

ZECHARIAH

The Apocalypse of the Old Testament

Chapter 7

Zechariah 7

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?”

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

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⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, ⁹ “Thus says the LORD of hosts:

‘Execute true justice,
Show mercy and compassion
Everyone to his brother.

¹⁰ Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless,
The alien or the poor.
Let none of you plan evil in his heart
Against his brother.’

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¹¹ “But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. ¹² Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the LORD of hosts.

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¹³ Therefore it happened, *that* just as He proclaimed and they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen,” says the LORD of hosts. ¹⁴ “But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known. Thus the land became desolate after them, so that no one passed through or returned; for they made the pleasant land desolate.”

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- The division of the book of Zechariah can loosely be described as:

Chapters 1-6: Night Visions (timeline for Israel's future)

Chapters 7, 8: Right Attitudes and Actions (Reminders!)

Chapters 9-14: The Fulfillment and Restoration

- Chapters 7 and 8 are serious reminders of what God wants from His people, the result of a simple question.

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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,



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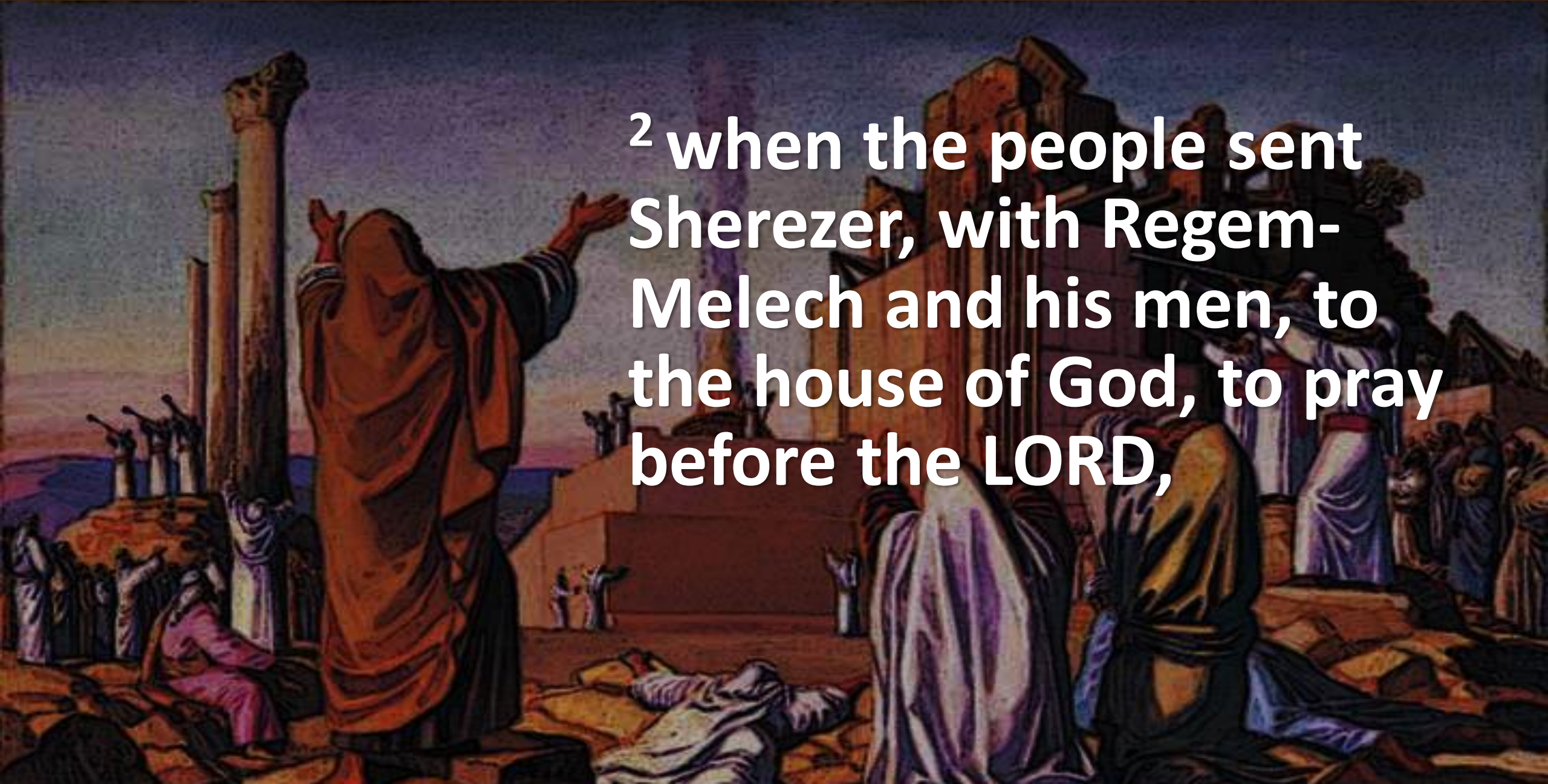
- Dated, again, by the **Gentile reckoning** (“Times of the Gentiles...”) Uses Nisan as the 1st month. (Contrast Genesis and post-Exodus reckonings...) *This would be December on our calendar.*
- This book is precisely dated, so we know it is now approximately two years after the night visions of Chapters 1-6 and about halfway through the period of temple rebuilding (520-516).

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- “The word of YHWH came to Zechariah” is a new message, not tied to the visions or anything else so far.
- This new message is an **answer, and warning guidelines**, in response to the question asked by these men seeking God’s counsel.

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² when the people sent Sherezer, with Regem-Melech and his men, to the house of God, to pray before the LORD,



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- ***“to the house of God...”*** There is a lot of discussion about how this should read... *“Now Bethel sent Sarezzer and Regem-melech together with his men to seek the favor of ADONAI, (TLV)*
- Most commentators and scholars agree that ***“to the house of God”*** is not a reference to Jerusalem and the temple being rebuilt there.
- In the Hebrew “house of God” is literally *“Beit-El”* or what we say is **Bethel.** Beit (or Beth) -El literally means “house of God,” but this phrase is never used of the Temple.

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- It always refers to the well-known town in the territory of Ephraim. Bethel was one of the centers of idol worship set up by Jeroboam when the Kingdom split in two.
- Most agree this means that the **city of Bethel sent a delegation of men down to Jerusalem** to inquire of Elohim through the priests there.
- In Genesis 28:17, after spending the night and wrestling with an “angel,” Jacob called this place *“this is none other but the house of God (Beit-El), and this is the gate of heaven.”*

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- Bethel was located about 11 miles north of Jerusalem in the northern kingdom of Israel.
- When the captives returned from Babylon (*the remnant*) all 12 tribes were represented.
- Many actually never left as they avoided the sweeps of the land by Nebuchadnezzar when taking Judah into captivity, or they were just left behind as peasants and of no value. These were generally the very poor, not part of Israel's "upper crust."

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- Many who either ended up in Babylon and returned, or those who were there all along, came back to rebuild their home towns, including Bethel.
- We know that “Bethelites” had returned with the remnant from Ezra 2:28, Nehemiah 7:32, 11:31.
- **Sherezer** = not a Hebrew name, probably given to someone in captivity (*like the three Hebrew boys of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego [Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah] (Daniel 1:7).* Sherezer is most likely *Sharusur*, a Babylonian name meaning “*protect the king.*”

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- **Regem-Melech** = This is Hebrew (*we think!*). *Regem* means *a heap of stones*, and *Melech* is *king*. Some think it might mean “*friend of the king*,” but it literally means **the king’s heap!**
- May have been a title of some important city official perhaps, or a name earned in captivity.
- It appears these two men, together with a delegation of other men, were sent from the city of Bethel to Jerusalem where they made an inquiry of the priests and prophets regarding their rituals.

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- The word for “pray” here is *challah*, which some have indicated literally means “***to appease the face of YHVH.***” They are trying to find favor with Him, through their rituals.
- The fact that a delegation came to Jerusalem from Bethel, seeking a word from YHVH is a strong indicator that perhaps these people learned *at least some* of the lessons of the fall of both the northern Kingdom of Israel and the southern Kingdom of Judah.

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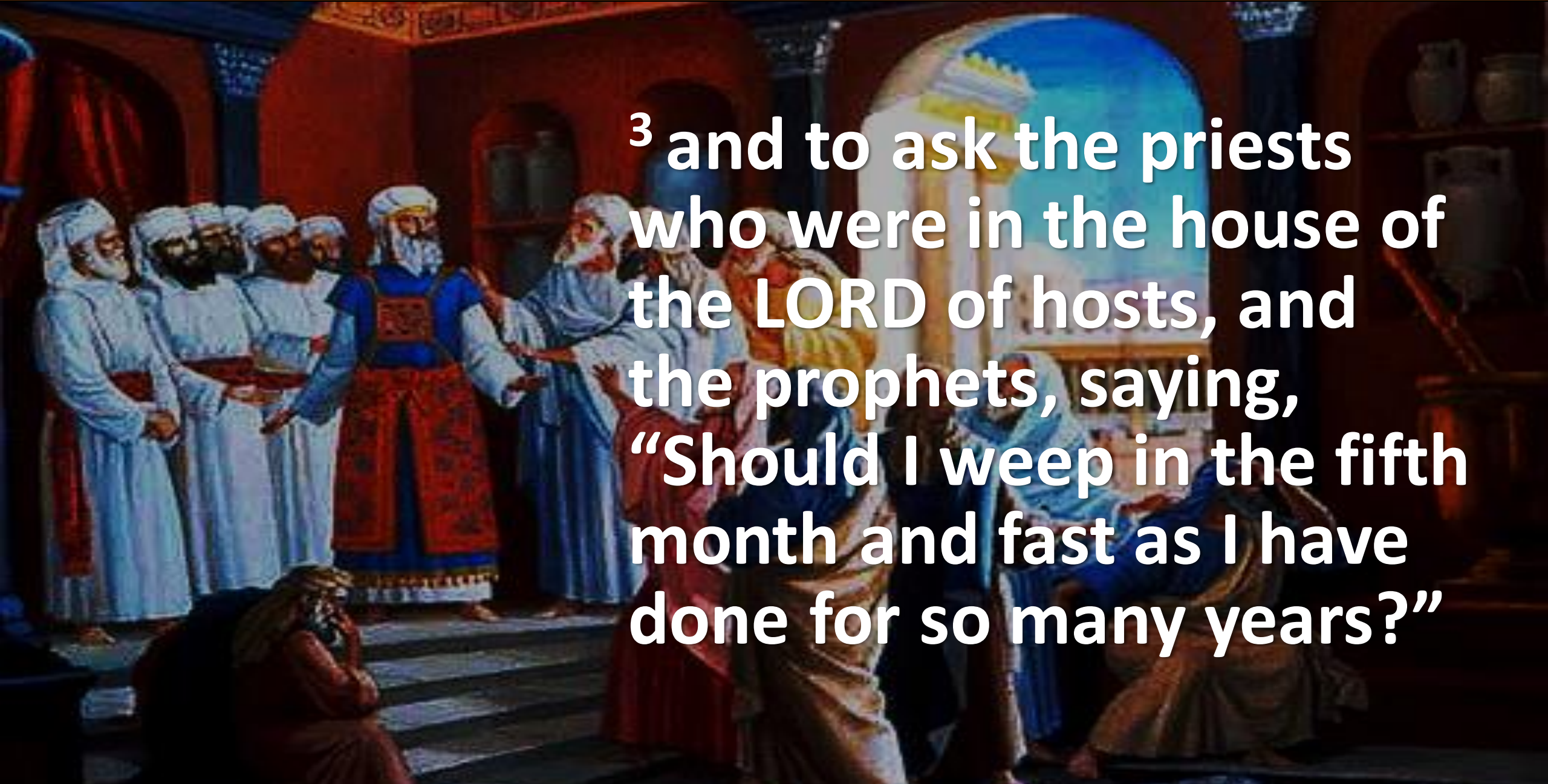
- Instead of going their own way and continuing to worship pagan gods in the northern kingdom, they traveled to the south *(Jerusalem, in the former southern kingdom of Judah)* to seek answers from the God of Israel.
- They apparently were convicted that **Jerusalem was to be the legitimate capital of the entire Kingdom**, not just the south.



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COMMENTARY: *“The men who had formerly belonged to the northern ten-tribed kingdom no longer cherished hopes of a separate destiny, nor looked to a different centre than their brethren of Judah. Notwithstanding the many sacred memories connected with their city, and the fact that it had been the seat of a Temple in the days of the Israelitish kingdom, to which the tribes of Israel had resorted in numbers, no attempt was now made on their part to dispute the legitimate right to Jerusalem being regarded as the only place where the sacrifices and services enjoined by the precepts of the Mosaic Law could be offered.”... (Baron)*

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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?”

Zechariah 7

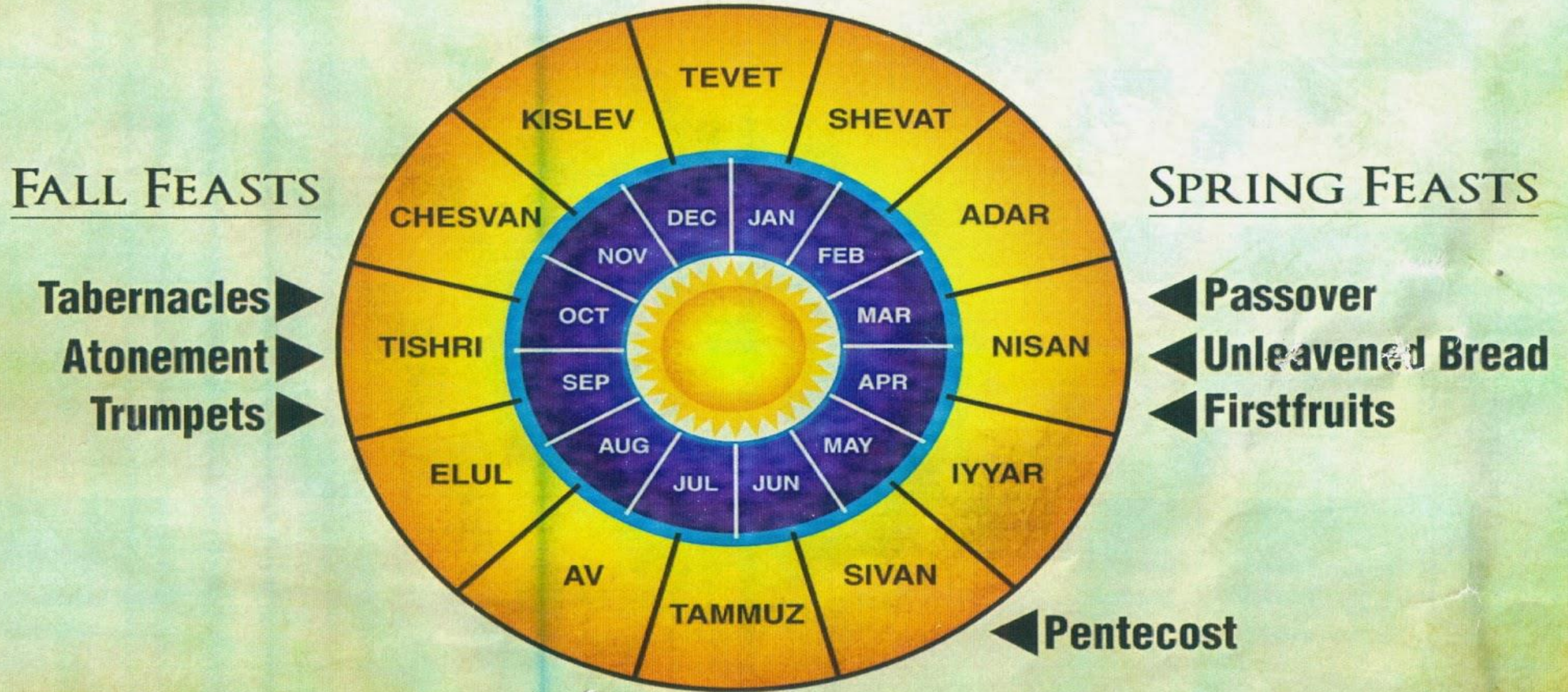
- This delegation sought answers through the priests who served in the newly built temple, and the prophets, chief which would have been Haggai and Zechariah. **YHVH spoke through Zechariah.**
- ***“Should I weep....”*** The question they asked is in regard to a man-appointed ritual of fasting on a certain date which commemorated the fall of Jerusalem before the captivity.
- ***“the fifth month...”*** Counting as God did on the sacred calendar He gave to Moses before the exodus, this fifth month is the month of Av.

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Hebrew Calendar

Number	English	Length	Civil Equivalent
1	Nissan	30 days	March - April
2	Iyar	29 days	April - May
3	Sivan	30 days	May – June
4	Tammuz	29 days	June – July
5	Av	30 days	July – August
6	Elul	29 days	August – September
7	Tishri	30 days	September – October
8	Cheshvan	29 or 30 days	October – November
9	Kislev	30 or 29 days	November - December
10	Tevet	29 days	December – January
11	Shevat	30 days	January - February
12	Adar I (leap years only)	30 days	February – March
13	Adar (called Adar Beit in leap years)	29 days	February - March

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- The first siege against Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was in 606BC. The first wave of captives were taken at this time back to Babylon (*included Daniel and his three friends*).
- Nebuchadnezzar left a “puppet” king on the “throne” but one that was supposed to rule as Babylon wished. Instead, they **rebelled**. And again Nebuchadnezzar came down, put down the rebellion, and installed another “vassal” king.
(*Taking a second wave of captives to Babylon, including Ezekiel*)

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- But yet again, the people rebelled (*against what the prophet Jeremiah advised repeatedly*) and a **third time** the king of Babylon sieged the city. This would be the final time. Nebuchadnezzar had “had it” with this “stiff-necked” people.
- The Israelites who survived (*military, civil and religious leaders and others*) were forced into captivity and had to journey across the Syrian desert to Babylon. *Many died on the way.*

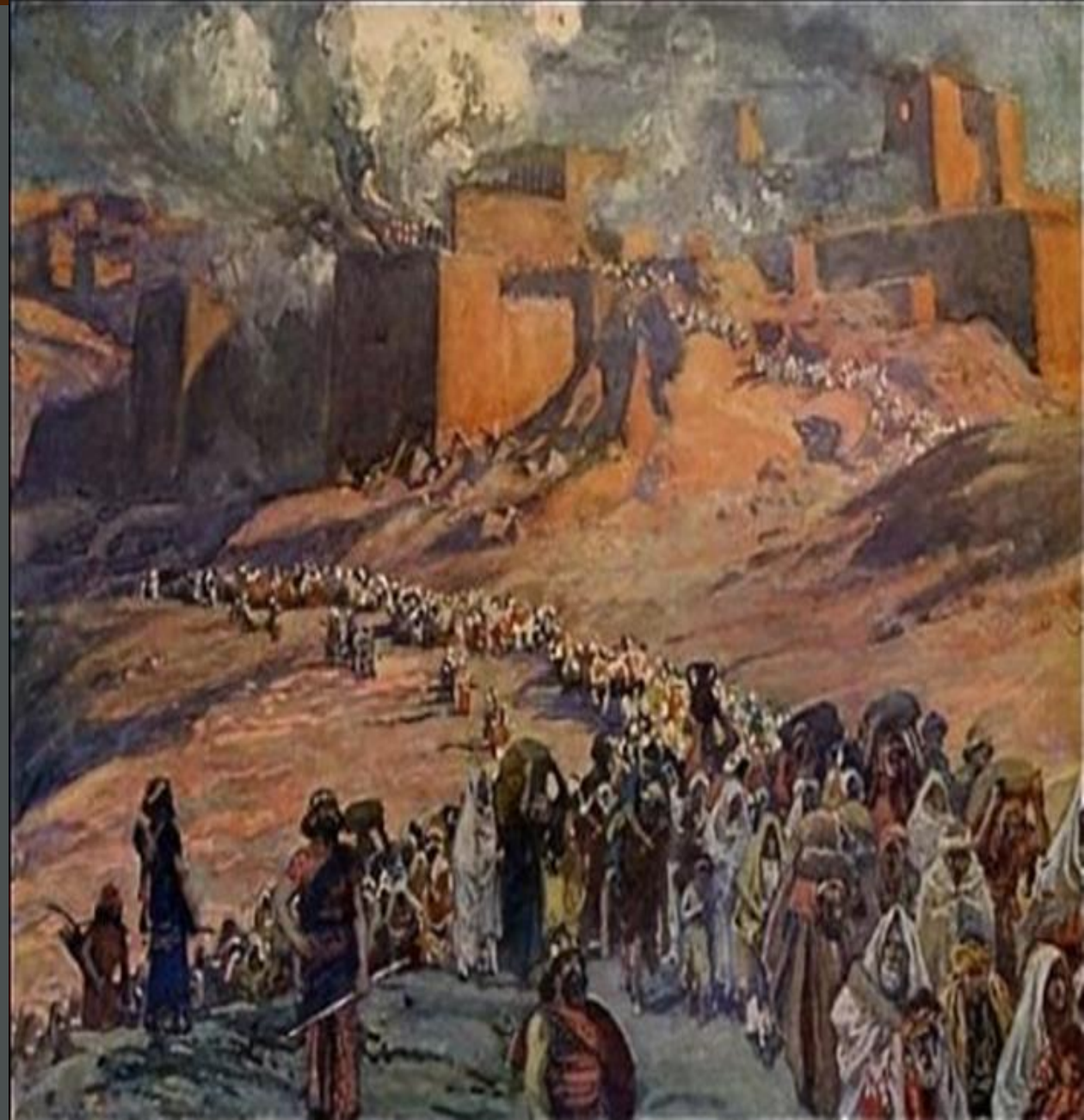
Zechariah 7

- The *Northern Kingdom of Israel* was conquered by Assyria in 722 BC. Now the **Southern Kingdom of Judah** was no more either. This ended the monarchy (times of the kings, throne of David) of Israel.
- This was 586 BC, 19 years after the initial siege on Jerusalem. Only the very poorest, and those few who escaped, were left in the land. The land was now completely desolate and mostly empty.



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- To permanently end any more rebellion by the Israelites, Jerusalem was burned, the city walls were torn down, and the Temple was destroyed.
- This destruction happened on the **9th day of the 5th month, or Tisha B'Av** (ninth of Av).



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- This final destruction of Jerusalem was the reason for the mourning and fasting that the delegation from Bethel was asking about.
- It seemed that now that Israel had returned from captivity and was well along in the rebuilding process, experiencing some economic growth, they **wondered if they still needed to fast and mourn.**
- It is important to understand that this was not a God-ordained date. God did not give His people “fast” days. **He gave them “feast” days.** They came up with the idea to fast.

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- This mourning began even before the destruction of Jerusalem as the end of the city was near. It continued even in captivity (*some already taken unto captivity before final fall of the Kingdom of Judah; see Psalm 137.*)
- **Just an interesting note...** The Temple destroyed here was Solomon's Temple, the **First Temple**. It was destroyed on the ninth day of the fifth month, Tisha B'Av. This was in 586 BC.
- *The Temple was being rebuilt at the time of the writing of this little book of Zechariah.*

Zechariah 7

- This rebuilt temple was initially known as Ezra's Temple, or Zerubbabel's Temple. It was very small and unimpressive next to Solomon's Temple. This "little" temple is considered the **"Second Temple."**
- At the time of Jesus, Herod wanted a prestigious building legacy (*common for Roman Emperors*), so he determined to rebuild/remodel the little temple (Ezra's) into something grand.
- That Temple stood at the time of Yeshua and was still under construction. It was Herod's Temple.

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- This Temple was the last one Jerusalem would see for millennia. It also was destroyed in 70 AD, just a few years after its massive remodeling project was completed, by the Roman army, also sick of Israel's constant rebellion.
- And guess what day in what month this Temple was destroyed? **Tisha B'Av.** Coincidence?
Coincidence is NOT a kosher word!!
- So now the question arises. *Do we continue to fast and mourn on Tisha B'Av?*

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By the way, Tisha B'Av is
STILL a day of fasting and
mourning in Israel!

TISHA B'AV
A TIME TO MOURN

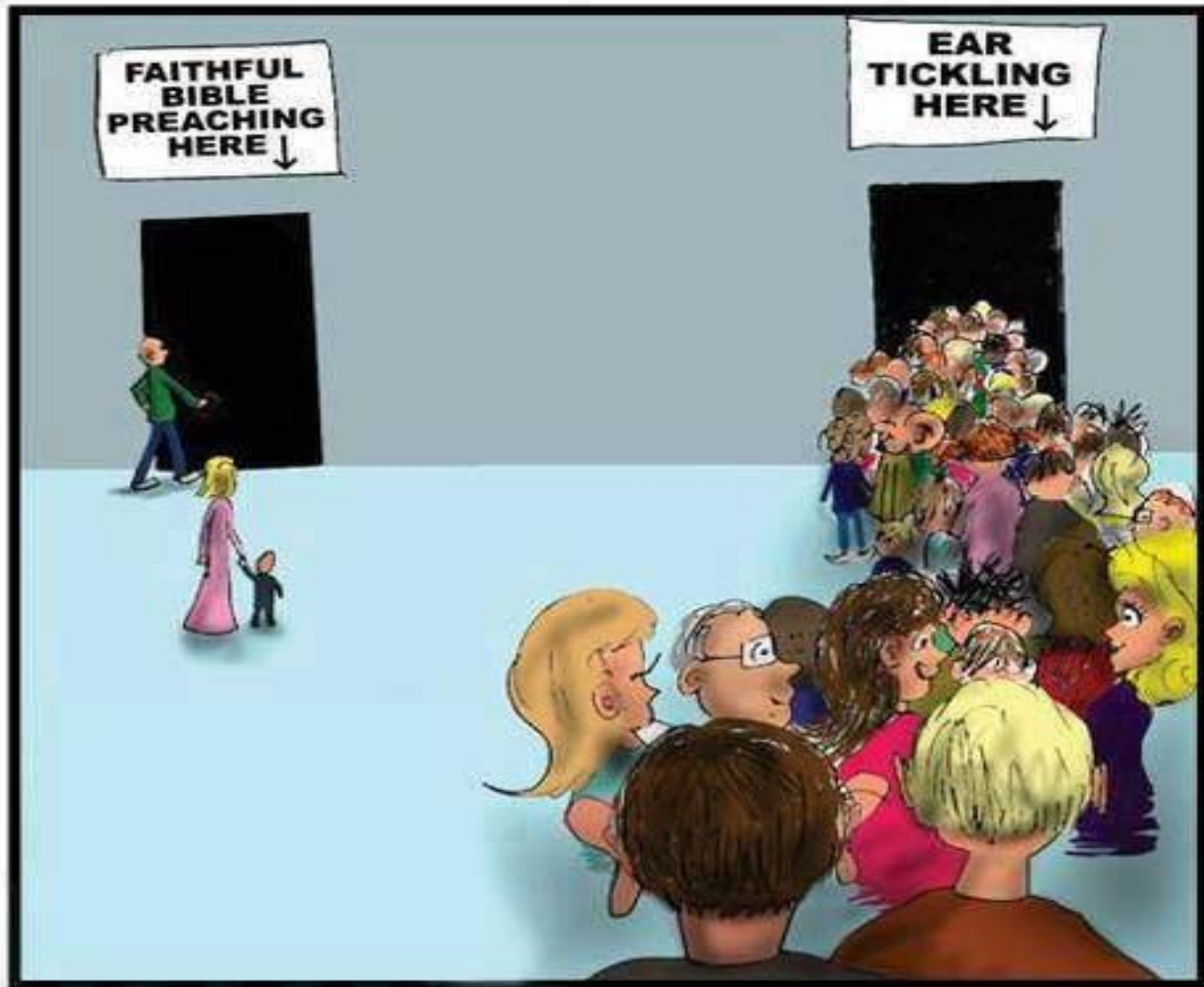
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- Unfortunately these guys were asking the wrong question. Their traditions and man-made religious rituals were part of their initial problem.
- They had allowed man's ideas to be placed in higher importance than God's ideas. The idea of fasting and mourning in itself is not bad. In fact in many times and appropriate ways it is very good.
- But the **act of mourning and fasting for them had become merely a religious ritual with no real meaning.**

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- The answer they got to their question was certainly not what they expected, but it was what they needed to hear. **It is also we WE need to hear.**
- COMMENTARY: *This is an important question for us because we are seeing today ... a movement toward formalism, toward adopting a ritual. Formalism is always in evidence when people cease to think. When people get away from the person of Jesus, they start either getting up and down or marching around—they have to start doing something. **This indicates a time of spiritual decline.** (McGee)*

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- It is very sad to see that many (*if not most*) of today's churches have resorted to tradition instead of truth. **To ritual, instead of relationship –** *exactly like those Jews.*

Zechariah 7



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?*’

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- Now it's God's turn to speak and answer. Notice, however, that He **does not give a "yes" or "no" answer.**
- **His answers always involve looking upon the heart.** And this is no exception. *He answers their question by asking them a question.*
- Notice also that it is not the High Priest Joshua, or the civil governor Zerubbabel, or the prophet Zechariah who answers. **It is YHVH TSAVA'OT again.**
- The boss of all bosses, the ultimate authority. The One who knows ALL the answers. And the way this is spoken, it means ***"shut up and listen up good!"***

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- And also notice that Elohim's answer is not *just to the delegation from Bethel*, but to **everyone**, "*to all the people of the land and to the priests.*" God wants everyone to hear this – including those "religious" officials! (*perhaps especially them!*)
- **God extends** their rituals to include not just the fifth month, but also the seventh month.
- The fifth month was about the destruction of the temple. The fast and mourning of the seventh month was called the **Fast of Gedaliah**.

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- The Fast of Gedaliah is *also still on the Jewish calendar (September 12 this year)*, and it is the anniversary of the murder of the governor (Gedalia) that the King of Babylon had set over the land after the captivity.
- There were still people in the land, loosely governed by Gedaliah (*a good, honest Israelite*) and a garrison of Babylonian soldiers. But as usual, the people revolted, murdering Gedaliah and the entire Babylonian guard stationed there.

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- We will read of another fast they instituted in the 4th month (Tammuz) (Zechariah 8:19) which was to commemorate the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem during that final siege.
- The Hebrew people were big into fasting and mourning! **But history has shown us they indeed have had much to mourn over.** The number of big events throughout history, that happened on Tisha B'Av, were worthy of mourning and beyond coincidence.

Tisha b'Av

We've spoken of "coincidence", but it is quite obvious that coincidence is not even a remote possibility.

A short list of just *some* of the events that have occurred on Tisha b'Av...

1. Israelites refused to enter the Promised Land, causing that generation to die in the wilderness (Numbers 14)
2. Solomon's Temple (1st Temple) destroyed (587 BC).
3. Ezra's Temple (including Herod's restoration, 2nd Temple) destroyed (70 AD)

Tisha b'Av

4. Romans crushed a Jewish revolt under Bar Kochba, killing over 100,000 Jews (132). The Romans plowed the city of Jerusalem under the next year.
5. Pope Urban II declared the first Crusade in which thousands of Jews were killed (1096)
6. Edict of Expulsion, Jews expelled from England (1290) following over 200 years of intense persecution
7. Jews expelled from France (1306)
8. Jews expelled from Spain (1492)

Tisha b'Av

9. Germany entered World War 1 (1914) leading to European upheaval and eventual Holocaust
10. Nazi's approve "Final Solution" to eliminate Jews (1941). It is estimated that 1/3 of world's Jewish population captured and killed during this period.
11. Massive deportation of Jews from Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka began (extermination camp) (1942)
12. Jews observe Tisha b'Av today to mourn for the 6,000,000 Jewish victims of the Holocaust

Tisha b'Av

9. AIMA (Argentine Israelite Mutual Association) **bombing that killed 85** and injured 300 (1994)
10. Israel's unilateral **disengagement from Gaza** and areas of West Bank (Gaza Expulsion) began (2005)



Tisha b'Av

- Tisha B'Av is the end of a **3-week time of mourning**, beginning with the fast of the 17th of Tammuz, which commemorates the first breach in the walls of Jerusalem, before the First Temple was destroyed.
- During this 3-week period, **weddings and other parties are not permitted**, and people refrain from cutting their hair.
- From the first to the ninth of Av, Jews usually **refrain from eating meat or drinking wine** (*except on Shabbat*) and from wearing new clothing.

Tisha b'Av

- Restrictions on Tisha B'Av are similar to those on Yom Kippur.
- Work in the “ordinary” sense of the word [*rather than the Shabbat sense*] is also restricted.
- Many of the traditional mourning practices are observed: people refrain from smiles, laughter and idle conversation, and sit on low stools.
- In synagogue, the book of Lamentations is read and mourning prayers are recited. The ark (cabinet where the Torah is kept) is draped in black.

Tisha b'Av

- Tisha B'Av is never observed on Shabbat. If the 9th of Av falls on a Saturday, the fast is postponed until the 10th of Av.
- This is truly a national day of mourning for Israel. But despite these tragedies, Israel prospers and continues, as Elohim keeps His promises and covenants.



Zechariah 7

- ***“For me...for Me?”*** The issue here is not about a ritual, it is about the heart. With this question God wants them to probe their own hearts about their personal reasons for the fasting and mourning.
- *It isn't about the ritual.* God never does answer whether or not they should continue to observe this self-appointed period of fasting and mourning. His message for them goes far beyond this observance He never ordained.

Zechariah 7

- **When the heart is right, the ritual is right. When the heart is wrong, the ritual is wrong.**

This is a HUGE lesson for us!

- Whenever anything in our lives becomes more of a legalistic ritual, lacking any glory for God or personal worship of Him, **it is wrong.**
- This is the message Elohim wants all Israel to finally understand. It is what got them in this place from the beginning.

Zechariah 7

COMMENTARY: *But apart from the special message which they conveyed to those to whom they were originally addressed, and their application to the Jewish people at the time, there is a solemn lesson in these words which men at the present time, both Jews and Christians, should lay to heart. Are there not thousands now who are very zealous and regular in religious observances, and who think that they are acquiring great merit before God, to whom Christ in that day will say, "Depart from Me; I never knew you?" Did ye at all do it unto Me, even Me? Was it not for the most part will-worship and mere religiousness, without any knowledge of, or real regard for, the will of God? (Baron)*

Zechariah 7

- God commanded sacrifices as a way to atone for their sins, to humble the people before Him, and point them to their Messiah.
- But they turned these into useless rituals because their hearts were not right with God. Here is what He had to say to them:

“I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. (Amos 5:21-22)

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For what purpose to Me, Comes frankincense from Sheba, And sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, Nor your sacrifices sweet to Me.” (Jeremiah 6:20)

- Whatever God commands us to do, it is to be done with a right heart before Him. He knows the difference between ritual and relationship.
- **Rituals and traditions have caused millions to walk away from God on the path to destruction.**

Zechariah 7

BEWARE OF RITUAL and TRADITIONS!

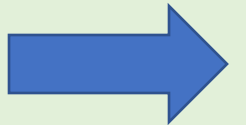
COMMENTARY: *To some church members, religion is a rite or a ritual or a legalistic and lifeless form, a liturgical system marked by meaningless and wearisome verbiage. There is a lot of religious garbage in our so-called conservative and evangelical churches also. There is a ceaseless quoting of tired adjectives and a jumble of pious platitudes. We so often hear people say, "We want to share our faith." My friend, most people don't have enough faith to share. (McGee)*

Zechariah 7

And I'm going to continue with these commentaries, because some are priceless and I can't state them any better...

COMMENTARY: *This reminds me of the little girl and the story of the three bears. The little girl's mother was having guests for dinner and she sent the little girl upstairs to go to bed early. She gave her instructions, telling her she knew how to undress, put on her pajamas, and kneel down to have her prayer. The next morning at the breakfast table, the mother asked the little girl how she did. "Just fine" was the reply.*

"Did you say your prayers?"



Zechariah 7

“Well, kind of.”

“What do you mean ‘kind of’?” the mother asked.

The little girl explained, “Well, I got down on my knees to say that prayer I always say, and I just thought that maybe God got tired of hearing the same thing all the time, so I just crawled into bed, and I told Him the story of the three little bears.”

I think God enjoyed that evening when that precious little girl already sensed that there is something wrong with a ritual when the heart is not in it. I think God listened to the story of the three bears. (McGee)

Zechariah 7

COMMENTARY: *If we could see ourselves as God sees us, we couldn't stand ourselves. Only God could put up with us. Oh, if we would just come to the Word of God and rest in the Word of God! (McGee)*

