

**"Empty Worship"**

**Part 1**

**Zechariah 7**

**Introduction:** So far in our study we have looked at two sections of the book of Zechariah.

- **The Call to Repentance**
- **The 8 Night Visions**

The purpose behind both of this was to motivate the Jews to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The 8-night visions were capped off with the crowning of Joshua who was a type of Jesus Christ who will one day return to this earth and establish His Millennial Kingdom.

As we move on, we have come to chapter 7, and it will be in this chapter as well as chapter 8 that we will see questions that were asked and God's answers to the questions. These will be questions that deal with fasting.

**I. The Question**

**Notice Zechariah 7:1**

Here in this verse we see that we are now 2 years after the 8-night visions.

**Zechariah 1:1**

*In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying,*

By the time the events of this chapter take place the temple construction is well underway.

**Notice Zechariah 7:2-3**

Here we see that the Jews sent 2 men as well as several others to the priests with a question about fasting. They had a spiritual question, so they came to the spiritual leadership. What was the question?

Since the temple was being rebuilt, should they continue to weep and fast as they did for the last 70 years for the temple? You see that since the day that the Babylonians destroyed the temple 70 years ago, they had set aside that very day as a day to fast as they would remember the events and the destruction of the temple. Now God had not established this day of fasting, this was something that they choose to do on their own.

Listen to the words of Thomas L. Constable

*"Whoever these men were, they wanted to know if they should continue to 'weep' and 'abstain' from food (i.e., to fast), which had become traditional but which the Mosaic Law did not require. The only fast that the Mosaic Law prescribed was on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29; 23:27-32) ...The question was a reasonable one."*

So the Jews had set aside the very day that the temple was destroyed as a day of remembrance and fasting. Now there is something here that I want to share with you concerning the temple which the Jews were building in Zechariah's day. This would be the very temple that Jesus Christ would come to in His earthly life and then after His resurrection in AD 70 this temple would be destroyed by Titus and the Romans. Tradition tells us that this temple was destroyed on the very same day that the Babylonians destroyed Solomon's temple.

Listen to the words of Josephus;

*"So Titus retired into the tower of Antonia, and resolved to storm the temple the next day, early in the morning, with his whole army, and to encamp round about the holy house; but, as for that house, God had for certain long ago doomed it to the fire; and now that fatal day was come, according to the revolution of ages; it was the tenth day of the month Lous [Ab], upon which it was formerly burnt by the king of Babylon; although these flames took their rise from the Jews themselves, and were occasioned by them..."*

## II. The Answers from God Part 1

God is going to respond to the question 4 different times.

### Response #1

#### Notice Zechariah 7:4-6

Here God responds with a challenging question. When you fasted did you do it for yourself or for Me?

The Jews were actually observing 2 dates. The fast on the 7<sup>th</sup> month was to commemorate the assassination of Gedaliah.

#### 2 Kings 25:25

<sup>25</sup> *But it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, came, and ten men with him, and smote Gedaliah, that he died, and the Jews and the Chaldees that were with him at Mizpah.*

The entire fast however had been a ritual and it was empty. There was no spiritual value in what they were doing because it was not for God, but it was for themselves. What does this mean?

They were observing the date and the fast to make themselves feel good. They were trying to impress God and earn His favor by fasting. They were looking around at those who did not participate, and they saw themselves as being more spiritual. All of this was empty worship.

**Application:**

Let me ask you a question; "Why do you come here to church?"

You should be coming here because you desire to worship God and to grow in your knowledge of Him.

**Ephesians 4:11-16**

*<sup>11</sup> And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*

*<sup>12</sup> For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

*<sup>13</sup> Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:*

*<sup>14</sup> That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;*

*<sup>15</sup> But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:*

*<sup>16</sup> From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*

Many people who attend church do it as a ritual. They only go through the motions. They come because they feel in coming, they are doing their duty for the week. That is nothing but ritual. Others come so that they can feel good about themselves because there are many that they know who do not go to church and therefore when they go it makes them feel more spiritual. If you are not coming here because you want to know more of God and

His Word and to worship Him, then you are just going through the motions as the Jews were, and it is all emptiness. This is religion not a relationship. Let me show you what this looks like.

**Genesis 4:1-7**

*And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.*

<sup>2</sup> *And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.*

<sup>3</sup> *And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.*

<sup>4</sup> *And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:*

<sup>5</sup> **But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.** *And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.*

<sup>6</sup> *And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?*

<sup>7</sup> *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.*

**Notice Zechariah 7:7**

Here God tells them that they needed to remember the Words that were spoken by the prophets before the Babylonian captivity. Let me show you what God had said.

**Isaiah 1:9-16**

<sup>9</sup> *Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.*

<sup>10</sup> *Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.*

<sup>11</sup> *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.*

*<sup>12</sup> When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?*

*<sup>13</sup> Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.*

*<sup>14</sup> Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.*

*<sup>15</sup> And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.*

*<sup>16</sup> Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;*

**Amos 5:21-24**

*<sup>21</sup> I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.*

*<sup>22</sup> Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts.*

*<sup>23</sup> Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.*

*<sup>24</sup> But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.*

**Hosea 6:6**

*<sup>6</sup> For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*

Now let me explain what was happening with the Jews of Zechariah's day. They were fasting on two days of the year to remember King Gedaliah and they were fasting on the day of the temple destruction. But the problem was they were focused upon what had happened/the results and not the CAUSE. They remembered the death of the king and the destruction of the temple, but they forgot why it happened.

They had gone into the captivity, and they returned and remembered the destruction and death, but they were repeating the very same things which their fathers did that brought the death and destruction.

**Application:**

The Jews were in a very dangerous place. They had gone through the captivity and were now back in their home land and things were turning around. This therefore caused them to drop their guard and forget what had caused the captivity just 70 years before.

One of the most dangerous times for a believer is right after a time of testing and trials. In the testing we learn to lean upon the Lord and we cling tightly to Him. But after the testing we tend to relax and drift away. That is our old sin nature, and these are things we must guard against. We can go through a time of chastening and remember the pain of the chastening but forget what brought it upon us to begin with. We then have the tendency to fall back into the sin that God brought us out of. **MANY TIMES THE MOST DANGEROUS TIME IS AFTER A VICTORY.**

After the victory over Jericho we read the following.

**Joshua 7:1-5**

*But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.*

<sup>2</sup> *And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai.*

<sup>3</sup> *And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few.*

<sup>4</sup> *So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai.*

<sup>5</sup> *And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.*

Then after the victory over Ai we read the following.

**Joshua 9:**

<sup>3</sup> *And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai,*

<sup>4</sup> They did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up;

<sup>5</sup> And old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy.

<sup>6</sup> And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us.

<sup>7</sup> And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a league with you?

<sup>8</sup> And they said unto Joshua, We are thy servants. And Joshua said unto them, Who are ye? and from whence come ye?

<sup>9</sup> And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the LORD thy God: for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt,

<sup>10</sup> And all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites, that were beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, which was at Ashtaroth.

<sup>11</sup> Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spake to us, saying, Take victuals with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say unto them, We are your servants: therefore now make ye a league with us.

<sup>12</sup> This our bread we took hot for our provision out of our houses on the day we came forth to go unto you; but now, behold, it is dry, and it is mouldy:

<sup>13</sup> And these bottles of wine, which we filled, were new; and, behold, they be rent: and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the very long journey.

<sup>14</sup> And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD.

**Conclusion:**

If God takes you through chastening to remove sin never forget that the sin removed leaves a vacuum and it must be filled with something healthy, or a sinful practice will develop again.