

Zechariah 7:8-14 - For Backsliding God Emptied His Church

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: "If you can't hear, you're gonna feel." That was a childhood promise from our parents. And we did feel the consequences 后果-on many parts of our bodies.

Judah too didn't listen and "had to feel." **They felt God's hand of instruction for 70 years in captivity. But even then, they didn't change their hearts.** You saw this lack of real change when they **sent 2 men to inquire if they could stop fasting and praying.** They outwardly wanted to look good but without the real change of heart. So the Lord condemned Judah's formalism 形式主义 and **warned them he would do the same thing as he did before if they did not change.**

Our headings are:

The Warning

The Willfulness 任性

The Whipping 鞭打

Our goals are: **You will be reminded how easy it is to fall back into old ways, and that you will guard yourself against backsliding 倒退 by relying on God's Word and Spirit.**

The Warning

8 Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, 9 "Thus says the LORD of hosts [said]:
'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.'

1. God's warning came with his judgment name: Lord of hosts. His warnings came to judgment. (So this was no longer the regular "behave yourself." This was like just before you actually discipline your children.) This was God's final warning before captivity.

2. This warning was as relevant after God brought back Judah after 70 years of punishment. Why? Judah's sins did not get less, but greater. Zechariah and Haggai warned about this. Judah pursued 追求的 their own profit.

Zechariah 1:4 "**Do not be like your fathers,** to whom the former prophets preached, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds.'" But they did not hear...

3. What were specific warnings God gave to Judah (sins of omission & commission) that were the basis of their captivity? To

a. Execute justice. The Jews had lost their sense of justice. And a nation that showed favoritism to the rich or to the poor—was bound to fail and incur God's wrath. And they did. **Justice and politicians were up for sale.**

b. Show mercy and compassion. Instead of hoarding and being selfish, Judah was challenged to be merciful and show compassion. But getting ahead was too important for the Jews. **Tenderness to brothers** and sisters was lost.

Hosea 6:6 For I **desire mercy and not sacrifice,** And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

1 John 3:17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, **how does the love of God abide in him?**

c. Do not oppress the widow, orphan, and foreigner 寡妇，孤儿，和外国人. The lust for wealth and personal success pushed the Jews to **be cruel to the weakest.** But God hears the cries of the weak.

Deuteronomy 24:14 "You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates.

God even gave prescription of how to help these weak ones...and he rewards those who do this!

Deuteronomy 24:19 "When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf 捆 in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

d. Don't be cruel to your own brother (mercy and compassion were so far away). The Jews were cruel, even while they were performed their ceremonies 仪式 before God.

Matthew 5:22 "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment..."

There is a sense of plotting here. The Jews were thinking **how** to do evil against their brother.

Micah 2:1 **Woe to those who devise iniquity 制定罪孽,** And work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it, Because it is in the power of their hand.

4. Lessons:

- a. In the West today the rich can buy-off 买通 justice with lawyers and technicalities of the law. In communist countries the poor can use the state to rob the rich** and devastate 蹂躏 the whole nation. **Christians: Both are wrong!**
- b. Guard your hearts against the obsession 困扰 with wealth; be generous to the poor.** God will remind you on Judgment Day if you lacked compassion 同情. **Do not take advantage of others just because you can, or because it is legal.** It is **not moral** 道德 to abuse the weak. A fair wage is determined not by Queen's Park, but by the King of heaven. Consider Job 29: *I was eyes to the blind, And I was feet to the lame 瘸子. I was a father to the poor, And I searched out the case that I did not know. I broke the fangs of the wicked 恶人的獠牙, And plucked 拔掉 the victim 受害者 from his teeth.*
- c. Guard your hearts in other areas. Guard against obsession with knowledge and don't mock 嘲笑 those who know less than you. Be tender.** Remember this: **It is not just that you didn't hurt someone, but more, you are required to actively help.** The criminal argues: "I didn't hurt him." God requires that you say: "I helped him in his troubles."
- d. Consider a specific warning: Often, because of Islamic terrorism, broad categories take over our minds,** and we can treat all foreigners as equally evil. That is not showing God's love!

The Willfulness

11 "But they refused to heed, **shrugged their shoulders 耸耸肩膀**, and **stopped their ears 捂着耳朵** so that they could not hear. 12 "Yes, they **made their hearts like flint 燧石, refusing to hear the law** and the words which the LORD of hosts had **sent by His Spirit** through the former prophets...

1. Instead of taking the Lord's warning to heart, the wicked men of pre-captivity Judah bluntly refused to listen.

a. They pulled away from their responsibility. "Shrugging" doesn't do justice to the original. It was literally a "pulling away" (dropping) of the shoulders from under the burden of God's law – God's yoke...like Israel before.

Hosea 4:16 "For **Israel is stubborn Like a stubborn calf 倔强的小牛**; Now the LORD will let them forage 饲料 Like a lamb in open country.

And the Jews had fair warning!

Jeremiah 34:10 Now when all the princes and all the people, who had entered into the covenant, heard that everyone should set free his male and female slaves, that no one should keep them in bondage anymore, they obeyed and let them go. 11 But afterward **they changed their minds and made the male and female slaves return, whom they had set free**, and brought them into ...

b. They refused to listen to what their duties were. They stuck their fingers in their ears like a child.

Psalms 58:4 ...They are **like the deaf cobra 聋眼镜蛇 that stops its ear**, 5 Which will not heed the voice of charmers 魔术师, Charming ever so skillfully.

2 Chronicles 36:16 But they **mocked the messengers of God**, despised 鄙视 His words, and scoffed 嘲笑不已...

2. Why did the Jews refuse to submit to God's law before captivity? Their hearts were like diamonds. Yes, "flint" is translated diamonds. It means "a very hard stone" that could not be crushed. Jeremiah said that "diamond" was so hard it was used for engraving. (Jer. 17:1) The Jews taught that Moses used a diamond to cut out the 2 tables on which the Lord wrote the 10 laws. The point: The hearts of the Jews were very hard. **No preaching had impact, as Jeremiah testified. They trampled God's law underfoot** 践踏上帝的律法在脚下. (Hebrews 10) and resisted the Holy Spirit (Acts 7). Neither promises nor threats had any impact on their lives.

3. Lessons:

a. Nothing is so hard, unmalleable, and inflexible, as the heart of a presumptuous sinner. And this is a sure way of accomplishing nothing by prayer and fasting.

Isaiah 1:15 When you spread out your hands, **I will hide My eyes from you**; Even though you make many prayers, **I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.**

b. Because man's heart was so hard, he needed a full heart transplant. That is what God provided in Jesus Christ. Now as a believer, you know that the Lord's yoke is easy and his burden is light.

Ezekiel 36:26 "I will **give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you**; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

The Whipping

12... Thus great wrath came from the LORD of hosts.

1. So “if you can’t hear, you will gonna feel.” The difference was that in childhood you might get a few stripes and then it would all be over. But Judah had to face God’s wrath for 70 years – almost 2 generations.

13 "Therefore it happened, that just as He proclaimed and **they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen**," says the LORD of hosts. 14 "But I **scattered them with a whirlwind** among all the nations which they had not known. Thus the **land became desolate 荒凉** after them, so that no one passed through or returned; for they made the pleasant land desolate."

2. In fact, God would disperse 分散 them (with a tornado) among the Gentile nations, nations they would have despised and mocked in the past. These were the nations that hated the Jews!

Proverbs 1:24 Because **I have called and you refused**, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, 25 Because you **disdained 蔑视 all my counsel**, And would have none of my rebuke 训斥, 26 I also will **laugh at your calamity 灾害**; I will mock when your terror comes, 27 When your terror comes like a storm, And your **destruction comes like a whirlwind 旋风**, When distress and anguish 苦恼和痛苦 come upon you. 28 "Then they **will call on me, but I will not answer**; They will seek me diligently 用心, **but they will not find me**.

The Jews were scattered everywhere...on top of the scattering that took place in 722BC by the Assyrians. And there seems to be an interesting play on words. In verse 11, the word shrugged-off is very similar to scatter. (Sawrar, Sawar)

3. God would not listen to them when they called for help. What a hard thing this was – to call on a father who would not listen! But that is exactly what Judah deserved for ignoring God’s call.

Micah 3:4 Then they will cry to the LORD, **But He will not hear them**; He will even hide His face from them at that time, Because **they have been evil in their deeds**.

4. God would make their land desolate. You have to understand the ties a man has to his land in agrarian cultures 农耕文化. And when one thinks of Canaan of the land flowing with milk and honey, desolation was quite disconcerting 令人不安.

Deuteronomy 8:7 "For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks 溪 of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; 8 "a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates 石榴, a land of olive oil and honey; 9 "a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity 缺乏, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper. 10 "When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD...

Consider what God threatened and then fulfilled.

2 Chronicles 36:21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

These things happened just as God proclaimed. This meant that God’s Word was unstoppable.

5. Lessons:

a. God will whip his church until there is real repentance 悔改. I wished it were simpler, but it isn’t.

So you see how you have to work.

b. God will empty the churches for living backslidden 退后 lives – people who want to look like they are serious but are not. Isn’t this coming true today in North America? Shouldn’t the church be repenting in “sackcloth and ashes?”

Conclusion:

Judah fell back into their rituals 仪式 and forgot faith in and love for the Lord. Ritualistic (formalistic) obedience was the most subtle form of backslidden state. So God emptied his church!

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Demand and pray for faithful preaching...preaching that pierces the soul.

2. Depend on the Holy Spirit to strengthen your commitment to Christ to your Savior.

3. Defend justice, defend the weak against abuses in the state, church, schools, and home.

4. In doing this you will defer the punishment that covenant children deserve 推迟公约的孩子应有的惩罚
for departing from truth and righteousness in the heart!

Finally: God has no tolerance for sin. He even punishes Christian, though in a fatherly way. But if you are not his child, he will punish you with eternal death in hell... unless you have someone to take your punishment. That is what Jesus did for sinners when he died on the cross. If you want his death to be counted as yours, ask him.