

Lesson 12

Last week we started Chapter 8, which like Chapter 7 urges the people to obey God and worship him in spirit and in truth. The difference, though, is the motivation provided by each chapter. While Chapter 7 encourages obedience to avoid punishment, Chapter 8 encourages obedience to enjoy the reward. And the greatest reward was the great blessing for the entire world that God would provide through the Messiah and the Messiah's kingdom, the church.

Zechariah 8:3

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.

If anyone can read verse 3 and not think of Isaiah 2, then we need to go back and brush up on our "church chapters" (Psalm 2, Isaiah 2, Daniel 2, Joel 2, Acts 2, and Ephesians 2). Verse 3 here in Chapter 8 is pointing to the same events that are described in Isaiah 2:2-3.

Isaiah 2:2-3 - 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.

Both here and in Isaiah 2 we see the mountain of the Lord. In both we see Zion. In one we see the city of truth, and in the other we see the law and the word of the Lord going forth. In both we see God dwelling among his people - dwelling in their midst in Zechariah 8, and teaching them his ways after they come to the house of God in Isaiah 2.

That house or city is the new Jerusalem, which is the church. Just as the old Jerusalem was the dwelling place of God's people in the Old Testament, so is the new Jerusalem, the church, the dwelling place of God's people in the New Testament.

Revelation 21:2 - And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

I know we sometimes say that Revelation 21 is describing heaven, but Revelation 21:2 lets us know right from the start that we are **not** seeing Heaven, but rather we are seeing something "coming down from God **out of heaven**." In fact, we are seeing the church in Revelation 21.

The church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5). The church is the New Jerusalem and the holy city of Revelation 21. And the church is the city of truth of Zechariah 8:3. We are seeing a people, not a place, in Revelation 21.

And what about God dwelling with his people in the midst of Jerusalem? First Corinthians 3:16 tells us that we are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in us. Ephesians 2:22 describes the church as a dwelling place or habitation of God in the Spirit. God dwells with men now in the church. Christ's perfect sacrifice made that possible.

Once again, God is lifting the curtain to give the people of Zechariah's day a glimpse of the wonderful eternal kingdom that was coming. We saw this same promise earlier in the visions, where it also referred to the church.

Zechariah 2:10 - Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord.

Look at verse 3 again. **The city of truth!** Don't you just love that description of the church? This is the only place in the Bible where that phrase occurs. But it is not the only place where that description is applied to the church.

1 Timothy 3:15 - But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, **the pillar and ground of the truth**.

What we are seeing in verse 3 is the church - the pillar and ground of the truth! But who will get to enjoy these great blessings in the city of truth? Keep reading.

Zechariah 8:4-5

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.

Who in the city of truth will get to enjoy these great blessings? Everyone.

Everyone in the city of truth will enjoy those blessings. The references to the very old and to young children is a figure of speech. By mentioning the extremes of human lifespan, the text shows that the entire population would enjoy these blessings. No one would be left out! Not even the very young or the very old. Revelation conveys this same message with another figure, the 144,000. Each figure means the same - ALL of God's faithful people will enjoy these blessings.

Is that true of the church? Yes, the church is the body of the saved. There are no lost people in the church. The lost are outside the body of Christ - either because they were never in the body or because they were in the body but fell away. How do we know that? Because everyone in the kingdom has "redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14). There are no lost people in the eternal kingdom.

This prophecy of the church goes hand in hand with the great prophecy of Jeremiah 31:34 - "for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord." Verses 4-5, by mentioning the young and the old, also remind us of Joel 2.

Joel 2:28 - And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.

And we know with absolute certainty when that verse from Joel 2 was fulfilled. How? Because Peter told us in Acts 2:16 that it was being fulfilled on that very day when he was proclaiming the first gospel sermon. Joel 2 was fulfilled in Acts 2, when the church was established. As with verse 3, verses 4 and 5 are talking about the church!

Zechariah 8:6

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.

As I have mentioned before, some commentaries on Zechariah read this book and see neither Christ nor his church. I suppose they avoid the obvious in an attempt to rid the Bible of predictive prophecy, but the text itself contradicts their efforts - and verse 6 is a clear example of that.

If the previous verses had dealt only with finishing the temple and repopulating the city, then no one listening would have thought them farfetched. The temple was already under construction, and people were already moving back into the city. Yes, much of the city was still rubble, but it could all be rebuilt given enough time and enough people.

But verse 6 tells us that the people had a different reaction to these prophecies. They seem to have thought the prophecies were so farfetched that not even God would be able to make them happen! And because of that attitude, the people receive a sharp rebuke.

God begins by asking them if what seemed "marvelous" in human eyes would actually prove "marvelous" in his own sight? In other words, should an action be too difficult for God to accomplish simply because the deed is too difficult for man to accomplish?

A well-known book by J. B. Phillips is entitled *Your God is Too Small*, and the attitude expressed by the title of that book seems to have been a problem here as well. The people were assuming God shared their own limitations and their own near-sightedness, and of course that is not the case.

Jeremiah 32:27 - Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?

Luke 18:27 - The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

The point of the rhetorical question in verse 6 is clear: how can any man sit in judgment on God's ability to fulfill his own word?

Again, we are seeing a theme here: if God says it will happen, then it will happen. These promises were a test of the people's faith. And the more wonderful the promise, the greater the test of faith.

Notice that verse 6 of Zechariah 8 is specifically addressed to the "remnant of this people." The word "remnant" occurs three times in Zechariah, all here in Chapter 8 (verses 6, 11, 12), and it occurs frequently in the other prophets as well. What does it mean?

Commentaries like to say that the remnant was "a technical term for those who had survived the exile." And that is partly true, but it fails to tell the whole story. Yes, **at that time**, the remnant included those faithful people who had returned from the exile - but the remnant also included those faithful people who had remained behind in Babylon (such as Daniel).

And the "remnant" was not just an Old Testament idea. Today there still remains a remnant consisting of God's faithful people.

Romans 11:5 - Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

God's faithful people have always been a remnant! Or perhaps I should say, *almost* always. God's people have been in the majority only twice in human history - just after creation and just after the flood. Other than that, we have always been a remnant.

And were it not for the faithful remnant, things would have turned out very differently.

Isaiah 1:9 - Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

All that God was doing *with* his people, *for* his people, and *to* his people at this time was designed to ensure the existence and preservation of a faithful remnant. Why? Because it was through that faithful remnant that the Messiah would come to bless the entire world.

God's plans depended on the faithful remnant; they did then, and they do now. And that means that the remnant has a **responsibility**; it did then, and it does now. Or rather, **we** do now! If we don't proclaim the truth today, then who will do it?

Zechariah 8:7-8

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.

Can there be any doubt now that we are reading about the church? Look at verse 8: "They shall be my people, and I will be their God"? Where else have we seen that?

Jeremiah 31:33 - But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; **and will be their God, and they shall be my people.**

2 Corinthians 6:16 - And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and **I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**

Verse 7 shows us a beautiful picture. It shows God gathering his people from wherever they are, from the east to the west, and bringing them into the holy city, Jerusalem, so that they can dwell with him and be his people. That holy city of Jerusalem is the church!

Hebrews 12:22-23 - But ye are come unto mount Sion, **and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem**, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and **church of the firstborn**, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.

There can be no doubt - Zechariah is pointing straight to the church! If these people were discouraged, then what they needed to do was look at Christ and his eternal kingdom. And if that was true before the cross, how much more must it be true for us after the cross? If we are discouraged, we need to open our eyes and see what God has prepared for his people!

Zechariah 8:9

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.

Verse 9 shifts the time frame back to the events of Zechariah's day. The message leaves for a moment the discussion of the future heavenly temple and returns to more immediate concerns - the *earthly* temple that the people were at that time working to rebuild.

How do we know that we have moved back to the earthly temple in verse 9? Perhaps the best way to know that is to look at the very first thing that God tells them here in verse 9 - let your hands be strong! That command cannot be discussing the temple made *without* hands!

Verse 9 must be discussing the temple made with hands, which was the temple they were at that time working to rebuild. The text of verse 9 itself also makes clear that the focus has shifted: "ye that hear in **these** days **these** words by the mouth of the prophets."

A major focus of both Zechariah and his contemporary, Haggai, is to encourage the people to finish building the temple. That encouragement becomes a command in verse 9, with God himself telling the people to get busy and finish what they had started.

The "prophets" in verse 9 include Haggai as well as Zechariah himself. Haggai tells us when the foundation was laid.

Haggai 2:18 - Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it.

That was in December 520 BC. The messages in Zechariah 7 and 8 were given in December 518 BC. The temple would be completed and dedicated a few years later in 515 BC. But for that to happen, the people needed to get busy! The temple was not going to rebuild itself! And that physical earthly temple was part of God's plan to bless the world through Christ 500 years later.

Zechariah 8:10

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.

In verse 10, God explains why the people must *strengthen* their hands. What had been going on that might cause their hands *not* to be strong? Verse 10 answers that question.

In short, the people had been facing very harsh conditions ever since their arrival back from Babylon. As one commentary described it, "to do anything beyond meeting life's basic necessities would require sacrifices of time and financial resources reaching almost heroic levels."

Verse 10 says, "*There was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast.*" Not only was the city in ruins, but the economy was also in ruins. No one was hiring anyone, neither man nor beast. There were no jobs, and there were no wages. Each day must have been a struggle to survive.

Verse 10 says, "*Neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction.*" Not only were the people living in harsh conditions, but their neighbors were actively working against them and sending back false reports about them. This "affliction" caused further

economic harm by affecting agriculture and trade. There was no peace in the land.

Verse 10 says, *"For I set all men every one against his neighbour."* What we see here is a complete breakdown in social order. The situation had become so bad that neighbor had turned against neighbor. The prevailing attitude had become "every man for himself."

But what does it mean in verse 10 when God says that **he had set** every man against his neighbor? That tells us that these events were, at least in part, a judgment from God intended to wake the people up to their situation and to remind them that they had a job to do in rebuilding the temple. God was doing this to get their attention.

Zechariah 8:11-12

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.

Verse 11 begins with two very encouraging words, "but now!" Things had been bad in the past, but now things would be different.

Based on their current situation and on their past situation, it would have been very understandable for the people to believe they were facing a very bleak future. But that was not the case at all! If the people listened to God and obeyed his word through the prophets, then God would **not** be to them in the future as he had been to them in the past.

The word "residue" in verse 11 is the "remnant" we have discussed before. God is speaking here about the faithful few, and he is promising once again to bless them.

What we see in verse 12 is a clear connection with Haggai, who was preaching to this same people at this same time. In Haggai 1, the prophet proclaimed a divine judgment brought about by the people's haphazard approach to rebuilding the temple.

Haggai 1:10-11 - Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth,

and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.

But that judgment was withdrawn after the people repented and recommitted themselves to rebuilding the temple.

Haggai 2:18-19 - Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you.

That reversal in Haggai is the backdrop for Zechariah's prophecy here. The promise in verse 12 occurred between the judgment in Haggai 1 and the reversal of that judgment in Haggai 2.

Zechariah 8:13

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.

What we see in this verse is the same choice we have seen repeatedly in this book and that we see repeatedly in the rest of the Bible - the choice between a blessing and a curse.

Because of their sin, the people had been taken into exile where they became "a curse among the heathen." God promises them here that he would save them from that, and they would be a blessing once again. Part of that promise had already happened - they had returned from exile and were once again living in Jerusalem. But they had not yet become a blessing.

Note the language here - it does not say that the people would be blessed but rather says that they would be a blessing. What does that mean? I think it is pointing all the way back to Genesis 12 and Genesis 22.

Genesis 12:3 - And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Genesis 22:18 - And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

That great promise to Abraham has been behind much of what we have seen in Zechariah. It is the reason why God preserved the remnant and why the work of these exiles was so important. It was all part of God's plan to use this people to bless the entire world.

Three times in this chapter, Zechariah has referred to the remnant. Here in verse 13 a different designation is used: "O house of Judah, and house of Israel." Why?

I think that designation confirms that the blessing we are seeing in this verse is going all the way back to the blessing of Genesis 12. Israel had been scattered by Assyria two hundred years prior to Zechariah, and yet they are mentioned here along with Judah. This verse is looking backward over the history of both Judah and Israel to point the people back to the day when Abraham had received that great promise.

Verse 13 concludes with the same command with which verse 9 began: "let your hands be strong." What happens next? Verses 14-15 will show what God will do to bless his people, and verses 16-17 will describe what Judah must do to satisfy God's demands.

Zechariah 8:14-15

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.

God has given these people a very tough message, but here he tells them not to be afraid. But things looked pretty bad. Shouldn't the people have been afraid? No. Why? Because God was standing by to bless them - and the choice was theirs. Whether they received blessings or suffered the fate of their ancestors was in their own hands. We are reminded of Joshua 24:15 - "Choose you this day whom ye will serve."

The choice was theirs. But once they made their choice, could they trust God to do what he had promised? Absolutely, and the proof of that fact given here in Zechariah is interesting. To show his faithfulness in fulfilling his promise to **bless** them, God points to his faithfulness in fulfilling his promise to **punish** them!

And once again there is a lesson in there for us. Yes, God has promised great blessings to those who obey his gospel and who live faithfully unto death - but God has also promised great wrath to those

who reject his word and who live apart from Christ. We should never doubt that God will be faithful to **all** of his promises.

The Hebrew verb translated "thought" or "determined" in verse 15, when God is the subject of the sentence, almost always introduces God's intention to bring judgment rather than blessing. The only exception occurs right here in verse 15 where that word is used to express God's intention to bless his people. The use of that Hebrew word here emphasizes the dramatic reversal that Judah would experience if they obeyed God.

We are seeing one of our key themes at work in these verses - God will accomplish his plans on this earth, and there is nothing that can stop that from happening. God is the one acting in these verses. Yes, God's people can choose to obey or to fall away, but if they choose the latter, then God will find a faithful remnant elsewhere that he can use to accomplish his plans.

#Zechariah