**BCM Bible Study – January 18/19, 2023**

**Zechariah 1-2: Return to the Lord**

**Background**: Zechariah takes place after the first of four waves of Jewish people returned to Israel after the Babylonian exile. The date in Zech. 1:1 would place the book’s start at approximately 520BC and the last dated oracle is from 518BC, meaning that Zechariah ministered for at least two years. Both Zechariah and Haggai were prophets to the Israelites at this moment and offered them encouragement amidst the challenge of returning and rebuilding the Temple (Ezra 5:1-2). Zechariah’s name means **Yahweh has remembered** - very fitting for God’s encouragement and reestablishing of his people in the Promised Land. One of the ways that Zechariah does this most consistently is through the book’s prophecies about the coming Messiah, Jesus!

**Read Zechariah 1:1-6**

* Why was God upset with these ancestors?
* What does this passage tell us about God’s character? (Especially v. 3!)
* The prophesied 70 years of Babylonian exile have passed and God’s deliverance is within sight at this point! How does the response of the people to God’s declaration through Zechariah suggest that it has impacted them?
	+ Where might you need to return to the Lord in your life right now?
	+ Why is hardship often such a good teacher?

The rest of tonight’s passages from Zechariah are from a dream that he had with a series of visions. Much like our own dreams, these can be pretty strange or difficult to understand at times. Yet, there are many instances throughout the Bible of God speaking or working through dreams and visions.

**Read Zechariah 1:7-17**

* What is going on in this passage?
* “A correct understanding in simply associating the myrtle trees with the Kidron valley outside Jerusalem. The Lord had returned to the outskirts of the city, symbolically speaking, but had not yet entered Jerusalem because the Second Temple was still under construction.” (Hill)
* If the whole world is at peace (v.11), then why does the angel cry out to the Lord in such a distraught fashion (v.12)?
	+ What does it say about us when we are at peace or ease amidst the suffering of others?
	+ **Read Matthew 25:34-40**
	+ What do Jesus’ words suggest is our responsibility or accountability for how we treat others then?
	+ How do we stir our souls to compassion and action for those who are suffering?
* What can we learn from how the Lord responds to the angel crying out to him in v.12-13?
* Describe what the Lord promises as the future for Jerusalem and His people.
	+ How does this show God’s goodness?
	+ Is God rewarding Israel for repenting or is this God showing them still undeserved mercy? How should we understand this distinction in our own lives?

**Read Zechariah 1:18-21**

* What might these horns represent?
	+ “In prophetic visions, the *horn* is commonly used in biblical prophecy to designate a king or a leader of a nation.” (Hill)
* How do we rightly understand God’s outpouring of wrath (here against other nations) as part of His justice?
* What role does this play in God’s restoration of Israel?

**Read Zechariah 2:1-13**

* “All this stood in stark contrast to the city as Zechariah knew it, with the temple reduced to a rubble heap, the city walls in disrepair, and the people opting to live outside the confines of Jerusalem.” (Hill)
* How would you describe the tone of the angel’s words in v.3-5 about Jerusalem?
* While the wording is slightly confusing, it is most likely that the angel in v.3 speaks with the man measuring in v.1, especially as he tells him to stop measuring. What does this interaction teach us about how we look at things in a singular moment, not knowing the conclusion?
	+ How can we stretch ourselves to better have eyes of faith in God’s long-term work?
* What does the emphatic nature of the language in verses 6-7 suggest about God’s desire for his people and where they are geographically?
* Does the language in v.9 remind you of anything? (Think Matthew 5:3-11 and the Beatitudes!)
	+ How is God’s showing of power here in the OT a foretaste of what is to come? Why might God have such interest in the oppressed or the “less than” succeeding?
* What do verses 10-13 say about the coming Messiah?
	+ How are these verses fulfilled?
	+ What hope or encouragement do these verses give you?

**Challenge**

Spend time over the next week “returning to the Lord” in areas throughout your life not just for blessing or Him returning to you, though, but for the joy of communion and connection with the one who has made you and breathed life into you.

**Extra Notes**

The commentary Nick is using for this study is by Andrew Hill, so anytime you see that name - that’s where it is coming from!

* Zechariah has the second most Messianic prophecies in the OT, only behind Isaiah!

For anyone interested, here is a full timeline of the Old Testament. I’ve attached a modified relevant version below. <https://biblehub.com/timeline/old.htm>

| 537 BC | The Proclamation of Cyrus | **Ezra 1** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 537 BC | The Exiles Return | **Ezra 2** |
| 535 BC | Temple Work Begins | **Ezra 3** |
| 534 BC | Adversaries Hinder Temple Work | **Ezra 4** |
| 534 BC | Artaxerxes Orders Work Stopped | **Ezra 4:17** |
| 520 BC | Tattenai's Letter to Darius | **Ezra 5** |
| 520 BC | The Word of the LORD by Haggai | **Haggai 1, 2** |
| 520-518? BC | The Word of the LORD to Zechariah | **Zechariah 1 - 14** |
| 515 BC | Second Temple Construction complete | **Ezra 6** |