

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH
Lesson 14, Chapters 7 and 8

We ended our previous lesson with Zechariah chapter 7 verses 11 and 12, which says:

CJB Zechariah 7:11-12 ***¹¹ But they wouldn't listen, they stubbornly turned their shoulder away and stopped up their ears, so that they wouldn't have to hear it. ¹² Yes, they made their hearts as hard as a diamond, so that they wouldn't hear the Torah and the messages that Yehoveh-Tzva'ot had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. This is why great anger came from Yehoveh-Tzva'ot;***

I touched on this a bit last week, and it is so very important for every God worshipper to hear and understand what is being said because the consequences of not paying attention to this can be most serious.

When God says the Judeans wouldn't hear it, He was speaking in terms of His body of worshippers not listening. We don't have to wonder or be hazy about what, exactly, it was that they refused to hear. This passage says that they refused to hear the Torah and they also refused to hear God's Prophets who have brought God's oracle to God's people. The result was that great anger came from God and He severely punished His people for their disobedience. Of course, the question we all face is: is this just ancient history with a cause and effect that had only to do with the Jewish people in that particular era? Or does Zechariah's prophetic oracle from God impact us, Jew or gentile, in modern times?

I can tell you unequivocally that the Christian Church (which I labeled the Constantinian Church) generally says that no, Zechariah's words have nothing to do with us. They have no actual bearing on Believers, and especially not on gentile Believers, more than perhaps a point that can be used in an allegorical sermon. I speak regularly about the Constantinian Church, a label I coined not to demonize but only as a means to differentiate between the faith the New Testament teaches versus the quite different faith developed under the auspices of Emperor Constantine and his Bishops beginning in the 4th century

A.D., which is the model of how people today think of something called Christianity. While the Constantinian type of faith structure indeed borrows Yeshua from the Hebrews, and rightly worships Him as Lord and Savior, this is actually a re-structured Yeshua from His original Hebrew mold into a new Greek framework that significantly alters who He is and what He means by what He says. In this new framework His Jewishness and His heritage nearly disappears. Christ's people that His Father sent Him to deliver, become outsiders. The covenants God made with the Hebrews over the centuries are voided, and one of them is separated out and turned over to Constantinian Church gentiles (minus any possible punishments for our violations), God's laws and commands from the Torah are abolished and replaced with one obscure law: to love. This morphed-God will punish others, but never a Christian, and will rather only show mercy because for Christians, sin isn't really sin any longer. It is now the Church leadership that will determine what that love-covenant amounts to... or more recently in the Evangelical branch of the Church... that Church leadership in co-operation with the Holy Spirit living in you will customize the meaning of love, obedience and morality for each individual, with no two individuals having to go by the same definitions of love and morality.

Over the centuries, various leaders and their faith groups that form the Constantinian Church, and who love Yeshua and want to live out the biblically defined faith, have come forward to challenge some of the doctrines of this manmade faith only to be marginalized as heretics. In earlier years they were even hunted down to be killed. As I have pointed out in earlier lessons, the famous Pilgrims that came to America in 1620 was one of those groups. They got here because they were driven out of Europe by the Constantinian Church.

Just as with Israel (in the case of Zechariah, we're talking about Israel in the sense of Judah and the Judeans), the people did not deny God, nor did they deny their faith, nonetheless customs and traditions had been created and evolved, which eventually made a mockery of what the Torah and the Prophets taught to them. The bad consequences of their decisions and behaviors were nowhere in sight for scores and scores of years...allowing them to assume that all was well... until one day it all came crashing down on their heads. God suddenly moved the Babylonians to attack and decimate Judah

and lead the people off into exile in a foreign land, and all on His behalf. The governing dynamic we learn in story after story in the Bible is that God has given mankind a steady, never changing truth to know, and His laws and commands to follow so we can be at peace with Him. History reveals that His worshippers tend to follow them for a while, but in time decide they have some better ideas. Then follows decades of warnings through God's Prophets to abandon such audacious rebellion and return to the Torah, and these warnings always seems to go unheeded. Then suddenly, overnight, calamity arrives and the people are startled and unprepared. They are bewildered by this evil that has befallen them even though they had been told, and told, and told it was coming.

As Zechariah 7:11 says: "But they wouldn't listen." I am not a Prophet. But, I *can* read. And because I believe to my core that the Bible is God's true Word to us, and that what it instructs us is valid and relevant forever, then despite the bit of quezzyness I feel each time I bring this sensitive matter up, I know that I have little choice but to point out these biblical warnings again and again to those who have ears to listen (knowing most will see me as a Church basher and a Church heretic). Yet, I must be honest about what is called The Church today... what I call the Constantinian Church. The Church has done much good, just as it has also done much atrocity. Millions have been led to Christ and an opportunity for eternal joy with God. Millions of hungry have been fed. But, this same Church has also burned thousands of Jews at the stake, tortured and killed those who don't adhere to certain of their doctrines, extracted billions of dollars from the poor and ignorant, and some branches have declared that the Jews are Christ killers who don't deserve a place on this planet. Yet, despite this, the reality is that what we see today is NOT the Church Christ created; it is not the one that He described nor envisioned as presented in the New Testament. And, as such, it has gone tremendously astray after its own way, because it is based on anti-biblical principles, and what compels me to speak is that it is dragging millions upon millions of unsuspecting souls along with it. To what end I'm not sure because I'm not the Great Judge.

As we learn from the Bible, Yeshua did not come to reform the Synagogue or the Priesthood. He certainly didn't come to start a new religion. He came to

present truth to the common people who had been getting precious little of it for a very long time, but were convinced their religious leaders know the truth and were teaching it to them. For those who refused to listen, Yeshua didn't stay and plead; He simply moved on to find any willing ears. If any of what I'm saying touches you, or makes sense to you, then you know what you must do even if the thought of it is painful or sounds radical. It's not hard to know if you belong to a faith group that is Bible oriented or if it is doctrine oriented. If they denounce the Torah and/or the Prophets, that group is wrong-minded in its core and is probably not salvageable. Is that a standard of determination or judgment I just made up? No, it has been that way since there has been a Torah and since there have been Prophets. Together we have read about it time after time, and yet again right here in Zechariah. Enough said for today.

The final 2 verses of chapter 7 are these:

CJB Zechariah 7:13-14 ¹³ and it came about that just as they hadn't listened when he called, so Yehoveh-Tzva'ot said, 'I won't listen when they call; ¹⁴ but with the power of a whirlwind I will disperse them among all the nations which they have not known.' Thus, the land was left desolate after them, so that no one came or went. They had turned a pleasant land into a desert."

Zechariah's forensic autopsy of what Judah had done in the past, and what happened as a result as a warning of what **not** to do in the future, comes to a stunning conclusion. God says: you refused to listen to Me, so I eventually quit listening to you. We must always understand the bedrock bottom line to this entire line of thought. It is this: obedience to God leads to stability and abundance. Disobedience leads to chaos and lack. Obedience to what? To our civil leaders? To manmade customs and traditions our religious leaders teach? No; obedience to the Torah and to the Prophets. Again: not to our Church leaders and institutions, or to denominational doctrines, or especially to our hearts that are, by definition, weak, fallible, and susceptible to corruption of every kind.

In the covenants God made with the Hebrews, He promised to be their God who was jealous for them. That is, no one was to touch that which is His and

His alone. However, as with all covenants, they come with caveats and conditions. God says if they keep their part of the bargain, He will listen to their requests. But, if they don't, then He won't. He won't stop being their God any more than a parent that spansks and then confines their rebellious child to their room for a few hours quits being that child's parent or stops loving them. But, there will be a time of disciplinary separation, and a time when their comforts and needs aren't met because this is a time of justice for their wrong doing. It remains the same now and forever for those of us who think to be joined to those covenants and to benefit by them.

So, instead of the Lord hearing Israel's prayers, He scattered them to the wind. They were dispersed randomly all over the known world. Like seed pods blown by a strong wind, there is no way to know where they will land. Nations had no reason to show kindness to Israel's and Judah's exiles. Compassion and privilege were reserved for the natural people of whatever nation they landed in; not for those who had been brought there that didn't belong there. Even more, because Israel and Judah were emptied of God's people, then the land became mostly desolate. That doesn't mean every acre became that way, but the bulk of it did. Not every Judean or Israelite resident was exiled; some were allowed to stay and tend to their fields, vineyards and orchards. But, they were the exception to the rule.

It is a historical reality that when Israel leaves the land God gave to them, the land quickly declines due to their absence. It has happened a few times in history. Back in the mid-1800's the famous Mark Twain made a visit to the Holy Land and said this about it:

Of all the lands there are for dismal scenery, I think Palestine must be the prince... Renowned Jerusalem itself, the stateliest name in history, has lost all its ancient grandeur, and is become a pauper village; the riches of Solomon are no longer there to compel the admiration of visiting Oriental queens; the wonderful temple which was the pride and the glory of Israel, is gone... Palestine is desolate and unlovely. And why should it be otherwise?...

However, in the mid-20th century, when Israel was reborn as a nation and the Israelites moved back in, the desolation began to transform back to the beauty and abundance we find there today. God's Word never fails.

Let's move on to Zechariah chapter 8.

READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 8 all

Chapter 8 is another that is not symbol laden, but rather explains Judah's, and by extrapolation, Israel's future. There is a promise of a restoration of the immense grace that God had at one time shown to them, which is mostly illustrated by them again being secure and at peace, as well as having great abundance return to their agricultural efforts. However... this comes with a condition. They must properly observe God's moral code: The Law of Moses.

The great Bible commentator of old, Jerome, who lived during the 4th century, and was an assistant to Pope Damasus I, had this to say about this part of Zechariah that I think frames it about as well as it can be done:

"By the separate words and sentences, in which Israel is promised not only prosperity, but things almost incredible in their magnitude, the Prophet declares, Thus saith the Almighty God. Saying, in other words, do not imagine that the things which I promise you are my own, and so disbelieve me as only a man. They are the promises of God which I unfold."

I want to take a moment to remind you that the novel Christian theological idea that a promise is somehow a special official instrument of God that is different from a covenant, or perhaps is but a one-way covenant (which is actually an oxymoron), is not true. A covenant is full of promises... an agreement between two parties... but it also has terms; that is what the vehicle of a covenant is designed to do. Each side has obligations, even if quite simple. For example, God's covenant with Abraham (that the Church tends to say is not a covenant,

it is a promise by God) required 1 thing for Abraham to receive what God promised to give to him: he had to leave his father's family and go to the land God would show him. Abraham did this, and that fulfilled his requirements. Had Abraham not done that, then the covenant would have been broken and the land would not have been given. Thus, here in Zechariah, God promised Israel a renewed prosperity but, Israel had a requirement: they were obligated to follow the Law of Moses as their condition for the promises to come about.

Once again the issue boils down to obedience. This is something that Israel's previous generations had ignored, still believing that because God was indeed a God of grace, and that Israel was His set-apart people, that even in their unfaithfulness He would nonetheless keep up His side of the bargain and give them nothing but blessings, and at the same time forego the curses (the punishments) for their many violations of the covenant terms. Sound familiar? I had more or less heard that all my years as a child and as a younger adult no matter what Church our family attended and am thankful God eventually straightened me out. What a dangerous doctrine that is to be taught to Believers because... just like for the returned exile's forefathers who thought of themselves as the perpetually immune... it gives a false sense of security.

Vs. 2, which includes the second mention of Yehoveh as the Yehoveh of Hosts already in this chapter, is a word formula that introduces each of the oracles in chapter 8 (of which there are 10). This first oracle is Hebrew poetry in its literary style. So, the exact words were partially selected so that they expressed the rather typical symmetry of Hebrew poetry. Parallelism... that is, two statements essentially saying the same things but said two different ways... is also employed but in a limited way. Therefore, it is important that we understand not to apply too much precision to the individual words because indeed they are poetic. Rather, it is the overall sense of the meaning and the emotion involved that we are to apprehend.

The CJB version of this verse really does a good job of bringing to us the height of the emotions expressed. Listen to this again:

CJB Zechariah 8:2 *"Yehoveh-Tzva'ot says, 'I am extremely jealous on Tziyon's behalf, and I am jealous for her with great fury.'*

The Young's Literal Translation version does this even better.

YLT Zechariah 8:2 *'Thus said Jehovah of Hosts: I have been zealous for Zion with great zeal, With great heat I have been zealous for her.*

The word zeal or zealous (sometimes rendered as jealous, which waters this down in modern English) is used 3 times in this verse. It is based on the Hebrew root word **qanah**. And, not surprisingly, the final verb of the verse (fury or heat) is in Hebrew **chemah**. When pronounced in Hebrew then we hear the rhyming between **qanah** and **chemah**. Thus, the overall idea and emotion is that God is enormously enthusiastic and passionate about His relationship with Zion (Jerusalem), and equally so determined to protect His Holy City and chosen place of dwelling on earth with fierce destructive rage. Folks, the intensity of His love for Zion and intensity of His protective instinct to inflict harm and annihilation upon anyone or any nation that would think to do harm to Zion cannot be measured. Yes, this is poetic. But Hebrew poetry just as English poetry serves the great purpose of communicating heights of feelings and depths of awe better than any other literary device.

This verse sends chills up my spine due to its forcefulness. Countless times in the Bible Israel's enemies are warned that they are playing with a fire they cannot hope to contain when they determine to do harm to God's people, to God's land, or especially to Jerusalem. Today, near the end of 2024, as Israel is still at war against Islamic forces that viciously attacked them seeking only to destroy Israel once and for all, and there are nations and faith groups that stand with those evil Islamic forces, what awaits them is probably beyond mere words to describe. We must always be aware that whatever nation we are part of, whatever fellowship of faith we belong to, we must measure it carefully as concerns Israel because how Israel is treated will greatly affect how God treats us. We can go along for an extended period of time not experiencing any discernable consequence should we stand with Israel's enemies; but, eventually, it will come.

Verse 3 in the CJB begins with: "I am returning to Zion..." This misses the mark. It is not "I am returning", it is "I have returned". Essentially God is saying that He had packed-up and left Jerusalem. He turned over power to Judah's enemies. God had literally kept His presence in the Temple, but His presence also literally departed when Judah had gone too far in its apostasy. In fact, we read in Ezekiel about this exact thing. Ezekiel directly speaks of The Glory of God departing. Listen to this extended excerpt from Ezekiel 8 and 9.

CJB Ezekiel 8:17-18 ***¹⁷ He asked me, "Human being, have you seen this? Does the house of Y'hudah consider it a casual matter that they commit the disgusting practices they are committing here, thus filling the land with violence, provoking me still more? Look! They are even putting the branch to their nose! ¹⁸ Therefore I will act in fury, my eye will not spare, I will have no pity. Even if they cry loudly right in my ears, I will not listen to them."***

CJB Ezekiel 9:1-7 ***Then he cried loudly right in my ears: "Summon the commanders of the city, each holding his weapon of destruction." ² At once, six men approached on the path from the upper gate, to the north, each man holding his weapon of destruction. Among them was a man clothed in linen, with a scribe's writing equipment at his waist. They entered and stood by the bronze altar. ³ Then the glory of the God of Isra'el was made to go up from over the keruv, where it had been, to the threshold of the house. He called to the man clothed in linen, who had the scribe's writing equipment at his waist. ⁴ Yehoveh said to him, "Go throughout the city, through all Yerushalayim, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who are sighing and crying over all the disgusting practices that are being committed in it." ⁵ To the others I heard him say, "Go through the city after him and strike! Don't let your eye spare; have no pity! ⁶ Kill old men, young men, girls, little children, women- slaughter them all! But don't go near anyone with the mark. Begin at my sanctuary." They began with the leaders in front of the house. ⁷ Then he said to them, "Defile the house! Fill the courtyards with corpses! Get going!" So, they went out, spreading death in the city.***

Then in Ezekiel 10:

CJB Ezekiel 10:4 *The glory of Yehoveh rose from above the keruv to the threshold of the house, leaving the house filled with the cloud and the courtyard full of the brilliance of Yehoveh's glory.*

And then finally in Ezekiel 11:

CJB Ezekiel 11:23 *Next, the glory of Yehoveh rose from within the city and stood over the mountain which is on the east side of the city.*

Ezekial is describing The Glory leaving the Temple and departing. The Glory is a proper name. The Glory is the name of a particular manifestation of God, just as the Angel of Yehoveh is a particular manifestation of God. The Glory represents His presence. So now, in Zechariah 8:3, God says His presence... The Glory... has returned to Jerusalem. This has a profound effect upon Israel and on Redemption History for mankind. God has begun the process to again dwell in His Holy City. But... it requires a Temple to do so, and that is why the urgency of God's demand to Zerubbabel and the Judeans to get His Temple rebuilt and put back into operation.

Verse 3 continues that when He returns, then Jerusalem will be called The City of Truth, and Yehoveh's Mountain. To get the full impact of this unique term for Jerusalem...City of Truth... we need to connect it to chapter 7 verse 9.

CJB Zechariah 7:9 *"In the past Yehoveh-Tzva'ot said, 'Administer true justice. Let everyone show mercy and compassion to his brother.*

Jerusalem as the City of Truth is the point from which true justice is established in Israelite society. As we're reminded on countless occasions, true justice is defined by the Law of Moses. This is about an ideal Jerusalem that went bad, but it will be restored. Listen to Isaiah express this thought.

CJB Isaiah 1:21 *How the faithful city has become a whore! Once she was filled with justice, righteousness lodged in her; but now murderers!*

Without The Glory returning, true justice cannot be restored. The ideals that are presented in the Torah and in the words of God's Prophets can be realized again as God returns to Jerusalem. In the final words of the final verse of the final chapter of Ezekiel, he describes the effect of the construction and completion of the Millennial Temple. This, of course, is a future event when this prophecy is brought to its fullest scope and completion.

CJB Ezekiel 48:35 ***""The perimeter of [the city] will be just under six [miles] long. And from that day on the name of the city will be Yehoveh Shamah [Yehoveh is there].""***

Here, finally, the ideal Jerusalem (which is embodied in the concept of Zion) happens. What was happening in Zerubbabel's day was merely another step... another stage... towards realizing this conclusion. In no way did the Temple and city of Jerusalem aspire to or attain the pure character of an ideal Jerusalem after Zerubbabel finished rebuilding the Temple; rather, idolatry would soon begin to infiltrate yet again. Not even the advent of Messiah in the 1st century could propel it to that high status. Rather, it can and will only come after His return. Thus, not long after Yeshua's death, due to the corruption of God's people the city of Jerusalem was again destroyed, and the Temple was razed one more time.

It is interesting to me that even among Christians, there is a hope that this ideal Jerusalem can come soon. Although the rebuilding of a Temple is necessary according to the Word and according to God's desires, much of the Church finds it as perhaps an evil necessity rather than a good thing. Jews, of course, pray constantly for a new Temple. The irony is that large segments of both Jews and Christians envision a divided or shared Jerusalem as the fair and loving way to finally achieve this goal. This is a fantasy. There will be no presence of God when a shrine to a false-god sits next to His Temple. There will be no designation of Jerusalem as the City of Truth when half of the city worships another god. The UN and much of the world has, since the 1940's, envisioned Jerusalem as a designated International City that belongs to no nation. While this might sound nice, God's presence will never be there under such a circumstance.

Verse 4 begins the next oracle and works with verse 5 to picture an entire new dynamic for Jerusalem when God's presence returns there to its fullest.

CJB Zechariah 8:4-5 ***⁴ Yehoveh-Tzva'ot says, 'Old men and old women will once again sit in the open places of Yerushalayim, each one with his cane in his hand, because of their great age. ⁵ The city's open places will also be full of boys and girls playing there.'***

The idea here is based on the principle of merism. Recall that merism is a literary device that acts as bookends. That is, in this case one bookend is old men and women, and the opposite book end is boys and girls, with the understanding that everything in between is also included. Our everyday expression of saying "From A to Z" is merism. So, these 2 verses express the idea of the entire population of Jerusalem, not just the two bookends. That said, the 2 bookends do have special significance. Old men and women express the idea of living to a comfortable old age. They, in turn, are surrounded with an abundant number of young children who are going to bloom into responsible and faithful adults. These are considered as great blessings; rewards, actually, for faithfulness. But, now, let's understand better how people of Zerubbabel's time would have thought about this.

In that era, one of the chief values of people was the labor they could supply. Much labor was needed merely to have the necessities of life. So, here we have old men and women who are not needed for work. It takes a very vibrant and healthy economy for there ever to be a time when even the elderly didn't have to contribute to the labor force. The same goes for young boys and girls. At a very early age, from the time a child could understand a simple instruction and do the most basic of tasks, their labor was needed. So, for these children to be spending their time playing says those same societal conditions I just spoke about for the elderly have to exist. This is another way of expressing the ideal.

And, for the people of Zerubbabel's era, with the exile still burned into their memories, this prophecy is a promise of a reversal of the destruction and misery they suffered, and the foreign control and occupation they currently

live under. But, an important principle is also front and center. It is that with spiritual peace comes material blessings. Spiritual peace must come before physical peace can happen. Yeshua expressed this same thought a little differently.

CJB Matthew 6:33 *But seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Moving on to verse 6 begins the next oracle... the 4th one.

CJB Zechariah 8:6 *Yehoveh-Tzva'ot says, 'This may seem amazing to the survivors in those days, but must it also seem amazing to me?' says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot.*

Why would Israel be amazed at what the previous oracle described? After all, they have God's Word and the previous oracles of their Prophets to refer to. It's because they had never known such conditions to exist. So, how would it be possible for them to imagine what it looks like in action? And, as the End Times arrives and our world deteriorates even further than we could imagine, believing God's promise to bring about such ideal conditions will seem more and more as a distant and unattainable fiction. If we are intellectually honest about it, what God says is going to happen seems impossible. So, when it does happen, amazement is much too weak of a word to describe the reactions of the surviving remnant of humanity on earth. But, is God supposed to be amazed that His plans worked!? Obviously this is a rhetorical question with the answer being: "of course not!"

Zechariah surely knew this oracle was not for his time, except, perhaps, in the most minimal way. For one reason, the words "in those days" had a specific meaning to the Israelite psyche. It meant a future time, a Messianic time, which he and the Judeans inherently knew had not arrived. They longed for that day. They believed that day would come. But today was not that day, and it still is not for us. The survivors this is ultimately speaking about are the surviving remnant of Armageddon, both Hebrew and gentile.

Using that same word formula of "Thus spoke Yehoveh of Hosts", verse 7 brings us yet another oracle.

CJB Zechariah 8:7 *Yehoveh-Tzva'ot says, 'I will save my people from lands east and west;*

This 5th oracle indeed did describe the Jews return from Babylon and out of other pagan lands as well. But, it was limited. I remind you that fewer than 5% of Judah's exiles chose to return. And, it involved very few ... an incidental few... of the 10 tribes that had been exiled by Assyria from the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim/Israel that happened some 200 years before Zechariah's time. This is clearly an End Times event, and so it must be fully inclusive of all the tribes of Israel.

Saying the people will come from the east and the west is another merism. East and West are the bookends of all the possible directions people could come from. So, this is not to say ONLY the East and West, but not including the North and South. It means everywhere. And, this too is prophesied by other Prophets.

In the famous two sticks prophecy of Ezekiel, we read:

CJB Ezekiel 37:21-22 *²¹ Then say to them that Yehoveh ELOHIM says: 'I will take the people of Isra'el from among the nations where they have gone and gather them from every side and bring them back to their own land. ²² I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Isra'el; and one king will be king for all of them. They will no longer be two nations, and they will never again be divided into two kingdoms.*

In conjunction with verse 7, verse 8 expands on the thought.

CJB Zechariah 8:8 *I will bring them back, and they will live in Yerushalayim. They will be my people; and I will be their God, with faithfulness and justice.'*

God actively caused Israel to be scattered and so then He will cause Israel to be gathered back home. It thrills me to no end that I have the privilege of living in this time when this prophecy is being fulfilled. Remnants of the 10 Lost Tribes are returning home. In fact, just this week, the premier Israeli newspaper wrote a story about a young Israeli soldier killed in action. They pointed out that he was NOT a Jew. Rather, he was a returnee from one of those 10 Lost Tribes.

We'll pause here for today and pick up with verse 8 next time.