

LESSON 10

Zechariah has relayed some very tough messages for God's people in this chapter. As we read this chapter, we should keep in mind Zechariah's age. As we discussed in our opening lesson, the prophet was likely a young man, probably still in his twenties, when these events occurred. If we are picturing the stereotypical old bearded prophet as we read these pronouncements, that picture is almost certainly wrong. Haggai was old, but Zechariah was not.

Last week when we ended we had just started discussing verses 8-10 in Chapter 7. What we see in those verses are themes that run all throughout the Bible. God wants his people in whatever age they live in to live in a certain way, and those commands are repeated over and over again in the Bible.

The question that had been posed earlier in Chapter 7 dealt with an outward show of religion — fasting. God is telling them to instead focus on what is inward. Having done that, the outward would take care of itself.

Verse 9 has two positive commands, and verse 10 has two negative commands. Last week, we ended by discussing the first positive command in verse 9: “execute true judgment.” We'll start today with the second positive command in verse 9: “show mercy and compassion.”

One commentator described the Hebrew word translated “mercy” as “notoriously difficult to translate, no English translation can capture the breadth of the word's connotations and denotations.” Some say it is close in meaning to the Greek word translated “grace” in the New Testament. It denotes the blessings that flow to God's

people from God's faithfulness. Those blessings include "mercy," but they also include forgiveness, protection, and much more. God gives these blessings to us, and we are to show the same attitude to others.

Along with "mercy," verse 9 also uses the word "compassion." The Hebrew word for compassion is related to the word for "womb." It is meant to convey the gentle tender love that a mother has for her children.

And, again, how God treats us should be the basis for how we treat other people. Zechariah was not the only prophet to proclaim this word from God.

Micah 6:8 — *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

Hosea 12:6 — *Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually.*

Verse 10 mirrors the two positive commands in verse 9 with two negative commands. The first negative command is to not oppress widows, orphans, strangers, or the poor. I think we would all agree that we should be concerned with widows and orphans, but I fear that sometimes we are tempted to think of these concerns as secondary concerns. If so, we should recall James' definition of pure religion.

James 1:27 — *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, **To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,** and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

Widows, orphans, strangers, and the poor — what do they all have in common? They are easy to oppress. They have no one to defend them. They are the most vulnerable in any society — both in Zechariah's society and in our own society, 2500 years later.

But widows, orphans, strangers, and the poor do have a defender — God. And if God’s people are living as God has commanded them to live, then the widows, the orphans, the strangers, and the poor will have God’s people to defend them as well.

“The true measure of any society is determined by how that society treats those that are the most vulnerable.”

God leaves no room for doubt about how his people should treat them.

Exodus 22:21-23 — *Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry.*

Deuteronomy 10:19 — *Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

Deuteronomy 24:14-15 — *Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee.*

Isaiah 1:17 — *Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.*

Verse 10 concludes with a final negative command: “let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.” Whatever we do, we must be motivated by a desire to seek the highest good for all men. And, yes, sometimes that will require that we offend that person. Why? Because a person’s highest good is that person’s eter-

nal home with God, and that must be our goal for all men. God does not desire that any should perish — can we say the same thing? If not, then we have a problem with the command in verse 10.

How did God’s people react to these commandments? Keep reading.

Zechariah 7:11-12

11 But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. 12 Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts.

The past tense in these verses, along with the “great wrath” in verse 12, lets us know that this reaction was the reaction of those who lived **prior** to the exile. It was this reaction to God’s commands that led to the exile. The warning is clear — the people of Zechariah’s day must not react as their ancestors had reacted or they will suffer the same fate their ancestors had suffered.

So how did their ancestors respond to these commands from God? Verses 11-12 use three metaphors to answer that question: they pulled away the shoulder, they stopped their ears, and they made their hearts as an adamant stone.

The first figure of speech — “they pulled away the shoulder” — also appears in Nehemiah 9:29, which says they “withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck,

and would not hear.” Literally that phrase means “they presented a stubborn shoulder.” It refers to a stubborn ox that refuses to submit to the yoke. As used here it means the people were resisting the purpose for which they had been created.

The second metaphor, “they stopped their ears,” is easy to understand. Stopping your ears was a common reaction to the word of God then, and it remains so today. And for those that take that path, God often punishes them by giving them even more of what they want.

Isaiah 6:10 — *Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.*

God’s people must be the opposite of that — they are to have the law of God written on their hearts.

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.*

The final metaphor is that “they made their hearts as an adamant stone” or flint. Again, that figure of speech is easy to understand — they were so hardened in their sin that they were almost unreachable. Ezekiel explains the change that needed to occur in their lives.

Ezekiel 36:26 — *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.*

What is the outcome of pulling away your shoulder, stopping your ears, and making your heart as an adamant stone? Verse 12 answers that question: “therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts.”

Let’s pause and ask a question: How did we get here? This chapter began with a question that seemed innocent on the surface — a question about fasting. But that question was not innocent; it ignored something that should have been front and center to these people. They were standing in the rubble of their ruined city — not because they had continued some fast — but because their ancestors had rejected the law of God and had turned their backs on the prophets of God who were proclaiming the word of God to them! These people were close to going down the same path! They should have been focused on things much more weighty than what they had asked about at the beginning of this chapter! That’s how we got here!

God is very angry at the end of verse 12 — so what happens next?

Zechariah 7:13-14

13 Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts: 14 But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate.

In Chapter 1, verse 3, God said, “turn ye unto me, and I will turn unto you.” Here, in verse 13, God says, “they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear.” In the face of such a wonderful promise in Chapter 1, God is reminding them here of the bad choice that their fathers had made.

There is a textual question about verse 13. While the first part of the verse speaks of God in the third person (“that as **he** cried, and they would not hear”), the second part of the verse speaks of God in the first person (“so they cried, and **I** would not hear”). From the context it seems that God is using both the third person and the first person in reference to himself. Why? We don’t know for sure, but one commentary offered this explanation: “Through this subtle shift, Zechariah’s audience is transported back into the audience of the earlier prophets, making vivid this divine disciplinary statement.” Another writes: “The change in person from ‘He’ to ‘I’ is not uncommon in the prophets and reflects the vividness of the message in the mind of Zechariah.” But, although I am sure it was vivid in Zechariah’s mind, these words did not originate in Zechariah’s mind, so I don’t much favor that explanation. Of course if you are unfortunate enough to be using the NIV you won’t even know there is a problem here — that version simply changes “he called” to “I called” in verse 13!

Verse 14 says that God scattered the Jews to nations it knew not — Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and Persia. God had told them earlier that such would happen if they rejected his covenant.

Deuteronomy 28:49 — *The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand.*

God had brought them out of Egypt to “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:17), but now, as we have already seen, that pleasant land was desolate. Jeremiah used the same language to describe the same sad situation:

Jeremiah 3:19-20 — *But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? and I said, Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me. Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the Lord.*

The land “flowing with milk and honey” lay ruined because of Judah’s sin.

Chapter 7 ends far from where it began. The people came seeking clarification on a relatively minor religious matter. But to their surprise, they did not receive an answer to that question (and they won’t get an answer until near the end of the next chapter). Instead, they were partly accused of and partly warned about having the same sort of sinful attitudes that had caused the exile in the first place. And they were told that if they did have such attitudes as their fathers, they should not be surprised when they met the same fate as their fathers.

In Zechariah 1-6, God has offered repeated promises of blessings (both present and future), and he has encouraged the people as they struggled to rebuild the temple. But they needed to know that whether they would enjoy those blessings rested on whether they were obedient to God.

The themes of Zechariah 7 are true worship and the consequences of disobedience. Those are vital themes both to them and to us. God wants neither superficial worship nor superficial obedience. Instead, God wants his people to love him with all

their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their mind — and when we do, neither our worship nor our obedience will ever be superficial.

CHAPTER 8

The love of God for his people is on full display in Chapters 7 and 8. It was because of his love for them that God gave the people the stern message of Chapter 7 after they asked their superficial question about fasting. And it is because of his love for them that God in this chapter will reassure them of their position and of their present and future blessings. As we have seen before, the book of Hebrews once again offers a perfect summary of what we are seeing in these chapters.

Hebrews 12:6 — *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*

If the people had only heard Chapter 7, they would have left discouraged. If they had only heard Chapter 8, they would have left over-confident. Together these two chapters provide the perfect balance of what the people needed to hear — a balance that we also should seek.

Another way to look at Chapters 7 and 8 is to see in those chapters the same tension between sin and blessing that we see all throughout the Bible — and especially in the Old Testament. Over and over again, God promised great blessings to his people if they would hold fast to him, but they would not. Instead, their sin would bring upon them a curse rather than a blessing. But God would welcome them back after they repented and returned to him, and once again blessings would be in their future if they obeyed his word.

We see that same cycle here — the consequences of sin in Chapter 7, and the promised blessings in Chapter 8 if they would hold fast to God. And again, that is a model for us. We must proclaim both the severity of God and words of encouragement, and we must proclaim the warnings to God’s people about sin while not neglecting to proclaim the blessings enjoyed by God’s people.

Both Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 are intended to get the people to live righteous lives, but they provide different motivations for doing so. In Chapter 7, God’s people were to repent and live righteously to avoid a repeat of the punishment that caused their captivity. In Chapter 8, God’s people are to repent and live righteously because of the promise of their future restoration and blessings.

One of the most notable features of Chapter 8 is the phrase “the Lord of hosts,” which occurs seventeen times in this chapter. That designation is intended to convey the might and authority of God on earth. God is the Creator of everything, God is King over everything, and everything belongs to God.

If the people had any doubts about whether God could deliver on his promises, those doubts were completely baseless and unfounded. God is the Lord of Hosts! If God says it will happen, it will happen. No one can possibly prevent God from doing what he has promised to do. That fact is a theme of Chapter 8.

Zechariah 8:1-2

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.

The message in verse 2 is not new. We saw it all the way back in Chapter 1.

Zechariah 1:14 — *Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy.*

And, of course, the description of God as a jealous God goes back further than that.

Exodus 20:4-5 — *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.*

Jealousy is a particularly strong emotion. What does it mean when God is jealous? The key to understanding the jealousy of God is to see that jealousy in terms of the **covenant** that God has with his people and in terms of the **love** that God has for his people. God will not tolerate any rivals, and that intolerance operates in two directions. First, God will not tolerate rivals in the form of false gods and false worship. But, second, God will not tolerate foreign powers that threaten his people.

God's jealousy is like the jealousy of a husband for a wife, which is displayed when either the wife looks to someone else or when someone from outside the marriage comes in and seeks to harm the wife or persuade her to leave. It is in that second sense that we see the jealousy of God in verses such as:

Isaiah 42:13 — *The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up **jealousy** like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies.*

Do we always think of God as an *emotional* God? Or do we sometimes picture God as just a giant search engine of some sort who knows everything and keeps track of everything? In short, is God like Google? No. A clear message of the Bible is that God has very strong emotions. We see God loving, we see God hating, and here we

see God being jealous. Those are perhaps the three strongest emotions. And, of course, we see the emotions of Jesus in the New Testament. We see his love, his anger, his compassion, and his tears. Have you ever thought about how much we can learn about God from the shortest verse in the Bible? “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). And when we see God the Son, we are seeing God the Father. In God there is no un-Christlikeness! “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). Yes, God is an emotional God — one who can burn with love, with anger, and with jealousy. And although some may have trouble thinking about God in such terms, that is how God describes himself in his word.

And we should be thankful that God is emotional. Why? Because it is only because of God’s great love for us that we have the hope of eternal salvation. An unemotional God would have been just fine with mankind forever remaining hopeless and hell-bound — but our loving heavenly Father was not.

Why do we see this description of the jealousy of God here in the opening verses of Chapter 8? Again, we need to put ourselves in the place of those former exiles living in the ruin of their city and building a temple that seemed just a faint shadow of the former temple that had been destroyed. They must have wondered if God still loved them as much as he had loved their ancestors. So much had changed for God’s people — had God’s love for them changed as well? Had God turned his love and his attention to some other nation? Was God looking around? Chapter 8 opens with a resounding “no” to that question. God still loved his people just as he always had — and God was still jealous for them just as he always had been.

A later prophet would remind these same people that God does not change. “For I am the Lord, I change not” (Malachi 3:6). And they should have been very thankful for that fact! Why? Because if God had been the sort to change, then they would likely have been destroyed long ago. That’s what the entire verse in Malachi 3 says.

Malachi 3:6 — *For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*

God has a burning love for his people. And nowhere was that burning love more on display than when it came to the wonderful blessings that God had in store for his people — blessings that God is telling them about all throughout this book of Zechariah. God's burning love for his people is what caused God to send Jesus into this world to establish his eternal kingdom. You mean the church is related to the jealousy of God? Absolutely! Listen to the word:

Deuteronomy 4:2 — *For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.*

Where else have we seen that phrase? "A consuming fire"?

Hebrews 12:28-29 — *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: **For our God is a consuming fire.***

Notice the word "for" in that last verse. The reason we have the church is because of the burning love that God has for his people — because God is a jealous God. Let's be thankful for the jealousy of God!

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 city in Isaiah 2.

That 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.

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

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, in their mention of 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. 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!