

A Shabbat message from Rabbi Rheins  
*Shabbat Chanukah Vayeishev 5781*

## **Not By Might**

Since this Shabbat falls on the second day of Chanukah, we will read a special Haftarah portion from the prophet Zechariah. The prophet's message is especially relevant for this world that is still struggling to see light and feel hope in the 10th month of the pandemic.

***Zechariah 4:1*** *The angel who talked with me came back and woke me as a man is wakened from sleep. <sup>2</sup> He said to me, "What do you see?" And I answered, "I see a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl above it. The lamps on it are seven in number, and the lamps above it have seven pipes; <sup>3</sup> and by it are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and one on its left." <sup>4</sup> I, in turn, asked the angel who talked with me, "What do those things mean, my lord?"*

<sup>5</sup> *"Do you not know what those things mean?" asked the angel who talked with me; and I said, "No, my lord."*

<sup>6</sup> *Then he explained to me as follows: "This is the word of Adonai to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit -- says Adonai, the God of Hosts.*

Let's consider the context of Zechariah's message. He was addressing ancestors as they were returning from Babylonian exile. Generations had passed since Jerusalem was sacked and the Temple destroyed (586 BCE). Now, a new Persian regime in Babylon was permitting our ancestors to

return to our homeland. And yet, when they returned they saw the ruins of the old Temple and the walls of Jerusalem torn down. The tasks and challenges seemed overwhelming. The early attempts went slowly and some despaired that they simply did not have the resources or the ability to successfully rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. Adding to their woes, antisemitic adversaries plagued them and caused delays in the reconstruction (Ezra 3:8- 4:24). Nevertheless, the prophets Zechariah and Haggai continued to encourage our ancestors. So inspired were the leaders and the people that they sent emissaries to the new Kings of Persia and soon King Darius and King Artaxersus (who some identify as the son of Achashverosh and Queen Esther) permitted the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

*<sup>14</sup> So the elders of the Jews progressed in the building, urged on by the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah son of Iddo, and they brought the building to completion by the decree of the God of Israel and by the order of Cyrus and Darius and King Artaxerxes of Persia.*

*<sup>15</sup> The house was finished on the third of the month of Adar in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. <sup>16</sup> The Israelites, the priests, and the Levites, and all the other exiles celebrated the dedication of the House of God with joy. (Ezra 6:14-16)*

Despite the emotional blow of seeing Jerusalem in ruins, despite the overwhelming task they faced in rebuilding our ancestral capital and the sacred Temple, despite the setbacks and the obstacles and the constant harassment they faced from enemies, our ancestors never lost hope; they

never lost faith. Indeed, they overcame all that which plagued them by relying on their indomitable spirit. It was by spirit and not by might that they prevailed.

As we kindle our *chanukiyot* let us look at those flickering flames as symbols of the light of hope, faith, and peace. Yes, we have felt the darkness close in. But in every age, a hero or sage has come to our aid, reminding us that the brightest of lights are those within our heart and soul. Each of you can be that hero. Each of you can be the *shamash*, the candle that kindles the light, renewing hope and inspiring others to shine brightly.

Tune in each night as the Temple Sinai community goes on Zoom so we can light our *chanukiyot* together. Download the blessings and songs and see the faces of friends and family shine with the spirit of Judaism.

Together with my family and on behalf of the Temple Sinai Staff and Board of Trustees, I wish you a very Happy Chanukah and a Shabbat Shalom!

*Shabbat Shalom v'Chanukah Sameiach!*

*Rick*

Rabbi Rick Rheins