Zechariah 7:1-7

**Digging Deeper in the Word**

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***Zechariah 7:1–7***In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of YHWH 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 YHWH, saying to the priests of the house of YHWH **tseva’ot** and the prophets, “Should I weep and abstain in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?” Then the word of YHWH **tseva’ot** 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 YHWH proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous, with her cities around her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited?”

1. When does YHWH speak these words to Zechariah in relation to the when the previous eight visions took place? What year was this according to our calendar today?

Darius ruled from 522 BC to 486 BC. This message came in year 4 of King Darius, on day 4, month 9 (Chislev), which was 518 BC. The prior visions were in year 2 of Darius, on day 24, month 11. So this is nearly two years later.

1. Look Ezra 6:15. When did Zerubbabel actually complete temple reconstruction? So at the time of the events of Zech 7 had the temple been completed yet?

***Ezra 6:15***and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

The temple was completed in 516 or 515 BC (probably in spring of 515 BC, at the end of year 6 of Darius’ reign). It was dedicated the next month at Passover, the beginning of year 7 of Darius’ reign.

So the temple was still over 2 years away from its completion at the time of this word from YHWH to Zechariah.

1. Is there anything special about the date that Scripture mentions: day 4 month 9 ? Why do you think this date is specifically mentioned?

I can’t find anything special about this date. The fact that a specific date is recorded is often meant to show the reader that the event actually took place.

1. Where is Bethel located in relation to where Zechariah was?

Bethel is 10 miles to the north of Jerusalem, where Zechariah was living.

1. Sharezer and Regem-melech were sent from Bethel. Do we know anything about these men? What do their names mean? Can we infer anything about these men based on their names?

Sharezer = Hebrew שַׂר־אֶ֕צֶר **sar-‘etser** “prince of things stored / treasurer”  
שַׂר **sar** means prince, leader; אֶ֕צֶר **‘etser** possibly from אָצַר **‘atsar** “to store up, accumulate,   
 place someone in charge of store / treasurer”  
Note that some say Sharezer means “prince of fire” from אֵשׁ **esh** “fire” but this doesn’t make any sense since the Hebrew consonants are quite different.

Regem – melech = Hebrew רֶ֥גֶם מֶ֖לֶךְ **regem-melekh** “friend of the king”  
מֶ֖לֶךְ **melekh** “king”; רֶ֥גֶם **regem** probably means “friend”

There is absolutely no proof of this, but one thought is that these names may actually be titles for community leaders in Bethel, such as “treasurer” or “friend / associate / ambassador”. We know nothing more about these people.

Note that some suggest that these names were Babylonian, however there is no proof of this. They could just as easily be Hebrew, and I believe the arguments for Hebrew origins are actually stronger.

1. Where were the men going? Why would they be going there, in view of your answer to question #2 above?

To Jerusalem to the house (temple) of YHWH. The temple had not yet been completed, but apparently the temple area still functioned as the religious center, with priests and prophets living and working in the immediate vicinity.

1. The men were going to “entreat the favor of YHWH”. What does this mean? Note that the same phrase is used in Zech 8:21, 22; 1 Sam 13:12; and Mal 1:9.

***Zechariah 8:21***The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the favor of YHWH and to seek YHWH tseva’ot; I myself am going.’

***Zechariah 8:22***Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek YHWH tseva’ot in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of YHWH.

***1 Samuel 13:12***I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of YHWH.’ So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering.”

***Malachi 1:9***And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says YHWH tseva’ot.

This literally means “to request before YHWH” or “to request from the face of YHWH”. It usually meant to ask for YHWH’s blessing in a particular matter. Often the person would offer a sacrifice as part of worship, and then hope to receive a blessing, sometimes guidance, direction, or a particular word from YHWH regarding the particular matter being brought before him.

1. What was the question they wanted to ask YHWH? What happened in the fifth month that they were weeping and abstaining” about? Look at 2 Kings 25:8-9. Why were they asking this particular question at this time?

***2 Kings 25:8–9***In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month—that was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. And he burned the house of YHWH and the king’s house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down.

They were fasting and mourning in sorrow each year during the fifth month – the month of Av, because that was the time the temple was destroyed by Babylon in 587 BC.

They wanted to know if they should continue this annual time of mourning and fasting, apparently because the temple was now being rebuilt. Perhaps they should be rejoicing instead!

1. What does this tell you about the progress being made in rebuilding the temple? From this, would you think that the previous visions communicated by Zechariah 2 years earlier had any impact?

It would seem that progress was being made in completing the temple. So much so that it was nearing completion and the people needed to know if they should still be mourning its destruction every year as they had been doing the past ~70 years.

So apparently the messages of Zechariah (and Haggai) must have been heeded at least to some extent.

1. YHWH spoke his answer through Zechariah. He mentions two fasts… one in the fifth month and also one in the seventh month. What was the fast in seventh month? See Lev 23:27. Also see 2 Kings 25:25 for a less likely possibility.

Probably the fast of Yom Kippurim (Day of Atonements) on the day 10 of month 7. This was the most solemn day of the year, and the only fast of the appointed times, most of which were feasts not fasts!

***Leviticus 23:27***“Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the Lord.

Note that In Lev 23:27, **afflict** = HB עָנָה **‘anah**. “to humble, afflict, deny oneself” This Hebrew word is clearly linked to fasting in Isaiah 58:3, Isaiah 58:5, Ezra 8:21, and also Ps 35:13.

***2 Kings 25:25***But in the seventh month, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, of the royal family, came with ten men and struck down Gedaliah and put him to death along with the Jews and the Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah.

Another less likely possibility is that the seventh month fast originates from from 2 Kings 25:25 and Jer 41:2 with the killing of Gedaliah, the Hebrew “king” appointed by the Babylonians. This event happened shortly after the destruction of the temple, and would have been a significant event associated with the exile. It is possible (although I think doubtful) that the seventh month fast could be in commemoration of this event. I think, however, that is unlikely given that the fast of Yom Kippurim was considered the most important day of the year. This fast would have overshadowed anything else. It would seem that if a lesser fast of the seventh month were being referred to, it would have been stated as such clearly, since the default understanding would have to refer to the more important fast.

1. It seems like the word of direction from YHWH, given to Zechariah to communicate to the people from Bethel, was in the form of a rhetorical question. What was YHWH really saying to them?

Are you really fasting for me, or are you just putting on a show to make it look like you are religious people??

1. Compare this message to that of the prophet Isaiah 200 years earlier. Look at Isaiah 1:11-17 and Isaiah 58:3-6. What is being communicated about the worship and fasting of God’s people in these passages?

***Isaiah 1:11–17***“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says YHWH; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.

***Isaiah 58:3–6***‘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 YHWH? “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?

Their sacrifices and their fasting are not for God, but rather for themselves. And their requests will not be heard. Their behavior is not acceptable to God.

1. Given the content of this message from YHWH, why do you think YHWH introduced the fast of the seventh month? Remember the question had only to do with the fast of the fifth month, but in the answer from God, He brings in the seventh month as well. Why?? What happened on Yom Kippurim and was that day supposed to represent?

Yom Kippurim was the one and only day when the high priest went into the holy of holies, into the very presence of YHWH, to make atonement for the sins of the nation. This was to be THE day like no other day when people humbled themselves before God, recognizing their sinful human state and their need for YHWH’s grace and forgiveness.

YHWH brings this day of fasting into his reply to say that this is the kind of fasting He is looking for, and this is obviously not the kind of fasting they are doing.

1. In Zech 7:6, YHWH goes on to ask another rhetorical question, this time not about fasting, but about eating and drinking. This probably hints at feasting rather than fasting. Given the context of YHWH referring to the fast of one of the appointed times, Yom Kippurim, what may he be referring to here? Look at the rest of Lev 23, and specifically Lev 23:6 and Lev 23:34. What is YHWH saying, and how does this tie in with the previous verse (Zech 7:5)?

He seems to be saying that both their fasting and their feasting are being done for themselves, not for YHWH. In other words, all of the Appointed Times they are celebrating are being done for others to see, instead for YHWH.

1. What is YHWH saying in Zech 7:7 ? What Scriptures might He be referring to?

He is saying, “The message I am giving you now through Zechariah is no different than the message I gave you through the former prophets in the good old days before the exile.”

For example, Isaiah 1 and Isaiah 58.

1. Given these words from YHWH, what can we now conclude about the response of the people to Zechariah’s visions and prophesies two years earlier?

They may be have resumed rebuilding the temple, but their hearts are still not in the right place. He is still waiting for them to “repent, and return to me” so He can return to them. There outward actions may appear to be in obedience to God’s commands, but their hearts are not yet aligned with His.

1. How are you living this same way? What is the Father wanting to say to your heart through this message?