

LESSON 11

In verses 3-5 of Chapter 8, God once again lifts the curtain and allows the people to have a glimpse of the wonderful blessings that God was planning through the Messiah and his eternal kingdom. In verse 6, we see their reaction to those promises.

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 re-

turned from the exile — but the remnant also included those faithful people who had remained behind (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.*

And we’ll also see the remnant when we get to Revelation 12.

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.

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.

But, some might object, if we take all of these verses as pointing to the church, then aren't we taking all of the Jewishness out of this text? Not at all! Or, for a stronger response, we might echo Paul: "Hath God cast away his people? God forbid" (Romans 11:1). Yes, the promise in verses 7-8 was a promise for the Jews of Zechariah's day, but it was not a promise **only** for the Jews.

Yes, those Jews who were faithful to God when the Messiah came would become a part of that church when they obeyed the gospel, but they were not the **only** ones to enjoy those blessings. God had promised Abraham long before that through his seed all the world would be blessed, and that is what Jesus did in his eternal kingdom.

Galatians 3:26-29 — *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. **There is neither Jew nor Greek**, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. **And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.***

And the church is somehow involved in that? Absolutely! In the text we just read, how were the "children of God" defined? "For **ye are all the children of God** by faith in Christ Jesus. For **as many of you as have been baptized into Christ** have put on Christ." And what does it mean to be baptized into Christ? We become part of the body of Christ. And what is the body of Christ? It is the church (Colossians 1:24).

And what a turn-around this was for the people of Zechariah's day! Not long before, this was what they had heard from God:

Hosea 1:9 — *For ye are **not** my people, and I will **not** be your God.*

But even that prophecy from Hosea pointed to a day when that would all be different.

Hosea 1:10 — *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.*

And where else have we seen that prophecy?

Romans 9:22-26 — *What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, **Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?** As he saith also in Hosea, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, **Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.***

There can be no doubt — Zechariah is pointing straight to the church! If these people were discouraged, 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? 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.

The message in 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 *earthy* temple that the people were at that time working to rebuild.

How do we know 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! It 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!

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. We studied those events in detail when we studied Ezra. 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.”

“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.

“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. Again, we studied about this situation in Ezra.

“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.

There is an important message for us in verse 10: If God’s people living in those difficult conditions were told to get busy, what must God’s message be to us today?

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 discussed before. God is speaking here with 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.

Verse 12 has an interesting phrase: "for the seed shall be prosperous." The Hebrew text reads literally, "for the seed of peace." What does that mean? One commentary suggests it means that the sowing process will proceed slowly and will require patience. But that is not what the word "peace" (shalom) typically means. More likely it is a promise that the sowing of the seed would occur during a time of peace.

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.” Verse 15 does not state that obedience would be required to receive these promised blessings, but everything else in these two chapters has told us that is the case. If that were not the case, then why all of the warnings?

There was no need to be afraid because if they wanted blessings then all they had to do was choose that path. And there is a lesson in there for us as well. I am reminded of one of my favorite C. S. Lewis quotes:

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “Thy will be done.”

There is so much that is wrong with Calvinism that it would not be possible to distill it all down to one basic error — but if I were to pick one, I would point to this: Calvinism places the choice of obedience with God rather than with man. With Calvin, it is as if Joshua had God saying, “I will choose for you this day whom ye will serve!” But we have free choice, and the choice to obey God or to reject God is our choice.

But once we have made our choice, can we trust God to do what he has promised? Absolutely, and the proof of that fact given here 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 live faithfully unto death — but God has also promised great wrath to those who reject his word and 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. And here we see one more message for us. In Luke 18:8, Jesus asked, “Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” The answer to that question depends on us.

If we fail to teach God’s word and pass on that faith to the next generation, then the answer could be no. But even if the church were to sink into secularism here, as it has elsewhere where it once was strong, God is always on the lookout for a faithful remnant. And as long as God’s word is available, history tells us that there will always be a faithful few who read it and obey it.

Many of us today are Christians because of the preaching of faithful Christians in the nineteenth century who left denominations to proclaim the pure gospel. If that happened before, it can happen again. God’s word will accomplish the task it has been given (Isaiah 55:11). The best thing we can do to make sure that the answer to the question in Luke 18:8 is yes is to continue to proclaim God’s word and fight every attempt to silence God’s word. We can’t plant the seed if we don’t have the seed!

Zechariah 8:16-17

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 verses 16-17, God once again tells the people how they should live. Yes, the people had blessings, but they also had responsibilities. The commandments listed here remind us of the similar commands we saw in 7:9-10.

Notice the beginning of verse 16 — “these are the things that ye shall do.” We can read and meditate on the word all day, but in the end what matters is what we do.

James 1:22 — *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

The first command is to “speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour.” This command reminds us of Psalm 15.

Psalm 15:1-3 — *Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.*

This command combines two vital concepts — our concern for the truth and our concern for our neighbor. Those two concerns must go together, as this command emphasizes.

The second command is to “execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates.” This command reminds us what we saw in Zechariah 7:9 — “Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother.”

The third command is to “let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour.” We saw that same command in Zechariah 7:10 and discussed it there. Why is that command being repeated? For the same reason it is repeated all throughout the Bible — it is important, and God’s people were not doing it as they should.

The Bible only has to command something once for it to be a command we must follow, but when the Bible commands the same thing over and over again, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, then that suggests we should really pay attention! God uses repetition for the same reason we do — for emphasis!

The fourth command is to “love no false oath.” This command reminds us of the vision we studied in Chapter 5 in which the flying scrolls entered “into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name” (Zechariah 5:4). Bringing false testimony has always been a serious offense. “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour” (Exodus 20:16).