



Zechariah - Chapter Eight

I Zechariah 1:1-8:23 - Oracles and Visions (continues/concludes)

I.c Zechariah 7:1-8:23 - From Fasts to Feasts (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Eight

God states that, although it may seem improbable to the remnant who were currently living there, God would once again fulfil his promise to have Jerusalem teeming with young and old alike because of his great love of them.

God will protect his people from their enemies and, indeed, will not treat them as he did their ancestors so that they will become a blessing for the other nations. However, there is a command for them to be obedient.

The people are called to be a joyful people, holding festivals throughout the year. This would show that God was with his people so that people from every nation would be drawn to Jerusalem to seek the Lord for themselves.

II.c.ii. Zechariah 8:1-23 - The Promise of the Future

God is renewing his presence with his people and reaffirming his purpose to bless the nations through them.

II.c.ii.1 Zechariah 8:1-17 - God's Promises to Zion

God had loved his people but was raised to anger by the disobedience and thus had exiled them. God now promises not to do that to this present generation and their descendants because of his great love for them. Instead, they are to bring great joy to Jerusalem and to be a blessing to the Gentile nations they will attract.

¹ The word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying: ² Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath.

Zechariah 8:1-2

Thus says the Lord of hosts. God introduces himself with a title declaring his power and majesty. He is the Lord of hosts, hosts referring to the armies of heaven. The title itself is a wake-up call.

I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy. The word for jealous in the ancient Hebrew comes from the idea 'to become intensely red.' It has the thought of a face becoming flushed with deep emotion. This shows that God is passionately concerned for his people: <<*Then the Lord became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people*>> (Joel 2:18).

I am jealous for her with great wrath. God's great love for his people is equally matched by his anger when they continuously disobey him and seek other gods.

³ Thus says the Lord: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts shall be called the holy mountain.

Zechariah 8:3

The sombre word of judgement on the former generation is not the end of the story. The time of judgement for God's chosen city is reaching an end, and there will be a new beginning (1:14-16). God has returned to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. God's people and city will be transformed by the presence of the Lord.

In the days ahead, Jerusalem will become the faithful city: <<*And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counsellors as at the beginning. Afterwards you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city*>> (Isaiah 1:26), and Zion would again be the holy mountain: <<*So you shall know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it*>> (Joel 3:17). For God's return to the land to be a blessing, the people must also be transformed, so that the dwelling place of the true and holy God will be peopled by truth-telling, holy inhabitants. Paul describes this process of transformation: <<*And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit*>> (2 Corinthians 3:18).

⁴ Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. ⁵ And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.

Zechariah 8:4-5

Old and young, male and female are depicted enjoying their natural habitat. Such an idyllic picture of opposite extremes implies peace and plenty for all ages and both sexes, with images of healthy play and relaxed rest that contrast dramatically with the slave labour, malnutrition, and starvation that had been the fate of former Jerusalem. Because of the rigors of returning to Jerusalem, there were probably few old people in the city, and their absence was felt. However, the Lord promises that all that will change one day, and young and old together will enjoy the city in safety, fulfilling former promises: <<***No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed***>> (Isaiah 65:20), <<***Their children shall be as of old, their congregation shall be established before me; and I will punish all who oppress them***>> (Jeremiah 30:20), and: <<***Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow***>> (Jeremiah 31:13). This was a significant promise because in Zechariah's time Jerusalem's walls were ruined and the city was not safe and secure because many opposed the return of the Jews. Certainly, compared with their present impoverished circumstances, the future holds greater blessing.

⁶ Thus says the Lord of hosts: Even though it seems impossible to the remnant of this people in these days, should it also seem impossible to me, says the Lord of hosts?

Zechariah 8:6

Such a transformation may seem an impossible miracle to Zechariah's hearers, but it is the sort of miracle that the Creator God of the universe does routinely: <<***But Jesus looked at them and said, 'For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible'***>> (Matthew 19:26).

⁷ Thus says the Lord of hosts: I will save my people from the east country and from the west country; ⁸ and I will bring them to live in Jerusalem. They shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.

Zechariah 8:7-8

The Lord uses opposite extremes to underscore the comprehensiveness of his salvation: he will save his people from the east country, that is, the land of the sunrise; and the west country, i.e. the land where the sun sets, and thus from everywhere in between. Proportionately, few among the exiles returned to the Promised Land. God promises a gathering from exile to come that will far surpass the present gathering. This was something that certainly occurred in the 20th Century, when millions came back from Europe and the Soviet Union.

The promise they shall be my people and I will be their God looks back to: <<***But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people***>> (Jeremiah 31:33), <<***They shall be my people, and I will be their God***>> (Jeremiah 32:38), and: <<***They shall never again defile themselves with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. I will save them from all the apostasies into which they have fallen, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God. My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children's children shall live there for ever; and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them for evermore. My dwelling-place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people***>> (Ezekiel 37:23-27). The gathering-in that God promises will not just be a geographic gathering, as it was for those returning from exile, it will be a spiritual gathering unto God. It will not matter whether their address changes or not, it is their heart that God wants to change!

When the Lord returns to Jerusalem, all his people must likewise be brought in, so that the central relationship of the covenant between God and his people can be realised, and they can live together in faithfulness and in righteousness.

⁹ Thus says the Lord of hosts: Let your hands be strong – you that have recently been hearing these words from the mouths of the prophets who were present when the foundation was laid for the rebuilding of the temple, the house of the Lord of hosts. ¹⁰ For before those days there were no wages for people or for animals, nor was there any safety from the foe for those who went out or came in, and I set them all against one another. ¹¹ But now I will not deal with the remnant of

this people as in the former days, says the Lord of hosts. ¹² For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. ¹³ Just as you have been a cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you and you shall be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.

Zechariah 8:9-13

The assurance of God's transforming work is the basis for the people to **be strong**; refer to Haggai 2:3-9. This encouraging command was for those who had heard the words of the prophets **when the foundation was laid for the rebuilding of the temple, the house of the Lord of hosts**. The foundation was set more than fifteen years before. Although they faced deprivation (**no wages for people**) and opposition (**nor was there any safety from the foe**), God wanted them to find strength for the work in his promise (**let your hands be strong**).

With the reestablishment of the temple, the Lord's attitude toward his people has changed. Before its rebuilding, travel was hazardous and agricultural labour was unrewarded. But now, after its reconstruction, there will be **a sowing of peace**, resulting in the blessings of agricultural prosperity and security promised in the Sinai covenant: *<<I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit>>* (Leviticus 26:4).

I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days. God allowed a period of difficulty but would not allow it to last forever. He would bring prosperity and blessing to the once afflicted nation. Although their present state was lowly, God wanted Israel to trust in his promise of blessing, and let the promise encourage them to diligent, strong service.

Through the Lord's sovereign act of salvation, **the remnant of this people**, who encompass both the **house of Judah and house of Israel**, will receive the peace that unfaithful Israel never possessed. As a result, their name will be transformed from use as a byword of **cursing among the nations** into a formula of **blessing**, fulfilling the Lord's purpose for them: *<<I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing>>* (Genesis 12:2).

¹⁴ For thus says the Lord of hosts: Just as I purposed to bring disaster upon you, when your ancestors provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the Lord of hosts, ¹⁵ so again I have purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; do not be afraid.

¹⁶ These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgements that are true and make for peace, ¹⁷ do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the Lord.

Zechariah 8:14-17

Just as I purposed to bring disaster upon you, when your ancestors provoked me to wrath. As surely as the Lord carried through his purpose to judge their disobedient forefathers, so certainly the Lord has planned **good** things for this new generation. The Lord's commitment to bless them should have a twofold impact: it should free them from fear and motivate them to lives of new obedience toward one another in truth, justice, and grace. God promises blessing to Israel instead of cursing, and he promises it on the principle of the Mosaic Covenant.

Render in your gates judgements that are true and make for peace. The elders would normally meet near the city gates and conduct business there: <<*No sooner had Boaz gone up to the gate and sat down there than the next-of-kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came passing by. So Boaz said, 'Come over, friend; sit down here.'* And he went over and sat down. Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, 'Sit down here'; so they sat down>> (Ruth 4:1-2). In the case of Boaz justice was served but so often God's people had not acted in accordance with his will and he is calling for the people to change their ways: <<*Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph*>> (Amos 5:15).

For all these are things that I hate, says the Lord. Idolatry is one thing that God cannot abide. However, he also makes it clear that he hates it when his people sin against one another. Jesus will also make this clear: <<*Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these'*>> (Mark 12:29-31).

II.c.ii.2 Zechariah 8:18-19 - Joyful Fasting

Formerly, the people fasted in the fourth month, when the walls of Jerusalem were breached; in the fifth, when the city fell; in the seventh, when Gedaliah was assassinated; and in the tenth, when the siege of the city first began. Yet in the days ahead, these fast days would be turned into festivals, seasons of joy and gladness, celebrating the salvation and transformation that the Lord had accomplished for them. In view of this, the people are called to love truth and

peace: love implies commitment and devotion rather than being simply an emotional response.

¹⁸ The word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying: ¹⁹ Thus says 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 seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful festivals for the house of Judah: therefore love truth and peace.

Zechariah 8:18-19

The fast of the fourth, fifth, seventh, tenth months, shall be seasons of joy and gladness. Each one of these fast days remembered a tragic day around the fall of Jerusalem. God here promises blessing so wonderful that these mournful fasts will be transformed into cheerful festivals of celebration: <<*You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy*>> (Psalm 30:11).

G. Campbell Morgan says of these man-appointed fasts: “None of these things had been in the purpose of God for his people; they had resulted from their sins. The fasts therefore were the result of their sins. In jealousy and fury, the outcome of love, Jehovah would put away their sins, and so restore them to true prosperity. In that day, let them still remember and observe, only let the observance be a feast in celebration of God’s grace, instead of a fast in memory of their sin.”

In light of God’s promised blessing, his people should want to be more like him; they should love truth and peace: <<*Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, in truth and love*>> (2 John 3).

II.c.ii.3 Zechariah 8:20-23 - Many Peoples Drawn to Jerusalem

God promises that, because of what he will do for the people of Jerusalem, then people from all nations will come to the city to seek him.

²⁰ Thus says the Lord of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, the inhabitants of many cities; ²¹ the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Come, let us go to entreat the favour of the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts; I myself am going.’ ²² Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favour of the Lord.

Zechariah 8:20-22

In Zechariah's day not many people wanted to come to a downtrodden city like Jerusalem. God promises redemption so great that one day the peoples shall yet come to the glorified city.

This blessing will extend beyond Jerusalem and Judah to include others as well, the inhabitants of many cities: <<*For as you have drunk on my holy mountain, all the nations around you shall drink*>> (Obadiah 16a). Like the people of Bethel in 7:2, they will come to Jerusalem to entreat the favour of the Lord. It will extend beyond God's own people to include the Gentiles: Many peoples and strong nations shall come. This promise will ultimately be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus. Jerusalem will be the headquarters of his Kingdom, and the nations will come to seek the Lord in Jerusalem.

²³ Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'

Zechariah 8:23

Ten men represents a complete group from the nations of every language who recognise that God is with his people and therefore who come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord. This prophecy found its initial fulfilment on the day of Pentecost; refer to Acts Chapter 2. Since then, the Gospel has gone out into the whole world to draw the Gentile nations to Christ, just as he had commanded his disciples: <<*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judæa and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*>> (Acts 1:8).

Take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment. This same word grasp is used for grabbing a snake by the tail (Exodus 4:4) or for grabbing a lion by its jaw (1 Samuel 17:35). It means to grasp something that you cannot afford to let go of.

Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you. When others see that God is with his people, it attracts them to the Lord: <<*so that the name of the Lord may be declared in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem, when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the Lord*>> (Psalm 102:21-22). When people see: <<*Christ in you, the hope of glory*>> (Colossians 1:27), they want to come to Jesus.