

PART I: THE NIGHT VISIONS

Study 1: The terrifying tradies

Zechariah 1 – 2

Icebreaker

If you could have dinner with any person in modern history who would it be (and what would you eat?). If the group is new or has newcomers enforce a name amnesty (i.e. everyone gives their name just as a reminder).

Where are we headed? (put this in your own words to give the group some context)

In this study we begin a new series on Zechariah, an Old Testament prophet who arrived on the scene about 500 years before Jesus. God's people had recently been released from 70 years of exile in Babylon as a result of their sin. But now they are back in Jerusalem, and efforts to rebuild the temple and restore the kingship have been slow. Zechariah has a message of encouragement for the faithful: there is hope through disappointment.

Prayer

Invite the group to pray with you for God's help as you read the passage together.

Observation and interpretation

Read Zech 1:1-6.

Is God angry with the people of Zechariah's day?

Zechariah reminds his hearers of the history between their ancestors and God. Read Jeremiah 25:2-7. What was Jerusalem guilty of?

Read Jeremiah 25:8-11. What will happen if they don't listen to God?

Knowing this back story, what are some words you would use to describe your impression (1) of God, and (2) of his people? [You may like to use a whiteboard, or slips of paper in a hat, or a low tech twitter wall with hashtags]

"It would be better if God just dictated all the Bible at once, in easy to understand headings." Do you agree or disagree. Why?

Why is God's word so bound up in foreign times and places?

Who do you think is the "they" that repents in verse 6 – the ancestors or the current generation?

Read Zech 1:7-17

- The horses find the whole world at rest. Is this a good thing or a bad thing?
- Why will the Lord return to Jerusalem, and what will that return mean for God's people?

"Zion" and "Jerusalem" are the same place, the most important city in the Old Testament. "Zion" was the name of the fortress that David captured (2Sam 5:7), and then made into his capital (the City of David). So to say "Zion" rather than "Jerusalem" may remind the reader of David's military accomplishments. Regardless, Hebrew writers love to refer to the same thing in two ways, hence "comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem".

Read Zech 1:18-21

- Horns are a symbol of power, and represent the foreign forces that punished Jerusalem. But why do you think it is *craftsmen* (tradies, not soldiers) who terrify the nations? (Clue: look at Zech 1:16 ... what are they rebuilding? Why is it significant?).

Read Zech 2:1-13

- How are these different groups to respond to God's return to Jerusalem?
 - The exiles in general (v6)
 - Those living in Babylon (v7-9)
 - God's city, Zion (v10)
 - The nations (v11)
 - All of humanity (v13)

Read Zech 2:7-10

- How are God's love and his anger connected in this section?

Implications

Is God still angry with you?

Zechariah's call to his generation was to "return" to the Lord, by obeying him, and by rebuilding the temple. In what ways does our generation need to "return" to the Lord?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16. The task of the craftsmen was to rebuild the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, terrifying the forces opposed to God. Where is the temple now? What is *our* work that we should be getting on with?

Prayer to close

Spend a good bit of time praying for us as the church, that we might get on with the work of the temple. Pray also for our city, Sydney, that it might return to the Lord.

Then you might like to spend some time praying for specific things in each other's lives.

Theological and pastoral notes for leaders:

- The previous generation Zechariah has in mind is probably the generation that was warned to turn from their evil ways before judgment came. They ignored the prophets, and so in 586 BC Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. Zechariah is speaking to those 66 years later who have returned to Jerusalem.
- The temple was not just a building for worship services. It was the place where God promised to be present amongst his people. When he departs from the temple in Ezekiel 10 that is the beginning of the end for God's holy city Jerusalem. God has given up on them. So the return to the temple is hugely significant. God's presence is what gives Jerusalem security from her enemies (see Psalm 46:5).