

PostExilicProphets 21-08-12b

We're ready now to resume our study in Zechariah, picking up at chapter seven. Let's read this. Keeping in mind the preceding context, what should we have in our minds at this point? Remember the Zechariah scroll was pretty much just one continuous message, didn't have the convenience of chapter and verse divisions and such.

So in the perusal of this prophecy, people would have had that night of visions centering on this twofold identity of priest and king with God in his heaven, all knowing, with a perfect plan, with his goodness at the fore, not just his intrinsic goodness, but his goodness expressed toward his people. That's something we should keep in our minds at all times is God is good. God is gracious.

God is for us. And because he's for us, nobody can be against us. And it is his righteousness and his justice expressed in the Lord Jesus Christ that is central.

And those who appreciate those truths, who live in their light are going to be close to God in the kingdoms to come. With that comes a condition being part of that memorial, being laid up like a crown in the temple, a pillar in the temple. Remember the names that are written on those faithful Philadelphians, the wonderful ascriptions that are eternally a part of our identity.

If we are faithful in this momentary light affliction, we gain an eternal weight of glory. And that is a part of it is to be laid up like that crown. So when you come to chapter seven, this is now two years later.

You remember at the beginning of the visions, it was in the second year of Darius chapter one, verse one, and everything up through the middle of chapter six. And then through what we've just seen took place in that second year. Now, when you come to chapter seven, in the fourth year of King Darius, this is about 518 BC, 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 Kislev.

The people sent Sherezer with Regim Melech and his men to the house of God to pray before the Lord 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? Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me saying, 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 70 years, did you really fast for me? For me, when you ate and when you drank, did you not eat and drink for yourselves? 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 low land were inhabited? Well, there is quite a lot here. It's more than it appears. It sounds like it's just a question, but the more you look at it, the more interesting it gets.

We'll talk about the date another time. I want to get right into the meat of this. All dates are

important, all years, all months, all days of the month.

It's always important. We've seen this throughout Ezekiel and his prophecies. We saw it in Haggai and what happened before and after the assembly feasts in the fall.

But here, let's dive right in. You can see you've got a one, two, and three there, text note in verse two. And there's all kinds of textual ambiguities here.

The word Bethel is in there. And some people think, well, the city of sent these guys. We're not sure that Regem Melech is a name.

It might be a title. You know, Regem sounds like Latin for king and Melech is Hebrew for king. And Sherezer, who the heck is he? Or Sar-ezer, and Sar means prince.

Etzer means, so it's like the prince of help and the king king. I mean, who knows what all this means. And for the moment, we're just going to bypass all of that.

It's something we can reference a bit later. But the real issue here is not who sent whom. The real issue is the question.

How do I know that? Because God's response is to the question. God doesn't make an issue. Now, he has made an issue out of out of Zerubbabel.

He made an issue out of Joshua. He made an issue out of Heldai and Tobijah and Judiah and Josiah and Zechariah. Those men have been made an issue by God, right? These guys never mentioned again.

It's and even the text doesn't seem to preserve their names very well or where they came from or what they're doing. What it does say is they came. There are a couple of leaders.

We're not sure who are these titles. Are they governors? Are they, you know, local authorities of some kind? But a couple of guys and their men come. What do they want to do? They come to the house of God to pray before the Lord.

Now, remember, the house of God is still under construction. There's saw horses and tape and workmen and picks and shovels. And the thing is, is not finished till yet.

This is 518, the fourth year of Darius. And the temple is far from complete. This is the reason God sent Haggai and Zechariah to light a fire under these people about the temple.

More about that in a moment. To the house of God, such as it is, but it's really Bethel. Are they from Bethel? Are they sent to that? There's really not a house of God at this point.

So did they come to the temple as near as we can tell? We'll just kind of go with what the King James says here for now that they came because they want to pray before the Lord and talk to the priests. And that's more likely to be the house of God, Bait El than it is to be that they came

from Bethel, which wouldn't tell us a lot. So we'll go with the King, new King James here that they came to the house of God to pray before the Lord, to ask the priests who are in the house of the Lord of hosts and the prophets.

Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years? There's quite a lot of detail here. Notice that we've got priests, multiple priests, priests in the plural who are at the house of God and available for questioning. Otherwise, these guys would not have come.

So their surface reason for coming is, well, we came to pray before the Lord, but Hey, while we're here, we've got a question for you, religious authorities. So they ask the priests and the prophets plural. Now, who are these prophets? Well, it's not Zachariah.

It doesn't appear to be Haggai. There are prophets. And this goes back to a notion that there was a school of the prophets going all the way back to the days of Samuel.

And we've seen him in Kings and so on. The guy that lost his ax head and the bitter soup, you know, that was poisonous. And these prophets is Saul also among the prophets.

Even in the days of Saul, there seemed to be this group of guys that were kind of running a Bible school and trying to be representatives and spokesmen for God. So this group has now reconstituted and is at the temple and the priests are at the temple. These guys are not good guys.

There's already nascent Phariseism at no sooner do they lay the foundation and start building the temple that formalistic, ritualistic, religious constructs of manmade origin are starting to form and starting to accrete. How do I know this? Am I just being, you know, belligerent and prejudiced and unkind? You would have to say that God is being prejudiced, belligerent and unkind because God ignores all these guys. Notice the question is asked to the priests and the prophets at the house of God.

What should we do about these expressions of mourning? So we'll just say that these are names for purpose of convenience. So we've got Sharizer, he's one guy, and we've got Regimelech is the other guy. We could call him, you know, Cher and Reggie.

But these two guys have come from somewhere with their men. They're kind of arrived in pomp and circumstance and they are coming to pray to the Lord here. And while they're there, their real reason for coming is to ask this question.

Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years? What is this about? In the first place, there is not a word for fast here. The first word is Baka, B-A-K-A-H, which means to weep. The other word is Nazar, N-A-Z-A-R, and it means to separate oneself.

So I'm mourning and doing something unusual. I'm not doing my usual thing. It doesn't specifically say fast.

We're going to get the word for fasting later, but this delegation doesn't really use that word. We don't know really much about fasting. The Law of Moses has a lot to say about feasting.

It has little to nothing to say about fasting. It seemed to be something that individuals would do on their own recognizance. You remember when David and Bathsheba have their firstborn son and he gets sick and David fasts, lays prostrate on the ground and he refuses to eat.

That's in 2 Samuel 12. It is something that is thought that on the Day of Atonement there came to be a tradition of fasting on the 10th of the month in the fall feasts, the Day of Atonement. But that whole ritual is defined in Leviticus 16 and the word fast is never used in there.

Israel just decided, well, wouldn't this be a way to afflict your souls? Do you need to refrain from food for that? Maybe not. But you find afflicting the soul in 1629 and again in 1631 of Leviticus. But the idea of fasting wasn't a formal requirement anywhere in the law.

It's kind of surprising. It's kind of like a required offering if you sin is not in the law. It doesn't say, if you commit a sin, go take a sacrifice down to the tabernacle or to the temple.

There is no sin offering per se. If you look closely, there are some corporate offerings. There are some specific offerings.

But remember when we went through the Levitical offerings in Leviticus 1 through 6 or 7 and some of the instructions of the priests in later chapters, the one that's traditionally considered the sin offering, the whole burnt offering in Leviticus 1 is actually a dedication offering. It is the whole burnt offering represents my desire to symbolically express my whole dedication to God. And it being accepted was the issue.

But especially after the exile, fasting really became a strong tradition in Israel. And really the only place you can find a reference to fasting before the exile is in Jeremiah 14, verse 12, to whom we have just been looking in the first session. And in that context, Jeremiah 14, 12 says, when they fast, I will not hear their cry.

And when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. I will consume them by the sword, by famine and by pestilence. So the one pre-exilic reference to fasting as we're going to see it in this context is not happy.

It's not God being happy about the fast. It's quite the opposite. And this is what we're going to see here in this context.

There are four different fasts that are going to be mentioned in the reply when we read this verse five, say to all the people of the land and to the priests, notice, say to all the people of the land and to the priests who got left out, who's not officially mentioned, but they were questioned by Scherzer and Rejamelech. Who did they pose the question to? The prophets and the priests. God says, tell the priests and everybody else.

Who does he ignore? The self-appointed, self-designated prophets. They're not mentioned. They're just left out.

And this tells me that they're not legit. By the way, if they were legitimate, who would be answering this question? If you go to the prophets of God, plural and pose a question, what's their alleged function and job to speak the word of the Lord to the people? They don't get a word in edgeways here. Who delivers God's answer? God's prophet Zechariah.

So the word of the Lord of hosts came to me saying, 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 70 years, did you really fast for me, for me? So the fasts that are mentioned here, and some of them you have to look a little further in the context here to find it. Flip forward to chapter eight and look at verse 19. The fasts that they're talking about are just representative.

They had actually four different fasts. They had one in the fourth month, see that in eight 19, the fast of the fourth month. Then they had a fast in the fifth month with his, which is mentioned in the question, the fast of the seventh month that's mentioned in the question and the fast of the 10th month.

So four different fasts were observed during the exile. Now, how many of these fasts are commanded by God or commended by God or suggested by God is the fast of the fourth month. What these were is, um, the fourth month was a commemoration of the final breaching of the walls of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

When the walls of Jerusalem were destroyed, that occurred in the fourth month, the fast in the fifth month. This was the destruction of the temple. Remember five 86 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, he destroys Jerusalem, breaks down his walls, and within a month the temple is destroyed.

That was the fast of the fifth month. The seventh month commemorated the murder of Gedaliah, who was the governor of Jerusalem, uh, that Nebuchadnezzar put in place of the king memory, burned the king's eyes out and took him and his sons into and he put Gedaliah in there. Then Gedaliah was murdered.

And then the 10th month was to remember the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem that preceded all of these bad happenings. So are these fasts remembering good things or bad things? They're not only bad things, but they are parts and pieces of the judgment of God upon his people for their wicked recalcitrant, unrepentant hearts. So you would think, well, to remember these judgments would be a good thing.

They're all made up feasts or fasts rather, um, to afflict their souls and beat their chests and, and, uh, say I'm really taking these to heart. What a disaster. This is like, uh, remembering 9-11 every year or remembering the tsunami that hit, uh, overseas or remembering, um, the crash of, uh, an airliner where many people were lost or remembering the Beirut bombing where you lost so many sailors and Marines or some other tragic disaster, uh, commemoration, uh, for a

long time here in Oklahoma, the, the Oklahoma city bombing every year would be, uh, remembered.

And, uh, I'm sure there are people who still do particularly those who lost loved ones, but during the captivity, all they could think of is, wow, look at the, this series of tragedies, the, the, uh, siege began. Then the walls were breached. Then the temple was destroyed and then get a lie was murdered.

And they had a commemoration of each of these. So these guys are asking, and it sounds like a legitimate question. Well, now that we're back, should we continue? The, these men are asking God's representatives, the priests and the alleged prophets, should we keep observing these, these mourning times? And they just give the, uh, in our chapter, they just give the fifth and seventh month.

Uh, those, those were the biggies, the destruction of the temple and the murder of the governor, which was the destruction of the last vestige of their self-government. Uh, so do we still weep on these occasions? So the word of the Lord comes to Zachariah verse five, when you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month during those 70 years, did you really fast for me, for me? This is a matter of what do you look at? Are you looking at the tragedy and saying, what a tragedy? What at the end of an era, the destruction of Solomon's temple that had stood for so many years, the last vestiges of our independence and self-government, the, the siege of our capital city and, and so on commemorating those days. What are you really thinking about? The simple way of posing this issue is not what you do.

Why do you do what you do? You think about Jesus sitting at the temple and watching the widow with the two mites put in everything she had and then Pharisees and self-righteous people coming and putting in large bags of coins into the temple coffers. There is giving, but just because it is given, is it, is it equal? Is it equal in the sight of God? It's not what you do. It is why you do it.

So God through Zachariah makes this point. It's not that you're weeping. I never told you to weep and mourn on these occasions.

Ezekiel, Daniel, did they ever tell the people, Oh, commemorate these dates. This is, this is manmade religion, mad made, hair shirt, self-flagellation. I'll, I'll humble myself in commemoration of God's judgment and God will somehow be pleased.

God says, did you have me in mind when you were doing these things or were you just sorry for everything you lost? Criminals are always sorry when they get caught. They're sorry when they're in prison. They're sorry when they're punished.

White collar criminals are sorry when they are fined or when they are stripped of their power and their position or whatever. Everybody is, is sad when judgment falls on wrongdoing, but does it reach the point of repentance, recognition of wrongdoing and change of mind, seeing

oneself before God? So this is God's question. This 70 years worth, you do these, these four fasts times 70 years.

That's a lot of fasts. That's 280 fasting occasions in Babylon. And God says, was I any part of that? That they had become a ritual, people that grew up in Babylon and didn't even remember the siege or the destruction of the temple or the murder of Gedoliah or the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem.

It's just, Oh, we, you know, this is, it's like a lot of our holidays have become today. Washington's birthday. It's just, well, I can't, I can't get to the bank today.

Uh, does anybody remember Washington and why the country wanted to recognize him and honor him on his birthday? Does anybody, you know, they just mashed it in with president's day. He's not even got his own day anymore. And there would be no country without George Washington.

You know, my feelings about George Washington. He is the only human being that I've got a statue of, uh, except Beethoven, um, for different reasons, but, uh, an amazing man. But the commemoration of George Washington on our money and in our holidays is completely hollow without appreciation, without knowledge, without understanding.

Uh, it's, it's, it's bankrupt. That's what was happening here. And God points it out as always God strikes right to the heart of the matter.

And you know, you, you fast, but is it for me? And of course the answer to that question is a resounding, no, God has nothing to do with it. Then in verse six, when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves? We're it's in italics there, but this is the true sense of it. When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink? It's for your benefit.

Do you remember the God who provides the God who preserves the God who makes promises and keeps them? The God who defines who you are and why you are here when you eat and drink. It's one of the reasons we like to, to remember God at the beginning of a meal, because these people didn't remember God when they ate and when they drank and notice all of the italics at the beginning of verse seven, do you not eat and drink? If you, if you take all the italics out of verses six and seven, when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink? Not the words, which the Lord proclaimed through the former prophets, you're eating physical food. You are not living by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

You have to wonder if a passage like this didn't come to Jesus mind when he was talking to Satan, turn these stones into bread. It's not the bread. It's not eating or not eating.

God's word is food. God's word is drink. When Jesus was at the, at the well at Jacob's well, up in Samaria, I have food to eat that, you know, not of, he told the woman, I've got water that when you drink it, it is unto eternal life.

What was that food? And what was that drink? It's the word of God. And that's what this is trying to get at here. When you eat and when you drink and you've got a double negative here, it is not, it is not the words, which the Lord proclaimed through the former prophets.

And this is a little bit of a jab at the current prophets who are not prophets. Why didn't you listen to the words of the former prophets? You're coming to these fake prophets asking for permission to quit doing your rituals that you made up yourself is the blind leading the blind. Who cares what they say? And who cares about your rituals that you made up that focus on the wrong thing for the wrong purpose.

You are not, not eating and drinking the words that the Lord proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous. You wouldn't have been in captivity. There would have been no need for the siege and the breaching of the walls and the destruction of the temple and the murder of get a liar.

If you had listened, if you had imbibed the word of God, God didn't prescribe a fast, God prescribed feasts. And those feasts were designed to be a feast, not just of ritual, but a feast of the truth of his word commemorating his grace and his provision and his deliverance Passover, a commemoration of God's grace, Pentecost, a commemoration of God's grace in, in causing the crops to grow so that there is a harvest. The feast of trumpets calling attention to God day of atonement, calling attention to God and his grace and atoning for sin, the feast of booths, God, the promise of his dwelling together with him, Emmanuel, God with us, whether it's in the pillar of fire and cloud, whether it's in the, the glory filling the temple, whether it is in the personal coming of the Messiah, God with us feasts.

But when you are celebrating feasts, you don't incorporate the word of the Lord that he gave you through his prophets, starting with Moses and on down. If you had listened when the land was inhabited and the cities were prosperous, judgment would not have come. And now you're worried about how to commemorate the judgment.

Why don't you go back to the words and alleviate and obviate the need for judgment and those failures that brought those judgments about. So then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah saying, thus says the Lord of hosts. It doesn't matter about your rituals.

It doesn't matter about which month you decide to remember a judgment, execute true justice, show mercy and compassion, everyone to his brother. What did we see in revelation three 12 in the first session? Who is it that has the honor of being a memorial in God's temple? Like the crown that those men created, who is it that is going to have those names, the name of God, the name of the city of God, the name of the new Jerusalem and the Lord Jesus, his own new name inscribed on them as a memorial in the temple. Who is it? Phila, Delphia, Philos Adelphos show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother.

Notice it doesn't say go out and make provision and set up charities and fully support widows and orphans, the aliens and the poor. What does it say? Don't oppress them. You do not have to

take them all in and support them.

Just don't oppress them. There was oppression of the poor in post-exilic Israel. It was already they had just been oppressed.

They had just been captives. They had just been servants and slaves. And they come back.

And it's like the parable we just saw Jesus deliver of the unforgiving servant who had been given much forgiven much and could not forgive his fellow servant a small amount. Here, these recently released captives, recently released workers and slaves and oppressed people are already turning around and oppressing the vulnerable. Now, there's a lot of talk about who's vulnerable in our society.

The thought is good. The practice and execution is done in the wrong ways for the wrong reasons in most cases, but sensitivity to the vulnerable is a biblical principle. And we are not to oppress the widow, the orphan, the stranger, or the poor.

Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother. If you're planning evil, you're not expressing love. Right? These were the commands that God gave Israel by the former prophets.

He didn't say, be sure that you observe the rituals. Be sure that you follow the feasts. Be sure the Levites do the sacrifices properly.

Be sure that you pay the tithe. Be sure that you don't shave the corners of your beard and that you think about those rituals that God gave Israel. Don't touch that which is associated with death.

Don't eat unclean animals. Was God really concerned about diet and hygiene? When God said, don't act like the nations, don't look like the nations, tie tassels of a particular color onto the corners of your garments. Don't cut yourselves for the dead.

Don't, don't mar and deface yourselves. All of those ritual requirements in the law. Was God really concerned about those rituals being fulfilled? Or was he concerned about people appreciating what those rituals signified and executing those rituals, looking at the word of God and the truth of God, the grace of God, the power of God, the mighty actions of God in deliverance and sustaining and giving them promise and hope of the future.

The rituals were supposed to be the means to an end, not an end in themselves. These rituals are doubling meaningless because God never instituted them. And all they are is people feeling sorry for themselves about getting judged.

God says, why don't you go back to the words that were delivered to your fathers, the words that they ignored that brought about this judgment. These words were delivered to them, execute justice, show mercy and compassion. Everyone to his brother.

God is saying, this is what I told your ancestors when the land was populated before judgment

came. But verse 11, they refused to heed shrugged their shoulders and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. You look around the world today.

You look around our country today. You look at our culture today. What are people doing with the words of God that are not demanding giving of money or wearing a hair shirt or a lot of tedious requirements? God hasn't put a heavy yoke on the human race.

What does God want people to do? True justice, mercy and compassion, everyone to his brother. Don't oppress the weak and vulnerable. Don't plan evil against others for a reason.

Not just because this is a wonderful altruistic, moral and ethical way to live. There's a lot of unbelievers who have who try to practice these qualities, but like the rituals, what were these things supposed to reflect? What was their purpose? Why did God want his people to execute true justice and to act in these ways? Why? Just because I'd love to have people that love each other and don't act unkindly. What was God's purpose? What is Israel's purpose? Why are they on the earth? They are God's people identified with God and they are a light to the Gentiles.

Gentiles looking at Israel are supposed to see God and come to God. Come all ye ends of the earth, worship, be saved. What's our function now? Is God happy if we're just good, moral, kind people? We don't oppress widows and orphans and we're moral and ethical.

What's our purpose? We are a light in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation shining to the world to communicate God's justice, God's mercy, God's love, God's grace. It's not an end in itself anymore than the tassels and the rituals were an end. I would just like a certain number of animals sacrificed every year.

So bring these sacrifices, have a lamb in the morning, lamb in the evening. That way your pastures won't be eaten down by sheep. Was that God's purpose? They communicate a greater truth.

Even our goodness is supposed to be the means of communicating things about God, not just being good people. Their world is full of good people whose intentions paved the road to hell. They refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, stopped their ears so they could not hear.

They made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and words which the Lord of hosts had sent by his spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the Lord of hosts. Therefore it happened that just as he proclaimed and they would not hear, they called out and I would not listen, says the Lord of hosts.

Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, your sins and hid his face from you so that he will not hear. I scattered them with a whirlwind among all nations, which they had not known. Thus the land became desolate after them so that no one passed through a return for they made the pleasant land desolate.

It's pretty clear that we have the same opportunity. We've been given the same great and

precious promises of God for reward and blessing. If we feed on his word, if we are refreshed by his spirit and if we do what we do because God has said it's God's word, it's not an abstract morality, not an abstract ethic, not just being good people.

It is a reflection of who we represent. That was Israel's mistake, forgetting. They're doing these rituals thinking, well, if I perform rituals, I'm a good person.

A, you made up the rituals and it's your own standard righteousness. And B, what about the word of the Lord? That's why we're a Bible church. That's why we dig in deep here to try to let God's word sink into our souls so that the Holy Spirit can use it to make us body of Christ, representative of God on this earth so that others can ask us a reason for our hope.

They can see our good works and glorify our father who is in heaven. They see the good and recognize that there is a good God that we represent. Good in and of itself is going to perish with the using.

Good that communicates the goodness of God is eternal and it has those eternal rewards mentioned in Revelation. Well, we'll pick up our study here. We have a lot more to say about Zechariah 7 and into chapter 8 next time, but we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the power of your word. It is supernatural in its effect on our souls. It renews our minds.

It gives us strength. It gives us perspective. We pray that as God, the Holy Spirit clarifies and brings to our mind these truths that we can see opportunities to put it into application, to live in a way that pleases you and honors our savior, the Lord Jesus.

We pray it in his name. Amen.