

Zechariah 7:1-14 – Feast or Fast?

The first six chapters of Zechariah contain 8 visions. The first three visions communicated that God would judge those who harmed Israel, that God would protect and dwell with the people of Israel and that Jerusalem would prosper. The fourth vision was about Joshua the high priest and one called the Branch. The fifth vision was about Zerubbabel and the completion of the temple. Visions 6 and 7 spoke about the punishment and removal of evil from Judah and Jerusalem. The eighth vision spoke about the punishment of the nations who oppressed Judah. Chapters 7 and 8 deal with a question about fasting.

Read Zechariah 7:1-7.

According to verse 1, when did this prophecy occur? Note that the rebuilding of the temple had been going on for over two years. The completion of the temple was only about two years and 3 months away. This date fell in early December. (7:1)

A delegation was sent from the town of Bethel, located about 12 miles north of Jerusalem. What was the mission of the delegation? What was their question? Who was their question directed towards? What was the significance of the fifth month? See Jeremiah 52:12-16. What may have prompted their question? Do you think their comment about “so many years” revealed their attitude about the fast? Chapters 7 and 8 contain God’s response to the delegation’s question. (7:2-3)

The delegation came to entreat the favor of Yahweh. Verse 4 indicates that they at least got to hear Yahweh of hosts’ response to their question. You can judge, in the following verses, if they received Yahweh’s favor. (7:4)

God’s response wasn’t just directed to the delegation from Bethel. Who were the intended recipients of this word from God? In verse 5, what question did God have for the people? What do you think the people’s reason was for holding the fast of the fifth month for so many years? What were they mourning over? What should have been their focus? God also mentioned the fast of the seventh month which may have been for the assassination of Gedaliah. See Jeremiah 41:1-3. Note that the delegation said “so many years”. God said “seventy years”. The seventy years was close to ending. (7:5)

Verse 6 is difficult. It could refer to the feasts, like Passover and Booths, with the implication that they were only going through the motions. Or it could refer to daily eating and drinking with the implication that their fasting, like their eating, was self-indulgent. (7:6)

In verse 7, Zechariah mentioned Yahweh's words proclaimed by the former prophets who lived before the exile. Who were some of these prophets? Do you think the words of the former prophets refer back to verses 5 and 6 or do they look ahead to verses 9 and 10? (7:7)

Read Zechariah 7:8-14.

In verse 8, the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah. What was God's message to the people? (7:8-10)

Do verses 9 and 10 remind you of any pre-exilic prophets? My mind was immediately taken to Jeremiah 7 which was a prophecy given about the people's false confidence in the temple's protecting power while at the same time they ignored God's word and refused to obey. See also Jeremiah 9:24, Micah 6:8, Isaiah 1:17, 58:4. (7:9-10)

In verses 11 and 12, how did the people respond to God's word given through the former prophets? See Jeremiah 5:3, 7:27, 25:3. How did God respond to their disobedience? (7:11-12)

In verse 13, God called and they did not hear. What did God do in response? (7:13)

In verse 14, what did God do because of the people's extreme disobedience? What was the impact on the land? (7:14)

The temple was only a little more than two years from completion. Why do you think God reminded the people of the former prophets and the pre-exilic Jews' disobedience?

Have you ever been in a church where people seemed more concerned about the church building than what went on in the building or how members behaved outside the building?