

September 6, 2026

A CALL TO OBEDIENCE IN LIGHT OF A GLORIOUS FUTURE

Zechariah 7:1-8:23

(8 of 10 in a series through Zechariah)

If Zechariah were a television show, the episode that covers chapter 7 would start with the words, “Two years later.” As this chapter begins, we’re now two years removed from that night when Zechariah received a series of visions that we’ve looked at over the first six chapters. The temple rebuilding project is now two years further along, after that seventeen-year break. And we’re only two years away from its completion. So, the scene in Jerusalem at the time of our text (December, 518 B.C.) probably looked a lot like our new sanctuary project right now. Work is going on, progressing, and things are taking shape. The exciting news that the temple was being rebuilt in Jerusalem would have been spreading throughout the region.

One area that got the news and would have been aware of the temple rebuilding project in Jerusalem was Bethel. It was only about twelve miles north of Jerusalem. And because Jews would have been in that area, the temple would have dominated much of their conversation. And one day as they started talking about the temple being rebuilt, someone raised a question, “If the temple is being rebuilt, should we keep weeping and fasting as we’ve done for years?”

It’s probably not obvious to us why that question would have come up, so let me explain. After Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. and the people were hauled off into exile, the Israelites began to practice a series of fasts to remember and mourn the loss they suffered. It was in the tenth month that the Babylonians laid siege to the city, and so the tenth month of every year, they had a time of fasting and weeping. It was in the fourth month that the Babylonians finally broke through the walls, and so they observed a time of fasting and mourning for that. In the fifth month the Babylonians had burned the temple and the city, and so there was a fast then. And, finally, it was in the seventh month that Gedaliah was murdered. Gedaliah had been put in place as the ruler of Jerusalem by the Babylonians after the conquest, in the place of Zedekiah. You might remember that Zedekiah always rebelled against the prophet Jeremiah, whereas Gedaliah had been happy to abide by what the prophet said. So, this was a good thing—except that one of Zedekiah’s officers murdered him in the seventh month, and so they fasted and wept in the seventh month as well.

Now, to be clear, the Lord had not commanded these fasts in the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months of the year. The only fast the Lord commanded annually was a fast on the day of atonement. The Israelites had come up with this on their own. But as it is, the fifth month fast that remembered the destruction and burning of the temple was one that the Jews in Bethel began to ask if they should continue. After all, the temple was being rebuilt. And so the question of whether they should continue to fast and mourn for the temple’s destruction while the temple was being rebuilt seems like a good question to ask. Therefore, they send a delegation of some men to go to Jerusalem and ask the prophets (Zechariah and Haggai) and the priests just that.

That's why we see the question in 7:3, "Should I weep and abstain in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?"

Now, ultimately, Zechariah doesn't answer that question until near the end of chapter 8. That's why we're taking 7 and 8 together. These two chapters are held together by the question at the beginning of chapter 7 and the answer at the end of chapter 8. And my guess is that the delegation was simply hoping for a yes or no answer—yes, keep fasting, or no, you can quit. But the Lord doesn't give Zechariah a word that simple. Rather, he begins by talking about the nature of their fasts, and by the time Zechariah gets to answering their question, the delegation has been told a lot. And we can be grateful for this because Zechariah's response—which runs from 7:4-8:23—is something that we likely need to hear this morning as well. So, what I want to do is walk through Zechariah's response to this delegation under three headings. The first of which is the seriousness of sin and need for obedience.

The seriousness of sin and need for obedience

As the delegation asks if they should keep up their fast in the fifth month, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, "Say to all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted? And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat for yourselves or drink for yourselves?'" (vv. 5-6).

I don't think I have to tell you that when the Lord asks these kinds of questions, the answer isn't going to be, "Yes, it was for your sake, O Lord, that we were fasting." The Lord is exposing their sin. And yet, this raises a question. Why is it obvious that when the people were fasting and mourning, they were simply doing this for themselves and not for the Lord? I mean, aren't those kinds of things hard to parse out? Well, as Zechariah continues, it becomes clear that it wasn't difficult to discern that they weren't fasting out of their concern to honor the Lord. And the reason why is because Zechariah notes all the sinful things that they were doing while they were fasting. We see this in 7:7-14.

Zechariah tells them that this is the same thing that the prophets noted to the people back in the days that led up to the exile in the first place (7:7). And then in 7:8-14, he notes all the sins that were taking place then. They weren't rendering true judgments when deciding disputes, not showing mercy to one another, oppressing widows and orphans and the poor and sojourner, and devising all kinds of evil against one another (7:8-10). And though the prophets called them to repent, they refused to pay attention, turned a cold shoulder to them, shut their ears from hearing, and hardened their hearts (7:11-12). Therefore, the Lord said, in essence, "Fine, don't hear me, and when you call for me to deliver you in the day of destruction, I won't hear you either" (7:13), and so he judged them under the destructive might of the Babylonians (7:14).

And again, the reason Zechariah is rehearsing those days is because the people whom the delegate from Bethel represent are guilty of doing the same things. That's why the Lord tells them that their fasts are simply for themselves and not for him. They were fasting and mourning,

but it was not because of the sins that had led to God's judgment. They were fasting and mourning because of the *consequences* of their sin. They fasted and mourned because the temple was destroyed, and they had to leave Jerusalem, not because of their sin that had caused these things. And the reason we know that this is the case is because they haven't done anything to turn from these sins.

Imagine a man who has done all kinds of violent acts against his neighbors and gets thrown into prison for them. Then, imagine he is sitting before a parole board, supposedly telling them how sorry he is. He says, "I weep thirty minutes a day that I got myself thrown into prison." And the parole board says, "Now, we've gotten reports that you instigate violent acts against your fellow prisoners daily." And the man responds, "Yes, that's true, but I really do weep every day that I got myself thrown into prison." That man would obviously be weeping for his prison sentence, not because of his sins that got him there. That's this picture.

And it's a lesson for us that we need to take our sins seriously. For some of us, our sins have cost us much, and that's worth mourning over. But if we mourn for the consequences of our sins and not for our sins themselves so that we turn from them, it's hard to argue our weeping is for the Lord. Perhaps the questions we should ask are: Are we content if things are going well in our lives but we are walking in sin? Does our sin only bother us if it brings unpleasant consequences? If the answer to these questions is, "Yes," then we need to ask the Lord to help us see the seriousness of our sin and give us the grace to repent. That's the lesson of Zechariah 7—the seriousness of sin and need for obedience. Second, we the glory of God's future blessings.

The glory of God's future blessings

You would think that the Lord might respond to the scene in chapter 7 by saying, "Therefore, I've changed my mind and am no longer going to bless Jerusalem" or "You all from Bethel won't get to enjoy it." But he says nothing like this. Rather, in 8:1-8, the Lord doubles down on his intention to bless Jerusalem and to bless it more than anyone might imagine. He is faithful to his promises.

In 8:1-8, we see some of the themes we've seen earlier in Zechariah where the Lord makes clear that once the temple was rebuilt, that wasn't the extent of his blessings. In fact, the temple and Jerusalem itself, were simply shadows of blessings so glorious they couldn't imagine them. He declares that Jerusalem will be adorned by faithful people (8:3). People will live long and grow old there (8:4). The city will be well-populated and safe with boys and girls filling the streets (8:5). And the Lord will bring people from the east and west to fill it and dwell there, as he dwells with them as their God in faithfulness and in righteousness (8:6-8).

Now, I don't think that this is a promise that the Lord fulfilled fully back in the sixth century B.C. As I've noted, so many of these promises simply didn't come about during the time of the Old Testament and are so much bigger than anything we see then. So, how does God fulfill this promise? Well, the answer is that he'll do it fully when Christ returns and makes all things new.

When we experience a new Jerusalem, which is nothing less than a new heavens and new earth, it will be filled with faithful people who don't have to fear anything, including death, and we will dwell with our God forever.

But we should also recognize that the Lord is fulfilling this promise in part through his church. We noted last week that the work of the Branch—our Lord, Jesus Christ—would not be to build a physical temple but to build a living temple, to gather a people for himself among whom God would dwell forever. And he's doing that now. He's gathering people from the east and west, taking away the threat of condemnation so that death has lost its sting and sin its enslaving power in their lives, and he's allowing us to enjoy this glorious reality of living with him as our God and we as his redeemed people. In other words, the Lord is giving us a taste now of this glorious picture of Zechariah 8:1-8. And yet, as great as it is, never forget that there is so much more and so many greater things to come.

But, if you're like me, all of this is raising another question in your mind. Why would the Lord go off on this monologue about all the glorious things that he's going to do in front of a people whom he's just identified as walking in sin? This isn't what we'd naturally anticipate. But I think the answer is this: he's luring them toward repentance and obedience by holding out the glories to come. Let me see if I can show you why I'm arguing that as we look at this final section of our text, as we look at the call to obedience in light of what's to come.

The call to obedience in light of what's to come

Notice the structure of the text once more. In 8:1-8 the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, telling the people of this glorious new Jerusalem to come. Then, immediately after that glorious declaration, 8:9 picks up with a command—"Let your hands be strong, you who in these days have been hearing these words from the mouth of the prophets who were present on the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be rebuilt." Now, when he says, "Let your hands be strong," he's saying, "Don't grow weary in the work of building the temple." In other words, he's saying, "Keep enduring in doing what I've commanded you to do." They're to persevere in obedience in light of the promise of the promised future glory. You have a promise of a glorious future followed by an exhortation. But the cycle doesn't end there.

After exhorting the people to let their hands be strong in 8:9, verse 10 begins with the word "for." In other words, the Lord is saying, "I'm going to tell you once more why you should persevere in obeying my command to build the temple." Then he reminds them that back in the day, the Lord had allowed his curse to bear down on his people. They were poor and in danger—from outside threats as well as their neighbors. And yet, the glorious day that he's promising won't be like that. He continues, "But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, declares the LORD of hosts. For there shall be a sowing of peace. The vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its produce, and the heavens shall give their dew. And I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. And as you have been a byword of cursing

among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing" (8:11-13a).

God announces that he's no longer going to curse his people in judgment but bless them. There are future glorious blessings to come. That's the *why* he gives them for why they should let their hands be strong, which he exhorted them to do in 8:9. And then he ends the section by returning to that exhortation, saying at the end of 8:13, "Fear not, but let your hands be strong." Again, a promise of a glorious future followed by an exhortation.

And then, 8:14 begins with "for" again. In other words, God's just repeated the command to let their hands be strong, and now he's going to remind them why they need to obey once more. So, what reason does he give? Unsurprisingly, it's that God's going to bring future blessings to them. He says in 8:14-15, "For thus says the LORD of hosts, 'As I purposed to bring disaster to you when your fathers provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the LORD of hosts, so again I have purposed in these days to bring good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear not.'" In other words, "Let your hands be strong and be courageous in obedience because I've purposed to bless my people in the days to come."

And again, this cycle of exhortation, followed by promise of future blessing, followed by another exhortation, followed by another reminder of the promise of future blessing continues as in verses 16-17 he returns to exhorting them, saying, "These are the things you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace; do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the Lord."

Now, for us, this has come full circle. These things that he's exhorting them to do in 8:16-17 are the very things that he condemned them for *not* doing in 7:9-10 as they had been fasting merely for themselves. There he'd told them that like their fathers before them, they were not rendering true judgments, were oppressing the weak, and were devising evil against one another. Now, he's telling them to render true judgments and not to devise evil against one another. And so, we see the pattern fulfilled. The Lord exposes their sin, shows them the future blessings to come, and then calls them to turn from those specific sins and pursue righteousness in light of the future blessings to come.

Then, he gets to answering the question about fasting that had been posed in 7:2:3. Well, he kind of answers it. He says in 8:19, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth month and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace."

The answer isn't, "Yes, keep fasting." Nor is it, "No, stop fasting," which is what the delegation was no doubt looking for. The answer is that the fasts and mourning that you're practicing now will one day turn to feasting and gladness because of the Lord's future blessings. And then we see the exhortation following the promised of future blessings again, as the Lord declares, "Therefore [i.e. in light of the future promised blessings] love truth and peace."

Finally, the section ends with the Lord elaborating on these future blessings, as he declares that he will bring people from all nations into Jerusalem, a reality that is right now happening as the gospel goes forth throughout the world as people come to Christ and will one day be fully manifest as the redeemed from all nations stand before the throne in the kingdom of Christ. In other words, the last word is a promise of future blessings so that the people might hold onto this and let it drive their obedience.

Now, what do we make of this cycle where the Lord is saying, “Obey now in light of the glorious promises to come”? Well, we should see that this is a thread that runs through all of Scripture. We’re told to give so that we might store up treasure in heaven. We’re told to endure suffering because the suffering of this age isn’t worth comparing to the future glory to come. We’re told to serve all so that we might know true greatness in heaven. We’re told we can even lay down our lives in obedience to Jesus now because one day we’ll take them up again. Even our Lord endured the shame of the cross because of the joy that he knew lay in his future. We’re constantly told to walk in obedience now, strengthened by the vision of the glorious blessings to come. That’s how this last section stands and how the whole of the two chapters works. Their sin is exposed, future glories are shown, and then they’re called to repent and obey in light of those future glories.

And this raises a question for us, “If the glories to come are to strengthen our present obedience, do we spend time meditating on future glories?” One of our disciplines needs to be meditating on the reality of the glorious future that the Lord has promised—a day when there will be no more sin, pain, tears, death, loss of any kind, or any reason to be depressed or discouraged. You won’t have to worry about losing the next loved one, having that hard conversation, or being disgusted with your own selfish actions. There’s a day coming that is beyond our ability to comprehend now, where we’ll dwell in a new creation with no taint of sin, loving perfectly and understanding how we’re perfectly loved. And in that day, we’ll not regret one sacrificial thing we did to obey Jesus. We won’t regret that we endured in loneliness instead of chasing after that potential spouse we knew didn’t love Jesus. We won’t regret that dollar we gave instead of trying to build a bit more here in this age. We won’t regret the time we spent when no one was looking, trying to serve one another with nothing to gain in the here and now. And if we keep that glory in our mind, it can strengthen us to press on in obedience against all the present difficulties and things pushing back against us. Like our Lord, let’s endure in obedience for this glorious joy set before us.

One day—just like our Lord who died and was raised—we’ll be raised. I promise you that day is coming. It’s real. And it should give us strength to repent of chasing after the fleeting pleasures of sin and to walk in enduring obedience as we set our eyes on that glorious day to come. Amen.