

WHITE NOISE

"OVERCOMING THE DEAFENING DILEMMA OF SIN"

ZECHARIAH 7:1-14

This Week's Core Competency

Compassion – I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need. Psalm 82:3-4

*3 Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless;
maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.*

*4 Rescue the weak and needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.*

Those who call themselves God's people always run the risk of misusing the scriptures; in Luther's words, of "making out of them what they wish, as though they were a nose of wax to be pulled around at will." His words allude to both twisting of the scriptures' meaning and the twisted observance of the scriptures' teaching. In the first instance, some search the scriptures simply to prove their preconceived notions or justify their current practices, nothing more. It has been said, "Figures don't lie, but liars do figure." Might not the same type of thing be said about the scriptures?

In the second instance, some hypocritically observe the letter of the law while denying its spirit. The Pharisees of Jesus' day excelled at this, and he called them out on it. Matthew tells us Jesus "went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?'

He said to them, 'If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a

*I would rather make mistakes in
kindness and compassion than work
miracles in unkindness and hardness.*

– Mother Teresa

person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.'

Then he said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus" (12:9-14).

Their hypocrisy, now legendary, did not go unnoticed by Jesus, who later warned his disciples, "do not do what they do" (Mt 23:3) and denounced his detractors, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!" (vv. 23-24).

Religious hypocrisy is nothing new. The pre-exilic prophets condemned it in Israel and in Judah before their destruction by Assyria and by Babylon. To Israel the LORD had said, "'I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!'" (Amos 5:21-24).

And to Judah he had said much the same thing. "'The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?' says the LORD. 'I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your

cont. pg. 2

incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow" (Isa 1:11-17).

Following the seventy-year Babylonian exile, a remnant of Jews returned to the land to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem. The prophet Zechariah warned the returnees against behaving like their forefathers had (1:4-6 [Oct-Nov 520 B.C.]); two years later he suspected that religious hypocrisy was again rearing its ugly head, this time among the returnees (7:4-6 [Dec 518 B.C.]). With the temple nearing completion, the people of Bethel sent a delegation to Jerusalem to ask whether they should continue to fast and mourn the temple's destruction as they had for so many years. The prophet's response made it ever so clear that the LORD was interested in the sincere practice of religion, which James calls "pure and faultless" (Jas 1:27), not in the rote performance of rites. Rather than give a direct answer to their question, Zechariah quoted the following timeless words of the LORD: "Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other" (7:9-10). Even today, when it comes to being Christian, some who call themselves God's people are, as we say in Texas, "all hat and no cattle." To put it bluntly, their compassionless Christianity is worthless (Jas 1:26).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Zechariah 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, the month of Kislev. 2 The people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melech, together with their men, to entreat the LORD 3 by asking the priests of the house of the LORD Almighty and the prophets, "Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?"

4 Then the word of the LORD Almighty came to me: 5 "Ask all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? 6 And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves? 7 Are these not the words the LORD proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?'"

8 And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah: 9 "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. 10 Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.'

11 "But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. 12 They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry.

13 "When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen," says the LORD Almighty. 14 "I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate."

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Underline the references to specific years and particular months in vv. 1, 5.
- * Bracket "people of Bethel" in v. 2.
- * Circle the names in verse 2.
- * Circle "fifth month" in v. 3.
- * Highlight the two rhetorical questions in vv. 5-6.
- * Underline "for yourselves" in v. 6.

- * Circle "these" in v. 7.
- * Circle "says" in v. 9.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 11.
- * Put a ? over all the verbs that end in "ed" in vv. 11-14.
- * Box "as" indicating *comparison* in v. 12.
- * Box "so" indicating *result* in v. 13.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. "The word of the LORD came to Zechariah" on two earlier occasions (cf. 1:1, 7). Approximate the time between the three occasions.
2. *What* did the people of Bethel want to know and *why* did they want to know it?
3. Turn the *rhetorical question* in verse 5 and the one in verse 6 into two simple *declarative statements*.
4. What's the point of the implied *comparison* between their fasting and feasting in verses 5 and 6?
5. "These words" (v. 7) are *what* words? In other words, what had the LORD proclaimed through earlier prophets?
6. Pack what the LORD had proclaimed into one commandment.
7. Explain the *contrast* introduced in verse 11.
8. Explain the *irony* of verse 13.
9. **Discussion:** Talk about the spiritual condition of the people who made their pleasant land desolate.

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

New believers soon learn how to "fit in" the evangelical Christian subculture, a subculture that has its different denominations; its own missions agencies and parachurch organizations; its own publications and media networks; its own education system that includes home schools, primary and secondary schools, universities and seminaries; its own celebrities, music industry, publishers, and retail outlets (for what some insiders call "Jesus junk"). Outsiders soon become insiders by jumping headlong into the communal life of their churches where they slowly become like everyone else. They attend worship services, take notes during the sermon, and join a small group. Some connect to women's Bible studies, others to men's ministries. Some go on to volunteer inside or better yet, outside their congregations. Along the way, they learn to do what is valued and not do what is verboten. They pick up the evangelical jargon and in the process acquire a stock of cliches handy for stringing together when praying or testifying. Their acculturation isn't necessarily a bad thing; it is what it is. Until they confuse rote conformity to the Christian culture with the "pure and undefiled religion" to which James refers (1:26). People who practice that kind of religion look after orphans and widows in their distress and keep themselves from being polluted by the world.

Zechariah spoke out against a mere display of the trappings of religion in 7:1-14. In December 518 B.C., about two years before the rebuilding of the temple was completed, a delegation from Bethel led by Sharezer and Regem-Melech came to Jerusalem to ask a legitimate question. In their minds they simply wanted to know if the people should continue to mourn and fast in the fifth month as they had done for nearly seventy years. After all, the temple was nearing completion.

The LORD answered their question through the prophet but not directly. Doubting the sincerity of their yearly practice, Zechariah answered their question with two of the LORD's own. First he asked, "When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years,

was it really for me that you fasted?" In effect Zechariah told them on the LORD's behalf, "When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, it was not really for me that you fasted." Second he asked, "And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves?" Again in effect telling them, "When you were eating and drinking, you were just feasting for yourselves." The implied comparison between their fasting and their feasting suggests that just as they were feasting for themselves for the past seventy years so also were they fasting for themselves. One commentator observes, "The form that YHWH's (i.e., the LORD's) question takes in regard to the genuineness of the fasting and grief betrays in itself their lack of sincerity" (Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 185). They were doing neither for the LORD as far as he was concerned.

Religious hypocrisy, the mere display of the trappings of religion, was no small thing. After all, it was the very thing the LORD had warned the people about through earlier prophets while the temple still stood and the people of Jerusalem enjoyed peace and prosperity. And this is what he proclaimed to them then, "Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other" (vv. 9-10). In a nutshell, love your neighbors as yourselves. However, the pre-exilic inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem "turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets" (vv.11-12). As a result, in an ironic turn of events, when the people called the Lord would not listen, for when the Lord had called, his people would not listen (v. 13). Their empty show of religion coupled with their refusal to repent and love their neighbors "made their pleasant land desolate."

The Message of the Passage

God delights in the sincere expression of justice, mercy, and compassion, not in a mere display of the trappings of religion.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 "living questions" to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **fourth year** . . . I.e., December 7, 518 B.C. (Merrill, 181; on the historical background of Zechariah see Thomas E. McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets*, 1004-1008). "More than two years had passed since Zechariah received his first vision (1:1). The construction of the temple would have been well under way at this time, and the initial frustrations and fears of the people were giving way to the more immediate demands of a maturing community. The population was spreading to cities and towns outside Jerusalem. The people of Bethel were probably not caught up in the immediate concerns of completing the temple structure and the respite they had from the building activities in Jerusalem allowed time for religious disputation" (McComiskey, 1124).

v. 2 **people of Bethel** Lit., "Bethel;" cf., "Now *the town of Bethel*" (NASB). Italics indicate words not in the text.

v. 3 **Sharezer** Some take the name to be Bethel-sharezer, since this name appears in Neo-Babylonian materials from around the time of Zechariah. This implies the delegation came from Babylon, not Bethel (see Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, TOTC, 141-43). Bethel is, however, more likely a city name (see Merrill, 182-83; McComiskey, 1124).

v. 3 **fifth month** "The practice in mind is that of weeping and fasting in the fifth month, something the people of that community had done for a number of years. 'Fasting' is implied by the niphal infinitive of [*nazar*] ('separating myself'), a verb used here to denote a consecratory withholding of oneself (from food), and is made certain by YHWH's response in v. 5 where the normal term for fasting (*sum*) occurs. The lamentable occasion that had given rise to this observance was the destruction of Solomon's Temple, a disaster that had occurred almost exactly 70 years earlier, on August 14, 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:8). This was on the seventh day of the fifth month, so the next anniversary was just a few months away, about August 2, 517" (Merrill, 183). The fast in the seventh month (v. 5) marked the murder of Gedaliah (2Ki 25:25), a Judean governor (McComiskey, 1127).

v. 6 **for yourselves** Zechariah implies their hypocrisy by suggesting that for the past seventy years just as they had been feasting for themselves (v. 6b), they had also been fasting for themselves (v. 6a). "There is no difference between those who fasted and those who feasted in this community, for neither display true repentance" (Mark J. Boda, *The NIV Application Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah*, 359). "Their fasting and mourning, not only on the fifth but the seventh month and for seventy long years, was an empty exercise designed to enhance not YHWH but those who engaged in it in such a hypocritical manner. In other words, their religion had become one of outward show with no inner content. Evidence for that appears in the next section, vv. 8-14" (Merrill, 184).

v. 7 **these** "These words" most likely refers to the following words of verses 9-10 (see Boda, 358). "It is difficult to know whether 'are [these] not the words?' refers to the prophet's questions in verses 5-6 or to the words of the pre-exilic prophets in verses 9-10 . . . If the prophet's rhetorical question in verse 7 does not relate to verses 9-10, the words of the former prophets appear with no introduction, and we do not know we are reading their words until verses 11-12" (McComiskey, 1130). Merrill treats the syntax a little differently but with little different results (183-84).

v. 9 **says** Cf., "said" (NASB). The use of the past tense in verses 11-14 implies "says" would be better translated "said" (187).

v. 12 **as flint** "The Hebrew word used here occurs elsewhere in a simile for hardness only in Ezek. 3:9 where it is frequently translated 'diamond.' In that passage it is described as something harder than flint, so diamond is a reasonable suggestion. On the other hand, it is questionable as to whether the diamond was known to ancient Israel so that what is in view is more likely an adamantine such as corundum" (Merrill, 189).

v. 14 **so desolate** "So great was the stormy breath of God that scattered the people over foreign lands that it also laid waste their homeland. Merchants and travelers no longer traversed the now desolate and forbidding land. Neither nature nor invading armies had laid the land waste—it was the people themselves who were responsible. They lost their inheritance because they proved untrue to the covenant that assured on condition of obedience (Exod. 19:5-6) their continuation in the land" (McComiskey, 1135).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Michelle's family moved into a house on a busy street when she was in first grade. The house was set back from the road and had a long driveway that ran from the street to the garage of the house. On the first day they lived there, Michelle's dad took her and her 4-year-old brother to the end of the driveway. He carried a bucket of paint and a wide paintbrush. When they got to the end of the driveway he painted a wide stripe of white paint all the way across it. "You may use this whole long driveway to play in but you are never to cross this white line on your bicycles or roller skates. Do you understand?" They both said they did, however, Michelle says that white line became so intriguing to them. For years they would skate up to the edge of it and wonder what would happen if they crossed it. One day when he was 8 years old, Michelle's brother decided to cross the white line. He rode his bike out into the street and just at that moment a car clipped his bicycle. Thankfully he wasn't seriously hurt, but the lesson of the white line became clear. It was for their protection. Obedience to God protects us. Lord, keep us from sin that we may hear you clearly!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Zechariah 7

1. What question did God ask the people in verse 5?
2. The Lord said to them, "show _____ and _____ to one another." (9)
3. Did the people obey?

What Do You Think

1. Why do you think the people chose to disobey God?
2. Why do we choose to disobey God?

What R U Going To Do

Psalm 119:11 tells us that hiding God's Word in our hearts will help us to not sin. Make a commitment to memorize scripture this school year. Just add it to your list of homework each day and you will be surprised at how many verses you have learned by the end of the year!

MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Compassion - I believe God wants me to help others in need.

Memory Verse

Heb 1:1 - *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways . . .*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC _____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade _____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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