

ZECHARIAH

Chapter Eight

Introduction

If you could live anywhere you wanted, where would it be? Once you determine *where*, then consider *why* you would want to live there.

God could "live" anywhere He wants. He has a lot more choices than you and I! Besides any address on the earth, He has heaven and His vast created universe to choose from.

It should therefore be something of a shock to hear God say in Zechariah 8:2&3,

Zechariah 8:2 "... 'I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her.'
Zechariah 8:3 "... 'I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.'"

God is all excited about one day living on earth in the city of Jerusalem. Maybe He's not watching CNN! It's odd, to say the least, that God would desire above anywhere else to be in Jerusalem.

It's odd until you ask "*Why?*" The reason why He wants to live there is because He wants to live among His people. You read in verse eight,

Zechariah 8:8 "I will bring them *back*, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness."

God wants to be among His people. He wants to live among those He loves. In the future He will draw them to Jerusalem and dwell with them there.

Some of you can relate to this. Maybe you live here in Kings County to be closer to loved ones; or maybe you are considering moving somewhere for the same reason. **God wants to live among His loved ones!** And that means He looks forward to the future day when Jerusalem will be the capital city of His kingdom on earth.

God communicates His passion to live among His loved ones by using the Hebrew word *qana* (kaw-naw). He uses it three times in verse two of this chapter. In some of your Bibles it is translated as *jealous*; in others it is translated as *zealous*. Jealousy is the attitude and zeal is the activity – it is jealousy in action working to accomplish its desire. God is *jealous* to live among His people and He acts with *zeal* to accomplish His desire.

I want to discuss God's jealousy and zeal as we go through chapter eight. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 You See God's Jealousy In His Zeal To Live Among His Loved Ones, and #2 You Show God's Jealousy In Your Zeal To Live As His Loved Ones.

#1 You See God's Jealousy In His Zeal To Live Among His Loved Ones (v1-15)

We normally think of jealousy as bad. **God's jealousy is good!** God says of Himself in Exodus 34:14, "... the LORD, whose name *is* Jealous, *is* a jealous God." God's jealousy is an attitude of care and concern and compassion for His loved ones that is expressed in His zealous activities to bless them.

God's jealous zeal can be seen in His plan for Jerusalem. Zechariah was writing to encourage the Jews in the sixth century who had returned to Jerusalem and were rebuilding the Temple. He looked beyond their century to the coming of the Messiah to Jerusalem to establish the kingdom of God on earth. He discussed the future *city* and its future *conditions*.

The future city of Jerusalem:

Zechariah 8:1 Again the word of the LORD of hosts came, saying,

Zechariah 8:2 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her.'

Zechariah 8:3 "Thus says the LORD: 'I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain.'

"Zion" is one of the ridges upon which Jerusalem was built. Jerusalem is mentioned an astonishing eight hundred times in the Bible. It is mentioned more than that everyday in the news.

After being scattered for twenty-five hundred years to every nation on earth; after being hounded, hated, and hunted; after being made the object of history's most systematic attempts at genocide; the Jewish people have astonishingly survived as an identifiable ethnic group. They have miraculously returned to their ancient Promised Land. Add to all this that the Bible predicted in Zechariah chapter twelve that in the Last Days just before the return of the Messiah Jerusalem would be a "cup of trembling" and a "burdensome stone" to all the nations of the world. We are on the verge of seeing the fulfillment of God's promise to return and dwell among His loved ones in Jerusalem!

Something is going on in Jerusalem – something spiritual. It is the place on earth where God dwelt spiritually among His people, the Jews...It is the place Jesus came in order to offer salvation to the Jews and to all mankind... **And it is the place on earth Jesus will "return to" in the future to dwell physically among His people, both believing Jews and Gentiles.**

The future conditions of the city are summarized in verses four and five:

Zechariah 8:4 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age.

Zechariah 8:5 The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.'

The very old and the very young will be safe when the Lord rules the earth from Jerusalem. How different from our attitudes toward these groups today. This description is enough to tell you it will be a wonderful time of peace and prosperity.

Is it hard for you to believe that there could be peace and prosperity in Jerusalem? It should be, because it is impossible for mankind to establish a lasting peace there. But what is impossible for man is possible for God:

Zechariah 8:6 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'If it is marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, will it also be marvelous in My eyes?' says the LORD of hosts.

Zechariah 8:7 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west;

Zechariah 8:8 I will bring them *back*, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness.'

Verse six could be translated, “This may seem impossible for my people who are left, but it isn't impossible for me, the LORD All-Powerful” (CEV). God promised to regather His loved ones from all over the earth. This has certainly begun, but will have its ultimate fulfillment after a yet future time of persecution against the Jews that we know as the seven-year Great Tribulation. At the end of those seven years the Lord will return to earth to dwell among His people as He both promised and prophesied.

In the mean time the Jews to whom Zechariah was writing in the sixth century could learn a lesson about God's jealousy. So can we. In His jealousy, God is zealous to *discipline* His loved ones, and to follow His discipline with *dedication*.

In His jealousy, God is zealous to discipline:

Zechariah 8:9 “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Let your hands be strong, you who have been hearing in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, who *spoke* in the day the foundation was laid for the house of the LORD of hosts, that the temple might be built.

Zechariah 8:10 For before these days *there were* no wages for man nor any hire for beast; *there was* no peace from the enemy for whoever went out or came in; for I set all men, everyone, against his neighbor.

God said He was responsible for their trials. It was His discipline. God loved them so much that He disciplined them when they were disobedient. Discipline is a positive, loving expression of jealousy. It is wanting what is best for your loved one by not allowing them to ruin their life. It is why **you** should be zealous to discipline your own children.

God follows His discipline with dedication:

Zechariah 8:11 But now I *will* not *treat* the remnant of this people as in the former days,’ says the LORD of hosts.

Zechariah 8:12 ‘For the seed *shall be* prosperous, the vine shall give its fruit, the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew - I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these.

Zechariah 8:13 And it shall come to pass *that* just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you, and you shall be a blessing. Do not fear, let your hands be strong.’

Zechariah 8:14 “For thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Just as I determined to punish you when your fathers provoked Me to wrath,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘And I would not relent,

Zechariah 8:15 So again in these days I am determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear.”

God was promising to dedicate Himself to the well-being of the Jews who were in Jerusalem rebuilding the Temple. He had disciplined them by allowing them to be captives and exiles in Babylon for their disobedience; but now He was dedicating Himself to blessing them for their obedience.

God wants to dwell among His loved ones! He visited Adam and Eve every afternoon in the Garden of Eden... He visited Abraham... He was present with the Jews when they fled from Egypt and wandered in the wilderness... His glory dwelt in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple... He came in the first century and dwelt among us – Immanuel, God in human flesh... He will return at the end of human history to live on the earth... In eternity He will create a new heaven and a new earth and dwell among us.

History is the story of your jealous God and His zeal to be among you. Ages come and go; nations rise and fall. Through it all God is reaching out to those He loves.

Who does He love? “For God so loved the world...” He loves *all* mankind. **But you must believe in Him.** The verse goes on to say,

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

When you believe in Him you join those He loves **and** is jealous over. He dwells *within you* by His Spirit. You begin to experience His jealous zeal as He guides your life into situations and circumstances that cause you to draw closer to Him. He disciplines you when necessary; but He is dedicated to you to bless you with all spiritual blessings.

#2 You Show God’s Jealousy In Your Zeal To Live As His Loved Ones (v16-23)

Twice we read “let your hands be strong.” Knowing God is jealous to dwell with you ought to have an effect on your life. It ought to strengthen you in everything you do for God. It ought to give you a zeal to serve God. Others should be able to see that His jealous love is something to be prized and praised.

In the remaining verses of chapter eight your zeal is revealed in three ways: in your *relationships*, in your *religion*, and in your *reaching-out*.

Your zeal is revealed in your relationships:

Zechariah 8:16 These *are* the things you shall do: speak each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace;

Zechariah 8:17 Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; and do not love a false oath. For all these *are things* that I hate,' says the LORD."

Each of these things you "shall do" involve your relationships with others. In a word, you should love others. God jealously loves you; you should jealously love those whom God loves. You show it when you are zealous to *think* about them as you should and when you *treat* them as you should.

Perhaps people are not interested in God's love for them because they see it has no effect on our love for each other! Marriages split; families split; churches split. There needs to be a jealousy for relationships that is revealed by your zeal to preserve them to the glory of God. "Let your hands be strong" in working in these relationships.

Your zeal is revealed in your religion:

Zechariah 8:18 Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying,

Zechariah 8:19 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'The fast of the fourth *month*, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.'

We looked at these fasts in great detail in our last study. The Jews observed four fasts to commemorate four catastrophes: the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the penetrating of the walls of Jerusalem, the burning of the Temple, and the killing of their governor. In chapter seven a delegation of Jews had come from Bethel to Jerusalem to ask if they should still fast in the fifth month once the Temple was rebuilt. We pointed out to you that God *never* established any fasts in the Old Testament, only feasts. His desire was and is that His people should celebrate with joy their relationship with Him and with one another. We should express this joy in a zeal for our religion.

I use “religion” in the sense of our outward activities. Christianity is a relationship, not a religion; but we still do things as Christians. They should be celebrations. People should want what we have. Prayer, fellowship, Bible study, serving in the church... All of these and everything we do should declare that we are joyously blessed to walk with God.

Your zeal is revealed in reaching-out:

Zechariah 8:20 “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities;

Zechariah 8:21 The inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another, saying, “Let us continue to go and pray before the LORD, and seek the LORD of hosts. I myself will go also.”

Zechariah 8:22 Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD.’

Zechariah 8:23 “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard *that God is with you.*”’”

The context of these verses is the future kingdom on earth. Jesus will be ruling as King from His throne in Jerusalem. The nation of Israel will have a prominent role. Gentiles from all over the earth will stream into Jerusalem to worship Jesus. They will be so excited that, as they approach Jerusalem, they will grab any Jew they can find and follow him to the Lord.

There is a principle for us: In the future, when Jesus is on the earth, men will reach-out to God’s people... Today, while Jesus is in heaven, God’s people should reach-out to men.

There are two points I’d make from these verses about reaching-out: You are to *encourage* and you are to *example*.

“Let us continue to go.” It is an encouragement from one believer to another. It assumes you are looking out for one another and are desiring God’s best for the other person. In short, you are jealous for them to experience everything God desires for them.

You can’t truly encourage unless you are an example. The believer in our passage said, “I **myself** will go also.” It is somewhat hypocritical to encourage people to do something you see no need

for in your own life! People may not follow your example; but you should at least be an example they could follow.

Conclusion

Every year various publications list the most desirable cities in America. A recent overall top-five were Salt Lake City, Washington DC, Seattle, Tampa-St. Petersburg, and Denver.

The list, though, depends on the criteria you use. For example: While Denver was number five on the overall list, it was number one based on factors from air quality, health care, and education – and none of the other cities in the overall top five made that list at all. If you're looking for restaurants, then it's New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

In the near future, Jerusalem will top all the lists – because Jesus will be there.

In the mean time, it doesn't matter where you live... Only Who you live for and how you live.

God is jealous over you... Be zealous for Him.