

# CHAPTER 7

## INTRODUCTION TO ZECHARIAH 7

This chapter treats concerning the nature and use of certain fasts kept by the Jews, on account of the destruction of the temple, and other things; and concerning the message of the former prophets to them, and the effects of it. The occasion of the former was an embassy sent by the Jews to the priests and prophets, to know whether they should continue the fast of the fifth month; upon which the prophet was sent by the Lord unto them. The time of the prophecy is noted, (<sup><307></sup>Zechariah 7:1). An account of the embassy is given, of the persons that were sent, and to whom, and upon what account, (<sup><307></sup>Zechariah 7:2,3). The answer of the Lord to it by the prophet, showing the usefulness of fasts to him, and putting them upon hearkening to his voice by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was in great prosperity, (<sup><307></sup>Zechariah 7:4-7) and then they are exhorted by him, in the ministry of the present prophet, to acts of righteousness, several species of which are mentioned; and which were the same they had been exhorted to by the former prophets, but had neglected, and hardened their hearts against all exhortations and instructions, (<sup><307></sup>Zechariah 7:8-12) and were the reason of their captivity and desolation, (<sup><307></sup>Zechariah 7:13,14).

**Ver. 1.** *And it came to pass, in the fourth year of King Darius*, etc.] Near two years after the foundation of the temple was laid, (<sup><307></sup>Haggai 2:10,18) and near two years before it was finished, (<sup><1575></sup>Ezra 6:15) when the work was going forward, and there was a great deal of reason to believe it would be completed:

*[that] the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah, in the fourth [day] of the ninth month, [even] in Chisleu:* which answers to part of our October, and part of November.

**Ver. 2.** *When they had sent unto the house of God*, etc.] It is, in the Hebrew text, “when he sent Bethel”; which some, as Kimchi observes, take to be the name of a man that was sent along with those after mentioned; but the Targum and the Septuagint render it, “when”, or “after he had sent unto Bethel”: not the place so called in Jacob’s time; but Jerusalem, where

the temple or house of God was now building; and it may be observed, that the words are expressed in the singular number, “when he had sent”<sup>f140</sup>; and not, as we render them, “when they had sent”; and agreeably, in (~~301B~~ Zechariah 7:3), it is said, “should I weep”, etc. as if these messengers were sent by a single person, and yet a body of people is meant; and not the captives that remained in Babylon, as most interpreters understand it; but the Jews that were returned from thence, and were in Judea, as Junius and Tremellius observe; for to them the answer is returned, and to them does the Lord by the prophet direct his speech throughout the whole chapter. The persons sent were

*Sherezzer and Regemmelech, and their men*; who these persons were is not known; they were, no doubt, principal men of the people, by whom they were sent, and the chief of the embassy, and had others with them inferior to them: part of their business at Bethel, or the house of God, was,

*to pray before the Lord*; that they might be directed aright, and have a proper answer returned to the question they came with. The temple at Jerusalem was the place where men used to go up to pray; (see ~~280~~ Luke 18:10).

**Ver. 3.** *And to speak unto the priests which were in the house of the Lord of hosts*, etc.] That ministered in the sanctuary, as the Targum explains it, who offered sacrifices, etc. and who were to be consulted in matters of religion, (~~301B~~ Malachi 2:7):

*and to the prophets*; who were then in being, as Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi:

*saying, Should I weep in the fifth month*; which is the month Ab, and answers to July: now on the seventh day of this month, according to (~~127B~~ 2 Kings 25:8,9), the temple was burnt by the Chaldeans; and, according to (~~248B~~ Jeremiah 3:12,13), it was on the tenth of this month, which day was kept by the Jews as a day of fasting and humiliation, in commemoration of it; and by the Misnic doctors<sup>f141</sup> afterwards was removed, and kept on the ninth day of the said month; but, seeing the temple was in great forwardness of being rebuilt, the question with those Jews was, whether they should continue any longer mourning and fasting on that account:

*separating myself*: that is, from eating and drinking, and not taking the lawful pleasures and recreations of life:

*as I have done these so many years?* for the space of seventy years, as in (<sup>3075</sup>Zechariah 7:5).

**Ver. 4.** *Then came the word of the Lord of hosts unto me, saying.*] Upon the sending of this embassy, and upon putting this question.

**Ver. 5.** *Speak unto all the people of the land,* etc.] Of Judea, who had sent these men on this errand, and whom they represented, and in whose name they spake:

*and to the priests;* who were consulted on this occasion:

*saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth;* on the seventh or tenth day of the fifth month Ab, on account of the temple being burnt by Nebuchadnezzar:

*and seventh [month];* the month Tisri, which answers to September; on the third day of this month a fast was kept on account of the murder of Gedaliah, (<sup>2400</sup>Jeremiah 41:1) though Kimchi says he was slain on the first day of the month; but, because that was a feast day, keeping a day for a fast on this occasion was fixed on the day following:

*even those seventy years;* of their captivity, during which they kept the above fasts. The Jews say<sup>f142</sup> there was no fast of the congregation, or public fast, kept in Babylon, but on the ninth of Ab, or the fifth month only; and if so, other fasts here, and in (<sup>3889</sup>Zechariah 8:19), must be private ones. These seventy years are to be reckoned from the nineteenth of Nebuchadnezzar, when the city was destroyed, to the second or fourth of Darius:

*did ye at all fast unto me, [even] to me?* the fast they kept was not according to the command of God, but an appointment of theirs; nor was it directed to his glory; nor was it any profit or advantage to him; and therefore it was nothing to him whether they fasted or not; (see <sup>2380</sup>Isaiah 58:3-7).

**Ver. 6.** *And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink,* etc.] Either at common meals, or at their festivals:

*did not ye eat [for yourselves], and drink [for yourselves]?* merely and only for their own refreshment and pleasure, and not for the glory of God; though that ought to be the principal end in eating and drinking, (<sup>4001</sup>1 Corinthians 10:31).

**Ver. 7.** [*Should ye*] *not [hear] the words which the Lord hath cried by the former prophets*, etc.] As Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others; suggesting that it would have been much better for them to have regarded the exhortations and instructions which the Lord sent them by his servants, which would have prevented their captivity; and so would have had no occasion of fasting and mourning: for those prophecies were delivered out

*when Jerusalem was inhabited, and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her*; when Jerusalem, and the cities about it, were full of people, and enjoyed all the blessings of life in great plenty; and which would have continued, had they attended to the exhortations, cautions, and warnings given them:

*when [men] inhabited the south and the plain?* the land of Judea, as the Misnic<sup>f143</sup> doctors say, was divided into three parts; the mountainous part, the plain, and the valley. Jerusalem was in the mountainous part, and these are the other two; and not only those parts of the land which were hilly, and those cities that were encompassed with mountains, were in safety and prosperity; but those also that were in the champaign country, and in the low valleys. The “south” was that part of the land of Canaan formerly inhabited by the Amalekites, and which they invaded when David was at Ziklag, (~~HE39~~ Numbers 13:29 ~~880~~ 1 Samuel 30:1). Sometimes it was called Negeb, as here; and sometimes Daroma, as frequently in the Jewish writings; in which Judea is often called the south, with respect to Galilee; for they distinguish between the inhabitants of Galilee and the inhabitants of the south country: and say, a disciple might intercalate the year for Galilee, but not for the south, i.e. Judea. It reached from Eleutheropolis to the south of the land, eighteen or twenty miles: it was distinguished by the Jews<sup>f144</sup> into upper and nether Daroma, or south country: the upper consisted of the hilly part of it; the nether of the plain; and by Jerom<sup>f145</sup> mention is made of interior Daroma, by which there should be an exterior one. The “plain”, or “Sephela”, was all the champaign country, near to Eleutheropolis, to the north and west; and so the above writer<sup>f146</sup> says it was called in his times: now each of these were well inhabited; Daroma, or the southern part; hence it is frequent, in Jewish writings<sup>f147</sup>, to read of such a Rabbi of Daroma, or the south, as R. Jacob, R. Simlai, and others; and of the elders of the south<sup>f148</sup>; and so Jerom speaks of Eremmon, and Duma, large villages, in his days, in Daroma or the south; the one sixteen, the other seventeen miles from Eleutheropolis; and of Ether, Jether, and

Jethan, one of which was eighteen, and another twenty miles from it<sup>f149</sup>; and in the Apocrypha:

“Simon also set up Adida in Sephela, and made it strong with gates and bars.” (1 Maccabees 12:38)

mention is made of Adida in Sephela, fortified, by Simon; and in which also were various other places well stored with inhabitants. This expresses the happy and safe state the Jews were in before their captivity, and in which they would have remained, had they hearkened to the words of the Lord.

**Ver. 8.** *And the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah, saying.*] Giving him orders to repeat what the former prophets had said, and to urge the same things on the people which they had before rejected, the rejection of which had issued in their ruin.

**Ver. 9.** *Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying,* etc.] The same things as he had before; for the things following are ever in force, and always to be attended to, and to be regarded and preferred before anything merely ritual and ceremonial; and especially before the traditions and commandments of men, of which nature the above fasts were:

*Execute true judgment;* or, “judge judgment<sup>f150</sup> of truth”; this is addressed to the judges of the people, that when any cause came before them between man and man, that they would judge righteously, according to the law of God; and, without respect to persons, pass sentence as the truth of the case required:

*and show mercy and compassion every man to his brother;* whether in want of food, raiment, or in whatsoever distress, whether of body or mind; which is much more acceptable to God than any legal sacrifices, or outward abstinences and humiliations, (<sup><3016></sup>Hosea 6:6 <sup><6117></sup>1 John 3:17).

**Ver. 10.** *And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor,* etc.] Such as have no husband to provide for them, nor father and mother to care for them, and are in a strange land, where they have no friends or acquaintance, and are poor, and can not help themselves. Laws of this kind were frequently inculcated among the Jews; (see <sup><6214></sup>Deuteronomy 24:14,17):

*and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart;* thoughts of evil are sinful, and forbidden by the law of God, as well as

actions, which agrees with our Lord's sense of the law, (<sup><4162></sup>Matthew 5:22,28), (see <sup><4897></sup>Leviticus 19:17).

**Ver. 11.** *But they refused to hearken*, etc.]. That is, the Jews, before the captivity, refusal to give heed to the above exhortations, and obey the voice of God in them:

*and pulled away the shoulder*; from serving the Lord, and supporting his interest: or "they gave", or presented, "a rebellious shoulder"<sup>f151</sup>; a refractory one, that slides back, like a backsliding or refractory heifer, that will not admit of the yoke, (<sup><2806></sup>Hosea 4:16) so these could not bear the yoke of the law, nor the burden of duty; nor suffer the words of exhortation, or receive the admonitions given them:

*and stopped their ears, that they should not hear*; like the deaf adder, (<sup><1884></sup>Psalm 58:4,5) they would not hear, and pretended they could not; which was an instance of contempt to the speakers.

**Ver. 12.** *Yea, they made their hearts [as] an adamant stone*, etc.] The word here used is translated a "diamond" in (<sup><2470></sup>Jeremiah 17:1) and it is said to be harder than a flint, (<sup><2189></sup>Ezekiel 3:9). The Jewish writers say<sup>f152</sup> it is a worm like a barley corn, so strong as to cut the hardest stones in pieces; Moses (they say) used it in hewing the stones for the two tables of the law, and in fitting the precious stones in the ephod; and Solomon in cutting the stones for the building of the temple; and is so hard that it cannot be broken by iron: and as hard is naturally the heart of man, and which becomes more so by sinning, and obstinate persisting in it, that nothing can remove the hardness of it but the powerful and efficacious grace of God: as hard as the adamant is, it is to be softened by the blood of a goat, as naturalists says<sup>f153</sup>; so the blood of Christ sprinkled on the heart, and a sense of forgiveness of sin by it, will soften the hardest heart:

*lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath seat in his Spirit by the former prophets*; the words of reproof, admonition, caution, and exhortation, which Jeremiah and others were sent to deliver to them, under the influence of the Spirit of God:

*therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts*; which brought the Chaldeans upon them, who carried them captive into Babylon.

**Ver. 13.** *Therefore it is come to pass, [that] as he cried*, etc.] The Lord by the former prophets called them to repentance and obedience:

*and they would not hear*; his words, nor obey his voice:

*so they cried*: when they were besieged in Jerusalem, and were carried captive into Babylon:

*and I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts*; so as to deliver them out of the hands of their enemies; (see <sup><302></sup>Proverbs 1:24-28).

**Ver. 14.** *But I scattered them with a whirlwind*, etc.] Denoting the fierceness of his wrath, and the strength of his fury, seen in their dispersion:

*among all the nations whom they knew not*; such as the Babylonians, Medes, and Persians, people before unknown to the Jews:

*thus the land was desolate after them*; that is, the land of Judea was destitute of inhabitants, or had but few remaining in it, after the Jews were carried captive into Babylon; for the rest, after the death of Gedaliah, fled into Egypt:

*that no man passed through, nor returned*; neither from Egypt, nor from Babylon, until the seventy years of captivity were ended; nor indeed did any from other nations pass through and fro, or settle in it, during this time, that we have any account of:

*for they laid the pleasant land desolate*; either the Israelites by their iniquities, which were the cause of it; or the Babylonians, as the instruments of God's vengeance. This pleasant land is the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey; the glory of all lands, for its great fruitfulness, and delightful situation; and especially for being the seat of the divine Majesty, and where his people dwelt, and where his temple was, and he was worshipped; (see <sup><306></sup>Ezekiel 20:6) (<sup><307></sup>Deuteronomy 8:7-10).