

# You Know Better

## Zechariah 7

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### I. Seek the Favor (Need Answers) vs. 1-3

#### a. Timing

##### i. Fourth Year of King Darius

1. Now, however, the captivity was a thing of the past, and, although their city as yet had no wall, it was beginning to grow and the temple was well on the way to completion. These facts called for recognition and gratitude; feelings inconsistent with the continued commemoration of former misfortunes. The people of Bethel appear to have been the first to realize what had taken place.
2. Further, the oracles in Zech 7–8 preceded the rededication of the temple by two or three years, an event that occurred on March 516 BC, although some place the event a year later
3. Nearly two years after the night visions (December 7, 518 B.C.; cf. v. 1 with 1:7) and about halfway through the period of temple rebuilding (520–516) **Zechariah** gave four messages.

#### b. Messengers

- i. Sharezer One of two emissaries sent by the people of Bethel in 518 B.C.E. to inquire of the temple priests and prophets in Jerusalem concerning continuation of the practice of fasting in the fifth month (Zech 7:2).
- ii. Regemmelech- One of two leaders of a delegation that inquired at the rebuilt temple about the continuation of fasting in the fifth month (Zech 7:2).
  1. These messages were given in response to a delegation that came to Jerusalem to ask whether the nation should continue to fast in remembrance of Jerusalem's destruction. The delegates were evidently Jews
  2. These two, or others unnamed, were sent, as is taken for granted, to Jerusalem, first of all, according to the Massoretic text, *to entreat Yahweh*, that is, to seek his favour by the presentation of the customary offering. Now, it is altogether probable that the offering was brought. It would please the priests, if it did not affect Yahweh.

#### c. To Ask

- i. Seek Favor- soften the face, to soften by caressing - 1 Kin 13:6; Jer 26:19; Zech 8:21, to entreat the Lord.

- ii. Weep in fifth month- This fast is widely interpreted by scholars to be a commemoration of the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem by the Babylonians
  - 1. The question raised by the Bethelites implied a desire to discontinue the self-imposed religious observance of fasting **in the fifth month** (July–August, the month Ab), which commemorated the burning to the ground of the city and the temple by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:8–10).
  - 2. A group of the Lord’s worshippers from Babylon sought an authoritative statement from the religious leadership in Jerusalem regarding the propriety of holding the fast that commemorated the fall of Jerusalem. The question focused on whether the Lord’s covenantal people should continue a fast of mourning or whether their perspective should look forward to the promised restoration. The community of the faithful required Jerusalem’s blessing before any change in religious practices could take place
  - 3. The exiles had observed two fasts during the Babylonian Captivity, one in the **fifth month** (see comments on v. 3) and one in the **seventh month**. This seventh-month fast was not the divinely instituted fast on the annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29, 31; 23:26–32), which was also in the seventh month, but a fast commemorating the murder of Gedaliah, governor of Judah, during a time of civil strife after the fall of **Jerusalem** (Jer. 41:2). The feasting probably included both the national feasts of Leviticus 23 and the family feasts associated with Levitical sacrifices (cf. Deut. 12:5–7).
- iii. Abstain
- iv. Have done these many years
  - 1. Second Kings 25:8 recounts the Babylonian destruction of the temple on the seventeenth day of the fifth month. This momentous event moved the community to commemorate the tragedy with a season of fasting. After almost 70 years of observance, the people wanted to know if the practice should be continued. Biblical law did not mandate this day of fasting, heightening the need for clarification. The singular verb translated “Should I mourn” represents the question the people voiced collectively.

## II. Real Answer vs. 4-10

### a. Rhetorical

#### i. Say to All

1. Fasted - Fasting was often associated with weeping, mourning, entreating, and repenting. The origin of fasting has been lost in antiquity
2. Mourned
  - a. These seventy years -
  - b. The phrase “the past seventy years” suggests that the period of the exile had drawn to a close.
3. Rather, God shifted the focus by questioning the sincerity of the people’s fasting and responding with a series of rhetorical questions. What had begun as a time of genuine contrition for sin and the suffering that ensues had deteriorated into a mere ritual performed legalistically.
  - a. They had turned it [the fast] into a time of self-pity for their physical condition, devoid of genuine repentance and moral implications
  - b. Thus, the oracle begins by broadening its circle of concern as the sermon begins to expose the people’s deepest motivations for their religious activities

#### ii. Eat and drink

#### iii. Words of Former Prophets

1. Meanwhile the first divine message reminded the people that God warned their fathers **through the earlier prophets** that He wanted reality, not ritual (e.g., Isa. 1:11–17; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21–24).
2. At the point of God’s desires regarding his people’s fasting, Zechariah relied heavily on Isaiah’s earlier prophecies. The prophet Isaiah explicitly stated that fasting without righteousness and justice brings no pleasure to the Lord (Isa 1:10–17; 58:1–7).
  - a. The question provided an occasion to rebuke self-imposed fasts that not only were antiquated by God’s present blessing on the returned remnant but also were observed without proper motivation and spiritual attitude. Thus, the rebuke was against empty formalism devoid of spiritual reality, for whether fasting or **feasting**, they were doing it not for the Lord (Zech. 7:5) but for themselves (v. 6).
  - b. As in Isaiah, also in Zech 7 hypocritical ritual and fasting are juxtaposed with social justice, proving the emptiness of the people’s faith. To apply Isaiah’s language to the question posed by Zechariah, had fasting enabled the

people's "voice to be heard on high"? The emphatic answer to the Lord's rhetorical question was a resounding, No!

- c. In conclusion, the Lord did not condemn fasting. Fasting and other forms of contrition pleased him when they developed the people's spirituality. Consequently, God did not look favorably upon their fasting because it "showed no promise of betterment, being an expression, not of godly sorrow for past offences, but of selfish regret for the loss of their country and their liberty. They pitied themselves, but they had not learned to fear the Lord

3. This portion of chap. 7 employs the spiritual failures of preexilic Israel as an example that cautioned Zechariah's contemporaries about their own spiritual condition. Specifically, the same fate might happen to them if they chose the path of rebellion their fathers followed. The familiar cycle of disregarding God's message, rebellion, warning, and judgment characterized both the preexilic and postexilic communities

iv. When Jerusalem inhabited and prosperous

1. The "western foot lands" provided homes to orchards, producing olives and many other valuable crops. These "foot lands" lay between the Judean hills and the plains of Philistia. The reference to rest and prosperity establishes a foundation on which the Lord will correlate true worship, divine blessing, and social justice in 7:8–14.

b. Do

- i. Dispense - reliable judgement, true judgements (NRSV), true justice (REB)  
Zech 7:9- Ezek 18:8; 45:9; Zech 8:16

ii. True Justice

1. True- trustworthy man

- a. True- The word *'emet* can express the ideas of "reliability," "permanence," "truth," and "faithfulness"; the notion of faithfulness best captures the sense in this passage
- b. Furthermore, the inclusion of the word "faithfulness" evokes all that the covenant with the Lord represents, enjoining Judah to treat her neighbor as she has been treated by God (cf. Col 3:13). Faithfulness sometimes appears to function as a technical term characterizing the legal obligations each party has to the covenant.
- c. On the human level, the Lord demands that Judah must always show faithfulness to her neighbor because doing so reflects the nature of God himself (Zech 8:16). Furthermore, the Lord requires faithfulness or consistency

in the administration of justice (Ezek 18:8), in giving witness (Prov 14:25),

2. Justice - ruling, legal decision, judgement

- a. The former prophets had almost nothing to say about fasting. Their main concern was social justice, but as we have seen social justice is a corollary of piety and in turn fasting. Although the former prophets did not relate the two, Zechariah and Deutero-Isaiah certainly did (cf. Isa 58:1–9). There is a striking similarity between the passage in Deutero-Isaiah and this one in Zechariah.
- b. provides one of the finest summaries of the teaching of the former prophets. It has a strong emphasis on social justice. But it is not social justice for social justice's sake. Social justice is God's requirement. Right relationship between God and man, and between man and man, go together. It is not individual piety expressed in fasting that keeps the fabric of society secure, but honesty, integrity, compassion, faithfulness expressed in one's conduct, and attitude toward other people.
- c. Instead, justice denotes the rights and duties each party possesses. These privileges arise from the shared covenant the Lord made with his people. Accordingly, everyone has his own special *mišpāt*. The task of righteousness requires all to render consistently this justice and the ethical claims that *mišpāt* demands. Thus, the Lord intended for his righteousness to extend to all in order to safeguard the wellbeing of those united into one community under divine law
- d. In v. 9, however, the term does not mean to hand down judicial decisions, for God gives the command to those who do not have the authority to issue legal determinations. Rather, the exhortation requires every inhabitant of Judah to promote social harmony, respect, and judgment throughout society.
- e. On a deeper level, the Lord himself models what godly ethics are among his people. No passage states this more plainly than Lev 19:2, "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy." Thus, the people bear the responsibility to live justly as their God epitomizes justice. Amos 5:24 teaches, "But let *justice* roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"
- f. Likewise, Jer 22:3 states, "This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right." Jer 7:5–7 also illustrates Zechariah's point well:

- iii. Practice Kindness - State of being that includes the attributes of loving affection, sympathy, friendliness, patience, pleasantness, gentleness, and goodness. Kindness is a quality shown in the way a person speaks and acts. It is more volitional than emotional.
- iv. Compassion -to show friendliness and mercy to someone
  1. Related etymologically to the Hebrew word for “womb,” *rehem* expresses tenderness toward another like a mother manifests gentle, devoted feelings toward the fruit of her womb. Theologically, *rehem* signifies “something that goes beyond what ought to be given
  2. Speaking of the Lord, Exod 34:6–7 portrays God as, “The LORD, the LORD, the *compassionate* and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.” Thus, the Lord charges the community to treat each other with this same spirit of compassion.
- v. Brother – fellow countrymen
  1. Thus, Mic 6:6–8, like Hos 12:6–7 and Zech 7:9, requires humble and faithful conduct from an Israelite toward his neighbor

**c. Don't**

- i. Oppress to **oppress, exploit** (a debtor unable to pay, the weaker party in a business contract)
  1. Zechariah warned his audience never to “oppress” a fellow Israelite who might not enjoy equal social protection, such as a widow or an orphan
  2. Rather, these groups represent everyone who does not have a defender. The Mosaic law governs the way these constituencies should be treated (Exod 22:22; 23:6–9; Lev 19:15–18; Deut 10:18–19; 24:14). The theme of protecting the vulnerable in society occurs often in the prophets as well (see Isa 1:17; Jer 7:6; Amos 2:6–7; 4:1; 5:11–12; 8:4).
  3. **True justice** (cf. Isa. 1:17; Amos 5:24) along with **mercy and compassion** (cf. Zech. 8:16–17; Micah 6:8) should be demonstrated toward all, but especially toward **the widow ... the fatherless, the alien, and the poor** (cf. Deut. 15:7–11; 24:14–15, 19–21; 26:12–13), who were in no position to stand up for themselves, and so are often mentioned in the Bible as objects of God's care. In addition, God's people were not even to **think evil of each other**.
  4. In several biblical passages, particularly in the Psalms and the Prophets, God is portrayed as having a special concern for the poor, particularly the widow, the fatherless, and the oppressed (Ps 10:17–18; 82:1–8; cf. 109:16).
    - a. Widow

- b. Orphan
- c. Stranger
- d. Poor - When they sold their produce and services, they expected a fair deal from the merchants (Amos 2:6–7) Ownership of land and property, freedom and security, constituted their inalienable human rights endowed upon them by God, their creator. For this reason, passages which refer to justice (*mišpāṭ*) of the poor are in actual fact referring to the rights of the poor (Jer 5:28). Therefore, justice (*mišpāṭ*) does not solely refer to moral norm, but also refers to basic human rights. For this reason, when the prophet Amos refers to the poor as the righteous (*ṣaddīq*), he is referring to their being on the right with respect to their dispute with the oppressors over the infringement of their basic rights. It was therefore natural that the people oppressed by the economic, social, and political systems and others, such as the sojourners, who experienced some injustices, should appeal to God to intervene in order that their rights (*mišpāṭ*) might be restored (Ps 146:7–9; cf. 119:153–59). Since God requites all people according to their just deserts, those who felt innocent of any wrongdoing against other people, and who had not transgressed God’s law, summoned God to test, try, or examine them to verify their uprightness in order that he might judge (*špṭ*) them accordingly (Ps 139:23–24). In making this summons, God was invoked to reward the wicked according to their wickedness and the upright in heart according to their righteousness (Ps 94:1–3). God judges in order to restore the lost rights of the oppressed (Ps 76:9). He establishes justice in the world by eliminating inequalities (Ps 113:4–9). God’s justice aims at creating an egalitarian community in which all classes of people maintain their basic human rights

ii. Devise- to impute, reckon misfortune of somebody

1. Evil The concept of evil in the OT has both qualitative and moral categories. Qualitatively, evil is something bad in nature or condition, worthless, corrupt, displeasing, undesirable, or inadequate. Evil is misfortune, particularly injury or threat of injury to life or standing in society.
2. In Hearts

### III. Don't Want Truth

- a. Refused
- b. Pay attention - to **listen attentively**
  - i. Stubborn shoulder -(a) "they turned a stubborn shoulder" (cf. Neh 9:29). The figure is that of a stubborn ox that will not allow a yoke on its neck (cf. Hos 4:16).
    - 1. For an agrarian society, few images more effectively communicate uselessness than the picture of an obdurate ox refusing to submit to the yoke. Likewise, God deemed sinful Israel profitless to himself and to her neighbors when she resisted the purpose for which the Lord had created her.
  - ii. Stopped their ears - They made their ears heavy so they could not hear." Isaiah was told that his preaching would make the people's ears heavy or hard so they could not hear (Isa 6:10).
  - iii. Hearts The heart is especially important in biblical religion. The mystery of the hidden self is fully known to God and to Christ
    - 1. like flint - Dark, fine-grained, hard silica (rock) used for blades of tools. The traditional rendering diamond is supported by the general sense of all three passages
    - 2. "They made their heart like a diamond." The word שֹׁמֵר "diamond" is only used three times in the OT; once in Jer 17:1, "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart and on the horns of their altars"; again, in Ezek 3:9, "Like a diamond harder than flint have I made your forehead.
- c. Could not hear
  - i. The Law
  - ii. Words
    - 1. Lord of Hosts
  - iii. Sent by the Spirit
    - 1. Former Prophets
- d. Great Wrath came
  - i. And there was a great anger from Yahweh of hosts." The word for wrath פָּצַח means "outburst" or "splintering" This word is used in Zech 1:2, 15; 7:12; 8:14.
  - ii. The wrath of God expresses itself in Zechariah in three ways: (a) in God's withdrawal, "They will call and I will not answer"; (b) in exile for the people, "and I will blow them away among all nations"; (c) and in the beautiful land becoming a waste and desolation without inhabitant. God's withdrawal reminds us of Hos 5:15