



Lesson 11 May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## Peace and Justice Reign

Study Scripture – Zechariah 8:18, 11-17

Background Scripture – Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17

### Key Verse:

*“So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the Judah: fear ye not.”*

**Zechariah 8:15**

### INTRODUCTION

The book of Zechariah which was written over 2500 years ago in the early part of the fifth century B.C. contains some of the most unusual and exciting prophecies in the Old Testament. It was a dangerous time for the people of Israel who were under financial, physical and emotional pressure. Someone had to teach them how to survive.

What the prophet Zechariah told the people were important instructions. These instructions are important also for us. The book addresses the problem of the nation of Israel, the Jews, as well as the problems of Gentiles, and how God related to both Jew and Gentile.

This is therefore not a simple book. It contains magnificent prophecies and gives us a clear insight into what is going to happen in the last days. Its prophecies as well as those in the books of Revelation, Daniel, Malachi, and the Matthew 24 and 25 discussions by Jesus are great instructions. Any prophetic doctrine that has statements which go against any of these are clearly wrong and should be discarded.

Some people like to say that even though they are Gentiles they have replaced the nation of Israel and therefore the predicted words of God's blessing in the future belong to them. They are clearly wrong.

Then there are others that like to say that God has finished with Israel and the promises to the fathers do not apply to the people of Israel. Of course, the Apostle Paul swept aside those arguments as being quite wrong. We should do the same.

Our study chapter 8 has a different focus from chapter 7 and so one writer said:

**“In Zechariah 8 the focus is 180° in the other direction. Instead of a dirge being played in a minor key by a mournful organ, a joyful trumpet sounds as God ceases talking about sorrow, fasting and hurt over sin, and directs his attention to joy and redemption. Here God begins to talk about what it will be like when his people are redeemed, what it will be like on the day when fasting is turned to feasting. This is a tremendous picture of God's redemptive work”.**

This book of Zechariah illustrates redemption and how the Second Coming of Jesus will unfold. Our focus in this Lesson is on the coming of peace and justice brought by Messiah at His second coming. It is noted that not all of the blessings promised would come at the return of the people of Israel from their exile in Babylon. The fulfillment in total awaits a future time.

The Book is really divided into two parts. For background we note that the first eight chapters contain three prophecies. One scholar advises us on this matter of how the book is divided and how the prophecies should be looked at noting it was the rulers of the Persian Empire that allowed Judah to return home from exile:

**“All three are dated-two in the second year of Darius's reign, and the one we looked at last time in the fourth year of Darius's reign. But beginning chapter 9, the prophecies are not dated. We do not know when they were given; we only know it was some time after the turn of the Fifth century-- perhaps around 450 B.C.**

**The thrust of these prophecies is somewhat different than that of those preceding. The first set of prophecies, in chapters 9, 10, and 11, have to do with the Gentiles..... Some 14 times in these three chapters there is a reference to the Gentile nations, while Israel is mentioned only obliquely and infrequently. But when you come to chapters 12, 13, and 14, you will find the names of Israel, Jerusalem, and Judah repeated many, many times. The name, Jerusalem, occurs 22 times in these chapters. So it is obvious that in chapters 12, 13, and 14 Zechariah is dealing with his people, and primarily with the city of Jerusalem but in chapters 9, 10, and 11 is dealing with the Gentile nation. That is one broad definition.**

**There is another. In chapters 9, 10, and 11 all the prophecies is applied to the first advent of Christ's coming and rejection and crucifixion. There is one very familiar prophecy in chapter 9, verse 9, about the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. There is one in chapter 11, verse 12 about the 30 pieces of silver that Judas was paid to betray Christ. But in chapters 12, 13, and 14, the references are all to the Second Advent of Christ. Here you have that great prophecy of Christ coming back, his feet touching the top of the Mount of Olives, and the mountain being split from east to west”.**

The prophetic words of Zechariah seem to be as fire, burning away the chaff in judgment on a people whose hearts seem to be as stiff as their necks. And yet amidst the pronouncement of judgment in his prophetic message, there is a sense of hope that echoes the words and sentiments expressed in Habakkuk who asked that God, in His wrath, remember mercy. So it is that Zechariah's message also encompasses the kind of messianic message that is most pronounced among the Minor prophets. Indeed, and certainly the meaning of his name, “Yahweh remembers”, is absolutely fitting for his prophetic work.

One writer advises:

**For a people newly returned from exile, Zechariah provided specific prophecies about their immediate and distant future-- no doubt a great encouragement. Their nation, however, would still be judged for sin (5:1-11), but they would also be cleansed and restored (3:1-10), and God would rebuild His people.**

The prophet Zechariah was most uncompromising in his analysis of the behaviour of Israel and he dwelt on the very hard things that would happen to them. He did this through the use of many pictures or visions to communicate God's intention. Zechariah placed a powerful emphasis on the Covenant between the nation and their God and issued stern demands on the people. He stressed that God's word was powerful and right, so we can rightfully call this lesson, The Triumphant Word of God.

Zechariah ministered about the same time as Haggai and Malachi. They all dealt with the issue of whether the nation would make a success of their presence in the land this time and answer the question as to whether it was worth the struggle and the dangers. Were they doomed



because of their sinful practice and their sinful inclinations which had led them to rebel, and would God be forced to judge them again?

This was a time of calling to remembrance. The Northern kingdom and the Southern kingdom had gone through a very bitter experience. Judah had gone into exile in Babylon because of their gross sins. Judah had been so overwhelmed by their enemies and had sunk so low that before Jerusalem was destroyed they had practiced cannibalism to survive. Now they had spent 70 years in exile and a tiny remnant returned to again inhabit the land and rebuild. There was no king and though they were basically a semi-independent nation, they remained under the titular control of the rulers of the Medes and the Persians. The land was desolate after 70 years of abandonment and neglect. The returnees lacked money and manpower. The enemies around them were hostile and did everything they could to retard the work of rebuilding. On top of that the people could remember the relatively easy time they had had in the rich city of Babylon.

These were difficult years. But in the eyes of God a return to the land was not quite the same as them **“returning to God”**. God wanted them to properly understand the spiritual state of their lives. The truth of God had therefore to be declared with vigour and forthrightness.

The economic situation was disastrous. The people who came back to the land were still not following the terms of the Covenant and this led to all kinds of social injustice. The poor, the widows and the fatherless were routinely oppressed and maltreated. Despite the bad state of the economy some of the people were doing well. However greed also flourished and those who have money would oppress the poor to acquire their property and possessions in the most underhanded fashion. There was no limit to their pursuit of prosperity or the means that they would employ, staying up nights to devise schemes by which they could defraud their brethren. The people neglected rebuilding the Temple. But in the unfinished Temple corrupt priests officiated. The leaders were unjust with righteousness being scarce with no one fighting for the rights of the poor and the downtrodden.

It was a dangerous time to be a prophet for they were unpopular and greatly disliked but Zechariah was a powerful young man and he was like Jeremiah very young when he was called to the prophetic office.

## THE TEXT

**Verse 1.** In this verse Zechariah continues to speak of what is to come, essentially exhorting the people to choose God, and choose obedience to God, unlike the disobedience of their fathers. This was a wise thing because God has promises of prosperity that He wants to bestow upon His people.

Zechariah emphasized a message of encouragement to the people who were undergoing difficult times, oppressed by leaders among them that should have known better but who were choosing to again disregard the covenant.

To make it clear they should take the prophetic word seriously God addressed the people with the title the **LORD of hosts**. God introduced Himself showcasing His power and majesty, pointing out that He was the Commander of the Armies of Heaven. Clearly then this was a wake-up call to those who were fooling around.



**Verses 2 & 3.** This verse stresses the love and protection God has for His people and secondly the wrath that He has for those who will try to hurt His people. One writer tells us that when God said He was zealous for Zion with a great zeal and great fervour, it was interesting that the word for “zealous” in the ancient Hebrew comes from the idea of becoming intensely “red”, the face flushed with deep emotion

It was important for God to establish that He still loves Zion. All of the previous actions were done in order for Israel to separate themselves from sin and return back, to now serving and obeying the Almighty God. Now that they had returned from the Babylonian captivity the prophet Zechariah’s purpose was to stir up the Jewish nation at that moment to complete the building of the Temple, restore the pure worship of God and to encourage their faith and hope in the expectation of the Messiah son of David.

God declares that He intends to actively demonstrate His love for His people despite their previous transgressions. He says He will once more show His love to Zion, and His wrath towards the nations that were hostile to Zion. When Jerusalem was given up into the power of its foes, the Lord had forsaken His dwelling-place in the temple. Ezekiel bore witness to the glory of the Lord departing the temple (Ezekiel 9:3; Ezekiel 11:22-25).

God would now be present with His people and therefore both the people and the city would be transformed. The Lord had decided to resume His communion with Jerusalem once more. The city will therefore be a city of truth or fidelity, one in which truth and faithfulness towards the Lord have their home.

The Temple mountain of Zion will be called the holy mountain because it will from this point be recognized as the dwelling place of the Lord God Almighty, as He will sanctify it by dwelling there. In considering the period from Zechariah 8:3 – 13, and the promise made, it does not refer exclusively to the Messianic times, as some people have strictly thought but has a near and a future fulfillment. But its fulfillment is accompanied by the completion of the work of building the Temple, and the restoration of Jerusalem by Nehemiah.

Note therefore that the commitment of Yahweh to His people has not changed and never will change. Because of these there will be a new beginning for them.

Consider the application of this principle to your life and future.

**Verses 4 & 5.** Long life, to an extreme old age, and a plentiful number of blooming children, were theocratic blessings, which the Lord had already promised in the law to His people, so long as they were faithful to the covenant. This is what the people of God should be striving for in this day and age. That means we need to get the message of the Gospel to others, so they may see the truth, experience salvation and grace, and see all the God has to offer. We even need to pray for our leaders and even our enemies so that as God’s will is done, they do not hinder the prosperity of the Children of God.

If we compare the fourth verse with Isaiah 65:20, we shall see that extreme old age also belonged to the blessings of the Messianic times.

In this time when God has visited His people, there shall be old men and old women dwelling in the streets of Jerusalem. There will be tranquility and prosperity abounding in the nation, as wars shall no longer prematurely cut off the people, such that men and women shall reach advanced ages.

It is clear that with God present once again sheltering His people it will cause a great increase of people, and all the marks and of a profound tranquility, when Jerusalem becomes that city of



truth and a mountain of holiness. To have so many old men and old women moving freely about the city with joy implies that there will not be war, famine, or pestilence. No one will be slain, or deserted or left desolate, to be cut off by untimely deaths (either through their own intemperance of God's vengeance), but the people should enjoy the greatest span of time their natural lives have to offer them, to the point where they are in need of a staff to support them as they move, which is a sign of divine grace.

An even more subtle point is the communion of men and women to an old age. It implies no strife or competition between them, but God's children living in the complete and full harmony of what is and was meant to be. This is the joy and pleasure experienced when all serve and obey the Lord God Almighty.

The second component of living a Godly life in a Godly community is that it shall be blessed with a multitude of children. Their families were promised to increase and multiply, and replenish the city, which was an early product of the divine blessing. Both boys and girls are mentioned playing, being active, strong and happy, which once again points to a very healthy community. Demonstrating such joy we can obviously imply that the children had no care or fear about anything, there was just a true love and peace among themselves. The sports and diversions used shall be all harmless and inoffensive: the boys and girls shall have no other play than what they are willing that persons should see in the streets, no play that seeks corners, no playing the fool, or playing the wanton, for it is the mountain of the Lord, the holy mountain, but honest and modest recreations, which they have no reason to be ashamed of.

**Verse 6. God now asks a question.** He compares how He looks at things with how men look at things. If it be marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvelous in mine eyes?

However impossible these things just promised by God seem to Israel, to others, to you, they are not so with God. The "remnant" that had returned from the captivity, beholding the city desolate, and the walls and houses in ruins, could hardly believe what God promised. The expression "remnant" implies their preservation by the grace of God amidst all the trials of the Babylonian captivity, and glances at their ingratitude in rating so low God's power, though they had experienced it so 'marvellously' displayed in their restoration. Because of unbelief men 'limit' the power of "the Holy One of Israel" by comparing His power to their own power (Ps. 41).

**Verse 7.** The verses continue to give hope to the people of God. It says that all the scattered Israelites shall be brought together again from all parts from where they were dispersed. God will be the One who will save them from being lost, or losing themselves in whichever land or nation that they have found themselves in. In coming back to God, no nation in which they have sojourned will stop them from returning, such is the decree of the Almighty God. His invitation to them can't return to Him void, and so it will be accomplished, and not just that but God will put in their heart that will to return, to share in the joy and prosperity of a holy city with God its ruler.

Note when God promised to bring His people from exile this is not just a physical gathering literally from the rising of the sun to the setting of the sun, but the promise is also of a spiritual gathering.



They therefore have every reason to have strong hands to work to build the Temple of the Lord and demonstrate diligent and strong service.

**Verse 8.** The following verse refer also to the future state in which *all* of God's people will be gathered to Him. However, at the present time at the now post- Babylonian suppression, God would renew His covenant with them. He would be faithful to them and make them so to Him. That is the foundation and crown of all these promises and is inclusive of all happiness. They shall obey God's laws, and God will secure and advance all their interests. This contract shall be made, shall be new made, *in truth* and *in righteousness*. Some think that the former denotes God's part of the covenant (he will be *their God in truth*, he will make good all his promises of favour to them) and the latter man's part of the covenant--they shall be his people in *righteousness*, they shall be a righteous people and shall abound in the *fruits of righteousness*, and shall not, as they have done, deal treacherously and unjustly with their God. See Hosea 2:19, 20.

God will never leave nor forsake them in a way of mercy, as he has promised them and they shall never leave nor forsake him in a way of duty, as they have promised him. These promises were fulfilled in the flourishing state of the Jewish church, for some ages, between the captivity and Christ's time they were to have a further and a fuller accomplishment in the gospel-church.

**Verse 11.** The Lord God Almighty directs a loving decree to His people, saying He will act differently to His remaining people, and bless "the remnant" again with a fruitful harvest of the fruits of the field and soil. He has removed the punishment of the former days when they were in disobedience and looks to exalt them. God wishes the people to return to their duty, and God says He will return to His, being their God, their shield, defender and protector, and sustainer.

It is important not just for Israel and Judah to understand what God means here, but for every child of God. God will contend with the froward but will bless they who will walk with Him.

**Verse 12.** Israel and Judah shall have great plenty and abundance of all good things. God is prepared to bless them with all they can desire, not only for necessity, but for ornament and delight.

God exercises control over nature so that it will benefit His people. For when the heavens release their dew, the earth can start to unfold their yield to those who work it, which is a constant intimation to us of the beneficence of the God of heaven to men on earth and of their dependence on Him.

God continues to highlight that it is a remnant, a residue that He is dealing with. This is somewhat of a shame to the people of God as they have always known what God would do for them, but they continually break the covenant between themselves and their God. However, God remembers His promise and is merciful to accomplish what He has set out to do. With a little or a lot, God will and does save. With this residue, now that they are at the work for God, He will take care that they shall want nothing which is fit for them.

**Verse 13.** Everyone censured and condemned them, spoke ill of them, and wished ill to them, upon the account of the great disgrace that they were under. Some think that they were made



a form of execration, so that if a man would load his enemy with the heaviest curse he would say, ***God make thee like a Jew!***

"But now, ***I will save you, and you shall be a blessing.*** Your restoration shall be as much taken notice of to your honour as ever your desolation and dispersion were to your reproach. You shall be applauded and admired as much as ever you were vilified and run down; shall be courted and caressed as much as ever you were slighted and abandoned."

Men have a tendency to smile or frown upon their neighbours according as Providence smiles or frowns upon them, but those to whom God plainly blesses as His own, shows favour to and puts honour upon, we ought also to respect and be kind to. All children of God should understand that the blessed of the Lord are the blessing of the land.

**Verse 14.** When they provoked Him to anger with their sins, He said that He would punish them, and so He did. It was His declared purpose to bring destroying judgments upon them, and, because they repented not of their rebellions against Him, He repented not of His threatenings against them, but let the sentence of the law take its course.

One of the lessons to be learned here is God's punishing sinners is never a sudden and hasty resolve, but is always the product of thought, and there is a counsel in that part of the will of God. If the sinner turns not, God will not turn. As children of God, and most importantly among our brethren when correction must be meted out, this example is important as a foundation. God is always looking to redeem His people, and so should we. He is patient, but He does act with a thoughtful purpose. We should take heed and put such wisdom into our practices in all our daily lives.

Now that they pleased Him with their services He said that He would do them good and will He not be as true to His promises as He was to His threatenings? No doubt He will:

"So again have I thought to do well to Jerusalem in those days, when you begin to hearken to the voice of God speaking to you by his prophets and these thoughts also shall be performed."

**Verse 15.** The first idea stressed in this verse declares that man cannot turn to God until He changes man's heart by His Spirit, and so begin to do good to them, which is to pardon sins and to give him His graces. With this in place now the work of God can flourish.

The difficulties that God's children met with in their work must not drive them from it, nor make them go on thoughtlessly and without pleasure in doing it, for the issue would be good and the reward great.

This should encourage and excite God's people to proceed with vigour and cheerfulness. The dangers they were exposed to from their enemies must not terrify them, the children of God, for those that have God for them, engaged to do them good, need not fear what man can do against them.

**Verse 16 & 17.** We, the believers of God, and the doers of His will have a duty to perform. These are the same duties which the former prophets pressed upon their fathers from the consideration of the wrath threatened (Zechariah 7:9, 10).

This prophet presses them to consider the mercy promised in the Covenant.



God will perform for His children what He has promised in His own way and time, but upon the condition that you make conscience of your duty. If God's children maintain the duties which we are to perform, fulfil, and keep, which are part of our covenant with God, that would bring the blessings of the covenant. Accordingly we are advised by the prophets:

1. You must never tell lies, but always speak as you think as the matter is, to the best of your knowledge. God's children should dread every word that looks like a lie.
2. Those that are entrusted with the administration of public justice must see to it, not only that none be wronged by it, but that those who are wronged be righted by it. This means judges in all their judicial proceedings must have regard both to truth and to peace. They should look to do justice, accommodate differences, and to prevent vexatious suits.
3. *It must be a judgment of truth in order to peace, and making those friends that were at variance, and a judgment of peace as far as is consistent with truth, and no further.*
4. No man must bear malice against his neighbour upon any account. Essentially, injury and mischief must be crushed in the thought, in the embryo.
5. Great reverence must be had for an oath, and conscience made of it.  
"For all these are things that I hate, and therefore you must hate them if you expect to have God your friend." These things here forbidden are all of them found among the seven things which the Lord hates, Proverbs 6:16-19.

We must forbear sin, not only because God is angry at it, and therefore it is dangerous to us, but because he hates it, and therefore it ill becomes us and is a very ungrateful thing.

## CONCLUSION

It is important to note that Zechariah spoke of a time of peace and justice. He gave specific commandments to his hearers to dispense true justice, practice kindness and compassion to the widows, orphans, the strangers, and the poor.

There would be a time that God would lead humanity and bring about peace, order, harmony and delight among the nations of the world. This would now come in measure to the nation of Israel and Judah.

But note in verse 14 God lists His Law, His concern similar to that listed in Chapter 7:9-10. But now this was listed in the form of a challenge for God said He was determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. They therefore did not have to fear but simply had to do the things that God said they should do in verses 16-17.

So despite their moral failure when they were reacting to God's redemptive work, God's work of redemption, their joy would be unrivalled. Their joy would be abundant. There would be vitality in living. Their fasting days would be replaced by days of feasting.

It is important to note and never forget the three extremely beautiful word pictures of the time when peace and justice reigns.

The first one is quite lovely. The first word picture is of the people living such a good and long life that they cannot stand up without the help of their staff while looking out and seeing the generations of children playing in the streets in freedom.

But we should remember that there is another beautiful word picture.

This second beautiful word picture is of the time when peace and justice reigns and is actually in Zechariah 8:12 when the prophet speaks thus of the time:





***“For there will be peace for the seed: the vine will yield its root, the land will yield its produce, and the heavens will give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these things.”***

Then we have the third word picture in 8:13

***“And it will come about that just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and the house of Israel, so I will save you that you may become a blessing. Do not fear; let your hands be strong”.***

So what more could we ask of God that He has expressed; what the Lord loves and what He wants us to love, and what He hates and what He wants us to hate.

The tremendous promise is that those of us who have experienced fasting and mourning for heart-felt sorrow over the rebellion of people, will experience feasting in its place. We will become joy filled. We should be thrilled at the prospects of joy even though we know that the pictures the prophet has painted for us are inadequate to describe the overflowing life of the delight, gladness, closeness to God, and the magnificent sense of approval from God we will have.

The picture of God that we have is not that of a cruel God but it is a picture of a patient merciful God who will bring real truth and righteousness one day in Zion.

Note also that the prophecy is **soul** spoke to us to produce an ethical response in us. When we hear the message our hands are to become strong. We are to be faithful to God. God will touch our physical life with blessings but He will also touch our spiritual life. This is of course very important in times of depression, an economic hardship which arise on occasion because we have neglected to put the spiritual things that are placed before us in the word of God. Sometimes troubles come because we do not give priority to the word of God and have not truly returned to God.

But then we cannot forget that the prophet speaks of practical righteousness. For peace and Justice to reign we must speak the truth to our neighbour, let peace be in the gate, have no evil imagination of people in the heart against one's neighbour. All this is the response of obedience to the Word of God. This must be done if we want blessings.

One thing we do know for sure and it is that God will act upon these promises spoken of by Zechariah when He is ready. He will then save both Jew and Gentiles as well. Jerusalem is going to be the capital of the Earth and everyone will want to go there to worship the Lord God of Israel.

It is amazing when we think that God will fulfill His promises to a wicked, hypocritical people such as those in Israel. It is amazing when we think that God would fulfill His promises to the wicked and hypocritical and Gentile world.

But the answer is found in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ for there at Golgotha Jesus died on the Cross with outstretched hands to point out to men that He is welcoming them to His arms. To those who want to come to Him He's able to save and deliver.

