–Save This Page as a PDF–

Zechariah: the Visionary
Ezra 5:1-2 and Zechariah 7:1 to 8:23

DIG: What are some holidays or other observances that today have lost connection to what they were originally intended to celebrate? Why does this happen over time? Why had the Jews observed this cycle of fasting for so many years? What did it represent in their view? What did it represent in God's view? The Jews asked a fairly straightforward question, but ADONAI's answer was lengthy and complex. What deeper truth was He trying to find out?

REFLECT: What is the difference between repentance of sin and sorrow over the consequences? How do you distinguish between them? What is the outward result of each? In what sense are religious observances a waste of time? When are they valuable? How do you distinguish between these two situations? What things does God hate? Why does He hate them? How does your own list of "hates" compare with God's list? What did God mean when He said, "Thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, "I am exceedingly zealous for Zion, I am burning with jealousy for her" (Zechariah 8:2)? How does God's zeal for your fellowship compare with yours for His? What are some signs that Yeshua's return is imminent? How does this affect your daily life? How might your priorities change in the coming week if you took this to heart? Does your daily life reflect true obedience to God's Word, or do you tend to "go through the motions" of religious observances? What area of obedience might the Lord be calling you to this week?

November-December 518 BC about two years before the Temple was completed.



The name **Zechariah** means *ADONAI remembers*. **He** was the great prophet of the days of the restoration from the Babylonian Captivity (see the commentary on Jeremiah). **Zechariah** was born in Babylon of a priestly family and, much like the prophet **Haggai**, traveled back to Judah with the first wave of exiles under the leadership of **Zerubbabel** (see **Ag – The First Return**). **The rabbis teach that he was also a member of the Great Sanhedrin, a council of 120 men originated by Nehemiah and presided over by Ezra.** This council later developed into the ruling elders of the nation (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lg – The Great Sanhedrin**). **Zechariah** is occasionally referred to as the son of **his** grandfather, with whom **he** traveled to Judah, so many assume that **his** father died when **he** was very young.[93]

Zechariah was a contemporary of **Haggai,** and like **Haggai, his** ministry was to encourage the returned exiles to rebuild **the Temple** and continue the feasts. **He** began **his** ministry two months after **Haggai** gave **his** first sermons, but **his** ministry extended far beyond the life of **Haggai**. **ADONAI** used **Haggai** to begin a revival, and **He** subsequently used **Zechariah** to keep it going strong. Following the time of **Zechariah**, **ADONAI** would raise up one final prophet named **Malachi** (see **Cq – Malachi: The Pollution of the Priesthood**) to rebuke and condemn **the exiles** for the abuses **they** committed during the period of **Nehemiah's** absence from 445 to 433 BC (see **Af – Ezra-Nehemiah Chronolgy**). After **Malachi**, prophecy from **YHVH** would fall silent for four hundred years, until a man named **John** arrived on the Judean scene (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Be – John the Baptist Prepares the Way**).[94]

Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of

the God of Isra'el. Here, **the prophets** functioned as catalysts to finish the rebuilding with **their** encouraging message **(Ezra 6:14). Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the House of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them supporting them (Ezra 5:1-2).** Those workers were not on their own, **God was over them.**

Now that **the Temple** was being rebuilt, some **Jews** traveled to **Yerushalayim** to seek the will of **ADONAI** about whether **they** should continue **their** annual feasts. **In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of Adonai came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, in Kislev. Now Bethel sent Sarezer and Regem-melech together with his men to seek the favor of Adonai, and to speak to the cohanim of the House of ADONAI-Tzva'ot and to the prophets** saying: **Should I mourn and consecrate myself in the fifth month as I have done for so many years (Zechariah 7:1-3)!** These **men** came *from* **Bethel**, rather than *to* **Bethel**, a town twelve miles north of **Tziyon**. Since the return from Babylon, **the Jews** had rebuilt and repopulated that **city**. **Bethel** had been the center of apostate worship for the Northern ten tribes of Isra'el **(First Kings 12:28-29, 13:1; Amos 7:13)**. **They** journeyed to **Jerusalem** to ask the priests whether **they** needed to continue to celebrate the yearly schedule of **feasts**. **Their** question, however, implied a desire to discontinue the religious observance of **fasting**.[95] **God gave four responses.**

God's first response: ADONAI asked **the people** to examine **their** hearts. What was the real reason for fasting? What was **their** true motive for fasting and eating for the feasts? **Then the word of ADONAI-Tzva'ot came to me** saying: **Speak to all the people of the land and to the cohanim** saying: **When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh months for the past seventy years, did you really fast for Me?** The fast of **the fifth** month (July-August, the month of Av), commemorated the destruction of **the City** and **the Temple** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Gb – The Destruction of Solomon's Temple on Tisha B'Av in 586 BC**). The fast of **the seventh month** was not the divinely instituted **fast** on the annual day of **Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16:29-31, 23:26-32)**, which was also on **the seventh month**, but a **fast** commemorating the murder of **Gedaliah**, **governor of Judah**, during the time of civil unrest after the fall of **Yerushalayim** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Gg – Gedaliah Assassinated**). Were **they** merely going through the motions of these yearly **fasts**, or was **their** heart really in it? Were **they** really mourning over the destruction of Solomon's

Temple and the assassination of Gedaliah, or were **they** only putting on a show? When **they ate** and **drank** during the other cycle of feasts, who were **they** thinking of? **When you eat and drink, are you not eating and drinking for yourself?** If their eating at the yearly cycle of **feasts** was for **their** own pleasure, the fasts were also likely to be driven by selfish ambitions. And if that were the case, it had all been a big waste of time.

Are not these the words that ADONAI proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem with its surrounding cities were inhabited and prosperous, when the Negev and the lowland were inhabited (Zechariah 7:4-7)? If **the Israelites** had just obeyed **His** word in the first place, there would never have been any call for **the fasts**. The important matter was not ritual, but obedience. In the past it had been obedience to **God's** Word that brought great joy, peace, and prosperity to Isra'el during the time of David and Solomon. If that present generation in **Zechariah's** time were to substitute ritual for obedience, **they** would have the joy, peace, and prosperity that **they** were enjoying. **YHVH** wanted **them** to show **their** repentance through obedience, not through outward pious religious ritual.

God's second response: Then **the LORD** offered some practical examples of the type of obedience **He** desired. **Again, the word of ADONAI came to Zechariah** saying: **Thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot: "Administer true judgment and practice mercy and compassion each to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the outsider or the poor. Furthermore, do not let any of you devise evil against one another in your heart" (Zechariah 7:8-10). Those** who looked for every opportunity to advance **themselves** would only end up planning evil against others, pushing others down, using every underhanded scheme imaginable to get ahead. For **them** the ends justify the means. **ADONAI** said to repent of such things, and **they** would have no need of fasting.[96]

Next, **Ha'Shem** pointed out that **the previous generation** had been told the exact same thing. **But they refused to pay attention. They stubbornly turned their backs and stopped their ears from hearing. Indeed, they made their hearts as hard as flint preventing them from hearing the Torah or the words that ADONAI-Tzva'ot sent by His Ruach through the former prophets.** The implication of this was a warning to the present generation not to make the same mistake. **Consequently, great wrath came from ADONAI-Tzva'ot. It came about that just as He called and they did not listen, so** when **they would call** for deliverance, **I would not listen,** says **ADONAI-**

Tzva'ot. "I scattered them to exile in Babylon **with a whirlwind among all the nations they have not known. Thus, the Land was left so desolate behind them that no one passed through or returned; for they made the pleasant land desolate" (Zechariah 7:11-14).**

God's third response: Then ADONAI turned **His** eyes toward **the far eschatological future**, and contrast **Isra'el's** past judgment with **her** promised future restoration. **The word of ADONAI-Tzva'ot came saying: "Thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, "I am exceedingly zealous for Zion, I am burning with jealousy for her" (Zechariah 8:1-2). Exodus 20:5a** says: **Do not bow down to [other gods] . . . for I am a jealous God.** The reason that **idols** are not to be worshiped is that **ADONAI** is **a jealous** or **zealous God**, and idolatry is looked upon as spiritual adultery. The Hebrew term *qanna'* combines the two concepts of **jealousy** and **zeal** (not envy or suspicion). So **zeal**, or **zealousness**, meaning *a passionate devotion to*, would be a better term to use than **jealous**, which has negative, even petty connotations. So idolatry would cause **God's zeal** to **burn** like a husband's **zealousness** would **burn** against an unfaithful wife **(Hosea 2:2-5)**. Because **God** and **Isra'el** are viewed as married, **Zion** is viewed as **the wife of ADONAI (Deuteronomy 5:1-3, 6:10-15, 7:6-11; Isaiah 54:1-8, 62:4-5; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezeki'el 16:8; Hosea 2:14-23)**. For that very reason, **God** has a right to be **zealous** over what is rightfully **His**.

Thus says ADONAI, "I will return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth and the mountain of ADONAI-Tzva'ot will be called the Holy Mountain." Zion was **the mountain** on which ancient **Jerusalem** was built, which became the name of **the City**. But in **the far eschatological future**, **the Lord Himself** will rule the whole earth from **the Temple** in **Jerusalem** for a thousand years (see the commentary on **Isaiah Db – The Nine Missing Articles in the Messiah's Coming Temple**). **Thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, "Once again old men and old women will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with his staff in his hand because of his age. The streets of the city will be full of boys and girls playing in its streets" (Zechariah 8:4-5). Zion** will be secure and safe for the young and **the old** alike.

Thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, "It may seem difficult in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, but will it also be difficult in My eyes?" – it is a declaration of ADONAI-Tzva'ot (Zechariah 8:6). The Jews of **Zechariah's** day might have thought these promises sounded hard to believe, but

there is nothing too hard for **the Lord**, **He** always keeps **His** promises no matter how hard they are to believe. **The virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son (Matthew 1:22-23a).**

Thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, "Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west. I will bring them back and they will live in the midst of Jerusalem (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Jp – The Earth Will Mourn When They See the Son of Man Coming on the Clouds**)**. They will be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness" (Zechariah 8:7-8).**

God's fourth response: ADONAI continued to expound on the countess blessings **He** intends for **His people**. In the end, the answer to **His** question in **Zechariah 7:3** is simple: obey **Me**! **Thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, "Let your hands be strong – you who hear these words spoken by the prophets [Haggai** and **Zechariah] who were there the day the foundation of the House of ADONAI-Tzva'ot was laid – so that the Temple may be rebuilt. Before those days,** when **the people's** opposition by the Samaritans and **their** love of ease and comfort created an indifference in **them** finishing building **the Temple**, **there were no wages for man or animal, nor was there any shalom from adversity for those who came or went because I set every one against his neighbor. But now I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days" – it is a declaration of ADONAI-Tzva'ot (Zechariah 8:9-11).**

For there will be a sowing of shalom: the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its increase, and the heavens will give their dew. I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these things. It will happen that just as you were a curse among the nations, house of Judah and house of Isra'el, so will I save you and you will be a blessing (Zechariah 8:12-13a). These promises of blessings applied in some measure to **the Jews** of **Zechariah's** day, but **they** also pointed to **the far eschatological future** and the Messianic Kingdom, when **ADONAI** will restore **Isra'el** to full fellowship and restoration.

Fear not! Fear is the enemy of faith and causes a person to doubt that **Ha'Shem** is in control in the face of overwhelming circumstances. The same truth is critical for all believers in all ages. We are commanded to resist **fear** through faith in **His** sovereignty. **Let your hands be strong** to complete the rebuilding of **the Temple (Zechariah 8:13b)!**[97]

For thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, "Just as I determined to harm you when your fathers provoked Me to anger," says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, 'and I did not relent, so I have again determined in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Fear not! These are the things that you are to do: speak the truth one to another; administer the judgment of truth and shalom in your gates; do not let any of you devise evil in your hearts against your neighbor; and do not love false oaths, for I hate all these things," – it is a declaration of ADONAI (Zechariah 8:14-17). As always blessings are connected with obedience to **YHVH's** righteous standards. As **God's people** learn to share **His** promises, they will grow **to hate lies** and **evil** as much as **He** does.

Again the word of ADONAI-Tzva'ot came saying: **Thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, "The fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth month will become joy, gladness and cheerful moadim. Therefore, love truth and shalom" (Zechariah 8:18-19)!** But here **Zechariah** mentions four extra-biblical **fasts** instituted and observed during the Captivity. On **the tenth month** of Tevet (December/January) 588 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon marched against **Jerusalem** and laid siege to **the City** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Ga – The Fall of Jerusalem**). On the ninth day of **the fourth month**, the walls of **Jerusalem** were broken through by the Babylonian army. The fast of **the fifth month** (July-August, the month of Av), commemorated the destruction of **the City** and **the Temple** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Gb – The Destruction of Solomon's Temple on Tisha B'Av in 586 BC**). And the fast of **the seventh month** commemorated the murder of **Gedaliah**, **governor of Judah** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Gg – Gedaliah Assassinated**). **Zechariah** encourages **the exiles** to be faithful to finish building **the Temple** as **they** look forward to the Messianic Kingdom when all **their fasts will become** times **joy** and **gladness.**

Thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, "Peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will again come. The inhabitants of one city will go to another saying 'Let us go to entreat the favor of ADONAI and to seek ADONAI-Tzva'ot. I also am going.' Indeed, many peoples and powerful nations will come to seek ADONAI-Tzva'ot in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favor of ADONAI" (Zechariah 8:20-22). Isra'el's restoration in the Messianic Kingdom will be the means of blessing for the entire world. Gentiles from all around the world will travel to **Jerusalem** to worship **the Lord**, fulfilling the words of **Psalm 122**.

Thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, "In those days it will come to pass that ten men from every language of the nations will grasp the corner of the garment of a Jew saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you' (Zechariah 8:23)." The Jews will truly be **God's** messengers as originally intended **(Genesis 12:3),** and will bring untold multitudes to **Messiah** during **His** thousand year reign (see the commentary on **Isaiah Kq – The Wolf and the Lamb Will Feed Together, and the Lion Will Eat Straw Like the Ox**).