

Title: **WRATH DESERVED - MERCY DETERMINED**
Text: Zechariah 7:1-8:2
Subject: *In Wrath God Remembers Mercy*

Reading:

Habakkuk 3:1-19

1. A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth.
 2. LORD, I have heard thy speech, *and* was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.
 3. God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.
 4. *And his* brightness was as the light; he had horns *coming* out of his hand: and there *was* the hiding of his power.
 5. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet.
 6. He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways *are* everlasting.
 7. I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: *and* the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.
 8. Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? *was* thine anger against the rivers? *was* thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses *and* thy chariots of salvation?
 9. Thy bow was made quite naked, *according* to the oaths of the tribes, *even thy* word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers.
 10. The mountains saw thee, *and* they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, *and* lifted up his hands on high.
 11. The sun *and* moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, *and* at the shining of thy glittering spear.
 12. Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger.
 13. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, *even* for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah.
 14. Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing *was* as to devour the poor secretly.
 15. Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, *through* the heap of great waters.
 16. When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.
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17. Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither *shall* fruit *be* in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and *there shall be* no herd in the stalls:

18. Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

19. The LORD God *is* my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' *feet*, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

INTRODUCTION:

When God's prophet, Habakkuk, declared to Israel the judgment of God upon the nation, declaring that the Lord God would lay the land desolate in his wrath, Habakkuk said, "*When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself*" (Hab. 3:16). When he heard God's word of judgment against his people, his determination to invade the land of Israel with troops and carry the nation away in the fury of his holy wrath, his belly trembled, his lips quivered and he trembled in himself. Then he lifted his heart to God in prayer, and said, "*O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive* (that is — preserve, keep alive) *thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy*" (Hab. 3:2), and declared that even in his terrible judgments, "*His ways are everlasting*" (Hab. 3:6), "*Thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation*" (Hab. 3:8). Even as he marched through the earth in his indignation, threshing the heathen in his anger, God's prophet comforted himself with this sweet word of grace — "*Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed*" (Hab. 3:13). And with that sweet assurance, his soul was at peace (Hab. 3:17-19).

(Habakkuk 3:17-19) "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither *shall* fruit *be* in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and *there shall be* no herd in the stalls: (18) Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. (19) The LORD God *is* my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' *feet*, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments."

Like David, many years earlier, he found rest for his soul in God's great purpose of grace, even when it appeared that everything was contrary to it (2 Sam. 23:5).

(2 Samuel 23:5) "Although my house *be* not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all *things*, and sure: for *this is* all my salvation, and all *my* desire, although he make *it* not to grow."

Habakkuk and Jeremiah lived in the days of Israel's apostasy and prophesied that God's wrath would fall upon them, warning them of the seventy years of Babylonian captivity. Zechariah's prophecy commenced after Israel's return, during the rebuilding of Jerusalem and of the temple. In the eighth month of the second year of Darius' reign he received a message from God in a series of visions, conveyed to us in chapters 1-6. Two years later, he received another message from God, a message declaring the cause of God's wrath and his determination to save his people.

Proposition: I want you to see, and see clearly, that God's wrath is that which he executes in response to man's rebellion and sin, and his salvation is the determination of his free mercy and grace. As Paul puts it in Romans 6:23, — "*The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life.*"

REPRESENTATIVE MESSENGERS

(Zechariah 7:1) "And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Darius, *that* the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah in the fourth *day* of the ninth month, *even* in Chisleu."

The Word of the Lord was precious in those days. There were plenty of prophets, but few who were true prophets. Few were those men who had a word from God. Few were those men who were sent of God. Few were those men who spoke for God. It had been two years since God's had spoken from heaven, two years since he had given his prophet a message. Then, "*the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah.*" — What a blessing! God says, "*He that hath my word, let him speak it faithfully*" (Jer. 23:28). And Zechariah here gives us God's Word faithfully.

(Zechariah 7:2) "When they had sent unto the house of God Sherezer and Regemmelech, and their men, to pray before the LORD."

The message God gave to his prophet was God's response to this delegation sent by those who had recently returned from Babylon, who came to the house of God "*to pray before the Lord.*" Two of the men in the delegation are specifically identified, — "*Sherezer and Regemmelech.*" "*Sherezer*" means "man of fire." "*Regemmelech*" means "king's heap." They were, apparently men of significant importance among the Jews.

These men were sent as representatives of the nation of Israel; but they might just as well have been representatives of any nation, or any people. Indeed, they well represent all natural men, because all men are anxious to have a form of religion to pacify their guilty consciences, any form of religion that is of their own making and allows them to retain a sense of self-worth and self-righteousness before God. All men "*take delight in approaching God*" (Isa. 58:2) on their own terms. Until we are born of God and taught of him, we all vainly imagine that we can do or give something to God that will appease his wrath and win his favor (Mic. 6:6-7).

(Micah 6:6-7) "Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, *and* bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? (7) Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, *or* with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn *for* my transgression, the fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul?"

The leaven of the Pharisees permeates the hearts of all men. As Robert Hawker stated, Satan "infused this deadly poison unto our nature at the fall, and it runs like blood through the veins of the whole race."

SEEKING APPROVAL

(Zechariah 7:3) "*And* to speak unto the priests which *were* in the house of the LORD of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?"

They did not really come to the temple to worship the Lord. They came seeking approval for their devices, their religious customs. In their proud arrogance and self-righteousness, presuming that they had done good by inventing ways to worship God, according to the traditions and customs of their fathers, they came to the priests and prophets of God, expecting them to approve of their inventions. It was in response to this that God sent his Word to Zechariah; and Zechariah faithfully declared it to all the people and to those self-serving prophets priests in Israel who were so highly admired and greatly loved because they dealt treacherously with the people in the name of God (Jer. 5:30-31).

(Jeremiah 5:30-31) "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; (31) The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love *to have it so*: and what will ye do in the end thereof?"

WILL WORSHIP

(Zechariah 7:4-6) "Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying, (5) Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh *month*, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, *even to me*? (6) And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat *for yourselves*, and drink *for yourselves*?"

The Jews had kept up a form of godliness throughout their 70 years of captivity; but they had utterly abandoned the worship of God, continuing to ignore his Word, just as they had in the days of Habakkuk and Jeremiah. All that they did in their pretense of worshipping God was nothing but "*a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body...to the satisfying of the flesh*" (Col. 2:23). There was nothing in their religion to honor God, nothing glorifying to him.²¹²¹

The gospel of Christ, redemption by his blood, salvation by grace alone, gives all glory to the triune God alone (Eph. 1:3-14). They asked "*Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself* (That is Nazariting myself, sanctifying myself, making myself holier than others.), *as I have done these so many years?*" (v. 3) Like their fathers before them and their children after them, to this day, these self-righteous men stumbled at the stumbling stone, Christ Jesus. Going about to establish their own righteousness, they refused to submit themselves to the righteousness of God found in Christ alone (Rom. 9:30-10:4).

(Romans 9:30-33) "What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. (31) But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. (32) Wherefore? Because *they sought it* not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; (33) As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."

(Romans 10:1-4) "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. (2) For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. (3) For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (4) For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

Faith in Christ is such a self-emptying, self-denying thing, that none, except those who are taught of God the Holy Spirit can or will trust he Son of God alone for salvation and acceptance with the holy Lord God. Religion without faith, religion that does not look to the blood and righteousness of Christ alone is but the mockery of God. God says it is the religion of a rebellious people, walking in an evil way, after their own thoughts, provoking him to anger continually, — "*Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.*" (Isa, 65:2-5).

WORD DESPISED

(Zechariah 7:7) "*Should ye not hear* the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when *men* inhabited the south and the plain?"

God had spoken to them by his prophets Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, before he sent his furious judgment upon them and carried them away into Babylon, but they refused to hear his Word. And though he had now brought them back from seventy years of bondage and captivity, they persisted still in their rebellion, refusing to believe his Word, refusing to trust Christ. They continued to follow the way of Balaam, refusing

to “*know the righteousness of the Lord*” (Mic. 6:5), mixing works with grace, trying to sanctify themselves, rather than trust Christ for redemption, righteousness and sanctification.

In all their pretended sanctity and fasting, in all their holy observances, there was a total disregard to the Word of God. What delusions men choose, what refuges of lies, who set up for themselves a form of godliness, while denying the gospel of Christ, which is the power of godliness!

GOD'S REQUIREMENT

(Zechariah 7:8-10) “And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, (9) Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother: (10) And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.”

They had despised his prophets, despised his Word, and despised the Lord God himself. Yet, he spoke the word of the gospel to them again, repeating exactly what he had told them before (Isa. 58:4-14; Jer. 5:1-4; Hosea 4:1).

(Isaiah 58:4-14) “Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as *ye do this* day, to make your voice to be heard on high. (5) Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? *is it* to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes *under him*? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? (6) *Is* not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? (7) *Is it* not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? (8) Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward. (9) Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I *am*. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; (10) And *if* thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness *be* as the noon day: (11) And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. (12) And *they that shall be* of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. (13) If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, *from* doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking *thine own* words: (14) Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.”

(Jeremiah 5:1-4) “Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be *any* that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it. (2) And though they say, The LORD liveth; surely they swear falsely. (3) O LORD, *are* not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, *but* they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return. (4) Therefore I said, Surely these *are* poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the LORD, *nor* the judgment of their God.”

(Hosea 4:1) “Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because *there is* no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.”

How often we refused to hear. Yet, the Lord God continued to speak! What mercy! What goodness! What longsuffering! What patience! How I thank him!

God's Word has not changed. The gospel sent to Israel by Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah is the same message he sent by Micah and Zephaniah (Mic. 6:8; Zeph. 2:3).

(Micah 6:8) "He hath showed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

(Zephaniah 2:3) "Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger."

And that is exactly the same message our Savior declares in the sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-9).

(Matthew 5:1-9) "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: (2) And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, (3) Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (4) Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. (5) Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. (6) Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. (7) Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. (8) Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God. (9) Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

It should be obvious to all that all these admonitions are exactly the same. They are clearly summarized in the words of Micah 6:8. — "*He hath showed thee, O man, what is good. And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*"

It is commonly thought that God is here telling us that if we would come before him and find acceptance with him, we must do that which is just, show mercy to others, and walk in a display of humility before God. Nothing could be further from the truth. I bless God, that I have not so learned Christ. It is true, faith in Christ will make believers just, gracious and humble; but these things are the result of coming to God by faith in Christ, not the means by which we find acceptance with God (James 1:27).

(James 1:27) "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world."

God requires us to give up our works of righteousness, and trust Christ. Those things spoken of by Micah (doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly) are specifically said to be with God, with an eye to him, coming to, worshipping and honoring him in all. **God requires that we come to him by faith in Christ...**

- That we "**do justly**" (justice) with God. — We do justly with our God, when we confess that in ourselves, by reason of sin, we justly deserve his wrath and furious indignation (Ps. 51:5-7), justifying his judgment, taking sides with God against ourselves (Lev. 26:40-42).

(Psalms 51:5-7) "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. (6) Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden *part* thou shalt make me to know wisdom. (7) Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

(Leviticus 26:40-42) "If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; (41) And *that* I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: (42) Then will I remember my

covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land.”

- That we “**love mercy**” with God. — We love mercy, if the Lord Jesus Christ, who is himself the mercy promised (Luke 1:72), is the mercy we love.^{3[3]} His blood and righteousness, Christ himself, is the whole of God’s Mercy. He is God’s Salvation. — We do mercy when we trust Christ for mercy, and when we proclaim the mercy of God, when we preach Christ to lost sinners.
- That we “**walk humbly**” with God. — We walk humbly with our God, when trusting his mercy, trusting Christ, we constantly acknowledge that we fully deserve his wrath, — when, knowing our own depravity and corruption, we gratefully acknowledge and live as a people who belong to God by free grace alone, being redeemed by the precious blood of Christ (1 Cor. 6:19-28).
- In a word, to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God is **to find rest in Christ, our Sabbath, calling the Sabbath a delight**, not doing our own ways, our own pleasure, and speaking our own words.
- That is what it is **to worship God in the Spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus, having no confidence in the flesh**.

The Lord in grace says, “Return to me, and I will return to you.” And men set up a form of godliness, by which they try to bring themselves to God: — Saying Prayers — Bible Readings and Bible Study — Religious Rituals — Moral Reformations — Fasting — Almsgiving — “*Separating*” (sanctifying) Themselves — Making Themselves Holy, — Substituting anything and everything imaginable for faith in Christ.

If we would return to God, we must return to him by faith in Christ, looking upon him whom we have pierced, acknowledging and confessing our sin (Heb. 11:6).

(Hebrews 11:6) “But without faith *it is impossible to please him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

Until God the Holy Spirit arraigns our hearts before God with an indictment for sin, convincing us of sin, of righteousness and of judgment, we will cling to our own ways and despise Christ, who is the only Way. But, as soon as God the Spirit is pleased to reveal Christ, as soon as he shows us our sin, we confess our sins. — And “*if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*” (1 John 1:9).

GOD’S ANSWER

Do you ask, with the *Sherezers* and *Regemmelechs* of the present hour, should I weep, should I fast in the fifth month as I have done these many years? This is God’s answer. Trust Christ. Look to Christ alone. “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*” Oh, may God the Holy Spirit give you grace see all grace in Christ, to look to him for all, to trust him as All! He, and he alone, in his glorious person, blood, and righteousness, is the only Propitiation, the only Mercy Seat, the only Sacrifice. We cannot come to but by him, who of God is made unto every believing sinner “*Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption: that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord*” (1 Cor. 1:30-31).

CAUSE OF WRATH

(Zechariah 7:11-14) "But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. (12) Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts. (13) Therefore it is come to pass, *that* as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts: (14) But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate."

God sent Israel into Babylon and scattered them with a whirlwind among the nations because they refused to hear his Word, spoken faithfully, passionately and unceasingly by his prophets. His judgment upon the nation was the retribution of his justice to their willful rebellion and unbelief. — "*Therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts*" (v. 13). If you go to hell, you will go to hell for the same reason (Pro. 1:23-33).

(Proverbs 1:23-33) "Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. (24) Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; (25) But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: (26) I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; (27) When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. (28) Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: (29) For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: (30) They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. (31) Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. (32) For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. (33) But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil."

Oh, may God not allow you to go on as those Jews of old, pulling away from Christ's sweet yoke of grace, stopping your ears lest you hear his voice, making your heart as an adamant stone! Oh, may he melt your hard, adamant heart with the precious blood of his dear Son!

There is hope even for such hard hearts. John Trapp, quoting ancient writers, said, The adamant stone is a legendary stone thought to be the hardest of all stones, harder than flint (Ezek. 3:9), harder than the nether millstone (Job 41:24). Fire could not burn it, or even cause it to be heated throughout. It could not be broken by a hammer. Yet, this hardest of all stones, when soaked in a goat's blood, was melted, dissolved and broken. So the hardest heart of the most obstinate sinner is melted, dissolved and broken when sprinkled with the precious blood of Christ, the sinner's Scapegoat.

- That is my hope and prayer to God for you. If God the Holy Spirit sprinkles your heart with the blood of Christ, if he will apply the blood to you, you will look upon him you have pierced and mourn.
- Judgment will never break your heart.
- Affliction will never break it.
- The law will never break it.
- Hell itself cannot break the rebel heart of man.
- But the blood of Christ can!

MERCY DETERMINED

(Zechariah 8:1-2) "Again the word of the LORD of hosts came *to me*, saying, (2) Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury."

Yet, though the Lord scattered Israel in wrath, in wrath he remembered mercy, preserving an elect remnant for whom he had determined mercy, saying, "*Behold, I will save my people!*"

(Zechariah 8:3-8) "Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain. (4) Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. (5) And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. (6) Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts. (7) Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; (8) And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness."

So it is today. God has scattered his elect to the four corners of the earth in his wrath, scattered them among the sons of men. Yet, he remembers mercy. He yet, preserves them alive, because he is determined to save them (2 Pet. 3:9, 15; Deut. 30:3; Jer. 31:10; Ezek. 11:17; 20:34, 41; John 11:51-52; Rom. 11:25-27, 33-36).

(2 Peter 3:9) "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

(2 Peter 3:15) "And account *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;"

(Deuteronomy 30:3) "That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee."

(Jeremiah 31:10) "Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare *it* in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd *doth* his flock."

(Ezekiel 11:17) "Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel."

(Ezekiel 20:34) "And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out."

(Ezekiel 20:41) "I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen."

(John 11:51-52) "And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; (52) And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad."

(Romans 11:25-27) "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. (26) And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: (27) For this *is* my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins."

(Romans 11:33-36) "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (34) For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? (35) Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? (36) For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen."

Date: Danville — Sunday Morning — August 13, 2006
Booneville, NC — (TUE — 08/15/06)

Tape #Zechariah #34

^{4[2]} Remember, while the Jews were in Babylon, they had established and had regularly observed some religious traditions, ceremonies God never commanded, and called the observance of their traditions the worship of God. They had practiced their religious customs for 70 years. Now they asked God's priests and his prophets, "Should we maintain our form of godliness?" — "*Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?*" (v. 3) — They had established solemn fasts, commemorating the things they had witnessed and experienced.

- On the 17th day of the 5th month they kept a day of fasting and humiliation in remembrance of the day the Chaldeans had destroyed the temple (v. 3).
- On the 9th day of the 4th month they kept another annual fast, weeping and mourning, separating themselves from food and drink, in remembrance of the destruction of Jerusalem.
- Every 7th month they held another fast in remembrance of the murder of Gedaliah and the captivity of the Jewish remnant in more remote parts of Israel 9 (v. 5).
- And on the 10th day of the 10th month they kept a fast commemorating Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem.

All these solemn fasts involved considerable sacrifice and effort. At first glance, we might think that they were good things. While they were in Babylon the Jews wanted to remember the things they had witnessed and experienced. They wanted their children to remember. How could they better secure that end than by establishing religious traditions and ceremonies? So they observed these four solemn fasts every year for 70 years.

HORRIBLY EVIL

But their religious traditions were horribly evil. **The Lord God had ordained only one fast, a fast to be kept by the children of Israel once each year in connection with the day of atonement** (Lev. 16:29-34). But the Jews could not keep the day of atonement and the fast God required in Babylon. So they invented four fasts that they could keep, and gratified themselves

with those fasts. In all four of those fasts, they gloried in that which was their shame for 70 years!

Those traditions and customs established and observed in Babylon were the beginning of Phariseeism. They paid great attention to formalities and external worship. They invented and maintained a form of godliness; but the power of godliness was unknown. They strictly tithed the mint, the anise, the cummin of religion, but knew nothing of mercy, compassion and justice. They multiplied ceremonies to themselves, ceremonies without any warrant whatever in God's Word. They observed fasts and holy days Moses never commanded, and religious feasts for their own pleasure, calling them acts of divine worship (vv. 4-6).

(Zechariah 7:4-6) "Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying, (5) Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh *month*, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, *even* to me? (6) And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat *for yourselves*, and drink *for yourselves*?"

Paul's admonition to us in 1 Corinthians 10:31 specifically refers to this passage.

(1 Corinthians 10:31) "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

The Lord God almighty calls all the religious activities invented by men sin, sin to be exposed and condemned by his faithful servants. He declares that all such religious practices, though solemnly performed in his name, are but an outward show in the flesh, acts of will-worship, and nothing but deeds of sensual gratification and pleasure (Isa. 29:13; 58:1-5; Jer. 2:5; Matt. 15:8; Luke 16:15).

(Isaiah 29:13) "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men."

(Isaiah 58:1-5) "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. (2) Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God. (3) Wherefore have we fasted, *say they*, and thou seest not? *wherefore* have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. (4) Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as *ye do this* day, to make your voice to be heard on high. (5) Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? *is it* to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes *under him*? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?"

The fast he chose and ordained (Lev. 16:29-34) was a ceremonial picture of repentance and faith in Christ, a fast connected with the sin-atonement sacrifice of the Son of God.

(Jeremiah 2:5) “Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?”

(Matthew 15:8) “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me.”

(Luke 16:15) “And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”

Learn this, with regard to all religious ceremonies. — Whatever they are, no matter how old they are, no matter how universal they are, no matter how delightful they are to men, if they be not expressly commanded of God in his Word, they are an abomination to him, and should be to us. They are nothing but rubbish. The sooner they are hauled to the garbage dump and burned the better (Neh. 4:10).

(Nehemiah 4:10) “And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and *there is* much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.”

There is so much rubbish and garbage in the church today that a foundation cannot be laid until the garbage is recognized and carted off to the garbage dump, where it belongs! We cannot build a wall of hope on religious rubbish. We cannot erect a wall of security on a pile of garbage. If we would worship and serve our God, we must clear his house of all the rubbish men bring into it by their vain philosophies, religious traditions, and foolish sentiments.

^{5[3]} “**MERCY** (is), properly speaking, the name of Jesus. For David, speaking of grace, and pleading for it before the Lord, saith, as an argument and plea for receiving it, There is mercy (that is, there is Jesus) with thee. (Ps. 80:4). And when Zecharias prophesied, under the influence of God the Holy Ghost, at the coming of Christ, he said it was to perform the mercy promised. (Luke 1:72). Jesus is the mercy promised.” — *Robert Hawker*