

## **The End of the Exile and the Beginning of a Glorious Future, If... (7:1-8:23)**

Zechariah chapters 7 and 8 form a distinct unit under a single heading (7:1), which marks off the new section. The heading dates these oracles to the ninth month in the fourth year of King Darius, which is December 518 B.C. This is about two years after the temple construction recommenced and about two years before its completion.

The unit begins when a delegation from Bethel arrives in Jerusalem to inquire of the priests regarding their fasting ritual, which they had done to mourn the exile. This prompts Zechariah to respond by calling out the empty religious activities of the previous generation, even as they disregarded the Lord's demand upon them to execute justice and mercy. A section of oracles promising the community a future of blessing and favor on Jerusalem (8:1-8) transitions the oracles from focusing on the past to the present. As the former generation's disobedience led to their exile, so the current generation must heed the same call to love justice and peace, lest they suffer the same fate. The section ends when the delegation's question about fasting is answered by the Lord, which calls them to put away the mourning of the exile and live in the glorious future the Lord has promised. If they do, all the nations will be drawn to the presence of God and His people, just as the delegation of Bethel was.

This unit is arranged in a chiasmatic pattern, as follows:

- A The People of Bethel Come to Seek the Lord (7:2)
- B The People Ask a Question About Fasting (7:3)
- C The Call to the Former Generation to Execute Justice and Righteousness (7:4-10)
- D The Former Generation's Disobedience and Subsequent Punishment (7:11-14)
- E The Lord's Promised Restoration of the People and the Land (8:1-8)
- D' The Current Generation Called to Obedience and Blessing (8:9-15)
- C' The Call to the Current Generation to Execute Justice and Righteousness (8:16-17)
- B' The Lord Answers the Question About Fasting (8:18-19)
- A' The Peoples will Come to Seek the Lord (8:20-23)

### **Message-reception Formula (with Date) (7:1)**

#### **The People of Bethel Come to Inquire of the Priests Regarding Fasting (7:2-14)**

The first section begins with a delegation arriving in Jerusalem from Bethel, which was once the idolatrous religious center of the northern kingdom of Israel. Now these representatives of the people come to inquire of the priests regarding their fasting ritual. The fasting ritual occurred on the fifth month, which likely commemorated the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, which also occurred on the fifth month (2 Ki 28:8-12; Jer 52:12-16). The people of Bethel want to know if the imminent reconstruction of the temple means that the exile is over, and thus they can cease their fasting.

Rather than a reply from the priests, the Lord delivers a word from Zechariah to the people *and the priests*, asking if they had continued these fasting rituals because they were truly repentant or because it was another in a long history of empty religious activities. This calls the community to reflect on the reasons the exile occurred, specifically due to their empty religious exercises as well as judicial and social injustice. Even though the prophets of the past warned the previous generation, they refused to listen, and thus were led into exile.

A Delegation Sent from Bethel to Jerusalem to Inquire About Fasting (vv. 2-3)

Prophetic Response: The People Questioned About Fasting (vv. 4-14)

Message-reception Formula (v. 4)

Command to the Speak to the People and the Priests (v. 5a)

Question Concerning the People's Motivation for Fasting During the Exile (vv. 5b-6)

The Same Message Proclaimed to the Previous Generations (v. 7)

## The Former Generation's Refusal to Heed the Former Prophets (vv. 8-14)

Message-reception Formula (v. 8)

Quotation Formula (v. 9a)

Call to Show Justice and Mercy (vv. 9b-10)

The Previous Generation's Rebellious Response (v. 11-14)

## The Lord Promises Restoration of Jerusalem and Its People (8:1-8)

The center of this unit is made up of a series of five oracles, each beginning with a quotation formula (i.e., "Thus says the Lord..."). These oracles speak of the future of Jerusalem now that the Lord's favor has returned to it, despite its then devastated state. The first oracle recalls an earlier message that the Lord is jealous for His city (1:14). The second oracle also reiterates a previous oracle (1:16, 2:10-11) that the Lord desires to dwell again in the midst of His people, thus reversing His abandonment of them. The third oracle promises that the once desolate city will be full of bustling activity. The fourth oracle reminds the people that despite how they see the city now, when they see it as it will be, it will be a marvelous sight, in both their eyes and the Lord's. The final oracle promises to bring the people back from exile and renew the covenant once made with their forefathers.

Heading: Message Reception Formula (v. 1)

Oracle 1 (v. 2)

Quotation Formula (v. 2a)

Oracle: The Lord is Jealous for Zion (v. 2b)

Oracle 2 (v. 3)

Message-reception Formula (v. 3a)

Oracle: The Lord will Dwell in Jerusalem Again (v. 3b)

Oracle 3 (vv. 4-5)

Quotation Formula (v. 4a)

Oracle: Jerusalem will be Populated Again (vv. 4b-5)

Oracle 4 (v. 6)

Quotation Formula (v. 6a)

Oracle: The Future will be Marvelous in the Lord's Sight (v. 6b)

Declaration Formula (v. 6c)

Oracle 5 (vv. 7-8)

Quotation Formula (v. 7a)

Oracle: The People will Return from Exile (vv. 7b-8a)

## Encouragement to the Community to Trust in the Lord's Promises (8:9-15)

The previous section promised a glorious future for Jerusalem, but here the post-exilic community is spoken to directly, reminding them that they *must* walk by faith and trust God to bring about these promises. Therefore, they are encouraged to be strong and not fear as they work toward the completion of the temple reconstruction. They must trust in the Lord if they are to leave the curses of the past behind and live in the blessing that God has purposed for them.

A Call to Be Strong as the Lord Has Promised Prosperity (vv. 9-13)

Quotation Formula (v. 9a)

Encouragement to the Community (vv. 9b-10)

The Lord's Promise of Future Prosperity (vv. 11-12)

Israel will be a Blessing to the Nations (v. 13a)

Encouragement to the Community (v. 13b)

A Call to Not Fear as the Lord Has Purposed Good (vv. 14-15)

Quotation Formula (v. 14a)

The Lord's Purposes to Do to Jerusalem (v. 14b-15)

### **The Current Generation Called to Justice and Mercy (8:16-17)**

Just as Zechariah prophesied that the previous generation had been called to justice and mercy (7:9-10), so now he calls the *current* generation to the same thing. The community is called to two positive admonitions: to speak the truth and judge with justice; and two negative prohibitions: to not devise evil toward their neighbors and not partake in false oaths. The people must not follow in the rebellion of their fathers, but rather respond to God's words with faith and obedience.

### **The Lord Answers the People of Bethel's Question Regarding Fasting (8:18-23)**

As the unit comes to a close, the Lord now answers the question on fasting asked by the delegates from Bethel (7:3). The fasts that had been enacted to lament and mourn the exile are to be transformed into feasts of joy and gladness. The community is no longer to dwell on their past judgment, but rather look forward to God's unfolding promises of restoration. Zechariah then, once again, admonishes the people to love truth and justice (v. 19c).

The final promise in this unit is related to the delegation's arrival to Jerusalem to seek the Lord. Just they had come to seek the Lord's wisdom and will, so all nations will be drawn to Jerusalem to seek the face of the Lord. Verse 23 reiterates this same theme by illustrating that because God's presence has returned to the community, many people will be drawn to them.

Heading: Message Reception Formula (v. 18)

The Delegation's Question About Fasting is Answered (v. 19)

Quotation Formula (v. 19a)

The Lord will Transform the Mourning Rituals into Celebratory Feasts (v. 19b)

The Nations will Come to Jerusalem to Seek the Lord (vv. 20-23)

Quotation Formula (v. 20a)

The Nations will Come to Seek the Lord (vv. 20b-22)

Quotation Formula (v. 23a)

People will be Drawn to the Judeans as the People of God (v. 23b)