

Zechariah 8:1-13 – From Cursing to Blessing

Chapters 7 and 8 of Zechariah are about God's response to a delegation from Bethel. They wanted to know if they could stop fasting in the fifth month in remembrance of the destruction of the temple. The 2nd temple was just a little over two years from being completed. Good progress had been made. The seventy years prophesied by Jeremiah were almost complete. The delegate's characterization of the fast as being for "so many years" revealed their attitude toward the fast. They were tired of it. Did they keep the fast just because their beautiful building was destroyed? Did they give any thought about how their forefathers' sin brought on its destruction? God, through Zechariah sounded the alarm. Don't be like your forefathers. It reminds me of the message of the robot from "Lost in Space" when he said "Danger, Will Robinson, danger." Danger, Judah, danger. You are in danger of becoming your sinful forefathers.

Read Zechariah 8:1-8.

Anthony R. Petterson notes that there are two major sections to chapter 8 each introduced by "And the word of Yahweh of hosts came". Within these two sections there are 10 occurrences of "Thus says Yahweh of hosts" (with a couple of variations). Verse 1 starts the first section, 1-17, with "And the word of Yahweh of hosts came". It is followed by the key phrase "Thus says Yahweh of hosts." What was God's word to the people in verse 2? See also Zechariah 1:14. (8:1-2)

What was God's word in verse 3? See also Zechariah 1:16. What was the physical symbol of God dwelling with his people? (8:3)

Notice the different tone of chapter 8 from chapter 7. Chapter 7 was about the bad old days. Chapter 8 was about God's promises for a bright future. What did God say in verses 4 and 5? Note that this was in contrast to the last verse of chapter 7 which spoke of the land being desolate after the exile. (8:4-5)

In verse 6, ESV, KJV and NIV have "marvelous". NASB has "too difficult". Do you think God was asking if his fulfilled promises would be marvelous in his sight or was God asking if his fulfilled promises would be too difficult in his sight? (8:6)

In 7:14 God said that he scattered his people with a whirlwind among the nations. How do verses 7 and 8 represent a reversal of the scattering of 7:14? How were the promises of verses 7 and 8 fulfilled? (8:7-8)

Read Zechariah 8:9-13.

Verses 9 through 13 contain another section introduced by “Thus says Yahweh of hosts”. What was the command in verse 9? Who was the command directed towards? See Haggai 2:4. “The prophets” mentioned are assumed to be Haggai and Zechariah. The Bible does not mention any other prophets during this time period. The phrase “who were present on the day that the foundation of the house of Yahweh of hosts was laid” has caused differences of opinion. There is no mention in any other scripture that Haggai and Zechariah were present when the foundation was laid two years after the exiles returned to Judah. Some simply assume that this verse asserts that they were there. Others understand this laying of the foundation to have occurred about 16 years later when Haggai’s recorded prophecies began in the second year of King Darius. Do you think Haggai and Zechariah were present when the foundation was laid two years after the exiles returned to Judah? If so, why was there no prophecy for these 16 years? (8:9)

Verse 10 has “before those days”. What time period does “those days” refer to? What was the condition of the returned exiles while the temple remained in ruins? This may remind you of Haggai. See Haggai 1:9-11, 2:15-17. (8:10)

Verse 10 talked about former days. Verse 11 starts with “but now”. What did God say would be different now that the temple work was progressing? (8:11)

In verse 12, how was the future time of blessing described? (8:12)

How did the nations previously view the remnant? What did God promise to do for the remnant? (8:13)

Verse 13 ends this section (8:9-13) as it began with “let your hands be strong”. What does this phrase mean, especially in the context in which it was given? One new phrase was added in verse 13. What was it? (8:13)

How did fear affect the previous efforts to rebuild the temple? See Ezra 4:4-5.