

## Zechariah 7:1-14

What is true Christianity and how do we distinguish it from false Christianity? We are still living in very religious times. Yet if we ask how powerfully the Bible and Christianity impact our society, the answer would have to be hardly at all.

### Summary

**In Zechariah 7:1-14, the question of true versus false religion was prompted by a delegation which arrived in Jerusalem from Bethel, a town known for its idolatry and rebellion against the Lord.**

#### **1. Strong Reproof vv. 1-7; 11-13**

Previously, Bethel had been a seat idolatry and rebellion against the Lord but since the various judgments associated with the exile had come, the current inhabitants were looking once again to Jerusalem and the Lord (**Zech 7:3**).

Two years had passed since Zechariah's visions exhorted the people to renew their efforts on the temple. This accounts for the question about the fast in the fifth month, which had specific reference to the destruction of the temple.

What a surprise it must have been when the delegation from Bethel received a stinging rebuke from the Lord (**Zech. 7:5-6**). Their fasting was not for the Lord at all, but for themselves. This kind of self-centered spirituality abounds in our time.

God, who made us, and who owns us desires the willing gift of our hearts to him (**Prov 23:26**). It is not petty religious observance that the Lord desires, it is not fasting or feasting that matters to Him, but the giving of our hearts in whatever we are doing. This condemns all hypocritical religion but it also ennobles everything we do that is truly for God.

There was a second problem: a shallowness in their thinking of the Bethel delegation. Now that the temple was restored, they wanted to stop fasting because they were concerned with the consequences of past sin and not with the sin itself.

God wanted the people to mourn not just the disaster brought on by sin, but the sin itself (**Zech 7:11-12**). The people of Jerusalem did not listen to God when he rebuked them, so God did not listen to their cries when disaster came (**Zech. 7:13**).

This provides us a standard to evaluate our own spirituality.

Is it sin or the consequences of sin we are concerned about?

Zechariah adds a third response, reminding the people that if they were seeking true religion they need only have consulted God's Word (**Zech. 7:7**). With false spirituality, people are looking for some new angle, seeking a new program or experience or high, when God's Word presents us with clear instruction as to our duty to him.

God's reply warns us against formalistic, self-centered, and man-invented worship.

## 2. Urgent Call vv. 8-10

After the Lord's reproof against false religion came an exhortation to true religion, based on the teachings of the earlier prophets (**Zech. 7:8-10**).

When the prophet speaks of true spirituality, he points to things that are predicated of God himself. True religion, therefore, is a matter of godliness.

If we love God, we will seek to be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ, for love always emulates its object.

Zechariah's call to true spirituality is a life in imitation of God, a life of truth and love for others, and a life of faith in the Bible, applying its teaching in practical ways as God's Spirit works in us.

## 3. Solemn Warning vv. 11-14

Zechariah now moves to a warning against unbelief and hardness of heart.

**First**, we see people's determined efforts to reject God that nonetheless failed to push God out of the picture (**Zech. 7:11**). It is simply not possible to avoid the consequences of false religion and self-worship (**Zech 7: 12**).

**Secondly**, when the Jews did not hear God when he called, when the consequences arrived, the Lord did not listen when they called to Him (**Zech. 7:13-14**)

This is the most terrible judgment-to be without God when we need Him.

Zechariah makes clear that the greatest evil that stands behind and causes all our other evils is our own sin. This is what we should mourn and lament: not just the consequences, but the sin itself (**Zech 7:14**).

What is true fasting but a hatred of sin, a loathing of evil, and a mourning for the transgressions that stand between us and God?

It is the pursuit of the things Zechariah of which the prophet writes, especially justice, mercy, and compassion, instead of a spirit of oppression and evil in our hearts (**Zech. 7:9-10**)-all in the power of the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ.

True religion is a love of God's answer to the problem of sin, Jesus Christ.

True spirituality is a thirst for the Spirit of God to dwell within us through his Word for newness of life.

True religion motivates us to strive against sin in the world, and to serve the cause of truth and justice and love so far as God should give us opportunity.