

“GOD’S GRACE FOR TROUBLED PEOPLE” PT. 1
ZECHARIAH 8:1-8

[Thaddeus Williams](#) writes about the fastest-growing religion in the world, self-worship:

...84 percent of Americans believe that “enjoying yourself is the highest goal of life.”

Further, 86 percent believe that to enjoy yourself you must “pursue the things you desire most.”

And 91 percent affirm this statement: “To find yourself, look within yourself.”...

These are the sacred commandments of this ancient and still-trending world religion [self-worship]:

- Your mind is the source and standard of truth, so no matter what, trust yourself...
- Your emotions are authoritative, so never question (or let anyone else question) your feelings.
- You are sovereign, so flex your omnipotence and bend the universe around your dreams and desires.
- You are supreme, so always act according to your chief end, to glorify and enjoy yourself forever.
- You are...the standard of goodness—so don’t let anyone oppress you with the antiquated notion of being a sinner who needs grace.
- You are the Creator, so use that limitless creative power to craft your identity and purpose.

If you’ve ever participated in self-worship (and it is the nature of the flesh to do so), you know the folly of it. You know of your inadequacy and weakness and inability. In Zechariah 8, the prophet points to something better — God-worship and God-dependence. His message in the opening verses of this chapter is that...

GOD’S POWER AND GRACE ARE ADEQUATE TO PROVIDE FOR HIS PEOPLE.

Zechariah eight focuses on the unlimited power of God — it uses the title **Lord of Hosts** (God Almighty) more than any other chapter in the Bible, appearing 18x (vv. 1-4, 6 [2x], 7, 9 [2x], 11, 14 [2x], 18-23). That power is manifested as God’s grace to inadequate, weak, over-estimating people.

There are two main sections in the chapter indicated by the phrase, “The word of the Lord of Hosts came...” (vv. 1, 18). This chapter has two main sections — God’s provision for the future of Israel (vv. 1-8) and the implications for Israel in the present, because of God’s future provision (vv. 9-17). In this section, we will **observe five demonstrations** of God’s power and grace to His people for the future. The Israelites are not what they thought they were and had not accomplished what they thought they did through fasting (7:3), but God (after correcting them for their folly, 7:4-14) will still provide for them.

1. The Grace of God’s **JEALOUSY** (vv. 1-2)
2. The Grace of God’s **PRESENCE** (v. 3)
3. The Grace of God’s **“FUTURE”** (vv. 4-5)
4. The Grace of God’s **POWER** (v. 6)
5. The Grace of God’s **SALVATION** (vv. 7-8)

1. The Grace of God's JEALOUSY (vv. 1-2)

- Verse one uses the phrase *the word of the Lord came [to me]...* — a saying that begins each of the four oracles/declarations of God in chapters 7-8 (7:1, 8; 8:1, 18).
 - ✓ In this third oracle of 17 verses, there are two main sections (vv. 1-8, vv. 9-17).
 - ✓ Within these two large sections, there are also seven smaller sections/themes that are marked by the saying, *Thus says the Lord of hosts...*
 - ✓ The first five of those declarations are in the first section (vv. 1-8) and deal with Israel's future.
- Remember also that God (through Zechariah) is still answering the question in 7:3 about fasting.
 - ✓ The two oracles in chapter seven were largely filled with warnings and judgments (7:6-7, 14).
 - ✓ But the tone of the two oracles in chapter eight is very different; here is hope and encouragement after the warning of God's discipline and judgment.
 - ✓ In chapter seven, the nation was to repent and live righteously because of the warning of judgment. In chapter eight the nation was to repent and live righteously because of the hope of restoration.
- The first declaration from the powerful God (*Lord of hosts*) is that He is *jealous*.
 - ✓ He says *I am exceedingly jealous* — the ESV captures the sense very well: "I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy." He repeats the root word twice in this phrase and then uses it again, *with great wrath I am jealous*. So God uses the word 3x in this verse (and once also in 1:14).
 - ✓ We call jealousy the "green-eyed monster" (Shakespeare); it is often self-serving, possessive, and manipulative. It is rarely seen as a benefit in a relationship. It has been described this way:

"Here is the way [jealousy] works. I love something very much, indeed, *too much*. I desire, in fact, to possess it completely. But the thing I love slips out of my hands and passes into another's. I begin to experience the gnawing pangs of jealousy. Strangely, the feelings of zeal and love begin to change. By the dark, transforming power of sin, my love turns to hate. Once I was open, happy, filled to the brim with exquisite delight, but no longer! Now I am closed within a narrow compass of inner rage, intensely and insanely angry." [Swindoll, *Come Before Winter*, 187.]

- ✓ How then is God's jealousy something good?
- God's jealousy is also a reflection of His love for His people and commitment to them, but with this idea:
 - ✓ God's jealousy means He tolerates no rivals to Himself or to His people. He is protective of His people so they can maintain their allegiance to Him alone. His jealousy is protective.
 - ✓ His jealousy is from His covenantal relationship with His people and His commitment to preserve them (Ex. 20:5; 34:14; cf. Dt. 5:9).
 - ✓ That protection means that He will at times discipline His people (7:14; Ps. 78:56-62).

- ✓ That protection also means that He will judge those who attempt to harm His people (v. 2b; 1:14f).
- ✓ “God’s wrath — His burning jealousy — is not against me, but against those things that would draw me away from Him.” [Creasman, “A Holy Jealousy.”]
- ✓ That is the emphasis in this verse — in jealousy God will defend His people by pouring out His wrath on her enemies. Cf. Ezk. 36:5-6; Is. 42:13; 59:17; Nahum 1:2.
- ✓ How is God’s jealousy a grace to Israel? The nation thought it was protected from the nations by its ritual observances of fasting. That legalism was of no benefit. Their protection was God’s grace manifested through His righteous allegiance and jealousy to Israel. His burning love for them would protect them now and in the future.
- ✓ If we are in Christ, this same jealous love protects us. God will not allow us to wander away from Him and He will not allow our adversaries to go unpunished. We are safe with Him (Jn. 10:28).
- ✓ The next verse begins to expose some of what God will do for His people in His jealousy.

2. The Grace of God’s PRESENCE (v. 3)

- The second declaration of this oracle is ***I will return to Zion and will dwell...in Jerusalem.***
 - ✓ Notice that God promises not only will He *return* to Zion (Jerusalem), but He will *live* there. It will be His “habitation.” Jerusalem is His “home.”
 - ✓ The statement has the same emphasis as 1:16 — God is returning to rule His covenant people.
 - ✓ That was an encouragement as the rebuilding of the temple began (1:16) and was still an encouragement as they were now about half way finished with the project.
 - ✓ The word ***dwell*** is also the word that is the root for “Tabernacle.” So to hear this word being used had to remind the people of Ezekiel 10:4, 18 — the departing of God’s glory; He stopped dwelling with them. And this verse is a promise that the glory of God *will* return in MK (Ezk. 43:1-5).
 - ✓ Where God is present, His people are safe. The enemy will not flourish or be victorious.
 - ✓ Like children comforted at night (“Daddy is here...”) so God’s people are comforted by His presence.
 - ✓ That was true of Israel in the past and it is true of believers today.
 - Jesus came to be w/ His people (Mt. 1:23); He ascended and left His Spirit (Jn. 14:16; Eph. 3:17)
 - When Christ is present, His people are safe. When you are indwelt by the Spirit of God, no matter what happens outside you, you are safe (2 Tim. 4:18; 1 Pt. 1:3-5; cf. Mt. 10:28).
 - ✓ Our world yearns for safety (consider how much insurance you purchase monthly). Nothing is safe. But when we are in Christ, we are safe — even (especially) when we die.
- The result of God’s dwelling in Jerusalem is also a blessing to Israel — what is the benefit?
 - ✓ ***Jerusalem will be called the city of truth*** — Just as in 7:9, ***truth*** probably means “faithfulness.” When God is present in Jerusalem, it will be known as “the faithful city.” The people will be faithful to their covenant obligations (v. 16); and God will be faithful to provide for them. Both the King and the subjects will be known for faithfulness.

- ✓ Isaiah described Jerusalem as a place where truth had fallen in the street (Is. 59:14-15). No more! Truth will be “revived” and come and live in and control Jerusalem once again. [Merrill]
- ✓ ***The mountain...will be called the Holy Mountain*** — Zion (the mount where the temple is) will be known for holiness because the King who lives there is holy (Is. 6:3; cf. Ps. 15:1; 43:3; Jer. 31:23).
- ✓ Because God’s holiness is there, the nations will be attracted to Jerusalem (Mic. 4:1-3). Genuine holiness is attractive to unbelievers (and invites gospel conversations, 1 Pt. 3:15).
- ✓ Combined these attributes of truth and holiness remind the hearer/reader that only YHWH has the power and authority to change the character of a nation/people. And He will.
- ✓ This is also a reminder that only by God’s grace will we receive what we really want and need (truth and holiness). Fasting didn’t (and won’t) make Israel holy. But the presence of God will.

3. The Grace of God’s **FUTURE** (vv. 4-5)

- What is the result of God being in Jerusalem (Christ being on His throne)? The most vulnerable people will receive His care and protection and will flourish.
 - ✓ ***Old men and women will again sit in the streets*** = The elderly may still have to lean on a **staff** (cane) for support, but they are safe walking in the streets. There is no danger for them and they will experience joy. He is obviously talking about a millennial setting (Is. 65:20; Jer. 31:12-13)
 - ✓ Children — both **boys and girls** — will play (and be safe) in the streets (cf. Is. 11:6-9; 65:20, 23-25).
 - ✓ The foreign armies will be gone from the streets and the everyday dangers of being in the street will also be gone. Safety (and joy) all around — from the oldest to the youngest.
 - ✓ This would have been particularly encouraging because even though the Babylonian captivity had ended, Jerusalem’s population was still low (Neh. 7:4; 11:1-2).
 - ✓ Even the remaining desolation of Israel’s captivity is not an impediment to God Almighty.
- God’s grace, manifested through His power as **Lord of hosts**, will provide for all people — His power will put His King on His throne — and His power will care for the marginal, overlooked, and weak. Everyone will receive His care in His kingdom (and it will come by grace) and not the merit of fasting or anything else. We do well to meditate on our future with God (Rev. 20-22; Is. 65-66; 2 Cor. 4:16-18).

4. The Grace of God’s **POWER** (v. 6)

- The promise of vv. 4-5 (as well as the rest of the chapter) is remarkable. It seems beyond possibility.
 - ✓ The people may have been tempted to say, “No way — that can’t be; it’s impossible for us.”
 - ✓ So God anticipates (or hears) their response and says, ***If it is too difficult [for]...the remnant...will it also be too difficult in My sight?***

- ✓ The remnant had gone back to the land from Babylon; the opposition they faced provoked them to delay rebuilding the temple for 15 years. They were overwhelmed by the opposition.
- ✓ When they heard these statements, they had to think, “we can’t even rebuild the temple...how will we be able to do that?” The question/objection is the same as Sarah’s (Gen. 18:12, 14)
- ✓ And the implication is, “if we can’t do this, then God will not be able to do it either.”
- God makes a simple and clear correction — “just because you can’t doesn’t mean I can’t.”
 - ✓ God almighty is able to accomplish what man cannot. Cf. Mt. 17:20; 19:26; Jn. 15:5.
 - ✓ Just because He has not done it (yet), doesn’t mean He cannot do it.
 - ✓ A while ago, Raye Jeanne told me a story of someone she met who was uninterested in the gospel. For decades. No interest. Even animosity. And then one day this person called RJ — “can you help me?” I was stunned by the whole story. “I don’t know what to say...” “Terry...it’s the Lord...”
 - ✓ I should know...I always say, “Who knows what the Lord might do...?” He can and does act.
 - ✓ And notice that just to make sure the readers didn’t miss this point, Zechariah uses the title **Lord of hosts** (God Almighty) twice in this verse — He is always able to act; He is never limited!
- Most of us (all of us?) have circumstances in our lives that seem impossible. We just can’t fix it.
 - ✓ We can’t fix the marriage. Or the children. Or the illness. Or the financial troubles. Or the temptations to coveting, or disobedience, or escaping troubles with sex or alcohol or... Or the results of someone’s sin. Or the despondency. Or the court or political ruler. Or...
 - ✓ This verse is not a promise that all those things will get fixed here and now. But this verse is a promise that God is able to fix all of it. He can fix your marriage. And your children. And your finances. And your heart. What is *your* impossibility? He can fix it. It’s not beyond Him.
 - ✓ And while not all of your physical circumstances will be changed by Him on earth, one day He will.
 - ✓ There is a day coming for both Israel and us when His power will be on full display through the correction of all of the problems that overwhelm us today. Be of good courage. He is strong enough.

5. The Grace of God’s SALVATION (vv. 7-8)

- As the fifth promise of what He will do in the future, the Lord of Hosts says ***I am going to save My people...***
 - ✓ As we will see in these two verses, this salvation is not just a temporal salvation, but it is a final salvation of the nation; all the promises to the nation (Gen. 12:1-3) will be fulfilled.
 - ✓ The nation (***My people***) will finally be redeemed as an entire nation (Rom. 11).
 - ✓ He will do this salvation by bringing people from ***east*** and ***west***.
 - To the east is Babylon. He did that historically (and will do it again), so that is easily understood.
 - To the west is the Mediterranean Sea. So what does He mean? Perhaps Philistia. But more probably He simply means “as far as the east is from the west” — from all points of the globe.

- God will call His people to the promised land from all over the world (Is. 43:5-6; Jer. 31:8).
 - This may well be the greatest promise of Israel's regathering and salvation in Scripture. (Hope!)
- Notice this: not only will God live in Jerusalem as His dwelling (v. 3), but His people will live *with Him*.
 - ✓ ***I will bring them back*** — it is *His* work to regather them to the land He promised to give them.
 - ✓ The people of the land are coming back to the land. And the people who are not of the land will also come to the land as the overflow of this promise to Israel (1 Pt. 2:10-11; **Rev. 7:9ff**).
 - ✓ Their scattering in all the lands is not final; their residence in the Land *is* final. And God's gracious power will do it.
 - ✓ God will save and God will restore...it's *all* His work.
 - There is a further aspect to the promise — not only will they come back to a land, but they will come back to a relationship: ***and I will be their God***.
 - ✓ This likely alludes to the fulfillment of the New Covenant (**Jer. 31:31ff**). All the covenants of God with Abraham, Moses, David, and Jeremiah are designed to this end — to make Israel His possession.
 - ✓ The promise is not just about a location but about a purpose and a relationship.
 - ✓ Further — God will be God of Israel, and He will do so with ***truth*** (fidelity/faithfulness) and ***righteousness***. These are characteristics of the Davidic Kingdom and point to the MK (1 Kings 3:6).
 - While this promise of salvation is not yet fulfilled for Israel, the power of the ***Lord of Hosts*** makes it certain. And the grace of the Lord of Hosts also makes salvation available for us who are not Israelites.
 - ✓ The promises to Israel were always with the accompanying responsibility to be a spiritual blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:3) and a source of salvation for the nations (Jer. 1:5).
 - ✓ So we also can be saved. And we must be saved. But we cannot be saved by our own righteousness.
 - ✓ Our only hope is to trust in Christ (the Messiah/King, v. 3) alone for our salvation.
 - ✓ If you are a sinner who hasn't repented, I exhort you to repent (turn from sin and to Christ).
 - ✓ And believe that only Christ paid for the penalty and power of your sin — and that Christ alone is worth living for (2 Cor. 5:9). If you haven't repented and believed, would you today?

CONCLUSION: What is better than self-worship and self-righteousness? God worship and Christ-righteousness. The self-dependent, self-worshipping Israelites (Bethelites) are not adequate. And you and I when we are self-dependent and self-worshipping are not adequate either.

But even as God helped the Israelites in their post-exile days and in their folly, so God helps us with His limitless power. We are not enough. We are never enough. He is always enough and He is always able.

BENEDICTION (Don): Jude 24-25