

God Demands Justice

Key Verse: *“Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.”*
—Zechariah 7:9,10

Selected Scripture:
Zechariah 7:8-14

me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? Should ye not hear the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when men inhabited

THE LAW GIVEN TO MOSES

commanded a fast on Israel's Day of Atonement. (Lev. 16:29-34) While in Babylonian captivity, however, the Jewish people instituted additional fasts in remembrance of various events associated with their tragic defeat at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. (II Kings 25:2-10) In today's lesson, once the exiles were back in their homeland, a delegation was sent to priests and prophets to inquire as to the propriety of continuing these fasts.—Zech. 7:1-3

The Heavenly Father through his servant Zechariah responded to this query. “Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto

the south and the plain?”—vss. 4-7

The foregoing rebuke indicates that the mourning associated with their fasts was not for the Lord, but rather for themselves. Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, their former righteous prophets had warned them that the Heavenly Father desires sincerity and obedience rather than rituals and lip service.

Our Key Verses emphasize God’s required standard of conduct from his people, including the manifestation of justice, mercy, and compassion towards others. Not only was this true of Judah in the past, but these same qualities would be expected to be manifested by all who love righteousness today and in the future.

Despite the clarity of God’s response, Israel refused to heed this counsel. They evidently did not recognize that God’s wrath upon them, including their dispersion and the desolation of the land, resulted from their obstinacy of heart. “It is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts.”—vss. 11-14

The future of Israel promises their restoration to God’s favor, as exiles would be regathered to their homeland. (chap. 8:1-17) Although these promises had a partial application in Zechariah’s time, their complete fulfilment awaits the glorious Kingdom of God, when all sin, sorrow, and unrighteousness will be a thing of the past throughout the earth. “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.”—Isa. 35:5,6

There are still many present difficulties for Israel as well as others of the human family who desire the blessings of peace and righteousness. However, we are assured as to the conditions which will exist in the future, since Christ taught his disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.” (Luke 11:2) What a time of blessing that will be for all mankind! ■