



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

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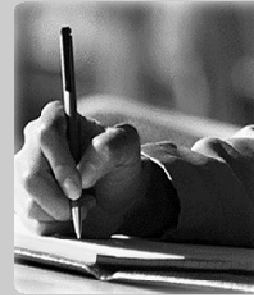


God's Big Plan For A Struggling People
HG128: Surveying The Plot

Zechariah 1 and 2

Home Group Study Notes

11 September 2016 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Have you ever felt homesick? If so, what did you miss the most?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



God's Big Plan For A Struggling People HG128: Surveying The Plot

Zechariah 1 and 2

Home Group Sermon Notes

11 September 2016 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction In vs1 we have the names of the prophet, his father, and his grandfather: "*Zechariah son of Berechiah, son of Iddo.*" Each man's name has a significant meaning. Zechariah means 'the Lord remembers.' Berechiah means 'the Lord blesses.' Iddo, means 'in time.' And these three names provide us with a clue as to the theme of this book: ***The Lord remembers and blesses at His set time.*** The book was written: "*In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius.*" This would corresponded with our October or November. God's message came to Zechariah "*in the second year of Darius.*" Darius was a Gentile king, a pagan ruler, governing the land of Persia. Based on what history tells us, this prophecy would have been given to God's people about 520 years before the birth of Jesus. Zechariah was a young man (2:4) when God called him to minister to the struggling Jewish remnant trying to rebuild their temple in the ruined city of Jerusalem. The elder Prophet Haggai had delivered two of his messages before Zechariah joined him in ministry, and the two of them served God together for a short time. Haggai got the building program going again after a sixteen-year hiatus, and now Zechariah would encourage the people to finish their work.

1. God Calls His People To Repent (1:1-6) Whilst Haggai's primary purpose was to get the people to restart the work of building the Lord's house, Zechariah's purpose went even deeper. He called the people to a renewed closeness to the Lord. Now back in their homeland, those living in Jerusalem had grown cold in their spiritual lives. The initial enthusiasm they had for rebuilding the new temple had turned into complacency and discouragement. Their work had stopped, their faithfulness had wilted, and the Lord was not pleased. Zechariah boldly proclaimed what God told him to say, after all, the Lord couldn't bless His chosen people until they were clean in His sight. If Zechariah had wanted to quote a text for his sermon, it could well have been 2 Chronicles 7:14, a verse the Jewish people would have known well. "*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*"

Vs2: "The Lord was extremely angry with your ancestors." Those who had returned to the land knew their nation's history very well. They knew that God had sent prophet after prophet to plead with their forefathers to turn from idolatry and return to the Lord, but they had refused to listen. The problem is that when we hear "The Lord was extremely angry," our immediate assumption is to think that God's anger must somehow be like our anger. Our anger causes us to lash out with words we later regret. Our anger causes us to hold on to grudges that eventually destroy relationships. Our anger can harden into long-term bitterness and an unforgiving spirit that destroys us. But God's anger is not like our anger. He does not pitch temper tantrums, nor is He an ogre in heaven, eagerly waiting to lash out at people. God is slow to anger and rich in love (Psalm 145).

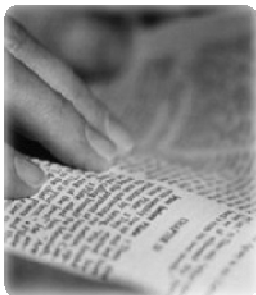
4: How is human jealousy similar to God's jealousy? How is it different?

5: Zechariah's vision revealed that the enemy nations surrounding Judah were enjoying peace while Jerusalem remained in ruins. How do you reconcile the prosperity of wicked people with the suffering of faithful believers?

6: Who are some people in Scripture, history, and your own life who have experienced God's goodness after a time of trial and testing? What might you share in their stories?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: The people of Judah had stopped rebuilding the temple because of the opposition of the enemies. When you encounter spiritual opposition, how can you keep from quitting the work the Lord has called you to do?

2: How is God's wrath against sin in your life compatible with His unfaltering love for you?

3: How has God worked in your life to warn you when you were headed in the wrong direction?

Yet, the Bible is clear in our text that sin and rebellion make the Lord "extremely angry." Both the Old and New Testaments speak of God's wrath along with His love (Exod 34:6-7; John 3:16,36). There are circumstances where God does express His anger. Our attitudes and actions can evoke His anger. When people deliberately take the path of sin and rebellion, when we determine to distance ourselves from Him, we experience God's anger, His righteous wrath, just as the Jewish people did in their history.

God is angry at sin in my life and in your life. And when we rebel against Him, we place ourselves in His anger zone, all because of where we have chosen to place ourselves spiritually. The only way out of God's anger zone is to repent and return to Him. God has promised us, vs3: "*Return to Me ... and I will return to you.*" God's promise to return to us if we return to Him is another way that His anger differs from human anger. Sadly, when we get angry with someone and they try to make amends, we often say, "I don't care what you do. I'm going to stay angry." That's not how God works. Even in His anger He is ready to forgive when we return. His anger isn't temperamental or unpredictable, but righteous and just.

Zechariah asks the people two questions, vs5: "*Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever?*" Had the listeners answered honestly, they would have said: "Many of our fathers are dead because they were slain by the Babylonians, and some are still in exile in Babylon. Some of the prophets are dead because our ancestors killed them." But the point Zechariah was making was that the death of the prophets indicated the loss of opportunity for the nation to repent and escape punishment and now it was too late. Some of their forefathers did repent (vs6), but their repentance came too late to prevent the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion (the theological term is Diaspora) of the people. By calling the people to repent, Zechariah was preparing them for the messages he would give them, for unless our hearts are right with God, we can't hear His Word with true spiritual insight. "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb. 3:7). Admittedly, we repent and return to Him when we 'confess' as part of our liturgy, as we will do before sharing Communion later, but how often is this just 'what we do' rather than a genuine repentance? It's one thing to ask God to bless us but quite another to be the kind of people He can bless!

2. God Comforts His People (1:7-17) Zechariah had a series of eight visions that God gave to encourage the remnant and motivate them to finish rebuilding the temple. These visions focus primarily on God's ministry to Israel and His judgment on the Gentile nations that have afflicted Israel.

a) **The Army (1:8-11)** In the first vision, the prophet saw a man on a red (bay) horse, leading an army astride red, brown, and white horses. This "man among the myrtle trees" was an Angel of the Lord (11-13). But there was also an "interpreting angel" present who explained various things to Zechariah (1:9, 13-14, 19; 2:3). Ten times during these visions, Zechariah asked questions of this angel and received replies. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). In this first vision, the Angel taught Zechariah the meaning of the horsemen, 1:10. They are God's angelic army that patrols the earth and carries out the decrees of the Lord the Commander of the armies of heaven and earth. The messengers reported that the Gentile nations were "at rest and in peace." After the upheaval of empires and Persia's conquest of Babylon and other nations, this would appear to be an encouraging report, but it really wasn't. The Jewish remnant was in distress while the Gentile powers were at ease. Haggai had promised that the Lord would shake the nations and redeem His people (Hag. 2:6-9, 20-23), but this event hadn't occurred yet. The kingdom promised by the prophets seemed to be a dream that would never come true.

b) The Appeal (1:12) "How long?" has been the cry of suffering people, especially the people of Israel for centuries. "How long?" is even the cry of the martyred saints in heaven (Rev. 6:10). How long? might also be the cry of our own hearts when we look at the state of the world, even the church! That the Son of God should so identify Himself with the cries of His people reveals His compassion and concern: "In all their distress he too was distressed" (Isa 63:9). Jeremiah had promised that God's blessing would come after the seventy years of captivity (Jer, 25:8-14; 29:10-11), but the nation was still suffering, Why? Because they forgot that God had attached conditions to that blessing: the people had to repent, call upon God, and seek Him with all their heart, the very thing Zechariah had preached. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper who love thee" (Ps. 122:6). Jesus (Luke 23:34), and Paul (Rom. 10:1) prayed for Israel and gave us a good example to follow. No wonder we're taught to pray, "Thy kingdom come" (Matt 6:10); for when we pray that prayer, we are praying for the peace of Jerusalem. And there can be no true peace in Jerusalem until the Prince of Peace reigns in glory. "You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give Him no rest till He establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth" (Isa. 62:6-7).

c) The Answer (1:13-17) After interceding for Israel, the Lord gave "comforting words" to the angel to give to Zechariah. He affirmed His jealous love and concern for Jerusalem (see 8:2). William Shakespeare spoke of jealousy as a "green-eyed monster," in Othello. Science fiction writer Robert Heinlein, who was no respecter of God, identified jealousy as "a symptom of neurotic insecurity." In its human expressions, jealousy can truly be spiteful and destructive. Our jealousy is rooted in insecurity, fear, and anxiety that come when we anticipate losing something, such as a relationship, status, or possession. Jealousy creates friction and problems for us in our interactions with others. As a result, we rarely consider it a virtue to be jealous. Instead, jealousy is ugly, petty, and hurtful. Scripture cautions us strongly against human jealousy as a work of the flesh (Gal 5:20), calling it inconsistent with love (1 Cor 13:4). However, God is jealous over His chosen people as a husband is jealous over his wife and as parents over their children (Ex. 20:5). This explains why the Lord accused the Jews of adultery and unfaithfulness whenever they were guilty of worshipping heathen gods (Jer, 2:1-3; Hosea 1). Worldliness on the part of Christians is also pictured as "spiritual adultery" James 4:4-10.

The Lord was angry with the Gentile nations because they had been unnecessarily brutal toward the Jews. True, God had called Assyria to punish the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and Babylon to chasten Judah: but these nations went beyond what God called them to do and tried to destroy them. Other nations, like Moab, had also joined in the assault (see Psa 83 and 137). But the Lord's most heartening words had to do with Judah's future, not her enemies, for God promised to return to His people and prosper their nation. He would comfort Zion and prove to the enemy nations that Jerusalem was indeed His chosen city.

3. God Protects His People (1:18-21) The Jews have suffered repeatedly at the hands of many nations, and yet they have survived and every nation that has sought to destroy them has discovered the truth of God's promise to Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you" (Gen. 12:3). That's the message of the second vision that God gave to Zechariah: the nations that have scattered the Jews will be terrified and thrown down by God's judgment. In a letter to President Ronald Reagan, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin wrote, "My generation, dear Ron, swore on the altar of God that whoever proclaims the intent of destroying the Jewish state or the Jewish people, or both, seals his fate." But it's the Lord who does the judging, not the armies of Israel, and His judgments are never wrong. In Scripture, a horn is a symbol of power, especially the power of a nation or a ruler. The four 'craftsmen' represent nations that God uses to defeat the enemies of the Jews. They would use their "tools" to cut off the horns and render them powerless. This reminds us of Daniel's visions of the image (Dan. 2) and the beasts (Dan.7), both of which speak of four empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome.

This scenario reminds the Jews of God's providential care in the past and His promise of protection for the future, *for God will not permit any nation to annihilate His chosen people*. In the last days, when Antichrist, the "dreadful and terrible beast," establishes his kingdom (Dan. 7:7-8, 15-28) and persecutes the Jews, he and his kingdom will be destroyed by the return of Jesus Christ in glory and power. Zechariah will have more to say about this in the last part of his book and will give us some helpful insight as we draw near to the season of Advent.

4. God's Loves His People (2:1-13) Zechariah 2 records a single vision that continues the theme of God's jealous commitment to His people. In this vision Zechariah sees a man with a measuring line in his hand. The prophet asks the man where he is going, and the man indicates that he is on his way to take the measurements of Jerusalem (vs1-2). Then, as now, surveying in this way is done in preparation for building. The man in the vision represents God's desire to restore and rebuild the city. In verses 3-4 another angel instructs Zechariah's interpreting angel to tell Zechariah, that Jerusalem would have to expand its walls because so many people and livestock will be in it. This would have been a surprising message. At the time of Nehemiah, the city was in such a state of ruin that very few wanted to live in it, preferring the surrounding area in Judah (Neh 11:1-2). Verse 5 shows the reason the city would once again become safe for inhabitants. The Lord Himself would be the city's defence, with His protection circling the city like "a wall of fire" and His glorious presence providing stability within it. Based on this vision, in verses 6-13 Zechariah proclaims a message to the people of God. The message includes the following elements:

a) The exiles remaining in Babylon should return to Jerusalem as quickly as possible (6-7). In vs6 the "land of the north" is Babylon, identified explicitly in vs7. The people of Zion, whom God has scattered out "like the four winds of heaven" in every direction, are urged to return immediately to Jerusalem.

b) The nations that had been harming Israel will be judged (8-9). God promises to judge Babylon and other nations that have harmed Israel, which is another reason that the people of Judah needed to leave Babylon so quickly. Ironically, those who have plundered God's people will now be plundered by the Lord Himself. The word for "plunder," *shalal*; means to take by force.

c) God will bless Israel and many nations through Israel (10-12) The expression of God's blessing on Israel include the Lord "coming to dwell" among them, other nations that "will join themselves to the Lord on that day and become My people," and the Lord taking possession of Judah "as His portion in the Holy Land."

d) All people should be silent in the presence of the Lord (13). In light of what God had revealed to His people, the only fitting response was awe-filled and silent submission to the Lord's might.

Conclusion As we review these first two chapters of Zechariah, we learn that God watches over the nations and knows what they are doing; that He judges the nations for their sins, especially for their mistreatment of Israel; and that there is a glorious future planned for Jerusalem and the Jewish nation, when the Messiah will return to cleanse them and restore the glory of God in their midst. We remember that God's overwhelming love protects us, draws us back to Himself, and renews us is the ultimate root of God's extreme jealousy for us. He will not let us go, because we are precious to Him!

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14