

Ritual or Reality?
Zechariah 7 & 8

Introduction

I had quite a mix of reactions to last week's sermon on Physical Expressions of Worship: Voice, Hands & Feet. Some were glad about the sermon because it gave Biblical reasons for practices they experienced in the traditions of other churches. Some were thankful to gain some clarity on what is and what is not Biblically appropriate. A few did not like the sermon and expressed mild to strong opposition to the challenges to the traditions in which they are comfortable. The range of reactions does not surprise me because varied responses of affirmation, learning or rejection are common to any sermon. That is normal for all Bible teachers and preachers of the past and present. It was the experience of Jesus, the apostles and the prophets. It is included in the exhortations and prophecies of Zechariah which we are currently studying.

Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai and both of them began their ministry of prophecy in 520 B.C. to encourage the remnant of exiles that had returned from captivity in Babylon to Jerusalem to resume the work of rebuilding the Temple of Yahweh which had been idle for about fourteen years. Zechariah was given a series of eight visions one night which were varied messages of rebuke, exhortation and encouragement about both the present situation and Yahweh's promises for the future. As we begin our study of Zechariah 7-8 this morning, we will see these same elements. Rebuke for past sins. Exhortation to take action. Encouragement of Yahweh's promises concerning the future. The messages from Yahweh in chapters 7 & 8 come in the same time period and are related to each other.

Time & Place - Zechariah 7:1-2

¹ Now it happened that in the fourth year of King Darius, the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, which is Chislew. ² And the town of Bethel sent Sharezer and Regemmelech and their men to entreat the favor of Yahweh,

According to the calendar we follow, this word of Yahweh came to Zechariah on December 4, 518 B.C. It has been about 22 months since Zechariah received the eight night visions and just over two years since work on rebuilding the Temple had resumed. It would be two more years before the Temple would be completed (Ezra 6:15).

Darius has been ruler of the Persian empire for four years. It was his decree that allowed the Jews to resume rebuilding the Temple according to the earlier decree of King Cyrus. Zechariah specifically refers to Darius as King here which is a reminder that though many prophecies concerning the future coming of Messiah and restoration of the Davidic kingdom had been given, they were not in that time period yet and Judea was still under the authority of the Persians.

Two men, *Sharezer and Regemmelech*, and their entourage travel the ten miles from Bethel south to Jerusalem to entreat the favor of Yahweh. Bethel is part of the area in which the exiles from Babylon have returned, and both of these men have Babylonian names meaning "*prince of the treasury*" and "*messenger from the king*" respectively indicating they are among the remnant that has returned. Bethel had been an important city in the past due to its location on the major north-south road, the Way of the Patriarchs, that connected the Jezreel valley in the north all the way to the Negev in the south. It was also the border city between Judea and Israel in which Jeroboam has set up an alternative altar to keep the people in his kingdom from going to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh. That altar was later desecrated and destroyed by king Josiah (2 Kings 23).

They have a specific question that they want answered in the quest to be able to entreat the favor of Yahweh.

A Question About Fasting - Zechariah 7:3

³ *speaking to the priests, who belong to the house of Yahweh of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, "Shall I weep in the fifth month and abstain, as I have done these many years?"*

They approach the priests and prophets, the people that should be able to answer their question about continuing a ritual they have done for a long time which in verse 5 specifically states to have been seventy years. What is this ritual? According to Jeremiah 52:12 it was on the tenth day of the fifth month in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar that the house of Yahweh, the king's house and the large houses in Jerusalem were set fire. Since that time the Jews would observe that day to fast and mourn in memory of the disaster. Though Mosaic Law did not directly command any fast and only by implication as part of "*humble your souls*" on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31), this fast quickly became strictly observed and included reading the book of Lamentations. It became second only to the Day of Atonement as an important Holy Day to observe. It was a reasonable question for them to ask. Should they continue their practice of fasting in fifth month over the destruction of the Temple when a new Temple was being rebuilt?

It would be commendable to remember and observe such a tragic event if it was to yearly reflect and avoid the sins of their forefathers that were the cause of it. However, both the practice and the question reveal it was simply a ritual done in the belief that it would gain God's favor. Yahweh's answer is direct to that point.

The Rebuke Against Ritual - Zechariah 7:4-7

⁴ *Then the word of Yahweh of hosts came to me, saying,* ⁵ *"Speak to all the people of the land and to the priests, saying, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months these seventy years, was it actually for Me that you fasted?'* ⁶ *'And when you eat and when you drink, are you not eating for yourselves and are you not drinking for yourselves?'* ⁷ *'Are not these the words which Yahweh called out by the hand of the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and at ease along with its cities around it, and the Negev and the Shephelah were inhabited?'"*

Instead of a commendation for their many years of observing this ritual fast, Yahweh rebuked all the people and priests and not just the delegation from Bethel. The seventh month fast referred to was in remembrance of the murder of Gedaliah whom King Nebuchadnezzar had appointed as his governor over Judea.

The rebuke goes to the heart of the issue of both their fasts and their feasts. Abstaining from food and pleasure was part of humbling one's soul in mourning or in intensity of seeking God (Leviticus 16:29). It is a time to be devoted to humble introspection, repentance and petition (Isaiah 58:5-7). Feasting was to be done in celebration of what God had done. It is a time of thanksgiving and praise. Fasting and feasting were to have a focus on God whether in piety, petition or praise. Tragically,

ritualism easily turns both into actions of self. Fasting becomes a ritual abstention endured in the effort to earn God's favor or impress others with supposed piety. Feasting becomes just enjoying a good time.

The rebuke includes the historical citation of Yahweh's rebukes of their forefathers on these same issues by the prophets of old. The land was occupied back then. The current dearth of people in the land was the glaring evidence of God's judgment of the nation because of its lack of reality in their practice of religion. They were following the same mind-set. Yahweh has more delight in obedience to His voice than in burnt offerings and sacrifices (1 Samuel 15:22-23). Jeremiah had warned that because of their disobedience, Yahweh would not listen to their prayers or accept their sacrifices (Jer. 14:12). Many generations earlier Isaiah 58:3-4 records God's rebuke of such ritual fasting. *"Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire,*

And drive hard all your workers. ⁴*"Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist."* Those are all opposite of the purpose of a fast, and yet they were surprised God was not paying any attention to them. Psalm 66:18 declares, *"If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear."*

These same truths still apply today. God is not impressed by ritualism though that is the practice in many Christian churches which define godliness by their liturgy and rituals. While many of those practices began with good intent, the meaning was lost long ago with the traditions continuing by rote. Jeremiah 17:10 records, *"I, Yahweh, search the heart; I test the inmost being, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his deeds."* Jesus warned in Luke 16:15, *"You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts, for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God."* Outward appearance and ritual are of no account to God. Salvation itself is a matter of the heart. Consider Romans 10:9-10, ⁹ *"that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; ¹⁰ for with the heart a person believes, leading to righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, leading to salvation."*

Traditions upheld with purpose and meaning from the heart can be good and pleasing to the Lord (2 Thess. 2:15), but rituals done by rote lose their meaning so that they are ignored by the Lord and may even become traditions of men which incur His condemnation (Mark 7:8-9). We gather here to worship the Lord our God in spirit and truth from the heart. I hope that is the reason you have joined with us.

True Religion - Zechariah 7:8-10

The text now continues past this first the rebuke to quickly point out the nature of true religion.

⁸ *"Then the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah saying, ⁹ "Thus has Yahweh of hosts said, 'Judge with true justice and show lovingkindness and compassion each to his brother; ¹⁰ and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the sojourner or the afflicted; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.'"*

Micah 6:8 is very similar, *"He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does Yahweh require of you But to do justice, to love lovingkindness, And to walk humbly with your God?"* Yahweh gives two commands here in Zechariah 7:9-10 with two related examples of how to carry out those commands.

First is to judge with true justice. That means according to God's commands instead of man's desires as we see in the "woke" culture of our own society. Many efforts by our own governments are in direct opposition to the prohibition of this passage for they are devising evil against one another, and not just in their hearts, but in practice by regulations, laws and litigation.

The second command is to show and carry out lovingkindness and compassion on others. Kindness, love, loyalty, mercy and compassion are characteristics of godliness. The opposite of those are taking advantage of and oppress the vulnerable such as widows, orphans, sojourners and the needy. James 1:27 states that *"Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."*

The nature of true godliness is in direct contrast with falsely professed piety. The passage continues on to detail the results of the rote ritualism of their forefathers.

The Rebuke Against Stubborn Hearts - Zechariah 7:11-14

¹¹ *"But they refused to give heed and turned a stubborn shoulder and dulled their ears from hearing. ¹² "And they made their hearts diamond-hard so that they could not hear the law and the words which Yahweh of hosts had sent by His Spirit by the hand of the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from Yahweh of hosts. ¹³ "And it happened that just as He called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen," says Yahweh of hosts; ¹⁴ "but I scattered them with a storm wind among all the nations whom they have not known. Thus the land is desolated behind them so that no one was passing through and returning, for they made the pleasant land desolate."*

Their forefathers had been fairly warned by multiple prophets, but then, like today, the ungodly become stubborn in their ways. A stubbornness that increases is described. Beginning with refusal to heed, pay attention to what God has said it progresses to shrugging it off. A refusal to let the word of the Lord burden them. Next is covering or stopping the ears so that it is hard to hear God if at all. Finally the heart becomes "shamir" translated as hard like flint and even "diamond-hard." They reject what God has said and refuse to hear any more. God responded to their resulting disobedience just as He had warned in the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 27 & 28) with increasing curses culminating in their deportation and desolation of the land. The people hearing Zechariah's message knew this first hand because they are the first generation back from the exile and were physically dealing with the desolation of the land.

Yahweh's Jealousy for Jerusalem - Zechariah 8:1-2

Yahweh's message to them through Zechariah does not end in chapter 7 and for that both they and we have to be very grateful. It continues on in chapter 8 with messages of hope for the present and future.

¹ *Then the word of Yahweh of hosts came, saying, ² "Thus says Yahweh of hosts, 'I am jealous with great jealousy for Zion, and with great wrath I am jealous for her.'*

Zion is one of the many names to refer to Jerusalem. It specifically refers to the fortified ridge between the Kidron and Tryopean valleys that David captured from the Jebusites (2 Samuel 5:7). It

became known as the “city of David” and “Mount Zion,” but it was also used to refer to the temple vicinity, all of Jerusalem, the entire nation or the covenant community. Here it refers to the Temple vicinity and Jerusalem as will be seen in verse 3.

Do not think of jealousy here as something akin to human jealousy which often has sinful elements and is used as a synonym for envy. This jealousy is holy and righteous. It is a vigilant guarding of a possession, in this case God for His people and city, and it includes an absolute intolerance of rivalry or unfaithfulness because those are contrary to truth and righteousness. God is jealous of Zion and woe to those that would strive to usurp His claim for His wrath will be upon them. God will not tolerate His people worshiping other gods (Exodus 20:5). He will take vengeance on His adversaries (Ezekiel 36:5-6; Nahum 1:2). Aren't you glad to be on the Lord's side so that His jealousy is your protection instead having to face it as His adversary? The remnant would have been glad to hear this since they had already faced opposition by the surrounding peoples to the rebuilding of the Temple and re-establishing of the proper worship of Yahweh.

The Future of Jerusalem - Zechariah 8:3-8

Yahweh's Presence in Jerusalem - Zechariah 8:3

The messages now turn their focus to a future time when the promises of Yahweh concerning Jerusalem and His people will be carried out.

³ *“Thus says Yahweh, ‘I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of Yahweh of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain.’*

Prior to the glory of Yahweh departing from the temple as recorded in Ezekiel 10, His presence had been manifested there just as it had been earlier in the Tabernacle. The promise here is that it will be restored in the future. This will result in new names being used to refer to Jerusalem and Mt. Zion. Because Yahweh is the God of all truth and truth emanates from Him, it will be known as the City of truth. Because Yahweh is holy, His mountain will be known as the Holy Mountain. That did not happen during the second temple period and there is no Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem at the present time, so we know this still future.

Yahweh's Peace in Jerusalem - Zechariah 8:4-5

⁴ *“Thus says Yahweh of hosts, ‘Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of age. ⁵ ‘And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets.’*

This is a description of the blessings of Yahweh that will be on these future inhabitants of Jerusalem, and it is a description of peace. Old men and women and children are vulnerable in times of turmoil and war since they cannot adequately defend themselves and even fleeing is difficult for them. The streets themselves are safe since the old folks who need a staff to help in walking can be there as well as the boys and girls safely playing in the street. The presence of both the old and the young indicate a peace has been present for a long enough period for them to become old, and for families to be established and

grow. Those are attractive promises for a population that still had threats from the surrounding peoples and lived in a city that still had its walls broken down. Those are attractive promises for any society. That had been normal in most of the United States, but there are an increasing number of places where that is no longer true as our society continues to break down as it flees from God and His commands.

Yahweh's Promise to Jerusalem - Zechariah 8:6

God's promises are certain as expressed in verse 6. *"Thus says Yahweh of hosts, 'If it is too difficult in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, will it also be too difficult in My sight?'" declares Yahweh of hosts.*"

While this promise may seem an impossibility - *"too difficult"* - to the small remnant that was then living in the land, the promise is made by the Yahweh of hosts, so it is a certainty. The term "host" here is a military term referring to armies, and in this case, armies of angels. It is no problem for God to keep this promise or any of His promises. That is why we can be at peace in all circumstances because we are secure in Him. All who trust in Him can be at perfect peace (Isaiah 26:3).

Yahweh's Promise Beyond Jerusalem - Zechariah 8:7

Yahweh continues on to make promises that extend beyond Jerusalem. ⁷ *"Thus says Yahweh of hosts, 'Behold, I am going to save My people from the land where the sun rises and from the land where the sun sets; ⁸ and I will bring them back, and they will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God in truth and righteousness.'"*

To this point in time, the remnant was made up of only those that had returned from the Babylonian exile. Since the decree of Persian King Cyrus went throughout his kingdom, there is a possibility that some descendants of those deported from Israel by Assyria could also have taken advantage of it and returned. This promise goes far beyond just those lands of deportation to the east of Jerusalem *"where the sun rises."* It also includes the lands to the west *"where the sun sets."* The Jewish people continued to disperse even as prophesied to be scattered among the nations from one end of the earth to the other (Deuteronomy 28:64; Jeremiah 9:16). This prophesy encompasses Europe, north Africa and beyond.

God's promise is that He will bring them back to the lands of Israel and Jerusalem so that *"they shall be My people, and I will be their God in truth and righteousness."* While we have seen a start of the beginning of this in the mid-twentieth century with the establishment of the modern state of Israel and Jews from around the world immigrating there, there are still millions of Jews scattered around the world that have not yet emigrated. More importantly, the modern of State of Israel is not a kingdom of Yahweh. It is a very secular state that approves of many things that are declared abominations to God. They are not yet living as the people of Yahweh following Him as the God of truth and righteousness. This is a promise yet to be fulfilled in the future in the establishment of Messiah's kingdom.

Encouragement to the Present Remnant - Zechariah 8:9-17

Exhortation to Be Strong - Zechariah 8:9

Though the promises are still yet future, they would have been an encouragement to the remnant rebuilding the temple because it gave them a firm hope of what God would do in the future. God next gives them a direct exhortation. It is God's promises concerning the future yet to come that also gives us a firm hope in the present to persevere and endure even when circumstances are difficult.

⁹ *"Thus says Yahweh of hosts, 'Let your hands be strong, you who are listening in these days to these words from the mouth of the prophets, those who spoke in the day that the foundation of the house of Yahweh of hosts was laid, to the end that the temple might be built.'"*

This is directly to those hearing Zechariah for the reference is to what he and Haggai had said two years earlier to encourage the resumption of the work that had started some sixteen years earlier when the first effort of restoring the foundation was laid by the early returned exiles. That work was now progressing well, but they needed to let their hands remain strong in order to finish the work. The next verse is a quick reminder of how much better things had become now that they were being faithful in obeying the Lord.

Remembering the Past - Zechariah 8:10

¹⁰ *'For before those days there was no wage for man or any wage for animal; and for him who went out or came in there was no peace because of the adversary, and I set all men one against another.'*

This is a reminder of the early prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah. Because the people were neglectful "before those days" of rebuilding the temple and were instead pursuing efforts to increase their own homes and wealth, they had been under God's curse so that they were poor despite their efforts and living under constant threat from outsiders and in contention with each other. They lacked both prosperity and peace. The next section resumes the message of encouragement for the future would hold both peace and prosperity.

Consider the Future - Zechariah 8:11-15

¹¹ *'But now I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days,' declares Yahweh of hosts.* ¹² *'For there will be peace for the seed: the vine will yield its fruit, the land will yield its produce, and the heavens will give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these things.'* ¹³ *'And it will be that just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you that you may become a blessing. Do not fear; let your hands be strong.'* ¹⁴ *"For thus says Yahweh of hosts, 'Just as I purposed to bring about evil to you when your fathers provoked Me to wrath,' says Yahweh of hosts, 'and I have not relented,'¹⁵ so I have again purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear!*

The promises here are completely in keeping with the prophecies of restoration in Deuteronomy 30. And while the fulness of what is said here in Zechariah will not come until the Messianic kingdom, elements of it are general promises of blessing as they obey Yahweh so that they are encouraged once

again to let their hands be strong and not to fear. Just as God kept His word in cursing their forefathers for their disobedience, so He will keep His word in blessing them as they obey Him. The next section are exhortations to specific actions.

Exhortations to Action - Zechariah 8:16-17

¹⁶ *“These are the things which you should do: speak the truth to one another; judge with truth and judgment for peace in your gates. ¹⁷ ‘Also let none of you devise evil in your heart against another, and do not love false oaths; for all these are what I hate,’ declares Yahweh.”* Adding to the exhortations given earlier in Zechariah 7:8-9 are related or repeated commands. First, speak the truth to one another. That same command is given to Christians in Ephesians 4:25. Lying is a mark of ungodly evil. Second, judge with truth. Truth brings about peace of righteousness while deception results in continuing turmoil. Third, do not devise, plan, consider, think about evil in your heart against others with the specific mention of loving false oaths, perjury, lies, deception against others. Why? Because God hates all these things. Doing what God hates brings His curses. Doing what God loves brings His blessing. That truth still remains in our own time.

Transforming Fasts into Feasts - Zechariah 8:18-19

The next message is one of radical transformation. ¹⁸ *“Then the word of Yahweh of hosts came to me, saying, ¹⁹ “Thus says Yahweh of hosts, ‘The fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth months will become joy, gladness, and merry appointed feasts for the house of Judah; so love truth and peace.’”*

This is the definitive answer to the initial question. Should they continue to mourn and abstain in the fifth month as they had been doing for so many years? The answer is no, and neither should they continue the other fasts. The fast of the fourth month was to mourn over the breaching of Jerusalem’s walls on the ninth day of that month in the eleventh year of Zedekiah’s reign - July 18, 586 B.C. (Jeremiah 39:2). The fast of the fifth month as already mentioned was for the destruction of the temple and city by fire on August 17, 586 B.C. (Jeremiah 52:12-13). The fast of the seventh month as already mentioned was for the murder of Gedaliah on October 4, 583 B.C. (2 Kings 25:25). The fast of the tenth month was for the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem on the tenth day of that month in the ninth year of Zedekiah’s reign - January 15, 588 B.C. (2 Kings 25:1).

Not only were their fasts improper as indicated in chapter 7, but they were not something to continue because God had something better planned for them in the future. Those fasts would be turned in to feasting because of all that the Lord was going to do. Mourning would give way to thanksgiving. It will be a permanent fulfillment of Psalm 30:11, *“You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness.”*

Future Seeking of Yahweh - Zechariah 8:20-23

The final message in this series speaks of a radical change that will occur throughout the world. ²⁰ *“Thus says Yahweh of hosts, ‘It will yet be that peoples will come, even the inhabitants of many cities.*

²¹ *'The inhabitants of one will go to another, saying, "Let us go at once to entreat the favor of Yahweh and to seek Yahweh of hosts; I will also go."* ²² *'So many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek Yahweh of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of Yahweh.'* ²³ *"Thus says Yahweh of hosts, 'In those days ten men from every tongue of the nations will take hold of the garment of a Jew, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."'"*

The current headlines against the nation of Israel even as it tries to defend itself against multiple opponents who rain rockets down on them even as it strives to permanently remove the very real threat of Hamas which vows to repeat the atrocities of last October 7 if given a chance makes this seem like an impossibility. Yet, these are the promises of the future. The view that the Jewish people are a curse on the world will be completely changed into being the blessing they were always meant to be as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). During Messiah's reign the people of the world will actively seek the favor of Yahweh, to pray before Him and will come to Jerusalem to do so. The prophecy of Isaiah 60:3 will be fulfilled, *"Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising."*

Men of nations of every tongue will seek to latch onto a Jew in order to learn from him about the true God. This will only be possible once the promise in Romans 11:26 is fulfilled and *"all Israel will be saved,"* for only the saved can lead someone to the true God. All these things will be true at the beginning of Messiah's reign. The prophecy of Isaiah 55:4-5 will be fulfilled,⁴ *"Behold, I have given him as a witness to the peoples, A ruler and commander for the peoples."*⁵ *"Behold, you will call a nation you do not know, And a nation which knows you not will run to you, Because of Yahweh your God, even the Holy One of Israel; For He has adorned you with beautiful glory."*

Conclusions

We who are Christians share in that hope. Whatever causes of mourning we now have will be changed. God will wipe away our tears (Revelation 2:14), and fasting will become feasting. Mourning will give way to thanksgiving, and sorrow to joy. Such is the nature of our God and His promises for the future that we can exclaim as Paul did in Romans 8:18, *"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."*

If you cannot do that at the present time, God can develop that in you, and it all begins by humbling yourself before God to believe what He has revealed in His word about the Lord Jesus Christ and what He has done by becoming a man, living a sinless life, willingly dying as the substitute sacrifice for man's sins, physically rising from the dead, ascending to heaven and even now preparing a place there for all who will place their faith in Him. But that cannot be done unless you will turn from your sin, self and pride to humbly seek Him. If you are willing to do that, come talk with myself or any of our church leaders and allow us to assist you, answering any of your questions and praying with you.

If you have already done that, then continue to seek the Lord in all humility yielding yourself to His will and living for His glory. Do not be like the Jews warned about here who insisted on seeking God according to their own ways and foolishness and became hard hearted.

Sermon Notes - 3/24/2024
Ritual or Reality? - Zechariah 7 & 8

Introduction

Time & Place - Zechariah 7:1-2

December 4, 518 B.C. - 22 months since the 8 night visions. ~ _____ since Temple construction resumed
Group from _____ come to Jerusalem seeking an answer in quest of entreating the favor of Yahweh

A Question About Fasting - Zechariah 7:3

Should they still mourn & abstain to commemorate the destruction of the _____ on the 10th of 5th month?
Mosaic Law did not _____ fasting, but this one became second only to the Day of Atonement in observance
The practice & the question reveal it was simply a ritual done in the belief that it would _____ God's favor

The Rebuke Against Ritual - Zechariah 7:4-7

The fast in the seventh month was to commemorate the _____ of Gedaliah, the governor
Fasting was to be a humbling of the soul devoted to introspection, _____ and petition
Feasting was to be done with _____ in celebration of what God had done
_____ turns fasting into abstention to be endured to earn God's favor & feasting into just a party
Their forefathers were _____ for the same thing - 1 Sam. 15:22-23; Jeremiah 14:12; Isaiah 58:3-4
God is not impressed by ritualism. He looks at the _____ - Jer. 17:10; Luke 16:15; Romans 10:9-10
Traditions can please the Lord (2 Thess. 2:15), but ritual by _____ is ignored & may be condemned (Mk 7:8-9)

True Religion - Zechariah 7:8-10

Micah 6:8 is similar
Judge with true _____ - which requires the standard to be God's commands and not man's desires
Show & practice lovingkindness & _____ - James 1:27
The nature of true godliness is in direct contrast with falsely professed _____

The Rebuke Against Stubborn Hearts - Zechariah 7:11-14

Their forefathers had been fairly warned by multiple prophets but remained _____ & so were cursed

Yahweh's Jealousy for Jerusalem - Zechariah 8:1-2

Zion can refer to several things, but here refers to the _____ vicinity and Jerusalem
God's jealousy is a holy & righteous vigilant _____ of Zion with intolerance for rivalry or unfaithfulness

The Future of Jerusalem - Zechariah 8:3-8

Yahweh's Presence in Jerusalem - Zechariah 8:3

His presence would be again _____ in Jerusalem as it had prior to its departure recorded in Ezek. 10

Yahweh's Peace in Jerusalem - Zechariah 8:4-5

Old people & children in the streets is a description of _____ - a long lasting peace

Yahweh's Promise to Jerusalem - Zechariah 8:6

What is too difficult for people is a certainty for Yahweh of hosts - His host is _____ of angels

Yahweh's Promise Beyond Jerusalem - Zechariah 8:7

Even if the remnant that returned included those from former Assyrian lands, this promise is far _____

It also includes return of those from the lands to the west - North Africa, _____ and beyond

Emigration to modern Israel may be a start, but they do not yet _____ the promise - *My people, their God*

Encouragement to the Present Remnant - Zechariah 8:9-17

Exhortation to Be Strong - Zechariah 8:9

Exhortation given to those who had heard Haggai & Zechariah 2 years earlier - be strong to _____ the work

Remembering the Past - Zechariah 8:10

Because the people were neglectful "*before those days*" they had been under God's _____

Consider the Future - Zechariah 8:11-15

These promises are completely in keeping with the prophecies of _____ in Deuteronomy 30

God _____ His word: As disobedience results in curses, so obedience results in blessing

Exhortations to Action - Zechariah 8:16-17

1) Speak the _____ to one another; 2) Judge with truth; 3) Do not devise evil in your heart against others

Transforming Fasts into Feasts - Zechariah 8:18-19

They should _____ any of the fasts - 4th, 5th, 7th or 10th month

Not only were their fasts improper (Zech. 7), but God had something _____ planned for the future - feasts

Future Seeking of Yahweh - Zechariah 8:20-23

The current situation in Israel shows the world continues to view that nation and Jews as a _____

During Messiah's reign, Jews & their nation will be a _____ to the world - fulfilling Isaiah 60:3

Men of nations of every tongue will seek to latch onto a Jew in order to _____ from him about the true God

Romans 11:26 and Isaiah 55:4-5 will be fulfilled - all Israel will be _____; Nations will seek Yahweh

KIDS KORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help. **Young Children** - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch. **Older Children** - Do one or more of the following: 1) Write down the scripture references and look them up later 2) Count how many times references are made to Yahweh. 3) Discuss with your parents the meaning of any traditions or rituals in your family that you do not understand.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in thinking about the sermon or discussing it with others. When were the messages of Zechariah 7-8 given? What was the purpose of the question by the men from Bethel? Why were they rebuked? What is the nature and expression of true religion? What is God's response to those with stubborn hearts? Why is God jealous for Jerusalem? Why is that a protection? What will Jerusalem be like during Messiah's reign? How certain are God's promises? How had things changed for the remnant since work on the temple had been restarted? Why would the former fasts be turned into feasts and when will that happen? Is the modern state of Israel a fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecies? Why or why not?