

Four Messages to the Jews Rebuilding the Temple

Zechariah 7-8

Zechariah 7:1-3 - *“Now in the fourth year of King Darius it came to pass that the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, on the fourth day of the ninth month, Chislew, ² when the people sent Sherezer, with Regem-Melech and his men, to the house of God, to pray before the Lord, ³ and to ask the priests who were in the house of the Lord of hosts, and the prophets, saying, “Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?”*

Background Notes

The year was 518 BC, and the rebuilt Temple was half-completed. The Jews who lived in Bethel (about 10-15 miles from Jerusalem) sent a delegation to Jerusalem to ask the priests and prophets if it was necessary to continue the fast of the fifth month. This fast was on the 9th of Av, and it commemorated the destruction of Solomon’s Temple by the Babylonians. The delegation from Bethel wanted to know if this fast should be kept now that the Temple was being rebuilt. Apparently, the priests didn’t have an answer - but the Lord gave Zechariah the answer. In four messages to Zechariah, God exposed the hypocritical hearts of many of the people, and showed how different the future will be when Messiah’s kingdom is set up. In that future day there will be no need to fast!

Our doctrinal points will come from each of the four messages. Each message begins with the words “The word of the Lord came...”

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord desires righteousness rather than ritual.

Zechariah 7:4-7 - *“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? ⁶ When 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?’”*

The first message to Zechariah was a message of rebuke. The fasts of the fifth and seventh months (v5) were not commanded in the Bible. The Lord rebuked the people for keeping these fasts that were not commanded - not because

the fasts were wrong in themselves, but because they had become mere ritual for these hypocrites. They were not fasting for the Lord. They were just going through the motions of religious observance - and this was hypocrisy.

This was also true with many of the biblical religious feasts that they were celebrating. The Lord was not honored. Their hearts were not right. They were eating and drinking for themselves (v6).

The Lord hates religious hypocrisy, then and today. Let me ask you - why do you go to church? Is your heart really in tune with the Lord? Do you really desire to worship and honor Him? Or are you bored and weary with divine things? Where is your heart - really? The Lord desires righteousness rather than ritual.

2. The Lord desires compassion rather than oppression.

Zechariah 7:8-14 - "Then 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. ¹⁰ Do 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 stopped their ears so that they could not hear. ¹² Yes, 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. ¹³ Therefore 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."

The second message to Zechariah was a message of repentance. Not only were many of the people merely going through religious motions when they fasted, but they were also falling back into their old ways of lacking social justice, mercy and compassion for the poor and needy. That was exactly why God sent them into captivity for 70 years (v14)! God had sent many pre-exilic prophets to them with warnings and predictions of the coming judgment, but the people didn't listen. They "shrugged their shoulders" at God!

What about this new generation that had returned from the captivity? Would they show mercy and compassion for the widows and orphans and the oppressed? Or would they continue in the old ways?

What about us? Do we show compassion for those who are oppressed? The Lord desires compassion rather than oppression.

3. The Lord will turn problems into peace.

Zechariah 8:1-17 - "Again the word of the Lord of hosts came, saying, ²"Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her.' ³"Thus says the Lord: 'I will return to Zion, and dwell in the

midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the Lord of hosts: The Holy Mountain.'
⁴ "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. ⁵ The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.' ⁶ "Thus says

the Lord of hosts: 'If it is marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, will it also be marvelous in My eyes?' says the Lord of hosts. *⁷ "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west. ⁸ I will bring them back, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness.'*

⁹ "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Let your hands be strong, you who have been hearing in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, who spoke in the day the foundation was laid for the house of the Lord of hosts, that the temple might be built.

¹⁰ For before these days there were no wages for man nor any hire for beast. There was no peace from the enemy for whoever went out or came in; for I set all men everyone against his neighbor. ¹¹ But now I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days,' says the Lord of hosts. ¹² 'For the seed shall be prosperous, the vine shall give its fruit, the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew. I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these. ¹³ And it shall come to pass that just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you, and you shall be a blessing. Do not fear. Let your hands be strong.'

¹⁴ "For thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Just as I determined to punish you when your fathers provoked Me to wrath, and I would not relent. ¹⁵ So again in these days I am determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear.

¹⁶ These are the things you shall do: Speak each man the truth to his neighbor. Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace. ¹⁷ Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor, and do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate,' says the Lord."

The third message to Zechariah was a message of restoration - for the near future, and for the far future. In verses 9-17 the Lord promised immediate blessing. The opposition and problems the people faced when they returned from captivity and started to rebuild the Temple would end (v9-10). The land would be prosperous. They would be blessed rather than disciplined. All God asked from them was that they would practice truth, justice, and peace (v16-17). All that immediate restoration and blessing anticipated the greater restoration and blessing with the coming of the Messiah in the future (v1-8).

Because the Messiah was rejected at His first coming, the complete fulfillment of the prophecy in verses 1-8 awaits the second coming of Christ and His millennial kingdom. Then Jerusalem will be called the "City of Truth" and the "Holy Mountain" (v3). Then people of all ages will be at peace in the streets of Jerusalem (v4-5). That certainly isn't the situation in Jerusalem today!

We know that this prophecy was never fulfilled in the past, because verse 7 says that the Lord will bring His people back “from the east and the west.” The Jews have never returned to Israel from the west - until modern times! This return is just the beginning of what will take place in the future. The Lord will turn problems into peace.

4. The Lord will turn fasts into feasts!

Zechariah 8:18-23 - *“Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, ¹⁹“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah. Therefore, love truth and peace.’*

²⁰“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities. ²¹ The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, “Let us continue to go and pray before the Lord, and seek the Lord of hosts. I, myself will go also.

²² Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord.’

²³“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.””

The fourth message to Zechariah was a message of rejoicing. Those empty fasts, that commemorated tragic events of judgment because of the nation’s faults and shortcomings, will be turned to joyful feasts when the Messiah sets up His kingdom here on this earth! Those sorrowful fasts will all be forgotten with the feast of the future kingdom, when believers worldwide will come up to Jerusalem to pray and to celebrate (v20-22). Then there will be no more need to fast. In that day, Israel will be a channel of blessing for the nations of the world, and there will be no anti-Semitism (v23). What a great day that will be! The original question of the delegation from Bethel was answered. The Lord will turn fasts into feasts!

Practical Application

What seems like a big deal to us is only “another day at the office” for God!

In essence, the meaning of Zechariah 8:6 was - Don’t get the idea that the wonderful prophetic blessings of the future will be hard for God to accomplish. No way! Our God is **God!** These predictions may have seemed unbelievably wondrous to them, but fulfilling them would not be difficult for God. Miracles are the norm for Him!

How true that is for us today! Do you think God is too weak or small to accomplish amazing miracles? I trust not! Our God can do *“far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20).*

What seems difficult and like a big deal to us is only “another day at the office” for God!