

BOOK OF ZECHARIAH
PRESENT ENCOURAGEMENT FROM GOD-PART 1
ZECHARIAH 8:9-17

Introduction

The prophecy we looked at in Zechariah 8:1-8 will only find its fulfillment in the establishment of Christ's millennial reign on the earth. Now we know that their hearts could be encouraged by the message of that time to come just as ours are! But just like us, God's people needed some encouragement to help them in the days they were living! Here we see that the LORD did have a word to help the people of Zechariah's generation!

We see here that God gives them His assurance that He will indeed respond to the repentance of their sin and their renewed obedience to Him and His Word and that He has purposed a new time of blessing for them!

I. GOD SPEAKS OF BOTH THE PRESENT AND THE PAST.
(Vs. 9-10)

The words of encouragement in *verse 9* are for those who have been listening to the preaching of the prophets over the long haul (for many years).

This message was to those who "*in these days*" [i.e. Those in the present and recent past] have been hearing, and taking hold of the Word of God, "*the words of the prophets.*"

The construction of the sentence here denotes a *continuous hearing!* Those who have been **continuously listening** to God are the ones who can personally claim these promises!

These were the ones who had both **heard and responded** to God's words! These were not just any words but these were God's words directed to "*ye that hear.*" Any that want receive special blessings from God must give audience to God over the course of time!

These words were from the "**mouth of the prophets.**" ["Mouth" is singular indicating that the prophets spoke with one accord!]

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Whoever else may be included, we know that Haggai and Zechariah were certainly intended (Ezra 5:1-2).

About twenty years prior to this time the physical foundation of the Temple had been laid and the altar rebuilt. But for the next seventeen years no more progress was made because the people gave in to hindrances and difficulties and turned to attempting to prosper themselves.

But the prophets preached and the administrators and many of the people repented and returned to the LORD, and now the good effects of their obedience to the Word of God were to be seen in the present progress toward the completion of the Temple!

So, those listening were instructed to let their hands be strong to continue the work. "*Let your hands be strong*" is an idiom for the expression, "*be of good courage.*" Those who hear the Word of God and act on it should be strengthened and encouraged when they see its results!

This remnant was to survey what had been accomplished since they undertook to obey God's voice. For there was a great contrast between the time before they took up the work of the Temple and the conditions of life since they hearkened to the voice of God through His prophets. (*Cf. Haggai 1*)

They were to continue in their renewed obedience to God's word and bring this good work to conclusion.

These encouraging words are for us today too! For we too have had a foundation to the eternal Temple of God previously laid for us through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord! We who heard, believed, and acted on God's Word are also building a Temple of God, not of bricks and mortar but of the living stones, of

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God's precious people!

So we are to let our hands be strong!

Galatians 6:9-10—“*And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. 10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*”

We are to continue in our obedience to God's commands for our time on this earth also!

Verse 10 recalls to memory the condition society was in before they returned to the work of the Lord.

God wanted them realize the contrast of the present where they were obeying the Word of God, to the past when they did not.

“*Before these days*” refers to the time before decisive action was taken to restart the Temple building project.

Those former days when they were focused on themselves and everything around them but God were the days of selfishness and scarcity.

They had selfishly neglected the task of rebuilding the Temple for seventeen long years (Haggai 1:2-6) and consequently, those were days of severe economic and spiritual depression! They should have been thankful that those days were behind them!

Three examples of contrast are chosen to illustrate the comparison.

First, unfruitful labor affected both man and beast. So little was being produced that it did not pay the labor of man or beast.

Second, crime in the streets was rampant. It was unsafe to go about one's business. Travel was dangerous because their adversaries stole all peace, safety, tranquility and security from society [Ezra 4:1-5].

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Third, there was not only oppression from their enemies, but there was also conflict among their brethren!

It was a time of anxiety and strain because things were going from bad to worse. Rather than being helpful towards one another and having a spirit of community that would develop out of restoring the Temple, there had developed infighting instead.

This infighting was part of God's chastisement of His people for getting their priorities wrong. It should have alerted them to the fact that there was something fundamentally wrong with the way they were living. Those days must have been very evil and discouraging.

What was the problem? God's people did not put God and His work of Temple building as their first priority!

We too may be tempted at times to slow down our work for the Lord. There are many reasons:

- people aren't responding;
- we are emotionally or physically drained;
- discouragement over others not doing anything;
- the work is too difficult;
- or it may be that people don't appreciate our efforts.

We need to let God's promises about the future encourage us!

He knows what the results of our labors will be! See your labors from God's perspective and continue faithfully working for Him.

Hebrews 6:10—“*For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*”

1 Corinthians 15:58—“*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*”

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II. GOD SPEAKS OF BOTH THE PRESENT AND THE PAST.
GOD PROMISES RENEWED FRUITFULNESS. (Vs. 11-12)

Verse 11 indicates that a new era is about to begin.

God had terminated their former harsh conditions and now informs them of His dramatic change of attitude toward them!

He was now establishing a new agenda to help bring about their prosperity because the reasons that caused His discouragement had passed!

The group who would experience the Lord's changed dealings was the repentant remnant. God's promise here was to end His disciplinary activity and reward His people ! (*Cf. Haggai 2:19*)

This statement brought to the forefront the fact that God's attitude toward His people was the primary cause that made for their either their blessing or their failure!

This promised change would be visible through their productivity!
(*Read Vs. 12*)

What was previously lacking would now be available. The Lord promised them the opportunity for prosperity. The drought, the scarcity, and the general economic depression would give way to increased fruitfulness and productivity of their economy!
There would be natural fruitfulness of the crops themselves.

In a dry land the daily dews are God sent blessings! Because the daily dews were the main source of moisture for the land of Israel.

Notice that it is God who is going to make it happen!
The responsiveness of the people gave God's covenant relationship the open door to pour out blessings.

The improved conditions that the restored remnant had been experiencing since they sincerely set themselves to the task of building God's Temple, were only a pledge of the greater blessings that God was promising them!

Since they had heeded the prophetic warnings, repented and taken up the work of rebuilding, God would bless them in all their ways!

Again, it is not human effort or even nature's effort that makes for our prosperity! Our prosperity is the gracious gift of God!