

Post-Exile Prophets: Zechariah  
**GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS**

Monday, July 7

Reading: Zechariah 7:1-7

**Zechariah 7:5** *"Ask all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for Me that you fasted?'"*

Chapters 7-8 form the next section of Zechariah's book. It has been nearly two years since his night visions. While the work on the temple was well under way, it would not be completed for another 2 years (Ezra 6:15). These two chapters contain sermons the prophet delivered to the people of Judah during this time.

The sermons begin when a group from the Jewish exiles journey to Jerusalem to worship and to ask a question of the priests. Ever since the temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC, the Jewish people in exile had fasted and mourned on the anniversary of its destruction in the 5<sup>th</sup> month. Now, with the temple past the half-way point of construction, they wondered if it was still necessary to keep this fast.

The Lord had only commanded one national day of fasting – the Day of Atonement. The fast they are asking about was instituted by the people and for many had simply become a routine. Zechariah responds to their question with some hard-hitting questions of his own that exposes their hypocrisy.

"When you fasted and mourned...for the past 70 years, was it really for Me that you fasted?" Through His prophet, God asked the people what their motives were for fasting all those years. Was it really out of grief for the loss of God's presence represented by the temple? Or was it simply out of self-pity that things were not the same as before? God then turns to the times of feasting that He had commanded (like Passover, Tabernacles, etc.). Just like their fasting was only a self-centered ritual, so they had turned God's feast days into times to gratify themselves, not focus on God.

They had forgotten why they were fasting in the first place! The temple had been destroyed because of the people's sin. God's prophets had warned them over and over again about God's coming judgment, but they refused to listen. This is the same warning Zechariah had given the people at the start of his writings (Zechariah 1:1-6). His next message will remind them that the words of those former prophets still applied to their lives today.

Fasting is an external sign of an inward attitude. These people tried to replace ritual for a real relationship with God. They were going through the motions but forgetting the repentance and obedience required to properly "entreat the LORD." We can fall into the same trap.

Churches have traditions and rituals that we observe. I'm sure they began with pure motives and a desire to grow in their walk with God. But somewhere along the way, the ritual took the place of the relationship. We go through the motions because that is just what we do! Even important things like Communion/the Lord's Table can become an outward show with no internal substance if we forget Christ's sacrifice and the reason we partake – "In Remembrance of Me." What rituals or routines have lost their meaning in your life? Is your worship merely an outward show? What can you do to put the meaning back into the motions and refocus building your relationship with God?