

PEACE AND JUSTICE REIGN

Bible Background – ZECHARIAH 8

Printed Text – ZECHARIAH 8:1-8; 11-17

1 Then another message came to me from the LORD of Heaven's Armies: **2** "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: My love for Mount Zion is passionate and strong; I am consumed with passion for Jerusalem! **3** "And now the LORD says: I am returning to Mount Zion, and I will live in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City; the mountain of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will be called the Holy Mountain. **4** "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Once again old men and women will walk Jerusalem's streets with their canes and will sit together in the city squares. **5** And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls at play. **6** "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: All this may seem impossible to you now, a small remnant of God's people. But is it impossible for me? says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. **7** "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: You can be sure that I will rescue my people from the east and from the west. **8** I will bring them home again to live safely in Jerusalem. They will be my people, and I will be faithful and just toward them as their God.

11 "But now I will not treat the remnant of my people as I treated them before, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. **12** For I am planting seeds of peace and prosperity among you. The grapevines will be heavy with fruit. The earth will produce its crops, and the heavens will release the dew. Once more I will cause the remnant in Judah and Israel to inherit these blessings. **13** Among the other nations, Judah and Israel became symbols of a cursed nation. But no longer! Now I will rescue you and make you both a symbol and a source of blessing. So don't be afraid. Be strong, and get on with rebuilding the Temple! **14** "For this is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: I was determined to punish you when your ancestors angered me, and I did not change my mind, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. **15** But now I am determined to bless Jerusalem and the people of Judah. So don't be afraid. **16** But this is what you must do: Tell the truth to each other. Render verdicts in your courts that are just and that lead to peace. **17** Don't scheme against each other. Stop your love of telling lies that you swear are the truth. I hate all these things, says the LORD."

-----New Living Translation

Lesson Introduction

The Lord Almighty is with us and He is still in control! Because God's loving-kindness endures forever (Psalm 136), we can rest assured that a New Day is coming. Sometimes it is hard to envision a New Day when we are overwhelmed with reports of evil conditions, both natural and manmade, flourishing among us. Conditions for those without strong political voice, seem to worsen with each passing day. However, the rich and politically powerful seem to catch every advantage there is. It does not appear to matter that their selfish greed and attitudes of entitlement heap more hardships on those already suffering. Feelings of hopelessness and despair are natural responses to such circumstances. But today's lesson paints a portrait of God as One who restores peace and brings justice to even the most desolate of situations.

Zechariah: The prophet Zechariah was one of the twelve Minor Prophets. He is referred to as the prophet of the Messianic Age because several of the passages in this book seem to point to the

coming of the Messiah, the promised Son of David. His ministry began around 520 BC as he prophesied in a still desolate Jerusalem to the first group of captives as they returned from Babylonian captivity. He was a contemporary of Haggai but with a slightly different message. While Haggai foretold of the end of their economic misery, Zechariah encouraged the rebuilding of the Temple for the strengthening of Israel's spiritual life.

Background: Ezra tells us that soon after the remnant Jews arrived in Jerusalem, they embarked on the work of restoring the Temple, starting with the altar (Ezra 3). Their intention was to rebuild the Temple as well, but their drive to work petered out. There were too many distractions, especially from the numerous enemies around them. Haggai, who prophesied at the same time as Zechariah, tells us of the state of the Temple at the time. The people had settled down in durable houses while the Lord's house remained in ruins (Haggai 1:3-5). Zechariah emerged to be one of the prophets speaking hope and encouragement to the people. He is generally characterized as a prophet who challenges the remnants to believe that the Lord would actually remember Zion. He was a visionary prophet who inspired the people as they sought to rebuild the Temple.

-----*Precepts for Living*, the UMI Annual Commentary 2019-2020, p. 422.

God is Jealous for Judah

Zechariah 8:1-2: The Lord of all the hosts of heaven declares that He is jealous for Zion. He proclaims that He is passionately jealous for Jerusalem and even angrier at the nations who took advantage of her during her time of punishment. God often declared that He was a jealous God who would be provoked to anger if Israel went after false gods (Deut. 6:15; Joshua 24:19; Ezekiel 39:25). God's possessiveness and intolerance to idols results from the covenant relationship that exists between God and Israel.

But that passionate jealousy for Israel also compels God to love and forgive the nation and protect her from her enemies. He also promises to act on behalf of Zion and punish those surrounding nations for their abuse of Jerusalem. The very jealous nature of God that provoked His wrath toward Israel also results in an exclusive relationship between the Lord and Israel and ultimately a glorious future for His people.

◆ *Do you ever feel God being jealous over other things that try to take His place in your Life?*

God Will Restore Judah

Zechariah 8:3-8, 11-12: God's presence had left both the city of Jerusalem and the Temple and allowed them to be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar because of sin (Ezekiel (43:1-5). But now that sin has been reversed, God promises to return and dwell with His people. The new nature of the city warrants a new name—the city of truth. Her reputation is restored and the covenant between God and the people will be upheld. God promises that the city and the Temple will be rebuilt and He will be worshiped once again in Jerusalem. Fruitfulness and prosperity will return. Joy and Gladness will replace mourning and suffering among the people. The people seemed to respond to

all the miraculous promises of God presented through Zechariah as too good to be true, but God reminds them--is anything too hard for God? He can and will do what the people think is impossible. Doubting God simply shows that they did not know who He truly is. Doubting can weaken our faith and cause us to look elsewhere (false idols) for support.

Isn't it amazing that the prophet in verse 4 measures the city's health, not by its financial health or the health of the economy, but by the health and well-being of the two extreme age groups that are so often overlooked in a wicked and selfish society—the very young, and the very old?

◆ *How would our society look today if we measured the progress of our cities by how well the very young and the very old lived?*

Judah Must Return to God

Zechariah 8:13-17: The Lord reminds the remnant that He brought disaster on their ancestors because their sin provoked Him to anger. Now, however, His attitude toward Israel and Judah has changed. God is reversing economic depression and returning prosperity to the people. They will enjoy bountiful agriculture and economic growth. Echoing the promises He made to Abraham, He will make them a blessing among nations (Genesis 12:1-3). Zechariah admonishes the people to be strong because he knows that the change to prosperity will take time and work.

The Lord reminds the people that He has a strong desire to prosper them, but there are ethical requirements that He places upon them. He expects them to love truth and be truthful and just in all their dealings with one another. They should “not cook up plans to take unfair advantage of others. Don't do or say what isn't so (v.17 MSG). They should love honor and truth as much as God does.

Conclusion

In the midst of suffering, we must remember that God will change our circumstances. He longs to rescue us from whatever is holding us captive and restore us to a covenant relationship with Him. He wants to heal our bodies and protect us from our enemies. But as with any covenant between persons, there are expectations of us as well. We must be Covenant Keepers! This means that we love truth and justice as God loves those things. We don't lie. We practice justice in our private dealings and in court settings. We desire good and not evil for our neighbors. He asks us to trust Him with our lives and obey His every word.

Sources:

- Nickelson, R. L. (Ed.). (2019). Justice and Prophets. *Standard Lesson Commentary*, 67 (Spring Quarter), 310-315. Standard Publishing, Colorado Springs, CO.
- Ogbonnaya, A. O. (Ed.). (2019). Injustice Will Be Punished. *Precepts for Living*, 22(Spring Quarter), 410–417. The Urban Ministries, Inc. Annual Commentary 2019-2020.
- Parson, E. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, 1535-1536.

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Lesson for Next Week – May 17, 2020

Practice Justice

Bible Background ♦ Jeremiah 21

Printed Text ♦ Jeremiah 21:8-14 ~ Devotional Reading ♦ Psalm 86:1-13