

## Refusing to Hear

### *Zechariah 7*

#### **I. A note on** the context of Zechariah:

- A. As we discussed in recent lessons, Zechariah was among that trio of Prophets that were active during the return from captivity, when the people were still rebuilding in the land of their fathers:
- B. Like his fellow prophet Haggai, Zechariah's books begins with a call to repentance that is answered by many of the people (*Zech. 1*)
  1. However, this initial success does mean that there is no more work to be done among the people! A good portion of the book will tackle lingering issues of the heart that many Jews were either still dealing with, or had not fully learned from.
- C. **The events** of Chapter 7 take place around 2 years after the initial response of Israel to Zechariah's call to once again be faithful:
  1. There was a great deal of activity in the land that took place during that large gap of time:
    - a) The construction of the temple that Haggai had stirred up the people towards seems to be progressing well
    - b) The promise of renewed blessings that Haggai and Zechariah had made are beginning to be delivered
    - c) In addition to Jerusalem, there were many other cities in the land that were being rebuilt as well: (***Neh. 7:6***)
    - d) One such city is the town of Bethel:
      - (1) While this had once been a large and important city, (you'll recall that Jeraboam had turned it into one of two centers for idol worship) the census records in ***Ezra 2:28*** tell us that this is now a small village of 223 people
      - (2) Chapter 7 begins in this context: In the midst of a time of rebuilding, both physically and spiritually, two men will be sent out from this city to inquire of the Lord:

## II. Read Zechariah 7:1-7

A. The question at hand for these men was whether or not to continue to fast in the 5th and 7th month as had been their custom:

1. The first thing we need to do is ask what were these fasts, and why would there be a question as to whether or not they should still observe them?

**a) Fifth Month:** In *II Kings 25:8-9* gives us the record that it was in the fifth month that Nebuchadnezzar burned down the house in Jerusalem, the King's house, and most importantly the Temple:

(1) Now that Judah could see that all of the warnings they'd ignored had come to pass, they established a memorial fast for this occasion:

**b) Seventh Month:** It is in *Jer. 41:1-2*, that we are told about the murder Gedaliah, the man who Nebuchadnezzar had appointed to rule over the Jews, and in response to this second tragic occasion, they established another commemorative fast:

B. The reason why they were inquiring as to whether or not they should still fast was because these were not occasions that had been commanded by God: they were established by the Jews

1. Both of these events were obviously distressing and it would have been natural for the people to mourn about them

a) But these had ceased to be a time of mourning and had simply grown into a custom that they had kept for the past 70 years

C. God's answer to these men is directed to all of the people in the land, and it cuts straight to the heart of the matter: **Re-read v 5-6**

1. It didn't matter if they were fasting or feasting: either way it would not have been to honor the Lord; it was done out of selfish motives:

2. These were not fasts commanded by God, nor were they even occasions of repentance: these were events that paid homage to their self pity!

## III. There is application to be made from their motivation for fasting:

A. In every aspect of our service to the Lord, our motives must be pure:

1. God disapproves of us serving Him with impure motives just as much as He does of those who do not serve at all:
2. And there is only one acceptable motive for our actions, and that is of course to please God:

B. In what ways might we bring service that is tainted by impure motives?

1. If I'm not doing something because I am seeking to please God, that only leaves me with two groups of people: Pleasing others or pleasing myself:

### **C. Pleasing Others:**

1. Am I offering up service to please friends or family?
  - a) Am I appearing to live a life according to God's will because I know its what someone else expects of me? Spouse, Parents, Grandparents,
  - b) Am I following commands to hold on to relationships with people? Am I doing this to simply avoid unpleasant conversations?
  - c) If at any point I can look around and say: "if this person wasn't here, I wouldn't be here either" There is some serious reevaluation that needs to take place in my life!
    - (1) If you think that isn't possible, read in the same chapter of King Joash; who after repairing the Temple, abandons the Lord when his mentor Jehoiada passes: (*II Chron. 24*)
2. Am I pursuing a life of religion because it pleases me?
  - a) I'm not even discussing something to brazen as false and phony men who are teaching and preaching for sheer profit:
    - (1) But in my service to God do I keep it because I enjoy being seen by others? Because I'm looking for a commendation?
      - (a) The same could be said in my service to fellow brethren
    - (2) Am I looking to help keep a congregation on track with God's pattern, or am I looking to steer it in a direction that seems best to me?
3. These are some basic, first thought, applications of this: But the broad point is that my motivation for service must come from a desire to please God!

**IV. There is another** passing point to be made in these first seven verses:

- A. There is a sense in which their question is almost comical: *“Are we still supposed to be sad or not?”*
- B. Their approach to this fast, which was not inappropriate to have instituted in and of itself, had become so ritualistic that it was devoid of any and all emotion:
  1. Can you imagine going to God and asking whether or not we should still observe the Lord’s Supper, or Sing?
  2. And yet, that might explain why so many are willing to casually discard so much: If it has been approached with casual indifference for so long a time then no need will be seen for it!
- C. God’s answer in v 7 is to stop listening to themselves, and listen to Him:
  1. They had essentially wasted a trip:
    - a) He had already told them in times past how to please Him and it hadn’t changed: If you want to please me, listen to what I’ve told you to do:
    - b) *But this was the problem:* The following verses explain that their impure motives and ritualistic attitude had arisen from a refusal to listen to God

**V. Read Zechariah 7:8-14**

- A. God continues to make the same point: The corrections that He tells them to make are exactly the same words that were spoken to Israel before their captivity: Again, God’s Word had not changed:
  1. What had changed according to v 11-14 was the hearts of the people: They were no longer willing to listen: They had turned a stubborn shoulder like an Ox that is refusing to have a yoke placed on its shoulders
- B. It is very profitable to compare these verses with a description of God’s ideal servant in **Isaiah 50:4-10**
  1. This servant is given as an example to the people as to what they should strive to be:
    - a) He starts every day by listening to God’s word
    - b) He does so with ears that are open to the Instruction and He is ready to obey

- c) Knowing that following God so will bring opposition He trusts in the Lord for deliverance:
  - d) Moving forward He sets His face like flint before His enemies so that He may stand strong in His faithfulness and not compromise:
2. In contrast, how could the people be described?
- a) They had spent each day neglecting God's Word
  - b) They had closed their ears in rebellion
  - c) They trusted in themselves for deliverance
  - d) Instead of faces like flint to withstand their enemies, they made their hearts like flint to withstand God:
    - (i) As a result God did not answer when they called:

C. It seems like a simple enough answer: How did the people get so off track in their service to God? Literally, by becoming the exact opposite of what He looks for in a servant!

- 1. Wouldn't we notice? Wouldn't that be obvious to me if I was the polar opposite of what God wanted?
  - a) Which servant to I more closely resemble?
  - b) *Illus of Ben Franklin*

### **Conclusion:**

- As God told these men from Bethel: He had already told us what we need to do to please Him:
- If my service isn't what it needs to be, the answers as to why are right in front of me