

Zechariah 7:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And to speak unto the priests which were in the house of the LORD of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?

Analysis

And to speak unto the priests which were in the house of the LORD of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years? The delegation's question reveals both commendable devotion and potential misunderstanding. They addressed "**the priests... and to the prophets**"—the twin authoritative sources for understanding God's will. Priests interpreted the law while prophets brought fresh revelation. This dual consultation shows proper recognition of religious authority.

The question itself concerns "**weeping in the fifth month**" (ha-ebkeh ba-chodesh ha-chamishi, הָעֵבֶכֶה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַחֲמִישִׁי). The fifth month (Ab, corresponding to July-August) commemorated the temple's destruction by Babylon in 586 BC (2 Kings 25:8-9). The phrase "**separating myself**" (hinnazer, הִנָּזֵר) uses vocabulary related to the Nazirite vow, suggesting consecration or abstinence—they practiced mourning fasts with ascetic rigor. "**As I have done these so many years**" indicates this fast had continued for nearly seventy years during and after exile.

Now, with the temple being rebuilt, they questioned whether to continue. The question seems reasonable—if the reason for mourning (temple's destruction) is being remedied, should the mourning cease? Yet God's response (verses 4-14) reveals that their fasting had been self-focused rather than God-centered. They

mourned their loss, not their sin. True repentance seeks God's glory and produces justice and mercy (7:9-10), not merely ritual observance.

Historical Context

The fifth month fast commemorated the climactic tragedy of 586 BC when Nebuchadnezzar's forces burned Solomon's temple (2 Kings 25:8-9, Jeremiah 52:12-13). For seventy years, pious Jews observed this anniversary with weeping and fasting. Other exile-related fasts included: the fourth month (breaching of Jerusalem's walls), the seventh month (Gedaliah's assassination), and the tenth month (beginning of Babylon's siege—Zechariah 8:19). These fasts weren't commanded in the Mosaic law but arose as spontaneous expressions of grief and repentance. By 518 BC, with temple reconstruction underway, the question became pressing: were these fasts still necessary? God's answer transforms the question—He doesn't directly command cessation or continuation but instead addresses heart attitude. When full restoration comes, these fasts will become "seasons of joy and gladness" (8:19), but that requires genuine spiritual transformation, not just ritual adjustment.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. Do your spiritual disciplines flow from genuine love for God and concern for His glory, or from self-focused motivations like tradition or emotional catharsis?
2. How can we distinguish between mourning over sin's consequences (which can be self-centered) and mourning over sin itself (which leads to repentance)?
3. What does this passage teach about the relationship between outward religious observance and inward heart transformation?

Interlinear Text

וְלֹאמַר	אֶל	הַכֹּהֲנִים	אֲשֶׁר	לְבֵית	יְהוָה
And to speak	H413	unto the priests	H834	which were in the house	of the LORD
H559		H3548		H1004	H3068
וְלֹאמַר	וְאֶל	הַנְּבִיאִים	וְלֹאמַר	הֲאֶבְכֶּה	בַּחֹדֶשׁ
of hosts	H413	and to the prophets	And to speak	Should I weep	month
H6635		H5030	H559	H1058	H2320
וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הַחֲמִישִׁי	וְהִנֵּה	כְּאֲשֶׁר	עָשִׂיתִי	זֶה	כִּמֹּה
in the fifth	separating	H834	myself as I have done	H2088	H4100
H2549	H5144		H6213		
שָׁנִים:					
these so many years					
H8141					

Additional Cross-References

Zechariah 8:19 (References Lord): Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.

Malachi 2:7 (References Lord): For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.