

Promising Peace

Eugene glanced over at the table where the ruckus was happening. Things did not often get loud at a skilled care facility, but Royal Meadows had its moments. When things did become involved, it was usually during activity events and typically over bingo.

Two women were arguing over who was the winner. A decorated hand towel was the prize.

"Mr. Butler, did you win any games?" asked Lela, one of the nursing staff.

"No, not this afternoon," smiled Eugene Butler.

"Have your children been to see you?" asked Lela.

"The youngest came by yesterday," said Eugene. "My son is coming after dinner."

"I know you have a lot of people making sure you're taken care of," said Lela. "Is that why you are always so calm and peaceful?"

"I have good children, that's true," said Eugene, "but it is because of the Lord. He is the One who has saved me, loved me, and kept me all these years."

Lela pulled out another seat at the table with Mr. Butler. She liked all the residents, but especially Mr. Butler. She always felt a little warmth and peace after being in his presence.

While the 83-year-old man was able-bodied and had family who visited, Lela wondered how he could always be so consistently nice. She would never ask him, but he did not seem fearful about—well, anything.

"What about you, young lady?" asked Mr. Butler. "Do you have peace?"

- 1. What things do we do to try to get peace in our lives?**
- 2. Why is being right with God the best way to have peace?**
- 3. How do you know when you have God's peace in your life?**

The Promise of Peace

Zechariah 8:1-8, KJV

1 Again the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying,
2 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury.
3 Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain.
4 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age.
5 And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.
6 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts.
7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country;
8 And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.

Zechariah 8:1-8, NIV

¹The word of the LORD Almighty came to me.
²This is what the LORD Almighty says: "I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her."
³This is what the LORD says: "I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain."
⁴This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. ⁵The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there."
⁶This is what the LORD Almighty says: "It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?" declares the LORD Almighty.
⁷This is what the LORD Almighty says: "I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. ⁸I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God."

Do you know that the Lord passionately desires the devotion of His people? In verse 2 He says, "I am burning with jealousy" for Zion (the name of a hill in Jerusalem often used interchangeably for the city). He desires to be with His people and give them the security and peace that result from His presence. At the time envisioned by Zechariah, Jerusalem "will be called the Faithful City" (vs. 3); the people will serve only the Lord and not worship useless idols as they had done in the past.

In verses 4-5, the Lord paints a picture of the remarkable safety that will accompany His presence. The sight of the elderly sitting outside along with children playing in the streets of Jerusalem was something not seen at the time of the prophet. Because of the broken down walls, parents were much too afraid to let their children play outside. The aged likely would have been a small percentage of the population, in part because of the recent difficult trek from Babylon back to the city.

Because of their current lack of protection, the wonderful scene of safety was impossible for the people to imagine. However, with the Lord all things are possible. Someday God would dwell in the midst of His people: "they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God" (v. 8). His protection will result in peace for Jerusalem.

4. Why is the Lord jealous for His people?

5. Why would the picture of peace in verse 4-5 be so difficult for those living in Zechariah's day to believe?

The Blessings of Peace

Zechariah 8:11-13, KJV

11 But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts.
12 For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all

Zechariah 8:11-13, NIV

¹¹"But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as I did in the past," declares the LORD Almighty.

¹²"The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things

KJV

these things.

13 And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong.

NIV

as an inheritance to the remnant of this people. ¹³Just as you, Judah and Israel, have been a curse among the nations, so I will save you, and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong."

In former days, the Israelites suffered through much poverty and frequent enemy attacks because of their disobedience (vs. 10). The "But now" of verse 11 signifies God will begin to deal much differently with this remnant of His people. Though their current conditions were dire as the result of a great famine in the land (see Hag. 1:10-11), the returning exiles could find encouragement in what God promised to do for them. In contrast to the bleak picture of barrenness that the people saw all around them, the Lord said, "The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew" (vs. 12).

God's blessings included a dramatic change of heart on the part of the surrounding nations. Rather than curse the Jews, they would recognize Israel as a "blessing" (vs. 13). Many believe these promises not only applied to the people of Zechariah's day and their descendants, but also to a still future day of restoration for Jerusalem at Jesus' second coming.

6. Why might the returning captives have been so discouraged?

7. How did the Lord encourage the Israelites regarding their current plight?

The Response to Peace

Zechariah 8:14-17, KJV

14 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the LORD of hosts, and I repented not:

Zechariah 8:14-17, NIV

¹⁴This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Just as I had determined to bring disaster on you and showed no pity when your ancestors angered me," says

KJV

15 So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not.

16 These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates:

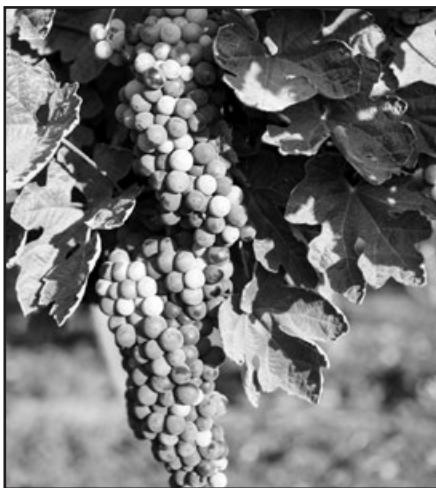
17 And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD.

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the LORD Almighty,¹⁵ "so now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid.¹⁶ These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts;¹⁷ do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this," declares the LORD.

To the downtrodden returnees from exile, the prophecies of peace and blessings no doubt sounded much too good to be true. To make sure they did not miss His assurance of restoration, the Lord compared His determination "to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah" with that of His previous commitment to judge the nation for its sins (vss. 14-15). His resolve to bless Israel would be just as great as His resolve in judging them for their idolatry. They could count on His future blessings!

Because of God's determination to seek their well-being, they were to do the same in their relationships with each other. The Lord expected that truth and kindness would characterize all their dealings with one another. Furthermore, their courts must be places of justice and honest testimony rather than an instrument to harm the weak and the poor.



Vines in Israel loaded with grapes. God promised the returning exiles that "the seed will grow well [and] the vine will yield its fruit" (Zech. 8:12).

8. How were the people to live in light of God's promise of future peace and prosperity?

Fear or Peace?

The returned exiles had been through the emotional trauma of being torn out of their homeland, then returning to a land full of ruins. Even though God had brought them out of exile, they still feared that their troubles were far from over. How could they look out at the devastated world around them and still find peace in Him?

Fear stops us in our tracks and causes us to think of the worst-case scenarios. Our minds may be overcharged with doubt, anger, grief, and regret. But the Lord didn't give us these fears, and our success is based on His power—not our limitations. Fear is the enemy of faith, and without faith, it is impossible for us to please God or to fulfill the will of God. With faith, we can set our sights on Jesus and find that elusive peace for which we have been searching so long. If we desire an abundant life with peace, it is only found in obedience to Christ, to faithfully follow His truth and live a holy life.

When the Lord commands truth, faithfulness, and holiness, we must obey if we are to have the peace and promises of God. Sin brings shame, sorrow, judgment, fear, and forfeiture of promises and peace. If we live a life of sin and lies and are unfaithful and unholy, then our rewards are depression, condemnation, death, and darkness.

Zechariah helps us realize that an abundant life is an obedient life. The peace of God endures even in adversity when we live according to God's will for us. If we want to experience the joy of the Lord, and "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7, KJV)—as well as the truth about who we are and why we are here—then we must be submitted, obedient followers of the Lord.

9. How important are truth, faithfulness, and holiness in life?

10. Why is it impossible to please God without these characteristics?

11. We are all looking for peace, but how do these three characteristics relate to that search?

Finding Peace

We all have a decision to make regarding our current relationship with the Lord. We can find peace and have victory over fear when we confess our sins, repent, and establish priorities that create a faithful life surrendered to Christ. We commit to His truthfulness, not the lies of the world around us, and we strive for holiness. We replace the old with newness in Christ.

► *Commit this week to living a life faithful to the Lord and filled with His truth. Give the Lord the firstfruits of your time each day. If you seek Him first, you will find order and clarity in your day. He desires to lead and guide us, but we must position ourselves to hear His voice.*

KEY VERSE

So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not. —Zechariah 8:15, KJV

“So now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid.” —Zechariah 8:15, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 11 through May 17

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Psalm 86:1-13—Seeking Divine Help in Troubled Times.

Tues. Jeremiah 27:1-11—Land Now Belongs to Babylon.

Wed. Deuteronomy 30:15-20—Choose to Love and Obey the Lord.

Thurs. Jeremiah 38:14-18—Surrender and the People Will Live.

Fri. Jeremiah 21:1-7—Jerusalem Will Fall.

Sat. 2 Kings 24:20b-25:7—Jerusalem Defeated and Zedekiah Exiled.

Sun. Jeremiah 21:8-14—Choose the Life of Justice.