

“Justice and Mercy”

INTRODUCTION: For some reason Zechariah gets overlooked among the OT prophets ...

1. Perhaps because he’s the *junior partner* of Haggai. They appear in commentary after commentary as “Haggai (top billing) and Zechariah.”
2. Perhaps because his prophecy is full of *apocalyptic visions*, rather than typical prophecy.
  - a) *Apocalyptic*: having to do with visions, dreams, imagery, symbolical numbers, and cryptic language.
  - b) Three Apocalyptic sections of the Bible: *Books of Revelation*, *Daniel 7-12*, and then *Zechariah 1-6*
  - c) Zechariah’s visions, however, are interpreted for us by angels
3. And perhaps because we find it difficult to place Zechariah’s messages in their *chronological* and their *historical* context.
  - a) Haggai, for example, dates his four “words from the Lord” messages: August 29 to October 17, 520 B.C.
  - b) Zechariah’s first message comes to him on what is dated as October-November, 520 B.C.
    - (1) *In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying, (Zech. 1:1)*
    - (2) Note: the **month** is noted: the *eighth month* (which began on our October 27)
    - (3) but the **day** of the month is omitted.
    - (4) So these visions came, likely, in November, 519 B.C.
  - c) “*The Word of the Lord*” came to Zechariah a second time on February 15, 519 B.C.
    - (1) *On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying, (Zech. 1:7)*
    - (2) Giving Zechariah one message that comes in 8 visions
    - (3) 1:7 to 6:15
4. Then God speaks to Zechariah a third time: “*The Word of the Lord came to Zechariah ...*”
  - a) *In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, which is Chislew. (Zech. 7:1)*
  - b) specifically: December 4, 518 B.C.
5. Zechariah’s chapters 9-14 are undated, and appear to span a great length of time – perhaps as long as 50 years!

6. **Michael P. V. Barrett:** *The Next to Last Word*; p. 109-110.

- a) *Zechariah had a lengthy ministry spanning approximately fifty years. He dates his first series of messages (chapters 1-6) to the second year of Darius, which corresponds to Ezra's historical record of when both Haggai and Zechariah prophesied (Ezra 4:24; 5:1). This calculates to 520 B.C. Zechariah then dates a second series (chapters 7-8) two years later in the fourth year of Darius (518 B.C.). However, the tone and focus of the message seem to shift in chapters 9-14. These chapters consist of two oracles, each introduced with the assertion "the burden of the word of the Lord" (9:1; 12:1). Zechariah does not date these messages like he did at the beginning, but reading between the lines and sometimes reading the line directly (for instance, references to Greece such as in 9:13) suggest a later date. Most conservatives date this portion of the prophecy between 480-470 B.C. By this time the temple would have been completed for approximately forty years, and the people were on their way to the spiritual deadness that Malachi was going to confront in a few more years.*
- b) If this is true, and it appears to be so, then young Zechariah prophesied/ preached during
  - (1) The reign of King **Darius** (520-486 B.C.)
  - (2) The reign of **Xerxes/ Ahaseurus** (486-c. 470)
  - (3) i.e., throughout the Story of **Esther**!
- c) **Key Point:** *Zechariah's prophecies and sermons, delivered in Jerusalem, would encourage the Jews, both in Judea and in Babylon where Mordecai, Esther and the exiles still lived!*

7. Zechariah has three kinds of messages –

- a) *Visions:* 1:7-6:8
- b) *Words from the Lord:* 6:9-15; 7:1-14 and 8:1-23
- c) *Oracles:* 9-11 and 12-14 (Hebrew: *massa* = "burden")
  - (1) *The burden of the Word of the Lord*
  - (2) a phrase used only 3 times in the OT: Zech. 9:1, 12:1, Malachi 1:1
- d) **Joyce Baldwin:** *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: TOTC*; pp. 162-163

*One problem which faces every translator is the impossibility of finding in the new language exact equivalents for some of the words he has to translate. Hebrew *maššā* is one of these. It comes from the root *nāšā*, which means 'to lift up', 'to bear a burden', hence the meaning given to the word in the AV/RV 'burden', 'the burden of the word of the Lord'. Isaiah used the word as a heading to his prophecies concerning the nations (Is. 13-23). In Zechariah 9:1 'oracle' has become the accepted translation in RSV, JB, NEB.*

*Through the word 'oracle' persists for want of a more accurate term, there is more to this heading than the word would suggest. It lays stress of the prophet's sense of constraint in giving the message that follows. He would not have chosen to give it but he finds he has no option. It has been placed on him, and like the load bearer, he has to accept it and discharge his duty. Like an ambassador he is given his message, and however unacceptable it may be he cannot alter it; hence the burdensome aspect of his calling. To the rather neutral term 'oracle', therefore, must be added the idea of compulsion,*

*urgency, dread; the prophet would escape if he could from what may understandably be called his 'burden'.*

8. Zechariah preached for 50 plus years, until he was *martyred* in a time of spiritual decline ...

- a) ... murdered in the very *Temple* he'd helped Israel rebuild!
- b) Jesus himself informs us about this:

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. (Matt. 23:29-36)*

- c) Many scholars believe that this text is incorrect, and that Jesus was really referring to *Zechariah the son of Jehoiada*, killed in King Joash's time ...

(1) Circa 893-796 B.C.

(2) *Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, “Thus says God, ‘Why do you break the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you.’” But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord. Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. And when he was dying, he said, “May the Lord see and avenge!” (2 Chron. 24:20-22)*

- d) Problem? Matthew says this Zechariah the martyr was the *son of Barachiah = Berechiah*
- e) *In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying, (Zech. 1:1)*
- f) Therefore, either ...

(1) Jesus was mistaken ...

(2) or Matthew was mistaken ...

(3) or a scribe who later copied Matthew's Gospel was mistaken.

(4) **But ... not so fast!**

9. **Gleason L. Archer**, one of the leading conservative and evangelical OT scholars of our times, explains this apparent contradiction, in his book *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, pp. 338-339.

- a) *The obvious solution is to start all over again and assume that Matthew 23:25 correctly reports the words of Jesus, and that He knew what He was talking about. If so, then we*

*discover that the Zechariah he was referring to was indeed the son of Berachiah (not Jehoiada), and that he was indeed the last of the Old Testament martyrs mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures. In other words, Christ is recalling to His audience the circumstances of the death of the prophet Zechariah, son of Berechiah (Zech. 1:1), whose ministry began around 520 and ended a bit later than 480 B.C. The Old Testament contains no record of events during the first few decades of the fifth century B.C. until about 457, the date of Ezra's return to Jerusalem. But it may very well have been that sometime between 580 and 570 Zechariah the prophet was martyred by a mob in much the same way Zechariah the son of Jehoiada was some three centuries earlier. Since Jesus referred to Zechariah as the last of the Old Testament martyrs, there can be no legitimate doubt that it was the eleventh of the twelve minor prophets He has in mind. Therefore we can only conclude that the later Zechariah died in much the same way the earlier one did, as a victim of popular resentment against his rebuke of their sins.*

- b) This is Jesus Christ's main point: *The Jews had an ugly history of martyring the Prophets whose messages upset them!*
- c) *Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, (Matt. 23:31-34)*

- d) So, Zechariah, the Prophet, was martyred as well ...

*Since there are about twenty-seven different individuals mentioned in the Old Testament bearing the name Zechariah, it is not surprising if two of them happened to suffer a similar fate. In other words, if we take Matthew 32:35 just as it stands, it makes perfect sense in its context; and it offers no contradiction to any known and established facts of history. In the absence of any other information as to how the prophet Zechariah died, we may as well conclude that Jesus has given us a true account of it and add him to the roster of the noble martyrs of biblical times.*

- e) Jesus is using a literary device known as a *merismus*:

- (1) mentioning the first and last item in a series, and including everything in between
- (2) Example: Our idiom "from a to z"
- (3) God's title: "*I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the Last*" (i.e., eternal; spanning all time)

- f) So ... *Abel* was the first martyr in the OT, and the Prophet *Zechariah* was the last.

- g) **Michael P. V. Barrett:** *The Next to the Last Word*; p. 109

*Jesus makes reference to an event not recorded in the Old Testament but apparently known to those to whom He was preaching. Ironically, Zechariah was killed at the very temple that he was instrumental in rebuilding. What caused the people to turn on him we do not know, but that they did is indisputable. Jesus said so, and that settles it.*

- h) How quickly people can turn on a man of God!

10. Zechariah's third sermon (message) may well have been the beginning of the Jews turning against him ...

- a) **ESV: A Call for Justice and Mercy**
- b) Two paragraphs
- c) But three parts, each beginning with "*The Word of the Lord came to ...*"

#### I. A QUESTION ABOUT FASTING (Zech. 7:1-3)

*In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, which is Chislev. Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-melech and their men to entreat the favor of the Lord, saying to the priests of the house of the Lord of hosts and the prophets, "Should I weep and abstain in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?" (Zech. 7:1-3)*

1. December 7, 518 B.C. God gave to Zechariah a revelation in response to a question from the Jewish people in Bethel.

- a) *Bethel*: a town 12 miles north of Jerusalem
- b) Note: *Bethel had been one of the worship centers for the Northern Kingdom (Israel) after the nation divided in the days of Rehabsam (after Solomon's death)*
- c) It was an **unauthorized** place of worship, since only Jerusalem was approved by God for worship.
- d) Bethel was a place of *syncretistic* worship: Judaism mixed with Canaanite paganism.
- e) The place of the *Golden Calf* of Jeroboam ...

*Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. And he went out from there and built Peniel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah." So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Then this thing became a sin, for the people went as far as Dan to be before one. He also made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites. And Jeroboam appointed a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the feast that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made. He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that he had devised from his own heart. And he instituted a feast for the people of Israel and went up to the altar to make offerings. (1 Kings 12:25-33)*

2. When the OT prophets preached, in the days prior to the Babylonian Exile, they preached against the idolatry, injustice and perpetuated by Bethel.

- a) Hosea prophesied against Bethel ...

*You have plowed iniquity;  
you have reaped injustice;*

*you have eaten the fruit of lies.  
 Because you have trusted in your own way  
 and in the multitude of your warriors,  
 therefore the tumult of war shall arise among your people,  
 and all your fortresses shall be destroyed,  
 as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle;  
 mothers were dashed in pieces with their children.  
 Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel,  
 because of your great evil.  
 At dawn the king of Israel  
 shall be utterly cut off. (Hosea 10:13-15)*

b) Amos preached against Bethel

*“Hear, and testify against the house of Jacob,”  
 declares the Lord God, the God of hosts,  
 “that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions,  
 I will punish the altars of Bethel,  
 and the horns of the altar shall be cut off  
 and fall to the ground. (Amos 3:13-14)*

*Come to Bethel, and transgress;  
 to Gilgal, and multiply transgression;  
 bring your sacrifices every morning,  
 your tithes every three days;  
 offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened,  
 and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them;  
 for so you love to do, O people of Israel!”  
 declares the Lord God. (Amos 4:4-5)*

*For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel:  
 “Seek me and live;  
 but do not seek Bethel,  
 and do not enter into Gilgal  
 or cross over to Beersheba;  
 for Gilgal shall surely go into exile,  
 and Bethel shall come to nothing.”  
 Seek the Lord and live,  
 lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph,  
 and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel, (Amos 5:4-6)*

c) Amos was banned by King Jeroboam from preaching in Bethel:

*Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said,*

*“‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword,*

*and Israel must go into exile  
away from his land.’”*

*And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.” (Amos 7:10-13)*

3. **Remember:** Bethel was a *sacred place* because their Jacob has his famous dream of “Jacob’s Ladder,” and had established a stone (memorial) in that place.

*Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder[a] set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.” (Genesis 28:10-22)*

4. But ... God’s decision to establish his Temple in Zion (Jerusalem) had made Bethel an illegitimate place to worship; It became a cult-center.
5. When the exiles returned to the Promised Land, 223 men from Bethel returned there and sought to reclaim Bethel for God.

*Now these were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried captive to Babylonia. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town. They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. The men of Bethel and Ai, 223. (Ezra 2:1-2, 28)*

6. The people of Bethel sent an official delegation to meet with Zechariah, led by **Sharezer and Regem-molech**.
7. They wanted Bethel to be *reclaimed* for the Lord God, and they wanted to know how they should practice **fasting**.
  - a) This question arose in 518 B.C.
  - b) half-way through the rebuilding process from 520-516 B.C.
  - c) Early difficulties had been overcome and the work was well on its way – the end was in sight.

- d) So ... a question arises: "*Should I weep and abstain in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?*" (7:3)

8. After the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C., Jews regularly gathered at the site of the ruined temple to fast, mourn and pray. For example ...

- a) *On the day after the murder of Gedaliah, before anyone knew of it, eighty men arrived from Shechem and Shiloh and Samaria, with their beards shaved and their clothes torn, and their bodies gashed, bringing grain offerings and incense to present at the temple of the Lord. (Jer. 41:4-5)*
- b) The Book of *Lamentations* had probably been composed by Jeremiah for such fast days ...

*How lonely sits the city  
that was full of people!  
How like a widow has she become,  
she who was great among the nations!  
She who was a princess among the provinces  
has become a slave.  
She weeps bitterly in the night,  
with tears on her cheeks;  
among all her lovers  
she has none to comfort her;  
all her friends have dealt treacherously with her;  
they have become her enemies.  
Judah has gone into exile because of affliction  
and hard servitude;  
she dwells now among the nations,  
but finds no resting place;  
her pursuers have all overtaken her  
in the midst of her distress.  
The roads to Zion mourn,  
for none come to the festival;  
all her gates are desolate;  
her priests groan;  
her virgins have been afflicted,  
and she herself suffers bitterly. (Lam. 1:1-4)*

- c) Four fast days commemorated these sad events:

- (1) The Fasts of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> months (v. 3, 5)
- (2) And the Fasts of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> month (8:19)
- (3) *Thus says the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace. (Zech. 8:19)*

- d) **Anthony R. Peterson:** *Haggai-Malachi: Apollos OT Com;* pp. 196, 209



- (1) *The fast of the fifth month is one of four fasts mentioned in 8:19. While there is no direct biblical evidence, it is thought that this fast was instituted to recall the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 586 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar. The first question expands their question about the fast of the fifth month to include the fast of the seventh month (cf. 8:19), thought to commemorate the murder of Gedaliah, whom Nebuchadnezzar had appointed governor after capturing Jerusalem.*
- (2) *Two additional fasts are referred to. Again, these are not mentioned elsewhere in the OT, but scholars suggest that the fast of the fourth month commemorated the day on which the Babylonian army breached the walls of Jerusalem, and the fast of the tenth month recalled the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem.*

- e) *Their question is obvious: Since the exile is over, since we have repopulated Jerusalem, and since we are rebuilding the Temple, do we need to keep the fasts we've practiced for the past 70 + years of captivity and exile?*
- f) *"... for so many years ... for these seventy years ..." (vv. 3, 5)*

9. This delegation asks the "priests of the house of the Lord of hosts and the prophets ...

- a) The Priests were to interpret the Law of God (Moses)

*And you shall come to the Levitical priests and to the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall consult them, and they shall declare to you the decision. Then you shall do according to what they declare to you from that place that the Lord will choose. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they direct you. According to the instructions that they give you, and according to the decision which they pronounce to you, you shall do. You shall not turn aside from the verdict that they declare to you, either to the right hand or to the left. The man who acts presumptuously by not obeying the priest who stands to minister there before the Lord your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall purge the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear and not act presumptuously again. (Deut. 17:9-13)*

- b) The Prophets, because they proclaimed judgment in Bethel ...

*Then Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence. (Jeremiah 48:13)*

10. These men went to Jerusalem to "entreat the favor of the Lord" (Literally: "to stroke the countenance of YHWH")

11. Zechariah's answer surprises (? upsets?) them!

## II. A REMINDER FROM THE PROPHETS (Zech. 7:4-7)

*Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me: "Say to all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted? And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves? Were*

*not these the words that the Lord proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous, with her cities around her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited?’’ (Zech. 7:4-7)*

1. Paraphrase: **The Contemporary English Version**

*It was then that the Lord All-Powerful told me to say to everyone in the country, including the priests: For seventy years you have gone without eating during the fifth and seventh months of the year. But did you really do it for me? And when you eat and drink, isn't it for your own enjoyment? My message today is the same one I commanded the earlier prophets to speak to Jerusalem and its villages when they were prosperous, and when all of Judah, including the Southern Desert and the hill country, was filled with people.*

2. Gist: “Answer their question for them, for all in Judea (*the people of the Lord*), and the *Priests*.”

- a) The delegation from Bethel
- b) All the Expatriates returned to Judea
- c) The Priest: those who interpret the Law.

3. Zechariah answers a question with **three questions**:

- a) *Say to all the people of the land and the priests, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted? (Zech. 7:5)*
- b) *And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves? (Zech. 7:6)*
- c) *Were not these the words that the Lord proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous, with her cities around her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited? (Zech. 7:7)*

4. The first question pushed into their **motives** –

- a) *Say to all the people of the land and the priests, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted? (Zech. 7:5)*
- b) **Ralph L. Smith:** *The heart of the matter concerning fasting is motive and attitude. A fast should be an outward sign of an inner disposition of humility, and a heart turned toward God (WRC: vol. 32; p. 224)*
- c) Was their motive not merely *self-pity*?

5. The second question probed into their **reason for living**:

- a) *And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves? (Zech. 7:6)*
- b) **Westminster Shorter Catechism #1** – “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”
- c) *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31)*
- d) Was their reason for living not merely *self-gratification*?

6. The third question examines the **heart of their religion**.

- a) *Were not these the words that the Lord proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous, with her cities around her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited? (Zech. 7:7)*
- b) Zechariah points to previous prophets who spoke about fasting, religious ritual and the neglect of righteousness.

- (1) *“Cry aloud; do not hold back;  
lift up your voice like a trumpet;  
declare to my people their transgression,  
to the house of Jacob their sins.  
Yet they seek me daily  
and delight to know my ways,  
as if they were a nation that did righteousness  
and did not forsake the judgment of their God;  
they ask of me righteous judgments;  
they delight to draw near to God.  
‘Why have we fasted, and you see it not?  
Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?’  
Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure,  
and oppress all your workers.  
Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight  
and to hit with a wicked fist.  
Fasting like yours this day  
will not make your voice to be heard on high.  
Is such the fast that I choose,  
a day for a person to humble himself?  
Is it to bow down his head like a reed,  
and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?  
Will you call this a fast,  
and a day acceptable to the Lord?  
“Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of wickedness,  
to undo the straps of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover him,  
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? (Isa. 58:1-7)*
- (2) *With what shall I come before the Lord,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?*

*Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"*  
He has told you, O man, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:6-8)

(3) *I hate, I despise your feasts,  
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.  
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,  
I will not accept them;  
and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,  
I will not look upon them.  
Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.  
But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:21-25)*

(4) *Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests;  
wail, O ministers of the altar.  
Go in, pass the night in sackcloth,  
O ministers of my God!  
Because grain offering and drink offering  
are withheld from the house of your God.  
Consecrate a fast;  
call a solemn assembly.  
Gather the elders  
and all the inhabitants of the land  
to the house of the Lord your God,  
and cry out to the Lord. (Joel 1:13-14)*

*"Yet even now," declares the Lord,  
"return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
and rend your hearts and not your garments."  
Return to the Lord your God,  
for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;  
and he relents over disaster. (Joel 2:12-13)*

(5) *The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous  
and his ears toward their cry.  
The face of the Lord is against those who do evil,  
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.  
When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears  
and delivers them out of all their troubles.  
The Lord is near to the brokenhearted*

*and saves the crushed in spirit. (Ps. 34:15-18)*

(6) *Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord that he had spoken to him. And Jeremiah ordered Baruch, saying, "I am banned from going to the house of the Lord, so you are to go, and on a day of fasting in the hearing of all the people in the Lord's house you shall read the words of the Lord from the scroll that you have written at my dictation. You shall read them also in the hearing of all the men of Judah who come out of their cities. It may be that their plea for mercy will come before the Lord, and that every one will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and wrath that the Lord has pronounced against this people." And Baruch the son of Neriah did all that Jeremiah the prophet ordered him about reading from the scroll the words of the Lord in the Lord's house. (Jeremiah 36:4-8)*

(7) *And it shall be said,  
 "Build up, build up, prepare the way,  
 remove every obstruction from my people's way."  
 For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,  
 who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:  
 "I dwell in the high and holy place,  
 and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,  
 to revive the spirit of the lowly,  
 and to revive the heart of the contrite. (Isa. 57:14-15)*

c) *If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:26-27)*

7. Zechariah is reminding Israel that they were judged by God and sent into captivity for **two reasons**:

- a) Their sins against God: *Idolatry and Immorality.*
- b) Their sins against one another: *Injustice and Oppression.*

8. Fasting may deal with our hearts toward God but what about our hearts toward one another – the two cannot be separated!

- a) *And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matt. 22:37-40)*
- b) *For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:11, 16-18)*

- c) *If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:20-21)*

9. **Ralph L. Smith:** *Micah-Malachi: WBC; vol. 32; p. 226*

*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.*

10. **This truth** is the ...

... meaning of the Law of the Priests apply to us ...

... message from God the Prophets preach to us ...

### III. AN ANSWER FROM THE LORD (Zech. 7:8-14)

*And the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart." But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears that they might not hear. They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the Lord of hosts. "As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear," says the Lord of hosts, "and I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations that they had not known. Thus the land they left was desolate, so that no one went to and fro, and the pleasant land was made desolate." (Zech. 7:8-14)*

1. Zechariah answers for God and reminds Israel about the pre-exilic sins of their forefathers. He tells them three things.
2. **Note:** He does not answer their question ...

*saying to the priests of the house of the Lord of hosts and the prophets, "Should I weep and abstain in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?" (Zech. 7:3)*

3. He answers God's Three Questions (Zech. 7:5, 6, and 7)

- a) **First:** What is your **motive** for fasting? Was it self-pity or self-righteousness?

(1) *Say to all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted? (Zech. 7:5)*

(2) *The Answer: The kind of fasting God requires is not to abstain from food but from sins against others.*

(3) *And the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart." (Zech. 7:8-10)*

(4) He mentions **five groups** of people whom God cares for

- (i) *the widow* (women on their own)
- (ii) *the fatherless* (orphans)
- (iii) *the sojourner* (the stranger)
- (iv) *the poor* (the needy or oppressed)
- (v) “another” = your neighbor

(5) These are the ones previous prophets called Israel to help –

- (i) *How the faithful city  
has become a whore,  
she who was full of justice!  
Righteousness lodged in her,  
but now murderers.  
Your silver has become dross,  
your best wine mixed with water.  
Your princes are rebels  
and companions of thieves.  
Everyone loves a bribe  
and runs after gifts.  
They do not bring justice to the fatherless,  
and the widow's cause does not come to them. (Isa. 1:21-23)*
- (ii) *Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight  
and to hit with a wicked fist.  
Fasting like yours this day  
will not make your voice to be heard on high. (Isa. 58:4)*
- (iii) *Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of wickedness,  
to undo the straps of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover him,  
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? (Isa. 58:6-7)*

b) **Second:** What is your **reason for living**? Self-satisfaction or glorifying God by obedience to His Word?

- (1) *And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves? (Zech. 7:6)*
- (2) The Answer: God really wants your life to be built around His revealed will and word, and to love God by obeying Him. (“If you love Me you will keep my commands.”)

(3) *But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears that they might not hear. They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. (Zech. 7:11-12a)*

(4) *Gist: Repeated disobedience hardens the heart so that it cannot love God.*

(5) **H.C. Leopold:** *Zechariah; p. 138.*

*Such persistent refusal of God's words as v. 11 depicted must produce a hardened state of heart as here described, when it becomes so utterly immune to influences of the Word as to warrant its being likened to a "diamond" (shamir) which was from days of old recognized as the hardest substance.*

(6) The **hardened heart** has been the plague of mankind –

- (i) *For you are our Father,  
though Abraham does not know us,  
and Israel does not acknowledge us;  
you, O Lord, are our Father,  
our Redeemer from of old is your name.  
O Lord, why do you make us wander from your ways  
and harden our heart, so that we fear you not?  
Return for the sake of your servants,  
the tribes of your heritage. (Isa. 63:16-17)*
- (ii) *When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:  
"Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,  
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"  
Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,  
"He has blinded their eyes  
and hardened their heart,  
lest they see with their eyes,  
and understand with their heart, and turn,  
and I would heal them."  
Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.  
(John 12:36b-41)*
- (iii) *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,  
"Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,  
on the day of testing in the wilderness,  
where your fathers put me to the test  
and saw my works for forty years.  
Therefore I was provoked with that generation,  
and said, 'They always go astray in their heart;*



*they have not known my ways.'*

*As I swore in my wrath,*

*'They shall not enter my rest.'"*

*Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said,*

*"Today, if you hear his voice,*

*do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." (Heb. 3:7-15)*

(7) Each time we disobey God or ignore His word, a piece of our heart (*i.e.*, *soul*) calcifies and dies!

(8) Heb. 3:13 ... *"hardened by the deceitfulness of sin ..."*

c) **Third:** What is the **heart of your religion?**

(1) *Were not these the words that the Lord proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous, with her cities around her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited? (Zech. 7:7)*

(2) Answer: The Heart of True Religion in Revelation: The Word of God by His prophets and apostles.

(3) *Therefore great anger came from the Lord of hosts. "As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear," says the Lord of hosts, "and I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations that they had not known. Thus the land they left was desolate, so that no one went to and fro, and the pleasant land was made desolate." (Zech. 7:12b-14)*

(i) God called Israel and they refused to hear.

(ii) God got angry with Israel's resistance.

(iii) So, when Israel called to God in prayer He refused to hear.

(iv) As a result: They were scattered by Assyria, taken Captive by Babylon, their land lay desolate for 70 years!

(4) *Real things happen to us in response to how we respond to God's Word.*

(5) Obedience to God is the heart of true religion: *"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams." (1 Sam. 15:23)*

(6) *And Samuel said,*

*"Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?*

*Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.*

*For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.*

*Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,  
he has also rejected you from being king.” (1 Samuel 15:22-23)*

- (7) *Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. (James 1:19-26)*

4. **Barry G. Webb:** *Zechariah: BST; p. 119*

*As sinful beings we have an almost inevitable tendency to move from the true center of things to the periphery, and from the depths to the surface. In short, to lose the heart of the matter and to turn even religious observance into a cover for an unrepentant lifestyle. In other words, to become religious hypocrites. Fasting, with its outward show of self-denial, is perhaps the classic example of a religious rite that can go badly wrong if we are not constantly reminded what the heart of true religion really is.*

Conclusion: And what was true for Israel in OT times is also true for Christians in NT Times ...

1. This Word from God to Zechariah is part of God's living Word ...
  - a) *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Heb. 4:12)*
  - b) living ... active ... pertinent to American Evangelicals in America, in 2017.
2. It is easy for us to build our religion around the **Seven Basic Tenants** of Reformed Christianity in America:
  - a) *Justified by Faith* (Sola Fide)
  - b) *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Sola Scriptura)
  - c) *The Covenant of Grace* (Sola Gratia)
  - d) *The Centrality of Christ* (Solus Christus)
  - e) *The Regulative Principle of Worship* (Soli Deo Gloria)
  - f) *Confessional Christianity* (Westminster Standards)
  - g) *Basic Biblical Ethics* (Manhattan Declaration)
    - (1) *The Sanctity of life in the Womb*
    - (2) *The Moral Integrity of Marriage*
    - (3) *The Religious Freedom of the Conscience*

3. These are **absolutely** God-fearing, Christ-honoring, Spirit-given truths! They shape our “most holy religion.”
4. But they also call us to more – **Justice and Mercy!**
  - a) *“Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.” (Zech. 7:9-10)*
  - b) Law and order in our streets *and* protection of poor people from police brutality.
  - c) Upholding “traditional” (Biblical) marriages *and* protecting battered wives.
  - d) Securing our nation’s borders against dangerous, illegal aliens (terrorists) *and* caring for the sojourner in our midst.
  - e) Defending religious liberty for Christians in America *and* advocating for all persecuted people around the globe – regardless of their religion.
  - f) Avoiding the “voodoo science” around false reports of “global warming” *and* practicing Biblical stewardship in protecting our environment.
  - g) Advocating Republican policies protecting States’ Rights and individual freedoms *and* embracing Democratic positions calling us to care for the poor and the forgotten.
  - h) Embracing the Grace of God *and* seeking to obey the Law of God.
  - i) *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)*
  - j) *But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:24)*
  - k) *And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” (Acts 16:31)*

5. **Illustration:** *An open letter to President Donald Trump (attached)*

*Dear President Trump and Vice President Pence,*

*As Christian pastors and leaders, we are deeply concerned by the recently announced moratorium on refugee resettlement. Our care for the oppressed and suffering is rooted in the call of Jesus to “love our neighbor as we love ourselves.” In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus makes it clear that our “neighbor” includes the stranger and anyone fleeing persecution and violence, regardless of their faith or country.*

*As Christians, we have a historic call expressed over two thousand years, to serve the suffering. We cannot abandon this call now. We live in a dangerous world and affirm the crucial role of government in protecting us from harm and in setting the terms on refugee admissions. However, compassion and security can coexist, as they have for decades. For the persecuted and suffering, every day matters; every delay is a crushing blow to hope.*

*Since the inception of the refugee resettlement program, thousands of local churches throughout the country have played a role in welcoming refugees of all religious backgrounds. Ministries to newly arrived refugees are ready, and desire to receive many thousands more people than would be allowed under the new executive order.*

*As leaders, we welcome the concern expressed for religious minorities, including persecuted Christians. Followers of Christ face horrific persecution and even genocide in certain parts of the world. While we are eager to welcome persecuted Christians, we also welcome vulnerable Muslims and people of other faiths or no faith at all. This executive order dramatically reduces the overall number of refugees allowed this year, robbing families of hope and a future. And it could well cost them their lives.*

*As Christians, we are committed to praying for our elected officials. Our prayer is that God would grant President Trump and all our leaders divine wisdom as they direct the course of our nation. We also pray for the vulnerable individuals whom their decisions directly impact.*

*Sincerely,*

6. This isn't easy. It calls us to a life of *self-denial, self-assessment and self-disclosure*. And to a life of *loving God, loving others and loving God's truth* – even when it hurts

7. But such is the cross of Christ –

- a) It reaches up into God's grace and down into our justification
- b) and it reaches out to others in **Justice** and **Mercy**
- c) For this is the life of Christ we share in ...

*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)*