

ZECHARIAH: GOD'S PRESENT DIRECTIVES AND FUTURE HOPE

XII: God's Turning Israel's Fasts Into Feasts

(Zechariah 8:1-23)

I. Introduction

- A. Zechariah along with Haggai called the returning Hebrews back to rebuilding the temple, and he gave God's directives and future hope. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the Book of Zechariah," p. 1310)
- B. In Zechariah 7:1-14, God gave a negative reply to the question on whether Israel should continue to observe the self-imposed fast that commemorated the burning of the first temple. God's negative answer had recalled Israel's sins that had led to the destruction of the nation for which that fast and other fasts had been instituted.
- C. However, Zechariah 8:1-23 provides the positive part of God's reply where He predicted how He would turn Israel's fasts into feasts (Merrill F. Unger Zechariah, 1974, p. 132), and we view the passage for our insight:

II. God's Turning Israel's Fasts Into Feasts, Zechariah 8:1-23.

- A. The positive part of His reply to the fast question starts with God's strong avowal of His love for Israel, v. 1-2.
- B. In line with that love, God predicted His future restoration of Israel in the Millennial Kingdom, Zech. 8:3-6:
 1. The Lord said that He would return to Zion and permanently "settle down" (*shakhan*, Ibid., p. 135) in Jerusalem, and it would be called a city of truth and God's mountain the holy mountain, Zechariah 8:3.
 2. As the result, elderly men and women would dwell in the city streets, each with his staff in his hand for great age, and the streets would be full of boys and girls playing in them, Zechariah 8:4-5.
 3. God added that if such a future seemed to be marvelous in the eyes of the people of Israel in Zechariah's time, it would certainly be marvelous in God's eyes, Zechariah 8:6.
- C. God promised to regather His people literally "from the land of the rising of the sun (*me'erets mizrah*)" and "from the land of the going down of the sun (*me'erets mekho' hashshamesh*)," Zechariah 8:7; Ibid., p. 138. This "terminology" refers to "the entire earth," Ibid. Regathered Israel will dwell in Jerusalem, being God's people and He being their God in truth and righteousness, Zechariah 8:8.
- D. The Lord then addressed Zechariah's generation to encourage them in their walk with Him, Zech. 8:9-17:
 1. God called Zechariah's generation in Israel to let their hands be strong in their calling by the prophets of the Lord to continue with the temple reconstruction work, Zechariah 8:9.
 2. God said that He had caused a severe economic depression and a lack of peace in the society for the way the people had focused on selfish gain versus rebuilding the temple, Zech. 8:10; Ibid., p. 140. (Hag. 1:2-6)
 3. However, since they had returned to do the temple work, God would bless them as in former days with the blessing of peace, agricultural bounty, and of being a blessing and not a curse. (Zechariah 8:11-13a)
 4. Zechariah's generation was to let their hands be strong to do the temple work, for as the Lord had thought to treat their forefathers with calamity when they provoked Him to anger, He thought to do good to Jerusalem and Judah in their day, Zechariah 8:13b-15a. Thus, they were not to be afraid, Zech. 8:15b.
 5. For these blessings from God to be realized in their lives, the people were to speak the truth to each other, to execute verdicts of truth and peace in their courts, to let no one devise calamity against his neighbor and to love no false, misleading oath, for God hated these sins, Zechariah 8:16-17; Ibid., p. 146.
- E. In Zechariah 8:18-23, the Lord finally addressed the question of the fast(s) with a very positive message:
 1. God said that the fast of the fourth month (for the opening of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar), the fast of the fifth month (for the burning of the temple), the fast of the seventh month (for Gedaliah's assassination), and the fast of the tenth month (for the start of Nebuchadnezzar's siege) would be replaced by joyful feasts were they to love truth and peace, Zechariah 8:18-19; Ibid., Ryrie, fms. to Zechariah 7:3; 7:5-7; and 8:19.
 2. The time would come when many people would come to pray before the Lord in Jerusalem, and ten Gentiles would grasp the clothing of a Hebrew and go with him, stating that they had heard that God was with him, and that they wanted to accompany him to enjoy God's blessing with him, Zechariah 8:20-23.

Lesson: *Israel's self-imposed fasts over the fall of their nation would be replaced by feasts in the Kingdom since the fasts had come due to God's judgment of sin, and when Israel was righteous, she would be blessed.*

Accordingly, the people of Israel in Zechariah's era were to live righteously for God's blessing in their time.

Application: (1) *May we stay occupied with God's ministry assignments and be considerate of others for God's blessing. (2) If we suffer financial hardships and/or lack peace in our relationships, may we check to discern if we have strayed from our ministry assignment, and if so, to repent as needed. (3) May we long for Christ's Kingdom.*