

## **SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH**

ZECHARIAH 4:1-6 and ACTS 13:44-52

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The Holy Spirit gives Jesus' connected followers supernatural strength to fulfill God's Kingdom purposes.

- JOY accompanies the filling of the Holy Spirit
- GOD will often strip away sources of power and strength we look to instead of Him and get us away from our comforts, all so we will depend on the power of the Holy Spirit.
- GOD often moves from small to significant ... so don't let small get you down.

### **ZERUBBABEL'S STORY**

Zerubbabel is mentioned in several other Old Testament books that deal with the same time period as Zechariah: Ezra, Nehemiah, and Haggai. 70 years prior, Israel was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, and all of the upper echelon of Israel that hadn't been killed were relocated to Babylon. Zerubbabel's grandpa, Jehoiachin, was king in Jerusalem at the time. We remember some stories from Israel's captivity, mostly from the perspective of the prophet Daniel. Young Daniel had three friends that their captors named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They survived Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. Later, as an old man, Daniel was miraculously delivered from the lion's den... that was a different king - actually a different regime entirely, as the Medes conquered the Babylonians.

Later the Persian Empire took hold, epitomized by a great king Cyrus who Isaiah prophesied would be an anointed servant of God. Somewhere along the line Jehoiachin gained the favor of his captors and 2 Kings 25:29 says that he exchanged his prison jumpsuit for royal robes and dined with the king until the end of his life. Apparently, this favor extended to Zerubbabel as well, because Cyrus appointed him Governor of Judea, and sent him back with Ezra, Nehemiah, and many other Israelites who longed for home. They were repatriated and

commissioned to rebuild the walls of the city of Jerusalem and the great Temple of God.

Zerubbabel, as one of the favored captives from Israel, was schooled in Babylon and Persia, much like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were. He was most likely trained in military strategy and politics. His family was wealthy and he no doubt rode into Jerusalem with the others, figuring he could get things done in a hurry. And they started off grandly enough. But then things came to a screeching halt.

Imagine if you were one of the residents of Jerusalem the day before all these hoi polloi came to town. Your family was no one special, but you all did what you could to tend the vineyards and gardens and keep the tattered ruins of the city together, and it was now home. Then along come these folks from the capital city of the nation who tore you down. They claim to be your long-lost countrymen. You don't know, they look a lot like you, they claim to share your values, and worship your God. But they're very different. They speak a different language, they come from a different culture. They have different jokes!

Your family was left in Israel because they were poor and Babylon thought they were too worthless to invest the resources to relocate and re-educate. Now here come the elite, re-educated people and they're talking about rebuilding their homes right where your sad little home is. Suddenly, there was a lot of distrust between the returnees and the remaining survivors. And that was among the ethnically Jewish people. Jerusalem and the vicinity had also been settled by people of other nationalities and cultures that had been decimated by Babylon. They worshiped false gods and some tried to combine a mix of worshiping the God of Israel along with their gods, corrupting what was left of the temple system. These multi-ethnic neighbors and the remaining Jewish survivors had one thing in common: an enemy, the enemy that plundered their homelands. It was easy to paint these returnees from Babylon, led by Zerubbabel, whose name meant "Seed of Babylon", as part of that enemy. Not surprisingly, these

neighbors put up quite a fight and the rebuilding of the Temple stopped after the foundation was laid, and the legal battles raged for nearly fifteen years.

The road to rebuilding seemed like a broad, well-paved and well-oiled boulevard. It had become a long, difficult, California pothole-filled, winding road that now appeared to lead to a dead-end.

Have you felt stuck in your life for a long time? Can you imagine that that may be how Zerubbabel felt at that moment? Yet Zerubbabel was a critical part of God's strategy of bringing the light of Israel back to shine brightly in preparation for the coming of Messiah.

And it was in the darkest moment of those fifteen years of being stuck that Zechariah had a vision that he had to share with Zerubbabel. Can you imagine Zechariah explaining something like this:

I had the strangest dream last night! But it wasn't a dream - I was awakened with a start out of deep sleep! As I was rubbing my eyes awake a big, resonant voice said, "What do you see?" I opened my eyes. It was astonishing. "I see a large, lit menorah made of pure gold being replenished from a golden bowl above it. From the bowl come seven gold conduits in which the oil flows from the bowl to fuel the seven individual wicks in the menorah. And there are two olive trees on either side of the menorah. Oil is transferred from the trees to the bowl by pipes. What are these?"

"Don't you know?" the voice said. I was stunned, "No, I don't know!"

"This is what God wants to say to Zerubbabel: It's not by might. It's not by power. It's by My Spirit says the Lord of Hosts."

The golden menorah represents the witness of God's people as light in a dark world. This witness had been nearly snuffed out because of Israel's faithlessness, and the subsequent judgment and captivity. Yet God, in His faithfulness, never abandoned His people or His purposes.

Zerubbabel was one of the olive trees in Zechariah's vision. As governor, we was the appointed civil leader and anointed by God to lead His people. Joshua, the high priest of the not yet Temple, was the other olive tree, anointed by God to lead His people in truth and uncorrupted worship.

I believe that the trees represent for us today holiness (priesthood) and justice (civil authority): two overarching ideals to which we as God's people are called, fueled by the oil of pure love. As these two trees, holiness, and justice, are healthy and fueled by love in the lives of God's people and in the Church, they allow for a brilliant, stable witness to be shown to the world. This is what I mean when I talk about being a connected follower of Christ. It's first about BEING, then it's about doing as I sense the Holy Spirit leading me. But more about that in a minute.

This golden menorah lampstand is as automatic as you can have in Zechariah's day... fuel for the candles is supplied through conduits attached to a bowl which is automatically refilled by two olive trees. This symbolizes the fact that the light is ***supernaturally supplied***. The oil, which I have been describing as love, is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. None of us can make the Holy Spirit appear. No one can command Him. He fills us and works among us on His timing, and at His command. Our part is to stay connected to Him by surrendering to Him and His work.

Zerubbabel knew that he was called to build the Temple. God put it on his heart as well as the hearts of other leaders around him, and had confirmed it on several occasions. God brought him out of familiar surroundings and comfort to do His work on location. Why then, this gridlock and frustration? Why did the Temple stand as only a small, laid foundation? He tried what he knew, employing the best of his schooling in strategy and politics. Nothing seemed to work until he heard what Zechariah had to say...

Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord of hosts.

God was speaking through a megaphone now: “Go ahead and design your most brilliant strategy Zerubbabel. Go ahead and try to charm, try to threaten, try to politic your way through. How’s it working for you? I just need you to be connected. Stay ready and hungry and see that I will do this through you by My Spirit. And by My Spirit I will do something *in* you as well. Just trust me!”

The oil, the presence of the Holy Spirit, brings us many wondrous, miraculous blessings. Consider a few. The oil of the Spirit of God brings:

1. Light instead of darkness (Exodus 20:21; Matthew 25:3 &4)

Matthew 25:3&4: “The foolish virgins took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.”

2. Healing instead of sickness (Psalm 23:5; Mark 6:13; Luke 10:34; James 5:14)

James 5:14 Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up.

3. Nourishment instead of hunger: without oil as a binder for bread, flour became fairly useless. (1 Kings 17:12; Ezekiel 16:13)

Ezekiel 16:13 Your food was honey, olive oil and the finest flour.

4. Anointing instead of inadequacy (Exodus 37:29; 1 Samuel 16:13; Psalm 133:2; 1 John 2:20 & 27)

1 Samuel 16:13 So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David.

1 John 2:20 & 27 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth... As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

5. Joy instead of sadness (Isaiah 61:3; Hebrews 1:9)

Hebrews 1:9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.

I believe we’re all included in the vision of Zechariah’s golden menorah lampstand. We all make up the seven wicks of the lampstand. As people of God, our primary Kingdom purpose is to shine brightly for Him, allowing the light of the gospel to shine brightly through us - bringing light instead of darkness, healing

instead of pain, nourishment instead of hunger, anointing instead of inadequacy, and joy instead of sadness.

Are your conduits clear for the oil of the Spirit to flow? Connectivity comes through the disposition of a heart that seeks after God, and the diligence of a mind and body that seek to follow His ways. *What Would Jesus Do* becomes more than a slogan or a wristband, but it is the way to live.

## HOW THE SPIRIT WORKS

In John 3, Jesus said that we can't see the Holy Spirit with our eyes, but, like the wind, we can see and hear Him moving.

The Holy Spirit works through people. We see Him work through Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13, just as He worked in Zechariah through Joshua and Zerubbabel.

The Holy Spirit can work through anyone: why do you think the Babylonian and Persian kings who had Israel by the throat suddenly relaxed their grip and allowed God's people to return to Jerusalem and rebuild? The Holy Spirit can work around you - and He can even work through you.... But the greatest blessing for you as a Christian is to surrender to Him and His work so that He can work *in* you, as well.

Here's how the Spirit of God works: He always calls you into your comfort zone. Just rest easy and don't worry about the world around you. [NO WAY!]

He usually begins by nudging us *out* of our comfort zones. Sometimes He does this through challenging our vision and maybe bugging us a little bit, like bugging us about communities and children in Africa that don't have sustainable sources of clean water, or bugging us about the homeless crisis right here in Bakersfield. "What are you going to do about that?" He may ask, and you find yourself bothered enough to sign up to do something. And then that something that you thought would be one-and-done, that is usually the starting point. It

always grows from small to significant. God doesn't want only a few positive posts on the Gram and a day or two of doing something you wouldn't normally do. He wants us to find our reward in Him and that reward is usually found as you serve outside your comfort zone.

Often, the Holy Spirit mercifully takes away from our lives the things that once made us comfortable, or causes those things to no longer yield the comfort they once did. Sooner or later, we realize that the Spirit is leading where our trust is without borders, and we are ready to set out on the waters with our Lord. We may not be jumping out all at once like the Apostle Peter; we may need some time in the wilderness like Paul... but Paul was plenty uncomfortable in the wilderness... and it didn't end there.

When we see Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13 they're in one of many uncomfortable times. It started grandly enough! It seemed like the whole city crowded together to hear the gospel. Then they discovered, to their chagrin, that, although the Gentile majority of the city seemed receptive to the Gospel, the Jewish minority made it impossible for them to stay. Paul and Barnabas were handed what seemed to be their first defeat on their first mission as a newly minted missionary team. They shook the dust off their feet, which was an ancient Middle Eastern way of saying, "I think we're done here," and they left because of the pressure being exerted on them to leave. But then comes the last verse of Acts 13,

And the disciples - probably referring to Paul and Barnabas *and* the new converts in Galatia, even though Paul and Barnabas had to leave - "And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." They shouldn't be happy at this point... they'd just been thrown out of the city! They shouldn't be happy at this point... they couldn't stay and lead the Discovering Membership class! And they weren't happy... they were filled with joy! Joy and the Holy Spirit!

If you are feeling stuck, tired, sick and tired, or about to give up because of the resistance you feel, I have good news for you! The Holy Spirit gives

supernatural strength - strength available to any of us who would be connected followers of Jesus - to fulfill God's Kingdom purposes!

For it is not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts. Amen.

Prayer:

Lord, we are so resourceful and able. We perceive ourselves as smart. Help us to repent of self-reliance to know that it is not by our power or might but that Kingdom work is done but by Your Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit and be the Source by which things get done around here. May it be that the longer we serve You the more radically we are dependent on Your Spirit. Amen.