

Zechariah 8:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.

Analysis

And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. If verse 4 depicted the elderly, verse 5 completes the generational portrait with children at play. The Hebrew "**boys and girls**" (yeladim vi-yeladot, יְלָדִים וַיְלָדֹת) emphasizes both genders—sons and daughters enjoying carefree childhood. The verb "**playing**" (mesahaqim, מְשַׁהָּקִים) from sahaq means to laugh, play, or rejoice—children engaged in joyful, uninhibited activity that only occurs in conditions of safety and abundance.

The detail that streets are "**full**" (yimalu, יִמְלֻא) of children suggests population growth and vitality—the community is fruitful, multiplying, prospering. This reverses the decimation of exile when Judah's population was catastrophically reduced. Children playing freely in streets indicates several blessings simultaneously:

1. **Security**—no warfare, violence, or danger threatening them;
2. **Provision**—families have enough that children aren't laboring for survival but can simply be children;
3. **Hope**—the community has a future, raising the next generation in stability;
4. **Joy**—the covenant curses are lifted, blessings restored.

This scene of children at play captures the essence of shalom—comprehensive well-being, peace, wholeness.

It's the opposite of Isaiah's judgment oracle: "I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them" (Isaiah 3:4), where immature leadership symbolized societal collapse. Here, children play while mature elders provide governance and wisdom. Both generations thrive—the image of God's kingdom fully realized.

Historical Context

During the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem (588-586 BC), children suffered unspeakable horrors. Lamentations records: "The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the young children ask bread, and no man breaketh it unto them" (Lamentations 4:4). Mothers boiled their own children for food during the famine (Lamentations 2:20, 4:10). Infants and children died in the streets from starvation, disease, and violence (Lamentations 2:11-12, 19).

This traumatic memory haunted survivors. The returned remnant in 520 BC represented a small population struggling to rebuild. Birth rates may have been low due to economic hardship and uncertainty. God's promise that streets would overflow with playing children assured not only survival but abundant flourishing—numerical growth, economic stability, and social security enabling families to raise children in peace.

Jesus Himself evoked similar imagery of children in the marketplace (Matthew 11:16-17), noting how religious leaders failed to respond appropriately to God's messengers. Christ's blessing of children—"Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14)—shows that God's kingdom welcomes and celebrates children. The church becomes a community where all generations flourish, children are treasured, and future hope abounds. Ultimately, the new creation will feature redeemed humanity of all ages glorifying God together in perfect joy.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the image of children playing freely reveal God's heart for human flourishing and communal shalom?
2. What does this promise teach about the connection between spiritual faithfulness and material blessing in God's covenant design?
3. In what practical ways should the church embody this vision by protecting, nurturing, and celebrating children?

Interlinear Text

מִשְׁמָרֶת יְמִינֵי וַיַּלְדָּת וְיַלְדָּת יְמִינֵי בָּרְחוּבָתִים:

And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing

H7339

H5892

H4390

H3206

H3207

H7832

בָּרְחוּבָתִים:

And the streets

H7339

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 31:13 (Parallel theme): Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow.

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