

PART II: THE ORACLES

Study 4: Zechariah 7

Icebreaker

Would you rather eat nothing for three days or eat the same meal for 3 months?

Where are we headed?

Chapter 7 of Zechariah begins a new section – the situation has changed and the rebuilding is under way, but he begins with the same call to repentance followed by reassurance of God’s concern for his city.

Prayer

Invite the group to pray with you.

Observation and interpretation

Read Zech 7. (You might like to break the reading up between the group). What’s interesting, difficult to understand or challenging?

Prophecy is God’s interpretation of history, so it is helpful to know what events this prophecy is speaking into. Look up these passages and place them on a timeline with post-it notes.

- Zech 1:1
- Zech 7:1
- Ezra 4:24-5:2
- Ezra 6:14-15

Read 7:4-6. According to Zechariah, what’s wrong with religious practices like fasting?

Read 7:8-10. Is true religion a private matter of the heart?

Read 7:11-14. Two years after his first prophecy, why do you think Zechariah is reminding the people of this backstory again?

Implications

Read Matthew 6:16-18. What is the place (if any) for religious traditions like fasting during Lent in the Christian life?

How can we (as a church, or as individual Christians, or as a nation) be more Godly when it comes to social issues of justice, mercy, compassion?

Prayer to close

Pray for the things we have just spoken about, particularly for the oppressed in our society.

Theological and pastoral notes for leaders:

- Bethel is a town 20km to the north of Jerusalem, whose inhabitants were formerly part of the Northern Kingdom. This community probably remained in the land during the exile and kept fasts related to the destruction of the temple. Now the temple rebuilding is well and truly under way, they want to know if they should keep fasting. But Zechariah's answer isn't what they bargained for!