



“Should ye not hear the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when men inhabited the south and the plain?” (Zechariah 7:7).

Learning From History

Central Truth: The prophet called upon the people to profit from past mistakes.

L441. Date: February 1986. **Text:** Zechariah 7:5-7, 9, 10.

Topic: God: Faithfulness of.

History is “His-story,” the record of how God has dealt with people of various nations and generations. It is an excellent record of how He will deal with us. History teaches us that God rewards right and punishes wrong in each nation and each generation.

A thing is right because it agrees with the nature and purpose of God. A thing is wrong because it disagrees with the person and nature of God. God does not change, so the standards of right and wrong do not change.

Each generation is responsible to God for itself, and for passing the knowledge of God to the next generation. One generation can bring a blessing or a curse on the one that follows it, depending on the religious heritage it leaves.

We must follow principles of holy living. There is no other way to receive God's approval once we are trusting Jesus.

This study is designed to call the present generation to faithful obedience to the principles of revealed religion by a review of the work of God in other generations.

I. GOD CALLS EACH GENERATION TO REPENTANCE

Zechariah 1:2-4 looks at two generations. God instructs the prophet to

speak to his own generation, saying, *“Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts”* (verse 3). His own generation was called to God.

That was not the first time God had called the people of Judah to himself. Zechariah continued God's message, *“Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways”* (verse 4). He calls people in each generation.

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoke unto us by his Son” (Hebrews 1:1, 2). Other generations were blessed in that God spoke to them through prophets. We are thrice blessed in that God has spoken to us by His only begotten Son.

God's call is always a call to holiness. *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof”* (Romans 6:12). *“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon”* (Isaiah 55:7). His call is, *“Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings”* (Jeremiah 3:22).

That same appeal goes out to generation following generation. It is necessary because a human being's nature is sinful (until he receives Jesus Christ) and because God's mercy is unchanging. Thank God His appeal came to our generation.

II. GOD JUDGES SIN IN EACH GENERATION

One generation passes away and is followed by another. But God remains the same. His unchanging standards determine His judgment upon sin, generation after generation.

A rebellious people have eyes to see and ears to hear, but they refuse to see what God shows and to hear what God says (Ezekiel 12:2). God warns such people, *“Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not”* (Isaiah 65:12).

Those who refuse to heed God will be cast away in discipline for their sins (Hosea 9:17). He will not tolerate sin. Those who cling to sin must account to God for their choice.

God would not be just if He judged sin in one generation and let it pass without judgment in another. But the Judge of the whole earth will do what

is right. He does not pass by iniquity as if it were of no consequence. Sin is a high insult against God and will be met with severe judgment. The only way to escape the judgment of God is to be done with the problem of sin.

III. GOD'S WORD IS TRUE IN EACH GENERATION

“My words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the LORD of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us” (Zechariah 1:6).

God is faithful to perform both His promises and His warnings.

“Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise” (I Kings 8:56). “The works of his hands are verity and judgment; all his commandments are sure” (Psalm 111:7).

He certifies His faithfulness, saying, *“I am the LORD: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged; for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord GOD” (Ezekiel 12:25).*

You can trust the Word of God because you can trust the God of the Word. He has no reason to speak what is untrue; indeed, it would be a contradiction to His own nature of truth. He has no occasion to change His purposes or adjust his plans. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He who promised is faithful. You can count His promises as certain as if they were already fulfilled. God's Word is true in each generation.

IV. WE MUST HEAR AND RESPOND TO GOD IN OUR GENERATION

God's message to us is, *“Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 1:3).*

How personal is that appeal. Twice God calls us personally to *“turn.”*

How sacred is that appeal. The full statement of Zechariah 1:3 has the phrase *“saith the LORD of hosts”* three times in a single verse. The repeated phrase must be to emphasize that God himself is calling the sinner to turn to Him. We are urged to remember the words of God has spoken before and respond to the words God is speaking today. *“Saith the LORD of hosts”* is your guarantee that God wants to do business with you.

“Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates,

waiting at the posts of my doors” (Proverbs 8:34). A readiness to hear what God says in His house is a sign of spiritual wisdom (Ecclesiastes 5:1). The word of God “*worketh effectually*” in those who receive it (I Thessalonians 2:13). We are responsible for how the seed of the Word grows in the hearts when we receive it from God's messenger (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23). It is our business to see that the seed is in good soil and produces a harvest of righteousness.

We each have a personal responsibility to respond when God speaks.

V. WE MUST BE PURE IN RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES IN OUR GENERATION

God asked Judah the purpose of her religious observances of fasting and mourning in time past. “*Did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?*” (Zechariah 7:5, 6).

Religious observances are never enough in themselves. The prophet Isaiah reported how an evil heart negated all the rituals performed by people of his generation. “*To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD. . . . When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; . . . it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. . . . I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear*” (Isaiah 1:11-15).

What was wrong? Their ritual was correct. They came as God commanded and offered what He specified. But they had to learn that God is interested in the heart more than in the ritual. He required, “*Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes*” (Isaiah 1:16). It is a spiritual cleansing which makes worship acceptable before God. Nothing else will satisfy.

It is not enough to draw near to God with one's words. The heart must be devoted to Him also (Isaiah 29:13). “*Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice*” (I Samuel 15:22).

VI. WE MUST FOLLOW PRINCIPLES OF HOLY LIVING IN OUR GENERATION

Here is what God requires as the practical expression of our having peace with Him. “*Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the*

stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart" (Zechariah 7:9, 10). What practical expressions of holiness! That is something each of us can do. How can we translate that into pithy principles?

A. Be honest. To "*execute true judgment*" is simply to deal honestly with all people. The New Testament statement of it is, "*Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men*" (Romans 12:17). That is a practical requirement by which anyone can live.

B. Be merciful. "*Shew mercy and compassions.*" The Bible admonishes, "*Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: so shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man*" (Proverbs 3:3, 4). The prophet Micah wrote, "*He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God*" (Micah 6:8). In the midst of doing justly to men and walking humbly with God is the requirement to love (and practice) mercy. Practice it!

C. Be benevolent (verse 10). God has a special sympathy toward the poor. He exercises a special watch-care over widows and children. Ancient Israel made a solemn vow before the Lord that all the benevolence tithe was given to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow as God commanded. The good thing God commands us to do through Isaiah is to "*seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow*" (Isaiah 1:17). Those who are weak and need help find special assistance in God and in the people of God.

D. Be pure (verse 10). Remember the words of James: "*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world*" (James 1:27). To be "*unspotted from the world*" means to be untarnished, uncontaminated, unstained, and free from the smut of the present evil age. That is the lifestyle normally expected of a Christian.

All those obligations can be met if a person will render faithful obedience to the principles of revealed religion as set forth in Holy Scripture.

We can learn from history. Secular history reveals spiritual truths to the spiritually sensitive person. God is at work in history to give us a better revelation of the principles of righteousness as they are experienced in daily life. Let us learn from history that we might serve God better.

Questions

1. What makes a thing right or wrong?
2. Why does God call each generation to repentance?
3. How does Hebrews 1:1, 2 show the superiority of our revelation?
4. What Bible passage gives God's requirement for holiness?
5. What judgment on sin might God give in our generation?
6. How does Zechariah 1:6 show the faithfulness of God?
7. How does Ezekiel 12:25 relate to this study?
8. How can you hear the message of God for our generation?
9. How can you improve your personal purity before God?
10. How can you obey the command of James 1:21?