**Zechariah 7:4-14 Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, 5“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? 6When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink *for yourselves?* 7*Should you* not *have obeyed* the words which the Lord proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?’ ” 8Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying 9“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion Everyone to his brother. 10Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, The alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart Against his brother.’ 11“But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stoppedtheir ears so that they could not hear. 12Yes, they made their hearts like flint, 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. 13Therefore 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. 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.”**

Last week, you recall that we were in Haggai. We spoke about the disobedience of the people and how they built their own houses and took care of their own needs and let the house of the Lord lay unfinished while they built paneled houses. The Lord spoke through Haggai in the second year of King Darius and we know that the foundation that lay untouched for 16 years was restarted in 24 days and the temple, we learned later was finished in 4 ½ years… right on time as God planned.

This week we find ourselves with the prophet Zechariah. Recall from Haggai 1 that Haggai was speaking in the 6th month of the 2nd year of King Darius. We see in Zechariah 1, that the word of the Lord comes to him in the 8th month of the second year of King Darius. Zechariah is seeing the temple building started again. He’s seeing God stirring the Spirit of the governor and the priests and the remnant. There’s a lot activity. From Ezra 6:15, we know that the temple was completed in the 6th year of King Darius.

So we know that Zechariah is a prophesying during the same time as Haggai, starting with visions early in the book, but now, as we enter into the 7th chapter, we see that he is delivering sermons to the people. The visions may be done, but the work God has for Zechariah is not done. Our scripture came to Zechariah, inspired by the Holy Spirit, in the 4th year of King Darius, two full years after the visions! Let’s join Zechariah. In verse 4, Zechariah establishes that it is the word of the Lord of hosts that he’s speaking. He’s giving glory and honor to God as his source of this message. Any pastor who’s being honest gives all glory and honor to God for the sermons we preach. The word of the Lord moves hearts. People will come up and tell me the things they got from “my sermon” and I just have to thank God, because I’m not nearly that smart. It’s the word of God moving in the hearts and minds of people that makes the difference. Without God, a sermon is just empty words and clever phrases. With God, a sermon can alter lives.

Look at verse 5-6, **“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? 6When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink *for yourselves?***A question has been raised – should we continue fasting in the 5th month? Verses 1thru 3 suggest that the people sent a man of some means to inquire. Now, here’s the answer. They came with the expectation that, if God said keep doing it, they would, but they’d rather stop. God turns it around on them by asking… were you really fasting for Me? Was your eye on Me? Were your thoughts on Me? Anything we do in a church without a solemn eye towards the worship of God is mocking God. If we sing the greatest hymns, without our heart on God, we are doing it for our own benefit. Silence can be the greatest sermon ever spoken, if our eyes are fastened on God. God was asking – who are you doing this for? What is your motive? And He asks the same of us today, each time we move for Him. It is our heart’s intention and not our mouth’s intimation that God hears.

Verse 7 **7*Should you* not *have obeyed* the words which the Lord proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?’ ”** Obedience isn’t just required on fast days, or church days, but always. Reading God’s word, obeying the commandments are cause for weeping in repentance everyday! No fast needed. When we see that we’ve neglected our duty to the God that loves us beyond measure, our conscience must drive us to repentance. God is saying – if you had obeyed the former prophets, this would not have happened. God has always been clear – when we draw close to Him, He draws near to us. He blesses those who are attentive to His leading. It was that way then – it’s that way now.

The people inquiring have come with some self importance – they brought their attendants after all. The Lord reminded them through Zechariah that the former prophets gave prophecies that might have saved, had they been heeded. He has seen their hypocrisy, given them a chance to wag their heads knowingly, perhaps purse their lips, and look at one another. Now, God brings it to the present time. **8Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying 9“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion Everyone to his brother. 10Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, The alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart Against his brother.’** All present tense. God is saying – the fast is not the issue. Your heart is the issue. How are you treating your brother and sister? How are you treating those weakest in society? God asks the same of us today. This is not an out of date problem. It’s as fresh in men’s hearts today as it was so many years ago.

Verse 11 – 12 **11“But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stoppedtheir ears so that they could not hear. 12Yes, they made their hearts like flint, 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.** People don’t want to hear words that cause them to examine their own actions. We want to hear that we’re right. We refuse to examine where we are not fully loving God’s people. It brought the wrath of God then – it brings it today. God gives us ample warning… do we heed or do we ignore?

Verse 13 **13Therefore 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.**God says – I sent word and they would not listen. So when calamity struck, I wouldn’t listen. How often we ignore, stiffen our necks, until calamity strikes. Then, we’re all about some prayer time. God where are you? God says – I’m still where I’ve always been. You built the wall between us.

Verse 14 **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.”** Sin has consequences. Being sorry doesn’t negate the consequences. King David was very sorry and his baby died anyway. Many repent, not because they have sinned against God, but because they wish to avoid more self-injury. God forgives, but damage is damage. He restores, but our hands and hearts must work.

In this land today, we see so many parallels to a blessed land that turned from a blessing God. Let us strive to be part of the remnant of faithful Christians loving God and being obedient to His commandments. Study and pray daily… God, even in a declining land, never forgets His faithful. May we always be among His faithful.