

The dating of this chapter in the reign of Darius brings the reader back to the historical setting and away from the prophetic future which has occupied the narrative of the book so extensively thus far. Real issues that affected the Jewish believers of that day and generation were the immediate audience of Zechariah, it is only by extension that others like us can subsequently apply these teachings and messages beyond that. As the prophecy unfolded it can be seen that a lot of information had been communicated via the prophet in a period of less than two years, 2/11/24 – 4/9/4. The months are named to ensure that the precise year form was known, the civil year began in Tishri whereas the religious year began in Nisan. This was the therefore the religious year system as Chisleu is said to be the 9th month. Today the Jewish calendar is entirely based on the civil with new year in the autumn not the spring.

The issue raised was whether the memorial of non-biblical dates and events was to be respected by fasting. During the fifth month, Av there was a commemoration of troublous times; indeed it is known that many significant destructive events took place on the 9th of Av including the destruction of both the first and second temples. It has other historical connections. The Eternal reminds the hearer that these fasts were not primarily done to respect Him but were rather *“for yourselves”*. Taking God out of the memorial distracted from the point that these were divine judgments that He had afflicted upon a *“disobedient and gainsaying people”*. At that time it was more a sense of victimhood, that provoked such action and was certainly not done to thank God for sending severe punishment upon them for their sins!

For seventy years the people had fasted, should such matters now been eclipsed by the joyousness of the return? The answer that God gave shows that He was not happy with the entire premise of their actions. Engaging the spirit of victimhood is a constant drain on vitality and would sap the energy from more positive behaviours. God reminded them of former times of prosperity when Jerusalem was sovereign, but the people did not listen then to His prophets. The Eternal explains that if people refuse to listen to Him, they should not be surprised if in turn he does not then listen to them.

“They laid the pleasant land desolate”. They had destroyed the land flowing with milk and honey by their greed and selfishness and laziness and then were surprised that things got worse! This is the usual caprice that afflicts mankind and his erroneous reasoning.

The prophet emphasised the key issues

Execute true judgment

Shew mercy and compassion

Oppress not the widow, fatherless, stranger nor the poor

Let none imagine evil against his brother in your heart.

Failure to uphold these divine standards in what should have been a godly society doomed Israel to judgment and diaspora! *"I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they knew not"*.

This was a deliberate hardening of the heart *"as an adamant stone"* one of the hardest materials they knew, in the face of the requirements of the law.

All such ceremonies and memorials then which a believer may become entangled with need to be pondered on the same basis. Is it first and foremost honouring and devotion to God, or is it a fleshly indulgence like the Christo-pagan celebration of Xmas on the 25th December when people over indulge themselves in the name of the Messiah!

A Voice from the Altar

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