

Our passage today continues the answer to the question asked by the men of Bethel, "Should we continue to fast over the loss of the temple? After all, the temple is being rebuilt." ¹ *And the word of the LORD of hosts came, saying,* ² *Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath.* Zechariah 8:1-2 Zechariah has already given them two revelations. God wanted to see fasting from a sincere heart devoted to prayer rather than religious duty with the attitude that the sooner it was over the sooner they could get back to making money (Isaiah 29:13ⁱ). It was a rebuke with a warning that what was needed was right judgments, kindness, mercy, and caring for the less fortunate, and not plotting evil against one another. Both revelations were a rebuke to the stubbornness of their "diamond-hard" hearts (Zechariah 7:12ⁱⁱ). God's jealousy was over their affections toward the idol of wealth which in turn harmed those made in His image. God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5ⁱⁱⁱ). He wants first place in our affections because He deeply loves us and loving Him above all else is good for us and others. He is jealous for our affection and has every right to be so. He made us, gave us all we have, showered us with mercy and grace, gave His only Son for us, and has a glorious future awaiting us. What should our response be to so great a love?

³ *Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain.* Zechariah 8:3 Now the message takes a completely different direction in seven oracles from the LORD of hosts, all of which had a present and future fulfillment. They are promises of things to come. The first oracle tells us why the LORD will bring these blessings that follow. He is a jealous God! The Hebrew word implies zealous as well. That means He so longs for us to be completely His and uncompromised with evil that He will deal with our enemies and discipline us in love (Hebrews 12:6^{iv}). This great love is not because of their obedience or sincere hearts, but rather God's passionate desire to make a people for Himself. The New Testament makes it clear that God's intent is to form the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:31^v). **God is not trying to force us to be something we don't want to be but rather to show us our greatest potential and help us find our greatest joy and fulfillment.** Considering this as an answer to the question from the men of Bethel, we see that they will turn from mourning to celebration as God in His faithfulness fulfills His promise to them because of His unconditional love (Jeremiah 31:3^{vi}).

Up until this time the remnant that had returned were compromising by marrying foreign women as a means to increase their wealth. ² *Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.* ³ *Then the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet,* ⁴ *Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?* ⁵ *Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways.* ⁶ *You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never*

have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes. Haggai 1:2-6

Their focus was on themselves, so the presence of God was not with them to bless and encourage them. God is everywhere (Job 34:21^{vii}), but when He uses a human description we can relate to (an anthropomorphic expression) it helps us understand what He means. If I was to tell you I'm not with you on some project, it doesn't mean I won't be there, but rather I'm not there to support it, and my hearts not in it. But now God says He is there. The world can once again look to Jerusalem as the city of God.

The fulfillment of this prophecy then foreshadows the heavenly city coming down from heaven when Jesus reigns over the earth in the Millennium (Revelation 21:2-3^{viii}). His manifest presence will be there. The world will call Jerusalem the faithful city, and the mount of the LORD of the armies of heaven, the holy mountain. That was only the case then to some extent. Presently, when we walk in the Spirit, people see the Lord among us as we express the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23^{ix}). But we often misrepresent the Lord. All that will change after the Second Coming (Philippians 1:6^x).

⁴ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. ⁵ And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. Zechariah 8:4-5 This is the third of seven "Thus says the LORD of hosts." Each was probably a separate revelation, but all are a part of the answer to the question regarding fasting. In that future kingdom, disease will be a thing of the past. There will be no more SIDS or genetic defects that end a life early. But Isaiah foretold that people will still die during the Millennium, however it will be after a long and full life. That seems to indicate that the curse of sin will only be partially lifted, perhaps that is because of the glorious presence of Jesus. Here is what Isaiah predicted about the age of people in that time: *²⁰ No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.* Isaiah 65:20

God's additional promise was children. There won't be a problem with infertility. There is a great distortion of what brings real joy in the world today. Advanced nations are seeing negative growth because women don't want to marry and those that do only want one or two children at most. In many cases that decision is made purely based on the lie that joy comes from focusing on one's self. Children are a blessing (Psalm 127:3^{xi})! Of course, they can be a great heartache, but the joys far outweigh the troubles.

I love the description of them playing in the streets. It reminds me of my childhood. We didn't sit in the house glued to an electronic screen. We were out in nature building forts and exploring. We'd leave in the morning and come back for lunch, leave again and come back when it started to get dark. It reminds me of India where the kids are all in the streets playing cricket. It is joyous seen of safety and unconcern about evil.

Again, this would be partially true of Jerusalem after the temple was rebuilt and Nehemiah oversaw the rebuilding of the walls. But the real fulfillment is in the coming kingdom. We'll glimpse what life was meant to be before sin entered the world.

⁶ Thus says the LORD of hosts: If it is marvelous in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my sight, declares the LORD of hosts? Zechariah 8:6 The people in that soon to come day would find this security and prosperity a marvelous thing. However, to God it is just what He always intended for us. He could easily bring it to pass if they would just return to Him with their whole hearts. What is stopping the blessing is not God's lack of ability to stop their enemies or limit the consequences of their sins. What holds God back from bringing these blessings on anyone is the hardness of our hearts (Matthew 23:37^{xii}).

⁷ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, ⁸ and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness." Zechariah 8:7-8 Those who heard Zechariah's prophecy would play a part in this wonderful future by rebuilding the temple. Some of them would live to help rebuild the walls. But it was future generations that would more fully experience the blessings predicted.

We should leave a godly legacy for the very same reason! We should be studying the Scriptures and sharing with our children and grandchildren while living a godly life they can learn from. I think we often underestimate the affect we can have on the generations that follow (Deuteronomy 7:9^{xiii}).

Here again we see a partial and ultimate fulfillment. As Jerusalem prospered more and more Jews returned. They were, for the most part, subject to some ruling nation, but they did experience times of blessings and godly high priests. We see a kind of fulfillment in our day, for it is difficult to find land for all the Jews returning to Israel, and it is abundantly blessed, though surrounded by enemies. Imagine how God would have blessed them if they embraced the Messiah He sent! Still there is the ultimate fulfillment when the raptured saints of the ages descend as a part of New Jerusalem, adorned as a bride for her husband, Christ Jesus!

⁹ Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Let your hands be strong, you who in these days have been hearing these words from the mouth of the prophets who were present on the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built. Zechariah 8:9 The longest of these seven oracles reminds them of Haggai's message. In verses nine and thirteen they are told to let their hands be strong. Put your all into it! They had seen the beginning so they should get to work and labor with all their might (Ecclesiastes 9:10^{xiv}). It's time to get it done. God's present and future blessings are ready to be poured out, so what are you waiting for? Is that not true for us as well?

The Apostle Paul told the Ephesian church that the church is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone. In Him, the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22^{xv}). Shouldn't verse nine apply to us as well, who are laboring to build the eternal temple? Whether we minister to the sick, prepare communion, teach the children, or share the gospel with a neighbor. Let us not be found to be lazy in our service to the Lord in building the temple (Ephesians 6:5-8^{xvi}). Let our hands be strong! Amen?

10 For before those days there was no wage for man or any wage for beast, neither was there any safety from the foe for him who went out or came in, for I set every man against his neighbor. 11 But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, declares the LORD of hosts. Zechariah 8:10-11 Disunity, lack of provision, and insecurity was the norm, but all that had changed. With a focus on building the temple, people not only had a common goal, but the blessing of God's presence and divine protection. God was saying it was a new day. That is what happens when we return to Him with our whole heart (Zechariah 1:3^{xvii}).

12 For there shall be a sowing of peace. The vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its produce, and the heavens shall give their dew. And I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. Zechariah 8:12 This is true in a microcosm then and in churches today. When the focus is on personal preferences and disagreement abounds, when personalities are set against one another and love is not the priority, there will be disunity and a lack of blessing. But when our focus is on building up one another and seeing the living temple grow and take shape, there is not only unity, but the spiritual blessing and presence of God (Ephesians 4:15-16^{xviii}).

In the Old Testament under the Sinaitic covenant, physical prosperity was a blessing for obedience. Under the new covenant, we are promised that our need is met in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19^{xix}). We may have to sacrifice and be in physical want at times, but God will see us through (Philippians 4:12^{xx}). Our spiritual prosperity is so abundant that we don't have the necessity of physical prosperity to show to the world the difference Jesus makes in our lives. In the ultimate fulfillment of this promise, which is the coming kingdom, both physical and spiritual prosperity will be obvious. We will truly possess all these things (1 Corinthians 3:21-22^{xxi}).

13 And as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing. Fear not, but let your hands be strong." 14 For thus says the LORD of hosts: "As I purposed to bring disaster to you when your fathers provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the LORD of hosts, 15 so again have I purposed in these days to bring good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear not. Zechariah 8:13-15 Times had changed! The punishment for their past rebellion was over. It was time to restore the nation and that began by trusting God's Word is true. That's why we need not fear. That is why we should give Him our all. That's why we should let our hands be strong. We were under God's wrath

but now our sin debt has been paid on Calvary (1 Peter 2:10^{xxii}). We were under a curse. Now we are blessed and a blessing to others. Now God is directing and guiding us for our eternal good. The most repeated phrase in the Bible is "Fear not!"

¹⁶ These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace; ¹⁷ do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the LORD." Zechariah 8:16-17 If they are to remain under this blessing, they can't go back to their old ways. God was *not* saying I will bless you no matter how you act, but rather I will bless you because I'm going to bring about a change in your behavior. But don't resist that change or go back to your old ways.

Honesty was the first command. Don't lie to one another. The second was that judges render judgments that are true and bring about peace. Seek resolutions between people rather than personal promotion or enrichment. Don't plot evil against one another, such as slander and turning people against those you dislike or with whom you disagree. Don't love deceptive promises. Then God added a powerful emphasis. He said He hates these things!

We can see the heart of God in these commands which all relate to treating others with respect. God hates deception because He is always true (Numbers 23:19a^{xxiii}). Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44^{xxiv}). When we deceive people, we are on the wrong side. When we take advantage of the weak or gain an upper hand on others to have our way without caring about their feelings or needs, we are acting in an ungodly way, harming others made in God's image whom He loves. We are in affect rebelling against God and withholding His blessings from our lives (Deuteronomy 28:15^{xxv}). We actually invite His discipline like a stubborn rebellious child. Wouldn't you much rather live in a loving relationship with God which expresses itself in obedience to His Spirit and love for others and experience His blessings? If you do, your remembrance of Calvary can turn from fasting to feasting. The old is gone and the new has come in you.

¹⁸ And the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, ¹⁹ "Thus says the LORD of hosts: The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace. Zechariah 8:18-19 The oracles to this point reminded the Jews that they had ignored the warnings of the prophets that were sent to them before the captivity. Both chapters reminded the people that justice and care for the needy were absolutely essential if they were to be blessed.

This chapter turned to the promise of a glorious future of peace and prosperity. The Lord had returned to Zion. There would be elderly people there again and children playing in the streets. Jews would return from distant nations. Their hands were to be strong to rebuild the temple. The past struggles would be replaced with prosperity, security and unity.

Now the answer to the original question is answered more directly. Instead of fasting during those times in which they remembered the fall of Jerusalem, there would be cheerful feasts of joy and gladness. For this very reason they should love truth and peace. When God blesses us, we should respond by loving the things God loves.

Truth is God's Word. It sets us free. Jesus is truth (John 14:6^{xxvi}). We should abhor deception and all distortion of truth. Peace comes through Jesus. He is the Prince of peace. He promised us peace when we are in Him, a peace that is unlike that which the world has to offer. It is His very own peace (John 14:27^{xxvii}). To love truth and peace is to love Jesus and His nature.

²⁰ "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities. ²¹ The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, 'Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going.'

²² Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD. ²³ Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'" Zechariah 8:20-22

The last two oracles tell us of the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham and Isaiah, that all the world would be blessed in Abraham's descendant. We see this is referring to a certain time by the phrase in verse 23, "In those days." While it has been in a very limited way a part of Israel's history, such as when Joseph saved Egypt, and prophets went to foreign nations, and the words of the prophets to foreign lands. It really found its first great fulfillment at Pentecost. Thousands went to the feast of Pentecost and found the Savior of the world. They then took the message back to their homelands. And as the message of the gospel spread, pilgrims began to go to Jerusalem. Messianic Jewish missionaries began traveling to foreign lands and Gentiles were grafted into the tree of the people of faith. For the last two thousand years believers have made their way to Israel to see the places where Jesus walked, preached, died, and rose again.

But the ultimate fulfillment will be in the Millennial kingdom. The world will know that Jesus reigns from Zion. People from every nation will seek God's blessings and go with the people of God to worship before Him. Zechariah writes of this later in this book. In fact, those who do not go up to worship will find a lack of rain (14:17-19^{xxviii}). To refuse to worship the LORD of hosts is to be in rebellion. If they don't acknowledge the blessing is from Him, they won't be blessed.

Let us return to the present application. The eighth oracle promised joy and gladness and cheerful feasts instead of mourning. Are not we who are in Christ Jesus experiencing that now? The early Christians called communion "love feasts." We have joy unspeakable and full of glory because our sins have been removed and a glorious future beyond our comprehension awaits us (1 Peter 1:8^{xxix}). When others see our joy, they realize how blessed we are, and they want to know the source of that joy. The whole world is hearing the gospel. While the first world nations turn away from Jesus and rely on their wealth, the third world is coming to Jesus like never before.

Are you living in that joy that attracts others to Jesus? I find myself often turning to the flesh to grumble and complain about situations and the decline of our culture, man's increasing selfishness, and on and on. When I let my flesh start down that road of complaint, the joy begins to fade along with the smile on my face. What should we expect from a world that is fallen? But it is not what we are to dwell on. We are to fix our eyes on Jesus and throw aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets us and run with patience the race set before us. And when our eyes are on Jesus the joy returns and others are attracted (Hebrews 12:2^{xxx}) and the temple of living stones grows.

We live in this blessed time when the gospel is clearly proclaimed, and the love of God has been seen in Jesus. How many are without that hope and struggling under the weight of sin? We have the answer. Let us live in the light and love of Jesus that others might see in us His joy and ask us of the hope that lies in us (1 Peter 3:15^{xxxi}).

Questions

- 1 Does God leave us and return to us in the sense of verse 3?
- 2 What is God's intention for us?
- 3 Why weren't the people of Judah being blessed?
- 4 In what ways did their future foreshadow the Millennium?
- 5 Why is it important to leave a godly legacy to our children?
- 6 What are we laboring to build?
- 7 What kind of prosperity do believers experience today?
- 8 How has this change taken place in our lives?
- 9 How do the commands of God here reveal His heart for us?
- 10 What takes us from fasting to feasting?

ⁱ **Isaiah 29:13 (ESV)**

¹³ And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men,

ⁱⁱ **Zechariah 7:12 (ESV)**

¹² They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the LORD of hosts.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Exodus 20:5 (ESV)**

⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,

^{iv} **Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)**

⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

^v **Ephesians 5:31-32 (ESV)**

³¹ "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

^{vi} **Jeremiah 31:3 (ESV)**

³ the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

^{vii} **Job 34:21 (ESV)**

²¹ "For his eyes are on the ways of a man, and he sees all his steps.

viii **Revelation 21:2-3 (ESV)**

² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

ix **Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

x **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

xi **Psalms 127:3 (ESV)**

³ Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.

xii **Matthew 23:37 (ESV)**

³⁷ "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

xiii **Deuteronomy 7:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,

xiv **Ecclesiastes 9:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

xv **Ephesians 2:19-22 (ESV)**

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

xvi **Ephesians 6:5-8 (ESV)**

⁵ Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

xvii **Zechariah 1:3 (ESV)**

³ Therefore say to them, Thus declares the LORD of hosts: Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.

xviii **Ephesians 4:15-16 (ESV)**

¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

xix **Philippians 4:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

xx **Philippians 4:12 (ESV)**

¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

xxi **1 Corinthians 3:21-22 (ESV)**

²¹ So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours,

xxii **1 Peter 2:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

xxiii **Numbers 23:19a (ESV)**

¹⁹ God is not man, that he should lie,

xxiv **John 8:44 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from

the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

^{xxv} **Deuteronomy 24:19 (ESV)**

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

^{xxvi} **John 14:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

^{xxvii} **John 14:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

^{xxviii} **Zechariah 14:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them.

^{xxix} **1 Peter 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,

^{xxx} **Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)**

² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

^{xxxi} **1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,