

SESSION TWENTY-EIGHT

ZECHARIAH

Chapters 5–8

I. THE EIGHT NIGHT VISIONS (continued)

F. Vision of the Flying Scroll (5:1-4)

In the 4th night vision, the cleansing of Joshua was a symbolic representation of the cleansing of the whole nation. This theme is elaborated in visions six and seven. The vision here (the 6th) is of a flying scroll which represents a curse that is going forth on the face of the whole land.¹ The writing on both sides bears judgment and foretells the purging that will occur on evil-doers of the land. The scroll was unrolled and available for all to see, on which the bold, clear pronouncement of punishment of sin should have spurred the people on to repentance and righteousness. The two sins of theft and swearing falsely in the name of the LORD are probably representative of the whole Law—being perhaps the most common ones at this time. Thus, God is going to continue holding the people accountable for covenant unfaithfulness.

The previous messages had been of a decidedly conciliatory character. Before they can be realized, there must be the righteous judgment of God upon all sinners and all transgression (cf. Deut 27:26)—in harmony with Zechariah's concern for the promotion of spiritual renewal. Since the 4th night vision has its fulfillment after the Second Coming, it is likely that visions 6 and 7 are also fulfilled at that time. The nation needed to be purged and cleansed for the LORD to dwell in their midst.

G. Vision of the Woman in the Ephah (5:5-11)

This vision is a continuation of the previous judgment associated with the flying scroll. The woman sitting inside the ephah is revealed in vs 8 to be "wickedness." Not only are sinners to be punished in the land, but wickedness itself must be removed from the land. Furthermore the removal is said to be to the land of Shinar, where a temple is to be built for "wickedness" (as represented by the woman). Feinberg understands the passage "to speak of the heaping up of the full measure of Israel's sins prior to the time of God's separation of the wicked from the midst of the righteous remnant in the last days."² All wickedness, with idolatry particularly in mind, that will be existent in Israel at this time will go back forcibly to the place of its origin, Babylon, the great apostate religious system.³ Thus, the nation will be cleansed as Zechariah 3:9 had anticipated.

¹The same term for "curse" is used in Deut 29:20-21 for the curses of discipline that God warned the people about for covenant unfaithfulness. The fact that it was written "on two sides" is reminiscent of the two tablets containing the 10 commandments which were written on both sides (Ex 32:15).

²Feinberg, 89.

³In the OT, the stork was regarded as an unclean bird (Lev 11:19; Deut 14:18), and hence appropriate for removing wickedness. Babylon was also the *filthy place* where Israel had been sent into exile (stronghold of idolatry).

For the Jews of Zechariah's day, Babylon was the place of all evil as far as they were concerned. This message served to convey Israel's need for a clean break with all the evil with which she had been contaminated while in exile, and to turn fully to Yahweh and follow in His ways. Thus we see the connection with the call to repent in chapter one. The nation cleansed of wickedness paves the way for Messiah to rule in righteousness (Isa 11:4-5).

H. *The Vision of the Four Chariots (6:1-8)*

This vision completes the cycle begun in the first vision where the horses patrolled the earth (cf. 1:10, 11), although there are slight differences in detail between the two visions. The four chariots are pulled by different colored horses which have been sent out to patrol the earth (once again symbolic of angelic messengers—note vs 6:5). Their purpose is expressed in 6:8, "those who are going to the land of the north have appeased my wrath in the land of the north." "In the first prophetic disclosure horse riders were dispatched to reconnoitre among the nations of the earth to ascertain their condition relative to Israel's restoration and final blessing."⁴ As a result of their report, war chariots are now dispatched. The nations (with particular reference to the north) are now the objects of God's wrath as a preparation to Israel's final period of blessing. Note that the chariots also proceed from between two bronze mountains, bronze being symbolic in Scripture of righteous divine judgment (cf. Rev 1:15; 2:18). "Just as the Lord will judge His nation for their unfaithfulness and disobedience, so He will visit the godless nations of the world who have arrayed themselves against Israel."⁵ The "north" is singled out for particular attention, because this alludes to Babylon (recall 2:6-7 and compare 1:15). All of this would serve to comfort and encourage the returned remnant of Israel that had come from Babylon, with the news that God was checkmating every effort of Israel's enemies until the Messiah would come.

I. *The Coronation of Joshua (6:12-13)*

Following the completion of the night visions is the crowning of Joshua the high priest, which forms a fitting conclusion to the eight night visions. This is a symbolic act, the meaning of which is explained in the text (6:12-13). Many of the night visions concerned the distant future of God's people Israel, which should have been an encouragement to those in Zechariah's day (since God had plans to eventually restore the nation and cleanse them from sin). But the bright future would be connected with the coming of her Messiah. Hence, this section highlights the Messiah, the one who would usher in the blessings for God's people.

Zechariah is instructed to have a party of the exiles prepare a costly crown and enact a ceremony in which the crown is placed on the head of Joshua, the high priest.⁶ Following this symbolic act, the significance is disclosed. God foretells of the coming of one called "Branch" (a messianic term; cf. Isa 11:1; Jer 33:15) who will accomplish two tasks: (1) He will act as both king and priest, and (2) He will build the temple of the Lord. As the present temple was already in the initial stage of construction thanks to the efforts of Zerubbabel (4:9), an even greater temple was promised at the hands of Messiah. In the present age, the Messiah is building a temple out of *living stones* (Eph 2:19-22; cf. 1 Cor 3:16 and 1 Pet 2:4-5); in the messianic age He will actually cause a Millennial temple to be built (cf. Isa 2:2-4; Ezek 40-43; Hag 2:6-9). A glorious hope was also set before the people of the Messiah who would unite the kingship (2 Sam 7:16; Isa 9:7; Lk 1:32) and priesthood in Himself. In the OT these offices were always kept distinct, but they will be perfectly combined

⁴Unger, 100.

⁵Feinberg, 94.

⁶Barker (639) notes, "The Hebrew word for 'crown' is not *nēzer* (used for the high priest's crown or turban) but *ʿaṭārôt*, referring to an ornate crown with many diadems—a plural of extension (cf. Rev 19:12)." See Jeremiah 13:18, where the term is used of a crown worn by a king (the LXX translates this term in Jer 13:18 as *στῆφανος*).

in the person of Messiah (see Ps 110:4 and Heb 7:1-3 for the priesthood that Messiah represents). Thus, Zechariah has made a panoramic sketch from the time of the restoration under Joshua and Zerubbabel to the day of restoration in the land in the millennial era.

Yet we must notice the important injunction in vs 15: "And it will take place, if you completely obey the Lord your God." Fulfillment of God's program necessitates obedience to God's program. Israel's glorious future demanded a positive response from the people for a hastening of that day. Those of Zechariah's day needed to move forward in faith in light of God's intentions.

II. QUESTION OF FASTING AND MOURNING (7:1–8:23)

In the series of night visions, the Jews were presented a sweeping foreview of the nation's prosperous future that will culminate with Messiah's coming. Nearly two years have passed since this initial prophecy (cf. 1:7 and 7:1). What had happened? The people had made a somewhat positive response, and had given heed to the warnings and encouragements by resuming work on the temple, which was now probably more than half completed. The city was looking prosperous once again and the question arose as to whether the solemn seasons of mourning in commemoration of the calamitous events of the past (namely, the burning of the city and temple by the Babylonians) were necessary any longer.⁷ Hence, the people inquired of Zechariah. The reply came basically in the form of a rebuke for their empty ritualism. This state of affairs caused the realization to surface that Israel was still unfit for her blessing as revealed in ch 1–6 (in which God takes opportunity to portray Israel's blessing and joy of the future that will replace their present mourning). "The purpose of chapters 7 and 8 is to impress on the people their need to live righteously in response to their past judgement and future glory."⁸

A. The Question of the Fasts (7:1-3)

In these three verses we are made aware that the people from a certain town called Bethel had taken the initiative to ask if it was still necessary for weeping and abstaining (see the discussion above). A four-fold response was given (note 7:4, 8; 8:1, 18).

B. God's Four-fold Response (7:4–8:23)

1. The Selfishness Exposed (7:4-7)

In response to the question, God replied by way of Zechariah with a rhetorical question. Yes, the people were "religious" and showing evidence of piety. Yet God asks, "Was it for Me?" The point is made that they had selfish motives in their actions and did not act out of true repentance from the heart. Self-pity dominated their thinking rather than genuine repentance.

2. The Call to Repentance (7:8-14)

The people are reminded that the Israelites of the past had been warned to express their true repentance in terms of godly actions rather than ritual alone. God says, "They refused to pay attention (7:11)." As a consequence they eventually came to experience the wrath of God. What a lesson to those of Zechariah's day! The call to repentance was given in 1:3, but empty ritual was not the evidence that

⁷A fast day(s) apparently had been initiated by the Jews in exile in commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem. With the temple well on its way to being rebuilt, the necessity of such a fast began to seem obsolete.

⁸Barker, 643.

God accepted. Israel must probe deeper to find the repentance that God considered valid, and attempt to get back on course. The present attitude they were displaying was dangerous, for it smacked of the same hollowness that had led to the downfall experienced by the previous generations.

In these verses, the Lord provided four tests of what should result from *true repentance*:

- (a) "Dispense true justice" - This meant fair dealings with everyone at every level of society. One must have integrity and honesty in all he does and with everyone to whom he relates.
- (b) "Practice kindness and compassion" to others - The word translated "kindness" really means to extend *loyal love* . . . to be faithful to those with whom you have a relationship. "Compassion" comes from the Hebrew word which means *the mother's womb*. Hence, compassion is to have *motherly feelings* for another . . . to deeply feel for the needs of others. God wants us to love, take care of, and be committed to others . . . not just thinking of our own needs.
- (c) "Do not oppress" - The weakest and neediest members of society must not be taken advantage of.
- (d) "Do not devise evil in your hearts against one another" - This would include a vindictive spirit against others and the desire to take revenge on others. Instead, forgiveness and the extending of blessing to others should be given.

3. The Restoration of Israel to God's Favor (8:1-17)

Whereas the negative answer to Israel's question was presented in chapter seven, this chapter will deal with God's positive response. Zechariah now points to the glorious future God has in store for His people, and the exact manner in which He will ultimately remove all their fasts. All the encouraging aspects of the night visions are succinctly set forth in a mood of joy anticipating the time when YHWH shall return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Barker comments,

The purpose of both sections is essentially the same: In the preceding section Israel was to repent and live righteously after the punishment of her captivity; here she is to repent and live righteously because of the promise of her future restoration."⁹

Vs 11 elucidates the fact that God has a day of blessing for a particular remnant. The purpose of the blessing stems from the Abrahamic Covenant and is expressed in 8:13: "So I will save you that you may become a blessing."

Following the declaration of God's ultimate blessing for His people, the announcement of "good" for the immediate audience is set forth. The fruits of repentance are then stated (vv 16-17). This is what He expected from His people in grateful response to the announcement of His ultimate blessings and His immediate blessings. Two positive examples are given (vs 16) followed by two negative examples (vs 17).

⁹Ibid., 649-50.

4. Kingdom Joy and God's Favor on All (8:18-23)

The first part of the book closes on a triumphal note.

The people's mourning (expressed in fasting) will be turned into joy, for their low position among the nations will be changed. And they will be a source of blessing to Gentiles, for all the peoples of the earth will join them on pilgrimages to worship the Lord at Jerusalem.¹⁰

Yes, the time of fasting and weeping will come to an end, but the time of real joy will be in Messiah's day (cf. Jer 31:12-14). All, both Jew and Gentile, do have a wonderful future to look forward to in the messianic kingdom, for "many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD" (vs 22).

A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

Fasting can be an important spiritual discipline in the life of a Christian. Yet such a practice, as valuable as it may be, can also be done with a heart that is not really in tune with the Lord. We can be deceived into thinking that such things as fasting make us pleasing to the Lord, when in reality He may be grieved over sin in our life or our failure to properly act as God's people. This is just as true for us today as it was for those of Zechariah's generation. That is why God used the prophet to tell the people what was really important in His sight (Zech 7:9-10). One of the issues that God called to their attention was the matter of "dispensing true justice."

It is easy to begin thinking that we want others to deal justly with us, and forget that we ourselves have a responsibility to be fair and impartial in all our dealings with others. The world is in desperate need of people who are going to act with integrity and be entirely honest in everything they do. Sometimes we may be tempted to take "shortcuts" or do (what we think are) little things that we know are not entirely honest but which we do not think others will notice. When people think of you, do they think of someone who is entirely honest and treats everyone fairly? Is there anything that you have done to others that is not really fair? Do you need to go and make that right? Don't *fast* until you do!

¹⁰Ibid., 654.