

And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Darius, that the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, even in Chisleu; " When they had sent unto the house of God Sherezer and Regemmelech, and their men, to pray before the LORD, And to speak unto the priests which were in the house of the LORD of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?

⁴ Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did you at all fast for me, even to me?

⁶ And when you did eat, and when ye drank, did you not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?

⁷ Should you not hear the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when men inhabited the south and the plain?

⁸ And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, Thus says the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they should not hear. Yes, they made their hearts as an immovable stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts.

¹³ Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, says the LORD of hosts: But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, so that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate. (Zech. 7:1-14)

Dear brothers and Sisters

Chapter 7 begins another aspect of Zechariah's prophecy showing that Yahweh does indeed remember as implied by the prophet's name. Two years have passed since the prophet's night visions, it was the fourth year of Darius the Great's reign. The construction of the Temple had not yet been completed. The troubles experienced by Joshua and Zerubbabel were resolved and the building of the Temple continued and the people were pleased with the progress and moreover they rejoiced in that Yahweh had blessed them with plentiful harvests. The Jews who had returned to Bethel decided that in view of the blessings they had received, the fasts they had kept seemed redundant and so they sent Sherezer and Regem Melech to ask the priests in Jerusalem about it. They asked if the Fast observed for the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the fast commemorating the murder of Gedaliah should still be kept. God sent an answer through Zechariah, and Yahweh asked them if when they fasted on these occasions, did they do it as unto Him? In fact the fast was used to satisfy their own discomfort that Yahweh had forsaken them for the wickedness of the nation, but it was not sincere. They refused the warnings of Jeremiah both before the destruction of Jerusalem and after that destruction when they insisted on going

down to Egypt. They didn't fast to show their sorrow for their rebellion and that of those who perished. No in their so called fasts they ate and drank unto themselves taking pleasure in their own self-pity as Jews still do today. The fact was and is that Yahweh the God of heaven had already given them fasts and feasts and these had not been kept as they had been instructed. There was no need for them to enquire about the fasts they had concocted to salve their own consciences. They needed to call to mind the instructions they had already been given. They had the God given Law of Moses with all the instructions needed for the people of God at that time. Yet the fasts that they asked about provided some usefulness by giving the people an opportunity to assess their own behaviour and to consider if the attitudes that resulted in the calamity that fell on Judah and Jerusalem were still apparent in their own conduct. Zechariah instructed them to seek the Word of God for the answers to their questions and this is what they would have found in Deuteronomy, in Samuel and in Micah:-

“And now, Israel, what doth the Yahweh your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Yahweh, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?” (Deut. 10:12-13)

“And Samuel said, Hath 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 hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of Yahweh, he has also rejected you from being king. (1Sa 15:22-23)

“Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or 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 hath shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic 6:7-8)

These scriptures also support the Apostle Paul's instruction in connection with breaking of bread:- “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of *that* cup. For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks condemnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. (1Co 11:28-31)

During their history Israel departed from the true and righteous worship of God and their ways did not accord with Solomon's prayer, but continually the

prophets called them to repentance. Jeremiah, in one of his appeals, drew attention to the nation's treatment of strangers. Israel could demonstrate the works of repentance by changing their attitudes to strangers: "If you thoroughly amend your ways ... oppress not the stranger ..." (Jer. 7:5–6). There was no amendment of their ways at this time and in later years the prophet lamented the fact that this departure from God was not followed by repentance, for instead Israel were punished by being forced to serve strangers; "Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens" (Lam. 5:2). This was a direct fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecies (5:19; 22:1–5). Other prophets were to have similar experiences, for example Ezekiel (7:20–21), Obadiah (10–12), and Zechariah (7:9–14). These servants demonstrated the justice as well as the severity of God, for they also warned strangers of dire consequences that would befall them if they sinned against the God of Israel (Ezek. 14:6–8; 14:1–3); and the prophets also spoke of a time when strangers would serve Israel (Isa. 61:5; Jer. 30:8).

So Zechariah reminded the messengers from Bethel "Should you not listen to the words which the LORD had cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when *men* inhabited the south and the plain? The answer is, Yes they should have listened. But in the centuries that followed the descendants of Jews from Babylon made the same mistakes over again. Consider the Parable of the Good Samaritan, assuming that the beaten man lying half dead on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a Jew, as inferred in the parable, Jesus reveals to us a heart-warming dimension of human kindness; the Good Samaritan did the very thing that was commanded the Jews by God through the prophet Zechariah, but in which they fell short: "Thus says the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassion every man to his brother" (Zechariah 7:9). Some 540 years later Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount urging the people to "love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Here, in the parable, was a truly striking illustration of the eloquent words of James, "mercy rejoices over judgment", as the Good Samaritan responded so mercifully to the needs of his wounded "neighbour".

The Jews who perished in Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem had made their hearts as an adamant stone and because they would not hear His voice from the prophets, when they cried God would not hear, and Yahweh of Armies scattered them with a whirlwind among the nations. He did it again in A.D.70 Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed as Jesus predicted not one stone was left upon another and the Jews were scattered among all nations of the world, not only so but the land of Israel became desolate, as Jesus predicted

“...trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. So in Zechariah 7:14, Yahweh makes mention of the fact that he had scattered the house of Israel with a *whirlwind* among all the nations whom they knew not and Jesus warned them of exactly the same thing. Now the times of Gentiles are rapidly approaching their end and the prophets are unanimous in their warnings of turmoil and devastation, and huge disasters coincident with the appearing of the Messiah to exercise dominion in the earth. War is to exterminate vast multitudes, whose carcasses are left to rot upon the ground. The slain of the Lord are to be many, from one end of the earth to the other. When the Great Prince arises for the deliverance of Israel out of the hand of all her enemies, there is, according to Daniel, to be **a time of trouble such as never was** since there was a nation upon earth. The populations are likened, in Isaiah’s prophecy, to the sour grapes of the earth, and they are to supply material for the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

“For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away *and* cut down the branches.⁶ They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them.⁷ In that time shall the present be brought unto the LORD of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the LORD of hosts, the mount Zion. (Isa 18:5-7) This, no doubt, has a look of dreadful severity about it; but the history of mankind from the beginning affords no hope that the nations will ever slide into a condition of purity and righteousness, and general harmony with the will of God nor by any law of moral development and progress at present known to man. Not until God’s judgments are abroad in the earth will the inhabitants learn righteousness.”

DHH