

Zechariah Chapter Eight

Zechariah 7-8 contains *four* messages (cf. 7.4-7, 8-14; 8.1-17, 18-23) dealing with the issues of *fasting* and *feasting* introduced by a question from the people of Bethel (7.2-3). The *first* two messages are a *rebuke* of past and present behaviour. Their fasting was self-imposed and ritualistic in character (7.4-7). Instead, they should prioritise obedience and righteous living, *not outward* ritual (7.8-10), unlike their ancestors upon whom the wrath of God fell (7.11-14). But, the scattering of Israel amongst the nations would not be God's final word. The *second* two messages are a *revelation* of future blessing. Israel will be re-gathered and *fasting* will be replaced by joyous *feasting* (8.19).

The chapter contains *two major* messages ('the word of the Lord of Hosts', v.1, 18). These divide into *ten minor* messages which have been called 'a decalogue of divine words' ('thus saith the Lord of Hosts', v.2, 3, 4-5 etc.). Each contains a promise of future blessing for Israel. All that was being experienced in the Jerusalem of Zechariah's day, was a faint foreshadow of the unparalleled blessing of a future millennial day. *MacArthur: Zechariah 8 opens the window in the house of Israel so every Jew can look out on the kingdom to see what God has prepared for them that love Him.*

The Declaration of a Coming Kingdom [vv.1-17]

v.1: The opening verse reaffirms the divine authority of Zechariah's prophecy. 'Lord [Jehovah] of Hosts' occurs 18 times in this chapter alone (x53 in the whole prophecy). The *sevenfold* divine promises of this section are so incredible, almost unbelievable from a human standpoint, that a divine guarantee is required. Thus 'Lord of Hosts' assures that all the resources of an infinite, eternal and faithful God will fulfil every promise.

1. Divine Passion (v.2). The word 'jealous' (or 'zealous') expresses strong emotion. When a person is zealous for *another's* property it is *envy*; when they are zealous for their *own* property it is *jealousy*. An appropriate desire for what one has a right to. God has an exclusive, covenant relationship with Israel. He is therefore *intensely passionate* for His own people and cannot tolerate their mistreatment (Genesis 12.3). Thus, God will judge those heathen Gentile nations that added to the affliction of His people with great 'fury' or 'rage' (cf. 1.14-16; Isaiah 42.13). It is this intense love for His own which guarantees their future restoration and blessing. Equally, God expected His people to remain true to Him (Exodus 34.14; Joshua 24.19). God still yearns for the exclusive affection of His children today (cp. 2 Corinthians 11.2). If our hearts are not totally devoted to Him, we will soon feel his hand of chastisement (Hebrews 12.6, 11).

2. Divine Presence (v.3). Before the exile, God withdrew His presence from Israel (Ezekiel 9-11). He had now returned in Spirit with the remnant from exile (cf. 1.16; 4.6; Haggai 1.13) and would permanently 'dwell' (*sakan*) in Jerusalem at the appearing of the Shekinah glory in the person of the Messiah. It is our privilege today to ensure the glory of God fills the house (Ezekiel 43.4-5). *Dennett: He would not yet dwell in Zion until the establishment of Messiah's kingdom. The work which the children of the captivity, were at this moment doing, contained in itself the promise and the guarantee, of the fulfilment of all that God had spoken concerning the future glory of Jerusalem.* The presence of God will transform Jerusalem from an 'unclean woman' (Lamentations 1.17), 'harlot' (Isaiah 1.21), 'Sodom and Egypt' (Revelation 11.8) to 'the city of truth (faithfulness)', cp. Isaiah 1.26. Her people will be characterised by *truth* (true justice) and *faithfulness* toward God and men rather than spiritual infidelity (7.9-14, cp. Zephaniah 3.13). Indeed, the temple mount will be called the 'holy mountain' because of the Lord's presence (cf. 14.20-21; Psalm 2.6).

3. Divine Peace (vv.4-5). **v.4:** The image of 'old men and old women' with 'boys and girls' in the streets of Jerusalem presents a scene of idyllic tranquillity and security in the two extreme (and most vulnerable) times of life. During the destruction of Jerusalem, both of these groups had suffered greatly (Jeremiah 9.20-21; Lamentations 2.11-12, 21), but in millennial days the city will be re-populated and enjoy a time of great prosperity and peace (cp. 2.4; Nehemiah 7.4; 11.1-2). There will be no war and people shall reach advanced ages (Isaiah 65.20, 22), with many requiring walking canes. **v.5:** Children will *joyfully* and *continuously* play games in the streets.

4. Divine Power (v.6). Many of these promises seem impossible to fulfil. The word 'marvellous' is elsewhere translated 'wonderful' and has the thought of something hard or difficult to accomplish. The chiasmic form of the verse literally reads: 'It will be difficult in the sight of the remnant [in *those* days], but in *my* sight will it be difficult?' We must never limit God! *Spurgeon: Consider the infinite difference between God and man and look no longer at God through the misleading glasses of our own feebleness.* Do we really believe that God is able? Note the delightful uses of this word in other contexts (Genesis 18.14; Jeremiah 32.17, 26), and its appellation to Christ (Judges 13.18-19; Isaiah 9.6).

5. Divine People (vv.7-8). **v.7**: From whence will Jerusalem be populated? God will *deliver* and *gather* His people from the 'east' (lit. land of the sunrise) and 'west' (lit. land of the setting sun) and restore them to covenant relationship with Himself (Jeremiah 31.33-34). 'East' and 'west' are two extremes (cf. Malachi 1.11) to refer to a comprehensive and universal regathering from all parts of the earth (cf. Isaiah 11.11-12; Matthew 24.31). Never in the past has such a restoration taken place, the exiles from Babylon having returned only from the east. **v.8**: Israel will enjoy a national conversion, putting an end to the 'Lo-Ammi' ('Not My People') period of separation from God (Hosea 1.8-2.1, 23).

6. Divine Prosperity (vv.9-13). **v.9**: This section begins and ends with 'Let your hands be strong', i.e. the remnant of Zechariah's day was to derive comfort and encouragement from God's glorious promises. Do we? It would be two years until the temple was completely rebuilt. Note. 'Be strong' is linked to: *divine territory* to be possessed (Joshua 1.6, 9); a *divine temple* to be built (Zechariah 8.9) and *divine truth* to be preserved (2 Timothy 2.1-2). The 'foundation of the house' refers, not to the initial laying of the foundation (536BC, Ezra 5.16), but the recommencement of construction following the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah (520BC). **v.10**: During the 16 years in which the temple work lay dormant, the people neglected the Lord's house by beautifying their own (Haggai 1.4). God thus disciplined them for their sin. There was economic hardship, high inflation and social unrest. **v.11**: But things had changed. The attendance of the people to spiritual matters and the word of God had brought forth the *blessing* of the Lord (cf. Haggai 1.12; 2.19). **v.12**: There would now be *agricultural* and consequent *material* and *social* prosperity (peace). **v.13**: The hand of Divine blessing upon the remnant was a pledge of greater things to come. In exile, 'the house of Judah and house of Israel' was an object of 'cursing', i.e. an example of God's judgment and discipline (Deuteronomy 28.15-68; Jeremiah 24.9) but following their 'salvation' (national re-gathering and conversion) they would be an object of God's blessing and favour as well as a conduit for divine 'blessing' to the nations (Isaiah 19.24; Ezekiel 34.26).

7. Divine Purpose (vv.14-17). **v.14**: Due to the disobedience of His people (cf. 7.9-14), God purposed to discipline them in captivity. God did not change His mind (repent) but was faithful in the execution of his 'wrath'. **v.15**: Now, God has determined 'to do well' or *bless* His people, and likewise, He will not repent! The good He will bring upon them is assured. **v.16**: But, the people have *responsibility* in the light of such glorious divine promise. They must be doers of the word, not hearers only! What God loves, they must love. What He hates, they must hate (Hebrews 1.9). What characterises God must characterise them. They must 'speak the truth' to one another (Ephesians 4.25) and administer justice based on truth to promote peace and harmony amongst the community. **v.17**: There must be no plotting, scheming or planning vindictively against others (often in a legal dispute) or bearing false testimony against a neighbour (Exodus 20.16; 2 Timothy 3.3; Titus 2.3). This is the sum of what God hates (cf. Proverbs 6.16-19).

The Delight of Israel and Desire of the Nations [vv.18-23]

v.18: The chapter closes with *three* statements of divine blessing which will be enjoyed by the nation during the millennial reign of Christ. It also finally addresses the question of fasting from the men of Bethel (7.3). Not only will Israel's fasting in *sorrow* be turned to feasting for *joy*, but those who came to 'pray before the Lord' (7.2) appear to foreshadow a far greater movement of people from *many* cities for the same purpose (v.21, 22).

- The Pleasure of Judah (v.19). The self-imposed fasting of various months (see notes on Zechariah 7.3-4) will be replaced by periods of joy and gladness, as the celebration of a marriage feast (Jeremiah 7.34; 33.10-11). The mourning and weeping of former days will be long forgotten in the rejoicing of millennial day (Isaiah 65.19). Again, the promise is given to incentivise righteous living in the present – 'love truth and peace'. 'Love' implies commitment and devotion. *Stubbs: God's prophecies of the believer's future joys should lead to an intense desire to know more of the truth and should promote love and harmony among the saints.*
- The Prayers of the Nations (vv.20-22). **v.20**: The consequences of Jehovah dwelling amongst His people is to draw all nations to Jerusalem (cf. v.22; 2.11; Haggai 2.7; Isaiah 2.2-3). **v.21**: Such will be the attractive power of the presence of God manifested in Christ, the inhabitants of Gentile cities will encourage one another to 'speedily' (earnestly with perseverance) entreat the favour and grace of God (cf. Psalm 122.1). When Christ Himself fills the soul, there is a fervent desire to gather to Him and draw others to His beauty. **v.22**: Indeed, the temple in Jerusalem will become a 'house of prayer for all peoples' (Isaiah 56.7).
- The Priesthood of Israel (v.23). 'Ten' is a number in scripture which is often symbolic of totality or completeness (Genesis 31.7; 1 Samuel 1.8). There are therefore *many* men, of every language (cp. Acts 2.5-11; Isaiah 66.18) seeking to enjoy the same divine favour as the Jew – it will be manifest that God's blessing is *upon* them and His presence *with* them. They will seize the 'skirt' (hem) of the distinctive, long-flowing robe of the Jew. Upon the 'skirt' was a border of blue tassels bound by a blue cord and symbolised a commitment to remember and obey God's commandments (Numbers 15.38-39). Thus, Israel shall fulfil God's purpose as a nation of priests (cf. Isaiah 61.6). They will be the means of drawing the nations of the earth to Messiah. *Ironside: When the people of God, in any age, are going on in happy fellowship with their Lord and Saviour, the unsaved will be attracted to Him, and will be found seeking out His disciples, saying, 'We would see Jesus.'* Note 1 Corinthians 14.24-25!