

PEOPLE REPEAT HISTORY!

Today's Text: Zechariah Chap. 7

Extracts:

Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, "Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me-for Me? ... Should you not have obeyed the words which the Lord proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited? ... But they refused to heed ... and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. ... 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'" [Zech. 7: 4,5,7,11,13]

Abraham Lincoln and John Kennedy are among the most admired past Presidents of the United States of America. They also share remarkable historical similarities.¹ For example, Lincoln became President in 1860 and Kennedy in 1960. Both of them each lost a child while in the White House. Both were assassinated while in office and both died on a Friday. Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson, was born in 1808. Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Johnson, was born in 1908!

How do you explain it that two men who lived a hundred years apart shared such remarkable similarities? To some people, the answer is simple: history repeats itself. To others, however, history does not repeat itself but people repeat history. The actors during Lincoln's time were different from those during Kennedy's era. Were the actors of a hundred years later influenced by what their counterparts did a century earlier? That is a debatable point. We face a similar situation today concerning our relationship with God. Sinners of old were warned by prophets of their time to no effect. Then God's judgment fell on the disobedient. Today, we continue to sin and modern prophets are warning us. We have not heeded them. Is history repeating itself or we are repeating history? Let us find out in this week's study.

¹ From Moises Reconalla, 'Does History Repeat Itself?' <http://ezinearticles.com/?Does-History-Repeat-Itself&id=367553> , Nov. 2006

1. Background: Sin- a vicious circle or a random event?

The people of Judah (after their return from exile in Babylon) sent a delegation to pray in the house of the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to ask the priests and the prophets there whether they should continue to pray and fast as they had done for so many years [**Zech. 7: 1-3**]. The word of God came to the prophet Zechariah for the people, saying, “When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months, during those seventy years (of exile), did you really fast for Me? ... Should you not have obeyed the words which the Lord proclaimed through the former (pre-exile) prophets, when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?” [**vv. 4-7**].

Three generations are mentioned in God’s response: the one from bondage in Egypt, the one that went into seventy years’ exile in Babylon, and the post-exilic returnees to Israel. What was common to the first two? Instead of heeding God’s warnings and doing what was right in His sight, they “stopped their ears so that they could not hear... refusing to hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets.” So, great wrath from the Lord of hosts fell on the disobedient among them [**vv. 8-12**]. God’s warning to the post-exilic generation was clear: “just as (the Lord) proclaimed and (the people of old) would not hear so (the people of Zechariah’s time would call) out and (the Lord) would not listen” [**v. 13**].

There is an iron law between sin and judgment. God prefers obedience to fasting or any hollow rituals of piety that are not supported by holy living. By doing exactly what the pre-exile people of Israel had done, the returnees from exile would face a similar judgment from God. But had they been influenced by their history (a vicious circle) or the new generation’s sinful state was a random event (i.e., unconnected with what their ancestors had done)? Was history repeating itself or the people were repeating history?

If people keep making the same mistake over and over from one generation to another, it suggests that they have learnt nothing from history. Yet, historians try to make us learn from the mistakes of the past so that we can avoid repeating them now or in the future. In reality, wickedness is growing worse today. Sinners are getting more daring. Hypocritical worship is becoming more fashionable. People do not seem to be learning anything from God’s past judgments of sin. Therefore, it can be argued that it is people that repeat history.

That puts personal responsibility on each of us. Fathers cannot eat sour grapes and their children’s teeth be set on edge. The soul that sins is the one that dies [**Ezek. 18: 1-4**]. Adam blamed his wife and his wife blamed Satan when both of them ate the forbidden fruit [**Gen. 3: 12, 13**]. God did not accept their blame shifting. He punished each of them. In the days of Isaiah, God rejected the people’s fast because it did not please Him. While they starved themselves physically, their

fasting was not accompanied by loosing the bonds of wickedness or undoing the heavy burdens or breaking every yoke from those under their control; nor did they share their bread with the hungry and the poor nor clothe the naked [Is. 58: 3-9]. When the Jewish returnees also made a similar complaint to God concerning their fasting, He asked them to “execute true justice, show mercy and compassion” to their brothers, to stop oppressing “the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor,” and to stop planning evil against others [Zech. 7: 9-10]. God does not change [Mal. 3:6] and He will judge each person and each generation *on their own merit*. Therefore, we each make or repeat history and get the judgment that we deserve.

2. How we repeat history

All through history, we have examples of people who have been blessed for obedience and those who have been judged for disobedience. Therefore, we can repeat good history or bad history, depending on how we react to our or others’ past experiences. Let us examine a few examples:

a) *The Foolish Person*

The foolish person is aware of what God did in the past to those who had committed the sins s(he) currently relishes but is not persuaded to desist. Instead, foolish persons continue in such evils. Are they expecting the unchanging God to overlook their case?

Let us take the example of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. When the two angels sent by God came to the city of Sodom, Lot, Abraham’s nephew, offered to host them, thinking that they were travellers. As soon as they had entered his house and just before bed time, “the men of the city, . . . both old and young” surrounded Lot’s house and demanded that he should bring out the two men that had just come into his house “that we may know them carnally” [Gen. 19: 1-5]. Lot pleaded with them not to “do so wickedly.” Instead, he offered his two daughters to do with them as they pleased. They pushed him aside and said to him, “This one came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge” [vv. 6-10]. As they surged forward to sodomize the two visitors, the angels struck them blind. The angels rushed out Lot and his family from that wicked city, and Sodom and Gomorrah were razed by fire from God [vv. 11-25].

Clearly, the sin described here is homosexuality. God made His position clearer on the matter when He gave to Moses the laws of sexual morality where He said, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; *it is an abomination*” [Lev. 18: 22]. Some four thousand years later, Paul drew attention to the wrath of God from heaven on “all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” [Rom. 1: 18]. Among such people that God had given up were “women

(who) exchanged the natural use for what is against nature,” and “men (who), leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men, committing what is shameful and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error” [vv. 26-27].

Modern society may no longer frown at fornication or adultery. Homosexuality (and lesbianism) may even be legalized through same-sex marriage. But God has not changed His position on sexual immorality. He will judge and punish it. So, whoever *knowingly* persists in sin is a foolish person. S(he) is repeating bad history.

b) *The Suicidal Person*

Some people do not learn from their own mistakes. Instead, they continue to make them as if they want to kill themselves! Such persons can be described as suicidal. For example, some people have escaped death from auto accidents due to their reckless driving and they keep driving recklessly as if they want to commit suicide! Some people have been infected with STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) several times and have continued in sexual promiscuity after each successful treatment until they get the big one- HIV/AIDS. Some young girls have had multiple abortions to the point of damaging their wombs or fallopian tubes. On getting married, they may no longer be able to have babies. Such people can be said to have a suicidal attitude to sinning.

Take the case of Saul, the first king of Israel, whose addiction was the sin of disobedience. At his coronation, God specifically warned him through the prophet Samuel that if he feared the Lord, served and obeyed His voice, and did not rebel against His commandment, his reign would be established over Israel [1 Sam. 12: 14]. His first test was to go ahead of Samuel to Gilgal for sacrifice before a battle against the Philistines. He was to wait for seven days. However, soon after the seven days had elapsed and Samuel had not come, Saul offered the sacrifices by himself, thus usurping the duty of a priest. His excuse was that the Philistines were close by and his troops had panicked! Soon after his unlawful sacrifice, Samuel came. On knowing what the king had done, Samuel told him, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God... For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever” [1 Sam. 13: 1-13].

Did he learn any lessons from that incident? It is doubtful because a few years later, when God sent him to attack and destroy Amalek, including the king, people and beasts, Saul spared the king and the best livestock. When Samuel asked him why he had disobeyed God again, he said that his troops had saved the best of the plunder, sheep and oxen “to sacrifice to the Lord” [1 Sam. 15: 1-21]! The prophet told the king that to obey was

better than sacrifice, and that the Lord had torn the kingdom from him and given it to a better person. Until his death, Samuel went no more to king Saul [vv.22-35]. The king had committed ‘spiritual’ suicide! How many of us are in that predicament today? Yet, we are still on our knees, praying and fasting, and wondering why God does not hear! A suicidal person is repeating bad history.

c) *The Repentant Person*

The repentant person has made mistakes in the past and, like the Prodigal Son, has come to realize his/her error. S(he) has now confessed and turned a new leaf. We have seen examples of people who came to Christ after imprisonment for murder or violent crimes; from prostitution or sodomy. Mary Magdalene was a devilish woman from whom Christ cast out seven demons [Lk 8: 2]. She became the first disciple to proclaim His resurrection [Lk 24: 10]! Paul of Tarsus persecuted Christians until Christ brought him to repentance on the road to Tarsus [Acts 9: 1-20].

A good example of the repentant person is Peter. Here was a bold man who believed in his human courage. When the Jews came for Jesus, he was the one who tried to defend Him by cutting off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest [Jn 18: 10]. However, during the trial of Jesus before the high priest, Peter denied Him three times. As soon as the cock crew, he remembered what Christ had prophesied about that event. So, Peter went out and wept bitterly [Lk 22: 54-62]. That is, he repented.

After the resurrection and ascension of Christ, Peter became the leading apostle. When he himself (and John) faced the same Jewish council that had earlier tried Jesus, Peter was a different man. They asked him to renounce Jesus by whose power he had just made a lame person walk, and he told them with unshaken determination, “We ought to obey God rather than men” [Acts 5: 17-29]. The man of fear had become the man of faith because he knew whom he had believed. We can be like Peter when we *truly* repent and return to Christ. That way, we are repeating good history.

d) *The Wise Person*

Repentance is not enough because our adversary the devil is not resting. Like a roaring lion, he is roaming to and fro the earth, looking for whom he may devour. Therefore, we must remain sober and vigilant [1 Pet. 5: 8]. Temptation will come and the repentant could backslide. That is why we must behave wisely at all times so that we can resist Satan and “be steadfast in the faith” [v. 9]. In other words, we must practise our faith. See what David did after he had been anointed (but not yet crowned) king of Israel. Saul was still on the throne and he had brought David to live in the palace after he had killed the Philistine giant, Goliath. We are told,

“David behaved wisely *in all his ways, and the Lord was with him*. Therefore, when Saul saw that he behaved wisely, he was afraid of him” [1 Sam. 18: 14-15]. That is why the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom [Ps. 111: 10].

The thief on the right side of Christ at His crucifixion (popularly referred to as the good thief) teaches us how to behave wisely. He was about to die for his criminal acts. His colleague on the left side of Jesus joined others to mock Him but the good thief upbraided his colleague, saying, “Do you not fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.” The good thief turned to Jesus and said, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” Jesus assured him, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” [Lk 23: 39-43]. That man entered heaven before any of Christ’s devoted followers! He was a wise man. He repeated good history.

3. Conclusion: You can’t crucify Jesus Christ a second time!

There is nothing new under the sun [Eccl. 1: 9]. What we see today or may see tomorrow has already been. Therefore, there is no new sin that had not earlier been committed in history; only it is now more grievous. But God who lives forever and has condemned sin in the past, still condemns and judges sin today. That is why we must always fear Him [Eccl. 3: 14-15].

Today is the beginning of the rest of your life. Jesus has already died *once* for you. That history cannot be repeated. When you continue in sin, especially in His holy assemblies, you are trying to crucify Him again BUT you cannot crucify Him twice [Heb. 6: 4-6]! The next time you see Him, He is coming as the Judge of all the earth! Such history does not repeat itself. But when He sends the wicked of this generation to hell, they will not be the first. They will join those from the flood during Noah’s days, and from Sodom and Gomorrah, and other generations before now. Remember, hell is never full [Prov. 27: 20]!

Repeat good history!