

Zechariah 4:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl,
and the other upon the left side thereof.

Analysis

And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof. The vision's most striking feature appears: ushnayim zeytim aleha (ושְׁנַיִם זֵיתִים עָלֶיהָ, "and two olive trees beside it"). These trees flank the lampstand's central bowl, positioned symmetrically—**one upon the right... the other upon the left**. The olive trees connect directly to the oil supply system, providing continuous fuel without human intervention. Verse 12 clarifies that golden oil flows from the trees through golden pipes into the bowl, which then distributes to the seven lamps.

Olive trees symbolize Israel throughout Scripture (Jeremiah 11:16; Hosea 14:6; Romans 11:17-24). They produce oil used for anointing kings and priests (mashach, מָשַׁח, to anoint—from which mashiach/Messiah derives). Here the two olive trees represent the two "anointed ones" (bney-hayitshar, בְּנֵי-הַיֵּצֶהָר, literally "sons of fresh oil") identified in verse 14 as standing before the Lord of all the earth. These are Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor—representing priestly and royal offices that together serve God's purposes.

The dual leadership of priest and king anticipates Christ who combines both offices (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5-7). The two witnesses of Revelation 11:3-4 explicitly reference this passage: "These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth." The principle is clear: God accomplishes His work through anointed leaders empowered by His Spirit, not through human institutional structures alone. Both Word (priestly teaching) and

governance (royal authority) must function together under God's Spirit to sustain the Church's light.

Historical Context

In post-exilic Israel, Joshua (Jeshua) the high priest and Zerubbabel the Davidic governor led the community. They represented both spiritual and civil leadership, though neither held full authority—Israel was under Persian rule. The vision assured them that despite lacking political independence, they were God's anointed servants through whom He would accomplish His purposes. Their partnership in temple rebuilding demonstrated the cooperation between spiritual and civic leadership necessary for God's work.

The olive trees' continuous oil production without human labor reinforced the message of verse 6: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit." Natural olive trees require cultivation, harvest, and pressing to yield oil—but these supernatural trees supply oil directly and continuously. This indicated that the Spirit's empowerment would flow through Joshua and Zerubbabel to sustain Israel's light to the nations.

Christian interpretation sees the two olive trees ultimately fulfilled in Christ who is both High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16) and King (Revelation 19:16). The Church's dual testimony of Word and sacrament, or teaching and governance, reflects this pattern. The Reformation's emphasis on Word and Spirit working together echoes Zechariah's vision: Scripture (like oil) must be supplied continuously by the Spirit through anointed teachers and leaders for the Church to shine.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does the partnership between Joshua (priest) and Zerubbabel (governor) inform your understanding of how spiritual and civic leadership should cooperate in God's purposes?
2. What does it mean that the olive trees supply oil continuously without human intervention—how does this challenge self-sufficiency in ministry?
3. In what ways does Christ fulfill both the priestly and royal offices represented by the two olive trees, and how should this shape Christian worship and obedience?

Interlinear Text

וּשְׁנַיִם	זֵיתֵי יָם	עַל יָהּ	וְאֶחָד	מִיְמֵי יוֹן	הַגֵּל הַ
And two	olive trees	H5921	and the other	upon the right	side of the bowl
H8147	H2132		H259	H3225	H1543
וְאֶחָד	עַל	שְׂמֹאלָהּ:			
and the other	H5921	upon the left			
H259		H8040			

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 11:4 (Parallel theme): These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.

Zechariah 4:14 (Parallel theme): Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.

Romans 11:17 (Parallel theme): And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;

Romans 11:24 (Parallel theme): For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

Judges 9:9 (Parallel theme): But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

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