

A Demand for Justice

Zechariah 7:8-14

SS Lesson for 08/23/2015

Devotional Scripture: Isa 30:18-26

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- (2) Refusal to submit to spiritual authority (7:11).
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B. The results of spiritual sclerosis:

- (1) Your heart grows hard toward God's Word (7:12).
- (2) You incur God's fierce discipline (7:12).
- (3) God is silent when you cry for help (7:13).
- (4) God turns our prosperity into desolation (7:14).
- (5) God visits our sins on our descendants.

Inward reality with God is the prescription for spiritual health.

A. Inward reality means living unto the Lord, not for self.

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reviews God's requirements for **A Demand for Justice**. The **study's aim** is to understand what God's stance is toward our reaction to principles of Justice. The **study's application** is to live our lives in joyful obedience to the principles laid out by God.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Zechariah 7:9-10

9 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion Everyone to his brother. 10 Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, The alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart Against his brother.'

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Nearly two years after the night visions (December 7, 518 B.C.; cf. v. 1 with 1:7) and about halfway through the period of temple rebuilding (520-516) **Zechariah** gave four messages. Three of the messages were introduced by the clause "the word of the LORD Almighty came to me" (7:4; 8:1, 18). The second message was introduced similarly: "The word of the LORD came again to Zechariah" (7:8). These messages were given in response to a delegation that came to Jerusalem to ask whether the nation should continue to fast in remembrance of Jerusalem's destruction. The delegates were evidently Jews (in spite of their foreign names, apparently acquired in Babylon) who came from **Bethel** (cf. Ezra 2:28), the Israelite city 12 miles north of Jerusalem that had been the center of apostate worship for the Northern 10 tribes of Israel (cf. 1 Kings 12:28-29; 13:1; Amos 7:13). (The KJV reads, "When they had sent unto the house of God Sherezer and Regemmelech." This trans. does not specify who sent them or where they came from. For a discussion of this and other views on the grammatical problem in the sentence, see Baldwin, *Zechariah*, pp. 141-3.) The question raised by the Bethelites implied a desire to discontinue the self-imposed religious observance of fasting **in the fifth month** (July-August, the month Ab), which commemorated the burning to the ground of the city and the temple by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:8-10). The answer to the delegates' question was not given till the fourth message (8:18-19). Meanwhile the first divine message reminded the people that God warned their fathers **through the earlier prophets** that He wanted reality, not ritual (e.g., Isa. 1:11-17; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21-24). The question provided an occasion to rebuke self-imposed fasts that not only were antiquated by God's present blessing on the returned remnant but also were observed without proper motivation and spiritual attitude. Thus the rebuke was against empty formalism devoid of spiritual reality, for whether fasting or **feasting**, they were doing it not for the Lord (Zech. 7:5) but for themselves (v. 6). The exiles had observed two fasts during the Babylonian Captivity, one in the **fifth** month (see comments on v. 3) and one in the **seventh** month. This seventh-month fast was not the divinely instituted fast on the annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29, 31; 23:26-32), which was also in the seventh month, but a fast commemorating the murder of Gedaliah, governor of Judah, during a time of civil strife after the fall of **Jerusalem** (Jer. 41:2). The feasting probably included both the national feasts of Leviticus 23 and the family feasts associated with Levitical sacrifices (cf. Deut. 12:5-7).

The second message from **the LORD** centered on the conduct of the earlier generation that resulted in the Exile. In preexilic times, as in Zechariah's own day, God desired inner spiritual reality rather than external formalism. **True justice** (cf. Isa. 1:17; Amos 5:24) along with **mercy and compassion** (cf. Zech. 8:16-17; Micah 6:8) should be demonstrated toward all, but especially toward **the widow... the fatherless, the alien, and the poor** (cf. Deut. 15:7-11; 24:14-15, 19-21; 26:12-13), who were in no position to stand up for themselves, and so are often mentioned in the Bible as objects of God's care. In addition God's people were not even to **think evil of each other**. The previous generation had been disobedient; **they turned their backs** (lit., "shoulder") **and plugged up their ears** (cf. Isa. 6:10). **They made their hearts**

as hard as flint (KJV, “an adamant stone,” i.e., diamond) and neither listened to nor obeyed **the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by His Spirit through the earlier prophets**. This statement not only places the words of the preexilic prophets on a par with the Mosaic Law but also identifies the Spirit of God as the Source of prophetic inspiration who spoke through human agents (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). The people’s disobedience to revealed truth resulted in divine anger, the results of which are indicated in Zechariah 7:13-14: (a) a denial of response to prayer (v. 13), (b) a dispersion **among... the nations** (v. 14a), (c) a desolation of the **land** (v. 14b).

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

This lesson gives us the opportunity to reflect on some “too lates.” For instance, think about relationships. Ministers often counsel alienated family members who wish there had been reconciliation before an untimely death. There is not much comfort or satisfaction in saying, “Sorry, please forgive me” while standing at a casket or a grave. It is too late. More importantly, we may hear someone ask, “Is it ever too late to repair a relationship with God?” Our first impulse may be to reply, “Of course not! God is gracious and loving and will always welcome back his wandering children.” But our lesson text for today may cause us to rethink that response.

By one count, there are 31 men by the name of Zechariah in the Bible, so we take care not to get them mixed up. The Zechariah who delivered the message of today’s text was a post-exilic prophet, having ministered in the period after some of the people of Israel had returned from their forced relocation to Babylon. That exile was the result of the crushing of the nation of Judah by the Babylonian army at God’s decree (Jeremiah 20:4-6; 21:4-10). This disaster included destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 586 BC. Many Israelites were killed, and many were deported some 880 miles to the east to serve their conquerors. The powerful emotions accompanying all this were captured by a psalmist: “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion” (Psalm 137:1). Zechariah was one of those who returned to Jerusalem in 538 BC to rebuild the temple after release from captivity (Ezra 6:14). But rebuilding a physical structure wouldn’t do any good without a proper spiritual framework to go with it. Zechariah’s focus was on constructing just such a framework. Zechariah is careful to date his prophecies and give some context. Chapter 7 of his book, from which today’s lesson text comes, begins by specifying a date that computes to December 7, 518 BC. Temple reconstruction had begun in the spring of 536 BC, but was halted shortly thereafter due to opposition (Ezra 3:8; 4:24). After work resumed on September 21, 520 BC (Ezra 4:24; Haggai 1:14, 15), rebuilding was finished on March 12, 515 BC (Ezra 6:15). Therefore the prophecy in today’s text occurred about halfway between the resumption of that construction project and its completion. The occasion for Zechariah’s teaching was a question raised by a delegation from Bethel, a town about 12 miles north of Jerusalem (Zechariah 7:2). They wanted to know whether it was still necessary or appropriate to fast in the fifth month each year (7:3). That custom was probably begun as a remembrance of Jerusalem’s destruction by the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar, which occurred in the fifth month of the Jewish year (see 2 Kings 25:8-10). The context of the question, which includes progress on rebuilding city and temple, indicates a desire to discontinue the fast (also observed in the seventh month per Zechariah 7:5). God’s four responses to this question, delivered through Zechariah, address the underlying heart-condition of the people. The first response questioned the sincerity of the fasting (Zechariah 7:4-7). The second response is the text of this week’s lesson.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

God's Appeal for Action (Zech 7:8-14)

8 Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah saying,

9 "Thus has the LORD of hosts said, "Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother;
10 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.'
11 "But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears from hearing.
12 "They made their hearts {like} flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the LORD of hosts.
13 "And just as He called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen," says the LORD of hosts;
14 "but I scattered them with a storm wind among all the nations whom they have not known. Thus the land is desolated behind them so that no one went back and forth, for they made the pleasant land desolate."

What to do (8-9)

Justice

Justice that comes from righteous wisdom (Ps 37:30)

30 The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just .

Justice that comes from the plans of the righteous (Prov 12:5)

5 The plans of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful.

Justice that comes from doing right (Prov 21:3)

3 To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

Justice that comes from insight (Ps 119:98-100)

98 Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. 99 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. 100 I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.

Kindness

Kindness should be a part of us because we are a part of God's chosen people (Col 3:12)

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness , humility, gentleness and patience.

Kindness that comes from the maturity of our faith (2 Peter 1:5-8)

5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness , love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Kindness that comes from love (1 Cor 13:4)

4 Love is patient, love is kind . It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

Kindness that is commanded (Eph 4:32)

32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Kindness should be offered to everyone (1 Thess 5:15)

15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

Compassion

Compassion that comes from the comfort of God (2 Cor 1:3-4)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

Compassion is commanded (1 Peter 3:8)

8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

Compassion that comes from the love of God (1 John 3:17)

17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

What not to do (10)

Do not oppress

Oppression shows contempt for God (Prov 14:31)

31 He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.

Beware because God protects those that are oppressed (Ps 12:5)

5 "Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise," says the Lord. "I will protect them from those who malign them."

God will plunder oppressors (Prov 22:22-23)

22 Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, 23 for the Lord will take up their case and will plunder those who plunder them.

Do no evil

Do not do evil because God does not take pleasure in evil (Ps 5:4)

4 You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell.

Do not do evil because it comes from anger and wrath (Ps 37:8-9)

8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret — it leads only to evil. 9 For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land.

Do not do evil because it should be shunned (Prov 3:7)

7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil .

Do not do evil because it ensnares (Prov 5:22)

22 The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast.

Do not do evil because of the fear of the Lord (Prov 8:13)

13 To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.

Do not do evil but do good in response to evil (Prov 17:13)

13 If a man pays back evil for good, evil will never leave his house.

People's decision (11-12)

Decision to be stubborn (Rom 2:5)

5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

Decision to ignore rebukes (Prov 29:1)

1 A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed — without remedy.

Decision to harden heart (Heb 3:13)

13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

God's discipline (13-14)

Do not make light of or lose heart because of God's discipline (Heb 12:5-11)

5 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." 7 Endure hardship as discipline ; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

God's discipline bring blessings (Ps 94:12)

12 Blessed is the man you discipline, O Lord, the man you teach from your law;

God's discipline comes from His faithfulness (Ps 119:75)

75 I know, O Lord, that your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

God's discipline keeps us from being condemned with the world (1 Cor 11:32)

32 When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

God's discipline should bring about earnest repentance (Rev 3:19)

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

Losing (the) Ground (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

Because of sin, the ancient Israelites ended up losing the very ground that God had given them, the promised land. Losing this ground in a physical sense was preceded by losing it spiritually. Instead of growing in obedience to God, the Israelites rebelled against his will. Instead of being a pure and holy people, they became defiled by the nations around them. This is part of a disturbing pattern. The Roman Empire, for example, also "lost it all." A few reasons cited for the fall of this great empire include political corruption, urban decay, increased military spending at the expense of other vital needs, and a decline in morals. Rome's downfall seems to have been predicted in Daniel 2:33, 34. It is easy to take pride in our own nation. But pride leads to a fall. We do well to remember that, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). Failure to practice righteousness can still lead nations into "losing ground" physically. For the individual, failure to practice righteousness may also mean losing the promised land of Heaven.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Steven Cole

Outward religion leads to spiritual sclerosis.

Outward religion without inward reality with God leads to spiritual hardening of the heart. This had happened to the ancestors of the remnant in Zechariah's day, as he points out in 7:7-14. Here's how this works: You get the religious system down pretty well. You've got a routine for living the Christian life. You're going through all the motions. Your motives aren't right, but you're oblivious to that. The outward appearance is that you've got it together as a Christian. But it's mechanical and outward, not real personal fellowship with God.

As you go on like this, you begin to resist God's Word when it confronts your life. Maybe it's a sermon that steps on your toes. You keep your Christian smile in place, but inwardly you're resisting God. Perhaps a brother in Christ attempts to help you grow in your walk with God. But he's getting threatening, so you dodge him with excuses, all the while keeping up the good Christian front. Your spiritual arteries are hardening gradually without your knowing it! Zechariah outlines the signs and the results of the disease.

A. Signs of developing spiritual sclerosis:

(1) Refusal to pay attention to God (7:11).

"But they refused to pay attention" (7:11). These words describe the generation that had been sent into captivity in Babylon. Verse 11 ties back into verse 7. The former prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Amos, Micah, and others, had warned the people of their developing spiritual disease, but the people ignored the warnings. They dodged the prophets' messages that stepped on their toes. Perhaps they adjusted matters outwardly, so that they would look good to others, but they didn't deal with the heart issues that God sees.

It's like when you go to the doctor for a routine checkup. You're feeling okay, but you know that you're overdue for the checkup, so you go. The doctor looks you over, asks you some questions, reads your chart from the last checkup, and asks, "What kind of meals do you usually eat?"

You know what he's getting at. You've gained some weight since the last time you were in to see him. But you don't tell him the whole truth. You tell him what he wants to hear, but you fail to mention the potato chips and ice cream that are part of your basic food groups. He warns you that you need to take off 25 pounds and eat more fruits and vegetables and less red meat. You nod in approval, and for about a week, you cut back on the junk food. Then you begin sneaking in a few potato chips, thinking to yourself, "The doctor doesn't need to know!" But, of course, it's not the doctor you're hurting! You didn't pay attention to the doctor's warning because you don't want to change!

Failure to heed God's warnings is related to times of outward prosperity (7:7). Jerusalem and the outlying areas were inhabited and prosperous. They were eating their spiritual potato chips and thinking that they were healthy. "Why are these prophets ranting and raving about sin? Can't they see that we're all doing fine?" But God saw their hearts. Outwardly, they went to the temple and went through the religious rituals, but inwardly they were tolerating sin and not walking in reality with God.

(2) Refusal to submit to spiritual authority (7:11).

They "turned a stubborn shoulder." This expression comes from an ox that refuses to accept the yoke (Neh. 9:29; Hos. 4:16). It refers to refusal to submit to God's authority over your life and refusal to do what He would have you to do.

People who are developing spiritual sclerosis don't like the idea of submission to authority. I have been told that people from dysfunctional homes don't like it when I preach about obedience to God because they don't relate well to authority figures, as if somehow that gives them a free pass when it comes to obeying God's

Word! Often these folks find a church that makes them feel good about themselves, without dealing with their sin. That leads to the next stage of the disease:

(3) Refusal to hear God's Word (7:11).

They "stopped their ears from hearing." There are different ways of doing this. You can blame others, thinking, "If *they* would just obey God, I would not have all these problems!" But you don't deal with the log in your own eye. You can find a church that never deals with sin, at least not with personal sins of the heart. Liberal churches blast the sins of big business or the sins of our government or the sins of male chauvinists, but seldom confront personal pride, lust, greed, gossip, or selfishness. Seeker churches pretty much dodge sin completely, and focus on how God can help you succeed in your personal life. They don't want to frighten sinners!

Like arteriosclerosis, spiritual sclerosis is a gradual process. But once it sets in, certain results occur:

B. The results of spiritual sclerosis:

(1) Your heart grows hard toward God's Word (7:12).

"They made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear" God's written or preached Word. Verse 12 is a strong Old Testament verse affirming the authority and inspiration of the Law of Moses and the prophets. The people's refusal to pay attention and submit to God's Word through His prophets led to such hardening of the heart that finally the people *could not* hear what these men faithfully proclaimed.

People with advanced spiritual sclerosis seldom, if ever, pick up their Bible with the intent of submitting their hearts to its message. They don't want to hear sermons that confront their hypocrisy or sins of the heart. After a while, they are not even able to hear such things. Their spiritual arteries are blocked, so that God's Word can't get through to them. At this point they often protect themselves by attacking the messenger. In the Old Testament that meant killing the prophets. Since murder is illegal in our day, it usually means criticizing the pastor or finding a church with a more user-friendly message.

(2) You incur God's fierce discipline (7:12).

"Therefore great wrath came from the Lord." This is further described (7:14) as God's scattering them like a storm wind, or tornado, among the nations. When God's people harden their hearts against Him, He can get pretty tough in discipline to get their attention ("scourges," Heb. 12:6). As A. R. Fausset puts it, "Hard hearts must expect hard treatment. The harder the stone, the harder the blow of the hammer to break it" (*A Commentary Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*, with Robert Jamieson & David Brown [Eerdmans], 2:2:682). By the way, if you sin and everything is going great, you're really in trouble, because you may not be God's true child (Heb. 12:8)!

(3) God is silent when you cry for help (7:13).

If we refuse to hear God when He speaks, at some point He returns the favor (Prov. 1:27-28; Isa. 1:15; Jer. 11:11). Many wrongly think that God is like Aladdin's Genie, waiting to make their wish His command, but He is not. If we continually refuse to obey Him, He won't come running to our aid the minute we need Him to bail us out. He will let us suffer the consequences of our sins to teach us not to sin.

(4) God turns our prosperity into desolation (7:14).

The land had been pleasant, with people living comfortably in it. But now it was laid waste because of their sin. Sin always takes a toll: physical health is ruined, families are shattered, bitterness, heartache, and grief abound. It's never a pretty picture!

(5) God visits our sins on our descendants.

It was the children and grandchildren of the guys with spiritual sclerosis who were trying to pick up the pieces in Zechariah's day. They had the hard job of clearing the rubble left by their parents and grandparents. God visits the sins of fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations (Exod. 34:7; Num. 14:18; Deut. 5:9). You may not like that, but it's true, even today. The children of the ungodly suffer. The children of the godly are blessed. The application is not to blame our parents for our problems, but rather to *deal with our own sins*, so that our children and grandchildren will not suffer because of us.

Outward religion without inward reality leads to spiritual sclerosis. What's the solution?

Inward reality with God is the prescription for spiritual health.

Much more could be said, but I want to point out two things:

A. Inward reality means living unto the Lord, not for self.

This is the converse of what the people were doing as reported in verses 5 & 6. Instead of fasting and feasting for themselves, they should have been doing it for the Lord. "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). His will should be the cause of our actions, His Word the guide, and His glory the goal or motive. The only thing that matters in the Christian life is that which is done unto the Lord. Any service that we render is not so that others will think about how wonderful we are. It is done as an offering to the Lord, out of a heart of love and gratitude toward Him.

B. Inward reality with God results in outward obedience in our relationships with people.

Those who walk in heart devotion to God should "dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother." They should "not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor." They should not "devise evil in [their] hearts against one another" (7:9-10). True religion reveals itself in how we treat others (James 1:27), especially those who are weak and most vulnerable. Any "good ol' boy" network, where political favors are traded for influence without regard to true justice, goes against God's Word. Christians should not play favorites to the rich and powerful, but stand up for the political, social, and economic rights of the oppressed.

Of course a person can be involved in these godly behaviors for the wrong reasons, totally apart from God. But we can't escape the fact that God's Word always connects our relationship with Him and our relationship with others. John is pretty blunt: If we don't love our brother whom we have seen, we cannot love God whom we have not seen (1 John 4:20). "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother" (1 John 4:10).

Conclusion

In *True Spirituality* (Christianity Today special edition, pp. 87-88), Francis Schaeffer writes,

... there is no mechanical solution to true spirituality or the true Christian life.... It is not possible to say, read so many of the chapters of the Bible every day, and you will have this much sanctification. It is not possible to say, pray so long every day, and you will have a certain amount of sanctification. It is not possible to add the two together and to say, you will have this big a piece of sanctification. This is a mechanical solution, and denies the whole Christian position. For the fact is that the Christian life, true spirituality, can never have a mechanical solution. The real solution is being cast up into the moment-by-moment communion, personal communion, with God himself, and letting Christ's truth flow through me through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual sclerosis, like arteriosclerosis, sneaks up on you gradually as you drift from reality with God to just going through the outward motions. Do a checkup: Are you *real* with God today? If there are any signs of spiritual sclerosis, don't trash this sermon! Your spiritual health is at stake!

(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-9-avoiding-spiritual-sclerosis-zechariah-71-14>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Eliza Edmunds Hewitt (1851-1920) taught in the tough public schools of Philadelphia in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Along the way, she suffered a tragic back injury that caused her to be confined to her bed for many years. As she was recovering, she did not allow herself to wallow in self-pity or bitterness. Instead, she turned to writing hymns. Among the dozens of her compositions are “More About Jesus” and “When We All Get to Heaven,” still sung today. As an invalid, Eliza Hewitt developed deep insights into the nature of God. One of her most powerful hymns, “Give Me Thy Heart”, reinforces the message of Zechariah in today’s lesson. The hymn reflects the Lord’s message to His chosen people for centuries: Give me your hearts! Don’t let them be hard! Don’t let selfishness and disobedience rule your lives! Give me your hearts! But they didn’t. History records that even as the Babylonians threatened their land and their beloved Jerusalem, the people continued in their stubborn ways. What about us? Our disobedience and lack of compassion try God’s heart today as well. Have you really given him your heart, or do you guard it for yourself? Do you assume that God will wait forever for you to finally turn to him with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength (Mark 12:30)? Don’t wait, don’t make excuses, don’t dawdle. Heed the lesson of Israel. Give him your heart!

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Those who claim to follow the Lord must exhibit His attributes of justice, compassion, and mercy (Zech. 7:8-9)
2. We should be just as concerned about our thoughts as we are about our actions (vs. 10)
3. It is a refusal to listen to the truth that brings God's judgment (vs. 11)
4. We should not harden our hearts when God speaks to us (vs. 12)
5. If we refuse to listen to God's Word, we cannot expect Him to listen to our prayers (vs. 13)
6. History confirms that those who reject God suffer as a result (vs. 14)