

Lesson 13

Last week we looked at Chapter 8, which encourages the people to obey God because of the great blessings he has promised for his faithful people. And what were those blessings? There were many, but the greatest blessing and the one on which Chapter 8 is focused was the Messiah who was coming to bless the entire world and establish his eternal kingdom.

Zechariah 8 is one of the great church chapters of the Old Testament, and the language in this chapter mirrors what we see written about the church in Isaiah 2, Joel 2, Jeremiah 31, Revelation 22, and elsewhere.

Starting with verse 9, the chapter focused on more immediate concerns for Zechariah's listeners - the reconstruction of the temple and God's demands for how they should live. And before we finish this chapter we will see the church again, and we will finally get an answer to that question about fasting that the men from Bethel asked all the way back at the beginning of Chapter 7!

Zechariah 8:16-17

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.

In verses 16-17, God once again tells the people how they should live. Yes, the people had blessings, but they also had responsibilities. The commandments listed here remind us of the similar commands we saw in 7:9-10.

Notice the beginning of verse 16 - "these are the things that ye shall do." We can read and meditate on the word all day, but in the end what matters is what we do.

James 1:22 - But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

The first command is to "speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour." This command combines two vital concepts - our concern for the truth and our concern for our neighbor. Those two concerns must go together, as this command emphasizes.

The second command is to "execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates." This command reminds us what we saw in Zechariah 7:9 - "Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother." This justice includes individual justice (how we respond to those who wrong us personally) but also includes corporate justice (how society responds to those who wrong it). That latter view seems to be what is stressed here given the reference to "your gates" in verse 16. As before, the "judgment of truth" is impartial judgment.

Leviticus 19:15 - Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

The third command is to "let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor." We saw that same command in Zechariah 7:10 and discussed it there. Why is that command being repeated? For the same reason it is repeated all throughout the Bible - it is important, and God's people were not doing it as they should.

The Bible only has to command something once for it to be a command we must follow, but when the Bible commands the same thing over and over again, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, then that suggests we should really pay attention! God uses repetition for the same reason we do - for emphasis!

The fourth command is to "love no false oath." This command reminds us of the vision we studied in Chapter 5 in which the flying scrolls entered "into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name" (Zechariah 5:4). Bringing false testimony has always been a serious offense. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Exodus 20:16). In Chapter 5, we discussed how that particular sin may have been tied to the rebuilding of the temple.

Notice the words we are seeing in these commands, both here in Chapter 8 and earlier in Chapter 7 - truth, true judgment, mercy, compassion, peace. We are reminded of what Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23.

Matthew 23:23 - Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted **the weightier matters of the law**, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

That is what we are seeing here - the weightier matters of the law. There is always a temptation to focus on those things that we can tick off a list and then be done with - but we can't live like that and

be pleasing to God. God's message in Zechariah 8 and in Matthew 23 is a message to us as well - we need to focus on the weightier matters, and not leave the other matters undone.

At the beginning of this chapter we saw the jealousy of God, and we talked about the emotions of God. At the end of verse 17 we see another example of those divine emotions: "for all these are things that I **hate**, saith the LORD."

When God says that he **hates** something, we need to pay very close attention! We are reminded of the list in Proverbs 6:16-19, which has some overlap with the list here in Zechariah 8.

If God hates something, then God's people must hate that thing as well. Psalm 45:7 tells us that the Messiah would love righteousness and hate wickedness. That is our example - we must love righteousness and hate sin. And when we think about the terrible things that sin has caused and continues to cause in this world, hating sin should not be a problem for us.

And, although we are told that the world will hate us (Matthew 10:22), we cannot return that hatred and be pleasing to God. We must follow the example of Christ - he hates sin, but he loves sinners (John 3:16, Luke 19:10). And for that fact we should always be very grateful - because we are all sinners (Romans 3:23).

Zechariah 8:18-19

18 And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me, saying, 19 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.

Remember that question that was posed all the way back in the third verse of Chapter 7? Well, here finally is the answer! I wonder if Sherezer and Regemmelech even remembered their question? They had certainly gotten an earful from God between the question and the answer.

And the answer? Should they continue the fasts? Yes and no.

Yes, they should continue the remembrances, but those remembrances should become cheerful feasts rather than mournful fasts. Rather than a reminder of the sad past, they should look forward to the wonderful blessings that are coming for God's people.

I think we all must admit that such an answer would have had little impact had it appeared immediately after the question in Chapter 7. Only now, after the intervening messages from God, could the people really appreciate the answer here in verse 19.

In Zechariah 7:3, the people had asked about a fast in the fifth month. God's initial response to them in 7:5 mentioned fasts in the fifth and seventh months. Here in 8:19, we see fasts that were also being held in the fourth and tenth months. All four of these fasts were to be turned into feasts.

We talked about the fasts in the fifth and seventh months when we looked at Chapter 7. What were the fasts in the fourth and tenth months intended to remember? The fast held during the tenth month probably recalled the initial siege on the city.

Jeremiah 39:1 - In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, **in the tenth month**, came Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and they besieged it.

The fast in the fourth month probably recalled the month when the city was destroyed.

Jeremiah 39:2 - And in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, **in the fourth month**, the ninth day of the month, the city was broken up.

Far from fasting, these events were to become times of "joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts." The term "joy" used here means "exultation or rejoicing." The word "gladness" refers to the fellowship that family and friends share around a meal. The Hebrew phrase for "cheerful feasts" does not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament, but its meaning is clear.

God's message in giving them this answer is that things are going to be different. Past memories of pain will be replaced by these thoughts of future gladness. But, for that to occur, the people must do their part in obeying God. That is what the verses in between the question and the answer told them.

We talked earlier in this chapter about what we should *hate*. Verse 19 concludes with a reminder about what we should *love*: "therefore love the truth and peace."

Both love and peace. We cannot love the truth and not love peace; and likewise we cannot love peace and not love the truth. Peace and truth always walk hand in hand, and we must love them both.

Zechariah 8:20-23

20 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: 21 And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. 22 Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. 23 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.

With verse 20, and the phrases "it shall yet come to pass" (verse 20) and "in those days" (verse 23), God once again turns to blessings that were yet future for those in Zechariah's day. And, as we have seen before, these verses once again refer back to Isaiah 2 in looking forward to the church.

Look at verse 21 - "and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also." And look at verse 23 - "we will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you." And compare those verses with Isaiah 2.

Isaiah 2:3 - And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.

Look at verse 22 - "many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem." We saw that same prophecy all the way back in Zechariah 2:11 - "and many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people." Compare verse 22 with Isaiah 2.

Isaiah 2:2 - And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; **and all nations shall flow unto it.**

When did that prophecy come to pass? When did all nations flow unto the Lord's house? Ephesians 2 tells us that that prophecy was fulfilled in the church.

Ephesians 2:17-18 - And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

Isaiah 2, Zechariah 2, and Zechariah 8 are all pointing to the same great event - the time at which God would fulfill his promise to Abraham to bless the entire world (Genesis 12:3) - both Jew and Gentile - through the Messiah. And that happened in Acts 2, when the church was established and the gospel was proclaimed to all. Verses 20-22 here in Zechariah 8 are pointing straight to the church.

Verse 23 declares that ten men speaking the different languages of the world would seek God. Again, that happened in the church. And, in fact, the proclamation of the gospel in many different languages *literally* happened in Acts 2.

Verse 23 is an interesting reversal of what we see in Genesis 11, one chapter prior to the great promise in Genesis 12:3.

Genesis 11:7 - Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

That confusion of tongues occurred because of man's pride and arrogance. But the prophecy here is that the church would reverse that confusion.

There is one body (Ephesians 4:4), which is the church (Colossians 1:18, 24). Why?

Why is there only one church? Wouldn't things have been easier if God had, for example, created one church for the Jews and another church for the Gentiles? No. There is one church because God wants us to be reconciled to him in one body. There is one church because of the promise to Abraham, which Galatians 3:7-9 identifies as the gospel.

Anyone who argues in favor of having multiple churches celebrating their diversity of doctrines is sewing confusion - and we know that God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). What that means is that when we see confusion (as we see in the religious world today), we can be certain that God is not behind it. We can be certain that confusion is not part of God's plan for the church.

God's creation was scattered and confused in Genesis 11 because of its sin. That situation is *reversed* in the *one* church. And the church is the fulfillment of the great promise in Genesis 12, which was given to Abraham just a few verses after the tower of Babel in Genesis 11.

One more comment about verse 23 - the text says that some would "take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: **for we have heard that God is with you.**" How did they hear that? How did they know what these Jews believed? What caused them to go with them? It's the

same answer we see in Romans 10.

Romans 10:14-17 - How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

In this great prophecy about the church we see a reminder that we have a vital role in the plan of God. "For we have heard that God is with you." Is that what people today are hearing about us? Faith cometh by hearing - but what are they hearing? Our constant prayer and our constant effort should be that we will lead lives that cause people to say to us, "we will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you."

With the end of Chapter 8, the first part of the book of Zechariah comes to a close. The people are back from exile, they are rebuilding their ruined temple, they have been reminded of their responsibilities before God, and they have been given promises of wonderful blessings yet to come. Psalm 126 captures the scene beautifully.

When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

That is where we are at the end of Chapter 8.

Introduction to Chapters 9-14

One of the commentaries I read begins its discussion of Chapters 9-14 with the following statement: "Many have long agreed with the claim that Chapters 9-14 are perhaps the most problematic six chapters in the Bible." And when you read them, you quickly see why.

As one would expect, commentaries disagree about almost everything when it comes to these final

six chapters of Zechariah. We will need to tread carefully and keep our interpretative guidelines in mind. Also, as one would expect, those proclaiming various false doctrines have had a field-day when it comes to these final six chapters. Why? Because their difficulty makes them easy to twist.

Premillennialists, for example, cite these chapters for their false view that the Mosaic system will be brought back into force during the so-called millennial reign of Christ. (We know that claim is false based solely on what we have seen so far in Zechariah - the combined kingship and high priesthood, not to mention the countless other reasons we know that view is false from our study of the rest of the Bible!)

As with any difficult section of the Bible, our efforts to understand it will be richly rewarded, but that is particularly true of these six chapters. Why? Here is how one commentator answered that question:

In many respects the book of Zechariah stands as a capstone or culmination to prior biblical revelation. ... The book of Zechariah, particularly the final six chapters, functions much like a lens, both focusing and refracting theological concepts from the remainder of the Old Testament.

That claim about the book of Zechariah is confirmed when we turn to the New Testament to see how often the book of Zechariah is quoted - and particularly how often these final six chapters are quoted. For example, Matthew quotes Zechariah 9:9 and Zechariah 11:12-13.

Matthew 21:4-5 - *All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.*

Matthew 27:9 - *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value.*

Later we will discuss why that verse in Matthew refers to Jeremiah instead of Zechariah.

The book of John quotes Zechariah 12:10 and Zechariah 14:8.

John 19:36-37 - *For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.*

John 7:37-38 - *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*

Jesus quotes Zechariah 13:7 in Mark 14:27.

Mark 14:27 - *And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.*

And notice the introductory language in those references.

Matthew 21:4-5 - *All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet*

Matthew 27:9 - *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet*

John 19:36-37 - *For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled*

Mark 14:27 - *And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written*

The prophecies in Zechariah referenced by these verses were Messianic prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus. Why do I stress that fact? Because a common (liberal) view is that the prophecies originally had nothing to do with Jesus, but rather the New Testament writers combed through the Old Testament looking for verses that matched something in the life of Jesus, and then they pulled those verses out of context and turned them into Messianic prophecies. **That view is completely false.**

When the New Testament quotes an Old Testament prophecy and says "this is that," then **that is that!** The prophecies about Christ in Zechariah are just that - prophecies about Christ, and that is what they have always been from the day they were first proclaimed by God and written down by his prophets. If the New Testament says that an Old Testament verse was fulfilled by something that occurred in the life of Christ, then that is the final word on the subject. The same Holy Spirit who inspired the text of Zechariah also inspired the text of the New Testament.

And for those who would charge the New Testament writers with twisting the Old Testament, do they realize against whom they are making that charge?

Mark 14:27 - And **Jesus saith unto them**, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it

is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.

Did Jesus take that verse from Zechariah 13:7 out of context in applying it to himself? That is what some commentators falsely suggest.

The prophecies in Zechariah are all genuine prophecies, and some of them are prophecies about Christ - a fact we know from their citation in the New Testament. And that fact will be very helpful to us. How? **Because it will help us date the prophecies.** We know with absolute certainty that at least some of these prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus in the first century.

In addition to Messianic prophecies, another thing we will see frequently in these closing chapters of Zechariah is God's judgment against the nations. We see such judgments elsewhere in both the Old and New Testaments. Those judgments typically serve a number of functions.

- First, they show that God is the only true God and that God alone is worthy of worship.
- Second, as recognition of that fact, they often show the vanquished nations turning to God and making offerings to him.
- Third, they show the defeat of the oppressing nations resulting in great joy and relief among those who had been oppressed.
- And fourth, we see the end of the arrogant self-sufficiency of those nations who had rejected God and persecuted his people, making way for God's kingdom to take their place.

That pattern is a common one. We see it in Isaiah and Jeremiah; we see it here in Zechariah; and we see it in the book of Revelation. The oppressors of God's people will change, but how God deals with those oppressors will not - God judges them and holds them accountable for their sins against his people.

The themes of these judgments are themes we have seen before:

- God will accomplish his plans on this earth, and no one can stand in his way.
- God knows what is happening, and no one can hide from God or escape the judgment of God.
- God loves and cares for his people, and God will deal with any threats that are made against his

people.

If our interpretation of these chapters ever departs from those major themes, then we should take that as an indication that we have likely gone down the wrong path.

As with any difficult text of the Bible, a good starting point is to drive some tent pegs into the ground. That is, we should make note of some unmoving and immovable easy-to-understand facts that will help us interpret the more difficult verses. If our interpretation runs up against an immovable Biblical tent peg, then we need to change our interpretation. What are some of those tent pegs?

1. We have already discussed the first one. When the New Testament refers back to a prophecy in Zechariah and tells us what it means, then that ends the inquiry as to the meaning of that prophecy. We know with absolute certainty what that prophecy is about, and we know when it was fulfilled.
2. The new covenant replaced the old covenant, and the old covenant is never coming back (Hebrews 8:13, Colossians 2:14, Hebrews 7:12). There is no need for the old covenant to come back, and it can't come back as long as Jesus is both King and High Priest.
3. Under the new covenant, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile as to salvation in Christ (Romans 10:12, Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11).

Just three tent pegs, but most commentaries on Zechariah violate all of them!

Finally, it should go without saying, but let's say it anyway - we must pay very close attention to the context of these verses, and we should be on the lookout for any clues as to their time frame.

For starters, Chapters 9-14 follow Chapters 1-8! That doesn't sound like much of a news flash but you would be surprised at the number of commentaries that treat Zechariah as two completely separate and unrelated books. (They do the same with Revelation by treating Chapters 2 and 3 as being somehow unrelated to the chapters that follow.) Whatever we decide about Chapters 9-14, what we say should make sense when viewed in light of Chapters 1-8. Zechariah is a unified whole - as is the entire Bible.

As for the time frame, we should always look for it when studying any prophecy in the Bible. For example, the time frame is vital in understanding the book of Revelation, and fortunately the time frame of that book could not be stated any more clearly. Here in Zechariah we need to watch for

helpful phrases such as "in that day," and, of course, we need to note whenever the New Testament provides a time frame by telling us when a prophecy in Zechariah was fulfilled.

And one final guideline that has already proved helpful in our study of this book - we should use easy-to-understand verses to help us understand the more difficult verses.

For example, if our view of these chapters is that they contain signs of the end of the world, then again we know we have veered off course. Why? Because the end of the world will come like a thief in the night (2 Peter 3:10) at a time when no one suspects (Mark 13:33).

For another example, if our view of these chapters is that they teach the old covenant will come back into force and that the Jews will someday be living under a different gospel than the Gentiles, then we know that we have gone very badly wrong. Why? Because of at least two very easy-to-understand verses:

Hebrews 8:13 - In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

Romans 10:12 - For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

The old covenant has been replaced by the new covenant, and the old covenant is not coming back and cannot come back. And there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek as to salvation in Christ. Those are two of our Biblical tent pegs, and those tent pegs are supported by verses that are impossible to misunderstand.

The final six chapters in Zechariah are broken up into two main sections, each containing an oracle or a burden. Those two sections are Chapters 9-11 ("the burden of the word of the Lord in the land of Hadrach") and Chapters 12-14 ("the burden of the word of the Lord for Israel"). Let's start with the first of those two burdens in Zechariah 9:1.

Chapter 9

Zechariah 9:1

1 The burden of the word of the LORD in the land of Hadrach, and Damascus shall be the

rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD.

Commentaries differ on the precise meaning of the word "burden," which introduces Chapter 9 and later introduces Chapter 12. It can mean a "divine judgment," or it can just mean a "divine utterance." While we will see many judgments in these final six chapters, we will see other things as well, so perhaps the broader meaning is the better choice - a divine utterance.

The big question in verse 1 is the meaning of "the land of Hadrach." What is Hadrach? Where is Hadrach? There are almost as many answers to that question as there are commentaries, but I think we can focus our attention on two possibilities - one literal and one figurative.

The literal view is that Hadrach is the name of an actual city located somewhere in Syria. (Damascus, which is also mentioned, was one of the major cities in Syria.) The problem with this view is that Hadrach is nowhere else mentioned in the Bible, which leads some to wonder why it would merit such a large oracle from God.

Those that take this literal approach usually identify Hadrach with the city of Hatarikka, which is mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions. But that connection is tenuous, and it does not solve the main problem: why would this obscure city be mentioned here?

Why would God give such a long pronouncement against an obscure Syrian city that is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible? Also, note that verse refers not just to Hadrach but to *the land of* Hadrach. That sounds less like a city and more like a region or a nation. I think we need to look for a better explanation for Hadrach, and fortunately there is a better explanation.

It is possible that Hadrach is not the *literal* name of any city or nation, but is instead a *figurative* name. Before we consider what the name might depict, let's ask another question - are such figurative names used anywhere else in the Bible? Yes, they are.

In Isaiah 21:11, "the burden of Dumah" refers to Edom using the word Dumah, which means silence. In Jeremiah 25:26 ("and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them") and Jeremiah 51:41 ("how is Sheshach taken!") Babylon is referred to as Sheshach, which means humiliation. In Isaiah 29:1 ("woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt!") Jerusalem is called Ariel, which means the hearth of God.

And we see this done with *people* as well as with cities. The book of Jeremiah, for example, gives Pharaoh Neco one of the greatest nicknames in history. In Jeremiah 46:17 we read, "Call the name of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, 'Noisy one who lets the hour go by'" (RSV). The Living Bible paraphrase of

that nickname is "the man with no power but with plenty of noise." In the original languages, that nickname is a pun - it has a similar sound in Hebrew to Pharaoh's actual Egyptian name.

We see another example in Jeremiah 20.

Jeremiah 20:3 - And it came to pass on the morrow, that Pashur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then said Jeremiah unto him, The Lord hath not called thy name Pashur, but Magor-missabib.

Pashur was the priest who ordered Jeremiah to be beaten and placed in stocks. When Jeremiah got out of the stocks, he told Pashur he had a new name - Magor-missabib, which means "terror all around." That would be the plight of Judah when Babylon approached if the people listened to Pashur instead of Jeremiah.

So if we determine here that Hadrach was a divinely inspired (and possibly insulting) nickname, then it would not be the only one in the Bible. But what could Hadrach mean, and to what could it refer? What does the word mean?

#Zechariah