

Zechariah 13 - Fasting for Flesh: Religiosity {Works}

Zechariah - 7
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Zechariah's Answer Outlined

Chapter Seven

- Question of Fasting
 - Comes to Temple
- Negative Answer
 - Decalogue - God Relationship
 - Decalogue - Man Relationship

Chapter Eight

- Positive Answer
 - True faith promotes right relationship with God
 - True faith promotes right relationships with others
- True faith unites all believers
 - True leadership - Serving

Fastings - What Do They Mean?

- Jews *added* celebrations, special observances (fasting) to festivals God proscribed, these are usually extrabiblical
 - Fourth Month - Destruction of Jerusalem's walls
 - Fifth Month - Destruction of the Temple
 - Seventh Month - Murder of Gedaliah by Jews
 - Tenth Month - Beginning of Babylonian siege
- Fastings were *ceremonial*, daylight hours only (2M 6:16-20)

Historical Background

- The Temple under construction for two years
- Take another two years to complete, Temple already acknowledged as the authority of Jewish faith
- Envoy probably from Babylon {Persian rule} seeking guidance on correct observance forms and rituals

Original Hebrew Correct

- Difficult passage to translate for Christians *at 1:1*
 - Lack of understanding of ancient Hebrew language, customs, idioms and history due to separation from Jewish sources {Gentile churches and learning centers}
 - Consult Jewish resources for Hebrew issues for unique perspective unavailable to early translators
 - Tradition makes changes difficult for publishers, this impedes understanding - Learn to use original language

It's In the Names

- English translations either read:
 - Bethel {town 10 miles north of Jerusalem} sent these men to Jerusalem to inquire of God...
 - These men came to the *house of God* {meaning of Bethel} to inquire of God...
- There is a third translation option...
(<http://www.jewishstudylibrary.org/sharret>)

Jewish-Babylonian Names

- Bethel-Sharezer - "House of God" "Protect the King"
 - Known in Babylon as Belshazzar (Bel Protect the King)
(Dn 5)
 - Jews were in top echelons of Persian court (Examples: Daniel, his three companions, Esther, & Mordecai)
- Regem-Melech - "Chief Eunuch" (Friend) of "King"
 - These men probably held established positions in the court and in the Babylonian Jewish community

They Came Directly to Jerusalem

- In chapter six delegation from Babylon came directly to Jerusalem, this envoy would also (Jerusalem to Bethel)
- Their coming recognizes the Temple (Priesthood) as the true authority for all Jewish faith and practice
- Jewish community had questions about fasting: continue them or not with Temple being built (Focus)

Temple Does Not Answer

- God does not give His answer via the High Priest but via His prophet (Zechariah was priest and prophet)
- God answers as He usually does, with a question, why did they fast?
 - Was it for God (faith)
 - Was it for themselves (religious works)

Decalogue – Relationship to God

- The why is crux of the question and the answer
 - Were they mourning for their broken relationship with God caused by the rejection of God by their fathers and themselves?
 - This was the cause of the Babylonian Exile
 - Daniel mourned for the sins of the people and himself in his prayers when he fasted; did they do the same?
(Da 9:1-19)

They Fasted for Themselves – Works

- God states they ate and drank for themselves implying that their observances were for their material losses
 - They mourned the results of their exile and not the *why*, which had been promised when they received the Law
(De 28:36-46; Je 16:13)
 - They did not mourn over their sin
 - They did not mourn over their broken relationship with God

Decalogue – Relationship to Men

- God implied that neither their fathers nor themselves exhibited the *fruits* of the law; they lived by other laws
 - Did not show *true* judgments, applying the laws equally
 - Did not show mercy, especially the fatherless, the widows and **strangers** (foreigners); only Mosaic Law mandated that everyone live by *one* law (Basis of our laws)
 - Did devise evil against anyone in hearts & minds

They Had Diamond-Hard Hearts

- Their fathers refused to hear and live God's Law
- Sin hardens the mind and soul against God and man
 - Their forays into idolatry produced great violence
 - They voluntarily decided against living by God's words
- God sent them *back* to Babylon from whence Abram had come to learn about the depravity of idolatry

They Called to God for Relief

- When they suffered the *natural* results of sin they called to God to remove the results without them changing the cause as they had done throughout their history
- God had warned them repeatedly; this time He would not reduce the consequences of their sin though He would not allow them to be annihilated

God Scattered Them as Warned

- God scattered them as before a powerful gale, one they brought on themselves
 - Since they did not listen to God, God did not listened to them when the Babylonians came
 - God let the land remain desolate since they had not given it its Sabbaths as ordained
 - God's *pleasant land* (Israel) desolate until He returned them {Zerubbabel led first wave back 20 years ago}

(De 28:47-51)

Sin Devours – God Prunes

- As wild plants always yield poor fruit so sin produces works of the flesh in its practitioners (Lk 5, Gal 5:19-21)
 - Parable of the vinedresser used by Christ from Isaiah
 - God planted and nourished them but they chose sin
- God disciplines, prunes, believers yielding those who will love and follow Him – Babylon was His pruners (Isa 1:6-11)

Some Learn – Some Do Not

- Daniel typical of those who learned from the Exile
 - Acknowledged the rightness of God's action
 - Recognized the root of their sin – Rejection of God
 - Expressed repentance – Asked for forgiveness (Dan 10:6-10)
- Most remained ensnared changing from idolatry to religiosity
 - They mourned their loss – **not** their sin

These Fasts Still Practiced Today

- Jews in Babylon encased their sin in traditions that poisoned Judaism (Isa 15:1-9)
- This is why they did not accept Jesus as Messiah (Lk 10:31-39)
- Another would emulate their Talmudic religiosity to develop a religion that would seek their destruction – Islam (Mohammed) (Quran, Sira, Hadith)

Christians Do the Same Today

- Christians leave their *first love* (Christ) to produce empty worldly religious observances celebrating self or 2:17
 - Easter - Ishtar: Fertility (Eggs and Bunnies)
 - Christmas - Saturnalia: Life (Evergreen trees & Lights)
- Christians glory in blending religion with atheistic philosophies to produce empty works (Psychology, Prosperity-Healing and Seeker Sensitive) to glorify self

Being Conquered by *Our* Sin

- Just as Mohammed (Islam) plagiarized Talmudic sources he also plagiarized from Gnostic Christianity
 - He altered these to legitimize his new faith - Islam
 - In Islam (Political) there is only one faith, all others are erased; Islam's goal: Convert or die (No coexistence)
- Just as ancient Judah's sin exiled her, we are in danger of being removed due to our sinful doctrines

Islam Prelude to Worse Religion

- There will come another religion that promises unity but instead delivers discord and death or 12:7-13:10
 - Mohammed did not claim to be god, just his prophet
 - One will come, to sit in the Temple, claiming to be god
 - His prophet will point all to him (John Baptist model)
 - He unites then replaces all religions (Gnosticism)
Cast out your Leaven (Lv 16:34; 1Co 5:7-8; Ga 5:7-9)
 - All will either accept him or die: There is no coexistence