

# Zechariah 8:18-23

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*The LORD promises to transform the fasts of His covenant people into joyful festivals and elevate them so high that other nations will go to Jerusalem to seek God willingly and entreat His favor.*

In the previous section, the Suzerain God promised to restore the fortunes of the people of Judah. But He expects them to dispense true justice in the community and refrain from evil and dishonest practices, such as planning wickedness against their neighbors and making false oaths (vv. 14–17). In the present section, He continued with the theme of restoration and told the people what He would do once they got their priorities straight. The prophet Zechariah introduced the divine revelation with the statement: *Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me* (v 18).

The Hebrew term for *word* is “dābhār.” It is the same word used for “thing, event, or matter” (Proverbs 11:13; 17:9; 1 Kings 14:19). That explains why Amos and Isaiah could say they “saw words” when referring to objects or events (Amos 1:1; Isaiah 2:1). Thus, the *word* is a message that requires actions from its recipient(s) because it deals with a situation or an event. It is important because it is *the word of the LORD*.

The Hebrew term for *LORD* is “Yahweh,” the covenant name of God. That name speaks of God’s character and His relationship with His covenant people (Exodus 3:14, 34:6). Using the divine name, Zechariah told his audience that he was not the primary author of the message. Instead, the *word* came from God, Judah’s Ruler or Master. He is *the LORD of hosts*.

The term translated as *host* is “Sabaoth” in Hebrew and means “armies.” It refers to the angelic armies of heaven. Thus, the phrase signifies that the all-powerful God leads His army to fight for His people and defeat His opponents. In Zechariah, it means that the LORD has all power and authority over human affairs.

The *word of the LORD of hosts came to Zechariah*, meaning that God revealed His will to the prophet (1 Kings 6:11, 16:1; Zechariah 1:1). Like all the prophets of God, Zechariah had a particular calling to understand what God communicated to him, live it out, and proclaim it to others; in this case, to the post-exilic community of Judah.

The prophet obeyed the voice of the LORD. After he received the divine revelation, he introduced it with the prophetic formula: *Thus says the LORD of hosts* to tell his audience that he was merely a messenger or an ambassador for God. In so doing, he added weight and credibility to his message, thereby preparing the minds of returning exiles of Judah to listen carefully.

The divine message begins here, where the LORD declared, *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 cheerful feasts for the house of Judah* (v 19). This statement tells us that the people of Judah

fasted during those periods. But what is the purpose of fasting? Zechariah 7 tells us that these fasts were held by Judah during their captivity in Babylon to mourn their exile. God's statement here is that in the future Judah's exile will turn to joy.

Fasting is the deliberate, temporary abstention from food, in this case for religious purposes. It often occurs in the context of mourning. It is a means of taking our eyes off the things of this world to focus on God completely. It involves making petitions to God and seeking guidance and wisdom before deciding on certain matters (Acts 13:2, 14:23). In this sense, it is a process leading to purification (Psalm 69:10).

The people of Judah *fasted* several times throughout the year to recall various events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem. The *fast of the fourth month* commemorated the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:3–4). The fast held during *the fifth month* likely lamented the fall of Jerusalem (including the destruction of Solomon's temple) to the Babylonians in 586 BC (2 Kings 25:8; Zechariah 7:5). The fast of *the seventh month* likely recalled and lamented the murder of the Judean governor named Gedaliah, whom the Babylonians had appointed after the fall of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:25; Jeremiah 41:1–3; Zechariah 7:5). Finally, *the fast of the tenth month* likely mourned the initial siege of the city of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1–2).

The Judeans had commemorated the above events for about seventy years to express their sorrow and grief while in exile and shortly after returning to their homeland, after the prescribed seventy years in exile (Zechariah 7:5–7; Jeremiah 25:11–12, 29:10). But in our passage, they learned that God would transform these sorrowful events into seasons of gladness and rejoicing.

The LORD instructed the people of Judah to *love truth and peace* (v 19). This could be a means by which the time of blessing arrives. In God's covenant/treaty with Israel, He made clear that if the people would love God, and one another, they would have immense blessing (Deuteronomy 28:1–14). To *love truth* is to love walking in God's ways, which lead us to love and serve others. Such a society will naturally flourish, but God also promised to add divine blessings.

The idea of *love* can have numerous applications. When we are commanded to *love* one another, the word *love* refers to making a choice to act in a way that pleases God, by taking actions that are in the best interest of others (1 Corinthians 4–7). The prophet Amos instructed his audience to “hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the gate” indicating that the people were instructed to make choices that benefit others, loving their neighbors as themselves, as the law required (Leviticus 19:18; Amos 5:15). Similarly, the LORD through Zechariah commanded His people to *love truth and peace*.

The Hebrew term for *truth* is “*emet*.” It means honesty and factuality. It refers to a genuine situation as opposed to a false one (Deuteronomy 13:14, 17:4). It focuses on factual accuracy (1 Kings 10:6). When someone *speaks the truth*, people can have confidence in what that person says. Mutual confidence is the bedrock of a thriving economy. Trust leads to a free exchange of mutual benefit. Conversely, if someone speaks lies, it leads to distrust, which causes people to disengage—to separate (which is death). That is why God urged the Judeans to love truth. They were to *love peace* also.

The Hebrew term for *peace* is “shalom.” The idea of “shalom” is a holistic integrity of all things working according to God’s (good) design. In our passage, it occurs conjointly with *truth* to describe a social environment where everyone feels secure. That is to say, a self-governing and harmonious society in which everyone looks out for the well-being of his neighbors. Such a society will naturally lead to human flourishing.

The prophet further described the future of the Judeans in their renewed state. He introduced the statement *thus says the LORD of hosts* to confirm the divine source of his message and let God speak to His people directly. Thus, God stated, *It will yet be that peoples will come, even the inhabitants of many cities* (v 20). When the Judeans experienced God’s renewed blessings, *people from many cities* would come to them. *The inhabitants* of those cities would encourage *one another* and say, *Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts* (v 21).

This could refer to the time prophesied by the prophet Ezekiel, when a new, massive temple is constructed in Israel, and the Dead Sea’s waters become fresh (Ezekiel 40-47). This could also be the same time as The Messianic Kingdom that will be set up after Jesus returns to earth (Revelation 20:4-6). Revelation 20 indicates that Jerusalem will be the center and seat of government for all nations, who will rebel at the end of the thousand years when Satan is released from his prison (Revelation 20:7-9).

There are many passages in the Old Testament that speak of The Messianic Kingdom and describe a period when the nations will no longer be at war and the whole earth will seek the God of Israel in Jerusalem where Jesus will be reigning for one thousand years. During this time Isaiah and Micah both state that Gentiles from all of the earth will “stream” to Jerusalem to seek God there:

“Now it will come about that  
In the last days  
The mountain of the house of the LORD  
Will be established as the chief of the mountains,  
And will be raised above the hills;  
And all the nations will stream to it.  
And many peoples will come and say,  
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
To the house of the God of Jacob;  
That He may teach us concerning His ways  
And that we may walk in His paths.”  
For the law will go forth from Zion  
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”  
(Isaiah 2:2-3)

Furthermore, later in the book of Zechariah we will see in chapter 14 that God will require every nation to send a delegation to Jerusalem during the Feast of Booths also known as The Feast of Tabernacles.

“Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them.”  
(Zechariah 14:16-17)

The idiom *to entreat the favor* is literally “to soften the face.” It means to seek *the LORD* or ask Him to grant a petition (Exodus 32:11; 1 Kings 13:6). In the previous chapter, a delegation of returning exiles from Bethel entreated the LORD to know whether they should continue to fast annually to commemorate and lament the temple’s devastation (Zechariah 7:2).

Here, those from *many cities* would *seek the LORD of hosts*. And one would say, *I will also go to reinforce the invitation. So many people and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD* (v 22). This indicates that the *many cities* full of people who will come to Jerusalem include cities from the Gentile *nations*.

Those planning to travel to Jerusalem would encourage others to join them. Once they make the pilgrimage there, they will worship God in the sanctuary and ask for His favor and blessings. This indicates that Jerusalem will be the center of worship for all peoples. This fits well with the thousand-year period prophesied in Revelation where Jesus and His people reign in the earth, and Satan is imprisoned (Revelation 20:4-9).

Zechariah again introduced the prophetic formula *thus says the LORD of hosts* to confirm the divine source of his message. Then, he said, *In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you”* (v 23).

The phrase *in those days* refers to the time when God restores the fortunes of His people. The number *ten* is often used to express completeness, as in God telling Israel they had tested Him “ten times” (Numbers 14:22). Here in Zechariah, it represents the totality of humanity (Genesis 31:7). The phrase *from all the nations* is literally ‘from all the languages of the nations.’

That foreigners will *grasp the garment of a Jew* means the nations will recognize Judah’s unique relationship with the LORD. In this era, it seems Jerusalem will be the center of life on earth, and the nation of Israel will have a special place as well. Again, this seems to fit with taking place during the thousand-year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:4-9).

All in all, many Gentiles with different ethnic backgrounds speaking different languages would travel to Zion to worship the LORD with the people of Judah. Thus, the fulfillment of this prophecy would somewhat reverse the negative effects of the tower of Babel, where God scattered the nations abroad (Genesis 11:1–9).

In Zechariah, the LORD encouraged His covenant people by telling them that He would transform their fasts into cheerful feasts. At that time, many nations would go to Jerusalem to seek the LORD and entreat His favor because they would realize that He dwells among His

covenant people. Many prophecies speak of this era when Messiah will rule on the throne of David, and many of the unfulfilled promises made to Israel will be fulfilled. These include:

- The full extent of Israel’s promised borders will be established for the first time, from the Nile River to the Euphrates River ([Genesis 15:18](#)).
- The reign of a son of David (Jesus) on the throne, restoring the monarchy ([2 Samuel 7:12-13](#)).
- The fulfillment of the many prophetic messianic predictions for a messiah that is a ruling monarch, such as Zechariah 14:16-17.
- The fulfillment of the prophecies about a restoration of Israel that goes far beyond anything we have experienced to date, where:
  - Death still exists, but becomes rare (Isaiah 65:20)
  - Nature is restored, and wolves and lambs no longer are at enmity (Isaiah 65:25)
  - There is no war on the earth (Isaiah 2:1-4)
  - The Dead Sea’s waters will be healed (Ezekiel 47:8-9)
  - Ezekiel’s temple will be constructed, and be the source of a river flowing to the Dead Sea, that will heal its waters (Ezekiel 40-47)

These promises were probably what Jesus’s disciples had in mind when they asked Jesus, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Jesus’s answer strongly infers that all these things will in fact take place, because Jesus replied, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority” (Acts 1:7).

### **Biblical Text**

<sup>18</sup> Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, <sup>19</sup> “Thus says the LORD 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 cheerful feasts for the house of Judah; so love truth and peace.’ <sup>20</sup> “Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘*It will yet be* that peoples will come, even the inhabitants of many cities. <sup>21</sup> The inhabitants of one will go to another, saying, “Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts; I will also go.” <sup>22</sup> So many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.’ <sup>23</sup> Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”’