

# OpenTheo

## Zechariah 7 - 8



### Zechariah - Steve Gregg

In Zechariah 7-8, Steve Gregg examines the issue of fasting among the exiles in Babylon and Jerusalem. He notes that while fasting had become a ritual on the calendar, it was not something commanded by God. Gregg suggests that fasting should be done with the purpose of mourning and not as a religious show, and that it should be accompanied by actions that benefit society, such as helping the oppressed and sharing bread with the hungry. He also reminds listeners that former prophets have warned about the consequences of ignoring God's commands.

### Transcript

We're turning now to Zechariah chapters 7 and 8. This is a section to itself. It follows, of course, the eight visions and the one acted parable that were in the first six chapters, and it precedes the remarkable section that will detain us longest of all, which is chapters 9 through 14. But this is sort of sandwiched in between.

All the things that we read so far previously happened about two years earlier than this. So, Zechariah had all those visions in one night, and then what he did for the next two years, I don't know. It's not on record.

He must have done something. Maybe he prophesied, maybe he went into secular work, and then later the Spirit of God came upon him again. We don't know what he was doing.

But this chapter picks up about two years after the previous night of visions. And it is an occasion where some representatives of the Jews who were still in Babylon, because most Jews had not left Babylon. Most Jews, after 70 years in Babylon, were well settled there.

They had families and friends and businesses and homes they'd built, no doubt, and they just weren't that interested in moving again, traveling 500 miles across the desert to get back to Jerusalem. So they just took the comfortable route and stayed where they were. But they felt a little guilty, no doubt, that their countrymen, who were somewhat more zealous apparently than they, had made that trek across the desert and had gone back and reestablished the city of Jerusalem and built the temple again.

And so, feeling solidarity within those of their countrymen who were gone, those in Babylon were feeling some need to financially support that, and also they had questions. And so they made trips. There were representatives of the exiles that were still in Babylon that would come to Jerusalem periodically.

In fact, in the end of chapter 6, the making of the crown that was set on the top of the head of Joshua was from a gift that had been sent back from the exiles back to the people in Jerusalem, and that gold and silver that was in the gift was what was used to shape the crown to make, to do that active parable. Now in this case, some people have come back to Jerusalem to ask the prophets and the priests a question. The thing here was that the Jews in Babylon had annually observed four fasts.

That is, on four days out of the year, they would fast. And these days were the anniversaries of events that were tragic in their past. All of them related to the destruction of the temple and the beginning of the exile, that which had caused them to have to leave Jerusalem in the first place and go live as exiles in Babylon.

These events were scattered throughout the year. The earliest event that they mourned by fasting was the murder of Gedoliah. Gedoliah was the governor that Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had set over Jerusalem after he had conquered the city.

He had taken away the Davidic sponse, the heir to the throne, took him into captivity, and left a governor in his place, Gedoliah. But Gedoliah was assassinated, which is what brought the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar back down on Jerusalem, another invasion which ended up destroying the temple and taking the rest of the captives away. So if they hadn't assassinated Gedoliah, the city could have survived and the temple could have survived.

But the assassination of this man was the catalyst that brought about the end of their temple and their city and their being able to live in their homeland. So his assassination had taken place in the seventh month of the year. And by the way, that was also the same month that the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, was.

And they were supposed to fast in the seventh month too. For that, it may be that they remembered both events. We don't know too much about this.

They only allude to their fast. They don't explain them too much. The second event that they mourned was when the siege of Jerusalem began.

After Gedoliah was assassinated, Nebuchadnezzar sent his armies back and besieged the city for the final time, this time a siege from which Jerusalem would not recover. And so the siege spelled the beginning of the end. And that took place in the tenth month of the same year after Gedoliah had been assassinated.

In the seventh month, the siege took place in the tenth month, three months later. Then,

of course, after a while, the siege was followed up by the breaching of the walls. The Babylonians managed to get through the walls of Jerusalem, which was what caused the city to fall, of course.

And that happened in the fourth month of the next year. That was the breach of the walls, the fourth month of the next year. And then the next month after that, the fifth month, the temple was burned down.

Now, all of those were important markers of how God's judgment had come upon them in stages. And each of those events was something to commemorate with mourning. And fasting is essentially synonymous with mourning.

Now, we might not always think of it that way. We usually think of fasting as part of praying, do we not? If we think of fasting at all, some Christians never think of fasting. But when they think of it, they think of it as something to accompany prayer, fast and pray, that you internod or watch and pray, Jesus said to His disciples, that you internod into temptation.

He said to His disciples, this kind does not come out but by prayer and fasting. And fasting is usually in our minds associated with maybe an intensification of prayer. But in biblical times, fasting was associated with mourning.

We can see this, for example, in Matthew chapter 9, where John the Baptist's disciples regularly fasted, routinely fasted, sort of like the Jews were doing in Babylon in Zechariah's day. In this later time when Jesus was alive, John the Baptist's disciples and the Pharisees, also disciples, they fasted twice a week, not four times a year. They now had increased their fasting schedule to twice a week.

And it could hardly be thought that it was now the case that they were mourning, literally mourning two days a week, so fasting had become just a religious ritual for them. But Jesus still saw fasting as appropriate primarily for occasions of mourning. Because in chapter 9 of Matthew, it says in verse 14, the disciples of John came to Him saying, why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples don't fast? Now it was thought that fasting is something you just ought to do routinely to just show how religious you are, and to show that you're making whatever, some kind of a, putting yourself under discomfort, hunger, just to make a sacrifice for God or something.

And Jesus said to them, can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. Notice He used the word mourn and fast interchangeably. Why aren't your disciples fasting? Because why should someone mourn when they're at a wedding feast? Eventually the feast will be over and there will be occasion for them to fast, that is to mourn.

And so it's clear that Jesus understood fasting to be related to mourning. And if there's no occasion for mourning, there's no occasion for fasting. Jesus was not one who fasted frequently.

He fasted long the one time He did it. He fasted 40 days at the beginning of His ministry. But after that, we apparently, Jesus and His disciples, didn't really practice fasting.

John the Baptist did, and His disciples and other religious people did. But for them it had become just a ritual on the calendar. Oh, it's Tuesday again, fast day.

Sort of like Ramadan or some other scheduled fast. Okay, do I have to get sad now because that day I'm supposed to be sad? Actually I'm feeling pretty good today, pretty happy, but I better, I have to put on a sad face. Remember when Jesus said that the Pharisees and scribes, they put on a sad face when they're fasting to make it look like they're mourning and so forth? Because they really weren't.

So this idea of fasting goes back to the Babylonian exile. Prior to that, there were no scheduled fasts in the Jewish calendar except for Yom Kippur. There's only one fast in the Old Testament that God ever commanded, and that was in the 16th chapter of Leviticus when He was talking about the annual commemoration of the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.

The people were supposed to fast that day, and that was the only day. But you know, Jews added traditional behaviors, just like the Pharisees had had two fasts a week. That was strictly a tradition of man.

But even before the Pharisees had come along, in Zechariah's day, the Jews had added some fasts to their calendar. Now they were fasting. They had a fast of the fourth month, a fast of the fifth month, a fast of the seventh month, and a fast of the tenth month, each of them corresponding to something that was mournworthy, something sad in their past.

Now the issue here was, should they still do it? They were mourning over the destruction of the temple, but the temple was now rebuilt. They were mourning at the dispersion of the people of Jerusalem, but now Jerusalem had been repopulated, and they built the city again. In other words, all the things we're mourning about aren't there anymore.

And this raised questions among the exiles. You know, we've been doing this mourning for 70 years, but now it seems like the things we're mourning about aren't even reality anymore. So is it now time to stop doing that? Well, of course, they had to get a word from the Lord.

What's interesting is that the Lord never told them to fast or mourn on those occasions. It was not a command, but they had been doing it so long, they thought of it as a duty, and therefore they wanted to ask the priests and the prophets in Jerusalem. They

actually sent someone there.

It might have been people who also had brought some gift of some kind, but they wanted to ask this question. So it says in chapter 7 of Zechariah, Now in the fourth year of King Darius, it came to pass that the word of the Lord came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, which is Chislev, when the people sent Cherezer with Regem-Melek and his men to the house of God to pray before the Lord and to ask the priests who were in the house of the Lord of the hosts and the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years? Now, they only mention here the fifth month, which was one of the four fasts. When Zechariah answers, he refers in verse 5 to the fasts of the fifth and the seventh months, mentioning two of them.

But later in his answer in chapter 8, he mentions all four of them. In Zechariah 8, 19, he says, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth month, the fast of the seventh month, and the fast of the tenth month. They had all these fasts, but they asked about the fast of the fifth month, but all the fasts were of the same sort.

So if you're going to stop doing one of them, might as well stop doing all of them. If you should continue doing one of them, you should continue doing all of them because they all had the same significance. So they said, Should we weep in the fifth month as we've been doing for so many years up until this time? And of course, the fifth month was the month that the temple had been burned, and now the temple is standing, so should we still mourn over this? And the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, Now I want to point out that in verse 4, it says, Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me saying, In verse 8, it says, Then the word of the Lord came to Zachariah, saying, and then in chapter 8, verse 1, it says, Again, the word of the Lord of hosts came, saying, and then in chapter 8, verse 18, it says, Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying.

This phrase, which is essentially identical with only slight verbal differences, introduces four different prophecies. Each of these prophecies is an answer to this question, but bringing out a different aspect of what God would say to them with reference to this situation. All the prophecies, the four prophecies given here, are all generated by this question, and all in some sense provide part of the answer.

But it's interesting that there are like four separate prophecies, each one punctuated by the word of the Lord again came to me saying. And I don't know if this, you know, if the again was a few minutes later, or later the same day, or the next day. We don't know how much time elapsed between them.

Like if he gave the first prophecy one day, and the next day the Lord told him some more things, so he looked him up and told that. I really don't know why this whole prophecy of chapters 7 and 8 is divided into four separate prophecies like this, but it needn't have

been. It could have been just all one flowing prophecy, and I just observed that this is divided into four separate responses.

The first beginning in verse 4 says, 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? You know, God's saying, was this about me that you're fasting? Is this something I have an interest in? You're asking if I want you to do it or not? Was this about me ever? Or was it not feeling sorry for yourselves? You know, is this in any sense these fasts related to your worship of me? And if not, why should I be concerned about you doing it? So he says, When you did that, was this for me that you're fasting? For me? When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves? Should you not have obeyed the words which the Lord proclaimed through the former prophets, when Jerusalem and the cities around were inhabited and prosperous, and the south and the lowland were inhabited? Now, that's the end of the first answer. So when they say, Should we keep fasting this? God says, Did I ever have an interest in this in the first place? Is this a concern of mine? Was this about me? Or was it about you? Whether you fast or eat, are you doing it unto me? Are you doing it for yourself? He doesn't say it in so many terms, but certainly the implication is, this is really something where you're just commemorating something that made you sad, wasn't it? And instead of fasting, you should have paid heed to what I was asking you to do. And that is, listen to what the former prophet said, and the cities around, before things went bad.

He said, Instead of mourning about what happened and crying over spilled milk, concentrate on what you should have done in the first place. You should have listened to those former prophets, and you would have never had these things happen that you're talking about. Now, the former prophets, they said lots of things, but one of the former prophets was Isaiah.

And interestingly enough, he spoke to the Jews of his time who were fasting and who thought wrongly about this too. In Isaiah 58, beginning at verse 3, it says, Why have we Israel's or Judah's complaint to God? Now, we've got troubles here, and so we're fasting and crying out to you, and you're paying no attention. Why are we fasting and getting no results from you, God? And the answer God gives in verse 4 through Isaiah, Isaiah 58, 4, says, Indeed, you fast for strife and debate and to strike with the fist of wickedness.

You will not fast as you do this day to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast and an acceptable day of the Lord? Then he says, Is this not the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring into your house the poor who are cast out, when you see the naked, that you cover him, and do

not hide yourself from your own flesh? What he's saying here is, okay, you people are trying to earn brownie points with God, or trying to twist God's arm to persuade Him to do what you want to do by fasting. But did God ever ask you to fast like this? Are you doing something He requested, or is this your own idea of what you want to do? Now, he says, Is that what I ask, that you bow your head like a bulrush and spread out sackcloth on the ground and put ashes on yourself? This is what you're doing.

I didn't command you to do that. Why don't you pay attention to what I'm interested in, instead of what you want to do? What I'm interested in is that you fast from your bad behavior. I don't care if you fast from food or not.

This is the fast I want you to fast from. Stop oppressing your slaves. Stop ignoring the poor.

The fast I want you to do is to feed the poor, not that you abstain from food yourself, but how about give some food to people who don't have any? In other words, what he's saying is, fasting as some kind of a meritorious act doesn't get any points with God. He doesn't care whether you're eating or not eating, for the most part. What he cares about is whether you're sinning or not sinning, whether you're treating your brother right or wrong, whether you're acting justly or unjustly, whether you're oppressing people or whether you're relieving people who are in need and afflicted.

So what God has said through these former prophets that Zechariah alludes to is that fasting isn't really God's priority at all. Never was, never will be. Fasting from evil, that'd be impressive.

That's the fast he's chosen, not that you fast from food, that you fast from wrongdoing. Start mending your ways. And so the first part of Zechariah's answer to these people is, you should listen to the old prophets.

They answered questions like this. And if you had listened to them and obeyed them, you would never have had these things happen that you're mourning about. The land back when they were prophesying, Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous.

The Babylonians had not come and taken anyone away yet and wouldn't have because it's God who brought Babylon to do this. In a sense, what you're mourning about is what God did to you, in which case you're showing more sympathy for yourself than appreciating the fact that God was just in punishing you. And you could have avoided the whole thing if you had been not so focused on such externalistic and unimportant things like fasting and had been more interested in doing justice and doing righteousness and obeying God in general.

Now, I want to say that fasting is not an unimportant thing altogether or a worthless

thing. Jesus obviously fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. There was some purpose in that.

Jesus did say when the bridegroom is taken from them, they will fast. And we do find some fasting going on in the New Testament in Acts 13 before Barnabas and Saul were sent out from the church of Antioch, the leaders of the church were fasting and ministering to the Lord. There apparently are occasions to fast, but ritual fasting as a religious act doesn't really earn any points with God.

It's not one of the things He's commanded. There are times, no doubt, when fasting is the appropriate accompaniment to your prayers, especially, I suppose, if you're praying about something that's grieving you. Since fasting was not really ever commanded except on the Day of Atonement when people were no doubt expected to be grieving for their sins and they were supposed to be fasting, it's probable that the whole concept of fasting on other occasions came about from originally the idea that when you are really grieved, when you're really emotionally upset, the loss of a loved one or something like that, they've died, that you kind of lose your appetite.

You just don't feel like eating. And so fasting is kind of a natural and understandable accompaniment to mourning. I know that when my family broke up back 15 years ago, it was traumatic for me.

In one month's time, I lost 20 pounds and I didn't have that much to lose. I was already like, what was I, about 15 pounds lighter than I am now before I lost the 20 pounds. Actually, I was 25 pounds lighter before I lost the 20 pounds.

One month after the marriage broke up, I was 45 pounds lighter than I am now. I didn't even know that I lost weight until I stood on a scale a month later and realized, wow, I've lost 20 pounds in one month. Why? I was mourning.

I wasn't fasting deliberately. I didn't even know I was losing weight. I didn't even know I wasn't eating.

I just had no appetite. And you know, if you've ever been through really traumatic grief, eating just seems, who cares? Who wants to eat? And I'm sure that that's where fasting as a practice originated, that when you're really grieved, just food just doesn't sound good to you. It's just not something you're thinking about.

You're distracted by your grief from eating and therefore probably fasting and mourning came to be natural accompaniments, not commanded. It's just something that people understood. You fast when you're mourning.

And when God told them to fast on the day of atonement, no doubt the idea was you're supposed to be deeply grieved over your sins on this day, so much so that you don't want to even eat. But then when they start scheduling fasts as a routine religious day, and by the way, the church in history has had scheduled fasts too. The church,



traditional church calendar has certain fast days as well.

It becomes a religious, an empty religious thing. At least it can be. I think that for the most part, God says, okay, if you're going to do it, do it.

But he doesn't, I don't think he pays much attention to it unless it is truly an accompaniment with a spiritual mourning and grief over something that you're pouring your heart out into the thing that you're praying for. If it's just, I'm going to pray and I'm going to miss meals so that God has to pay more attention to me, that's really just kind of trying to manipulate God. And he's not, you know, he'd be more responsive to just being, you being righteous than missing meals, which isn't particularly more or less righteous.

The Pharisees missed meals two days a week, yet Jesus wasn't impressed with their spirituality in the least. He did think his disciples would fast though from time to time. He didn't say how often or on what occasions, but in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6, Jesus said to him, when you fast, don't be like the hypocrites who disfigure their faces and look sad so everyone will know they're fasting.

When you fast, try to keep that a secret. Groom yourself in the normal fashion. Don't put a sad face on.

Don't let people know you're fasting. The idea being, you know, if you really are doing this unto the Lord in some sense, then you don't have to advertise to everybody else that you're doing it as if to advertise how spiritual you're being. Likewise, these people were fasting, but God says, I don't think this is being done unto me.

I think this is just about you remembering how sad you are because you suffered, frankly, just punishment for your wickedness. And instead of fasting about it, why don't you just not forget what you should have done in the first place and try to not repeat that behavior? Then the second prophecy that's associated with this in verse 8 says, Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, execute true justice, show mercy and compassion, everyone to his brother. 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. Now, this is almost like a summary of what the former prophets had said. In case you want to know how God wants you to respond to this disaster that happened, instead of fasting and mourning over your suffering, why don't you just do this? Start doing what would have prevented the problem in the first place.

Maybe you can prevent the next time. Execute justice, show mercy, compassion, everyone to his brother. Don't oppress people.

Oppressing the widow and the fatherless, widows and fatherless, widows and orphans

were generally the poorest or the most vulnerable people in society. Very disempowered by the fact that women didn't have a lot of power in the culture. It was very strongly patriarchal.

So a woman who didn't have a husband to advocate for her or protect her could easily be trampled on. Her rights could be trampled upon. And usually she didn't have a lot of money.

She wasn't the wage earner of the family. And so when her husband was dead, usually that bode ill for her financially. And so they were vulnerable, poor people, usually widows and orphans.

And that's why they're so frequently mentioned in the Old Testament and even the New as the proper recipients of protection from the society and especially from the courts that they should not allow those who have money and can bribe the judges to steal property from widows and such. Remember Jesus in Matthew 23 rebuked the Pharisees as hypocrites because he said, you make long prayers, but then in your private life you're spoiling widows' houses. You're basically robbing widows.

There must have been some kind of legal, technical way that they could take money or property or whatever through the courts from widows and others who were vulnerable. James said, pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep themselves unspotted from the world. It's almost a cliché of Old Testament prophets.

They're so concerned about it, they repeat it so often. Take care of the widows and the orphans and the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.

This would be a good kind of fast to do, fasting from all this wrong behavior. But they refuse to heed. Now, I believe that this statement, they, is Zechariah or God reminding this generation that the former generation who had been told these things by the former prophets were the ones who refused to heed, and that's why the bad things happened.

This is not telling us that Zechariah's hearers refused to heed him. This is actually not the case. Zechariah's hearers, rather uncharacteristically, actually responded properly to the prophets.

So here he's basically saying this is what your ancestors were told by the former prophets, but they, that is, your ancestors refused to heed. They shrugged their shoulders and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, they made their hearts like flint.

That's a hard stone. They harden their hearts, refusing to hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by his spirit through the former prophets. Thus great

wrath came from the Lord of hosts.

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. Apparently, we don't know when this happened, but it must have been when the problems came in Babylon besieged the city that people sometimes cried out for help from God. They just said, no, I'm done.

I'm not listening to you anymore. You didn't listen to me when you had a chance. I'm not listening to you.

You don't have another chance. Now, I don't actually know, I haven't read in the Old Testament anywhere of the people under the siege actually crying out to God. We read about Jeremiah living through that time, but his story usually takes place in the prison in town.

During the siege, he was kept in prison a lot of the time, but we don't know how many people were actually crying out to God during the siege, but apparently some were, but it was too late. They should have cried out with their behavior earlier, but it was now time for the city to be destroyed and their cries were not heeded. That's what the Proverbs chapter one actually says that wisdom warns the foolish about that very thing, that if they won't listen to wisdom, then when they cry out, wisdom won't listen to them because it says in verse 28 of Proverbs one, then they will call on me, but I will not answer.

They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would have none of my counsel and they despised all my reproof. So you go long enough ignoring God, despising what God has to say, thinking you're getting away with it.

Eventually when the crisis comes, say, oh, it's time to turn to God now. You find that God's turned a deaf ear. Wisdom isn't there when you've been refusing it and when you decide you need it.

Sometimes the point comes when it's too late. Lots of people think that they can repent on their deathbed and there is in fact a phenomenon, genuinely biblical of deathbed repentance. We see it in the case of the thief on the cross.

There's a man who repented literally on his deathbed. It wasn't a very comfortable bed, but he was dying a few moments later, a few hours later perhaps, and he repented and was saved. So we know that God will save people who genuinely repent on their deathbed.

The problem is when people realize that, they sometimes count on it. They say, well, I'll just live and sow my wild oats and do what I want to do, and then when I'm about to die, I'll turn to God. But you'll often find that people who thought they would turn to God on

their deathbed don't and can't.

And sometimes they try and find that God's not available to them. There have been studies actually done where people were told by doctors that they were going to die and they were really expected to die. And they called for their priest or they called for their pastor or they called and repented and prayed and tried to accept Christ and tried to get ready to die.

And in the cases studied, many of these people didn't end up dying after all. They did their best to find God when they were sure they were dying, but they unexpectedly recovered. And guess what? They didn't follow God at all.

Clearly they didn't find Him. They cried out to Him when they literally thought they were dying. They were as sincere as they knew how to be.

They were doing their very best to find God in the 11th hour, but He wasn't available and they didn't find Him. And so when they recovered, they lived as people without God. They didn't have Him.

And they later died without God, no doubt. But that's just it. If you decide, if you're going to presume upon God and say, well, I can ignore God for this long at the point that I'm starting to really feel like death may be near, maybe when the train is coming toward the car and we're stalled on the tracks, or when I'm getting really old, maybe I'll turn to God then.

But what that means is whenever anyone's reasoning that, when I've known people, I had a friend in school who said, I'll just turn to Christ when I see Him coming in the clouds. I'll say, I repent, I repent. Well, you see, when you're doing that, what you're saying is, I know I should repent, but I'm going to put it off.

I don't want to repent now, so I'm not going to do what I know I should do. There may be people who only learn about God very late in life, and their hearts are not hardened toward Him, and they are capable of true repentance on their deathbed. But when someone has all their life known about God and said, I'm going to repent later, later, later, later, that forestalling of repentance is hardening the heart because it's a deliberate saying no to God.

You can't keep saying no to God continuously without your heart hardening. And once your heart is hardened to a certain point, it's too hard. Then when you cry out to God desperately, you might find out, I don't really have a heart for true repentance after all.

I thought I would, but I've actually gotten kind of callous, and I can say the right words, but they're not heartfelt anymore. And so it is that the Jews, when they ignored the prophets again and again and again, when the Babylonians had besieged their city, some of them were crying out to God. He says, but I wouldn't listen to them then.

They didn't listen to me earlier. It was too late for them. I didn't listen to them then.

Verse 14, but I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known. Thus the land became desolate after them, so that no one passed through or returned, for they made the pleasant land desolate. This is the end of the second of the four prophecies here, and he reminds them of what the former prophets had said and how the people had not heard, and therefore God had scattered them.

The point he's making here, no doubt, is what you are mourning about, namely that God allowed you to be conquered by the Babylonians and scattered to the four winds. What you're mourning about is what God did. He did it on purpose.

He did it because you deserved it. You didn't want Him to in the final moments, but He did it because that was the right thing for Him to do, and for you to mourn about what God did, you should be mourning about what you did. If you're going to mourn and fast, how about mourning about your sins, not about what happened to you because of your sins, and that's what an awful lot of people are doing, of course.

Lots of people are very, very sorry they committed crimes once they're in jail. They weren't too sorry about it before, but now that they're in jail, they're really sorry, but of course they're really sorry that they got caught, and that's the idea. They're not really mourning their sin.

They're mourning the consequences of their sin. That's not repentance. That's shallow, and that's, you know, what the Jews who were fasting and mourning about these disasters that came upon them, they were just really not mourning for their sins.

They were mourning for the consequences that came upon them. Chapter 8, again, the word of the Lord of hosts came to me the third time. This is the third part of the answer, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, I am zealous for Zion with great zeal, and with great fervor I'm zealous for her.

Thus says the Lord, I will return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the city of truth, the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain. Now, I want to say that these two words in verses 2 and 3 are a repeat of the original words that God spoke in chapter 1. Not verbatim, but essentially the same, because in the midst of the first vision that Zechariah saw, the angel of the Lord spoke in chapter 1, verse 14, The angel who spoke with me said to me, Proclaim, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal.

That's what we just read a moment ago, essentially. I was exceedingly angry with the nations at ease, or I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease. I was a little angry, but they helped.

And then in verse 16, he says, I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy. My house shall be

built in it, and so forth. Well, that's it.

I'm returning to Zion is in this verse, verse 3. I'm zealous for Zion. I'm returning to Zion. So, it's the same message from chapter 1, reiterated.

And maybe this is to a new group, because when he said it in chapter 1, maybe these exiles who are here asking the question weren't present. And so, he says, this is the message that God has given us in our day. Jerusalem is being restored.

God is happy to do it. God's zealously restoring what was broken down, which, of course, raises serious questions. Why should you keep mourning over what is no longer true? God judged Jerusalem, but now he's zealous to rebuild it.

He's returning to it. Notice the imagery, I am returning, or I have returned. Earlier in Zechariah, he said, I have returned to Zion.

This is not talking about the second coming of Christ or the first coming of Christ. God returning or coming are images that are used in Scripture for God just basically acting favorably, in this case, or in judgment in other cases. So, in chapter 1 and verse 16, he says, I am returning to Jerusalem, sort of present tense.

And later on, and I have to say, I don't remember where it is. I think it might have been later on in chapter 4, but, or somewhere else, he said that I have returned to Jerusalem. And here he says, I will return to Zion.

God is actively at that time acting on their behalf, and this is referring to him showing up. I've returned. I'm back.

And showing up means showing up in activity, not visibly. It's important because the same kind of language may be used in other places, which are mistakenly thought to be references to his actual appearance, the second coming or something. For example, later on in chapter 14 of Zechariah, a passage that many people assume is about the second coming.

It says in Zechariah 14, 3, then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations. He says in verse 4, in that day, his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. A lot of people think that this is talking about Jesus physically coming and returning at this time, but actually this is talking about God acting.

It's not that he has actually moved from one place to another or come closer than he was before. It's his actions, his behavior toward them is referred to as him coming and doing this thing. It's just a figure of speech common enough in the Bible.

Now, this section we're actually reading here in chapter 8, verses 1 through 17, it's made up of several short, like one verse or two verse long oracles, this one prophecy. It's

chapter 8, verses 1 through 17. And many times it says, thus says the Lord of hosts.

Verse 2, thus says the Lord. In verse 3, verse 4, thus says the Lord of hosts. Verse 6, thus says the Lord of hosts.

Verse 7, thus says the Lord of hosts. Verse 9, thus says the Lord of hosts. And verse 14, for thus says the Lord of hosts.

So, we have these multiple times where he kind of repeats, I'm, this is the Lord speaking. This is the Lord speaking. The emphasis is almost as much on the fact that the Lord is the one speaking, as on the contents of what He's saying.

This is the Word from God. This is what the Lord of hosts is saying. He could have just said it at the beginning and then given the whole chapter.

This is what the Lord of hosts says, but He keeps repeating, thus says the Lord of hosts, thus says the Lord. So, it's like there's the underscoring that this is from God, this is God's Word. He could have said it with less emphasis, but He wants to get that across.

This is not anything less than the Word from God for you. And its content, much of it is not really that original, because He already said some of those things in verse 2 and in verse 3. He's basically repeating things He said back in chapter 1. But, He does say in the latter part of verse 3, Jerusalem shall be called the city of truth, the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain. Now, this could be referring to the fact that in Jerusalem they were currently building was going to be an improved, morally improved over the previous Jerusalem, but it's also entirely possible this is looking forward to the new Jerusalem or the church, the spiritual Jerusalem, would be the city of truth.

Christ is the truth and certainly the spiritual Jerusalem is made up of those who are joined to Christ who is the truth and who are committed to the truth. Jerusalem as a physical city didn't have very many times when that could be its description. There were some times, Ezra and Nehemiah who later came along to these same exiles and whipped them into shape somewhat, made things spiritually better in Jerusalem somewhat for a while, but they often came and found that people were compromised in various ways, marrying heathens and in one case they had let their slaves go and then taken them back into captivity.

And this was in the same Jerusalem that was being rebuilt. This was in the returned exiles community. So I don't know when the city of Jerusalem will be called the city of truth other than when it's now the spiritual Jerusalem, the church.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, verse 4, old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets. So this is an image of a peaceful situation, unlike the time when the enemies were threatening them on

every side.

You didn't have people sitting calmly on their front porches in the rocking chairs, the old people watching the little children play in the streets. This is intended to be a picture of idyllic, peaceful security, something that the people of Israel had not known very much because of their sins and because of the enemies that God had allowed to afflict them. Verse 6, thus says the Lord of hosts, if it is marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, will it be also marvelous in my eyes, says the Lord of hosts.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, behold, I will save people from the land of the East, save my people from the land of the East and from the land of the West. I will bring them back and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be my people and I will be their God in truth and righteousness.

Now a person might say this is talking about more of those exiles coming back. Only 50,000 came originally. Some more came back later with Ezra and some more also with Nehemiah came back.

And maybe when he's talking about I will bring my people back from the West and the East, he's talking about more of the exiles are going to come back to Jerusalem. But it's not likely that that's the case because the West and the East are not the areas that they've been dispersed to. In fact, in chapter 2, verse 6, it is clear that he called the Babylonian exiles to come back from the North.

In Zechariah 2, 6, he called to those in Babylon to return from the North country. The land of the North is what he called Babylon. But here it's the land of the West and the land of the East.

Well, what is to the West of Israel? Well, the Mediterranean Sea and points beyond. Of course, you've got Cyprus and Crete out there. But I mean, there's also, you know, if you go West of there, you've got Greece, you've got Italy, you've got Spain, you've got, if you go far enough, you've got North America.

West, that's not where people have been exiled to. And East, although it's true that Babylon and Persia were East of Jerusalem, that's not how they spoke of it. They spoke of that as the land of the North.

This is not talking about the exiles coming back from Babylon. The language is that of that, but it's actually looking forward to people coming, as Jesus said, from the East and the West. When the centurion, who is not a Jew, said to Jesus, just say the word, my servant will be healed, Jesus marveled and said, I've not seen this kind of faith in all Israel.

And I say to you, many will come from the East and the West and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God. And the children of the kingdom will



be cast out into outer darkness, where there'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Jesus said that in the eighth chapter of Matthew.

And the point was this, this Gentile centurion has shown more faith than anyone in Israel has. I've not seen this kind of faith in all Israel, he said. And then he says, come to think of it, there's going to be a lot of people coming like him who are not Israelites from the East and the West, who will be in the kingdom of God, when the natural children of the kingdom, the Jews, won't be.

There's a lot of Gentiles who are going to be in the kingdom, and a lot of Jews who won't be, is what Jesus is saying. And he speaks of the Gentiles coming from the East and the West, which is really what this is predicting. He says, behold, I will save my people from the land of the East and from the land of the West.

Actually, in the Hebrew, the word East isn't there, but the rising of the sun. And West is the setting of the sun. That was, if you read the Old Testament, that's the idiom that the Hebrews used to speak of the East was called the sun rising.

West is called the sun setting. But when they talk of the sun rising, they're not talking about the morning, they're talking about the East. We think of the sun rising as the morning time.

They think of it as the direction of the compass. In Malachi, when it says, from the rising of the sun till the going down thereof, the name of the Lord shall be praised. Christians often speak of that as if it means from morning till night, God shall be praised.

No, it means from the East, the rising of the sun to the going down of the sun, which is West. Globally, the Gentiles will be worshipers of the Israeli God, of the Jew's God, East and West. And it says, I will bring them back and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.

That'd be the spiritual Jerusalem, the church. And they shall be my people and I will be their God in truth and in righteousness. Verse 9, thus says the Lord of hosts, let your hands be strong.

You have been hearing in these days, these words by the mouth of the prophets. That'd be Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets, not the former prophets that we're talking now about these days. Those in those days didn't listen to the former prophets, but you who are hearing in these days, listen to the mouth of the prophets who were in the day when the foundation was laid.

That was Haggai and Zechariah. They were prophesying in the day they laid the foundation of the new temple. That's when they started their ministry.

For the house of the Lord of hosts that the temple might be built for before these days,

there were no wages for man or any hire for beast. There was no peace from the enemy for whoever went out or came in. For I set all men, everyone against his neighbor.

Now this is before Haggai and Zechariah began to prophesy before the temple's foundation was laid, there was economic hardship in among the people and, and strife between them. But now I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days, says the Lord of hosts for the seed shall be prosperous. The vine should give its fruit.

The ground should give her increase and the heaven should give their due. I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. It shall come to pass that just as you were a curse among the nations, Oh, house of Judah and house of Israel.

So I will save you and you shall be a blessing. Do not fear less. Let your hands be strong.

Now this section begins with let your hands be strong in verse nine and ends with let your hands be strong in verse 13. And he's basically saying it wasn't very good a few years ago, was it? But look, everything's turning around now. God's going to give you rain.

There's going to be fruit on the trees. It's going to be a different world. Now you're going to have a city where people can grow old and sit on the porch and watch the children play in the streets.

There'll be plenty of food. This is the blessing of God that he intends for you. Now that you've come back the remnant, he refers to them as the remnant of this people.

These are blessings to the remnant, not to all the race of the Jews, but the faithful for this says the Lord of hosts, just as I determined to punish you when your father's provoked me to wrath says the Lord of hosts. And I would not relent. So again, in these days, I'm determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.

Do not fear. These are the things you shall do. Speak each man, the truth to his neighbor, give judgment to in your gates for truth, justice, and peace.

Let none of you think evil in your hearts against your neighbor and do not love a false oath for all these things. I hate says the Lord. Now that's the end of the third of these prophecies.

The last one's very short, but obviously what he said here is with reference to continuing to fast on these days, it doesn't seem very appropriate. You were beaten up pretty bad. I cursed you.

I gave you trouble, but that's all changing now. It doesn't seem very appropriate to be mourning now. And that's what he goes on to say in this last one.

The word of the Lord of hosts came to be saying, thus says the Lord of hosts, the fast of

the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, the fast of the 10th shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts, not fasts, feasts, not mourning, but cheerful gladness. God's changing the fortunes of Israel and the occasion for fasting will hardly be appropriate. It's now time for feasting, not fasting for the house of Judah.

Therefore love truth and peace. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the peoples shall yet come inhabitants of many cities. The inhabitants of one city shall go to another saying, let us continue to go and pray before the Lord and seek the Lord of hosts.

I myself will go also. Yes. Many peoples in strong nations.

We're talking Gentiles here shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to pray before the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts in those days, 10 men from every language of the nations as 10 Gentiles shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man saying, let us go with you for we have heard that God is with you. Now this is, I think fairly clearly talking about the church age when Jerusalem reaches its ultimate fulfillment of its destiny.

It'll be the remnant of God's people with the Messiah having redeemed them and Gentiles coming in to be part of this. And that of course is what's been going on for the last 2000 years to say 10 men from all the nations will take the sleeve of a single Jew and say, I want to worship your God. That's just saying that for every Jew of the remnants who actually worships God, there'll be, he'll be outnumbered by 10 Gentiles who said, yeah, we're worshipping your God too.

The idea here being that whereas the Jews thought of themselves as God's people and the Gentiles not, the Jews are going to be a very small minority in God's people in the church. And this is of course the case. Certainly 10 would not have to be a real statistical number, but the impression is given that the people of God now are very predominantly Gentile.

The worshipers of Israel's God are mostly from all nations. The Jews are outnumbered as much as 10 to one in this deal. So that's this a prediction of the present age, which is truly the time where we do see this to be the case.

Jews in the kingdom of God, there are some, there is a remnant of Israel that are Christians, but among the Christians, there's certainly an overwhelmingly larger number of Gentiles. And that's what is being predicted. I would point out that this shift from fasting to feasting also is characteristic of the attitude that God wants us to have, because John the Baptist was the epitome of an Old Testament saint, as good as they come.

Jesus is the epitome of a New Testament saint, as good as they come. And Jesus made this distinction between himself and John the Baptist. In the 11th chapter of Matthew, Jesus said, John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine.

He was a faster. He was a Nazarite. He abstained.

He was a mourner. His message was repentance. He wore sackcloth made of goat's hair.

That was John, the epitome of Old Testament piety, mourning. His whole ministry the flavor of mourning, fasting. But Jesus said, but the Son of Man has come eating and drinking.

And you say, behold, a wine-bibber and a glutton, a friend of tax collectors and sinners, referring to the fact that Jesus, unlike John, he didn't abstain from wine. He didn't fast as a rule. He didn't mourn.

He was partying with people, so much so that he got criticized for being a friend of the wrong crowd and being a wine-bibber and a glutton. Now, of course, he wasn't a wine-bibber and a glutton, but he was in those circumstances that encouraged critics to judge him that way, which means Jesus' ministry was much more characterized by feasting and celebrating. Like, you know, when the prodigal came home, there was music and dancing, and the father was inviting the older son to come and participate in the party.

Well, that's what Jesus was doing to the Pharisees. These prodigals that come home, come and participate in the party. Come celebrate.

These tax collectors and sinners have come home from their prodigal lifestyle. The father's rejoicing. Come rejoice, too.

That's why Jesus said, you know, you don't expect the children of the bride chamber to mourn while the bride grooms with them. This is a party here. You don't mourn and fast at a wedding feast.

The point here being that the transition from the Old Covenant to the New is a transition from that which is merely an emotional burden, the law which condemns the condemnation of the Old Covenant that the law brought is an occasion for mourning and grief, even fasting, which symbolizes such. But the New Covenant, what we do, we rejoice in it. Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, and we rejoice even in our tribulations.

We rejoice in God. This is a rejoicing movement. The early Christians were characterized by their joy.

They were a joyful people because their sins were forgiven. David had said, how happy is the man whose sins are forgiven. How blessed is he against whom the Lord will not impute sin.

Forgiveness of sins is an occasion of celebration. They didn't have that assurance in the

Old Covenant. The New Covenant brings that so that the Old Covenant of mourning and fasting is replaced with the New Covenant with rejoicing and feasting so that being happy is more appropriate than being mourning as a Christian.

A lot of Christians don't seem to understand that. They think, you know, God is more pleased if they afflict themselves, whip themselves fast, and just be hard on themselves. And it almost seems irreverent to smile and to laugh and to have a good time.

But Christianity is about having at least a celebratory spirit and attitude. And that's what he's saying here. These fasts, they're going to be turned into joy and gladness and cheerful feasts.

This is talking about the transition from the Old Covenant to the New. And so, the whole message to those who say, should we still fast is, well, your fasting wasn't really my idea in the first place, says God. What you're complaining about is that God did something to you that you rightly deserved.

That doesn't make the fast seem very appropriate either. And more than that, whatever it is you're fasting on is over now. God is restoring Jerusalem and undoing all that.

And the time will come, of course, when the purpose of God is fulfilled and the Messiah has come, that fasting will not be appropriate. Feasting will be. Now, does that mean that Christians should never fast? It's not appropriate for Christians to fast? Well, it is.

As I said, sometimes you do see some instances of fasting in the New Testament, but it would be occasional. It would be when there's something to literally fast for. It's not that we live a life of fasting like the Pharisees who fasted twice a week, whether they needed it or meant it or not.

It was just to show how religious they were, how somber they were. Oh, I'm fasting today and day after tomorrow too. You know, every week, I got to give a certain portion of my week to being gloomy.

Well, that's not appropriate. There may be a time to fast, but Jesus said, if you're fasting, don't let people know it. Don't be gloomy.

Put on a happy face, even if you're hurting inside. And that doesn't mean be phony. It just means don't be, you know, being a downer on people.

Be cheerful, be uplifting. Rejoice. Again, I say rejoice.

Paul said in Philippians 4, 4. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice. That's something that's appropriate for Christians is to be happy and joyful.

And so it's possible that Christianity would have been more attractive as it should be if Christians had emanated more joy and happiness rather than grumpiness and

judgmentalism and, you know, acting like it's, you know, like being a Christian is like having a headache. You don't want to get rid of your head, but it hurts you to keep it. That's what the Hannah Whitehall Smith said in the Christian secret of happy life.

She started, a friend of her said, you Christians are like people with a headache. It hurts you to keep your head, but you don't want to get rid of it. So your religion is something you don't want to get rid of, but it makes you grumpy and stuff, but it shouldn't be that way.

The Christian secret of a happy life is that we have a relationship with God that is worth rejoicing about. And so that's what he's saying will be the ultimate fulfillment of God's purposes, looking beyond Zechariah's own day to the day of Christ, which we live in. This is the day we're supposed to be doing that rejoicing.

All right. So we come to the end of that section. And on Monday, we will get into the section I've been looking forward to.

You know, when I teach Zechariah, I'm always, I wouldn't mind if I could just skip over the first eight chapters and just teach chapters nine through 14, because they are so interesting and so rich and so often misunderstood and so often quoted to wrong purposes. So I really look forward to teaching chapters nine through 14. Nothing wrong with the first eight chapters either.

It's just, I'm always chomping at the bit that let's get through that so I can get to the part that's really kind of exciting. And that's what remains ahead of us here.