



**Why Do We Do What We Do When We Do What We Do?  
Ritual versus Worship or, It's Good to Ask Questions  
Zechariah 7**

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Growing up, I asked a lot of questions. Most kids do. But I was told I broke the mold. At home, whenever I asked why, I would get, well, pretty bogus answers every now and then. Many times, the answer was, either deferred, made up, or I was told to look it up in the encyclopedia. That usually led to also making use of a dictionary too.

But all of this led my young mind to keep asking away since it appears there are real answers out there, somewhere. We also used to go for 2 to 3 hours long drives every now and then and dad did not like to stop. So, I saved up my questions.

Whenever we were in the car, it meant I now could ask why questions pretty much unhindered for the next 3 hours. So, I did. I still remember when my Great Granddad Brown died, so I asked why at the funeral? I was told it was time for him to go to heaven. At the cemetery I asked the same question and got the same answer. Every time we drove by the cemetery, and that would be each and every trip, I would ask the same question.



Yes, the follow on is, so when is my time? When is your time? What happens when we die? Where do we go when we die? I miss Grandpa, when can I see him again?

And the only question answered was, after much asking, “well he is in heaven with Jesus, and you can see Him when Jesus comes back again.” Now this was coming from parents who were not saved at the time. But Grandpa really was a believer, so it was a true statement, but I was 6. And I remembered the answer.

Fast forward to the next trip, new question.

We are driving by the cemetery going into town so now I asked, “Has Jesus come back so I can see Grandpa?” Yes, I was one of those kids.

I have always had a lot of questions. I have been told that I ask too many of them, but I was never told that I asked dumb questions by anyone. I did hear, “I don’t know” a whole lot though.

When I came to Christ, guess what, I started asking lots of questions again. Ones that no one wanted to answer or couldn’t. I received a lot of books by doing that. That is probably why I love to work with new believers today, no question is dumb or silly. Because I may have asked it myself.

Some of my questions had to do with why we worshipped the way we did. Why do we do what we do when we do it? Why did we do communion the way we did and not the way Uncle Hubert and Aunt Dolly’s church did? By the way, they were serious Catholic. Why did we baptize in a big tub up front in the church when there was a perfectly good river down the road. Why not sprinkle?

And then I asked the questions not to be asked, why is the King James Bible so hard to read? Why no miracles? Why no healings? It happened in Acts, why not now?

The next two chapters in Zechariah are all because some folks from Bethel, asked some of the same kind of questions of the Priests and Prophets at the Temple.

The visions are done. It has been almost two years now. When we last met with Zechariah, it was late winter on February 15, 519 BC. Now it is December 7, 518 BC and the rebuilding of the Temple is about at the halfway mark.

As folks would arrive you could clearly see that there was work being done and more to be completed, but it was beginning to look like the Temple again.

Some normality is beginning to take place in some of the outlying communities because Temple ministry has been ongoing now for some time. This normality and the Temple being rebuilt, has led to some questions about some of the practices that have been going on for over 70 years. It seems that there have been some things incorporated into the life of the people without guidance from YAHWEH, because of what took place when the nation was disciplined by Him.

Now that the Temple is almost done, do we need to keep doing this?

This would be like walking into church and asking why do we stand for this, sit down for that, always sing first do announcements and then the Word.

By the way, just like the question being posed by the folks from Bethel, those questions are also on non-biblical things.



### Zechariah 7:1–3

“In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, which is Chisleu. Now the town of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regemmelech and their men to seek the favor of the LORD, speaking to the priests who belong to the house of the LORD of armies, and to the prophets, saying, “Shall I weep in the fifth month and fast, as I have done these many years?”” (NASB 2020)

Before we get too far into this, there is something we need to remember about Bethel. Pre-exile, they were all idolators.

Bethel had been part of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and was one of the two locations where the false religion set up by Jeroboam I, was engaged in. In fact, Bethel received special attention from YAHWEH when He sent the Prophet Amos from Tekoa in Judah there to talk with the false temple leadership about God, sin, and judgment.

When Israel split from Judah, they established two alternative centers of worship, in direct violation of the Torah, in Bethel and in Dan. Right at the very top of his prophecy, Amos let it be known to Israel, who he is going to be speaking to, just where the official center of worship for all Jews really is. It is in Jerusalem at the Temple. Not in front of a golden calf at an alternative worship location which also incorporates elements of fertility worship and Baal worship.

The worship of YAHWEH takes place on His terms, not theirs. The Temple is in Jerusalem and His edicts proceed from there.

It appears now, after most of Israel going into exile in Assyria, and then Babylon taking Judah away, that those who lived on the border in Bethel, finally got it. They have come to Jerusalem to the Temple to inquire of the Lord. But the reason sounds a lot more like the old ways, which is why they are there to ask. If they simply stopped doing, what was the official and approved method of worship to include certain fasts, then they might be accused of returning to idols.

They appear to have learned that lesson. Now they are worshipping at the Temple site in Jerusalem.

They are also trying to follow the law. The community has a question, and it is over a type and form of worship the Torah is silent on. They are asking about the fasting they have been doing now for over 70 years. Do we need to keep doing this even though the Temple is about done? Even though many in Bethel were not faithful, there were at least 223 loyal Jews there (Ezra 2:28) who returned from Babylon, and it appears they prevailed at the last meeting.

One other thing, prior to exile, all the festivals and various religious events, except for the Day of Atonement, were joyous events.

### Deuteronomy 17:8–10

“If a matter is too difficult for you to judge—bloodshed, legal claim, or assault—matters of controversy in your villages—you must leave there and go up to the place the LORD your God chooses. You will go to the Levitical priests and the judge in office in those days and seek a solution; they will render a verdict. You must then do as they have determined at that place the LORD chooses. Be careful to do just as you are taught.” (NET 2nd ed.)

They have a controversy in Bethel regarding the fast, and so they are doing just as Torah says to do. But they may have earlier sought a solution from the Persian Empire and were referred back.

That idea comes from the timing since it is now December and the fast that they are asking about took place 3 ½ months ago. It is also possible this is a group from Babylon which picked up the folks from



Bethel on the way to the Temple to get a ruling. After all, even the folks in Babylon were trying to at least follow the law too. It also may have simply taken that long to talk the idea through and decide what to do.

But the folks in Bethel are concerned with ceremony, moral righteousness, not so much. By the way, as it pertains to fasts, Isaiah pointed out the one which the Lord would be pleased with.

Isaiah 58:6–10

“‘Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; You shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’ ‘If you take away the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, If you extend your soul to the hungry And satisfy the afflicted soul, Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, And your darkness shall be as the noonday.’” (NKJV)

That is not anything like the fast they have been doing for 70 years and more. What they have been doing, or at least what it has turned into, is vain, ritualistic, ceremonial, heartless worship. They are asking pretty much the same question I asked after salvation. Why?

Why do we do the various religious acts that the Scriptures call us to? Are these merely an outward conformity on our part to rules and regulations, by which we hope to appease God? Or does our obedience flow out of hearts that delight in the salvation he has given us? (Duguid 2010, 130)

The fast they are asking about is not one specified by the Lord.

There is something in the text though that gives us a hint of where the heart of these men who are coming to the Temple on behalf of Bethel is. They are there to “seek the favor of the Lord” or as the Hebrew says, to “entreat the favor of the Lord.”

“This phrase is typically used in contexts where the Lord’s face has been turned away in anger. For example, in Exodus the Lord announced his intention to let his anger burn against his people, but ‘Moses sought the favour of the LORD’ (Exodus 32:11). The use of this phrase here about the men from Bethel suggests that they considered themselves to be experiencing God’s curses for the past 70 years rather than his blessings, and they had come to the Lord seeking a reversal of this situation.” (Stead 2015, 111)

The two men leading the group of men who have come from Bethel, know that they have been enduring the curses of the Lord due to what it is their ancestors had been up to when Bethel was one of the idol centers for Israel.

And about this fast. After the fall of Jerusalem, the people fasted four times a year. This was in addition to the one day, the Day of Atonement, that they were already commanded by the Lord to do. The Lord did not add these four additional times, they did.

These fasts were added to the calendar to mourn over what was lost, not so much over the sin that led to the loss.

- They fasted in the tenth month to commemorate when the Babylonians had begun to lay siege to the city of Jerusalem.
- They fasted in the fourth month to commemorate when the city walls of Jerusalem had been broken through.
- They fasted in the fifth month to commemorate when the temple in Jerusalem had been burned.



- Finally, they fasted in the seventh month, the month when Governor Gedaliah had been assassinated. (Fries, Rummage and Gallaty 2015, 140)

They came to get a ruling from the Priests and the Prophets since there were no longer any Judges. Zechariah was tasked by the Lord to provide the response. Oh, the answer will be delayed until the Zechariah 8:18-19. There is some other things to discuss first.

Zechariah 7:4–7

“Then the word of the LORD of armies came to me, saying, “Say to all the people of the land and to the priests, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months these seventy years, was it actually for Me that you fasted? And when you eat and drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves? Are these not the words which the LORD proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and carefree along with its cities around it, and the Negev and the foothills were inhabited?’ ”” (NASB 2020)

So, the question was about the fast of the fifth month regarding the destruction of the Temple (2 Kings 25:8).

The answer though has brought in one additional fast, that one for the assassination of Gedaliah (Jeremiah 41:1-2, 2 Kings 25:25).

Here is the question from the Lord – this is directed to the entire nation – why? The Lord is the one asking the why question here.

When we see this, immediately I find myself looking at my own heart. Why? When the Lord asks, it is time to examine overall motivation.

Why do we serve the Lord where we are serving Him? Why do we give to the Lord? Why do we even worship or come to church? Why?

This is no different than what Paul was talking about in his first letter to the folks in Corinth. They had serious issues over motivation and reasons why. They were into looking good but had a bit of confusion over the being a believer part.

In his instructions to them, Paul also covers the why from the perspective of the Lord. He does this using an analogy of various building materials and the quality and durability of the various material choices.

1 Corinthians 3:11–15

“For God has already placed Jesus Christ as the one and only foundation, and no other foundation can be laid. Some will use gold or silver or precious stones in building on the foundation; others will use wood or grass or straw. And the quality of each person’s work will be seen when the Day of Christ exposes it. For on that Day fire will reveal everyone’s work; the fire will test it and show its real quality. If what was built on the foundation survives the fire, the builder will receive a reward. But if anyone’s work is burnt up, then he will lose it; but he himself will be saved, as if he had escaped through the fire.” (GNB)

For us as believers, we all have the same base foundation, Jesus. But then choice comes into play. We can choose to build on top of the foundation with durable materials, or ones that are expedient but simply will not last. We are all given the opportunity to build as we want. Either with motivations that are in alignment with the Lord, or ones more oriented to making us look good.

When we see Christ at the Bema seat, the issue is not salvation, that has already been settled, no, it’s what have you done with it? Let’s take a look at the “whys” you did things. A lot like what YAHWEH is saying here in Zechariah.



Think of the Bema seat as an evaluation by the Lord of all the reasons why you did what you did as a believer. He is more interested in that than He is in the results.

We are used to job evaluations where it is all about the results. What have you achieved in the past year for the firm. How did you add value to the brand and furthered the mission of the organization. All Jesus is interested in is faithfulness and obedience. That tends to remove all we did due to other motivations and limit it to what did we do because of Jesus and what He has done for us. Are we simply faithful to His calling?

The fire mentioned is not a retributive or punitive fire, but it is a fire of testing. The image is that of a fire which exposes materials of bad quality by reducing them to ashes while leaving the good materials intact. The work that is judged is more the work of an individual in building on the foundation rather than that of personal character. (Vaughn and Lea 2002, 43)

The distinction is not between the lost and the saved, but among the saved between those who have built well and those who have built poorly. (Morris 1985, 70)

There will be those who are in the Kingdom who will have a bit of a smokey smell around them. They are saved, but they spent their time glorifying self and living for self. That was their motivation for service, or giving, or any other works.

Here in Zechariah, the Lord is asking the same question. Why did you fast? Nation of Israel, for the past 70 plus years, why did you even do this? Was it for the Lord? Did they truly fast, pray and repent of the sins that brought them to being in exile in the first place. Daniel did (Daniel 9:3-19), but he may have been the exception rather than the rule.

When we worship, why do we stand? Why do we lift our hands when we worship and pray? Why do we serve wherever it is we are serving? Why do I stand to teach up in front rather than have the stage in the center and everyone all around?

Some of the whys are personal preference and have no bearing whatsoever on the work of the Lord. Standing, sitting, kneeling or lying face down on the floor to worship or pray is exactly that. I can no longer kneel to pray since I have done things to both knees. There are times standing to worship is not comfortable and there are times sitting isn't either.

When we worship, should we stand, sit, sing along, or, as I see way too often, just stand and do nothing totally disengaged from what is going on. That is formalism.

But we don't do any of that, right? Currently we meet on Sunday mornings in a covered patio venue. Everyone sits at tables. There is no worship band, not that we wouldn't like one. We study the Bible together, pray and then go home. On Thursdays we meet in an auditorium and have never had worship, actually, that would be an incorrect statement.

When I first took over the Midweek Bible Study about 14 years ago, we were on Wednesdays, we had worship, it was a full service.

Traditions, routines are easy to get into. How do we do them?

Some of the ways we worship in the church today looks and feels too much like going to a rock concert rather than being led to the throne room of God and worshipping, praising and adoring Him together. But again, how do we do them?



Trust me, I like concerts, I performed in more of them than I can remember. But I also remember being told worship is only worship when the songs are at least 100 years old and are in four-part harmony. Then there are those who still go for Gregorian Chant.

I have also heard drums are of the devil and guitars should be seen and never heard.

But God says to us, why are you doing this to begin with? "The danger of any religious tradition—whether it is keeping a fast or singing a certain song or praying with certain words at a certain time in a certain way—is that tradition easily degenerates into traditionalism." (Fries, Rummage and Gallaty 2015, 143)

God is asking the people did you do this to honor me, or is it because you feel sorry for yourselves and what you lost?

This question from the Lord is a repeat of what He asked earlier in Isaiah 1:11-17, Hosea 6:6 and Amos 5:21-24. At the moment this is being asked, God is blessing His people. They are back on the land; the Temple is being rebuilt and the situation continues to improve daily.

He rebukes them for fasting and for feasting without having the heart in the right place accusing them of being no better than pre-exile.

Zechariah 7:8–14

"Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, "This is what the LORD of armies has said: 'Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.' But they refused to pay attention, and turned a stubborn shoulder and plugged their ears from hearing. They also made their hearts as hard as a diamond so that they could not hear the Law and the words which the LORD of armies had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the LORD of armies. And just as He called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen," says the LORD of armies; "but I scattered them with a storm wind among all the nations whom they did not know. So the land was desolated behind them so that no one went back and forth, since they made the pleasant land desolate." (NASB 2020)

You weren't there when this message first went to your ancestors who had a problem differentiating between ritual and relationship. So let me tell you what I told them.

The bottom line is this, when the heart is wrong, the ritual, whatever it is, is wrong. Remember, the folks who came from Bethel were interested in the future, not the past. But to understand the present, the Lord will take them to the past which is the key to their future.

Here is what YAHWEH told your ancestors through the prophets. "Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another." (Zechariah 7:9b–10, NASB 2020)

This is a recall of the message given both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms prior to going into exile. They were told, and they ignored the word from the Lord.

YAHWEH first shows them what true justice looks like. They know they went into exile due to sin meaning they already know that true justice was not something being done in the past.

True justice points to the kind of legal judgments that are in line with truth or faithfulness. Whereas there was a temptation for the rich to manipulate the court system to their own advantage, the prophet challenges those responsible for judgment to follow the core values expressed in the Torah and based on Yahweh's character, the one who "abounds in truth/faithfulness" (Exod. 34:6). (Boda 2016, 456)



In our study of the Minor Prophets, all of them railed against the injustice taking place in the culture of the day in both Kingdoms. And, as we learned, this is still an issue in our culture of today.

By bringing this back up, the Lord is not only reminding them of the why of the exile, something they have acknowledged in the language they used in approaching Him, but He is also warning them about the dangers they face as they go forward.

The Temple is being rebuilt, things are currently going well, and God is indeed blessing. But He knows their hearts and the danger that lies there.

This is not a history lesson simply to remind them of why they are where they are, but it is also a warning and is incredibly relevant for the present.

Zechariah 7:9–10

“This is what the LORD of armies has said: ‘Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.’” (NASB 2020)

This is also incredibly relevant for us today too.

YAHWEH has just restated some of the Big Ten + one.

- Dispense true judgement - “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:16, ESV)
- Practice kindness and compassion each to his brother - “You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal... You shall not covet ...anything that is your neighbor’s.” (Exodus 20:13–15, 17a, 17c, ESV)
- Do not oppress the widow or the orphan or the stranger or the poor - “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth... You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain...” (Exodus 20:3–4a, 7a, ESV)
- Do not devise evil in your hearts against one another - “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:18, ESV)

In other words, ritual on Saturday is ok if your heart is right. If your heart is right, the ritual is not ritual but is an exhibition of love flowing from an obedient heart. Because if your heart is right, then the way that you live Sunday through Friday will also be done in light of your relationship and your heart being right before the Lord. This is a warning to the nation.

The prophets were rejected in the past, don’t be like your ancestors.

We hear the same today. There are many who are “appearing” at church but not truly listening to what is being said. This is evident in the research being done by George Barna discovering that for those who say they are born again, only 50% are deeply committed to practicing their faith and 55% read or study the Bible at least weekly. (Barna 2023)

Every church today, no matter how faithful and biblically oriented they are, is struggling against Laodicea and Jezebel.





A graphic example has been taking place right here every week over the past decade. When we were part of the overall ministry of Calvary Jupiter, the church grew from around 400 on Sundays to over 1600. How many though want to go further with the word and show up for in depth Bible study. Less than 4%. It used to be that 10% was the norm for a midweek study, but that has never been the case here.

There have been significant changes in our country just since 2020. When looking at the general population of the United States, it used to be that 6% held a Biblical worldview, but that has dropped now to 4%. It used to be that 25% held some beliefs and behaviors consistent with a Biblical worldview but were not quite there, but now that is only 14%. That means that those who do not exhibit a Biblical worldview at all, has increased from 69% to 82% just since 2020. (Barna, American Worldview Inventory 2023 Release #1: Incidence of Biblical Worldview Shows Significant Change Since the Start of the Pandemic 2023)

We need revival. Only 23% of our country believes the best indicator of a successful life is consistent obedience to God.

I am excited to see the size of the mission field that the Lord has given us. Our goal is the make disciples, and we now know that we are in the right place and at the right time to do so.

We are praying to see thousands come to Christ here in South Florida. Join with us as we pray to see an outpouring of His Spirit here in these last days.

The hold of the world is alluring and since the pandemic, has only gotten stronger.

YAHWEH knows that this mindset also existed in His people there in Judea and Jerusalem. This is why the need for a history lesson. They need it, so do we.

What is the history of the nation? What did they do after being confronted with the numerous warnings from YAHWEH given through all of the Prophets?

Zechariah 7:11–12

“But they refused to pay attention, and turned a stubborn shoulder and plugged their ears from hearing. They also made their hearts as hard as a diamond so that they could not hear the Law and the words which the LORD of armies had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the LORD of armies.” (NASB 2020)

The way the Lord puts it is intensely personal. He had His message taken to them. It was as if He had walked up and put His hand on their shoulder in order to talk as a friend, but they pulled away. YAHWEH loved them and wanted to give them a warning as a friend would, but He was refused.

God is comparing the nations action to that of a spoiled child who, when touched on the shoulder for correction, pulls away from you. Daring you to correct them.

I still remember being in a bookstore in Wichita Kansas with my daughter and, at the time, her three children. The middle child decided to act up and started screaming at the top of her lungs the typical, no, I won't. Well, her mother asked if I would take her outside to the car where we would wait for her to finish her shopping. Which we did. I intended to walk with her hand in my hand but when I touched her shoulder, she pulled it away and said no.

No problem. I picked her up and threw her over my shoulder and carried her out to the car while she kicked, screamed, and yelled all the way. I even had several mothers offering to help me by opening doors as we headed out. Oh, and one applauded.



So, take that behavior, and now have it be the nation of Israel and how they reacted to God. Not only did they pull away from the Lord, but they also put their fingers into their ears, just like a kid, to prevent from hearing about any pending discipline.

Let me remind you again that this delegation had come from Bethel, the same Bethel that Amos went to just before the Assyrian army showed up and took the nation into exile and provided them this assuring word from YAHWEH.

Amos 4:12

“Therefore, I will bring upon you all the disasters I have announced. Prepare to meet your God in judgment, you people of Israel!” (NLT)

Of course, the reaction of Israel as well as the idolators was less than appropriate and repentance was not on the table.

In fact, the Priest in Bethel slandered Amos to the King and then tried a bit of gas lighting of Amos to chase him out of town. The response from God.

Amos 7:17

“But this is what the LORD says: ‘Your wife will become a prostitute in this city, and your sons and daughters will be killed. Your land will be divided up, and you yourself will die in a foreign land. And the people of Israel will certainly become captives in exile, far from their homeland.’ ” (NLT)

Yes, they did indeed pull the shoulder away.

Amos 5:21–24

“I hate all your show and pretense— the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies. I will not accept your burnt offerings and grain offerings. I won’t even notice all your choice peace offerings. Away with your noisy hymns of praise! I will not listen to the music of your harps. Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living.” (NLT)

The history is simple, they refused to pay attention, they pulled away from the only one who could save them and then refused to listen. They made themselves into hypocrites. That was not enough.

Zechariah 7:12

“They also made their hearts as hard as a diamond so that they could not hear the Law and the words which the LORD of armies had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the LORD of armies.” (NASB 2020)

This word applies to both the north and the south. Both did this. Both refused to listen. And both paid the price.

Here is the thing, performing a ritual does not mean the individual is in a right relationship with God. If the heart is right, then the ritual becomes worship and reflects the heart.

Zechariah is not condemning those things which the Torah teaches as means for the faithful and obedient to approach God. But when the heart condition is forgotten, and you begin to think that by simply doing the ritual, you are right with God, then you have become a hypocrite.

Zechariah wasn’t condemning traditions as such. He was emphasizing the fact that the true spiritual life can’t be turned on and off at our convenience, so that we serve God one minute and forget Him the next. (Weirsbe 1997, 120)



When I was in Bible school, my roommate was going to the Seminary across the street. In fact, I also considered going to the same seminary and was ready to register there. That was the first time I audibly heard the Holy Spirit speak to me. He said “No, this is not for you.”

In Bible school, there were no courses on how to do church. There was no class on the “how to” of this ritual or the other. The Seminary had no course work on that either. Why? Simple, the schools were not involved in teaching any specific denominational method of doing church.

There was no Baptism 101 class or Communion 201. If asked, the Professor would point you to the scriptures and say check out the guidebook, aka the Bible.

For the people bringing the query from Bethel, the Lord was pointing out to them that “religion” is just not part of your life as they had thought, it was their life, and it isn’t religion per se but relationship with the one who has provided them the means to approach Him in worship.

Rituals, or traditions, are not wrong. They can be instructive, unite us, give us a sense of identity and community, help us teach others and help to remember important truths. Yes, there are some things which the scriptures do indeed command us to observe or do. But the heart attitude is and should always be central.

I loved one of the things Tevye says in the Fiddler on the Roof after a discussion at the beginning of the play about the traditions of wearing a covering on his head or wearing a prayer shawl. He says, “because of our traditions every one of us knows who he is and what God expects him to do.”

Traditions, no matter how ancient they may be, only have value if they are grounded in God’s truth and point us to Him. Tradition must be under the authority of God and His Word; any tradition that contradicts God’s Word or distracts us from it should be discarded. Tradition may be a way we practice our faith, but our faith is founded in God’s truth, not fallible human tradition. (Got Questions Ministries 2014-2021)

YAHWEH is reminding the remnant of His people, those who have returned from Babylon, why that happened in the first place. There is one more step they need to be reminded of, discipline.

Zechariah 7:13–14

“And just as He called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen,” says the LORD of armies; “but I scattered them with a storm wind among all the nations whom they did not know. So the land was desolated behind them so that no one went back and forth, since they made the pleasant land desolate.” (NASB 2020)

Judgement came upon their ancestors because God is faithful to His promises. The curses of the covenant became inevitable because of the sin of His people. They refused to listen to God and rejected the ways He had outlined to be approached and instead they insisted on their own methods which meant the worship of false gods intermixed with empty ritual without any spiritual focus at all. They had no relationship with YAHWEH. When judgement came, they presumed upon the Lord thinking He would come to their rescue and would answer their prayers, but they did not know Him and did not seek Him until they began to reap what they had sowed.

Unfortunately, we are no different. I have talked with more people than I care to remember who have told me they are Christians because they went forward or said a prayer, but no relationship was ever established. The fruit of the Spirit, which we should see in the life of anyone who is a believer, is non-existent.

God is saying all of this to the folks from Bethel because He loves them. They are asking the right questions, and the fact that they have come to the Temple to ask, as per the Torah, what a bonus. They know and have already demonstrated verbally, that they have been under the curse.



They obviously do not want to go there again. So, first a history lesson.

We would do well to listen as well. When you “came to Christ,” was there a change? Has the Lord followed up with you on aspects of your life that just have to change? Those are all signs that you belong to Him. Or did you simply get your fire insurance and move on with your life never looking back or even thinking about how to serve the lord today.

The Lord does not want you to repeat history again. He wants you with Him for all eternity.

Romans 3:21–24

“But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.” (NLT)

Romans 10:9–13

“If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.” Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. For “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”” (NLT)

### **ABC’s of Salvation**

- A. Acknowledge that you are a sinner, tell Him that.
- B. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sin and that He rose from the dead.
- C. Confess that Jesus is Lord. Tell someone about what you have done.



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