

# Zechariah 07 - Questions About Fasting; Four Divine Answers

## III. Questions and Answers About Fasting (Zech 7:1—8:23)

- (1) Question (7:1-3)
  - (A) Date (7:1)
  - (B) Questioner (7:2)
  - (C) Question (7:3)
- (2) Four divine answers (7:4—8:23)
  - (A) Condemnation of empty ritualism (7:4-7)
  - (B) Condemnation of past covenant failure (7:8-14)
    - (a) Covenant requirements (7:8-10)
    - (b) Covenant rebellion (7:11-12)
    - (c) Covenant judgment (7:13-14)

Approximately two years after the night visions of Zech 1-6 describing the whole future of Israel, including the subjugation of her enemies, her regathering in the Land, her cleansing, restoration, and the establishment of the theocracy. (December 7, 518 BC; Cf. v1 with 1:7) and about halfway through the period of temple rebuilding (520-516 BC).

Result: Temple rebuilding encouraged (1/2 done?). Now in 518 BC, Darius reconfirmed the original decree by Cyrus (Ezra 6:1-14). Residences emerge (Haggai 1:4).

This section begins the second of the three divisions of the book. It is within this, the book's structural core, that we find the interpretive essence of Zechariah's entire message. The Lord Himself is undertaking to encourage His people to take heart and rebuild the Temple because He is returning to once again inhabit Jerusalem, glorify the city and bless its inhabitants.

Leaving behind the apocalyptic imagery of the previous chapters, Zechariah launches into a sermon of prophetic exhortation. The basis of this ethical appeal to the people is a response to a question asked of Zechariah by a delegation from the city of Bethel in regard to the continued appropriateness of observing certain days of mourning. This elicits a visceral response from the prophet, who tells the people that that no matter the particular circumstances, it is faithfulness to the covenant with which God is concerned. The worshipers' attitudes must be congruent with their exercise in order for God to appreciate their worship.

This two-chapter portion is dated Dec 7, 518 BC, almost two years after Zechariah's night visions, and over two years since the reconstruction of the Temple had begun. This chapter begins as the city of Bethel sends a delegation to the Jerusalem priests who served at the then half-completed Temple to inquire as to whether it was appropriate to continue observing the fast day of Tisha B'Av, the commemoration of the day of the Temple's destruction in 586 BC. Zechariah, speaking for the Lord, denounces the people for observing this and other fast days with inappropriate motives, with being more concerned with observance than obedience. The Lord charges them with self-centeredness and forgetting the covenant stipulations of social justice, mercy and societal compassion. They have hypocritically substituted the consideration of man-made memorials for God-ordained requirements. The people are reminded that it was this very attitude of covenantal neglect and insubordination which had invoked the Lord's severe wrath and resulted in the Babylonian exile.

## **Zechariah 7**

### III. Questions and Answers About Fasting (Zech 7:1–8:23)

#### (1) Question (7:1-3)

##### (A) Date (7:1)

**1** 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* Chislev.

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**1** During the fourth year of the reign of King Darius, a message from the LORD came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month Kislev.

**1** And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Darius, *that* the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, *even in* Chislev;

- "...fourth year of King Darius" - 2nd date given in Zechariah (Cf. 1:7); the events of Zech 7 took place about two years after the events of Zech 1 ("second year of Darius")

- "...fourth day of the ninth month" - the exact date was December 7, 518 BC

##### (B) Questioner (7:2)

**2** Now *the town of Bethel* had sent Sharezer and Regemmelech and their men to seek the favor of the LORD,

**2** Now *the town of Bethel* had sent Sharezer and Regemmelech and their men to seek the favor of the LORD,

**2** The people of Bethel were sending Sharezer, Regem-melech, and their men to pray in the LORD's presence

2 When they had sent unto the house of God Sherezer and Regemmelech, and their men, to pray before the LORD,

- "...Bethel" - about 10 miles north of Jerusalem (Cf. Ezra 2:28; Neh 7:32; 11:31)
- Two representatives were sent to Jerusalem to get some spiritual answers...

(C) Question (7:3)

3 speaking to the priests who *belong* to the house of the LORD of armies, and to the prophets, saying, "Shall I weep in the **fifthmonth** and fast, as I have done these many years?"

3 speaking to the priests who belong to the house of the LORD of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, "Shall I weep in the fifth month and abstain, as I have done these many years?"

3 and to speak to the priests assigned to the Temple of the LORD of the Heavenly Armies along with the prophets, asking, "Am I to go about mourning, denying myself throughout the fifth month, as I have done these many years?"

3 *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?

- Their question was about how they should worship the Lord (Cf. Mal 1:9)
- The two men wanted to know specifically if they should continue to 'weep' and 'abstain' from food (i.e. fast), which had become Jewish tradition, but which the Mosaic Law did not require
  - The significance of the ninth day of the fifth month was that was the date that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in 586 BC
  - The only fast prescribed in the Mosaic Law was on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29; 23:27-32)
  - The two ambassadors wanted to know, since the temple was being rebuilt, if they should continue with this ritual of fasting and weeping
  - "...fifth month" - Av (mid-July to mid-August)

Josephus records that the destruction of the second (Zerubbabel/Herod's) temple, which was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, occurred on the 9th of Av, the same date as Solomon's Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC.



## Josephus

*Antiquities 6.4.5*

“So Titus retired into the tower of Antonia, and resolved to storm the temple the next day, early in the morning, with his whole army, and to encamp round about the holy house; but, as for that house, God had for certain long ago doomed it to the fire; and now that fatal day was come, according to the revolution of ages; it was the tenth day of the month Lous [Ab], upon which it was formerly burnt by the king of Babylon; although these flames took their rise from the Jews themselves, and were occasioned by them...”

*Mishnah* - a book of extra-biblical Jewish traditions; it outlined the rules and regulations of the Pharisees, outside the Mosaic Law

## Mishnah

*m. Taanit 4.6*

“On the ninth of Ab (1) the decree was made against our forefathers that they should not enter the land, (2) the first Temple and (3) the second [Temple] were destroyed, (4) Betar was taken, and (5) the city was ploughed up [after the war of Hadrian].”



1. The decree by the forefathers that they should not enter the land (Num 13-14)
2. The destruction of the first temple (Solomon's Temple) by Nebuchadnezzar (586 BC)

### 3. The destruction of the second temple, by the Romans (70 AD)

God is a God of precision.

#### (2) Four divine answers (7:4—8:23)

##### (A) Condemnation of empty ritualism (7:4-7)

4 Then **the word of the LORD of armies came to me**, saying,

4 Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying,

4 Then this message from the LORD of the Heavenly Armies came to me:

4 Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying,

- "...the word of the LORD of armies came to me" - a textual marker indicating the Lord's answer to the question (v3)

— This is oracle 1 of 4 (Cf. 7:4; 7:8; 8:1; 8:18)

5 "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?

5 "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?

5 "Talk to everyone in the land, as well as to the priests. Ask them, 'When you were fasting and mourning during the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, were you really fasting for me?

5 Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh *month*, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?

- God's first oracle condemns empty ritualism

— He condemns this ritual they started because they were mourning the effect (consequence), but not the cause behind it

— They were upset and grieving over the fact that the temple was destroyed; they were not upset or grieving over their violations of God's Law, which forced Him to discipline His people

— They should be more upset about what got them into this mess than what the mess looks like. Their eyes were on the effect of the destruction, not on the cause of the destruction.

— They were upset about doing the time when they should've been upset about the crime that led to doing the time

— They forgot the reality behind the ritual. Once you forget the reality behind the ritual (communion?), it becomes an empty ritual

- God wouldn't have been so against their ritual mourning the destruction of the temple if they were more mindful of the cause of the destruction rather than the effect of it
- Throughout Scripture, God issues very sharp condemnations of empty ritualism: Is 29:13; Mark 7:13
- "...seventy years" - during the 70-year captivity in Babylon, the Jews faithfully kept this ritual

6 And **when you eat and drink**, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves?

6 When you eat and drink, do you not eat for yourselves and do you not drink for yourselves?

6 And when you eat and drink, you're eating and drinking for your own benefit, aren't you?

6 And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat *for yourselves*, and drink *for yourselves*?

- "...when you eat and drink" - in other words, the ritual was more for them than it was for God

7 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?"

7 Are not *these* the words which the LORD proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous along with its cities around it, and the Negev and the foothills were inhabited?"

7 Isn't this what the LORD proclaimed through the former prophets, when a prosperous Jerusalem was inhabited, as were its surrounding cities, the Negev, and the Shephelah?"

7 *Should ye not hear* the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when *men* inhabited the south and the plain?

- "...former prophets" - pre-exilic prophets (Isaiah, et al)
- God is saying, I'm telling you now exactly what I spoke through Isaiah earlier; what God spoke through Isaiah earlier, He is saying again now through Zechariah.
- God condemned the people, through Isaiah, before the temple was destroyed, for the exact same reason. Now that they were back from the captivity, they are repeating the same mistakes.
- Note that God is authenticating Zechariah as a prophet because he is saying the same thing as the former prophets said
- "...inhabited and carefree" - when God originally spoke through Isaiah, Jerusalem was populated and without care, as were its suburbs, and even the foothills and the Negev were inhabited.

— Israel never thought the captivity would happen...the economy was up, the stock market was up, unemployment was down...everything was good

Is 29:13: Then the Lord said, "Because this people approaches Me with their words And honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of *the commandment of men* that is taught;

(B) Condemnation of past covenant failure (7:8-14)

(a) Covenant requirements (7:8-10)

**8** Then **the word of the LORD came to Zechariah**, saying,

**8** Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah saying,

**8** This message from the LORD came to Zechariah again:

**8** And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying,

- "...the word of the LORD came to Zechariah" - oracle 2 of 4 (Cf. 7:4; 7:8; 8:1; 8:18)

— The second oracle outlines the Mosaic Laws that were broken, which led to the destruction of the temple

— Israel was upset about the destruction of the temple, but they were not upset by the covenant violations that led to its destruction

— Verses 8-10 are the covenant requirements that Israel violated; v11-12 is the covenant rebellion

**9** "This is what the LORD of armies has said: '**Dispense true justice** and **practice kindness** and **compassion each to his brother**;

**9** "Thus has the LORD of hosts said, 'Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother;

**9** "This is what the LORD of the Heavenly Armies says: 'Administer true justice, and show gracious love and mercy toward each other.

**9** Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother:

- God recapitulates what caused the Babylonian captivity in the first place

- "...Dispense true justice" - numerous provisions of the Mosaic Law relate to how Israel was to "dispense true justice"

— When God thinks of justice, He thinks of those who are oppressed: not paying employees who earned their pay; putting someone to death to obtain their property (Ahab); balances/weights that aren't fair, and many other provisions

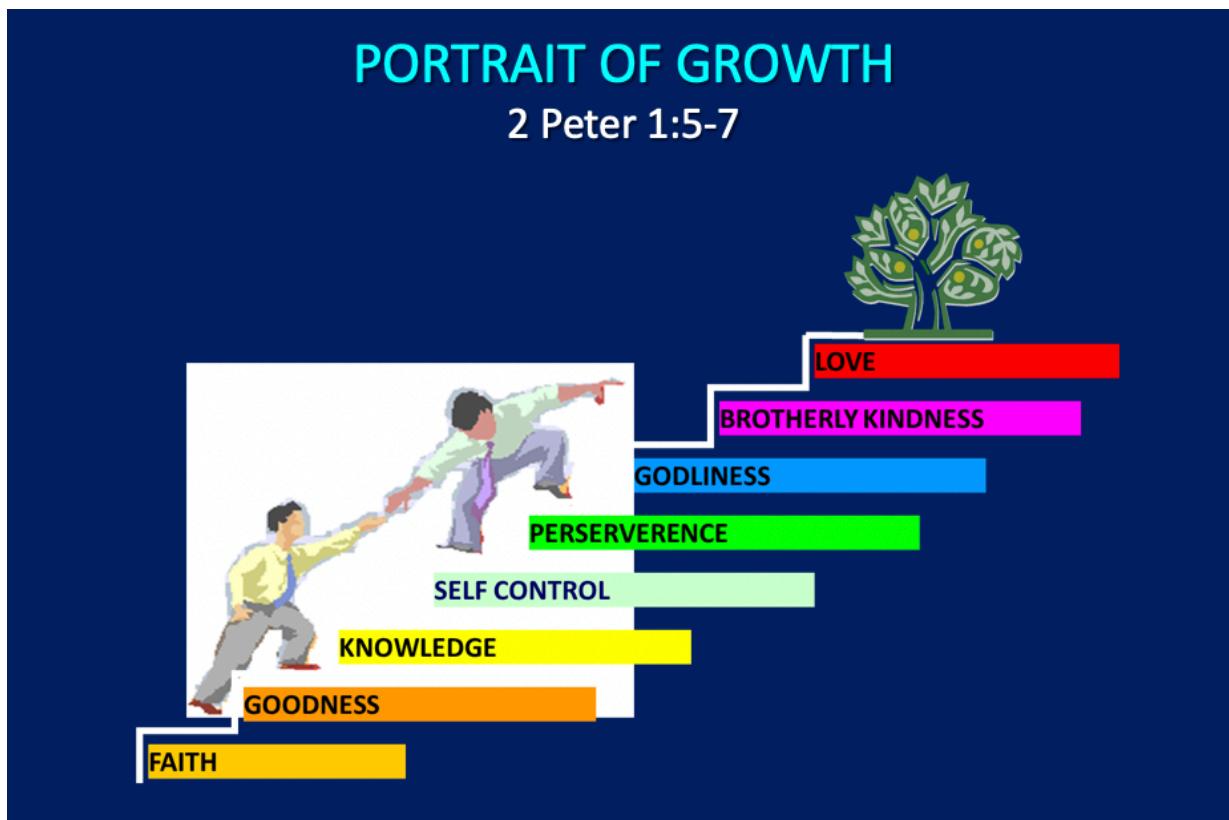
- "...practice kindness" - 2 Peter 1:5-7 talks about the portrait of spiritual growth...

— Whether you're under the Mosaic Law or the Law of Christ, God is into kindness (Cf. Rom 12:10)

- "...compassion each to his brother" - commandments 5-10 taught the Israelites how to relate to each other; Israel was not practicing these commandments with each other

2 Peter 1:5-7:

5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your **faith** supply **moralexcellence** (goodness), and in *your* moral excellence, **knowledge**,  
6 and in *your* knowledge, **self-control**, and in *your* self-control, **perseverance**, and in *your* perseverance, **godliness**,  
7 and in *your* godliness, **brotherlykindness**, and in *your* brotherly kindness, **love**.



10 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!

10 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!

10 You are not to wrong the widow, orphans, the foreigner, or the poor, and you are not to plan evil against each other.

10 And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.

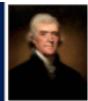
- "...do not oppress the widow or the orphan" - they were not looking out for the widows and orphans, in fact they were oppressing them (Cf. James 1:27)
- "...stranger" - *ger*, an alien, a non-Israelite
- It was a person who entered Israel and followed legal procedures to obtain recognized standing as a resident alien. They were legal immigrants.
- Ruth is a good example. Although a Moabite, she was allowed to enter the land (even though God said in Deuteronomy that the Moabites and Ammonites could not enter the land). Thus, God Himself recognized the distinction between being a *ger* and those who entered the country illegally (*nekar* or *zar*) for nefarious reasons. Ruth entered Israel legally and submitted to both their culture and religion.
- There is a significant difference between an alien (*ger*, used in v10) and a foreigner (*nekar* or *zar*) in the OT
- "...devise evil in your hearts" - they were devising evil in their hearts; they were turning on each other because the evil was emanating from their heart (Cf. Prov 4:23)



**James Hoffmeier**

*The Immigration Crisis, 52.*

**"In the Hebrew Bible the alien (*Ger*) was a person who entered Israel and followed legal procedures to obtain recognized standing as a resident alien. Hence I will use the term alien or *ger* throughout the book to refer to legal immigrants. Clearly there was a distinction between the alien (*Ger*) and a foreigner (*nekar* or *zar*) in the Old Testament, and this difference will be clear in the narratives, stories, and laws that will be reviewed in the following sections."**



## Thomas Jefferson

“His moral doctrines...were more pure and perfect than those of the most correct of the philosophers...gathering all into one family under the bonds of love, charity, peace, common wants and common aids. A development of this head will evince the peculiar superiority of the system of Jesus over all others. The precepts of philosophy, and of the Hebrew code, laid hold of actions only. He pushed his scrutinies into the heart of man; erected his tribunal in the region of his thoughts, and purified the waters at the fountain head.”

On April 21, 1803, Jefferson wrote to Dr. Benjamin Rush, also a signer of the Declaration

(b) Covenant rebellion (7:11-12)

11 But they **refused to pay attention**, and **turned a stubborn shoulder** and **plugged their ears from hearing**.

11 But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears from hearing.

11 But they refused to pay attention, turned their backs, and stopped listening.

11 But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear.

– "...refused to pay attention" - they refused to pay attention to the covenant, and refused to pay attention to the prophets who were pointing out their covenant violations

– God took that as a rejection of His Word. There are many ways that we can reject God's Word...from burning our Bible to organizing our life in such a way that we're so busy that we don't have time to read, study or pray.

– They weren't actively opposing the prophets...they simply ignored them and their warnings from God

– Their lifestyles were setup that they had everything else to do except pay attention to what was important to God

– "...turned a stubborn shoulder" - an agrarian term, relating to the difficulty in yoking an unyielding ox; intractably refusing

– "...plugged their ears from hearing" - they willingly drown out the prophet's messages by purposefully plugging their ears, silencing the voices of the prophets

— Stephen's politically incorrect sermon condemning 1st century Israel of their guilt of not recognizing their Messiah resulted in the Sanhedrin "covering their ears" just as they began to stone him (Acts 7:57)

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.**

12 They made their hearts *like* flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the Lord of hosts.

12 They made their hearts hard like a diamond, to keep from obeying the Law and the messages that the LORD of the Heavenly Armies sent by his Spirit through the former prophets.

12 Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts.

- "...the LORD of armies had sent by His Spirit" - there is no other mention of the Holy Spirit as the Mediator of God's Word to the prophets, who were themselves mediators, anywhere else in the OT prophetic books

— Zechariah is the first to record this aspect of the Doctrine of the Spirit

— What this means is that Israel in the OT was not rejected the prophets themselves, they were rejecting God Himself. Today, if we reject a Bible teacher who is faithful, you're not rejecting that Bible teacher, you're rejecting the Spirit-led message that the teacher is communicating.

- Calvinism points to this verse and says, Their hearts were *as hard as* a diamond

— What they completely bypass is the first part of the verse that indicates that the people ("they") "made their hearts" hard of their own volition. God didn't harden their hearts.

— Calvinists do the same thing with Pharaoh in Exodus...they always point out that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but what they overlook is that the text says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart 5-6 times before it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

- "...the Law and the words" - the prophets showed up during times of national disobedience and filed a "covenant lawsuit" (*rîb*)

— In the lawsuit, they point out the specific violations of the Mosaic Covenant, and the consequences that will come

— So this ritualistic fasting that they were doing was in remembrance of the consequences of their disobedience, not their own sin and covenant violations that brought on the consequences

- "...therefore great wrath came from the LORD of armies" - the outworking of the curses of the Mosaic Covenant (Deut 28:15-68)
- This wasn't new revelation from Zechariah...the Mosaic Law was 1000 years old when Zechariah prophesied. He's just saying the same thing all of the other prophets said, and communicated the curses of Deut 28 for covenant violations.
- God has a right to bring covenant discipline upon Israel for covenant disobedience because Israel entered into the Suzerain-Vassal Treaty with God at Mount Sinai.

Hosea 4:1: Listen to the word of the LORD, you sons of Israel, Because the LORD **has a case** [*rīb*] against the inhabitants of the land, For there is no faithfulness, nor loyalty, Nor knowledge of God in the land.

Micah 6:1-2:

- 1 Hear now what the LORD is saying, "Arise, plead **your case** [*rīb*] before the mountains, And let the hills hear your voice.
- 2 "Listen, you mountains, to the **indictment** by the LORD, And you enduring foundations of the earth, Because the LORD has a case against His people; And He will dispute with Israel.

(c) Covenant judgment (7:13-14)

13 And just as He called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen," says the LORD of armies;

13 And just as He called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen," says the LORD of hosts;

13 Therefore, just as when I cried out and they would not listen, so also they will cry out, and I will not listen,' says the LORD of the Heavenly Armies.

13 Therefore it is come to pass, *that* as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts:

- God says, I'm shouting at you, but you would not listen, so I'm going to put you into a circumstance through divine discipline where you're shouting at Me, then it's My turn not to listen.

14 "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."

14 "but I scattered them with a storm wind among all the nations whom they have not known. Thus the land is desolated behind them so that no one went back and forth, for they made the pleasant land desolate."

14 'I will scatter them to all of the nations, which they have not known.'" Now the earth was left desolate after them. As a result, no one came or went because they had turned a pleasant land into a desert.

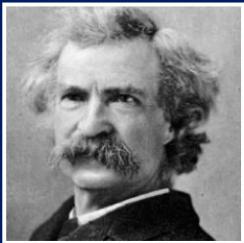
14 But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate.

- "...I scattered them with a storm wind among all the nations" - this prophecy could not have been fulfilled in the return from Babylon, because that was only one nation (not "nations")

— This is a foreshadowing of the scattering that would take place in 70 AD and last for almost 2000 years. The return from Babylon was a foreshadowing of the final regathering, happening today.

## Mark Twain

*The Innocents Abroad, Complete*, 1st ed. (A Public Domain Book, 1869), 267, 285, 302. These quotes can be found in chapters 47, 49, 52.



"... A desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds... a silent mournful expanse.... a desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action.... we never saw a human being on the whole route.... there was hardly a tree or shrub anywhere. Even the olive tree and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country." (cf. Zech. 7:14)