

Zechariah 8:1-8

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The Suzerain (Ruler) God promises to restore Mount Zion and reside amid Jerusalem, causing the Judeans to live in a vibrant and peaceful environment. At that time, He will deliver His people from all their enemies and be their God in truth and righteousness.

In the previous chapter, the prophet Zechariah spelled out four requirements to summarize the ethical teaching of the pre-exilic prophets—the prophets who warned Judah to repent in order to avoid God exercising the contractual terms of His treaty with Israel for disobedience. The prophets told Judah to:

“Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.”
(Zechariah 7:9-10)

However, Judah did not listen, so they were exiled, as prescribed in God’s covenant/treaty with Israel.

Zechariah also reminded the post-exilic Judeans that their forefathers’ rejection of this “love your neighbor” teaching was why the Suzerain God disciplined them by allowing foreign nations to invade their land and send them into captivity (Zechariah 7:8–14). In the present passage, Zechariah encourages the Judeans by telling them that God’s invocation of the punishment provision of the covenant/treaty (by exiling them) was not the end of the story—because He would one day restore His people and dwell among them.

The prophet began with the particle *then* to connect this passage to the previous one. He explained the next phase in God’s redemptive plan for the Judeans after His righteous judgment fell on them (Zechariah 7:8–14). But before he delved into the new topic, he identified the nature of the revelation as *the word of the LORD of hosts* (v 1).

The Hebrew term for *word* is “dābhār.” It is the same word used for “thing, event, or matter” (Proverbs 11:13, 17:9; 1 Kings 14:19). In the Bible, the *word* deals with a situation or an event, as the prophets Amos and Isaiah make clear (Amos 1:1; Isaiah 2:1). It is a message that requires actions from its recipient(s) because it came from *the LORD*.

The Hebrew term for *LORD* is “Yahweh,” the covenant name of God. That name speaks of God’s character and His relationship with His covenant people (Exodus 3:14, 34:6). In our passage, the prophet told his audience that the *word* came from *the LORD*, thus giving credibility to the message. He wanted the Judeans to know he received a *word* from *the LORD*, their covenant partner. Therefore, they were to obey it. They should understand by now that the terms of the covenant will be enforced.

The divine *word* was more than a mere speech. It was a medium of God's activity as promises, exhortations and creative power. The prophets were responsible for proclaiming that *word* to the chosen people, who, in turn, were to obey the stipulations therein in order to receive God's blessings and approval. God's approval required that they love and serve, rather than exploit their fellow citizens.

In this case, the *word* reveals God's will and power because He is the *LORD of hosts*.

The term translated as *hosts* is "Sabaoth" in Hebrew and means "armies." It refers to the angelic armies of heaven, whose leader is *the LORD*. Since the term *hosts* qualifies God as a warrior, the phrase describes His power as He leads His army to defeat His adversaries (Amos 5:16, 9:5; Habakkuk 2:17). Here in Zechariah, it demonstrates God's power as the supreme warrior who has complete control and authority over all human affairs. That is why He gave a message of hope to Judah and introduced it with the expression, *Thus says the LORD of hosts*. This statement confirms the power of God to rule over His creation.

The message begins here, where *the LORD* declared, *I am exceedingly jealous for Zion* (v 2). The adjective *jealous* is "qanno" in Hebrew. The Bible uses it for both men and God. When used for human beings, it may refer to a violent emotion aroused by fear of losing a person or something that is greatly valued (Numbers 5:14, 15, 18, 25). This form of jealousy is "as severe as Sheol; its flashes are flashes of fire" (Song of Songs 8:6).

However, when the adjective "qanno" is used for the true God, it refers to His zealous protection and care for what belongs to Him (Deuteronomy 5:9; Isaiah 42:8, 48:11; Nahum 1:2). He is zealous for His "holy name" (Ezekiel 39:25), "His land" (Joel 2:18), and Jerusalem and *Zion* (Zechariah 1:14). He has a great love for His people and its land.

The place called *Zion* or Mount *Zion* is in the southeastern part of the city of Jerusalem, which is in the southern kingdom of Judah. Mount *Zion* is one of the hills upon which Jerusalem is built. *Zion* symbolizes Jerusalem, and Jerusalem symbolizes the location where God dwelt among His people, in the temple. In our passage, *Zion* likely represents the nations as well as its inhabitants.

God intensified His zeal for *Zion* with the adverb *exceedingly*. In the Hebrew text, the sentence reads, "I am jealous for *Zion* with great jealousy." That means that God wanted to preserve and deliver the people of *Zion* because they had a covenant relationship with Him and were His children (Deuteronomy 14:1). He will protect His people, whom He loves and cares for deeply (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

The *LORD* returned to the theme of His jealous love for His people in the second line of the verse. He again emphasizes His deep love and care for His covenant people. In so doing, He added more weight to the message, saying, *Yes, with great wrath, I am jealous for her* (v 2).

The word *wrath* means God's intense anger and indignation brought about by human disobedience and unrighteousness. God grows angry when humans exploit one another, and act in a manner that is self-destructive. For instance, the *LORD* was angry at the Israelites when they played the harlot with the daughters of Moab and "bowed down to their gods" (Numbers 25:3).

The gods of Moab included Molech, whose worship included the sacrifice of children (Leviticus 18:21; 1 Kings 11:7).

As a result of Israel worshipping the pagan gods and adopting their exploitative practices, God sent a plague, killing all those who participated in such activities, 24,000 in total (Numbers 25:9). In Zechariah, God's *wrath* was directed against His enemies. His zeal for *Zion* would prompt Him to judge the enemy severely.

Once again, Zechariah introduced the prophetic formula *Thus says the LORD* to tell the post-exilic Judeans that their covenant God was the author of the message; they are hearing from Him directly. God declared, *I will return to Zion* (v 3). The verb *return* denotes a movement back to a previous location or condition. For example, human beings return to dust at death (Genesis 3:19). Jacob returned to the land of his parental origin after a twenty-year sojourn with Laban in Haran (Genesis 31–35).

However, the imagery of returning is more than a physical motion. It is a change of behavior, a change of mental focus. When humans *return* to God, they turn from their wicked ways and commit to pleasing Him. They turn away from their sinful path and confess to God, thus maintaining a sense of peace with Him (1 John 1:9).

When the *LORD* promised to *return to Zion*, it means He would reside there. When God returns to people, He forgives their sins, blesses them, and protects them beyond measure. That is what He promised to do for the inhabitants of *Zion*. To clarify the matter, He added a parallel line, saying, *I will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem* (v 3).

The city of *Jerusalem* was the capital of Judah at the time of Zechariah's prophecy. It is called the site of God's presence in scripture (Psalm 9:11; Zechariah 8:3). In Isaiah, it is called "the holy city" (Isaiah 52:1). The Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC (2 Kings 25:8-12).

During the time of Zechariah, the Jews had returned from exile and had begun to rebuild Jerusalem (around 538 BC, Ezra 1:1-5). Two years after their initial return they began reconstructing the temple, but after meeting resistance had ceased working on it for about sixteen years. God then raised up the prophet Haggai to encourage the people to again build the temple. Two months later Zechariah began to prophesy as well, also encouraging the people to rebuild.

The Jews would finish rebuilding the city, but centuries later the Roman army will destroy Jerusalem again (in AD 70). In this passage it appears that God is making a point that goes well beyond the immediate and near future. Not only does God want Judah to rebuild for the present, God sets forth a vision that one day *the LORD* will dwell among His people in Jerusalem. At that time, they will benefit from His unique presence and abundant blessings (Deuteronomy 28:1–14).

As a result, *Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth* (v 3). This prophecy could reach its complete fulfillment during the thousand-year reign of Christ upon this earth (Revelation 20:4). It could also apply to the time of the new earth, when there will be a new Jerusalem in which God dwells among His people (Revelation 21:1-3).

The Hebrew term translated *Truth* in the phrase *City of Truth* is “‘emet.” In addition to *truth* it can mean “faithfulness.” “Emet” describes the character of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In the near term, it reminds the Judean audience of their covenant relationship with *the LORD* their God. The Israelites and Judeans had rebelled against God and ignored His stipulations for a sufficient time so that He decided to invoke the corrective provisions of His covenant/treaty, and used foreign nations to discipline them (2 Kings 17:5, 23, and 2 Kings 25:8-12). The city of Jerusalem was not faithful and did not live in truth.

But the day will come when God dwells amid His people, and they will become faithful to their part of the bargain—they will begin to keep their covenant agreement with God. They will no longer live in the deception of the pagan ways of exploitation and violence, but they will live in truth and faithfulness. During that time, *the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain* (v 3).

The phrase *mountain of the LORD of hosts* refers to Jerusalem. It will be called *the Holy Mountain* because the LORD will dwell there with His covenant people (Isaiah 52:1; Joel 3:17).

The current Jerusalem is built on a number of hills (also called mountains), including Mount Zion. The new Jerusalem of Revelation will be over a thousand miles high, and could also be an enormous mountain (Revelation 21:16). In that Jerusalem there will be no temple, for God will dwell there and will be its temple (Revelation 21:3, 22).

It will become a place where God’s people find refuge, peace, and joy. Jerusalem will become the center of authority in the earth (Isaiah 2:2). The LORD may accomplish this promise when Jesus Christ returns and reigns for a thousand years on the current earth (Revelation 20:4). It is clear this will be the case in the new earth (Revelation 21:2).

Zechariah then inserted the prophetic formula *Thus says the Lord of hosts* to remind the post-exilic community of Judah that he was not the primary author of the message. Instead, *the LORD* is the author—He who leads His angelic armies with all glory and power. Since the revelation is from a God who never fails, the Judeans could believe it (Joshua 21:45; Isaiah 55:11).

Following the prophetic formula, *the LORD* informed the Judeans that they would have a vibrant and peaceful environment when He *returned to Zion*. At that time, *old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of age* (v 4).

The Hebrew root of the two words translated *old men and old women* is “zāqēn.” It means “bearded one” and refers to someone advanced in age. The term *staff* is “miš‘eneṭ” in Hebrew. It refers to a walker’s stick used as a support for the weary. Since elders often need the aid of a staff when walking, Zechariah used the term to portray an intact population with an increased life expectancy.

When God restores His kingdom in *Jerusalem*, the elders will lean on their staff as they walk and spend time *in the streets of Jerusalem*, an indication of economic prosperity. In the Bible, long life is a sign of accomplishment, prominence, and divine blessing. During Christ’s thousand-year reign on the earth, people will live to a long age and death will be rare (Isaiah 65:20). However,

it seems likely that God is also promising an immediate peace upon Jerusalem if they would trust their God (Haggai 1:13, 2:4-5).

In Zechariah's day, the post-exilic community of Judah was busy but understandably fearful about what the future would hold (Ezra 3:3). After returning home after about 70 years of captivity in Babylonia, the Jewish people had to rebuild the ruined temple of God as well as their homes (Haggai 1:4). But *the LORD* reassured them that the community would again experience safety and prosperity. Not only would elders use walking sticks because of their age, they would also enjoy watching young *boys and girls playing in the streets of the city* (v 5). There would be sufficient prosperity to support the birth of children, and sufficient safety for them to play in the *streets of the city* of Jerusalem.

Zechariah again introduced the prophetic formula *thus says the LORD of hosts* or "LORD of armies" to let the Judeans hear the revelation directly from God, their covenant partner (v 6). The next message is a rhetorical question—a question asked to make a point rather than to make an inquiry. The LORD declared, *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?* (v 6). The implied answer is "No."

Although the restoration of Jerusalem might be surprising to the people, it would not be so for the LORD because He is the God of the impossible. "Nothing is too difficult" for Him (Jeremiah 32:17; Genesis 18:14). The prophet enveloped the question with the expression *declares the LORD of hosts* to demonstrate that the LORD is all-powerful. He is the sovereign over human affairs.

In verse 7, the prophet once more introduced the prophetic expression *thus says the LORD of hosts* to emphasize that God is speaking directly to His covenant people. The all-powerful God began with the particle *Behold*, which often describes an event about to take place. It serves to focus attention on the statement that follows it.

That statement usually surprises the listeners because it describes an unexpected event, which may be immediate (Ezekiel 24:16) or distant, as here. Nevertheless, it will come to pass because God is faithful to His words (Deuteronomy 7:9). His "faithfulness continues throughout all generations" (Psalm 119:90).

Following the particle *Behold*, the LORD stated, *I am going to save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west* (v 7). The verb translated as *save* means to deliver or rescue. In our context, it likely refers to God bringing His covenant people back from exile to the land of Israel (Jeremiah 30:7, 46:27). The phrase from the *land of the east and from the west* stands for all the regions where God dispersed His people. It represents countries in all directions.

Therefore, God said He would rescue and return His people (Israel and Judah); as He said, *I will bring them back and they will live in the midst of Jerusalem* (v 8). This will be a gathering of Jewish people from all over the world (Ezekiel 36:24, 37:21-22). At the time of Zechariah's prophecy, the northern kingdom of Israel was still dispersed.

Only a small remnant initially returned to Israel. This bold prophecy spans beyond what is reasonable to humans, and speaks of an event that will be supernaturally orchestrated. The fulfillment of this could take place at the end of this era of human history on this earth, which culminates with a thousand-year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:4).

Not only would God restore His people to their land, but also they would enjoy a special relationship with Him: *They shall be My people, and I will be their God in truth and righteousness* (v 8). The Hebrew term for *truth* is “emet.” It speaks of reliability (see also v. 3). The term righteousness (“*ṣedāqâ*” in Hebrew) is the quality of being morally right. It describes someone who has moral integrity in his dealings with other people. Zechariah used it in conjunction with the term *truth* to describe the character of God, who is always reliable and upright (Deuteronomy 32:4).

The Israelites belonged to God. They were His children. But their willful disobedience led God to say to them, “You are not My people, and I am not Your God” (Hosea 1:9). This was because the people had forsaken their covenant/treaty with God, which removed them from under His protective care.

But here Zechariah looks forward to a time when not only will all His people return to their land, but also *they shall be My people, and I will be their God in truth and righteousness*. The people of Israel will return to their covenant promise and live *in righteousness*.

To live *in righteousness* means to live consistent with God’s design for humans to live in harmony and mutual benefit with one another. As Jesus stated, the entire covenant/treaty God made with His people could be summed up as loving God and loving our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). To love God is to seek *truth*, and to live in *righteousness* is to live according to His (good) design. God promises that the restoration of Jerusalem they are currently enjoying is a mere shadow of another restoration that is to come. This likely looks forward to the new earth, which will be an entire earth in which *righteousness* dwells (2 Peter 3:13).

Biblical Text

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.’ ³Thus 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.*’ ⁴Thus 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.’ ⁶Thus 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. ⁷Thus 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.’