

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH
Lesson 15, Chapter 8

As the Book of Zechariah progresses, we find with each new chapter its messages hitting closer and closer to home because more and more of it has to do with a time in history that not only lies not far ahead of us, but also the time in which we are now living. Therefore, as we move further into Zechariah, I'm going to exhort you to grasp that although it was written so very long ago, God is speaking through His Prophet to you, to me, to us all in the 21st century and beyond (if there *is* a beyond). So, I will be commenting more about how this affects us...what I suppose the Church calls "application"... because I see it as urgent.

Has it occurred to you the amazing privilege that we all have to be present during this era... such a short slice of historical time... in which the fulfillment of some of the most ancient prophecies are actually taking place; and we are here as eye witnesses? As I think about an era of the past that might have been similar in its stunning impact, the closest parallel I can see would be to have been Jews living in Judah when Yeshua was born, grew up, began His short ministry, did so many miracles, died on the cross, arose from the dead, and ascended to Heaven. What must it have been like to witness some or most of that personally? What must it have been like to have been in Jerusalem to celebrate yet another typical Shavuot when the Holy Spirit arrived in a spectacular way to disrupt history? I wonder if those living then understood how few in the history of mankind got to see what they saw?

And now, in the 21st century, especially for those of us who were born in the 1930's and 40's, we were alive to see the rebirth of Israel; a prophetic milestone whose only rival was perhaps the birth of Yeshua. Nearly 2000 years had passed since the end of Israel to its new beginning. A hundred generations had come and gone, with both religious Jews and Believing gentiles hoping their day would be the time when God brought Israel back to life as per several prophecies predicting... perhaps, better, promising... it. But it is we who are living now that have been granted the honor to see it. Even more, if (like me) you were alive when Israel was reborn in 1948, and have been so blessed as to still be alive, then we also are eyewitnesses to the 10 Lost Tribes

beginning their trek back home in ever increasing numbers. If we think about it very hard, it is too overwhelming to fully drink it all in.

We have been blessed with the 1 in a million honor of being alive for all this, but it brings with it a duty. Our being here at this time is not a coincidence. Our God-given duty is to tell those who have yet to recognize what is happening, and that indeed those improbable prophecies from so long ago have come alive, meaning it won't be long before other ones about the End Times begin to come alive as well. And, our duty is also to preserve our witness through verifying it to others, teaching our children, perhaps writing about it, and helping so many who may currently be oblivious to grasp that what is happening all around us is not random nor self-fulfilling hopes and dreams or fears, but rather is the unstoppable redemption plan of God playing out just as it was foretold. The Book of Zechariah gives us even more insight into **our** time, and the time that is just around the corner. So, let's continue to explore what it tells us and more importantly, let's take it to heart and allow it to affect our lives.

Let's re-read chapter 8 beginning with verse 8.

RE-READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 8:8 – end

I ran across a statement written by the eminent 19th century German Bible scholars Kiel and Delitzsch that I want to share with you. Keep in mind that they wrote their commentary during the time of the American Civil War. That is, a time when any thought of Israel being reborn as a nation wasn't on anybody's radar. Most Christians had long ago given up on this prophecy and instead created a trove of Church doctrines to try to dance around what they saw as its failed prediction. To be more precise, what you are about to hear was written more than 80 years before Israel was reborn.

"The deliverance of the people of God out of the heathen lands did indeed commence with the return of a body of exiles from Babylon under the guidance of Zerubbabel, but their deliverance out of all the countries of the earth is still in the future".

“Still in the future”. Yes, it *was* in the future for them, but it is not for us. For us, it is the present. It has happened and is happening as I speak.

We concluded at verse 8 last week with the oracle saying that not only will the people be returned to the land (former Judah and Israel in general) but also to Jerusalem... the city... in particular. While indeed that did happen (at least for some Israelites coming from some countries), the replay of this prophecy for the future didn't happen immediately upon Israel being reborn. In the 20th century the Jews returned to the Holy Land, but minus Jerusalem. Because of the sensitivity of especially Europe to the crucial role that the Arabs played in WWII by being the major source of oil to fuel our war machinery, the UN refused to include Jerusalem in the bargain. It remained in Muslim Arab control for just shy of 30 more years, until in 1967 Israel won it in yet another war with the Arab world that Israel didn't start. So, we see the prophecy of Zechariah 8:8 happening, but in stages. First, the rebirth of Israel and the return of the Jews. Then later the recapture of Jerusalem. And now, the return of the 10 Lost Tribes. And please notice something else; it is always war that precedes and enables these prophecies to be fulfilled. This has always been God's pattern, acting in stages and steps and in using wars, and it will always be so until the new heavens and earth appear.

Verse 8 continues with a phrase we find uttered by several Prophets: “they will be My people, and I will be their God”. I won't dwell on this point, but the reality is that literally this phrase does NOT say “I will be their God”. Rather it says “I will be their Elohim”. I have taught before that there is only 1 word in the Hebrew vocabulary that can truly be translated to the word “God”, and that is **yah**. Although both Jewish and Christian scholars have for centuries casually continued to translate **elohim** as God, it has always been suspected that there is a problem with this interpretation. The term **elohim** is used a few times in the Bible to refer to what is called the Divine Counsel in Heaven. And, when it is discussed, it makes Yehoveh as the chief **elohim** over the other lesser **elohim**. We also learn that Adam was meant to be the earthly equivalent of the **elohim** in Heaven. That is, just as the **elohim** in Heaven are essentially the administrators of all the lesser heavenly creatures, so are humans to be the administrators of Earth for the lesser creatures. So, it seems

to me that when God is referred to as **elohim**, it is more as the role of chief administrator (with, of course, nothing being above Him).

However, the bigger point I wish to make is this: the return of the scattered Israelites to Israel includes their spiritual restoration to Yehoveh. I have heard this sort of concept mentioned among Pastors and scholars, and usually it is along the lines of these scattered Israelites having a spiritual restoration (wherever they happen to be living), **before** coming back to Israel. However, due to some translations, there is a thread within especially the Hebrew Roots and Messianic movement to say that the spiritual renewal will happen only AFTER they return. Listen to this CJB translation of Ezekiel that is very much in line with the KJV and the NAS.

CJB Ezekiel 36:21-25 ***²¹ But I am concerned about my holy name, which the house of Isra'el is profaning among the nations where they have gone. ²² "Therefore, tell the house of Isra'el that Yehoveh ELOHIM says this: 'I am not going to do this for your sake, house of Isra'el, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have been profaning among the nations where you went. ²³ I will set apart my great name to be regarded as holy, since it has been profaned in the nations- you profaned it among them. The nations will know that I am Yehoveh' says Yehoveh ELOHIM, 'when, before their eyes, I am set apart through you to be regarded as holy. ²⁴ For I will take you from among the nations, gather you from all the countries, and return you to your own soil. ²⁵ Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness and from all your idols.***

The key word is "then". In other words, the way this is translated is, return first and be spiritually renewed later. However, the word "then" is not in present in this verse in the Hebrew. Rather, it more literally reads "I will sprinkle clean water on you". So, it doesn't specify the LOCATION or SEQUENCE of where or when this sprinkling (purification) occurs. Rather, it only means that spiritual restoration is part of the process of returning, whether it happens before or after the Israelites return home, and from what I have witnessed, it happens both ways.

Verse 9 says:

CJB Zechariah 8:9 *"Yehoveh-Tzva'ot says, 'Take courage, you who are hearing only now, in these days, these words spoken by the prophets when the foundation was being laid for rebuilding the temple, the house of Yehoveh-Tzva'ot.*

This is the beginning of the 6th oracle. And, what it is expressing is a strong and unshakeable conviction that the Temple being rebuilt will bring a sea change about in the Judean's circumstances... that is what "the words spoken by the Prophets" have been about. What will follow a rebuilt Temple is a better existence for the Judeans, full of prosperity and abundance. Lest this be misunderstood, this is not the Prosperity Doctrine championed by Joel Osteen. That is, whereas materialism and luxury to the point of decadence is the heart of the Prosperity Doctrine, when the Bible speaks of abundance and prosperity it centers mostly on sufficiency of food and absence of war, not on wealth. Indeed, from the beginning of Haggai and now Zechariah, the returned exiles have had a tough go of it. They have experienced resistance to the project, poor weather conditions, and so, poor harvests. They have suffered lack of everything, although not quite so terrible as to be famine. And, God through these 2 Prophets tells these Judeans that the reason for the absence of abundance and prosperity is because they had failed to rebuild the Temple. Now that the Temple is well underway (this verse speaks of the Temple foundation being laid) and God can see the determination of the Jewish leadership to complete it, then the resistance has diminished, the weather has improved, and along with it crop yields have risen. Therefore, "take courage". A much better sense of the meaning of this phrase than to take courage is to be strong. Don't slack off. Just because things are going pretty well for the moment doesn't mean it's going to be an easy task to get to the finish line so don't get discouraged when some roadblocks are encountered. In fact, the timing of the giving and writing down of this oracle seems to be 2 years after the laying of the new Temple foundation. Therefore, there has been at least 1, and probably 2, agricultural cycles since then and already the Judeans are seeing change for the better in food production.

Verse 10 reads:

CJB Zechariah 8:10 *For prior to that time, there were wages neither for people nor for animals; moreover, it was unsafe for anyone to go out or come in, because of the enemy; for I set all people each against the other.*

Prior to that time (or more literally, before those days) is referring to before the Temple rebuilding had been restarted by Zerubbabel. No wages for people or animals mean there was no expected return on the investment of their labor and time. Since animals were essentially for the ancients like our machines are for us now, the idea of man and animal together represents labor and work. Such a combination ought to bring profit. But, before the work on the Temple was restarted, it means the labors of man and beast hadn't been bringing the expected benefit.

Making matters worse, just living in Yehud was unsafe. The Samaritans who lived in the former Judah when the exiles returned were joined by other that had been residing there who simply wanted to make these returning exiles lives harder and more dangerous. Saying all people were against each other is a way of saying that a lot of societal chaos was happening. Law and order were in short supply. The Persians wanted the returning Jews to police themselves, but the Jews were ill equipped and at first they were not up to the task. But, now things are better. Zerubbabel is a good administrator and so has a good working system in place to subdue the former chaos. And, yet, we are always to keep in mind that God is not crediting the good work of people for the better conditions the Jews are now living under. Rather, this is happening as a divine reward for obeying God by rebuilding His Temple.

Verse 11 actually addresses the "but, now" that is set-up by verse 10. Things are going to change in a positive way.

CJB Zechariah 8:11 *But from now on, I will not treat the remnant of this people as I did before,' says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot.*

Instead of allowing or even causing His people trouble (a result of their disobedience), now owing to their increased obedience (reflected in working diligently to rebuilt the Temple) blessings are being unleashed. Who is the remnant of this people God is going to bless? Is it the returned exiles, or is it all the surviving Jews? Very likely the remnant means all of the Jews who re-establish their relationship with Yehoveh, although I suspect from the next verse that it means those from among the returnees, because the next verse says:

CJB Zechariah 8:12 *'Now they will sow in peace, the vine will give its fruit, the ground will produce its yield, the sky will give its dew, and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.'*

The first phrase to open this verse actually reads a bit awkwardly and most literally says "the seed of peace". It's the Hebrew word **shalom** that I think is causing the issue. There is a tendency among translators to always want to use "peace" to translate **shalom**, and that is an error. **Shalom** is a concept, and it more means divinely provided well-being. So, depending on what the subject is, the **shalom** it receives will manifest in different ways. A seed having peace makes no sense. But, a seed that receives or produces well-being does. That is, the job of seed is to produce food. Thus, a seed that has been provided with **shalom** provides an abundance of food.

The vine will receive and produce its own kind of **shalom**, which results in increased fruit (grapes). The ground (the **eretz**) producing its yield and the sky giving its dew are frequently used in tandem in the Bible regarding field crops growing because the earth gets sufficient rain to support plant growth as it was meant to.

God saying He will cause this blessed remnant to experience all of these things basically goes back to the idea of His people being loyal and faithful to the Covenants God made with them. In most cases, this refers primarily to the Covenant of Moses. One of the great promises of God to His people is that loyalty to the covenant brings with it blessings of peace and plenty. That the passage says the beneficiaries of this peace and plenty are the remnant (again, defined as those who re-establish their relationship with Yehoveh),

repeats a very important biblical principle that the Constantinian Church has significantly watered down or eliminated altogether. That is, loyalty to a covenant is always expected, or the offending party to the covenant terms (the party that breaks its terms) is penalized. I want to detour for just a short time to address something important that is directly connected and applicable to what we've been reading.

Believers, you may not realize it, but you all are party to a covenant (it is said that this covenant is the New Covenant as introduced in Jeremiah 31). However, the Church historically says that a Believer's level of loyalty to the New Covenant's terms plays no role in the blessings that result from it, and that the element of curses has been abolished. It is said that God has obligated Himself to fulfill His side of the covenant to its fullest, but the Believer has no such obligation. In fact, most branches of the modern Evangelical Church insists that all you need is a momentary loyalty to the covenant; at that point, even should you walk away from it, it is to God as though you are still loyal to it.

I must tell you that if that were to be true, such a thought is a complete re-write of what a covenant is. Further, in no way does Scripture ever re-write or re-define covenant, it is Church that has done this. For God, it is your obedience that reflects your loyalty. At every turn in the Bible... Old Testament and New... we get a reminder or a story that reinforces that the entire constellation of what the term "obedience" means, and always it centers on covenant. There is nothing else to be obedient or disobedient to when it comes to our relationship with God than covenant. That is, should a person claim they are being obedient to God, what does that mean to them? Where and how is that obedience defined? If God doesn't give us a set of rules or laws or terms and conditions to go by, then we have nothing to be obedient or disobedient to.

God gave Adam and Eve a one-law Torah: do not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. They broke that law, and they faced the terrible consequence. Let me give you an illustration: on earth, in civil society, can any of us be criminals or lawless if there are no rules or laws to break? The Church counters that by saying that instead of a set of rules or laws, after Yeshua

came it is the Holy Spirit in us that will inform us what God wants us to do (or not do) at any given moment, thus disavowing any standard, objective, universal or even consistent biblical moral code that had ever existed. This disconnects us from the concept of loyalty or faithfulness to a covenant... any covenant. Can you see the illogical nature of this line of thought that required the Church to do a complete re-definition of some terms that the Bible never changed? All consequences God-worshippers face are based on obedience or disobedience to a predetermined and agreed to set of obligations set down in a covenant. And, all blessings from God that one might hope to receive are also based on the obedience or disobedience to a predetermined and agreed to set of obligations set down in that same covenant. Although I've used the following verse to speak about eternal security, I also want to use it to highlight how a covenant actually works in light of what I have just explained.

CJB Matthew 5:17-19 ***17 "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. 18 Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened. 19 So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.***

So, there you have it. Yeshua just explained in slightly different words how a covenant works. Disobeying brings one result; obeying another and different result. If there were to be no covenant involved, then there would be no laws or rules to break and so our behavior would have no bearing on the consequences of our behavior or in our relationship with God. As to what it specifically is that clarifies and elucidates where those rules and laws are found for a follower of Christ, Jesus says it is the list of the terms and rules of the covenant as found in the Torah and the Prophets. Those same rules and terms with the same kinds of consequences were at play for those Jews returning from Babylon, just as they are for us in the 21st century.

Zechariah 8:13 says something pretty interesting.

CJB Zechariah 8:13 *House of Y'hudah and house of Isra'el, just as you were formerly a curse among the nations, so now I will save you; and you will be a blessing. Don't be afraid, but take courage!*

This is one of those prophecies that has a now and later fulfillment. Some of this happened when Judah returned from Babylon. But it would not achieve its fullest scope, nor rise to its completion, until a time future to Zechariah. Amazing as it is, it is we who are living at this moment that are witness to the beginning of the fullest scope of this prophetic fulfillment. Judah has come home to Israel, and the House of Israel (the 10 Lost Tribes) has begun joining them.

But, what does it mean that they (all the exiled Israelites) were formerly a curse among the nations? Does it mean that they brought a curse upon the nations they were scattered to? What it means is that their exile due to their years and years of gross disobedience has brought upon their heads the curse (the punishment) as listed in the Covenant of Moses for doing what they did. That is, they now represent and identify as a cursed people living out the curse they brought upon themselves. This cursed people live in several different gentile nations, and most of the time in not particularly pleasant circumstances. However, the time will arrive when God saves them by bringing them home, and anointing them with blessing.

For the exiled of the House of Judah, that time of curse was their God-imposed 70 years of expulsion from their land, which was coming to a close. For the House of Israel, that time of their curse of exile was nowhere near to being over. Now back in Judah (or more accurately, in the Province of Yehud), God was taking these Jews back into a state of divine blessing.

Sadly, covenant loyalty and the blessings received would slowly descend into disobedience, and finally some 600 years later, Judah would suffer the same fate yet again: the curse of exile to foreign nations. The House of Israel had never rejoined their brothers. But, in 1948, God decided that this most recent exile of the House of Judah was over; the curse was lifted, and they were brought home to be blessed again. Although it was delayed for about 50 years, the House of Israel also had their doors flung open and God lifted their curse

so that they, too, could come back home, join Judah, and experience renewed blessing. In the course of Redemption History, this is where we, and the world, stand today. This means, we stand on the threshold of the End Times or, as I think, we have just taken our first step into it.

Next, in verses 14 and 15, God says:

CJB Zechariah 8:14-15 ***¹⁴ "For Yehoveh-Tzva'ot says, 'Just as I resolved to do you harm when your forefathers provoked me,' Yehoveh-Tzva'ot says, 'and I did not relent; ¹⁵ so now, I resolve to do good to Yerushalayim and to the house of Y'hudah. Don't be afraid!***

Verse 14 references back to the earliest words of Zechariah as we find in chapter 1 verses 4-6.

CJB Zechariah 1:4-6 ***⁴ "Don't be like your ancestors. The earlier prophets proclaimed to them, Yehoveh-Tzva'ot says to turn back now from your evil ways and deeds'; but they didn't listen or pay attention to me," says Yehoveh. ⁵ "Your ancestors, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever?
⁶ But my words and my laws, which I ordered my servants the prophets, overtook your ancestors, didn't they? Then they turned and said, 'Yehoveh has dealt with us according to our ways and deeds, just as he intended to do.'"***

So, here God is recounting when He determined to do harm as a punishment to Judah (as well as to the House of Israel) for their lack of covenant loyalty and obedience. This is expressed further as meaning their commission of evil deeds and adopting evil ways. Good and evil are covenant words. They are also words that define morality, as well as what it means to violate terms of the covenant. Thus, for us to speak of anything that has no moral element, but rather is all about human preferences, then the terms evil and good do not apply. Rather, the terms right and wrong according to some secular human-devised civil codes are more appropriate. In other words, it can be wrong to go 45 mph in at 35 mph speed zone, but it is not evil because it isn't a matter of

morality. To be clear: it was violating God's laws of morality that was the issue for which Israel was punished.

"Our ways" refer to societal and religious norms and customs, while "our deeds" refers to our behaviors. So, it wasn't just Judah and Israel's evil behaviors that were at the root of their exiles., it was also their adopted society-wide norms and customs that were evil and this was because those norms varied from God's instructions. Our deeds can be thought of mostly as referring to us as individuals. Our ways are more referring to our corporate identity... from our extended family, to our congregation, to our tribe or nation. Thus, Yehoveh dealt with Judah and with Israel due to the entirety of their wickedness at every level.

It is interesting that should one take the time to carefully read the extensive record written by William Bradford, the leader of the Pilgrims that came to America in 1620, you will find that this was exactly his worry and concern. He felt that he and his group of like-minded Christ followers had been striving, as individuals, to produce nothing but good behaviors based upon the Torah. But, this was at odds with what the Church said they must do. For Bradford, the Church's ways had become so evil and corrupted that he was afraid that he and his group were going to be part of the collateral damage God would eventually inflict upon that wayward Church. Thus, out of self-preservation, rather than to stay affiliated to the Church any longer, they separated themselves from it. The Church recognized this and so labeled them as Separatists. The Pilgrims left the Constantinian Church altogether, and went to a distant place where they could begin a new society that practices God's ways, corporately. If only those Judeans and Israelites who saw how wicked the ways of their societies of Judah and Israel had become had decided to pack up and move to somewhere that they could bring their true, biblical faith with them, but no longer be subject to the wicked ways mainstream Judah and Israelite societies had become, their fate would have been far different than that of their Hebrew brothers and sisters who stayed and kept on following their current ways.

As I've mentioned before, and will repeat many more times, the motto of the Pilgrims was:

CJB Revelation 18:4 *"My people, come out of her! so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not be infected by her plagues,*

Verses 16 and 17 add the important element that everything God is promising to do for Judah and Israel is conditional.

CJB Zechariah 8:16-17 *¹⁶ These are the things you are to do: speak the truth to each other; in your courts, administer justice that is true and conducive to peace; ¹⁷ don't plot harm against each other; and don't love perjury; for all these are things I hate,' says Yehoveh."*

Once again, the language typical of covenant is brought up. This is NOT a newer covenant being announced; rather, this is simply a reiteration of the terms of the Covenant of Moses. And, like all covenant operation, the blessings God promises to deliver are contingent upon God's covenant people upholding their end of the bargain.

What we see is Judah being instructed about their deeds and ways. These words are not meant to replace the many Torah commandments, but rather sort of gives a Reader's Digest version of what it all boils down to in human-to-human relations. The reality is, that if a person adopts just these as the fundamental bywords of their lives and behavior, then obedience to all the other commands easily falls into place.

What is meant by speak the truth? This means far more than merely not to lie to one another. We need to take this in the context of the name God will give to the redeemed Jerusalem called Zion: The City of Truth. This, too, does not mean The City of Not Telling Lies. The truth is God's truth. The truth is who God says He is, who He says we are, and how we are to think and behave to be in harmony with Him and with the Universe He created.

For us, the first step to telling the truth is to discover the truth; and that is accomplished by knowing God's Word. The next step is to live the truth. After that, truth is to tell people that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lives and that His Word to humanity is the Bible. The truth is to measure what we

believe and how we behave according to what God tells us we should. The truth by definition can only be one truth from one source: the originator of truth... The Father. Opposition to that truth, is never truth. Truth is not to be tolerant or inclusive; truth, like salvation, is the narrowest and most exclusive of roads. Truth is to stand up against secular ways that oppose God's ways, and also to stand up against religions... including Constantinian Christianity... that might have a measure of truth at their core, but then created some strange synthetic mix of God's words with their own manmade doctrines to lead people away from it.

We'll pause here and continue with chapter 8 next time.