

Abiding Fruit

John 15:16



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Let Your Hands Be Strong Zechariah 8:11 - 13

Oftentimes the Lord will call us to trust in Him by performing that which He requires or desires of us. This probably seems like an odd way of accomplishing anything, at least from the perspective of the world. The world seeks to make us trust first in whatever it offers, and then on the basis of what it offers, it will ask us to do something. God seems to ask us to do something proving that we trust Him. The acknowledgment of trust is already assumed. God never asks anything of us that is against His nature because that would cause us to distrust Him. He cannot do that. He always acts in perfect harmony with His character and attributes. Now it is manifestly true that God has revealed Himself to us, therefore, we are without excuse. In Scripture we see God as trustworthy, reliable, glorious, perfect, etc; therefore, we can always trust Him.

This phrase, "*let your hands be strong*" occurs three times in Holy Scripture. It occurs twice here in Zechariah 8 (vss. 9, 13), and once in 2 Samuel 2:7. In 2 Samuel 2:7, David has been made king over Judah in Hebron. News has come to him that men from Jabesh-gilead had treated the body of King Saul with respect by burying him. David promises to show kindness to the men of Jabesh-gilead because of what they had done. He tells them that he would "*do good to them*" (vs. 6). They should "*let their hands be strong.*" They should be "*valiant*". Even though Saul, their lord was dead, David was alive and was now king, and they could look to him for protection and kingship. He tells them that the house of Judah has made him king, thus offering to them his rule and sovereignty over them in a beneficent way. We know that Abner, the commander of Saul's army promoted Ish-boseth, the son of Saul as king over Israel. David, thus, had to wait a few years before all Israel came under his rule. David's entreaty to Jabesh-gilead was predicated upon the fact that he was trustworthy. They could trust him. He would act for them, so *let your hands be strong* and come over to me, is what David is saying.

This is the way Zechariah uses these words. These words are the words of God to the nation Israel after the Babylonian Captivity. The people were supposed to rebuild the Temple, but they had grown indifferent to the things of God. Zechariah's prophecy is directed to the nation, that if they are faithful in rebuilding the house of the Lord, one day, Messiah would inhabit and rule from it. That ought to be motivation and incentive enough for a post-exilic nation, but they were slack and lazy. Zechariah is a prophecy about Messiah primarily. It is probably the most eschatological and messianic book in the Old Testament. Anticipation of Messiah is high on the agenda of the prophet.

The introduction of verse 11 with the words, "*but now*" suggests that the time for discouragement is over. In the following verses, God begins to provide encouragement for His people. God says that He will not deal with the people as He has done previously (*in the former days*) – in judgment, but will now deal with them in a new way. The prophet Haggai describes what God did to the nation because of their sins. The heavens withheld dew and the earth withheld its produce (Hag. 1:10). God called for a drought on the land, the hills, the grain, the new wine, the oil, on all the ground, all animals and on all people (Hag. 1:11). God promises in Zechariah to reverse these things.

Is it not incredible that God can so clearly promise blessing and judgment and man will reject the promise of blessing and choose the promise of judgment? Deuteronomy 27, 28 and Leviticus 26 describe to the nation these blessings and curses. The human heart is desperately wicked, and rebels against God even when He holds out life to it. There is a great lesson in that for us.

Zechariah 8:12 promises the reversal of Haggai 1:10, 11. There was to be a sowing of peace, the vineyards would be fruitful, the ground would bring forth produce in abundance, and the heavens would sprinkle the earth with life-giving dew. Not only does God promise these things to the remnant, but He says that He will cause them to possess these things.

It is very significant in these verses that God includes both the house of Judah and the house of Israel to inherit and possess these blessings. This finds a fulfillment in the New Covenant spoken of by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31 - 34) which is promised to both houses (Judah and Israel). What makes this significant is that the ten tribes of the northern kingdom known as Israel had gone into captivity in 722 BC to Assyria, and were dispersed and never re-gathered. The house of Judah, on the other hand went into captivity in 586 BC to Babylon, and it is this house that returns to the land in 3 stages under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. So what God promises here applies to both houses. We know that in the Epistle to the Hebrews (chaps. 8 & 10) the promises of the New Covenant are applied to believers and though the designation is made there encompassing both houses of Israel, yet it is applied to the Church. It has been argued that Israel and Judah as expressed in Hebrews means the Church (therefore the Church is spiritual Israel). This raises problems in the context of the prophecy in Zechariah and to the remnant addressed there. The remnant addressed there is not the Church, but the remnant of God's people as Judah (spiritual Israel). In my view, in the New Testament the remnant is comprised of two streams, believing Gentiles and believing Jews, and spiritual Israel should be identified as believing Jews. I think this proves consistent in Paul's usage of the Israel or remnant in Romans (Rom. 11) and Galatians (Gal. 6:16).

In verse 13, Zechariah is therefore referring to some future time of blessing. I believe this to be in two forms; first, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, when the Church is formed, and a remnant believes (remember - not all Israel believes therefore not all physical Israel is spiritual Israel as Paul says in Romans 9:6), and second, during the Millennial period when there will be a great outpouring of the blessing of God. In both cases, these are future to Zechariah. These future blessings are found during Messiah's reign (Zech. 8:20 -23; 9:9, 10, 16, 17; 12:10 – 13:1; 14:1 – 21).

In view of the promise that God will *save* them and that they shall be a *blessing* (8:13) – they were to not be afraid, but were to *“let their hands be strong.”* God has purposed to do good to and for His people. All of God's promises are guaranteed their fulfillment because of our Lord Jesus Christ, and since this is true, every Christian can let their hands be strong. We can trust God. We can depend on God and in God. He is our Sustainer and Provider. In Scripture, three things are called precious. We have precious blood (1 Pet. 1:19), precious faith (2 Pet. 1:1), and precious promises (2 Pet. 1:4). It is precisely because they are precious (they are made by God), that we can trust them. Trusting in the promises of God is the same as trusting in God.

Since we are the covenant children of God and because we have the promises of God, we can be strong, because we rely not on ourselves, but in God. Do you believe you are a child of God? Are you in covenant relationship with God ratified and sealed by the blood of Jesus? If you are, then be strong, lift up the feeble knees and trust God. It is our God who will cause us to inherit and possess all the promises that God has made to us. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might (Eph. 6:10). What shall sustain you in your hour of darkness and crisis – it shall be the precious promises of God. Rouse yourself and lay hold fast and firmly on God. Let your hands be strong.