

Fasts of Zechariah 7-8

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Most of you are probably not aware of it, but this past New Years Day, while most were celebrating the start of a new year, devout Jews were keeping a fast day. It wasn't that they fast on New Years Day, but this year that day happened to coincide with the 10th day of the 10th month on the traditional rabbinic calendar. This is one of several special days and feasts mentioned in the Scriptures apart from the commanded feasts of Leviticus 23.

We may be more familiar with Hanukkah, called in Scripture the Feast of Dedication which occurs shortly before this fast day, this past year from Dec 17-24. It was created by the Maccabees after they cleansed the temple and rededicated the altar following the defilement of Antiochus Epiphanes in around 164BC. It is described in the book of Maccabees, and it is mentioned in John 10:22 as something Jesus attended.

About 300 years before the Feast of Dedication was created, the Feast of Purim was established. It is described in the book of Esther, and commanded by Mordecai and Esther in chapter 9 as something to be kept by the Jews annually. It occurs a month before the days of Unleavened Bread.

But a hundred years before Esther, four **fast** days were set apart to commemorate some of the awful events surrounding the destruction of the temple and the captivity of the Jews by Babylon. We find them mentioned in (Zec 8:19 NKJV) as '**The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth**'. We will read this verse in context later. The fast of the tenth month was this past New Years Day, and I want to go into more detail today about the history surrounding these traditional fasts and what the Bible, and tradition, has to say about them.

We will begin our story in the days of Josiah the young king of Judah. It is 13 years into his 31 year reign. The kingdom is in a period of relative peace under this last of the "good" kings, when God calls Jeremiah, a priest from Anathoth, to become His prophet. Jeremiah has a disturbing message for the nation, and their king—don't be complacent, because the peace won't last. Indeed at about the same time Jeremiah begins his ministry, Nabopolaser of Babylon rebels against Assyria. Egypt, too, begins to stir to attempt to fill the power vacuum from Assyria's rapid decline. Judah is caught in the middle. When Pharaoh Neco comes through Judah, Josiah opposes him. And although the Pharaoh sends him a message to stay out of things, Josiah attempts to stop him at Megiddo, and is killed. Neco deposes Josiah's successor after 3 months and puts Jehoiakim on the throne to establish a buffer zone with Babylon.

But Babylon won't leave Judah alone, and so we read this in (Dan 1:1-6 NKJV) "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. (2) And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god. (3) Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, (4) young men in whom *there was* no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who *had* ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. (5) And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and **three years** of training for them, so that at the end of *that time* they might serve before the king. (6) Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah."

The following year, the great battle of Carchemish takes place, a battle mentioned in Jeremiah 46 as taking place in Jehoiakim's 4th year, between Egypt and Assyria against Babylon. The general is again Nabopolasar's son, Nebuchadnezzar, who is also joint king with his father:

(Jer 46:2 NKJV) "Against Egypt. Concerning the army of Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, which was by the River Euphrates in Carchemish, and which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah:" [Then follows a prophecy of the destruction of Egypt] (Jer 46:13 NKJV) "The word that the LORD spoke to Jeremiah the prophet, how Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon would come *and* strike the land of Egypt." (Jer 46:26 NKJV) ""And I will deliver them into the hand of those who seek their lives, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the hand of his servants. Afterward it shall be inhabited as in the days of old," says the LORD."

Babylon is victorious at Carchemish, bringing about the final end of Assyria, and Nebuchadnezzar pursues Neco to Egypt. But before entering Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar receives word that his father has died. He returns to Babylon to secure his throne. The prophecy of Jeremiah has been delayed, and I'm sure some in Judah look upon him as a false prophet. Egypt falls, but not until 18 years after the fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah further issues the prophecy of chapter 25:

(Jer 25:1-13 NKJV) "The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (which *was* the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), (2) which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying: (3) "From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, **this is the twenty-third year** in which the word of the LORD has come to me; and I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, but you have not listened. (4) "And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending *them*, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear. (5) "They said, 'Repent now everyone of his evil way and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers forever and ever. (6) 'Do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands; and I will not harm you.' (7) "Yet you have not listened to Me," says the LORD, "that you might provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt. (8) "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Because you have not heard My words, (9) 'behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' says the LORD, 'and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. (10) 'Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. (11) 'And this whole land shall be a desolation *and* an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon **seventy years**. (12) 'Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, *that* I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,' says the LORD; 'and I will make it a perpetual desolation. (13) 'So I will bring on that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah has prophesied concerning all the nations."

In Jeremiah 36, we read more of this 4th year of Jehoiakim, and on into the 5th year, when we have the infamous burning of the scroll by the king—a fascinating story we don't have time to cover today. But all during these 4th and 5th years of Jehoiakim's reign, Daniel and his companions are finishing their 3 years of training.

(Dan 1:18-21 NKJV) "Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. (19) Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. (20) And in all matters of wisdom *and* understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *and* astrologers who *were* in all his realm. (21) Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus."

(Dan 2:1 NKJV) "Now in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was *so* troubled that his sleep left him." Daniel interpreted the king's dream and impressed him even more, and we read in (Dan 2:48-49 NKJV) "Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise *men* of Babylon. (49) Also Daniel petitioned the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel *sat* in the gate of the king."

About 5 or 6 years after this dream, Jehoiakim dies a violent death, [At the end of the scroll burning incident (Jer 36:30 NKJV) "Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: "He shall have no one to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night."] and Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem again. He takes the king (Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim) and a large number of people captive, and installs a new king (Jehoakim's brother Zedekiah). Jeremiah even sends a **letter**, as recorded in Jeremiah 29, in which he tells them to build houses and settle down, because they will be there for 70 years, even as false prophets attempt to contradict him and say that Babylon will be destroyed. Jeremiah himself had already said Babylon would fall (Jer 25:12-13 which we read earlier). And in the 4th year of Zedekiah, Jeremiah issues a long prophecy about the eventual downfall of Babylon (ch. 50-51). But this would not be as soon as the false prophets are saying.

Among the captives taken at the time Zedekiah was made king was another priest like Jeremiah named Ezekiel. And about this time, in Zedekiah's 5th year, God begins to work with Ezekiel as a captive in Babylon. So now we have Jeremiah in Jerusalem, Daniel in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, and Ezekiel among the captives in Babylon. God was busy working with all of these prophets simultaneously.

Jeremiah continues to warn Zedekiah, and the people of Judah and Jerusalem that because of their sins, God was going to send Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the nation, the city and the temple, and take them into captivity. They didn't believe it. They were still sure the very existence of the temple would protect them, in spite of him telling them otherwise for many years. And perhaps, too, the people were aware of Daniel's high position in Babylon and thought they had an advocate there. But soon, Ezekiel too began to prophecy to the captives that they weren't going home any time soon. And so it came to pass on one momentous day that we read the following from Jeremiah:

(Jer 52:4 NKJV) Now it came to pass in the ninth year of his [Zedekiah's] reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth *day* of the month, *that* Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem and encamped against it; and *they* built a siege wall against it all around. [Same as 2 Ki 25:1]

We will return to Jeremiah shortly. But as this was taking place, although Ezekiel was a captive in Babylon, and did not have the benefit of our instant news media, he received this late breaking bulletin:

(Ezek 24:1-2 NKJV) Again, in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth *day* of the month, the word of the LORD came to me, saying, (2) "Son of man, write down the name of the day, this very day; the king of Babylon started his siege against Jerusalem this very day.

This was an important, if distressing day, for the Jews, by God's own decree. And the fast that occurred on New Years Day this year was the anniversary of that event. The Jews back then kept it as a memorial, and some observe it yet today with fasting.

Before we get to the other 3 fasts, I would like to make an observation. It is easy to miss the overlap of these 3 major prophets and the work God called them to. Did they know about each other? Most likely they did. Ezekiel I'm sure knew of his fellow priest, Jeremiah, and his prophecies before he was taken captive, and he undoubtedly read his letter after his captivity. Daniel, too, probably heard Jeremiah preach, as he was apparently of noble birth, and Jeremiah had been preaching about 22 years when Daniel was taken to Babylon. Daniel himself was probably only a teenager when taken captive, so he had perhaps heard Jeremiah his entire life until then. And did these men know what Daniel was doing in the palace? Turn with me to Ezekiel 28.

(Ezek 28:2-3 NKJV) ""Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, "Thus says the Lord GOD: "Because your heart *is* lifted up, and you say, 'I *am* a god, I sit *in* the seat of gods, in the midst of the seas,' yet you *are* a man, and not a god, though you set your heart as the heart of a god (3) (Behold, you *are* wiser than Daniel! there is no secret that can be hidden from you!"

Here the leader of Tyre is said to be wiser than Daniel. But what a testament to Daniel, that Ezekiel was told to use him as a comparison. This prophecy, according to Ezekiel 26, was apparently given just before Jerusalem was destroyed. Daniel had been in Babylon now for about 19 years, and was perhaps in his mid 30s. He had many years remaining in his interactions with Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius the Mede, and had yet to receive the many prophecies he recorded directly from God. But now let's turn to Ezekiel 14, which may have been written even earlier:

(Ezek 14:13-22 NKJV) ""Son of man, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it; I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it, and cut off man and beast from it. (14) "Though these three men, Noah, **Daniel**, and Job, *were* in it, they would deliver *only* themselves by their righteousness," says the Lord GOD. (15) "If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they empty it, and make it so desolate that no man may pass through because of the beasts, (16) "even though **these three men** *were* in it, *as* I live," says the Lord GOD, "they would deliver neither sons nor daughters; only they would be delivered, and the land would be desolate. (17) "Or *if* I bring a sword on that land, and say, 'Sword, go through the land,' and I cut off man and beast from it, (18) "even though **these three men** *were* in it, *as* I live," says the Lord GOD, "they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but only they themselves would be delivered. (19) "Or *if* I send a pestilence into that land and pour out My fury on it in blood, and cut off from it man and beast, (20) "even though Noah, **Daniel**, and Job *were* in it, *as* I live," says the Lord GOD, "they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver *only* themselves by their righteousness." (21) For thus says the Lord GOD: "How much more it shall be when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem; the sword and famine and wild beasts and pestilence; to cut off man and beast from it? (22) "Yet behold, there shall be left in it a remnant who will be brought out, *both* sons and daughters; surely they will come out to you, and you will see their ways and their doings. Then you will be comforted concerning the disaster that I have brought upon Jerusalem, *indeed* all that I have brought upon it."

Daniel was not only commended for his wisdom, he was also commended for his righteousness. Some may wonder how God could do this when Daniel was so young in his service. Perhaps this wasn't the same Daniel, but what other Daniel was there? I personally think it was the same Daniel who even then was serving in the court of Nebuchanezzar, as God's faithful servant. And I think we can draw a lesson from this: God knows those He has called. He has chosen us for His service at this time. Perhaps we do not have as prominent a role to play as Daniel did -- yet, although in His kingdom, our role will be even greater. But God had confidence in Daniel, and commended him for standing fast and behaving righteously, long before the end of his life. We too, should be able to behave righteously and honor the confidence God has placed in us with our calling. Let us be diligent so that it can be said of us that through our righteousness we will be able to deliver ourselves from the judgments God is bringing on this world, as he said of Daniel.

But let's go back now to the prophecy we were reading in Jeremiah:

(Jer 52:5-11 NKJV) So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. (6) By the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, the famine had become so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. (7) Then the city wall was broken through, and all the men of war fled and went out of the city at night by way of the gate between the two walls, which *was* by the king's garden, even though the Chaldeans *were* near the city all around. And they went by way of the plain. (8) But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him. (9) So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he pronounced judgment on him. (10) Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. And he killed all the princes of Judah in Riblah. (11) He also put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in bronze fetters, took him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.

[2 Ki 25:3-4 and Jer 39:2 also mention the ninth day of the month as the day the city was penetrated.]

The fast of the fourth month is said to commemorate this capture of Jerusalem. For some reason, it is observed on the 17th instead of the 9th. Perhaps this is when Zedekiah was finally captured, or more likely when his sons were killed and he was chained and taken off to Babylon.

Some also claim this fast of the 17th day of the fourth month is the anniversary of when Moses broke the two tablets of stone after being on Mt. Sinai for 40 days. This day is 40 days after Pentecost, and some Jews think this was additional punishment on the anniversary of one of their more severe rebellions in the wilderness, the incident of the golden calf, providing multiple reasons to fast in mourning. And perhaps so. For...

1. The book of Numbers records another rebellion a year later. Moses, under God's direction, sent 12 spies into the Promised Land. All we really know about the timing of this event is that it lasted 40 days beginning with the season of the first ripe grapes, during the summer one year after the Exodus from Egypt. When they returned, ten of the spies presented an evil report, and all the people threatened mutiny against Moses, and planned a return to Egypt. This much we know from Scripture. The Jewish Talmud, however, claims that the spies returned on a particular day of great significance to them, known in Hebrew as Tisha B'Av, a name not unlike the 4th of July or Cinco de Maio, which simply means the 9th of Av.

The 9th of Av is the third of these annual fast days kept by observant Jews, and it is arguably the most prominent of the 4. It is second only to the Day of Atonement in importance. But it is not the story of the spies that inspires this day of mourning. The story of the spies, assuming the tradition of that day is correct, is what some Jews feel is the reason why all of their other reasons for fasting that day occurred. Because history points to a series of calamities on this day that makes one wonder if it **is** more than just coincidence, and that maybe there is something to their almost superstitious belief that they are being punished repeatedly on this day for not going into the Promised Land.

2. Because we continue now with (Jer 52:12-14 NKJV) "Now in the fifth month, on the tenth *day* of the month (which *was* the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, *who* served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. (13) **He burned the house of the LORD** and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great *men*, he burned with fire. (14) And all the army of the Chaldeans who *were* with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls of Jerusalem all around."

Notice in verse 12 it said the 10th day of the month. The parallel account in 2 Ki 25:8 says it was the seventh day of the month. Tradition reconciles these dates by saying that the Babylonians entered the city on the 7th, set fire to the temple on the 9th of Av, and the temple and city burned during much of the 10th.

It was this fast in particular that the people had in mind when they approached the prophet Zechariah following their return from exile after the 70 years was complete. The people wanted to know if keeping this fast day was still an appropriate thing to do.

(Zec 7:1-7 NKJV) Now in the fourth year of King Darius it came to pass *that* the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, on the fourth day of the ninth month, *which is* Chisleu, (2) when the people sent Sherezer, with Regem-Melech and his men, *to* the house of God, to pray before the LORD, (3) *and* to ask the priests who *were* in the house of the LORD of hosts, and the prophets, saying, "**Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?**" (4) Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, (5) "Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: '**When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me; for Me? (6) 'When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink *for yourselves*? (7) 'Should you not *have obeyed* the words which the LORD proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?'"**

The people were hoping the worst was over, and maybe keeping a memorial fast no longer made sense. God let them know that if they had been obedient before the exile, the nation wouldn't have been destroyed. But their hearts weren't right then, and they still weren't right. And the Talmud goes on to record 3 other events associated with the 9th of Av.

3. In 66 AD, the Jews revolted against Rome and essentially kicked them out of Jerusalem. The Romans responded by attacking Jerusalem and in 70 AD, they entered the city and set fire to the second temple—on the 9th of Av. Some estimate that 2.5M Jews died as a result of the war. The fact that **both temples** were destroyed on the same day of the Hebrew calendar is a fairly well known fact. But there are other events as well.

4. Exactly one year later, again on the 9th of Av according to the Talmud, with the Roman-Jewish war still going on, the Romans plowed Jerusalem under with salt, which some say fulfilled Micah 3:12 which says: “Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed *like* a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple like the bare hills of the forest.”

5. In 132, the Jews revolted against Rome again, this time under the leadership of Simon bar Kokhba. The Romans claimed 580K Jews were killed, 50 fortified towns and 985 villages were razed. The Talmud claims **millions** were killed. After losing Jerusalem in the summer of 135, Bar Kokhba and the remnants of his army fled to the fortress of Betar, southwest of Jerusalem. The Romans laid siege to the fortress, and destroyed it--on the 9th of Av. The Romans banned the Jews from returning to Jerusalem--except for one day out of the year for a day of mourning. That day? The 9th of Av.

The Talmud, written about 500 AD, only records these 5 events. But history records more:

6. In 1096, the Crusaders began their attempts to liberate the Holy Land and impose their brand of Christianity, and they slaughtered many Jews, as well as Turks. For the Jews, the Crusades were not confined to the Holy Land, Europe being much worse for them. Some claim the first Crusade began on the 9th of Av in 1096, although most records I have seen place it two weeks later. Pretty close though. 10K Jews are said to have been killed in the first month alone.

7. Jews came to live in England in the time of William the Conqueror. They were successful business men, but charged usury on the money they loaned, which many thought was excessive. (The law of God has much to say about charging excessive usury, which we don't have time to review just now.) Nevertheless, the Jews lived in relative tranquility until Richard the Lionheart's coronation day in 1190, during the period of the Third Crusade. A rumor started that the new king intended to attack the Jews, and the rabble in London were whipped up to a frenzy. The monarch prevented a riot but his departure on the Crusade left the field open for the wealthy and the clergy, the main clients of the Jewish money lenders, to take advantage of his absence. By 1190, riots had spread, the most serious being that in York where 500 Jews took refuge in the local castle. They defended it for several days until, realizing they were doomed, most chose to commit suicide. The mob broke in and killed the remaining Jews. That day was the 9th Av.

8. The situation only got worse for Jews as the 13th century progressed. In 1218, England became the first European nation to require Jews to wear a marking badge. They were heavily taxed. And in 1290, Edward I of England issued the Edict of Expulsion--on July 18, the 9th of Av. It was accompanied by pogroms and confiscation of books and property. This was England, not Germany or Russia. 16K Jews were evicted from England. The edict formally lasted over 350 years, until it was repealed in 1655.

9. In France, an event occurred before this edict, in 1242, that seems fairly insignificant among these others, but the Parisians had gotten so upset with the Jews that they burned the Talmud by the cartload--on the 9th of Av.

10. But that was not an isolated incident, for in 1306, Jews were arrested and eventually expelled from France on the day after the 9th of Av.

11. In 1492, Spain got into the act as well with the Alhambra Decree, ordering the expulsion of the 200K Jews--by the 9th of Av. The exact date is subject to some dispute, but it was possibly the same day Columbus (himself of Jewish descent) set sail for the New World.

12. On June 28, in 1914, Archduke Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated. After failed diplomatic efforts, Austria declared war on Serbia July 28. Russia, Germany and France began to mobilize, and on August 1, Germany declared war on Russia. Other declarations of war followed within days. August 1 was the 9th of Ab--the beginning of the First World War. While not directly targets, the Jews continued being persecuted, and the outcome of WWI set up the tragedy of WWII.

13. Some claim it was the 9th of Av in 1941 that Heinrich Himmler formally presented his plan for the final solution of the Jewish problem to the Nazi party. Whether true or not, one year later, on July 19, 1942, Himmler ordered the start of Jewish deportations. Three days later, on July 22, deportations began from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka. The next day, July 23, was the 9th of Av. And some claim the first Jews were killed at Treblinka on that day.

Were the Jews being punished for not entering the Promised Land? I will let you draw your own conclusions, but it was more than just the Jews who refused to go in. It was all of Israel. Nevertheless this date has been observed as a great day of mourning and fasting by them throughout history, and you can see why.

You also may have noticed in verse 5 of Zechariah 7 a reference to the fast of the 7th month. This was not the Day of Atonement. God only mentions keeping this fast for 70 years. It was the 4th of the fasts that were established after the destruction of Jerusalem, and it commemorated the assassination of Gedeliah. It is observed on the 3rd day of the month, right after the Feast of Trumpets. Nevertheless, the words that follow apply equally well to the Day of Atonement. And with the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jews in mind, let's continue in Zechariah:

(Zec 7:8-14 NKJV) "Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, (9) "Thus says the LORD of hosts: '**Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. (10) Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.**' (11) "But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. (12) "Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the LORD of hosts. (13) "Therefore it happened, *that* just as He proclaimed and they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen," says the LORD of hosts. (14) "**But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known. Thus the land became desolate after them, so that no one passed through or returned; for they made the pleasant land desolate.**"

Chapter 8 begins with the good news that God will prosper His people in the future. He will bring a time of peace.

(Zec 8:1-19 NKJV) "Again the word of the LORD of hosts came, saying, (2) "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her.' (3) "Thus says the LORD: 'I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain.' (4) "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. (5) The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.' (6) "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'If it is marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, will it also be marvelous in My eyes?' says the LORD of hosts. (7) "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; (8) I will bring them *back*, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness.' (9) "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Let your hands be strong, you who have been hearing in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, who were in the day *that* the foundation was laid for the house of the LORD of hosts, that the temple might be built. (10) For before these days *there were* no wages for man nor any hire for beast; *there was* no peace from the enemy for whoever went out or came in; for I set all men, everyone, against his neighbor. (11) 'But now I *will not treat* the remnant of this people as in the former days,' says the LORD of hosts. (12) 'For the seed *shall be* prosperous, the vine shall give its fruit, the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew. I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these *things*.

(13) And it shall come to pass *that* just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you, and you shall be a blessing. Do not fear, let your hands be strong.' (14) "For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Just as I determined to punish you when your fathers provoked Me to wrath,' says the LORD of hosts, 'And I would not relent, (15) so again in these days I am determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear. (16) **These are the things you shall do: speak each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace; (17) let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; and do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate,**' says the LORD."

These principles were expounded even more in the book of Isaiah:

(Isa 58:3-14 NIV) "Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. (4) Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. (5) Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? (6) "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? (7) Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? (8) Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. (9) Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, (10) and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. (11) The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. (12) Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. (13) "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, (14) then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." The mouth of the LORD has spoken."

So what was the answer to the question the people brought to Zechariah? Should the Jews have kept observing the fast? Should **we** be keeping the fast? Based on what we read, let me offer this conclusion. **God wants a change of the heart, a change in attitude, a change in behavior.** If keeping the fast day and mourning for the destruction of the temple or any of these other tragic events of history will help us do that, good. If not, it's a waste of time. As Paul stated in Romans 14:5-6: "(5) One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike*. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. (6) He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it*. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks."

The theme running through these passages on fasting is one of relationships—our relationship with God, and with our fellow man. God expects us to deal appropriately with everyone we come in contact with. There will come a day when the house of Judah, the house of Israel, and the whole world, will have their hearts changed. And God will bring about the happy times we read of here in Zechariah 8. As I stated, there were four fast days established at the time of the Babylonian Captivity. And we return to them again now beginning in verse 18:

(18) Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, (19) "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'The fast of the fourth *month*, the fast of the fifth (which I emphasized today), the fast of the seventh (not the day of atonement—another fast on the 3rd of the month), and the fast of the tenth (this past New Years Day), shall (in the not too distant future we hope) be joy and gladness and cheerful **feasts** for the house of Judah. **Therefore love truth and peace.**'"