

Zechariah 7

1-3 It's December 518 BC, two years since the night visions. The construction of the Temple was well underway. In chapter 7 and 8, some of the exiles returning to Jerusalem have differences with those already in Jerusalem about religious rituals. Though not a Biblical command, the exiles had fasted on the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple. Now that the Temple is being rebuilt, should they continue with that practice? Would it be ungrateful to do so when a new Temple has replaced the old?

To "entreat the Lord" means to approach God through prayer and/or sacrifices for answers to difficult situations. It often included confession of sins. They came to the priests and prophets in Jerusalem to get an authoritative answer.

4-5 The answer to their question doesn't really come until the end of chapter 8. The fast of the seventh month was the to commemorate the assassination of Gedaliah. (Jeremiah 41:1-3) Instead of a "yes" or "no" answer, God asks them to look into their hearts to see the real reason for their fasting? It should have been introspection as to why God had allowed the devastation. What sins had they committed and had they now forsaken those things? In one sense, God didn't destroy Jerusalem, their sins did! That is what they needed to fast and pray about.

6 "Fasts and Feasts of the Jewish Festivals were they for Me?" God asks. Is your religious ritual about you or God? (Isaiah 1:10-17; 58:1-7) The implication is that it was merely a ritual that made them feel good about themselves, but failed to change their lives. They mourned and complained about their woeful circumstances, but didn't address their own faults in bringing it to pass. That puts the blame on God and off of self. It is essentially indulging in self-pity. Can church worship services be like that for us?

7 The message is not new. Zechariah assumes they know the words of the former prophets and how ignoring them brought about the desolation they were dealing with. They could look at the countryside and realize that the legalism of their forefathers, the vain worship in self-interest had destroyed the land. Now they are accused of doing the same! It should have struck their hearts with the fear of the Lord. The nation whose God is the Lord is blessed. (Psalm 33:12) What does that mean for our country?

8-9 True worship results in a righteous life. Justice was a chief concern of the prophets. (Hosea 4:1,5; Jeremiah 7:5-7) Showing mercy is at the heart of covenant relationship. (2Samuel 7:15 translated "love") Micah 6:8 commands us to love mercy. Compassion is Hebrew word related to the word for womb. It is

something that goes beyond what ought to be given. God is asking us to be like Him. (Exodus 34:6-7)

10 Verse 9 had two positive commands, and is balanced here by two negative commands. Don't take advantage of the vulnerable, and treat your neighbor as you would want to be treated. (Exodus 22:22; Matthew 22:36-39)

11-12 In reminding them of the sins of their fathers, Zechariah was warning them of how dangerously close they were to a repeat of their judgment as well. The heart of the problem is refusal to pay attention to God. (Nehemiah 9:29; Ezekiel 36:26) Their refusal to hear God mirrors mankind's stubbornness toward God.

13-14 When we refuse to hear God, He will refuse to hear us. We will reap what we have sown. The best texts say, "When He called..." and then suddenly shift to first person, a literary device to make the hearer suddenly come face to face with God's warning. (Proverbs 1:27) Those who oppressed the poor, became poor. They used the foreigner and became foreigners in a strange land.

The delegation had come with a religious question. Instead of an answer they got a stinging rebuke for their legalism. They received a reminder of why they faced their difficulties and that judgment would fall again if they didn't get serious about a right relationship with God. Can this be a message for today?