



ZECHARIAH, Being the People of God

Serving With Strong Hands

Lesson 8 Zechariah 8:1-23

As we have seen, chapters 1 through 6 form a single unit of thought within the book of Zechariah. Those chapters contained an introduction (1:1-6) where the prophet challenged the remnant not to repeat the sin of their forefathers. The introduction was followed by eight visions Zechariah received of God in a single evening that looked to their present situation and a future glory for Israel, while also providing fundamental principles for their daily lives as the children of God and as the remnant from whom God would reconstitute the nation (1:7-6:8). As you will recall, the first and last of these visions utilized similar imagery involving colored horses to express God's sovereignty over the entire world, and these similar visions were bookends or *inclusios* for the entire sequence of eight visions. These were followed in 6:9-15 with the crowning of Joshua, an episode that provided a divine object lesson looking forward to the crowning of The Branch, Jesus Christ, the only one ever qualified to serve as priest and king and to bring about the glorious future for Israel promised in both the night visions, the rest of Zechariah, and so many other places in Scripture. Chapters 7 and 8 form a hinge between the night visions and the very end-times (or eschatologically) focused chapters, 9 through 14. These two chapters address proper heart motivations in worship, true righteousness, and the blessings to be experienced in the future Millennial Kingdom, and in this way the practical principles of the first six chapters are connected to the remaining chapters that look especially to the future work of Jesus Christ. Whereas Chapter 7 focuses more on whether our worship is done for God or for self, and the righteous conduct that flows from a heart that truly worships God, Chapter 8 deals with the issues of fear and discouragement that can de-motivate us from faithful service. The challenge is to serve with "strong hands" (see 8:9, 13) in view of God's promises. Verses 1-17 present seven promises of God to the remnant, and verses 18-23 show how their faithfulness relates to a glorious future.

8:1 "Again the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, **2** Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury."

In this chapter, the focus is on a restored Israel. Much of what God will say was to be fulfilled in part by His people in Zechariah's day, but completely fulfilled in the future. This relates back to chapter seven where Messiah was presented as the unique priest-king, and we understand from the New Testament that Messiah is Jesus Christ, a king in the line of David and a priest in the order of Melchisedec. When Jesus is king in Jerusalem, Israel will be a place of blessing and a beacon of light to the world. God gives Zechariah a message for the people about this glorious future in order to encourage them in their day to see themselves in God's unfolding plan as the people of God. This perspective would allow them to move beyond the discouragement and fears they felt in view of recent history.

Zechariah's words in verse 1 introduce the prophecy that appears in verses 1 through 17, and the same phrase introduces the prophecy in verses 18 through 23. Unlike the eight night visions of chapters one through six, we do not find Zechariah looking up and observing what God has for him or in some other way receiving a vision. Instead, Zechariah receives "*the word of the LORD of hosts,*" just as he did with the message in chapter seven. We are not told how God gave the word to Zechariah, only the fact of it. Zechariah emphasizes throughout this chapter that it is God's message.

FIRST PROMISE. The first of the seven promises is that God is jealous for His people. Zechariah says here, and the Bible often emphasizes, that God is jealous for His people, "...Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy" (Zechariah 1:14). God's jealousy for His

people speaks of His love in action for the protection or well-being (physically and spiritually) of His people. We see this when Paul speaks of his having “godly jealousy” for the people he ministered to in the Corinthian church, “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2). We could certainly say that parents have (or should have) jealousy for their children in this same sense, namely of vigorously looking out for their physical and spiritual well-being. Likewise, in God’s love for us, He jealously looks out for our well-being and has zero tolerance for rivals. Here, we are not only told that God is jealous for Zion, but jealous with a “great fury.”

The term Zion is a reference to a mountain in Jerusalem, but is used here to represent Jerusalem. This is a figure of speech where a part is used for the whole, and the reference to this mountain as representative of Jerusalem is very common in the Old Testament (see, e.g., 2 Kings 19:31, Psalm 51:18). That God is jealous for His people makes very good sense in light of the historical background for the book of Zechariah. The remnant has returned from Babylonian captivity. They will need God’s intervention to reconstitute the nation, complete the Temple construction, and live victoriously for God.

8:3 “Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain.”

SECOND PROMISE. God promises His Holy presence in the midst of His people. Surely there is no greater blessing and protection than to have God Himself dwelling in Jerusalem. With God’s presence, the city will be radically changed, no longer the place of sin that brought God’s wrath (the Babylonian captivity), but a “city of truth.” By this, the point is that the city that not long ago could have been called the “city of sin” has been transformed. No longer characterized by injustice and corruption, the city is now characterized by “truth.” The Hebrew word here, *emet*, carries the idea of faithfulness. Because of God’s presence, Jerusalem will be a City of Faithfulness, where God honors His covenant promises to the people, and they honor their obligations to Him. It is also a place of holiness, “the holy mountain.” This means not only that God dwells there, but His people are there and they are radically different people than their forefathers. Although there would be some level of revival in Zechariah’s day, this passage looks to complete fulfillment when Jesus Christ returns and rules and reigns from Jerusalem.

8:4 “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. 5 And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.”

THIRD PROMISE. God promises peace and security. Zechariah again reminds us that this is God’s message, not his, “Thus saith the LORD of hosts.” Unlike the rampant death, destruction and defeat of their recent history, Israel’s future under the reign of Messiah will be characterized by security, joy and longevity. This passage cannot be understood to have been fulfilled at any point in Israel’s past. This verse awaits fulfillment during the Millennial Reign of Jesus. The two most vulnerable groups of people (children and elderly) are safe and secure, and that means the entirety of the people enjoy peace and security.

QUESTION

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1. What does it mean for God to be jealous for His people? What are the implications for believers today?
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8:6 “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts.”

FOURTH PROMISE. Here, God anticipates the doubts that the small remnant of Zechariah’s day would have about this promised future blessing and God promises His power on their behalf. First, note the use of the term remnant (also Zechariah 8:11-12), a term that refers here to those that survived the Babylonian exile. God asks them a critical question, namely whether the fact that it might seem incredible in their eyes means that it is impossible for God. When God says, “*should it also be marvellous in mine eyes?*” He is asking a rhetorical question. The answer is no. This glorious future is not “*marvellous*” in the sense that it is neither impossible nor surprising; it is the natural result of God dwelling in their midst. We should remember Jesus’ words in Luke 18:27, “*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.*” The heart of the matter is faith, for “*without faith it is impossible to please [God].*” (Hebrews 11:6)

8:7 “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; 8 And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.”

FIFTH PROMISE. God promises a regathering. Part of the future blessing is not only that Messiah will dwell in Jerusalem, but God will undo the scattering of His people. In Zechariah’s day, the remnant was the fruit of an “unscattering” of God’s people, and more would return in the years to come. But even today, Jewish people are living all over the world and the scatterings have never been completely reversed. But Israel’s future includes a complete reversal of the scattering, from the “east country” and the “west country.” The returning people will return to a place where God dwells, and they will be His people and God will be their God. The prophet Hosea captured this idea well in 1:8-11: “*Now when she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son. Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God. Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel.*” In other words, with the reversal of the scattering will be a revival among the Jewish peoples. They will be God’s people “*in truth and in righteousness.*” Zechariah will return to this theme of spiritual revival in 12:10-14. This revival will be contemporaneous with Jesus’ second coming, and the revival will be their acceptance of Jesus as Messiah and King.

8:9 “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built.”

Here, God addresses those that “*hear in these days ... the prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the Lord of hosts was laid.*” Although much of this chapter looks forward to Messiah Jesus’ rule in a restored Israel, there is a message here for the people of Zechariah’s day. They were the ones that saw the Temple’s foundation laid, and the prophets they heard were Haggai, Zechariah, and perhaps others that were not used of God to write part of the inspired Text. To these people in Zechariah’s day, God said, “*Let your hands be strong.*” These words are a call to faith like the invitation earlier in the book to return to Jerusalem, the city without walls. It is a call to faithful service despite the circumstances. In view of the promises God had made (the preceding verses of this chapter), they were to take courage about the future ahead and therefore serve faithfully.

QUESTION

2. In view of what happened to Israel in the first century under Roman rule, and the condition of Israel today, what do these verses tell us about Israel's future?
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8:10 “For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither *was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbour.* 11 But now I *will not be* unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts. 12 For the seed *shall be* prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these *things.*”

SIXTH PROMISE. God promises His divine blessing on His people. Before God brought the remnant back to Jerusalem, during the captivity, Judah was a desolate place. There was no work for man or beast, i.e., no economic activity at all. Indeed, there was no peace to anyone in the land. It was a place of affliction and violence, a far cry from its former glory in the days of kings like David. To these people (“*the residue of this people*”) God promises blessing “*as in the former days.*” In the context of this agricultural society, blessing means a fruitful harvest, and that is exactly what God promises. There will be abundant rain and the crops will prosper and all of these blessings are for the remnant. Again, God is giving a message through Zechariah to encourage the people to see their place in God's plan, to be His people in truth and righteousness and enjoy His blessings. This message parallels Haggai's message in Haggai 1:10-11 and 2:19, and they bring to fulfillment the warnings and blessings of Leviticus 26:3-10 and Deuteronomy 28:11-12.

QUESTION

3. What conclusions can we draw from these verses about the economy in the United States today?
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8:13 “And it shall come to pass, *that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong.*”

Although it had been centuries since Israel was a united kingdom, God now makes clear that the blessings He is promising are for all of His people, not just Judah. The Northern Kingdom (Samaria or Ephraim) had been defeated and scattered by the Assyrian, and later the Southern Kingdom (Judah) had been defeated and scattered by the Babylonians. In that sense, they were a “*curse among the heathen,*” but now God will reverse all of that. They will no longer be a cursed people (i.e., judged people) scattered among the Gentiles, but a blessed people in their land. For this reason, they should “*fear not*” and take courage (“*let your hands be strong*”). Although there was some uniting of the nation by Jesus' day, they were not united in spirit. We can see the division when we read John 4 and the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. But there will be a future Israel that is truly united under King Jesus. In that day, they will be a blessing to the world (“*ye shall be a blessing*”).

8:14 “For thus saith the LORD of hosts; As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the LORD of hosts, and I repented not: 15 So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not.”

SEVENTH PROMISE. God now promises His divine favor. What God reminds the people of is that once He determined to punish them by bringing in the Babylonians, He brought it to pass. God did not have second thoughts about the matter. So also, in their day, God has determined to pour out blessings on them and He will not have second thoughts. The word used here for “thought” is

the Hebrew *zamamti* and, except for this verse, it is exclusively used of God's determination to bring judgment on His people. Only here is it also used to show an equal determination to bring blessing.

8:16 "These *are* the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: **17** And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these *are things* that I hate, saith the LORD."

In view of all that God will do for them, He expects a certain response. His people are to be characterized by speaking with integrity, and there will be justice dispensed from the courts ("judgment of truth and peace in your gates"). His people are to love their neighbors and not swear falsely against them. God does not mince words here. He hates dishonesty and injustice. In these verses, we are getting a glimpse of the absolute justice that will prevail when Jesus reigns in the Millennial Kingdom.

QUESTION

4. Discuss how this message of truth, justice and peace applies to some specific aspects of our society and culture.
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8:18 "And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me, saying, **19** Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth *month*, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace."

The fast of the fourth month commemorated the day when the Babylonian army broke through the walls of Jerusalem. (2 Kings 25:3-4, Jeremiah 39:2). The fast of the tenth month commemorated the beginning of the siege on Jerusalem. (2 Kings 25:1-2, Jeremiah 39:1). The fast of the fifth month commemorated the burning of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (Jeremiah 52:12-13). The fast of the seventh month commemorated the death of Gedaliah, the Jewish governor. (2 Kings 25:23-26, Jeremiah 41:1-3).

Whereas during the captivity the fasts were times of sorrow and mourning over their captivity, the destruction of their homeland and their removal from it, now the fast days will be feasts of celebration. Three different words or phrases are used to describe the joy. The first is the Hebrew *sason*, which means exultation or rejoicing. The term translated "gladness" is *simhah* and means mirth and usually refers to fellowship. The third term, translated "cheerful feasts," is *modim* and only occurs here in the entire Bible. It means good or pleasant assemblies. Whereas Jerusalem's past brings painful memories, the future will be celebration. God's appeal to them is to love truth and peace, for these things will characterize Messiah's reign. (cf Amos 5:15)

8:20 "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; *It shall yet come to pass*, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: **21** And the inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. **22** Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. **23** Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days *it shall come to pass*, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard *that God is with you.*"

Recall, God said in verse 13 that the Jewish nation would be a global blessing. These verses build on that thought. This takes place "in those days," that is, the future Day of the Lord, when Christ returns. Because the Lord will dwell in Jerusalem, the peoples of all the other cities of the world will flock to Jerusalem to pray in the presence of Jesus. In the future Millennial Kingdom, Gentiles will not look

down on Israel as a defeated nation, but will long to go to it to seek the Lord. Indeed, so eager will they be to take a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, that ten Gentiles (“*out of all languages of the nations*”) will eagerly seek a Jew to guide them on their journey. This pictures a future in which the world is characteristically righteous and spiritual, and Israel is finally a light to the world that it never was before (up to Zechariah’s time). Finally, the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 is brought to complete fulfillment, “*in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*” That Zechariah speaks of ten Gentiles is merely representative of the high esteem in which the Jewish people are held. In Zechariah’s day, it would be difficult to find many Gentiles who would give the time of day to a Jewish person, but in the future, the Jewish people will be held in honor throughout the world. Israel will be a blessing to the Gentiles, who have heard the news that God is with them. This is a picture of worldwide revival (see also Isaiah 2:1-5, 23:23-25, 45:14, 49:2-3, 60:1-3, 66:18; Micah 4:2-5). Isaiah 2:2-3 is especially on point here: “*And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*” Also note what the psalmist wrote in Psalm 47: 1, 7-9: “*O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph... For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding. God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness. The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted.*” This is the tower of Babel episode reversed. Paul would write in the New Testament: “*And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.*” (Galatians 3:8).

QUESTION

5. Based on these verses, what is the most important thing we as children of God have to look forward to?
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