

PEACE AND JUSTICE REIGN

Lesson Scripture: Zechariah 8

Focus Scripture: Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17

Key Verse: I have purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; do not be afraid. Zechariah 8:15 (NRSV)

ZECHARIAH 8:1-8, 11-17 (NRSV)

Zechariah 8:1-8

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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

11-17

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

ZECHARIAH 8:1-8, 11-17 (KJV)

Zechariah 8:1-8

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

11-17

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

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.

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 judgments 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.

increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.

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.

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.

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.

VOCABULARY

- **Paradox** – Seemingly contradicting conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Naturally as humans, and as believers, we want peace and justice in our lives and in the society in which we live. But, we can face hardship which lasts for a long time. At times it seems like the bad times have no end. We cannot see the days of freedom from where we now stand. It is in those long, distressing situations that a word from the Lord gives life. In this lesson we will see where and how God

sent such a word to the descendants of Jacob (Israel). All the promises that God had made to Abraham and Jacob were still in play. Yet the people were literally living in hell. As you study the lesson, try to put yourself in the place of the people to whom the message of restoration was first sent. Try to see and feel what they saw and felt.

Then, consider the modern parallels given later and note the wonderful outcomes God can design when we endure in faith. What may look hopeless and impossible for us is nothing in the hands of God. Miraculous outcomes do happen. Solutions, though unforeseen by

us, can spring forth. Read this lesson with a view of putting some of the principles to work in your own life.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

We must note that this is a message, or rather a series of messages, from the Lord of Sabaoth, Lord of hosts. The Hebrews gave names to God to indicate the aspect of God's character they wanted to emphasize. By using this term, Zechariah was highlighting God as the ultimate warrior who controls the armies of both heaven and earth. So, what was the "Ultimate Warrior" concerned about it? And what did he plan to do about those concerns?

Bear in mind that Israel (the descendants of Jacob) were to be God's special people on the earth. They were to be the people who showed off God's favor and blessings to the world. But, their sinful acts of injustice had blurred the picture. So rather than being a bright light to the world, they were walking in deep darkness. The people who were blessed to be more than conquerors were conquered and enslaved. God showed

up to reveal divine plans to put Israel in its rightful place both on the earth and in eternity. Let us examine those messages. God opened by expressing his deep concern (jealousy) for God's people. This concern had made God angry about what was happening in the nation. So, God was showing up to urge the people to do what was right. God also invited them to look forward to the glorious days God

was setting up for them.

The first message was that Jerusalem and the Temple Mount (the sacred places of worship) were going to be restored. In the second message, God promised that God's people would once again live in a place of safety and joy. This was followed by a call for them to get serious

about restoring the temple. At first glance, the task may have looked impossible. However, it was achievable because God, for whom nothing is impossible, was going to help them.

Next, God promised to bring together his people from all over the world to the sacred place of worship. God would show



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up in that safe space to assure God's people of divine favor. God connected that promise to the work of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. The people were to respect the call of the prophets and be diligent in the rebuilding effort. Significant blessings awaited the people who restored the sacred place of worship. The people would see these blessings in both spiritual and material prosperity. God went on to explain the vision further. Because of their disobedience, Judah and Israel had become symbols of a cursed nation. God was about to change all that. Instead of the world looking on Israel with scorn, the onlookers would see Israel as a blessed prospering nation.

The people had a role to play in bringing about these blessings. God expected them to be truthful in their speech and dealings with one another. They had to practice what God loves – justice. They were to promote peace rather than trouble and strife. Finally, God emphasized the turnaround that was to come. The blessings on God's

people were going to be so big that the whole world would take note. People from around the world would flock to the Jews to find out what they were doing to be so prosperous. God's original vision for Israel will be realized.

SANKOFA

Consider the miracle that had to occur for Israel to move from where it was (when Zechariah wrote) to the vision the prophet saw. God had to move the country from deplorable to glorious. Sometimes, we read about these miraculous transformations and have difficulty embracing them. We can easily think those stories only happen in the Bible. Wrong! Right in the times we are living on this earth are rich examples of miraculous turnarounds. One such story comes from Ethiopia.

At the turn of this century, Ethiopia was in a deplorable situation. It was listed among the poorest countries in the world. About 50% of the population was living below the international poverty line, according to data from institutions

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like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. Childbirth deaths were about 1089 per 100,000 live births. Fast forward to 2015/2016 and there was a miraculously changed picture. The people living below the poverty line fell from around 50% to under 24%. No small achievement by any standards, but even more amazing for a country like Ethiopia. The economy that was once in shambles a few years before is booming. The dramatic improvement in the economy has led to equally dramatic improvement in living standards.

What does this mean? It shows that the remarkable promises we see in the Bible are very believable. Dramatic, unpredictable improvements are still possible today.

CASE STUDY

To appreciate the power in a lesson like this, you have to put yourself in the position of one of the persons who heard it for the first time. You can do that by considering cases where only a miracle could have brought desirable change.

Here is one such case.

Consider that you are an average young adult in Maryland in the late 1600's. At this stage, whatever your personal views on interracial unions, assume you are deeply in love with a person from another race. This person is equally in love with you. Both of you would love to get married and enjoy family life together. But there is one problem. The

laws of the state make interracial unions illegal (anti-miscegenation laws). And, the people of the state support and uphold that law. Even some churches! As a young person in love, could you see that situation changing? Most people could not. Those laws did not change until 1967, in Loving vs. Virginia. That

was some 300 years later. (Although some state judges had ruled against those laws earlier.)

Now, consider what would have been your mindset, if in 1670 you had heard from credible reports that legislation was being prepared to change those laws. Most people would have been hopeful



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and looked forward to the day when the promised legislation would take effect. That is the power of credible promises of relief in harsh situations. Credible promises of a better life give us hope. And, with that hope we find the strength to endure hardships. Hope gives us something to live for. That is the kind of impact the prophecy of Zechariah must have had on his people. It would have awakened in them a stronger desire to restore the temple, the sacred place of worship.

(Anyone interested in the story in this section can read it in the book, *Flavor*, which gives the life story of Shirley Howard and John Billy, an interracial couple. It explains how they had the fight of their life against the anti-miscegenation laws of Maryland. When God has decreed justice for a situation, it may take 307 years to happen, but justice and improvement *will* happen!)

LIFE APPLICATION

Consider the people in Zechariah's day. After they heard the message, they had to deal with a paradox. On one hand,

they had the reality of the present's harsh living conditions. On the other, they had the promises of the Lord. When you find yourself in similar circumstances, how do you deal with them? In this regard, consider the case study. What can you do when the justice you desire is promised in the scriptures, but not seen on earth?

Take this consideration a step further. What do you say to relatives who are facing seemingly hopeless situations? Consider the different ways you can help to give them hope, especially if they are not Christians. For how long could you bear with their constant complaining and pleading? Consider the practical steps you could take to help them. Many of us

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attend worship services weekly. We hear sermons often. Yet, we carry around loads of problems from year to year. In the safety of your private meditations, consider how the worship services you attend and the sermons you hear equip you to deal with the everyday challenges of life. In what ways do you connect what

you hear in church with what you do outside the church walls? You may want to spend some time thinking about this. Your findings will fashion your outlook on life.

At this stage, think about the messages you hear on the Second Coming of Christ. How do you receive those messages? What is the effect of them to you now? Ideally such messages should give us deeper assurances about the future. How do you handle the criticism that ministers have been preaching these messages for centuries, and nothing has of yet happened? Maybe you can find an old sermon on the Second Coming and listen to it to clarify your thoughts. There are many such messages available for free.

Lastly, give the same thought to a section of The Lord's Prayer. When you pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," what are your mental impressions? Can you connect the image of that request to your desire for justice and peace, or is it just a

line for recital? For people who see God as the source of all peace and justice, that line has the power of dynamite. You can blow away pockets of hopelessness with The Lord's Prayer!

QUESTIONS

1. What do you do to hold on to God's promise of peace in times of strong persecution and injustice?
2. What can we do to help persecuted Christians in Africa and other parts of the world hold on to hope?
3. Apart from the scriptures, where else can we find words of hope God wants us to have in times of trouble?



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CLOSING DEVOTIONS

The Closing Song: YouTube "Whispering Hope" by Firm Faith Zimbabwe (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9ey1mXIMqA>).

Prayer: Dear Father, help us to hear your voice as you whisper hope to us to get us through these distressing times. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**May 4-May 10**

Monday	Genesis 12:1-8 (God's Worldwide Covenant With Abraham)
Tuesday	Jeremiah 31:31-34 (A New Covenant of the Heart)
Wednesday	Ezekiel 37:15-23 (Divided Peoples to Become One)
Thursday	Romans 12:9-21 (Just Living in Church and World)
Friday	1 Thessalonians 5:12-22 (Cultivate Peaceful and Just Relations)
Saturday	Zechariah 8:18-23 (Joyful Feasts Draw Newcomers)
Sunday	Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17 (Enjoy Fruits of Peace and Justice)