



Structure

As we have seen, chapters 1 through 6 form a single unit of thought within the book of Zechariah. These chapters contain an introductory oracle (1:1-6) where the prophet challenges the people not to repeat the disobedience of their forefathers. This is followed by 8 visions Zechariah receives in a single evening that look to their present situation and a future glory for Israel tied to the coming Messiah, while also encouraging obedience in their daily lives as the children of God. The critical concern of the moment is completing the Temple, a project God promises in these visions to bring to completion. Chapters 7 and 8 form a hinge unit between the night visions and the ends times focus of chapters 9 through 14. Chapters 7 and 8 address proper heart motivations in worship and true righteousness and relate these to the blessings to be experienced in the future Messianic Kingdom. The specific religious practice addressed is fasting, but any religious practice can become and end in itself that displeases God.

1. **Date Marker (7:1)**: Zechariah receives a word from God on what equates to December 7, 518 BC. Recall that the 8 night visions in chapters 1-6 occurred on February 15, 519 BC. In the intervening period, Temple construction progressed, and it would be completed in about two more years. (Ezra 6:15)

1. **Question from Bethel (7:2-3)**: Note that the city name Bethel means house of God. This city first appears in Genesis, and the ark of the covenant was housed there during the time of the Judges (Judges 20:27). But after King Solomon, the nation divided and Jeroboam I made Bethel the religious center of an apostate religion in the north. He erected a golden calf there and employed non-Levitic priests to lead illegitimate religious feasts as replacements for the celebrations in Jerusalem, located about 10.5 miles to the south in Judah. When Jews began to return after the captivity around 536 BC, some returned to Bethel (Ezra 2:28).

— The delegation from Bethel marks a momentous event because the former seat of apostasy is now acknowledging the true priests and prophets in Jerusalem

— **The Question**: During the captivity they fasted on the 9th day of the 5th month (9th of Ab in July / August) to commemorate the burning of Jerusalem in 586 BC (cf. Jeremiah 52:12-13), which included the destruction of the first Temple (2 Kings 25:9). **Do we keep doing this fast?**

2. **The Answer (7:4-6)**: The answer refers to the fasts of the 5th and 7th months. The 7th month fast (Tishri, in Sep / Oct) lamented the assassination of Gedaliah, the governor of Judah (2 Kings 25:22-26). God answers Bethel's question with a question that implies their 70 years of fasting was an empty ritual that displeased God. (Cf. Matthew 6:16-20; Isaiah 58:3-7).

3. **History Lesson (7:7)**: Bethel should remember the cause and effect that led to divine discipline and seek to live righteous lives grounded in proper motives.

4. **What God Desires (7:8-14)**: Instead of empty rituals, God desires righteousness. (Cf. James 1:27, 2:15-16) God desires "true judgment," which means justice for the poor in the courtroom but also dealing with people fairly and with integrity. God desires "mercy" (*chased*) which means the lovingkindness He shows to His people, which is especially needful for the most vulnerable. The prior generations refused to hear God's prophets and reaped the consequences. That is to be a lesson to Bethel — righteousness not religion.