



# PathLights

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet  
and a light to my path"  
Psalm 119:104*

December 16, 2018

## Is It for God?

by Frank Himmel

The prophet Zechariah began his preaching in the second year of Darius, 520 BC. A remnant of captives had returned to Israel from Babylon nearly two decades earlier. They began to rebuild God's temple but soon abandoned the project. God sent Zechariah and Haggai to encourage the rebuilding effort.

### Question

Two years into the renewed effort, the town of Bethel sent two men to ask the priests and prophets if they should continue observing their fasts.

The Jews had kept four fasts during the Babylonian captivity (Zechariah 8:19), each commemorating some turning point in the downfall of their nation. One came in the tenth month, the same month Nebuchadnezzar began the siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1). Another was in the fourth month, in memory of the time Jerusalem's walls were broken through (2 Kings 25:3-4). Another was in the fifth month, when Nebuzaradan razed the walls and burned the city (2 Kings 25:8ff). The fourth was in the seventh month, corresponding to the death of Gedeliah, the governor appointed over those left in Judah (2 Kings 25:25).

The question was, "Shall I weep in the fifth month and abstain, as I have done these many years?" (Zechariah 7:3). Were these fasts still appropriate in view of changing circumstances? Perhaps there was also an element of, "Must we keep this up?"

### Answer

God's reply through Zechariah was, "Say to all the people of the land and to the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months these seventy years, was it actually for Me that you fasted? And when you eat and drink, do you not eat for yourselves and do you not drink for yourselves?'" (Zechariah 7:5-6).

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for God what is not from God.**

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None of these four fasts were commanded by God. They seemed to have been observed out of self-pity as much as anything else. In His

response, God charged the Jews with keeping them for themselves rather than for Him. Zechariah added that this had been a theme of the former prophets, before the days of captivity (v. 7). Time and again, they emphasized that God must be served on His terms, not ours; and that requires a right daily walk, not merely "religious" activities, especially those of one's own design (1 Samuel 15:22; Jeremiah 7:22-23; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8; etc.).

### Application

All of us need to learn this vital principle of serving God as He directs. Something is amiss when we ▶

convince ourselves we are doing *for* God what is not *from* God.

A prime example is before us. This month many will participate in a religious festival in honor of Christ. Or is it? Could it be that Christmas is something we are doing for ourselves instead of for God?

It may surprise you to learn that the Bible says nothing about an annual celebration of Jesus’ birth. Not one single word! There is no command to do it. There are no instructions about how or when to do it. There is no example of first-century Christians doing it. It is never mentioned by any New Testament writer. Surely if God wanted us to have such a celebration He would have said something about it, as He did about remembering Jesus’ death (Matthew 26:26-28; Romans 6:3-6).

This principle applies to other activities as well. The Bible does not authorize instrumental music or theatrical productions in worship, church-sponsored recreational activities, or a host of other things done “in the Lord’s name.” We need to learn that God’s preferences are different than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9). If our goal is to please Him, we must leave off self-serving activities and focus on doing what He has said. We must “learn not to exceed what is written” (1 Corinthians 4:6).

**Conclusion**

I suspect the men of Bethel were surprised at God’s answer through Zechariah. You may be surprised at

Fanny Crosby was one of America’s most prolific hymn writers. We regularly sing some of her works, including *Blessed Assurance; He Hideth My Soul; I Am Thine, O Lord; Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim It; Tell Me the Story of Jesus; To God Be the Glory.*

At age eight she wrote this poem.



O what a happy soul am I!  
 Although I cannot see,  
 I am resolved that in this world  
 Contented I will be.  
 How many blessings I enjoy  
 That other people don’t!  
 To weep and sigh because I’m blind  
 I cannot, and I won’t.

How are you using your talents?

this article. I know there will be a number of surprises at the judgment, when some of us discover that God rejects our self-contrived, self-oriented service. I know because Jesus said so.

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness’ (Matthew 7:21-23). ■

Service Leaders for the Week		
	Sunday	Wednesday
GREETER	Bruce Williams	Adam Gibson
SONG LEADER	Sam Walters	Ian Brown
OPENING PRAYER	Albert Lee Harrison	
LORD’S SUPPER		
BREAD	Brian Wilson	
CUP	Adam Wilson	
CONTRIBUTION PRAYER	David Gray	
SERMON/INVITATION	Frank Himmel	Adam Gibson
CLOSING PRAYER	Greg Winget	Josh Baucom