

A Lamp for the World

Jonathan K. Dodson | Zechariah 4 | November 11, 2015

We're in the fifth vision and fourth chapter of Zechariah, apocalyptic literature that uses images to alter our experience of reality to free your mind. Sometimes the images change but have the same meaning. Three images: A Stone, the Day of Small Things, a Lampstand.

The Premier Stone

Imagine you're among the Jewish exiles making the hopeful trek home to Jerusalem, you approach the city, a ghost of its former glory. The wall leveled to the ground, no sounds of commerce or laughter. Homes flattened. As you approach the center of the city and you look slightly up to the temple mount, to see rubble everywhere, the temple of YHWH razed to the ground. Perhaps they felt like some Parisians feel today...but their loss was greater. The temple was not just a part of the city; it was the heart of the city. It was where heaven overlapped with earth. Israel was to be a light to the nations, the beacon of God's glory and grace and the temple is where the glory of God had dwelt. But while in exile the prophet Ezekiel announces that the glory had departed (10:18) and the light snuffed out. Now they're back in the darkened city with a prophet, two prophets, Zechariah and Haggai, who encourage them and affirm Zerubbabel, an appointed governor in the royal line of David, as God's chosen leader to lead temple *reconstruction*. A prophet, a priest, and a perhaps a king, the three essential offices for the glory to return..hope is rising. Surveying the mountain of rubble Zechariah says: "**Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it (7)!'**" This mountain may stand for the literal pile of rubble before them and probably for the difficulty of the task head of them. Either way, Zechariah announces the mountain will be leveled, an essential step to rebuilding a structure with integrity. Next, a stone is brought forward and lots of people shout at it. What's going on? There are a lot of opinions on the meaning of the **top stone**. The word for top can be translated different ways rendering it a decorative stone put on top of the temple once its complete, or the cornerstone of the temple. But these miss the cultural context. In ANE, kings who presided over temple reconstruction took great pains to align a new temple with the old temple blueprint, sometimes down to the inch. Then, they would perform a ceremony, taking *a stone* from the old temple and fitting it into the new temple. This would often be accompanied by singing or shouting, which actually occurs when this vision is historically fulfilled in Book of Ezra: "**And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord...**" (3:10). So *why* all the fuss over an old brick? Why work so hard to construct the new temple foundation on the footprint of the old? *Well, remember this isn't restoration of the capitol building; it's reconstruction of the **house of God**, something God revealed in detail to Moses down to the shape of the lampstands and drainage holes in the foundation.* The house of a deity was revered, even feared. When the high priest went into the holy of holies, he had a rope tied around his waist in case he was struck dead for being unclean in the presence of Glory. Israel had something we have lost, a sense of sacred space. An inclination to reverence, awe. Today, we venerate the new (ogling new phones and fashion), but they treasured the old (glory, Presence). You have to catch up to the new, but you slow down for the old. **Are you too busy for awe, too self-consumed to slow**

down each day and revere what is truly great? Kierkegaard “*our incapacity for quiet contemplation cuts us off from our true self and leads to passive absorption of the ideals of others.*” Are you busily absorbing the political, moral, philosophical views of others or, in quiet contemplation of Glory, discovering your true self, that you were made for awe? **Israel was stuck on the stone because they knew they couldn’t stand without it.** God defined them. He brought light and hope to them, in the darkest of circumstances. Does God define you, your beliefs, your longings, your actions? Or do you insist on defining yourself? In the NT, this stone is described as as precious and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. Christ, the cornerstone or top stone, creates a building comprised of many living stones, people attached to one another, the church. It is this stone that builders rejected. Christ rejected, crushed, pulverized for us at the cross for our lack of awe, for our exchange of worship new for the old, for insisting we defines ourselves apart from him. But then he rematerializes as the top stone, the premier stone, who if we believe in him, if we touch him we live, and slide into God’s new temple. Does Christ define you? Is he your premier stone? How do you know? Awe gives way to holy joy. As Zerubbabel slides a piece of God’s former dwelling place into the new temple, they erupt in joy! Awe turns to **holy joy**, reverence to rejoicing!

The Day of Small Things

Things seem to be snapping into place: prophets, a priest, a king, the temple foundation and premier stone...What is missing? The Light and the Glory, the actual Presence of God. You can’t have a temple without a God. “*Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “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. For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice”* (8-10). As excitement surges around the refounding ceremony, there are those who despise the day of small things, insisting the temple will be nothing like the past. The day of small things. Americans like big things. Texans even bigger things. But God says don’t despise the day of small things. History is often measured by watershed events and dates, but historians are now insisting that it is the smaller, often *ordinary* people and unseen events leading up to these dates that really matter. Countless books and blogs urge us to be *extraordinary*, to defy convention, to be different, unique. How you raise your kids, where you send them to school, the music you listen to, the places you shop, the car you drive or don’t drive. But all of that anti-conformity is just another form of conformity. The consumer counter-culture, There’s a whole group of you with tattoos, driving Priuses, or citing gospel-centered this and that. In the search for the extraordinary, the day of small things has been forgotten. But our God is God who loves the ordinary, whose plan is to work in and through the small, insignificant things. He put his glory in jars of clay, his light inside lots of little awkwardly shaped, living stones. He invites harlots into his family tree, fishermen into his inner circle, and single women into his traveling ministry team. People with issues have a place of honor at his table, do they have a place at yours? Do you have time for ordinary people or are you too busy trying to be extraordinary? Over the years people in our church have said to me, out real gratitude for the church, what can I do, is there any way I can help? And when I respond by saying, “You can make a disciple, you can take spiritual responsibility for someone else growing grace, an ordinary person,” they are often disappointed. We prefer something that paves the way for extraordinary, a financial gift, a big project, an adoption...but Jesus simply says, follow

me and I will make you fishers of men, go into all the world and make disciples. **Be ordinary with ordinary people with my extraordinary grace.** Make a disciple, start a new fight club, pursue the **holy joy** of those around you. Bend your life around Jesus' life and invite others into your life.

The Lamp of the World

What would compel you to do such a thing, to embrace the ordinary and inconvenient, to put the holy joy of another ahead of your fleeting joys? [Zechariah says those who don't despise the day of small things will themselves rejoice—why? Because they will see the plumbline in the hand of Zerubbabel, the seven eyes of the Lord ranging throughout the earth.](#) Most scholars say plumbline should be translated stone of tin, and the seven eyes are associated with a stone in the previous chapter with seven eyes on it. The seven eyes are a metaphor for all-seeing, all-present Spirit of God who searches the earth. He's saying there is a day coming when the searching will end, and the Spirit will have called every living stone into place, and if you have lived for that temple, for others, and God's glory not your own, if you have sought the holy joy of others, then you will be especially thrilled as you see the cosmic temple of God snap into place (Re 21:2-3). When the future glory of God captivates us in the present, we love ordinary people with extraordinary grace. We build the temple now. Which brings us to our third image, the lampstand. The lampstand is a menorah of some sort [\[image\]](#), a lamp used to illuminate the temple. But the one described here has not only seven lamps, but seven lips on each lamp, which are probably individual wicks that are immersed into the oil in each lamp. This means *there are 49 lights on this lamp; it burned brightly*. But how? There are also two olive trees on either side of the blazing lamp. And when Zechariah asks what these trees stand for, the angel oddly says: [“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts”](#) (4:6) So what are they? After referring to the seven eyed stone of tin, Zechariah asks the question again: [Then I said to him, “What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?” And a second time I answered and said to him, “What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the golden oil is poured out?” He said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” Then he said, “These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth”](#)(11-14). The olive trees refer to those who stand by the Lord of all the earth. They are men and women who are unashamed to take a place in Jesus' temple, to be defined by the top stone, to witness to the glory of Christ. How? Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord. **They witness to the burning lamp because they have the golden oil flowing through them.** Historically, Joshua and Zerubbabel did this for Israel, but stepping back to look at redemptive history, it is the church that bears witness to the light. There is no plan B. You are an agent of the light, a witness of the truth, a herald who shouts about the Stone, Grace, grace to it and through it. Will you take your place? Notice the witness is close to the light; she feels its warmth and sees in its light. She is not in the dark and in the cold. **The closer we are to Jesus the more brightly we will burn.** We can't help but point others to the Lamp of the World. How do we do it? By contemplating greatness, by living on golden oil of the Spirit not the cheap gas of anti-conformity. We talk about what we're taken with. When you're amped about the game, you talk about the game. When you admire a director you talk about the director and his work. When you love a designer, you talk about her and her work. And to do all of that we invest time. We watch and shop. We study the players, the

films, the material. Don't be inoculated by the new; slow down and marvel over the old, and let the golden oil spill of the Spirit through you, to light up the world with the glory of Christ in the midst of the darkness.