

Zechariah 8:18-23 – Prayers Move God’s Hand

TSK, JFB, HebrewLexicon, Handfuls, Geneva, Gill, Clarke, Barnes, Henry, Phillips, Poole, Trapp, Calvin, Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: God did not abandon his Bride even though she abandoned him. Instead God **gave her many reasons to stay close to him – he had passion for her, he was present with her, and he gave her his promise** (V1-8), and he told them how he expected her to respond: **To be strong, to reflect on all the good he did for her, and to obey.**(V9-17)

Today you will hear how God helps his bride to obey: God gave her the blessing of fasting and prayer!

Our headings are:

Prayer and Fasting Bring pleasure

Prayer and Fasting Bring peoples

Our goals are: **That you will make be moved to fast and pray for to get what you need to do the work that you must.**

Prayer and Fasting Bring Pleasure

18 Then the word of the **LORD of hosts** came to me, saying, 19 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'The fast of the fourth month, The fast of the fifth, The fast of the seventh, And the fast of the tenth, **Shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts** For the house of Judah. **Therefore love truth and peace.**'

1. You know what prayer is, but what is fasting according to the biblical meaning? Fasting is a withholding food from the body so the soul could focus on prayer. Fasting without prayer is not a spiritual act. Fasting might be a good way to lose weight or save money, but nothing else.

2. The Lord spoke about 4 major fasts the Jews developed during captivity.

a. Fast of the 4th month (our June) reminded them of the breaking up of Jerusalem and of the breaking of the 2 tables of the law.

b. Fast of the 5th month (our July) was to remember the **pillaging and destroying** of the temple and other buildings in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah 52:12 Now in the **fifth month**, on the tenth day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, who served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. 13 He burned the house of the LORD and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire. 14 And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls of Jerusalem all around.

c. Fast on the 7th month (our September) was to remember how the Jews **murdered Gedaliah**, the governor appointed by the Babylonians.

Jeremiah 41:1 Now it came to pass in the **seventh month** that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family and of the officers of the king, **came with ten men to Gedaliah** the son of Ahikam, at Mizpah. And there they ate bread together in Mizpah. 2 Then Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men who were with him, **arose and struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with the sword, and killed him whom the king of Babylon had made governor** over the land.

d. Fast on the 10th month (December) commemorated the time of **the siege of Jerusalem** by Nebuchadnezzar. Jer. 52.

3. The Lord said fasting and prayer would bring joy and gladness, and would become cheerful feasts. This seems contrary to fasting because **when one fasts he is hungry and uncomfortable**. But God was speaking of **the joy of the heart**. The one who fasts knows he is meeting with the Lord. (Isn't it easy to go without food if you are going to get married?) And there are always blessings from meeting the Lord. He turns your tears into joy. Yes, tears come in the night, but joy comes in the morning. **The 2 who came from Babylon to ask if they could stop fasting did not have joy because their fasting was fake.** Hypocrites cannot know the joy of serving the Lord because they don't serve the Lord.

4. The Lord then called Judah to love truth and peace. Why? In the context, when Judah knew God was punishing them for their sins (**truth**), they would repent. When they repented, they would find **peace**. This is true for all men! A reason to evangelize.

5. Lessons:

a. There are some who wonder whether it is right to fast today. They use a long circular argument. They often put fasting as part of the ceremonial law which has now been abolished. But consider what Jesus said:

Matthew 9:15 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.**

Fasting would continue after Christ's ascension to heaven. Fasting was not necessary when the Lord was there because his disciples could directly ask him for anything they needed. So ask ourselves: **Why don't we fast and pray much anymore**

when there are serious issues?

b. When you fast, know that you will have joy as well. That was what God promised.

Isaiah 66:10 "Rejoice with Jerusalem, And be glad with her, all you who love her; **Rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her;**

Jesus spoke similarly about those who mourned for their sins...as Judah did. Matthew 5:4.

Prayer and Fasting Bring people

20 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: '**Peoples shall yet come**, Inhabitants of many cities; 21 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.**"

1. The Lord said that people would come from many different cities with the desire to pray and to worship. (Remember the Word must be preached to the nations for this to happen. People must first believe. There is no prayer without sacrifice – the sacrifice of Jesus. The peoples must know about this sacrifice.)

2. The invitee would himself go with the new believers to the Lord. The invitee would not point them in the direction, but would personally accompany them to the house of God. Henry: "**True grace hates monopolies.**" The **Christian who truly values his faith will want to tell others about it.** This is where iron sharpens iron. **Birds that come to a full heap of grain would chirp for other birds to come!**

Psalms 55:14 We took sweet counsel together, And **walked to the house of God in the throng.**

Psalms 122:1 I was glad when they said to me, "**Let us go into the house of the LORD.**"

3. Did the peoples really come to Jerusalem?

a. This happened very little during Zechariah's days.

b. It happened a little more just before Jesus' time. John baptized some. According to historians, Jerusalem had become rich on account trade. Some of the businessmen who came for trade, embraced the faith.

c. But this happened with an expanding force after Jesus. One example:

Acts 2:9 "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 2:10 "Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 "Cretans and Arabs — we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." 12 So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?" ^[41] **Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls** were added to them.

22 Yes, **many peoples and strong nations Shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem,** And to pray before the LORD.' 23 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'In those days **ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man**, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"

4. Even strong nations would come to seek Jehovah. This was an amazing statement considering how much the Samaritans and the Edomites were troubling God's people at the time. But God had long promised the worldwide spread of his kingdom. (Strong nations were nations that were either large, or nations that historically threatened Israel.)

Psalms 65:1 **Praise is awaiting You, O God, in Zion;** And to You the vow shall be performed. 2 O You who hear prayer, **To You all flesh will come.**

And the people would grab hold of the Jews like Gabrielle used to hold on to her mother's clothes and not let go.

5. These strong nations would come to Jerusalem. We don't have any record of 10 men thronging 1 man, demanding that he take them to the Lord...not yet. And surely this did not mean Jerusalem in Israel today where the Muslims and Jews are fighting. The nations couldn't fit there. **This was referring to the New Jerusalem, the church of Jesus Christ.** So the complete fulfillment of this promise will be when the nations are brought to the New Jerusalem.

Micah 4:1 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days *That* the mountain of the **LORD'S house Shall be established on the top of the mountains,** And shall be exalted above the hills; And peoples shall flow to it. 2 **Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,** To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Isaiah 2:3 **Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,** To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." **For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the LORD** from Jerusalem.

Look at more promises.

Isaiah 66:18...**It shall be that I will gather all nations** and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory. ^[23] And it shall come to pass That from one New Moon to another, And from one Sabbath to another, **All flesh shall come to worship before Me,**" says the LORD.

Consider this clearer picture.

Revelation 7:9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of **all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb,** clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

This was what Christ meant when he said: “Your kingdom come.”

6. The nations would only come to God, but only after the Gospel is preached among the m!

Romans 16:26 but now made manifest, and by the prophetic **Scriptures made known to all nations,** according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith —

There was little preaching to the nations prior to Jesus. Jonah preached 200 years before, but rarely had anyone tried to promote Christ in foreign lands. But God promises never fail!

Isaiah 60:3 **The Gentiles shall come to your light,** And kings to the brightness of your rising.

1 Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, **Preached among the Gentiles,** Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.

7. These converted people would worship Jehovah properly, knowing he is intolerant of all false gods.

Worship must be with a pure heart and guided by truth.

8. These nations did not come with sacrifices for sins. Jesus would have already died! If this were referring to Zechariah’s time, the people would have come with sacrifices. That was how foreigners came.

9. Lessons:

a. Imitation evangelism for conversion is contrary to God’s requirement. Conversion of the nations must be the result of the powerful working of God’s Spirit through his Word. He will work when his people pray and fast.

b. Pray that people would be attracted, not to a beautiful building, but to a beautiful Christ.

c. Where does evangelism start? In your home. Set an example for your children. Don’t send them to church, bring them. Doesn’t everyone want to see his family expand... have babies... spiritual babies!

d. The real fulfillment of this promise is taking place now, after the earthly Jerusalem was destroyed. So the question is: Are you playing your part? Will the kingdom come **because of you or in spite of you?** The Gentile Ruth said when she grabbed hold of Naomi, “Your God will be my God, your people, my people,” and this what other Gentiles would say. Will you take the word to them like Naomi’s family?

e. Does this passage picture a weak helpless church with a few people struggling to hang on?

Does this sound like churches with a few old people? Not at all!

Conclusion:

So how are you enabled to do all the Lord has done for you? One way is to fast and pray. **It will give you pleasure and it will give you progeny.**

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Use this gift of fasting and praying. If you find it difficult to fast, pray. At least pray!

2. If you don’t fast and pray, you are robbing yourself of the blessing that comes through your prayer (happiness to you and hope to others).

3. If you don’t fast you are robbing Christ of the glory that should come to him. You are acting like he doesn’t really matter to you...as if he were not your Savior from your sins!

Finally: If you are not a Christian, you can’t pray to God. It is contempt to pray to God. You can only have access to him if you are his child. You can become his child if you trust in Jesus and his perfect obedience, and Jesus and his sacrificial death on the cross. He lived perfectly and died sacrificially for sinners.