

## ***Session 8 The Forerunner Message in Zechariah 7-8***

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. **Summary:** Zechariah 7-8 is about fasting, feasting, and God’s zeal for Jerusalem and His people. It is a call for Israel to respond to the message of grace that was given in Zechariah 1-6. The zeal and mercy of God seen in Zechariah 1-2 reached great heights in Zechariah 3-4 in describing the Lord cleansing Israel’s leaders and promising to anoint them and provide necessary resources. In Zechariah 5-6, He promised to remove all of Israel’s enemies—spiritual, political, military, etc.
- B. I assume that Zerubbabel and others were proclaiming the “grace message” throughout Israel (4:7). Does extravagant grace motivate us to give our all or does it cancel out the need to press into God?  
*7“Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’” (Zech. 4:7)*
- C. The Lord wants us to see His zeal for us and then to respond with a zealous love for Him. The revelation of His zealous heart and blessings are meant to woo us into wholeheartedness. In seeing how God motivates by grace in Zechariah, we learn how to motivate people by grace.
- D. Zechariah 7-8 go together similarly to the other two-chapter units (Zech. 1-2; 3-4; and 5-6). The message of Zechariah 7 was to repent, seek God, and live godly *to avoid more judgment*. The message of Zechariah 8 was to repent, seek God, and live godly *to receive more blessing*.
- E. Outline of Zechariah 7-8
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| <b>Zechariah 7</b> | The heart of true religion                           |
| 7:1-3              | A delegation from Bethel asks about fasting          |
| 7:4-7              | The delegation from Bethel was corrected by the Lord |
| 7:8-14             | A call to obedience and a reminder of past judgment  |
| <b>Zechariah 8</b> | The glory of God in Jerusalem                        |
| 8:1-8              | Jerusalem’s full restoration                         |
| 8:9-13             | Encouragement in the face of difficulties            |
| 8:14-17            | The Lord’s determination to bless Jerusalem          |
| 8:18-23            | Jerusalem as the worship center for the earth        |

### **II. THE BACKGROUND FOR ZECHARIAH 7-8**

- A. The background for Zechariah’s third message was the visit of a delegation of leaders to Jerusalem from Bethel (about 10 miles north of Jerusalem). They came to ask questions about fasting and asked if they had to continue to keep the annual fasts which had been initiated in response to the tragedies related to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity (586 BC).
- B. They reasoned that since these fasts were not required in Moses’ law and since the Jews were back in Jerusalem in a new season of blessing, they should not have to keep fasting. They had lost sight of the first commandment as foundational to their relationship with God.

- C. With the temple nearly finished, and in a new season of blessing, they felt that it was time to stop contending for a greater breakthrough and just rejoice in the breakthroughs that they had gained. This question was being asked throughout Israel (7:5). Many in the Church ask this same question.
- D. This question has been asked for over 2,500 years since that time, and it is an important question in the end times. That is why I am including Zechariah 7 in our Forerunner Study Group.
- E. About 18 years earlier (536 BC), Israel returned from the Babylonian captivity to walk in her national promises associated with rebuilding the temple (house of prayer). Within two years they became discouraged and quit building the house of prayer. After a 16-year delay, the Lord raised up two prophets—Haggai and Zechariah—to inspire them to recommit to build the temple.
- F. Israel repented and recommitted to work on the temple on September 22, 520 BC (Hag. 1:14-15). By November of that same year they were drawing back, so Zechariah called them to repent (1:3). They responded quickly (1:6). The message in Zechariah 7-8 was given almost two years later.
- G. There was a new optimism in the land. The political environment changed. Money had been given to them in various ways. This new optimism was the occasion for the delegation from Bethel to ask questions about fasting. He warned them that their fathers had also approached Him that same way (7:7-14) by focusing only on blessed circumstances without growing in relationship with God.
- H. We are to rejoice with gratitude for any breakthrough that the Lord gives but continue to contend for a greater breakthrough. We are not to be satisfied with the measure of blessing that we have.

### III. ISRAEL'S FOUR NATIONAL FASTS (ZECH. 8:19)

- A. The Jews in exile in Babylon had instituted four voluntary annual fasts (8:19) in light of four tragic events related to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC (2 Kgs. 25). The only annual fast that the law of Moses required was on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:27-32). Observant Jews have kept these four fasts since then, and especially since AD 70.  
*<sup>19</sup>“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth...’” (Zech. 8:19)*
- B. ***Fast in the fourth month:*** Jerusalem's walls were breached by Babylon's army on the ninth day of the fourth month (Tammuz; 2 Kgs. 25:3-4; Jer. 39:2).
- C. ***Fast in the fifth month:*** The fast in the fifth month mourned the burning of temple in Jerusalem in 586 BC (2 Kgs. 25:8-9). According to the Talmud, on the same day, the ninth day of the fifth month of Av (August), Solomon's temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC, and Herod's temple (Zerubbabel's) was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.
- D. ***Fast in the seventh month:*** This fast mourned the assassination of their governor Gedaliah (2 Kgs. 25:25). He only governed for two months before he was killed by Jewish zealots led by Ishmael.
- E. ***Fast in the tenth month:*** This remembered the start of the siege of Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 25:1).

#### IV. A DELEGATION FROM BETHEL ASKS ABOUT FASTING (ZECH. 7:1-3)

- A. Men from Bethel came to Jerusalem to ask a question about the necessity of fasting (7:1-3). The men here only asked about the fast in the fifth month—related to the destruction of the temple.

*<sup>1</sup>In the fourth year of King Darius [518 BC] it came to pass that the word of the Lord came to Zechariah...<sup>2</sup>when the people [from Bethel] sent Sherezer, with Regem-Melech and his men, to the house of God, to pray...<sup>3</sup>and to ask the priests...and the prophets, saying, “Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?” (Zech. 7:1-3)*

1. **Fourth year:** This corresponds to December 518 BC, which was almost two years after Zechariah’s last message with the eight visions in 520 BC. The circumstances in Jerusalem had improved. The Angel of the Lord had prayed for mercy (1:12), and He rebuked Satan’s accusations against Joshua (3:1-2). Zerubbabel had been speaking, “Grace! Grace!” to the mountains (obstacles). The Lord responded to this by releasing greater blessing in the land.
2. **People of Bethel sent:** A delegation led by two men from Bethel was sent to Jerusalem.
3. **Should we weep in the fifth month:** They asked if they should weep—that is, to fast—in the fifth month for the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple.

- B. The Lord did not want His people to approach fasting and feasting *only* to make their life more comfortable, but to enrich their relationship with Him and participate in His zeal for Jerusalem.

#### V. THE DELEGATION FROM BETHEL WAS CORRECTED BY THE LORD (ZECH. 7:4-7)

- A. The Lord corrected the delegation from Bethel by asking three questions (7:4-7).

*<sup>5</sup>Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: “When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me—for Me? <sup>6</sup>When you eat and when you drink [the annual feasts], do you not eat and drink for yourselves? <sup>7</sup>Should you not have obeyed the words which the LORD proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous?” (Zech. 7:5-7)*

1. **All the people:** The Lord directed His questions to all the people in Israel, not only to the delegation from Bethel. He wanted them to know that they were not asking the right question.
2. **Did you really fast for Me:** The Lord answered that during 70 years in Babylon (606-536 BC) they fasted mostly to see difficult things change rather than seeking to connect in a greater way with His heart and purpose as seen in 8:1-8.
3. Did Jesus’ work on the cross for His people *minimize* God’s call for them to love and pursue God with all their heart? Or does it *empower* us to walk it out by the grace of God? A key issue today is the nature of grace—how it works in us and what it produces in us.
4. **Eat and drink:** In both their fasts and annual feasts, they focused on themselves, with little regard for their relationship with the Lord.
5. **Should you not have obeyed:** Their forefathers had not understood that seasons of prosperity had been given to motivate Israel to walk in wholehearted love and obedience toward God.

## VI. A CALL TO OBEDIENCE AND A REMINDER OF PAST JUDGMENT (ZECH. 7:8-14)

- A. Zechariah summarized the message of the prophets in calling for justice, mercy, and compassion (7:9-10). He described the life that agrees with seeking God in fasting and prayer for breakthrough. The Lord calls us to fasting that is rooted in a spirit of obedience and results in loving people.

<sup>9</sup>***“Execute true justice; show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. <sup>10</sup>Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or poor, let none of you plan evil...against his brother.”***  
(Zech. 7:9-10)

- B. Their forefathers neglected to obey the Lord, and it resulted in God’s judgment (7:11-14).

<sup>11</sup>***“They refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear...<sup>13</sup>They would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen,” says the LORD of hosts. <sup>14</sup>“But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations...the land became desolate...”***  
(Zech. 7:11-14)

1. ***I would not listen***: One of the most severe judgments on Israel was when God did not listen to their prayers for help as the Babylonian crisis increased across 20 years (606-586 BC).
2. ***The Lord scattered them***: The Lord scattered Israel among all the nations.

## VII. JERUSALEM’S FULL RESTORATION (ZECH. 8:1-8)

- A. The message of Zechariah 7 was to repent, seek God, and live godly *to avoid more judgment*. The message of Zechariah 8 was to repent, seek God, and live godly *to receive more blessing*.

- B. God’s promises for His people are rooted in the revelation of His zeal (8:2). When we see God’s emotions, it motivates us to pray with fasting for the fullness of His purpose.

<sup>2</sup>***“I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her.”*** (Zech. 8:2)

1. Zechariah had been commissioned to proclaim the message of God’s zeal in February 519 BC (1:14). Now, two years later, in December 518 BC, here the Lord emphasized it again (8:2)—His zeal, love, commitment to Jerusalem and His people.

<sup>14</sup>***Thus says the LORD of hosts: “I am zealous for Jerusalem.”*** (Zech. 1:14)

2. The revelation of God’s zeal was one of Zechariah’s core messages. God’s burning desire is for His people and purpose. It is manifested in Jesus as a loving Bridegroom, powerful King, and righteous Judge who intervenes to remove everything that hinders love.

- C. All who love Jerusalem are to rejoice with her by standing with her prophetic destiny. We rejoice with Jerusalem, instead of being critical, disinterested, or disengaged with God’s purpose for her. We mourn for her by understanding her pressures and failures and by praying for mercy for her.

<sup>10</sup>***Rejoice with Jerusalem...all you who love her; rejoice for joy with her, all who mourn for her.***  
(Isa. 66:10)

- D. The Lord will live in Jerusalem (8:3; cf. 1:16; 2:10). The nations will call it the “City of Truth,” and the temple mount will be called the “Holy Mountain.” Jesus’ throne will be there

<sup>3</sup>**“I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth [Faithful City ESV, NIV], the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain.” (Zech. 8:3)**

1. **City of Truth:** Jesus will reveal the truth about God and His ways and teach how the nations may walk with Him and enjoy the fullness of His blessing (Isa. 2:3). He will answer all about how nations are to function—politically, socially, economically, agriculturally, etc.

<sup>3</sup>**Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD... He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” (Isa. 2:3)**

2. The Hebrew word for “truth” is *emet*. It includes the idea of “faithfulness.” Jesus’ presence in Jerusalem will transform her character until she is praised as the “City of Faithfulness”— God will demonstrate His faithfulness, and she will respond in faithful love and obedience to Him.
3. **Holy Mountain:** The temple mount in Jerusalem will be called “the Holy Mountain”—it will surpass the glory seen in the Sinai narratives (Ex. 19:16-19; 24:9-18). The New Jerusalem will descend in proximity to earthly Jerusalem, resulting in Jesus’ glorious *Mountain-City-House*—it will be a vast governmental complex that includes the millennial temple. When the kings of the earth bring offerings (Rev. 21:24), they will be awestruck in Jerusalem (Ps. 48:5).

- E. Jerusalem will be a perfectly safe city, free of fear, crime, and war (8:4-5). Elderly people will sit in the streets, and children will play there in perfect safety without fear. Isaiah described people living to a great age, even for hundreds of years, being as “old as a tree” (Isa. 65:20, 25).

<sup>4</sup>**“Old men and old women shall sit again in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. <sup>5</sup>The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.” (Zech. 8:4-5)**

- F. These blessings seemed too good to be true to the people of Zechariah’s day (8:6). Many Bible translations translate “marvelous” in the sense of being “too difficult” or “impossible.”

<sup>6</sup>**“If it is marvelous [too difficult/impossible] in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, will it also be marvelous [too difficult] in My eyes?” says the LORD of hosts. (Zech. 8:6)**

- G. The Lord promised to bring His people back to Jerusalem (8:7-8; 10:8-12). It will be a reversal of the scattering that Israel has suffered. In the end times, the Jewish people will return from the east which includes the Middle East and Asia. They will return from the west—Europe and America (Isa. 11:12; 43:5-6; 59:19; Hos. 11:10). This will occur when Israel as a nation turns to the Lord (Rom. 11:26).

<sup>7</sup>**“Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; <sup>8</sup>I will bring them back, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness.” (Zech. 8:7-8)**

- H. The Lord’s promise to “save” His people from the east and west speaks of more than Israel returning from the Babylonian exile in the east which had already occurred about 18 years earlier.

## VIII. ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULTIES (ZECH. 8:9-13)

- A. The promises in 8:1-8 were given to strengthen Israel to persevere and not quit in their mandate to build the temple and sustain the temple ministry long term (8:9, 13, 15; cf. Hag. 2:4). Israel laid the foundation 18 years earlier in 536 BC (Ezra 3:8-10). But hindrances rose up, and they quit working on it for 16 years. It seems that 8:9 implies a “refurbishing” of foundation that was laid in 518 BC.
- <sup>9</sup>Let your hands be **strong**, you who have been hearing in these days these words...of the prophets [Haggai and Zechariah], who spoke **in the day the foundation was laid...that the temple might be built.** <sup>10</sup>For before these days there were **no wages...and there was no peace from the enemy...** (Zech. 8:9-10)*
- B. Judah’s commitment to persevere in building and sustaining the temple ministry would result in the increase of God’s financial blessing in their midst (8:11-12; cf. Hag. 2:19).
- <sup>11</sup>But **now** I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days...<sup>12</sup>For the **seed shall be prosperous**, the vine shall give its fruit, the **ground** shall give her increase, and the **heavens** shall give their dew--I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these. (Zech. 8:11-12)*
- C. God will save Israel and Judah and cause them to be a blessing to the nations (8:13, 7; Gen. 12:3).
- <sup>13</sup>“It shall come to pass that just as you were a **curse** among the nations, O house of **Judah** and house of **Israel**, so I will **save** you, and you shall be a **blessing**.” (Zech. 8:13)*

## IX. THE LORD’S DETERMINATION TO BLESS JERUSALEM (ZECH. 8:14-17)

- A. God’s zeal is seen in His determination both to discipline Israel and to do good to her (8:14-15).
- <sup>14</sup>“Just as I determined to **punish** you when your fathers provoked Me to wrath...<sup>15</sup>so again **in these days** I am **determined to do good** to Jerusalem...Do not fear.” (Zech. 8:14-15)*
- B. He described the lifestyle of those seeking God with fasting and prayer for breakthrough (8:16).
- <sup>16</sup>“These are the things you shall do: speak each man the **truth** to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for **truth, justice, and peace...**<sup>17</sup>and do not love a **false oath...**” (Zech. 8:16-17)*

## X. JERUSALEM AS THE WORSHIP CENTER FOR THE EARTH (ZECH. 8:18-23)

- A. Jesus will be exalted in the nations from Jerusalem (8:18-23).
- <sup>19</sup>The fast of the **fourth** month, the fast of the **fifth**, the fast of the **seventh**, and the fast of the **tenth**, shall be...**cheerful feasts** for the house of Judah. (Zech. 8:19)*
- B. The supremacy of Jesus will be magnified in Jerusalem which will be the global worship center (8:20-23; 14:16-17). This one of the Father’s ultimate purposes for Jerusalem.
- <sup>20</sup>Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of **many cities**; <sup>21</sup>The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, “Let us **continue to go and pray...and seek the LORD...**” <sup>22</sup>Yes, **many peoples and strong nations shall come to...Jerusalem...** <sup>23</sup>In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “**Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.**” (Zech. 8:20-23)*