

## Lesson 12

When we ended last week, we were discussing verses 16-17 of Chapter 8. We had looked at each of the four commands in those two verses, some of which we had already discussed when we first saw them in Chapter 7.

Notice the words we are seeing in these commands, both here in Chapter 8 and earlier in Chapter 7 — truth, true judgment, mercy, compassion, peace. We are reminded of what Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23.

***Matthew 23:23** — Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted **the weightier matters of the law**, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

That is what we are seeing here — the weightier matters of the law. There is always a temptation to focus on those things that we can check off a list and then be done with them — but we can't live like that and be pleasing to God. God's message in Zechariah 8 and in Matthew 23 is a message to us as well — we need to focus on the weightier matters, and not leave the other matters undone.

At the beginning of this chapter we saw the jealousy of God, and we talked about the emotions of God. At the end of verse 17 we see another example of those emotions: "for all these are things that I **hate**, saith the LORD."

When God says that he **hates** something, we need to pay very close attention! We are reminded of the list in Proverbs 6:16-19, which has some overlap with the list here in Zechariah 8. If God hates something, then God's people must hate that thing as well.

Psalms 45:7 tells us that the Messiah would love righteousness and hate wickedness. That is our example — we must love righteousness and hate sin. And when we think about the terrible things that sin has caused and continues to cause in this world, hating sin should not be a problem for us.

And, although we are told that the world will hate us (Matthew 10:22), we cannot return that hatred and be pleasing to God. We must follow the example of Christ — he hates sin, but he loves sinners (John 3:16; Luke 19:10). And for that we should always be very grateful — because we are all sinners (Romans 3:23).

*18 And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me, saying, 19 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.*

Remember that question that was posed all the way back in the third verse of Chapter 7? Well, here finally is the answer! I wonder if Sherezer and Regem-melech even remembered their question? They had certainly gotten an ear-full from God between the question and the answer.

And the answer? Should they continue the fasts? Yes and no. Yes, they should continue the events, but those events should become cheerful feasts rather than mournful fasts.

Rather than a reminder of the sad past, they should look forward to the wonderful blessings that are coming for God's people.

I think we all must admit that such an answer would have had little impact had it appeared immediately after the question in Chapter 7. Only now, after the intervening messages from God, could the people really appreciate the answer here in verse 19.

In 7:3, the people had asked about a fast in the fifth month. God's initial response to them in 7:5 mentioned fasts in the fifth and seventh months. Here in 8:19, we see fasts that were also being held in the fourth and tenth months. All four of these fasts were to be turned into feasts.

We talked about the fasts in the fifth and seventh months when we looked at Chapter 7. What were the fasts in the fourth and tenth months intended to remember?

The fast held during the tenth month probably recalled the initial siege on the city.

***Jeremiah 39:1*** — *In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and they besieged it.*

The fast in the fourth month probably recalled the month when the city was destroyed.

***Jeremiah 39:2*** — *And in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, the city was broken up.*

Far from fasting, these events were to become times of "joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts." The term "joy" used here means "exultation or rejoicing." The word "gladness" refers to the fellowship that family and friends share around a meal. The Hebrew phrase for "cheerful feasts" does not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament, but its meaning is clear.

God's message in giving them this answer is that things are going to be different. Past memories of pain will be replaced by these thoughts of future gladness. But, for that to occur, the people must do their part in obeying God. That is what the verses in between the question and the answer were intended to convey.

We talked a moment ago about what we should *hate*. Verse 19 concludes with a reminder about what we should *love*: "therefore love the truth and peace."

But how can we love both, some might ask. If we preach the truth, then won't that destroy the peace? No. Not "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding." (Philippians 4:7) The peace from God comes only through the truth. It is the peace that comes from having been made free (John 8:32). And the peace of Christ is *not* the peace of this world.

***John 14:27*** — *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

We cannot love the truth and not love peace; and likewise we cannot love peace and not love the truth. Peace and truth always walk hand in hand, and we must love them both.

*20 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: 21 And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. 22 Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. 23 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.*

With verse 20, and the phrases “it shall yet come to pass” (verse 20) and “in those days” (verse 23), God once again turns to blessings that were yet future for this people. And, as we have seen before, these verses once again refer back to Isaiah 2 in looking forward to the church.

Look at verse 21 — “And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also.”

And look at verse 23 — “We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.”

And compare those verses with Isaiah 2.

***Isaiah 2:3** — And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.*

Look at verse 22 — “many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem.”

We saw that same prophecy all the way back in Zechariah 2:11 — “And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people.”

Compare verse 22 with Isaiah 2.

***Isaiah 2:2** — And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; **and all nations shall flow unto it.***

When did that prophecy come to pass? When did all nations flow unto the Lord's house? Ephesians 2 tells us that that prophecy was fulfilled in the church.

***Ephesians 2:17-18** — And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.*

Isaiah 2, Zechariah 2, and Zechariah 8 are all pointing to the same event — the time at which God would fulfill his promise to Abraham to bless the entire world (Genesis 12:3) — both Jew and Gentile — through the Messiah. And that happened in Acts 2, when the church was established and the gospel was proclaimed to all. Verses 20-22 here in Zechariah 8 are pointing straight to the church.

Verse 23 declares that ten men speaking the different languages of the world would seek God. Again, that happened in the church. And, in fact, the proclamation of the gospel in many different languages *literally* happened in Acts 2.

Verse 23 is an interesting reversal of what we see in Genesis 11, one chapter prior to the great promise in Genesis 12:3.

**Genesis 11:7** — *Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.*

That confusion of tongues occurred because of man's pride and arrogance. But the prophecy here is that the church would reverse that confusion.

There is one body (Ephesians 4:4), which is the church (Colossians 1:18, 24). Why? Why is there only one church? Wouldn't things have been easier if God had, for example, created one church for the Jews and another church for the Gentiles? No. There is one church because God wants us to be reconciled to him in one body. There is one church because of the promise to Abraham, which Galatians 3:7-9 identifies as the gospel.

Anyone who argues in favor of having multiple churches celebrating their diversity of doctrines is sewing confusion — and we know that God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). What that means is that when you see confusion (as you do in the religious world today), you can be certain that God is not behind it. You can be certain that it is not part of God's plan.

God's creation was scattered and confused in Genesis 11 because of their sin. That situation is *reversed* in the *one* church. And the church is the fulfillment of the great promise in Genesis 12, which was given to Abraham just a few verses after the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11.

One more comment about verse 23 — the text says that some would “take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: **for we have heard that God is with you.**”

How did they hear that? How did they know what these Jews believed? What caused them to go with them? It's the same answer we see in Romans 10.

**Romans 10:14-17** — *How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

In this great prophecy about the church we see a reminder that we have a vital role in the plan of God. “For we have heard that God is with you.” Is that what people today are hearing about us? Faith cometh by hearing — but what are they hearing?

Our constant prayer and our constant effort should be that we would lead lives that cause people to say to us, “We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.”

With the end of Chapter 8, the first part of the book of Zechariah comes to a close. The people are back from exile, they are rebuilding their ruined temple, they have been re-

minded of their responsibilities before God, and they have been given promises of wonderful blessings yet to come.

Psalm 126 captures the scene beautifully.

*When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*

That is where we are at the end of Chapter 8.

Questions about Chapter 8?

## Introduction to Chapters 9-14

One of the commentaries I read begins its discussion of Chapters 9-14 with the following statement: “Many have long agreed with the claim that Chapters 9-14 are perhaps the most problematic six chapters in the Bible.” And when you read them, you quickly see why.

As one would expect, commentaries disagree about almost everything when it comes to these final six chapters of Zechariah. We will need to tread carefully and keep our interpretative guidelines in mind.

Also, as one would expect, those proclaiming various false doctrines have had a field-day when it comes to these final six chapters. Why? Because their difficulty makes them easy to twist.

Premillennialists, for example, cite these chapters for their false view that the Mosaic system will be brought back into force during the so-called millennial reign of Christ. (We know that claim is false based solely on what we have seen so far in Zechariah (the combined kingship and high priesthood), not to mention the countless other ways we know that view is false from our study of the rest of the Bible!)

As with any difficult section of the Bible, our efforts to understand it will be richly repaid, but that is particularly true of these six chapters. Why?

Here is how one commentator answered that question:

*“In many respects the book of Zechariah stands as a capstone or culmination to prior biblical revelation. . . . The book of Zechariah, particularly the final six chapters, functions much like a lens, both focusing and refracting theological concepts from the remainder of the Old Testament.”*

That claim about the book of Zechariah is confirmed when we turn to the New Testament to see how often the book of Zechariah is quoted — and particularly how often these final six chapters are quoted.

- **Matthew 21:4-5** — All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. (*referring to Zechariah 9:9*)
- **Matthew 27:9** — Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value. (*referring to Zechariah 11:12-13*)

Recall that we discussed in our introduction why that verse in Matthew refers to Jeremiah instead of Zechariah.

- **John 19:36-37** — For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced. (*referring to Zechariah 12:10*)
- **Mark 14:27** — And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. (*referring to Zechariah 13:7*)
- **John 7:37-38** — In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (*referring to Zechariah 14:8*)

And notice the introductory language in those references.

- **Matthew 21:4-5** — All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet
- **Matthew 27:9** — Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet
- **John 19:36-37** — For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled
- **Mark 14:27** — And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written

The prophecies in Zechariah referenced by these verses were Messianic prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus.

Why do I stress that fact? Because a common view is that the prophecies originally had nothing to do with Jesus, but rather the New Testament writers combed through the Old Testament looking for verses that matched something in the life of Jesus, and then they pulled those verses out of context and turned them into Messianic prophecies.

**That view is completely false.** When the New Testament quotes an Old Testament prophecy and says “this is that,” then for a Christian, **that is that!**

The prophecies about Christ in Zechariah are just that — prophecies about Christ, and that is what they have always been from the day they were first proclaimed by God and written down by his prophets.

If the New Testament says that an Old Testament verse was fulfilled by something that occurred in the life of Christ, then that is the final word on the subject. The same Holy Spirit who inspired the text of Zechariah also inspired the text of the New Testament.

And for those who would charge the New Testament writers with twisting the Old Testament, do they realize against whom they are making that charge?

***Mark 14:27** — And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.*

Did Jesus take that verse from Zechariah 13:7 out of context in applying it to himself? That is what some commentators falsely suggest.

The prophecies in Zechariah are genuine prophecies, and at least some of them are prophecies about Christ — a fact we know from their citation in the New Testament. And that fact will be very helpful to us. How? **Because it will help us date the prophecies.** We know with absolute certainty that at least some of these prophecies were fulfilled in the first century.

In addition to Messianic prophecies, another thing we will see frequently in these closing chapters is God's judgment against the nations. We see such judgments elsewhere in both the Old and New Testaments.

Those judgments typically serve a number of functions.

- First, they show that God is the only true God and that God alone is worthy of worship.
- Second, as recognition of that fact, they often show the vanquished nations turning to God and making offerings to him.
- Third, they show the defeat of the oppressing nations resulting in great joy and relief among those who had been oppressed.
- And fourth, we see the end of the arrogant self-sufficiency of those nations who had rejected God and persecuted his people, making way for God's kingdom to take its place.

That pattern is a common one. We see it in Isaiah and Jeremiah; we see it here in Zechariah; and we will see it when we get to the book of Revelation. The oppressors of God's people will change, but how God deals with those oppressors will not.

Of all that we have studied in the book of Zechariah, our study of these final six chapters will be the most helpful to us when we begin our study of Revelation.

The themes of these judgments are themes we have seen before:

- God will accomplish his plans on this earth, and no one can stand in his way.
- God knows what is happening, and no one can hide from God or escape the judgment of God.
- God loves and cares for his people, and God will take care of any threats that are made against his people.

If our interpretation of these chapters ever departs from those major themes, then we should take that as an indication that we have likely gone down the wrong path.

As with any difficult text of the Bible, a good starting point is to drive some **tent pegs** into the ground. That is, we should make note of some unmoving and immovable easy-to-understand facts that will help us interpret the more difficult verses. If our interpretation runs up against an immovable tent peg, then we need to change our interpretation.

What are some of those tent pegs?

- (1) We have already discussed the first one. When the New Testament refers back to a prophecy in Zechariah and tells us what it means, then that ends the inquiry for that prophecy. We know with absolute certainty what that prophecy is about, and we know when it was fulfilled.
- (2) The New Covenant replaced the Old Covenant, and the Old Covenant is never coming back. (Hebrews 8:13, Colossians 2:14, Hebrews 7:12) There is no need for it to come back, and it can't come back so long as Jesus remains both King and High Priest.
- (3) Under the New Covenant, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile as to salvation in Christ. (Romans 10:12, Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11)

Just three tent pegs, but most commentaries on Zechariah violate some or all of them!

Finally, it should go without saying, but let's say it anyway — we must pay very close attention to the context of these verses, and we should be on the lookout for any clues as to their timeframe.

For starters, Zechariah chapters 9-14 follow Zechariah chapters 1-8! That doesn't sound like much of a news flash but you would be surprised at the number of commentaries that treat Zechariah as two completely separate and unrelated books. Whatever we decide about chapters 9-14, it should make sense when viewed in light of chapters 1-8. Zechariah is a unified whole — as is the entire Bible.

As for the timeframe, we should always look for it when studying any prophecy in the Bible. For example, the timeframe is vital in understanding the book of Revelation, and fortunately the timeframe of that book could not be stated any more clearly. Here in Zechariah we need to watch for helpful phrases such as "in that day," and, of course, we need to note whenever the New Testament provides a timeframe by telling us when a prophecy in Zechariah was fulfilled.

And one final guideline that has already proved helpful in our study of this book — we should use easy-to-understand verses in helping us to understand the more difficult verses. For example, if our view of these chapters is that they teach the Old Covenant will come back into force and that the Jews will someday be living under a different gospel than the Gentiles, then we know we have gone very wrong. Why? Because of at least two very easy-to-understand verses:

**Hebrews 8:13** — *In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.*

**Romans 10:12** — *For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.*

The Old Covenant has been replaced by the New Covenant, and the Old Covenant is not coming back and cannot come back. And there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek. Those are two of our tent pegs, and those tent pegs are supported by verses that are impossible to misunderstand.

The six chapters in Zechariah 9-14 are broken up into two main sections, each containing an oracle or a burden. Those two sections are Chapters 9-11 and Chapters 12-14.

- "The burden of the word of the Lord in the land of Hadrach." (Zechariah 9:1)
- "The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel." (Zechariah 12:1)

Let's start with the first of those two burdens in 9:1.

## Chapter 9

*1 The burden of the word of the LORD in the land of Hadrach, and Damascus shall be the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD.*

Commentaries differ on the precise meaning of the word "burden," which introduces Chapter 9 and later Chapter 12. It can mean a "divine judgment," or it can just mean a "divine utterance." While we will see many judgments in these final six years, we will see other things as well, so perhaps the broader meaning is the better choice — a divine utterance.

The big question in verse 1 is the meaning of "the land of Hadrach." What is Hadrach? Where is Hadrach? There are almost as many answers to that question as there are commentaries, but I think we can focus our attention on two possibilities — one literal and one figurative.

The literal view is that Hadrach is the name of an actual city located somewhere in Syria. (Damascus, which is also mentioned, was one of the major cities in Syria.) The problem with this view is that Hadrach is nowhere else mentioned in the Bible, which leads some to wonder why it would merit such a large oracle from God.

Those that take this literal approach usually identify Hadrach with the city of Hatarikka, which is mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions. But that connection is tenuous, and it does not solve the main problem: why would this city be mentioned here? Why would God give such a large oracle against an otherwise unknown city in Syria?

I think we need to look for a better explanation for Hadrach, and fortunately there is a better explanation.