

Unit III: Called to God's Work of Justice

A New Day Is Coming!

DEVOTIONAL READING: Zechariah 8:18-23

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Zechariah 8

PRINT PASSAGE: Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17

Key Verse—So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not. (Zechariah 8:15, KJV)

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“So now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid.” (Zechariah 8:15, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Comprehend the impact of God's presence in a community.
- Yearn for God's perpetual presence and the promise of justice it brings.
- Pray for God's presence to result in a communal sense of justice, prosperity, and unity.

*Key Terms

Blessing (verse 13)—Hebrew: *berakah* (ber-aw-kaw'): a blessing; gift; to be generous.

Dwell (verse 3)—Hebrew: *yashab* (yä-shav'): to abide, sit, remain, establish.

Remnant (verse 6)—Hebrew: *sheerith* (sheh-ay-reeth'): rest; residue; remainder.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

Faced with an incorrigible group of students, the key character in the movie *Sister Act II* finally asserts herself, takes charge, and announces to them, “This is a new day, ladies and gentlemen!” Her message was clear: things were going to be different than they had been in the past. She emphatically told her students that the course they were in would no longer be called a “bird course” (easy “A”), and deliberate misbehavior would no longer be tolerated. As the plot unfolded, the “new day” proved productive for the teacher, students, and school. There are many situations that evoke the desire for positive change in life. Those who are



The Biblical Context

Zechariah was a younger contemporary of Haggai's in postexilic Jerusalem. Both men were concerned about the completion of the rebuilding of the Temple. The foundation of the Temple had been laid in 586 BC, but because of local opposition the work had been delayed for sixteen years. The response to their ministry produced success, and the Temple was completed and operating again by 515 BC. Zechariah is described as "the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo" (Zechariah 1:1). It is conjectured that Iddo was of priestly descent and accompanied Zerubbabel and Joshua in the return from exile. If this is the same Iddo, then he was Zechariah's grandfather, which would indicate that Zechariah had a priestly background. The dates given in the book link Zechariah's and Haggai's ministries. Whereas Haggai's messages were practical and to the point, Zechariah's were more visionary and included events in the future beyond his day. Haggai was used by God as the catalyst to rouse the people to resume building the Temple. Zechariah supported this but with emphasis on rebuilding in view of the promised Messiah's coming to dwell in it. Zechariah's book is apocalyptic in structure and relates to his time as well as the future Second Advent of the Messiah and the inauguration of His earthly kingdom.

experiencing a sense of hopelessness, regret, and other adverse circumstances certainly long for a new day that will bring about a better future. The first generation of exiles after the return to Judah from Babylonian captivity needed encouragement to complete the rebuilding of the Temple and to persevere in spite of opposition and the pollution of the land caused by their earlier sins. God called a young man named Zechariah as His messenger to proclaim to them that a new day was coming, one of peace and prosperity for Zion (Jerusalem).

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

A New Status (*Zechariah 8:1-8*)

KJV

AGAIN THE word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying,

2 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury.

3 Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will *dwell* in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain.

4 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age.

5 And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.

6 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the *remnant* of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts.

7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country;

8 And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.

NIV

THE WORD of the LORD Almighty came to me.

2 This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.”

3 This is what the LORD says: “I will return to Zion and *dwell* in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain.”

4 This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age.

5 “The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.”

6 This is what the LORD Almighty says: “It may seem marvelous to the *remnant* of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?” declares the LORD Almighty.

7 This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west.

8 “I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.”

Following the call to repentance (see Zechariah 1:1-6), Zechariah experienced eight night visions concerning Israel’s future (see Zechariah 1:7–6:15). After a lapse of two years, the prophet experienced his next series of visionary revelations. A delegation from the restored city of Bethel posed a question to him concerning fasts (see Zechariah 7:1-14). The Jews had commemorated the downfall of Jerusalem with four annual fasts. Now that the Temple was being rebuilt, they wanted to know if they were required to continue them. Zechariah’s response from the Lord was essentially that their fasting had been motivated by their selfish preoccupation with what they had lost and had become a meaningless and empty religious ritual. The fall of the nation had been their refusal to obey Him, and now the returning exiles were leaning dangerously toward the same old sins. Following a reminder of the consequences of ignoring God’s Word, Zechariah abruptly switches to the promised future blessings of Israel revealed during his night visions. The prophet shared God’s attitude toward the people since the destruction of Jerusalem (**verses 1-2**). God was ready to do whatever was necessary to change the devastated state of Zion (the people) with “great zealousness.” This would be proven by His return to and abiding in Jerusalem (**verse 3**). A result of His promised habitation would be the new names given to Jerusalem: the City of Truth or Faithful City, the Mountain of the Lord of Hosts, and the Holy Mountain. These names indicated the restoration of their relationship with God and the renewed character of its inhabitants. In addition, Jerusalem would be characterized by a new security (**verses 4-5**). These future blessings may have appeared to be impossible to the remnant, but they were not difficult for God to perform (**verse 6**). The final promise of blessings is the regathering of God’s people wherever they had been dispersed and bringing them back to dwell in Jerusalem (**verses 7-8**).

This return alluded to more than the physical return from Babylon and looks toward the re-gathering of God's people into the spiritual Jerusalem. Reflecting on these promises of God to Israel provides hope for a better future for those who are His children through Christ's redemptive ministry. He dwells in each of us through the Holy Spirit; the new name for His people is "the redeemed." We have eternal peace and security, and we are assured of dwelling with Him in the New Jerusalem.

What Do You Think? In what ways do you visibly reflect your status in Christ?

Reversed Fortunes (*Zechariah 8:11-13*)

KJV

11 But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts.

12 For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.

13 And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a *blessing*: fear not, but let your hands be strong.

NIV

11 "But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as I did in the past," declares the LORD Almighty.

12 "The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people.

13 "Just as you, Judah and Israel, have been a curse among the nations, so I will save you, and you will be a *blessing*. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong."

The description of the people's (Zion's) future status and restored relationship with God is followed by a second message where the prophet contrasts the past and present. Visions of the future glory of the city was intended to encourage the current remnant to listen to Zechariah's and Haggai's exhortations to continue the work begun (verse 9, Background Scripture). They are reminded to consider conditions that existed before work on the Temple was earnestly resumed to appreciate what had been accomplished (verse 10, Background Scripture). Poverty and insecurity had hindered their work. God promises a complete reversal of these past conditions (**verses 11-12**): (1) an utterly different relationship between Him and them; (2) their crops will be safe from their enemies; (3) the land will yield abundant harvests; (4) essential seasonal moisture

from crops will be provided; and (5) the remnant will enjoy and inherit all these promised blessings. The reversal of these deplorable conditions will change the attitude and perception of other nations toward them (**verse 13**). God will deliver them and make them a blessing to the nations (His original intent). This divine pronouncement provided the motivation for them to continue the work begun fearlessly and eagerly. A relationship with God through Jesus Christ is a “reversal of fortunes.” Rather than being sinners bound for hell, believers become heirs and joint-heirs of all the blessings of salvation (see Romans 8:16-17). This should be our motivation to strengthen our resolve to diligently engage in works of righteousness (see Philippians 2:12-13) and be a blessing to others.

? **What Do You Think?** *When have you experienced a divinely orchestrated reversal of a circumstance or situation in your life or in your local congregation?*

Divine Confirmation (*Zechariah 8:14-17*)

KJV

14 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the LORD of hosts, and I repented not:

15 So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not.

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.

NIV

14 This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Just as I had determined to bring disaster on you and showed no pity when your ancestors angered me,” says the LORD Almighty,

15 “so now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid.

16 “These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts;

17 “do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,” declares the LORD.

Zechariah reiterates God’s past and current purposes for His actions and attitude toward the people (**verses 14-15**) and His expectations of them (**verses 16-17**). The people are reminded that their recent captivity was not accidental but had been divinely planned because of the nation’s deliberate sins (**verse 14**). He had not made idle threats through His prophets but had done what He promised to do if they refused to repent. Now, His

purpose was to do good toward them—that is, to fulfill His previously given promises in verses 12-13 (**verse 15**). The certainty of these promises is guaranteed. Therefore, again there was no need for the people to fear. Specific expectations accompanied these promises (**verses 16-17**). If met, they would reflect spiritual genuineness rather than the hypocritical religiosity of their ancestors. First, the people were to demonstrate integrity in their relationships with each other. Second, equity and truth were to characterize judgments made. Third, none of them were to devise evil in their hearts against their neighbors. Fourth, they were to avoid a love for perjury or false oaths. Finally, they were expected to hate all that God hated. This generation of Jews could substantiate God's truthfulness by what they had experienced. The great salvation we have received and the faithfulness of God to His promises we have experienced are more than enough reason to commit to these same expectations of His people. We should speak truth at all times and in every situation. Justice and integrity should characterize our behavior individually and collectively as His people. Our confirmation of His doing what He has promised is the reality of the saving work of Jesus Christ on our behalf and our Christian experiences.

? What Do You Think? In what ways would participation in ministry opportunities change if what God expects of those who have experienced the blessings of salvation was the primary focus?

A Closing Thought

Zechariah's ministry to the generation of Jews that had returned to Jerusalem involved a call to repentance for their present spiritual condition, exhortation to complete rebuilding the Temple, and a message of hope that revealed God's future blessings for them. The new day described included current and future conditions beyond Zechariah's ministry. The lesson text, though focused on Israel, is a source of assurance and encouragement for believers who make up the community of faith today.

Your Life

Your accepting Christ as Savior gave you a new status and reversed your life condition, resulting in blessings now and in the future. An appropriate response is a personal commitment to live out His expectations of godly living, characterized by truthfulness, integrity, justice, and honesty.

Your World!

It is reassuring to know that God has divinely planned a new day for those who have become part of the community of faith. The conditions that characterize this present world may appear unstoppable, but we can balance our uncertainty about them with the certainty of God's Word that justice and peace will become realities.



Closing Prayer Lord, we are encouraged by Your promise to usher in a new day when peace and justice will reign, and we will be able to enjoy Your presence forever. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week, God speaks to us through the prophet Jeremiah and assures us that He will ultimately recompense evil and injustice. Study Jeremiah 21 in preparation for this lesson.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY , May 11	"Seeking Divine Help in Troubled Times"	(Psalm 86:1-13)
TUESDAY , May 12	"Land Now Belongs to Babylon"	(Jeremiah 27:1-11)
WEDNESDAY , May 13	"Choose to Love and Obey the Lord"	(Deuteronomy 30:15-20)
THURSDAY , May 14	"Surrender and the People Will Live"	(Jeremiah 38:14-18)
FRIDAY , May 15	"Jerusalem Will Fall"	(Jeremiah 21:1-7)
SATURDAY , May 16	"Jerusalem Is Defeated and Zedekiah Is Exiled"	(2 Kings 24:20b-25:7)
SUNDAY , May 17	"Choose the Life of Justice"	(Jeremiah 21:8-14)

Notes
