

Book of Zechariah

Chapter 7:1-14

¹ In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, which is Chisleu.

The fourth year of King Darius ... > (Utley) This would possibly be December 7, 518 BC

Barnes > Two years after the series of visions, shown to him, and two years before the completion of the temple.

Benson > (very important information which will help us to understand chapters 7 and 8) In this and the next chapter is contained a third and distinct revelation made to Zechariah, about two years after the former; of which the occasion and matter are as follows: A considerable progress having, by this time, been made in the rebuilding of the temple, and affairs going on pretty smoothly, the hopes of the Jewish nation began to revive, and a deputation was sent to inquire of the priests and prophets, whether it was God's will that they should still observe the fast, which had been instituted on account of the destruction of the city and temple by the Chaldeans. To this inquiry, the prophet is directed in these chapters how to answer; and his answer is given not all at once, but, as it seems, by piece-meal, and at several times. For here are four distinct discourses that have reference to this case.

² *Now (the town of) Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regemmelech and their men to seek the favor of the LORD, ³ speaking to the priests who belong to the house of the LORD of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, "Shall I weep in the fifth month and abstain, as I have done these many years?"*

Bethel > (Petterson) Petterson > *Bethel* is understood to be the subject, but this is not clear. LXX (Septuagint) and Tg (Targum) separate Bethel from Sharezer and understand it as the place to which the delegation was sent, understood either as 'Bethel' or 'the house of God' (Cathcart and Gordon 1989: 199).

The **Septuagint** translates this as > ²*And Sarasar and Arbeseer the king and his men sent to Bethel, and that to propitiate the Lord,*

To seek the favor of the Lord > (Utley) (The Hebrew grammar for *favor*) denotes the cessation of hostility (cf. **Dan. 9:13** ... next page), as well as the presence of God's blessing and acceptance (cf. Ps. 119:58). This same VERB is used in **8:21-22** (next page) for what the nations will seek from God.

Daniel 9:16 > ¹³ *As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought **the favor of the LORD** our God by turning from our iniquity and giving attention to Your truth.*

Zechariah 8:21, 22 > ²¹ *The inhabitants of one will go to another, saying, “Let us go at once to **entreat the favor of the LORD**, and to seek the LORD of hosts; I will also go.”* ²² *So many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.’*

Shall I weep in the fifth month ... > (Wiersbe) To commemorate events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, four new fasts had been added to the religious calendar by the Jewish exiles in Babylon (see Zech. 8:19): one in the tenth month, when the Babylonians had begun the siege of the city; another in the fourth month, when the city walls had been broken through; one in the fifth month, when the temple was burned; and the fourth in the seventh month, when the Jewish governor Gedaliah had been assassinated (see Jer. 41).

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.

Wiersbe > The word *tradition* simply means *that which is passed along*. It comes from a Latin word that means *to hand over*. The basic doctrines of the Christian faith must be handed from generation to generation (2 Tim. 2:2; 1 John 1:1–3; 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6; Jude 3), but the customs and traditions of the early church don’t carry the same authority as the inspired Word of God.

Wiersbe > The danger of tradition is that it can easily turn into traditionalism. “Tradition is the living faith of the dead,” wrote theologian Jerislav Pelikan; “traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.” Traditionalism means going through the outward motions instead of honoring the Lord from our heart; it means participating in a religious event but failing to have an inner spiritual experience.

Merrill > What may have appeared to be an innocent question about the propriety of fasting was instead a question fraught with hypocrisy, as YHWH’s response puts beyond any doubt.

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 these seventy years, was it actually for Me that you fasted?’**”

The word of the LORD of hosts came > (Constable) This is the first of four messages that Zechariah received from the Lord that bear on the question just raised. That there were four separate messages seems clear since each one begins with the same preamble: "**The word of the Lord came**" (Zechariah 7:4; Zechariah 7:8; Zechariah 8:1; Zechariah 8:18).

When you fasted and mourned ... > (Wiersbe) To institute four fasts because of the tragedies that occurred in Jerusalem, and yet not repent because of the sins that caused these tragedies, was to miss the whole purpose of God's discipline.

Seventy Years > (Wiersbe) While the Babylonians had been overthrown by the Persians some twenty years earlier, the seventy years seems to be tied here to the completion of the temple. Interestingly, if the temple was destroyed in 586 BC, its completion in 515 BC accounts for the seventy years.

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

When you eat and drink ... > (Keil and Delitzsch) The thought of Zechariah 7:6 and Zechariah 7:7 is the following: **It is a matter of indifference to God whether the people fast or not.** The true fasting, which is well pleasing to God, consists not in a pharisaical abstinence from eating and drinking, but in the fact that men observe the word of God and live thereby, as the prophets before the captivity had already preached to the people.

⁷ **Are not these the words which the LORD proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous along with its cities around it, and the Negev and the foothills were inhabited?"**

By the former prophets > (Barnes) Isaiah and Jeremiah (And also ... Micah, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk)

Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous ... > (Utley) This refers to the time before the Babylonian exile. Nebuchadnezzar conducted four deportations.

1. **605 BC** - Daniel and his three friends
2. **597 BC** - Ezekiel and 10,000 skilled Jews
3. **586 BC** - Jerusalem and the temple destroyed and most of the remaining population exiled
4. **582 BC** - after the death of Gedaliah the Babylonian military returned and exiled everyone they could find

And the Negev and the foothills were inhabited > The **Septuagint** translates this phrase as
> *and the hill country and the low country was inhabited?*

Foothills > (Strong's) lowland (the Hebrew word is *shephelah* ... see below)

Constable > The Negev to the south of Beersheba and the foothills (*Shephelah*) toward the Mediterranean coast were grazing and agricultural areas in which the returnees had not yet settled.

⁸ *Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah saying,* ⁹ *"Thus has the **LORD of hosts** said, 'Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; ¹⁰ and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.'*

Dispense > (Strong's) to judge, govern

Dispense true justice and ... > HERE are the attributes the Lord wanted to see in their lives. So much more important that ... "Do I continue to follow some tradition that never began with the Lord in the first place.

Kindness (*hesed*) > **Vine** writes that... In general, one may identify three basic meanings of *hesed*, and these 3 meanings always interact -- **strength**, **steadfastness**, and **love**. Any understanding of *hesed* that fails to suggest **all three** inevitably loses some of its richness. **Love** by itself easily becomes sentimentalized or universalized apart from the covenant. Yet **strength** or **steadfastness** suggests only the fulfillment of a legal (or similar) obligation. *hesed* refers primarily to mutual and reciprocal rights and obligations between the parties of a relationship (especially Jehovah and Israel). But *hesed* is not only a matter of obligation but is also of generosity. It is not only a matter of loyalty, but also of mercy. *hesed* implies personal involvement and commitment in a relationship beyond the rule of law.

¹¹ *But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears from hearing.* ¹² *They made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the **LORD of hosts**.*

Pay attention > (Strong's) to incline (ears), attend

Turned > (Strong's) to give, put, set

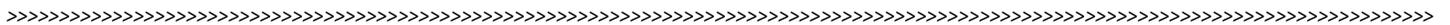
Barnes > Nehemiah confesses the same; "they gave a backsliding shoulder and hardened their neck and would not hear" Nehemiah 9:29.

Benson > The metaphor is taken from oxen that refuse to put their necks under the yoke.

Remember this from Micah 3:11 > ¹¹ *Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD saying, "Is not the LORD in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us."*

Had sent by His Spirit > (Baldwin) "This remarkable doctrine of the Holy Spirit as mediator of God's word to the prophets, who were themselves its mediators, has no parallels in the prophetic books. ...Zechariah is the first to record this aspect of the doctrine of the Spirit."

¹³ *And just as He called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen," says the LORD of hosts; ¹⁴ "but I scattered them with a storm wind among all the nations whom they have not known. Thus the land is desolated behind them so that no one went back and forth, for they made the pleasant land desolate."*



Hesed

Many biblical words such as *mercy, compassion, love, grace, and faithfulness* relate to the Hebrew word *hesed* (חֶסֶד), but none of these completely summarize the concept. *Hesed* is not merely an emotion or feeling but involves action on behalf of someone who is in need. *Hesed* describes a sense of love and loyalty that inspires merciful and compassionate behavior toward another person.

Hesed, found some 250 times in the Old Testament, expresses an essential part of God's character. When God appeared to Moses to give the Law a second time, He described Himself as "abounding in" or "filled with" *hesed*, which is translated "love and faithfulness," "unfailing love," "faithful love," "steadfast love," and "loyal love," depending on the Bible version (Exodus 34:6-7). The core idea of this term communicates loyalty or faithfulness within a relationship. Thus, *hesed* is closely related to God's covenant with His people, Israel. As it relates to the concept of love, *hesed* expresses God's faithfulness to His people.

In Exodus 20:6, God says that He lavishes His *hesed* "for a thousand generations" on those who love Him and obey His commands. This trustworthy, ever-enduring, loyal aspect of God's covenantal love resonates throughout the Old Testament (Nehemiah 1:5; Daniel 9:4; Jeremiah 32:18)

In the Bible, *hesed* often describes the mercy and compassion of God. When Moses interceded for the people, he appealed to God's *hesed*: “The LORD is slow to anger and filled with unfailing love [*hesed*], forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion. . . In keeping with your magnificent, unfailing love [*hesed*], please pardon the sins of this people, just as you have forgiven them ever since they left Egypt” (Numbers 14:18–19, NLT).

While God's faithful love [*hesed*] is eternal and limitless, humans, too, can express *hesed* to one another. As in the case of Jonathan and David (1 Samuel 18:3; 20:8; 2 Samuel 9:1, 3, 7), *hesed* motivates one person, the superior or more powerful party, to supply a critical need to the lesser or weaker person. Acts of *hesed* are always performed freely, under no obligation or fear of reprisal. The inspiration behind *hesed* is born of the relationship between the two parties. Boaz describes Ruth's kindness toward him and Naomi as *hesed* (Ruth 3:10).

God's covenant relationship with His people results in His loyal love and faithfulness [*hesed*], even when His people are unfaithful to Him. Always at the heart of *hesed* lies God's generous sense of compassion, grace, and mercy.

Hesed surpasses ordinary kindness and friendship. It is the inclination of the heart to show “amazing grace” to the one who is loved. *Hesed* runs deeper than social expectations, responsibilities, fluctuating emotions, or what is deserved or earned by the recipient. *Hesed* finds its home in committed, familial love, and it comes to life in actions.

The message of the gospel—God's act of forgiveness and salvation in Jesus—is rooted in *hesed*. *Hesed* describes the disposition of God's heart not only toward His people but to all humanity. The love of God extends far beyond duty or expectation. His forgiveness of sin fulfills a need that is basic to all other needs in the relationship between human beings and God—the restoration and continuation of fellowship with God in Jesus Christ.

God's *hesed* manifested in forgiveness makes a relationship with Him possible. That forgiveness comes to us freely as a gift from God based on the sacrificial act of Christ.