath Despised the Day of Small Things?

Zechariah 4:10; 2 Chronicles 20:15

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Why does the work of building the kingdom of Christ seem so difficult? Why is the work of a covenanted reformation so despised even by those who profess to be Christians? If this work is the Lord's work, why are there so few who are joining with us in this great and worthy cause? It is even out from discouragement that the Lord reminds us that it is His Church and He will build it.

The Lord challenges you who may have grown faint-hearted in standing firm for His truth because there are so few standing with you, because there is so little progress in reformation, or because you do not even have the encouragement to stand from family members or friends—He challenges you to look in faith to Him, “For who hath despised the day of small things” (Zechariah 4:10). Our main points are: (1) Two Prophetic Symbols Identified (Zechariah 4:1-5,11-14); (2) The Prophetic Message to Zerubbabel (Zechariah 4:6-9); (3) The Challenging Question to Zechariah (Zechariah 4:10).

I. Two Prophetic Symbols Identified (Zechariah 4:1-5,11-14)

A. The Historical Context

1. As we consider our text from Zechariah 4, a remnant of the Jews (under the capable leadership of Zerubbabel, the royal governor, and Joshua, the high priest) have now returned from 70 years of captivity (538 B.C.) in order to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. It was not easy; for as the foundation of the temple was laid, various discouragements were faced.

a. First, in Ezra 3:12, we learn that there were some Jews who were old enough to remember the glory of Solomon's temple from 70 years earlier who began weeping over the “good ole days” as they looked at the feeble foundation that was just laid. Instead of greatly rejoicing in God's mercy and moving forward, they were mired in the temple's past glory. We look to the past, but do not live in the past.

b. Second, we find in the prophecy of Haggai that others among the Jews became more interested in building their own houses than they were in building God's House. A general apathy was settling in among the people to such a degree that they had lost sight of their first mission to rebuild the House of God. They were not seeking first God's kingdom, but rather their own kingdoms.

c. Third, God's people faced opposition (in Ezra 4) from neighboring Samaritans who professed a desire to join in rebuilding the temple along with the Jews, but whose only goal was actually to conspire to foil and hinder the efforts of the Jews. They sought to discourage the Jews for years in completing the temple by sowing seeds of doubt.

d. Finally, when none of the above put a definite stop to rebuilding the temple, the enemies of God's people used the king of Persia, Artaxerxes, to halt construction on the temple (in Ezra 4). Enemies slandered the Jews calling them troublemakers who would only prove to be rebellious against the king once the temple was rebuilt. Artaxerxes halted the work on the temple for a couple years. Will the temple be rebuilt with the king now standing in the way? That the designs of the wicked to hinder reformation are successful for a time is not for the ruin of the church, but for the growth of our faith and patience. That is the historical situation as we consider our text today.

2. The Lord makes clear that rebuilding the temple was ultimately not man's work, but God's work, and He promised to see it to its completion. At that discouraging time, the Lord raised up two prophets (Haggai and Zechariah) to proclaim His message of rebuilding the temple despite the opposition they faced. Likewise, it is Christ's ministers that He has always used to dispel discouragement and refocus His

people's faith upon God and His promises. It's the latter of these prophets, Zechariah, whose prophecy we shall consider today.

B. The first prophetic symbol in our text is the golden candlestick with the seven lamps.

1. Zechariah is awakened by the angel to see a vision of the golden candlestick with its seven lamps. This golden candlestick reminds of us of the one in the temple (Exodus 25:31ff), but there are differences as well. For example, the priests continually put oil in the seven lamps in the temple candlestick, but this candlestick is supplied by oil from a bowl above it which drains oil through seven pipes to each of the seven lamps. This candlestick signifies the temple that would again burn brightly as the oil of God's grace continually brought the light of God's truth through the work of His ministers and magistrates.

2. This symbol is fulfilled in Revelation 1:13 as the Apostle John receives a vision in which Jesus is seen walking in the midst of seven golden candlesticks which signify the seven churches of Asia (Revelation 1:20). Understand, dear ones, that God's holy temple is no longer a building of stone, but is Christ's New Covenant Church composed of living stones (1 Corinthians 3:16). In our worship God's glory appears in His ordinances and in the spiritual sacrifices offered to Him. This temple is far more beautiful to the Lord than Solomon's temple of old.

C. The second prophetic symbol consists of two olive trees on both sides of the golden candlestick (Zechariah 4:11-14).

1. These two olive trees empty their oil through two pipes into the bowl at the top of the candlestick which then drains through the seven pipes to keep the seven lamps burning. The angel identifies them as "the two anointed ones" (or literally, "the two sons of oil") who "stand by the Lord of the whole earth". These two sons of oil receive from the Lord the oil (God's grace) that is then poured into the seven lamps that they might burn brightly to the profit and benefit of the candlestick (the temple). These two sons of oil represent Zerubbabel, the prince, and Joshua, the high priest in being called by God to serve the Lord in rebuilding the temple and in advancing reformation among God's people (Haggai 1:12-14; Zechariah 3:1; Zechariah 4:9).

2. Whenever God has brought reformation of true, biblical religion to a nation(s), He has used both princes (like Zerubbabel) and ministers (like Joshua) as those through whom (as instruments) He poured out His grace to the church in shining forth His truth brightly (ultimately from Jesus our Prophet, Priest, and King). During the Reformation (both first and second), it was through both magistrates and ministers that the Lord brought forth the light of His truth throughout Europe in dispelling the darkness of papal Rome and all false religion. Magistrates and ministers were working together to promote the advancement of Christ's kingdom within nations. This is how the Lord will bring about national and worldwide reformation in the future as well. Church and state will covenant together to be the Lord's and to serve Him (as was true in Israel and was true during the Reformation—Solemn League and Covenant, which yet binds England, Ireland, and Scotland with all their posterity).

II. The Prophetic Message to Zerubbabel (Zechariah 4:6-7)

A. The following message was to be proclaimed to the royal governor, Zerubbabel, as the civil ruler over God's people. As you look at the genealogies found in Matthew 1 and Luke 3, you will find that he was a descendant of David and an ancestor of Jesus. Being in the royal line of David, he had royal blood flowing in his veins.

B. What was the message directed to Zerubbabel?

1. First, "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

a. Zerubbabel was to understand that the rebuilding of the temple and the work of reformation would not ultimately be his work, or the work of any man. Though Judah was under the hand of Persia at this time, and though he had been prohibited to continue the work of rebuilding the temple by the most powerful ruler of the world at that time (King Artaxerxes), he was not to fear; for Almighty God says (in effect), “It is not your human strength, nor your military might, nor your abundant wealth or resources, nor your intelligence that will complete the rebuilding of the temple. Remember, Zerubbabel, this is My temple and My work, and I will bring it to pass” (2 Chronicles 20:15). It is not your church or mine, but Christ’s, and He will build it.

b. How we need to be constantly reminded of that good word (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). When we walk by sight and feeling rather than by faith, we put our trust in the arm of flesh to build the church (in numbers, in programs, in buildings, in entertaining sermons). We put our trust in ministers and elders to build the church rather than in Christ our King. Jesus never promised to build and reform His Church in a day, but He will do so (Zechariah 4:6). Remember the words of Jonathan to his armor bearer as they were greatly outnumbered by the Philistines in 1 Samuel 14:6. The LORD of “hosts” (armies) will fight for and defend His own cause (even though He uses frail people like you and me as instruments). He cannot lose, no matter how many there be that oppose or no matter how powerful they be that stand against the LORD of armies

2. A second aspect of this message to Zerubbabel addresses the king of Persia that stood in the way in Zechariah 4:7-9.

a. It is not uncommon in biblical, prophetic literature to address kings or kingdoms as mountains (Jeremiah 51:25; Isaiah 2:2; Daniel 2:35). Here the LORD of armies challenges the king of Persia that he will not be able to stand in the way of Zerubbabel in rebuilding His holy temple (any more than the Syrian king could overtake the Lord of armies at the time of Elisha). The king of Persia will become flattened like a plain and unable to stop Zerubbabel until the temple is completed (the Lord softened the heart of Darius who even supplied all that was needed to rebuild the temple, Ezra 5-6; Proverbs 21:1).

b. Just as the Lord declared, Zerubbabel did live to see the completion of the temple (Zechariah 4:7-9). So shall our King, Jesus (Matthew 16:18: I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it). But this would only be accomplished from beginning to end by the grace of God (Zechariah 4:7b). Zerubbabel, Joshua, Haggai, and Zechariah were merely earthen vessels that God used. Just as Paul planted, Apollos water, but God gave the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6).

c. God has instituted the office of civil rulers to uphold both Tables of His Law—the First Table (Commandments 1-4) and the Second Table (Commandments 5-10). It is their duty in a land that has been enlightened by the gospel of Jesus Christ to use their authority to establish and promote the one true religion revealed in Holy Scripture. They are instituted to be God’s ministers for good, not evil (Romans 13:4). This message of rebuilding the temple and promoting a covenanted reformation is directed to the civil ruler because it his duty to care for and protect Christ’s Church, whether then or now. Sadly, most churches would NOT have directed this message to the civil ruler. To the priesthood? Yes. To the civil ruler? No. And yet the two olive trees (“the two sons of oil”) represent the magistrate and the minister working together as means of God’s grace and favor to promote the light of reformation through Christ’s Church.

III. The Challenging Question to Zechariah (Zechariah 4:8-10)

A. In light of the fact that it is the LORD of hosts that has promised He will complete the rebuilding of the temple and promote reformation of the one true biblical religion, who cares how small, few, and insignificant your numbers and resources may be? For who has despised the day of small things? That is a great question. Who? Certainly the Lord does not despise the day of small things. He delights in it. Whether it be Gideon’s 300 outnumbered by 130,000 Midianites, or a youthful David facing a huge giant, or a lowly

Zerubbabel facing a powerful Persian king, or a few disciples of Christ facing the mighty Roman Empire. I might despise the day of small things. You might despise the day of small things. Those who oppose a covenanted reformation of faithful, biblical Christianity may despise the day of small things. But the LORD of hosts does not despise the day of small things. He has always delighted in taking that which is small and showing His greatness and in growing His kingdom from small beginnings (a mustard seed that becomes a tree in Matthew 13 or a rock that becomes a mountain in Daniel 2).

B. In whom is your trust as we work to rebuild and reform the temple and Church of Jesus Christ that has fallen away in doctrine, worship, and church government? In man or in Christ? In ministers and elders or in Christ? If you are committed to seeing Christ's Church reformed, the money changers chased out, true biblical religion and the covenants of our forefathers rebuilt in your nation, then despise not the day of small things.

C. Jesus is our greater Zerubbabel who promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church (Matthew 16:18). She may be persecuted, driven to worship in homes, and diminished greatly in numbers, but she will prevail because Jesus is her King. "For who hath despised the day of small things?" King Jesus certainly does not. Let us not do so either.

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