

Zechariah 7:1-7 –Right Form; Wrong Motive

Young, TSK, HebrewLexicon, Handfuls, JFB, Poole, Geneva, Clarke, Barnes, Trapp, Henry, Delitzsch, INT, Gill, Calvin?

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: There are some people who love to get married in a church. They are not active in any church. They don't go to church. But they want to be married in a church. To them, it makes their marriage special and it makes people think they are religious. They think that God is pleased because they were married in a church and would bless them. Lies! All lies.

Ritual 礼仪 actions – actions without any spiritual meaning is nothing to God. You will hear today how Judah tried that lifestyle and how God rejected it.

Our headings are:

The Review of Formalistic 律法主义式 Fasting

The Rejections of Formalistic Fasting

The Response to Formalistic Fasting

Our goals are: That you will learn that worship (prayer, fasting, baptism, etc.) must not be done as simple rituals, but must be accompanied with the right heart in order to please God.

The Review of Formalistic Fasting

1 Now in the **fourth year of King Darius** it came to pass that the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, on the fourth day of the ninth month, Chislev, 2 when **the people sent Sherezer, with Regem-Melech** and his men, to the house of God, to pray before the LORD, 3 and to **ask the priests** who were in the house of **the LORD of hosts**, and the prophets, saying, "**Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?**"

1. Many Jews still stayed in Babylon after they were freed by the Medo-Persians to return home because they had settled lives there. They didn't want to sell their homes, break off friendships (texting wasn't as popular then), and unsettle their children. These **Jews who stayed in Babylon wanted to know if they should continue to fast as they did during the time of the captivity.** So they sent 2men to inquire:
a. Sherezer meant "Prefect of the Treasury."
b. Regem-Melech meant "Official of the King."

2. These men went to the temple to find the answer. They **knew where to look for instructions.** Even though the temple was only half-built, the priests and prophet were already working there...praying, teaching, and making sacrifices. **A few translations say the men were from Bethel the town, rather than going to Bethel, which is literally translated "house of God.** But there is no evidence that these men were from Bethel, and there is evidence that they were going to the "house of God" in Jerusalem. So it wasn't the proper name "Bethel" but the meaning of the name "house of God."

3. Why were the Jews concerned whether they should continue fasting 禁食 and praying? They had continue to fast 20+ years after they were freed, but they figured since the temple was half built, they might be able to stop with the fasting and prayer. **They lost the purpose of prayer.** Could they not have easily fasted and prayed for other things...like for the completion of the temple or freedom from their enemies? Simply put, **they wanted to keep a formalistic connection with the faithful Jews -** keep their "name in good standing," while getting out of their duties before God. They acted **like God were fooled by their outward actions.** (Like the people who want to get married in a church but who don't have a relationship with God.)

4. This fasting that they were trying to get out of was on the 10th day of the 5th month, and it had a unique beginning.
Jeremiah 52:12 Now in the **fifth month, on the tenth day** of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, who served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. 13 He burned the house of the LORD and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire. 14 And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls of Jerusalem all around.

This fasting was in remembrance of the pillaging 抢劫 and destroying of the temple and important places in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. So with the temple incomplete, one would think they would still want to keep fasting!

5. Lessons:

a. There are blessings in using forms in worship. You know what you must do and you do it. Churches that lack form are chaotic 混乱. They love their ceremony (their noise and entertainment, which are man-focused) more than the substance.

b. At the same time, regularly take stock of your worship and see if there are some things that you simply do as a ritual, rather than from faith and love for the Savior.

c. If you want instruction, you have to go the church where the ministers are. Don't go to Oprah to learn child rearing. Psalm 27:4 One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple.

The Rejection of Formalistic Fasting

4 Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, 5 "Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: 'When you fasted and mourned in the **fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me** — **for Me?**'

1. How would the Lord respond to Jewish formalism – the love of form, but rejection of substance?

a. The Lord rejected their ritual fasting because they were fasting for own sick satisfaction – to feel and look spiritual. They were not fasting to please the Lord. The Lord's repetition of the phrase "for me" confirms this selfishness.

Proverbs 21:27 **The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination 可憎**; How much more when he brings it with wicked intent!

God wanted them to examine their consciences 良心.

Henry: **To fast, and not fast to God, was to mock him and provoke him...!**

1 Corinthians 10:31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

This contemptible way of prayer (form but not with conviction) was what made Daniel angry during captivity.

Daniel 9:13 "As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; **yet we have not made our prayer before the LORD our God**, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth.

b. The Lord rejected their lives because their prayer did not match their lives.

Isaiah 58:3 ... "In fact, **in the day of your fast you find pleasure**, And **exploit all your laborers**. 4 Indeed you fast for **strife and debate**, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. **You will not fast as you do this day, To make your voice heard on high.**你们禁食，却互相争竞，以凶恶的拳头打人。你们今日禁食，不得使你们的声音听闻于上。 5 Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul?

Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth 麻布 and ashes? **Would you call this a fast**, And an acceptable day to the LORD? 6 "**Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free**, And that you **break every yoke?** 7 Is it not to **share your bread with the hungry**, And that you **bring to your house the poor** who are cast out...

2. The Lord added another fast that they had corrupted. (You'll see 2 more later.) **What was significant about this 2nd fast?**

This was to remember how they had murdered Gadaliah, the governor appointed by the Babylonians. **There was no regret!** Jeremiah 41:1 Now it came to pass in the **seventh month** that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family and of the officers of the king, **came with ten men to Gedaliah** the son of Ahikam, at Mizpah. And there they ate bread together in Mizpah. 2 Then Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men who were with him, **arose and struck Gedaliah** the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with the sword, **and killed him whom the king of Babylon had made governor** over the land. 3

They surely did not show signs of true regret.

3. Jesus later vehemently rejected ritual fasting in his Sermon on the Mount. The Jews fasted on Monday's and Thursdays... because Moses went up the mountain on a Thursday and came down on a Monday. But Jesus said:

Matthew 6:16 "Moreover, **when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites 假冒为善的人**, with a sad countenance. For they **disfigure their faces** that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 "so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Jesus warned that formalism was condemnable. The Jewish leaders put on a sad face and refused to wash their faces. They put ashes on their heads and discolored their faces. Jesus called out their hypocrisy.

6 'When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves?

4. God then made an even more expansive rebuke. He said that though the people of the captivity ate and drank, they did not think of the Lord. They provided for their table and ignored the table in temple and table of the poor and needy.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion 那清洁没有玷污的虔诚 before God and the Father is this: **to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.**

5. Lessons:

a. You might be the best dressed person here, but if you don't have a deep love for Jesus and your neighbor, you

worship is invalid. God sees through fake worship. God despises formalistic worship. No one is commendable to God. That's like a pig dressed up as a princess.

d. So know well the danger of trusting in formalistic worship. Obedience and love must be tied to rituals.

The Response to Formalistic Fasting

7 'Should you not have obeyed the words which the LORD **proclaimed through the former prophets** when Jerusalem and the cities around it were **inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland** were inhabited?' 当耶路撒冷和四围的城邑有居民，正兴盛，南地高原有人居住的时候，耶和華借从前的先知所宣告的话，你们不当听吗？

1. God required the Jews to get a clean and pure heart when fasting and praying (and worshipping). This means that pure worship is not natural as **God had to work in his people through his Word and Spirit.** John 4:24 "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

2. If the Jews restored proper worship, God would restore them to their promised place of blessing. Even the dry southern places would become prosperous again.

Jeremiah 32:44 'Men will buy fields for money, sign deeds and seal them, and take witnesses, in the land of Benjamin, in the places around Jerusalem, in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the lowland, **and in the cities of the South; for I will cause their captives to return,**' says the LORD."

Yes, God had to take the prosperity away and send them into captivity, but there was hope. There is always hope with God.

3. Lessons:

a. Should you have written prayers? There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. The Lord read prayers. The Jews always had form prayers. Form prayers can help you from repetitions (I just, I just...glory...glory...glory...) and straying in thoughts. Remember, **you are talking to the King! But you have to focus on your heart that prays these prayers.**

b. Your prayers and worship must be sincere. If it is not from faith, it is sin.

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near with a true **heart in full assurance of faith,** having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Conclusion:

Judah kept multiple fasts for about 90 years. Fasting in deep repentance 悔改 wasn't bad, but that was not what they did. When Judah fasted, they fasted out of routine, rather than from a truly godly sorrow for sin.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. It is better to obey than to fast in repentance.

2. If you do have to fast (right action), it must be for the glory of Christ (right motive). Show your dependence on God...rather than live for a show!

3. This principle of right action and right motive applies to all of worship. Worship must not be a rote act. You must **consciously think of the glory of God** when you do worship. Don't repeat the lines of the confession of sins without thinking of you and Christ. Don't sing the Psalms only trying to keep up with the music. That would be like clanging cymbals. Don't do Profession of Faith 信仰告白 because everyone else is doing it. Do all what you do, not from formalism, but from a desire to honor the Lord.

4. You are only able to do this because Jesus changed your heart. But even Christians can fall into formalistic worship. So you have to **guard your hearts against this and focus on honoring the Savior – not promoting of yourself.** When you do this, you will be blessed by God, and will then be properly equipped to serve in the kingdom of the Lord.

Finally: Do you feel the conviction of your sins and want to worship God properly? Why not ask God to make you his child. Then you will have access to the throne of heaven forever.