

Zechariah: Jerusalem, behold your King!

Chapter 7: Obedience and Fasting



Woodcarving depicting the Jews being forced to leave Jerusalem in 586 B.C., by the Babylonians.

Introduction to Chapter 7

Chapters 7 and 8 are a complete unit in Zechariah, dealing with the hearts of the people toward their God. Following the eight visions of chapters 1 through 6, these two chapters aim to point the nation in a practical application of their restored relationship, culminating with Lord Himself dwelling in the city (Zechariah 8:3)

In chapter seven, the book of Zechariah addresses "True worship" as opposed to ceremonial worship and obedience. With the Temple nearly complete, the people want to know should they continue their fasting and mourning, which began with the fall of the Temple in the fifth month.

The Lord through Zechariah rebukes their ceremonial fasting, which is done for an outward show. He then instructs them to seek true worship, with a sincere heart, not like their forefathers seventy years earlier.

Obedience better then fasting

- 1 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, Chislew,
- 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?"

(1) Now: This begins a new phase in the book of Zechariah, the first six chapters took place in the second year of Darius, chapters 7 and 8 take place in the fourth year. In Zechariah there are three specific dates given, which allow us to date the book. After Zechariah was commissioned, he saw eight visions in one night, detailed in chapters 1 through 6. Chapter 7 begins a new part of the book of Zechariah.

Date	Date	Events
Zechariah 1:1 eighth month, in the second year of Darius	October/November 520 B.C.	Zechariah commissioned as a prophet
Zechariah 1:7 four and twentieth day of the eleventh month....second year of Darius	February 15, 519 B.C.	Zechariah has eight visions on this date. Chapters 1 through 6
Zechariah 7:1 fourth year of King Darius....forth day of the ninth month	December 7 th , 518 B.C.	Chapters 7 and 8

Chapter 7 calls the restored nations to sincere worship and prayer, not ceremonial repetition.

Fourth year: The fourth year of the reign of King Darius was 518 B.C.

King Darius: The third in the line from *Cyrus the Great*, he reigned from 521-486 B.C., he allowed construction of the Temple to resume. His son was Xerxes, who married Ester, and his grandson was *Artaxerxes Longimanus* who allowed the walls of Jerusalem to be rebuilt in the days of Nehemiah 444 B.C. (Nehemiah 2:1-8).

Chislev: the name adopted from the Babylonians by the Jews after the Captivity for the third civil, or ninth ecclesiastical, month (Nehemiah 1:1; Zechariah 7:1). It corresponds nearly with the moon in November.

(2) The people: With the Temple nearly complete, the people sent representatives, to seek advise whether they were to continue mourning and fasting after the Temple is complete. The two sent were *Sherezer*, and *Regem-Melech* along with their men, these names are both foreign, demonstrating the pervasive foreign culture among the exiles. *Sherezer* means in Assyrian , "Prefect of the treasury" and the *Regem Melech* means, "The king's official".

House of God: The words used here, בית-אל *Bayith-'el*, The word has connotations of Israel's apostasy, as Jeroboam set up a rival place of worship to Jerusalem in the city of Bethel (House of God) (1 Kings 12:29-33, 1 Kings 13). The men were sent to pray and enquire of the prophets and the priests, if they should continue their fasting.

Bethel was used by the Israelites to refer to their place of worship as opposed to Jerusalem or the house of the LORD as it is referred to in verse 4. The idea they men were coming to the *house of God* (Bethel) as opposed to the *house of the Lord*, may suggest the need for correction here, by the God of Israel through Zechariah the prophet.

To pray: God examines the sincerity of the people, in the 7th and 8th chapter, they came to enquire before the Lord, sending their representatives, the Lord responds with a rebuke against the people, for their ceremonial worship in the past seventy years of captivity.

(3) The priests...prophets: These men came to enquire of the priests and the prophets in the rebuilt second Temple.

Weep in the fifth month...fast: On the fifth month, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 B.C., from this point on during the seventy years of captivity the Jews mourned and fasted to the Lord.

12 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, he burned with fire. **Jeremiah 52:12-13**

So many years: Should they continue to fast and mourn now that the Temple is nearly complete. This was the question posed in the House of the Lord, Zechariah being both of the priestly line and a prophet, would have been there when the men arrived.

(4) Word of the Lord: The Lord heard the petition of these men, and replied through Zechariah.

(5) Say to people...the priests: The Lord's reply was not only to the people who brought the question, but also to the priests.

Fasted and mourned ...fifth and seventh month: The people of the land fasted in the 5th month, the month the Temple was burned, and in the 7th month. In the seventh month, Ishmael descendant of David's line killed the governor appointed by Nebuchadnezzar, whose name was Gedaliah.

25 But it happened in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family, came with ten men and struck and killed Gedaliah, the Jews, as well as the Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah. 2 Kings 25:25

Gedaliah by all accounts was of a righteous family, he was the grandson of *Shaphan*, the scribe who first read the scriptures to *King Josiah* (2 Kings 22:5, 8-11). His father, *Ahikam* rescued *Jeremiah* from a plan to kill him. (Jer. 26:24, 2 Kings 22:12). The anti-Babylonian party killed him, and escaped into Egypt taking Jeremiah the prophet with

them.

Really....for me? At this point the Lord questions their sincerity in their fasting, then in a Hebrew nuances, rebukes their fasting. Their fasting was not for the Lord, but for show and ceremony.

(6) Yourself?: The people and even the priests of the captivity, had fallen into the mode of ceremony, doing the actions, without the sincere heart. Here in Isaiah two people are contrasted, the poor and contrite who trembles at the Lord's word, and the outwardly religious.

2 For all those things My hand has made, And all those things exist," Says the Lord."But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word.

3 "He who kills a bull is as if he slays a man; He who sacrifices a lamb, as if he breaks a dog's neck; He who offers a grain offering, as if he offers swine's blood; He who burns incense, as if he blesses an idol. Just as they have chosen their own ways, And their soul delights in their abominations, Isaiah 66:3-4

The outwardly religious seem to do all the right things, sacrificing bulls and lambs, offering grain offerings, but their hearts is somewhere else, outwardly religious, inwardly he is wicked. The Lord is looking for sincere worship. He considers the poor and contrite, who values His Word rather than the outwardly religious.

This was the case here, the people and the priests actions were becoming ceremonial, rather than sincere toward the Lord.

Disobedience resulted in fasting

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?' "

8 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." **Zechariah 7:7-14**

(7) Should ...Have obeyed:. Seventy-years earlier, the people of Judah and Jerusalem had a similar problem; they rejected the Lord inwardly, while keeping an outward appearance. The prophets had warned them of the Lord's coming judgment, urging them to return from religious ceremony, to sincere worship. The events causing the fasting in the 5th and 7th months would not have happened had the people obeyed the prophets. Over 150 years before Zechariah, the Lord warned the people through Isaiah, of religious ceremony without a sincere heart.

10 Hear the word of the Lord, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah:

11 "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the Lord. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats.

12 "When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts?

13 Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies-I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.

17 Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.

18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.

19 If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land;

20 But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. **Isaiah 1:10-13,, 17-20**

The people in Zechariah's day were facing a similar problem, ritual ceremony without sincerity. The ceremony and actions were only complete if the rest of the covenant was kept. Outward actions toward humanity demonstrated the sincere heart, their lack of humanity demonstrated their ritual.

Former prophets: The prophets before the exile included Jeremiah and Isaiah. The prophets after the exile were Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea and Amos warned both Israel and Judah before their destruction what the Lord required, but the nation rejected their words.

Jerusalem: Jerusalem and the surrounding areas were prosperous and populated as compared to Zechariah's day, when the people lived in the midst of Jerusalem's destruction, under constant threat from the surrounding nations.

Prosperous: Wealth and prosperity is from the Lord, he gives the ability to make money, and fulfilled his covenant promises against the land, because they turned away from the Lord.

18 "And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

19 "Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish.

20 "As the nations which the Lord destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the Lord your God. Deuteronomy 8:18-20

(9) Execute true justice: Before the children of Israel entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, the Lord established conditional promises, based on obedience and disobedience. If Israel as a nation was obedient they would be blessed above all the nations.

"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. 2 "And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God: Deuteronomy 28:1-2

The Lord did not just require obedience of ceremony, but obedience of the heart, which was demonstrated by the treatment of those most vulnerable, the widows, orphans and strangers. They were to show love to their fellow man, reflecting God's nature to the world. Justice and love were also part of the Covenant established with the nation. When the nation was obedient to heart, they would be obedient to the whole.

Show mercy...compassion: The way we treat those close to us, our brothers, not only in blood but also in faith, all Hebrews were considered brothers, not just blood brothers. (Deut. 15:12). The Hebrew word for mercy is *חַד* **Checed**, meaning to show goodness, kindness, faithfulness, and the word for compassion is *רַחַם* **Racham**, which also means womb or tender love or pity. The Lord wanted the people to be tender hearted toward one another, reflecting his love to a hostile world.

(10) Do not: Humanity is made in the image of God; we are to reflect "godlikeness" to the world. Here the Lord lists four groups, each vulnerable in a hostile world; 1. the widow, 2. the fatherless (Orphans) 3. the alien (the foreigner) 4. the poor. The way these groups are treated reflects the heart of the culture to the world. The Covenant required the people to demonstrate God's character to these people.

17 "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.

18 "He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.

19 "Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. Deuteronomy 10:17-18

(11) Refused: Both the lands of Judah and Israel to listen to the prophets, even after they were judged, they rejected the words. In the book of Jeremiah, the people of Jerusalem, who escaped from the destruction of the city in 586 B.C. flee to Egypt taking Jeremiah captive. In Egypt, they burned incense to the *Queen of Heaven*,¹ even after the words of Jeremiah came to fruition, even after they asked Jeremiah what they should do.

Before these Jews who escaped to Egypt from Jerusalem fled, they asked Jeremiah to pray to the Lord God, so they would know what to do (Jeremiah 42). After swearing they will listen to whatever the Lord says, they accuse Jeremiah of lying to them to them, when he says to them, stay

¹ The Queen of Heaven is one of the Babylonian gods and goddesses worshipped in Jerusalem before their fall.

where you are, do not flee to Egypt (Jeremiah 43). In Egypt, they openly reject Jeremiah message from the Lord, both the men and the women, standing as a witness to their own destruction.

15 Then all the men who knew that their wives had burned incense to other gods, with all the women who stood by, a great multitude, and all the people who dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying:

16 "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not listen to you!

17 "But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, were well-off, and saw no trouble.

18 "But since we stopped burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine."

19 The women also said, "And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did we make cakes for her, to worship her, and pour out drink offerings to her without our husbands' permission?"

20 Then Jeremiah spoke to all the people-the men, the women, and all the people who had given him that answer-saying:

21 "The incense that you burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your princes, and the people of the land, did not the Lord remember them, and did it not come into His mind?

22 "So the Lord could no longer bear it, because of the evil of your doings and because of the abominations which you committed. Therefore your land is a desolation, an astonishment, a curse, and without an inhabitant, as it is this day.

23 "Because you have burned incense and because you have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord or walked in His law, in His statutes or in His testimonies, therefore this calamity has happened to you, as at this day."

24 Moreover Jeremiah said to all the people and to all the women, "Hear the word of the Lord, all Judah who are in the land of Egypt!

25 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying: 'You and your wives have spoken with your mouths and fulfilled with your hands, saying, "We will surely keep our vows that we have made, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her." You will surely keep your vows and perform your vows!' **Jeremiah 44:15-25**

(12) The Holy Spirit: Jeremiah, like the other prophets before him, spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The former prophets, means those prior to the captivity and destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The people did not reject Jeremiah's word, they rejected the Lord's word, spoken through Jeremiah. They reaped their own destruction, because they refused to listen.

(13) Just as proclaimed: The words spoken through the prophets were fulfilled, just as the prophets proclaimed.

I would not listen: Their comes a point, when the Lord turns people over to themselves, if people continue in rejecting the Lord's word, then when they call God does not respond. This was the case with Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day, the Lord even instructed Jeremiah to no longer pray for the people.

11 Then the Lord said to me, "Do not pray for this people, for their good.

12 "When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence."

13 Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, the prophets say to them, 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.' "

14 And the Lord said to me, "The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart. **Jeremiah 14:11-14**

(14) I scattered them: Before the Israel entered the Promised Land, the Lord promised to bless the nation above all nations on the earth, if they were obedient to Him. This promise of obedience and blessings will be fulfilled in the *Millennium*. Zechariah chapter 8, looks forward to this blessing, as Jerusalem receives the blessings of obedience, when God Himself will dwell in the city.

Israel also received promises for disobedience, among those promises, the Lord promised to scatter a disobedient people to the nations. However, one day, they will be gathered again into the land to receive the promises of the Lord's blessings. (Deut. 30:1-3)

In 586 B.C., because of their disobedience the Jews were scattered, fulfilling the words of the Covenant.

63 "And it shall be, that just as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess.

64 "Then the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known-wood and stone.

65 "And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. Deuteronomy 28:63-65

The Jews were gathered again in the days of Zechariah, back to the land of Israel from Babylon, and Assyria, after a 70-year period of desolation. This is what Zechariah is now addressing, the scattering of the people to the nations as fulfillment of words of the prophets, including Moses the author of Deuteronomy.

The greater scattering occurred after Zechariah, when the nation of Israel rejected their king, *King Messiah* who came riding into the city on a donkey in A.D. 33 (Zechariah 9:9). The Messiah, rejected and crucified, by the Jewish nation, resulted in the nation being scattered again to the nations a second time following Zechariah's day, in A.D. 70.

In the future, as the nation is gathered again, prior to end-times and the 2nd Coming of the Messiah, (Zechariah 12:10), and the Temple is rebuilt a third time, clearly the events of Zechariah's day become a foreshadowing of future events, with a greater fulfillment.