

## **Zechariah: Future Hope Despite Past Failure**

### **Zechariah 7:1-8:23**

**Scripture Reading Introduction: Zechariah 7:1-8:8** Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are three Minor Prophets who spoke after the Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah prophesied the Babylonian Captivity would last 70 years. Judah fell to Babylon because of her flagrant persistent sins against the Lord her God. Judah's history included the revivals of good kings like Josiah and Hezekiah, but she also fell to great depths of depravity under kings who rivaled Israel's Ahab and Jezebel for wickedness. Manasseh's wickedness sealed the judgment. Judah could look back at her history from Abraham to the Exodus to the Judges to Saul... and see repeated failure. One major message that God's Word gives us is that God's mercy is great. Our failures are frequent. They may be complete. Yet God graciously forgives and restores fallen failures. As we read Zechariah 7:1-8:8 note how God acknowledges the failures of His people even as He promises them a glorious future! Brothers and sisters, though we fail, we have hope that our God will be gracious and merciful. He will forgive our sins. God will never stop working on us until we see Him in glory. Then we will be like Him- without the presence of sin, made like our Savior, Jesus Christ!

**Sermon Introduction:** As we resume our study of Zechariah, let us go back to the beginning. Last week, we briefly looked at Zechariah's eight visions in Zechariah 1-6. We saw that the cleansing of Joshua portrays how Jesus Christ, our High Priest, took our sins upon Himself so that the Levitical high priest, Joshua, could be cleansed and restored to his priestly ministry among his people (ch 3). Zerubbabel, the Davidic heir and current governor, was anointed and enabled by the Holy Spirit to complete the temple (ch 4). The beautiful imagery of the Holy Spirit's illumination was found in the candle in the tabernacle and ten candles in the Solomonic temple. Zechariah's vision in chapter 4 shows a mega-candle with 49 lights fed by an endless supply of olive oil dispensed straight from the source of two olive trees. Of course, the Holy Spirit is often pictured not only as our Illuminator, but also our Anointer- the anointing of the Holy Spirit consecrates God's servant for service. All eight visions were given to a people in need of encouragement. They had experienced defeat at the hands of Babylon. They had faced greater spiritual defeats throughout history. Let's read the introduction to Zechariah to see this history of defeat as well as God's invitation to seek Himself genuinely in contrast to past hypocritical worship. **We are reading Zechariah 1:1-6.**

Zechariah's eight visions amplified the introduction's summons to seek God. Trust the One who restores, judges the nations, sends away Lady Wickedness, and is faithful to keep His Word! Trust the Omniscient Sovereign God to save and sustain you, body and soul! Today's sermon once again invites us as God's people to seek the Lord who mercifully restores despite past failures. The sermon title is "*Zechariah: Future Hope Despite Past Failure.*" While each of us must confess we fail, we know that our God is not done with us! Let us serve God faithfully, trusting that His plans for us are good! Philippians 1:6 assures us that God is not a quitter. The One who redeems His child will not stop working on us until He completes His good work in us and brings us to His presence in glory!

- 1. Past failure demands present genuine worship and service (Zechariah 7)**
  - 1.1 The Question: Should Mourning for Judgment Continue (Zechariah 7:1-7)?**

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**Simple answer:** Was past mourning genuine or for show (7:4-5)? When you eat and drink, do you glorify God, or simply satisfy yourself (7:6)? Didn't God command mourning during a time of success (7:7)?

#### 1.2 The Context: Mourning for sin must accompany repentance (reform)

**(Zechariah 7:8-12).** If sin is confessed (mourned) but continued in (practiced), then the repentance was not real. With God's command to mourn sin came a command to love their neighbor. Before the exile the Lord commanded through Micah (6:8):

*<sup>8</sup> He has told you, O man, what is good;  
And what does the LORD require of you  
But to do justice, to love kindness,  
And to walk humbly with your God?*

Now, many years later, the Lord repeats His command of old through the former prophets (Zechariah 7:9-10):

*<sup>9</sup> "Thus has the LORD of hosts said, 'Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; <sup>10</sup> and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.'*

Those words may remind you of the warnings of Amos against the social injustice of his day. The people of Amos' day spent their nights dreaming of evil works to commit against their neighbors by the light of day. The rich hurt the poor and took advantage.

The Lord reminds His people through Zechariah of their ancestors' refusal to listen to the Word of the Lord (Zechariah 7:11-12):

*But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears from hearing. <sup>12</sup> They made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the LORD of hosts.*

#### 1.3 The Conclusion: God's past judgment for sin was just (Zechariah 7:12b-14)

The people had "mourned", but continued to sin. They spoke words of sadness for sin, but lived lives enjoying sin! In other words, their repentance was a performance- the work of hypocrites- not genuine repentance. The people refused to listen to God's command to return to Himself and to do justly to their neighbors (7:13). When God's people ignored God, He ignored them. He did not listen to insincere prayers. Desolation was the result (7:14). The *pleasant land* was ruined and fruitless. The land of milk and honey experienced drought and poverty. The people were no longer gathered together as a family and a nation; they had been dispersed to the four corners of the earth in the Jewish *Diaspora*. Only a relatively few had returned to the Promised Land when King Cyrus gave permission to return 70 years after the Babylonian Captivity.

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#### 2. Future blessing demands present joyful worship and integrity (Zechariah 8)

##### 2.1 The Lord will return to restore truth, righteousness, and His ruling presence

**(Zechariah 8:1-8)** Last week we saw the Lord's sovereignty and omniscience in the first and eighth visions. The Lord has His watchers, patrolling the earth. He ensures justice is done to His people (punishment) and for His people (judging those who hurt "the apple of His eye") (2:8). Once again, the Lord reaffirms that He is jealous for His people (8:2; 1:14). The Lord had promised prosperity, comfort, and His presence (1:17).

God will be the wall of fire around His people; Jerusalem will no longer need walls for defense (2:4-5). Justice and righteousness rule within; citizens are safe from outside attack and unjust neighbors. Jerusalem will belong to the Lord (2:12)! Now Jerusalem is the "City of Truth"; Mount Zion is called "The Holy Mountain" (8:3). God dwells here!

Young and old enjoy the *Shallom* of God (Zechariah 8:4-5). People will live to a ripe old age and delight in their children and grandchildren playing in the streets.

If this Edenic utopia seems beyond belief- both God and men marvel at His faithfulness abiding with His people in righteousness and sovereign authority (Zechariah 8:6-8).

##### 2.2 God's people must be strong and sow to reap a blessing and be a blessing

**(Zechariah 8:9-13)** God's people in the present have work to do. There's a temple to finish building (8:9). Yes, this may be "the day of small things," but the day of small things may reap a great harvest! Take heart! Don't let the less-impressive temple, the financial struggles, or hardship discourage you!

The peace God withdrew when we dwelt in sin will be restored when we genuinely repent and return to the Lord our God (Zechariah 8:10-11). God generally prospers His people when they obey Him and do the work He has called them to do (Zechariah 8:12). God has given us six days to labor and work (Exodus 20:8-11). He won't prosper those who cheat, steal, or are lazy, but He does bless the work of those who serve Him with gladness both in worship and in their business dealings.

God's people must never fear men; when we fear God we can be "bold as a lion, fearless as a bear" (as the children's song suggests). When we are seeking to obey our God and seeking *HIM*, we become a blessing to others rather than a curse (Zechariah 8:13).

##### 2.3 God's people must live with integrity (Zechariah 8:14-17)

**The Almighty Sovereign God determined to do His people good (8:14-15)!** Just as God stubbornly refused to curse His precious people when Balaam begged at Balak's command, God will do His good will in blessing His own! What will change God's good intentions for His people? Satan? The world? Nothing can separate God's people from the love of God (Romans 8)!

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**The Servants of the Almighty Sovereign God must serve with integrity (8:16-17).**

Just as God refused to damn Israel with Balaam's bribery, so He judged His people when Moab drew His people from faithfulness to immorality. We can forfeit God's blessing and withdraw His favor by sinning against one another. Truth, justice, and peace should be sought among God's people by God's people (8:16). We must love our neighbors sincerely, and not be malicious (8:17). Whether in court or in society, let us not slander or perjure ourselves about our Christian brother and sisters' character!

**2.4 The Lord will be worshiped with joy by all people (Zechariah 8:18-23)**

**This sermon began with a question (7:1-7): Should we continue to mourn?**

**Finally, the sermon concludes with the answer (8:18-23): The Lord will turn His people's mourning to joy!**

As God's people obey His demand for truth, justice and peace (8:16), as we "love truth and peace" (8:19)... worship will no longer be characterized by mourning for our sins but by "joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts." Our tears of sadness become tears of joy at our God's goodness, grace, and mercy! Praise God, you have been forgiven! Come before His presence with singing! (Psalm 100)

The Lord commanded joyful singing for His people as they worship Him (2:10). When the Lord is in the midst of His people, there is fullness of joy!

**Conclusion:** People will come to Jerusalem to join themselves to the throngs worshiping our God (2:11). Instead of the Jews dispersed to the world as witnesses of the justice of God, the Gentiles come to "Mount Holiness" and the City of God to join the choir singing Hallelujah to our God! Holy huddles of people urge one another to go to Jerusalem to be where God dwells and is worshiped (8:20-23). The seed of Abraham with Christ their Messiah will be the blessing of the nations, as God has said! Brothers and sisters, as we go to the Lord in prayer today, let us ask the Lord to search us and know us. Let us confess anything that would prevent His favor upon us. Let us ask the Lord to help us to have integrity in our dealings with others and to loyally love and worship the Lord our God in the coming week!