

Zechariah

Part 3

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[00:00:01] Chapters 7 and 8, and I propose to read chapter 7 and then chapter 8, verses 20 to 23.

Visions have now ceased, end of chapter 6, and prophecy begins.

So it's a suitable break point in our studies.

Sometimes takes a fair time for exercise to develop.

We shouldn't expect progress at the drop of a hat.

Something puzzles us, we pray about it, we study the word.

We may well wait a long time until eventually the answer becomes clear.

[00:01:05] It's worth bearing in mind as a principle, worthwhile exercises often take time to develop. Now, I say that in passing because it's not quite the case here, of course, that the one who got the vision had the exercise extended. But certainly it is true that it was almost two years after Zechariah was granted the visions that there was this deputation which came with the query.

Now, as to the text here, it's worth noticing that in verse 2, where the authorize says, when they had sent unto the house of God, most of the reliable Hebrew scholars seem to agree that that's an over-translation.

[00:02:03] As we know, the place name Bethel means house of God.

And it seems that this deputation involved those who were at Bethel as a place, and not necessarily that they came from or came to as such the house of God as such.

But certainly there's this deputation with this query, and I suppose it was a valid one from their point of view.

There'd been the call to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. There were those who had responded to that invitation and call, and in repentance before their God, at least in measure, in faithfulness to him, [00:03:01] there was that relatively small proportion of the nation that had gone back. The temple was approaching completion, and there were those who had been celebrating

certain events each year during the captivity in Babylon who raised the query. Well, now that there are those back in the land, now that the temple is almost completed, what about these fasts that we are keeping? And in particular, they mentioned the fast in the fifth month. And they said, is it right, is it necessary to continue this fast now that the temple is almost rebuilt, at Jerusalem, where true worship should be offered anyway? As always, as we notice in the Gospels, the Lord Jesus frequently didn't so much as answer the question as he answered the questioner. [00:04:07] He went right through the detail to what was in the heart of those who raised the question. And so it was here. To this deputation, who raised the matter of one fast in the fifth month of their ecclesiastical calendar, the answer wasn't just to the deputation. Notice in verse 5, Speak unto all the people of the land, those on behalf of whom the deputation, the query, had been raised. And the answer that is given doesn't only refer to the fifth month and the fast and the mourning there. It also refers to the seventh month. Now, we need to dig a little bit into the historical books to see what these fasts commemorated. Two major events in Jewish history.

[00:05:03] And if we look back into the scriptures, we can certainly find the answer. Now, obviously, with this meeting in mind, I've checked it out. I've looked at the chapters. And when you get home, if you haven't looked at it lately, look back. First of all, the second Kings 25 also comes out in Jeremiah 52, the last chapter, where we are told that the destruction of Solomon's temple and its desecration and carrying away of the holy vessels into captivity was something that caused not only great consternation, but great mourning amongst those who were true to God.

Now, that happened, we are told in the text of the historical books, that this happened in the fifth month. And faithfully up to their light, there were those who fasted and mourned on the fifth month in every year [00:06:06] when they were in captivity at the fact that Solomon's temple and all that it stood for in the display of the glory of God had been besmirched, desecrated, and razed to the ground. Well, that would seem to be a valid cause for mourning each year. The first and the seventh month was not quite of the same order. But again, we learn, Jeremiah 41 or thereabouts, we learn that in the seventh month, Gedaliah, who was appointed to be governor in the land and over those who hadn't been taken away into captivity, that he was assassinated in the seventh month of a particular ecclesiastical year. And because of that, they arranged a fast to commemorate that sad occasion. [00:07:02] Now, that was the detail, and they brought, the deputation brought the query, is it right that we should continue this, particularly when the temple is almost rebuilt? Now, the rest of these two chapters, verses 4 of chapter 7, right through to the end of chapter 8 almost, gives a composite answer to that, to those fundamental questions. And as said, the prophet is given the word of the Lord communicated to him. In order, with the authority of thus saith the Lord, he can give Jehovah's verdict upon the Queen. The first answer, then, is given in verses 4 to 7 of chapter 7.

How topical that this always is.

[00:08:08] The prophet has to say, you're asking about an activity.

It's not the activity that's important, it's the heart. Separation of activity is good, but only where it's prompted by separation of heart.

And so he poses the question, when you did it all these 70 years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?

And when ye did eat, when ye did drink, did ye not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? Now,

it's a question that the Lord took up in the Gospels. Something that's always topical as a challenge to us, but of particular import to the people of the day. [00:09:09] Outward adherence to ceremony, in itself, is of no avail before God.

Mine looketh on the outward appearance, the Lord looketh upon the heart.

With our experience and knowledge of the Scriptures, the words come through loud and clear, quoted in an abbreviated form by the Lord in the Gospels, calling it from Isaiah 29, or thereabouts. These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. The distinction between separation and sincerity of heart, and mere outward ceremonial.

[00:10:03] Now that is the first of the answers, or the first part of the answer, that Zechariah is led to give. And he closes that section in verse 7 by saying, what you should be doing is not conducting these ceremonials when the calendar says the day has arrived. What you should be doing is taking account of what the previous prophets have said all down the history of the nation. Now, we come again to that which was mentioned on Saturday night in the first session. History of the nation is a repeated cycle of certain attitudes and conditions. God brings the people into blessing as an act of grace. He lays down certain rules and guidelines that they have to conform to if they are to continue to enjoy the blessing. [00:11:02] They fall into disobedience and idolatry. The prophets speak out whether thus saith the Lord. They give a warning to the people. The warning is disregarded.

Discipline is applied. There are a remnant who respond to a call to repentance, and then there is a blessing in measure that flows. Now, the prophet uses that knowledge that should have been stored in their minds, and he said you should have listened to the former prophets. It's happened before, and it's happening now. Verse 7, should ye not hear the words which the Lord hath cried by the former prophets when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity? There you are. They were enjoying the blessing. They should have known, but instead of hearkening to what the prophet said, he says you ignored it. [00:12:03] Now, he says it again. In verse 8, the second part of the answer starts, the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah saying, thus speaketh the Lord of hosts. Sixteen times or thereabouts in these two chapters, we get a thus saith the Lord. There are those, I understand, who in 1988 stand up in a congregation and say thus saith the Lord, and expect obedience from the congregation.

And if a query is raised that the word of God says something else, there are these who call themselves present day apostles who say this is a revelation from the Lord, up to date, for the moment, this must take precedence over the word of God. Let us beware of such folly. [00:13:01] Any attempt at speaking the word of the Lord prophetically at the present time must necessarily be judged against the plumb line of the word of God. And if it doesn't fit, it's the word of God which must take precedence. Well, time and again in these two chapters, Zechariah says thus saith the Lord of hosts. He appeals to previous prophecies, previous record in the word of God, and he demonstrates how repeatedly in history that this comes out. And so he reminds them in verse 9, a summary of the message of the former prophets. [00:14:06] Now, if I can take you back just for a moment to last night, if you look again at chapter 5 and verse 3, there were two major categories of sin that the prophet had to refer to.

Everyone that stealeth, which is bad, sinning against your neighbor. Everyone that sweareth, even worse, sinning against their God. A composite statement of how they fell far short of the Lord. Wrong Godward, wrong manward, wrong in every category and facet of their experience. [00:15:01] Now, in

the first part of the answer of the prophet, in verses 4 to 7, he says the first thing that you have to do is get right Godward in your heart. And then in verses 9 and 10, he says what you really have to do now is get right manward as well. And in that order, the evidence of being right Godward is that we are right manward.

As we learn in that perfect balance, the grace of God has educated us that we need to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world in every department of our life. Well, here he says, the prophet says, he says it's taking the normal trend, beware. [00:16:03] He says you're wrong Godward, because of that you're wrong manward. Bad doctrine leads to bad deportment.

Wrong belief leads to wrong behavior.

And he said you're wrong Godward, you're wrong manward. And he says because of that, I'm giving you this warning. It follows the normal cycle. And he said if you refuse, well, he goes over their history, doesn't he? 9 and 10, he says, this is a summary of the message of the prophets at every stage in the history of the nation. Verse 11, however, when the warning was given, they refused to hearken, pulled away the shoulder, stopped their ears, they wouldn't hear, made their hearts as adamant and so on. Not an impression was able to be made upon their hard hearts.

And so, end of verse 12, 13 and 14, I suppose to use modern terminology, God had to apply sanctions.

[00:17:12] He applied disciplinary judgments.

He blessed them.

They were disobedient. He warned them of the consequences. They paid no heed and he disciplined them. We've learned from earlier chapters, he used the Gentile nations to do it, holding them responsible for the way they touched the apple of his eye. But here again, we have at the end of chapter 7 here, we have I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations. Notice from these points onward how repeatedly we get reference to the nations, the Gentile nations, which were used in this disciplinary process. But how sad at the end of verse 14 of chapter 7, thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned, for they laid the pleasant land desolate. [00:18:17] We know from prophecy, it has always been God's intention that the land of Palestine, the promised land, Canaan, the state of Israel, should be the focal point of activities on earth.

This is why, and we'll come to it, God's center is Jerusalem. When directions are given in scripture, they're always relative to Jerusalem as such. It's God's center. If he says the north, he means north of Jerusalem. If he says south, he means south. [00:19:02] If he says east of the land, he means east of the promised land. It is his intention that it should be the focal point of things on the earth for blessing. What a travesty at the present time.

Since the days of Solomon, which gives us a picture, a preview of the display of the glory of God starting in Jerusalem, going out to the uttermost parts of the earth. Since that terrible event that they commemorated in the fifth month of every year during the captivity, since that time over 3,000 years ago, Jerusalem has been the focal point, not for peace, prosperity, but rather the focal point of turmoil and unrest. And it's getting worse every day. What a travesty because of the disobedience and

rebellion of the people. [00:20:07] And so this cycle continues even until this present time. Now, we haven't read the words, but we must look in to the sections in chapter eight, which continue the answer. First of all, verses one and two.

In our first session, we considered the statement that Jehovah, God of Israel, said, now look, I was a little displeased with my people, my nation of Israel.

And I used as my instruments of justice and discipline Gentile nations and will continue to do so. [00:21:02] But he said, the Jehovah stepped the mark. They've gone too far. I was only upset with them a little, but they've really enjoyed themselves. They've got their teeth into it and they've really run riot with my people and they are responsible to me for that. Now he returns to that here. And he said, using from the other chapters, he said, my indignation, again, a technical word in the prophets, my indignation has been made known against my nation. He said, but my intense fury will be unleashed against the Gentile nations who've dared to touch the apple of my eye. He says, they've touched me on the tenderest point. They've taken my beloved people and they have had the audacity to treat them like dirt and to tread them underfoot. [00:22:05] And he says, my fury will be seen against them. And so we have that word in verse two. He said, they're mine. I'm jealous with a godly jealousy over them.

And he says, there'll be great fury against these Gentile nations when the time comes. Verse 14 of the previous chapter, I scattered them among the nations. Verse two, he says, those same nations will know and feel the weight of my fury against them. But now he turns to positive matters, negative up to now, but there's the next two categories of answer are most positive. And in verse three, he begins this positive promise. I am returned unto Zion.

I will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. [00:23:03] Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth.

Refresh your memory.

Isaiah 14 and 46, words like, I have purposed it.

I will do it. I have said it.

I will surely bring it to pass. The purpose of God will not be thwarted either by the disobedience of his earthly people or the overstepping of the mark of the Gentile nations. Here then is a positive promise. He said, my purpose will be brought to pass. My plan will be fully executed.

And then he goes into wonderful detail to demonstrate that that should be so. Now, the only way I can sum this up from verses four right down, I suppose, to about verse 19 is to say it's a list of conditions which will only fully apply in the world to come, the millennium. [00:24:16] Now, I'll demonstrate what I mean from the text. But bear in mind that the things that are said have been on offer. They have been promised to the nation of Israel since the first giving of the law. That if they were faithful, if they were obedient, they would eat of the good of the land, nothing would be too good for them, and certain marks of material prosperity and blessing would mark them as individuals, as families, and as a nation. Now, let's look and see what some of them are. Verse four, there shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for the very age. [00:25:08] It's not a question of saying there'll be a lot of feeble people. For it is saying a fundamental promise to the nation of Israel is that faithfulness will be rewarded by longevity. Long

life, length of days, long life upon earth, enjoying material blessing is a promise held out to the faithful in Israel and will be realized in the world to come. That's what I mean when I say that some of the things that were promised, that were previewed in the glory of the kingdom of Solomon in all his glory, will be seen, worked out fully in the world to come. And the first one that is given is longevity. Verse five, the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls. [00:26:05] Not just that there will happen to be children, full of boys and girls. Again, the faithful in Israel were promised that a sign of their faithfulness would be that they'd be given large families and that they would be able to see many generations. Children, children's children, children's children's children. They would live to a ripe old age and they'd have the joy of seeing successive generations, progeny going into the future, the honor and dignity and blessing of the family assured for generations to come. A mark of the blessing of Jehovah upon his earthly people. Now these are things which God has committed himself to. I have purposed it, I will bring it to pass.

[00:27:01] Prolific progeny then, boys and girls, successive generations. Now notice again, verse six, this people.

Verse seven, my people. Verse eight, my people. Verse eleven, this people.

Verse twelve, this people. Half a dozen times, God is delighted to speak of them as my people. We know from the prophets that the condemnation, the judgment upon God's earthly people Israel at the present time is that he says you are not my people for the moment. I cannot own you as such.

They should be in the land, dwelling in the land. God dwell among his people.

They've forfeited that privilege and blessing because of their disobedience. God here commits himself. He says it will happen. They will dwell in the land. I will own them as my people. [00:28:02] They will know me as their God. I will dwell among them and be their God. And they will enjoy my presence in the midst, seen in its fullness in the world to come. God commits himself here from himself on the lines of grace that this will surely come to pass.

Verse twelve then.

The seed shall be prosperous. The vine shall give her fruit. The ground shall give her increase. The heavens shall give their due.

The land will be fruitful.

The land will be prosperous. The harvest will be plenteous.

They'll be able to distribute the bounty far and wide because the productivity of the land will be better than it's ever been before. [00:29:04] The desert will blossom as a rose.

I suppose after this kind of study, I'm committing myself to reading scriptures like the book of Isaiah, which goes into immense detail of the blessings that the land will enjoy, that the people of the land will enjoy when all this is brought to pass, when Christ rules in righteousness. Oh, I must enthrall my soul again. And I would suggest that we all do by reading such scriptures that we can see the detail filled out. But here in the compass of a dozen verses or so, these things are indicated.

Verse thirteen.

It shall come to pass as he were a curse among the heathen. [00:30:04] What a travesty.

God's people, the vehicle of blessing from God out to the nations, that they've been the means of nations being cursed.

Think over the last few years in our personal experience of all the lives that have been lost, all the heartache that's been caused, all the money that's been wasted, because the Jews are out of tune with their God, and that they are a curse to themselves and all the nations because of their disobedience over the years. But God has committed himself. He says you've been a curse for so long. You're going to be a blessing to the nations. [00:31:03] Try telling that to the Arabs at the present time. But God says it's going to happen, that they'll be the center of all the prosperity and all the blessing. So will I save you. Salvation will mark them. Ye shall be a blessing to all the nations. And in view of these positive things, he says, fear not. Let your hearts be strong. But there's something else. Verses 16 and 17.

Scan through these chapters. See how often he returns to these matters of practical godly living. Universal truths applicable in any dispensation.

Speak every man the truth to his neighbor. Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates. Let none of you imagine evil in your heart against his neighbor. [00:32:03] Love no false oath for all these things that I hate.

Very difficult at times in these chapters, and I think with good cause, to discern whether or not the prophet is reminding the people of this present time what has been said to previous generations, or whether he's saying, as I think he is here, now look, I've told you the past history. I've told you what's going to happen in the future. And in the light of what I've told you about the future, this is how you've got to act now. It's always true of prophecy that God gives us information about the future to regulate the hearer's conduct at the present time. It will come out again in later chapters. [00:33:01] We'll see how the text confirms that. But in every day, and it will certainly come out in the millennium, the thousand years reign, that practical godly living, righteousness, and truth will mark in a practical way the people of God upon earth. Now again, this will come out in other scriptures, and we'll return to it again. Verse 19, almost at the end of what he has to say on this particular occasion, certainly will be true in the millennium, the world to come. He says, fasting will be turned into feasting.

The time for mourning will be over. How many times the prophets say that mourning is past. The time of the singing of birds has come. The time for celebration, because everything's in proper balance, [00:34:02] supply and demand, command and obedience.

The king ruling in righteousness, as we shall see if the Lord spares us to another occasion. When he whose right it is, is in full control, all these wonderful features will be seen, including in the most practical way, these features of practical righteousness. One last section then, verses 20 to 23.

The travesty will be over.

One of the reasons that fasting will be turned to feasting is that Jerusalem will be the true center of God's activities on earth. Here again we get something of the measure of the blessing that there will

be on earth. The nations will be delighted to come to the city of Jerusalem, [00:35:04] which will then be the capital city of the world, the center of world government, teaching and training, and will also be the center of worship to the God who has blessed them in such a wonderful way. Look the scriptures up. The prophets make it also clear that Jerusalem will be the true center, and the nations will be pleased to have it so. They'll take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew. We will go with you. We have heard that God is with you.

Now, if this has any voice for us at all tonight, and it must, it is this. God has been pleased to reveal his will in a wonderful way. He's preserved these scriptures in the canon of Holy Writ. [00:36:01] He's given us this information of what God has committed himself to do in the future. For the glory of Christ, for the honor and majesty and the greatness of God, and the blessing of his earthly people, and through them the Gentile nations. Everything is going to be put right. And time and again, the prophet says, now I've told you what's going to happen. You get on with the practical righteous living now, to demonstrate what it means to be in right relationship with your God. Time and again, we learn from the Lord's own words. Ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. And again, from the words of the Apostle John, he that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure.

[00:37:03] We need the whole counsel of God.

We need the full scope of the prophetic outline. Not only to furnish our minds, we need our minds instructed, so that our hearts will be affected, so that our wills will be submitted, so that our feet are turned in the right direction. Always the order in which the word of God comes to us. On a future occasion, if the Lord will, we'll be looking at the further chapters. Because history repeats itself, we can see further underlining of the principles that we've already seen. But in between now and then, we have the opportunity of demonstrating, right Godward, right manward, the way that we live in this world, that what we've heard so far has affected us for the glory of God [00:38:01] and the blessing of those that we meet. Now let us sing hymn number 256. 256. Hail to the Lord's Anointed, Great David's greater Son.

When for the time appointed The rolling earth followed, He comes to break oppression, To set the captive free, To lay awake oppression, [00:39:01] And rule every year.

The dead which have conceived Him He comes to free and wise, His glory shall reveal Him To all rejoicing eyes.

He who with man shall live there, And with woman shall die, His glory shall reveal Him [00:40:02] To all rejoicing eyes.

He shall come down like shepherds Upon the hill of God, And over the cold white clouds Spring of heavenly love.

He who in wondrous wonders Shall see the paradise, And for ages at His countenance [00:41:03] Proclaim to the world, King of glory of the Lord, And Lord of wisdom free, All nations shall adore Him, His praise all ye will hear.

Out there in my dominion All liberty I show, God, the King of Kings, [00:42:07] Lord of light, rain, and snow.