

BOOK OF ZECHARIAH
THE PROBLEM OF DISOBEDIENCE
ZECHARIAH 7:7-14

Introduction

We've said that this is the third section of the book of Zechariah came almost two years after the first two earlier sections of the book.

Last week we saw how God pointed out that the errors of the generation that were taken into Babylonian captivity were beginning to surface again in this generation.

These folks in Zechariah's day needed to comprehend that God desired for them to have more of an inner spiritual reality rather than just the meaningless external ways of formalism they were practicing.

As this nation re-emerged from its 70 years of captivity in Babylon and returned to the land to rebuild what had been destroyed, God points back to the reason this all happened to begin with.

The basic mistake of the nation of Judah had been its failure to obey the Word of the Lord which resulted in the devastation of the Temple and the land as well as the captivity!

Here the LORD revealed to Zechariah that the same fundamental error that brought the destruction and captivity was being made by the restored community.

They were lapsing into the same social, moral and ethical sins that brought on the ruin of their fathers and that sin was their disobedience! (i.e. Their failure to obey the Word of the LORD from their hearts.)

The people needed to learn the lesson that the nation's life centered around its attitude toward and response to the Word of God. So God used the consequences of past disobedience as warnings and examples for the present generation!

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I. THE DEMANDS OF A JUST GOD! (7-10)

We saw last week how that God unveiled that the Jews institution and practicing of all these various fasts that were associated with the different aspects of the invasion and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple had only been of their mourning over the consequences of their sin rather than mourning over their sin itself!

God directs them back to the messages of the former prophets that were ignored by their forefathers!

In verses 8-10, God renews the old-time message with a basic summary or gist of the messages of the former prophets.

In verse 9, the phrase "*Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying*" forms the introduction to this authoritative declaration from God!

This is not Zechariah saying anything other than what the LORD had told him to say! If the wayward people and priests were to obey the Word of God, they must hear it and receive it for what it is!

The next two verses reveal social, moral and ethical areas where repentance was needed. Basically, God was wanting them to REPENT OF THEIR WAYS and begin walking in HIS WAYS!

GOD IS JUST, and He wanted His people to reflect HIS JUSTICE (i.e. TRUE JUDGMENT) in their lives!

God IS FULL OF MERCY AND COMPASSION, and He wanted His people TO BE MERCIFUL AND KIND as well!

It is note-worthy that man's duties to his neighbor are stressed. *1 John 4:20—"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"*

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Let's look at these four commands or tests of spiritual reality that the Lord gave the people in verses 9 and 10.

A. EXECUTE TRUE JUDGMENT!

(Or, execute judgment based on the truth!)

The word translated "*execute*" is imperative and means "*to judge or pronounce a sentence*". The phrase translated "*Execute true judgment*" means "*to give a judicial decision based on the truth or objective evidence.*"

Administration of justice is to be according to the truth.

This judgment based on truth is justice that is to be exercised with impartiality by an unbiased weighing of all evidence and reaching a non-subjective (non-personal) rendering!

Leviticus 19:15—"Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour."

"*Executing true judgment*" is the task of seeing and making just moral, religious, spiritual, political, social and economic decisions.

Both individuals and the leaders in Israel had been guilty of exploiting people for personal gain. Their behavior in these matters revealed the true state of their hearts as well as the true character of the nation.

B. SHOW MERCY AND COMPASSION TO HIS BROTHER!

The word "*show*" means "*practice, to do or work.*"

Showing or practicing *mercy* (speaking of *kindness*) means that someone who is in a position to help, freely does.

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The word *compassion* is related to the root word for womb. It indicates a maternal kind of love that grows and matures others, a watching over those more helpless. (i.e. natural affection, which seems to be lacking in our day!)

They are to have a brotherly attitude toward each other characterizing those born from the same womb.

Mercy (or kindness) and compassion are to be the order of day between a man and his neighbor. Kindness and compassion are the two great demands of righteousness and love.

See Micah 6:6-8, Hosea 2:19-21.

C. OPPRESS NOT!

Verse 10 addresses categories of people who more susceptible to being cheated, oppressed, or simply forgotten in society.

The *widow* and *fatherless* (or orphan) have much in common with the *stranger* and the *poor*. They represent the most common victims of oppression!

Deuteronomy 10:18—"He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment."

Isaiah 1:17—"Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."

REBUKE – *Isaiah 1:23*—"Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them."

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REBUKE – *Jeremiah 5:28*—“*They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge.*”

James 1:27—“*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*”

Those mentioned in verse 10 are the more defenseless members of society without the social position or economic means to stand up for themselves and so they are particularly exposed to the wiles of godless men.

Therefore each is singled out as not to be taken advantage of in their helplessness. Those who do so plainly manifest their greed and godlessness.

D. LET NONE OF YOU IMAGINE EVIL AGAINST HIS BROTHER!

God's people were not even to think of evil to do against another.

After mentioning outward manifestations of wrongdoing the prophet cites the root of evil from which such wrongs come from, but cannot be so readily seen—the evil plans of the heart!

Jesus said in *Mark 7:21-23*—“*For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: 23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.*”

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True morality measures the thoughts and deeds according to the motives of the heart. The secret longing of the heart must be pure.

Micah 2:1—“*Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand.*”

This is talking about not only *designs* but *desires* to get back at (revenge) or an attitude of ill-will, vindictiveness or animosity. It is in the heart where true religion must begin.

The clear inference is that these people who had been restored to the land needed to repent (change their way of their thinking and living - make a 180 degree turn) and begin to practice this ethical teaching and that would turn their fasting from mere formalistic legalism and hypocrisy into seeking the face of God. God seeks truth in the inward life and expects it be manifested outwardly to those about us.

II. THE FORMER REBELLION OF THEIR ANCESTORS. (Vs. 11-12)

A variety of expressions are used to convey this thought of obstinate rebellion. The three indictments of verse 11 together with verse 12 represent a strong progression of evil.

The accounting of how the LORD's people had responded to the LORD's message in the past lists four rebellions.

A. First Rebellion: “They Refused To Hearken”

The LORD had repeatedly sent His prophets to His people prior to the Babylonian captivity, who warned them to forsake their sin and entreated them to turn back to the LORD! But, there was a refusal to hear and obey the word as verse 11 states—“*But they refused to hearken...*” (*i.e. prick up the ears*)

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They looked the other way as if they had not been spoken to. When they were bidden to do something they simply refused to obey.

Not only did they persist in wickedness and injustice but they refused the frequent admonitions and exhortations given to them by the LORD!

It was a deliberate act on their part, not only of not giving attention to the message that was being presented, but of refusing to act on it.

The Word of the LORD by the mouth of His prophets was available, but they deliberately decided not to pay attention. They refused to listen to the LORD's words, and thereby refused to mend their ways and repent!

Jeremiah 5:3—“O LORD, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return.”

Jeremiah 8:5—“Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return.”

Jeremiah 11:10—“They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear my words; and they went after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers.”

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- B. Second Rebellion: *They “Pulled Away The Shoulder”***
Instead of receiving God's Word and serving Him with joyful and glad hearts, they turned from it.

The picture in the language is of an animal refusing to be bound by the constraint of a yoke and continually rebelling against indicated directions.

The LORD's people had refused to give heed to His Word being rebellious against its control and authority over their lives!

- C. Third Rebellion: *They “Stopped Their Ears.”***
Literally, they made heavy their ears. This is a persistent refusal to heed God's Word so that the word spoken or preached no longer reached them.

There are none so deaf as those that will not hear!
This was done by filling their minds with prejudices against the Word of God and resolving in their hearts that nothing said to them would be considered.

The phrase "*they stopped their ears*" implies they deliberately refused to listen to God and accordingly were responsible for their unresponsiveness!

One of the most terrible moral consequences of men turning away from doing the will of God is that they have ears, but they don't hear and they have eyes but they do not see and yet God holds them accountable because of their own stubborn unwillingness to hear and see!

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D. Fourth Rebellion: “They Made Their Hearts As An Adamant Stone.”

Verse 12 implies that they became so hard hearted that they were blocking out whatever the LORD was saying to them!

Persistent rejection of God's Word eventually produces a hardened, cold and unresponsive state of heart described here.

Notice *"they made their hearts,"* so they were morally responsible for their state. Nothing is so hard or so inflexible as the heart of a presumptuous sinner and they can thank themselves for their condition.

The prophet Zechariah warned these Israelites to learn from the past! The people who God judged with captivity had hardened their hearts and refused to listen to the words of the Lord!

The long term disobedience could have only one result.
Therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of Hosts."

The people's disobedience to revealed truth resulted in divine anger. God is patient and He is longsuffering, but He will not be mocked! **2 Chronicles 36:14-16 is a summary of what God did.**

III. THE JUSTICE OF THE LORD FULFILLED. (Vs 13-14)

In verses 13 & 14 Zechariah tells several other resultant calamities that overtook that disobedient generation.

A. Powerlessness In Prayer.

Verse 13 states that they are cursed with powerlessness in prayer!

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Just as the LORD had cried to them by His prophets for so long, so often, and so patiently, yet they would not hear, so they cried to Him in their distress for deliverance and He would not hear.

They had been forewarned that if God kept calling to them and they refused to listen, then that they would keep calling and He would not hear! (i.e. Just retaliation!)

Jeremiah 11:11–“ Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them.”

Jeremiah 11:14–“Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble.”

Jeremiah 14:12–“When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.”

Isaiah 1:15–“And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.”

Proverbs 1:22–“How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?”

Proverbs 1:28–“Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:”

Verse 13 says “Therefore it is come to pass”
What the LORD says He will do, He will do!

Some additional results of the judgment of God are given in verse 14.

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B. Scattered Among The Nations.

Verse 14 states that they were scattered among the nations and that their land became desolate.

Since they demonstrated no kindness or compassion, God withdrew His. Instead of hearkening to their prayer, He scattered them with the violence of a tornado among the nations.

C. Desolation Of The Land.

The conclusion lays the guilt of the whole desolation of the land upon the disobedient forefathers.

Since they had violated all the laws of their land, God took away all the glories of it.

So we have this picture of complete emptiness and desolation. Even the roads were void of travelers for no one passed through the land.

And the Jews were to blame for it all because of their own wickedness. Their own sin had transformed the pleasant land, the land of desire and delight, the land flowing with milk and honey, into a desolate, deserted and empty land.

The hardness and unyieldedness of their hearts turned the land into a hard and unyielding place!

Conclusion

So, what about the original question raised by the delegation concerning their traditional mournings and fastings? How was it answered?

By pointing out the true issue of indifference and disobedience to the Word of God.

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Instead of a comparatively insignificant issue, God pointed to the motive, to the underlying cause of evil of which they had not yet truly repented.

These traditions of mournings and fastings were nothing to God in and of themselves, so long as there was no real sorrow for their sin and a heartfelt desire to do His will as expressed in His Word.

So, in comparison their ritual observing of fasts or traditions was an unimportant matter. Obeying the Word of God was the all-important question they faced.

If they would honestly face this issue, then the question they asked would automatically be answered.

The question that each of us need to ask ourselves is, "*Am I being indifferent to the Word of God?*" Read **Romans 11:20-23**.

Are we sure that OUR conduct can stand up to the LORD'S scrutiny? When we worship God and engage in our religious duties, are we giving him the first place in our thinking that is rightfully his? Or, are we just going through the motions?