

Zechariah 8 • God's Greater Plan

Introduction

One of the reasons we miss the true meaning of End Times prophecy is that we become so focused on trying to understand the labels and descriptions (e.g., Who is "Gog"? When will the temple be built? What does "666" mean?) that we miss the even more important spiritual message behind them. When these kinds of questions finally get answered, they will also be answers to some serious spiritual issues to which they were connected. Just as God has a greater plan for our life, so He has a greater plan for His work on earth. The return to build a temple wasn't about an earthly structure as much as it was about building something far greater in the spiritual realm.

¹Then the word of the LORD of hosts came, saying, ²"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I am exceedingly jealous for Zion, yes, with great wrath I am jealous for her.'

³"Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain.'

⁴"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of age. ⁵And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets.'

⁶"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'If it is too difficult in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, will it also be too difficult in My sight?' declares the LORD of hosts.

⁷"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Behold, I am going to save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; ⁸and I will bring them back and they will live in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God in truth and righteousness.'

[Read v.1-8]

Q: Why do you suppose that nearly every reference to God in this passage uses "the LORD of hosts"?

A: The word "hosts" could most often be literally translated as "armies" or as a single expression encompassing the whole of the heavens or universe. So there would be multiple meanings to the people of this time:

1. **He is the Lord of all the heavenly armies.** There is no power that can stand against Him. It's the greatest exultation of His name in terms of sovereignty and power. This is a powerful message at a time when Israel and Jerusalem have been desolate for 70 years and the powerful Medo-Persian Empire is seemingly in control.
2. **He is the Lord of the armies of Israel.** Ever since coming out of Egypt, Israel was organized not just by tribes, but by armies. They were only victorious when led by the Lord, who gave them victory. It's a powerful reminder that they can overcome any earthly obstacle as long as they're in submission to God. Regardless of their small numbers, when God is on their side, they are undefeatable when it comes to achieving His purposes.
3. **He is the Lord of the armies of the earth.** God gave power to whomever He wished, even using others to punish Israel for their sin and disobedience. It conveys a message that God is in control regardless of the appearance of circumstances from an earthly point of view.
4. **He is the Lord of the heavens.** The predominant false religion of Israel's captors was the worship of the sun, moon, and stars. This title expresses the foolishness of engaging in the worship of things which are already in subjection to the One True God, and a reminder of His superiority over the gods of their captors.

Point: From every angle, in ever conceivable way, God is in control and reigns supreme over all.

Q: God declares, "I am exceedingly jealous for Zion". What is the biblical definition of jealousy? How would its true intent and goal apply to God's plans for Jerusalem?

A: Jealousy is the focused action of keeping someone in a faithful and devoted relationship to them alone, as exemplified in the example of marriage. The actions that God will take on Zion will result in removing all obstacles related to infidelity and establishing a faithful and committed relationship to Him and Him only.

Point: Sometimes people restrict their view of prophecy concerning Jerusalem to just events which will happen in and around the city. As with all prophecy, however, there is a greater message and spiritual lesson at work.

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Q: What are God's goals in v.2? How does it fit in with the biblical definition of jealousy?

A: He is not just going to return to Jerusalem, but spiritually transform it into the "City of Truth". Exclusive adherence to God's truth is the cornerstone to establishing the degree of faithfulness that spiritual jealousy demands.

Q: How does v.4 fit within the context of a people who are wholly devoted and faithful to God?

A: It's a picture of obedience to the first commandment of the second tablet, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you." (Ex. 20:12)

Point: Through nearly every prophet God has consistently taught that the proof of love and devotion to **HIM** is one's love and devotion to their **neighbor**. If you don't love your neighbor, by God's standard of measure you can't possibly love Him.

Q: In the final "thus says the LORD" in v.7-8, what is the greater spiritual goal than merely physically returning His people to the city of Jerusalem?

A: "I will be their God in truth and righteousness." It's a re-established relationship based on obedience to His Word and ways.

Application: Why is it foolishness to interpret End Times prophecy in this case as simply being the restoration of the people to the land and the re-establishment of the city of Jerusalem? If there are greater spiritual issues at work in their literal fulfillment, what should we be personally doing in preparation for their fulfillment?

⁹“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Let your hands be strong, you who are listening in these days to these words from the mouth of the prophets, those who spoke in the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, to the end that the temple might be built. ¹⁰For before those days there was no wage for man or any wage for animal; and for him who went out or came in there was no peace because of his enemies, and I set all men one against another. ¹¹But now I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days,’ declares the LORD of hosts. ¹²For there will be peace for the seed: the vine will yield its fruit, the land will yield its produce and the heavens will give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these things. ¹³It will come about that just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you that you may become a blessing. Do not fear; let your hands be strong.’”

[Read v.9-13]

Q: What is the main work that the people of this time were supposed to be primarily engaged in? What was God's immediate purpose for bringing them back to Jerusalem?

A: "...to the end that the temple might be built". It's interesting to note that reconstruction does not begin with things more closely associated with people's earthly needs such as their own houses, the city around the temple, or even the walls of the city; it begins with that thing which is supposed to be the closest, visible evidence of their relationship with God.

Q: What is the word of encouragement twice expressed in these verses?

A: "Let your hands be strong". (v.9 & 13)

Q: Was this merely meant as encouragement to keep their strength up?

A: The intent is to motivate the physical with awareness of the greater spiritual issues at work. God was not just promising short-term blessings in v.10-12, but blessings that would extend beyond their lives and to the whole world. They were to be strengthened by the knowledge that "I will save you that you may become a blessing", that God had a greater plan for them that did not end when the temple was completed.

Application: Regardless of our calling or gift, God is working something in us far greater than within us individually or even during the limits of our lifetime. How well do you understand your role in God's greater plan? Is it possible to be distracted from His real work by only focusing on the details of the present? Aren't we saved to become something more for God to everyone around us?

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¹⁴“For thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Just as I purposed to do harm to you when your fathers provoked Me to wrath,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘and I have not relented, ¹⁵so I have again purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear! ¹⁶These are the things which you should do: speak the truth to one another; judge with truth and judgment for peace in your gates. ¹⁷Also let none of you devise evil in your heart against another, and do not love perjury; for all these are what I hate,’ declares the LORD.”

[Read v.14-17]

Q: Why should their faith be encouraged by God’s statement in v.14-15?

A: They have personally witnessed and experienced the fulfillment of the first part, the results of His wrath. Therefore, it is a sure thing that He will do what He’s promised, to “do good” to them. The fulfillment of the past confirms the certainty of the future.

Q: So knowing the results of disobedience to God’s Word firsthand, what actions of obedience are they to undertake to confirm their faith in God’s promise to do good to them?

1. “...speak the truth to one another...” (v.16)
2. “...judge with truth and judgment for peace in your gates.” (v.16)
3. “...let none of you devise evil in your heart against another...” (v.17)
4. “...do not love perjury...” (v.17)

Note that these are all relationship issues involved in loving one’s neighbor.

Point: God doesn’t want a temple devoted to Him populated by so-called worshipers who don’t obey **ALL** of His commandments. God’s greater plan than just a **PLACE** to worship, is having worshipers who prove themselves worthy of Him.

Application: Confirm or refute this statement: True spiritual revival is proven by the degree to which personal relationships and the treatment of others is changed.

¹⁸Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, ¹⁹“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘The fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth months will become joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah; so love truth and peace.’”

[Read v.18-19]

Q: Which fasts as provided in the Mosaic Law do these refer to?

A: Trick question: None.

1. The fast of the 4th month was the anniversary of when Jerusalem was taken.
2. The fast of the 5th month was the anniversary of when the temple was destroyed.
3. The fast of the 7th month was the anniversary of the assassination of Gedaliah.
4. The fast of the 10th month was the anniversary of the beginning of the final siege of Jerusalem.

Point: Basically these were yearly reminders of the most recent events brought by God as judgment for their sin and the breaking of His covenant and Word.. The promise that they will “become joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts” is actually a promise of forgiveness for sin and spiritual restoration to God.

Q: How is this connected to God’s command, “so love truth and peace”?

A: It’s the lack of these things which led to the disastrous results of each of the anniversaries listed. It’s obvious that they did not pursue truth, but in regards to peace, remember that biblically speaking this is the end result of living in exclusive obedience to God. “Peace” can also be translated “living in safety”, in the protection God affords those who are in a right relationship with Him.

Point: God has a greater plan that is not limited to being publicly reconciled to Him, but personally restored. Our success at achieving greater, visible things is dependent on our personal faithfulness and obedience.

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²⁰“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘It will yet be that peoples will come, even the inhabitants of many cities. ²¹The inhabitants of one will go to another, saying, “Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord, and to seek the LORD of hosts; I will also go.” ²²So many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.’

²³“Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”’”

[Read v.20-23]

Q: Why would these last two “thus says the Lord” statements be especially powerful to the people of Zechariah’s day?

A: Sociologically they were at the very bottom of the societal structure in place at the time since they were a conquered people removed from their land and in subjection to the reigning empire of the time. They had little value or influence.

Q: But what is the greater purpose for which God will elevate them in the eyes of others?

A: To lead others spiritually, to direct everyone to the One True God. Far more important than social status or earthly wealth, they will possess the more important distinction of being the undisputed spiritual leaders of the nations pointing them to God’s Word and ways.

Overall Application

Jesus expressed the New Testament equivalent of this teaching as...

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:13-16

- *At times we need to engage in major projects which result in a building or such, but what is God’s greater plan at work behind such things?*
- *Looking at the big picture of your own gifts and calling, what are the greater spiritual issues and goals at work?*
- *How highly do you prize personal faithfulness as the key for success?*