



exploring the old  
testament book of  
**Zechariah**

# 1

## Zechariah 1-2

### **SURVEYING THE LAND**

Do you like the idea of second chances? If we're honest with ourselves, we would all probably say 'yes'. Every one of us can make dumb, stupid, foolish choices in life, and then we have to suffer the consequences. It might be at home or at work or in church. You may have said something that's hurtful and now you hope that you get the chance to repair the relationship. You may have broken a promise and now you hope that person hasn't totally lost their trust in you. Or maybe you even let a fantastic opportunity pass you by, but now you hope it wasn't the only chance you'll ever get.

And for each one of us, we can wonder if we'll ever get a second chance with God. Through our selfishness, our sin, the way we've ignored and mistreated God, we can wonder if we've blown it with God and if he'll truly love us and accept us. That's why the Old Testament book of Zechariah is so important. It's a book about second chances. It's a book that tells us about the second chances for the nation of Israel after they've blown it with God. And ultimately it's a book that tells wonderful truths about God to us – that he is full of love, and he's 100% committed to bring amazing blessing to his people, no matter what.

#### **The Setting for Zechariah**

**Read Zechariah 1:1-6.** From these verses, what do we learn about the situation that Israel is now in?

In those few verses we have the beginning of 'the word of the Lord' that came to Zechariah. And it's here that God gives his explanation for what has led to the plight of Israel. This is where a bit of background is useful. Zechariah is a 'post-exilic' prophet. That is, he spoke to the Israelites after they returned from exile in the land of Babylon. Way back as early as Deuteronomy 28, God had warned Israel that if they fail to follow him, he would cast them out of the land. Unfortunately, Israel constantly turned their backs (and their hearts!) on God and they worshipped the gods of the nations around. And so after repeated warnings God brought the Babylonian army against Jerusalem to sack the city, destroy the temple and deport the inhabitants. But while in exile, the world superpower of Babylon is replaced by Persia and God moves the heart of the Persian King Cyrus (see Ezra 1:1-4) so that he sends back the Israelite people with the command to restore the city and rebuild the temple.

What life was like back in the land is provided in the history records of Ezra and Nehemiah and also through the prophets, Haggai and Malachi. Appendix 1 gives a chronology for some of the figures and events during the post-exilic period. From the writings of the time we see that though their feet might be back on the ground of God's promised land, their own hearts are still far from Him. Like their forefathers, sin abounds and there is still hard-hearted neglect of God's law. In particular, they have failed to rebuild the city and reconstruct the temple. Rather than getting on with the work of restoration, they are fearful and more interested in making their own lives comfortable. It must be said – rather than looking like the blessed nation at the centre of God's purposes for the world– they look more like a small, selfish and vulnerable people group that is just one province within the empire of Persia. Zechariah might be called a 'post-exilic' prophet but by the look of it, it seems that the nation of Israel

is still in exile – fearful and uncertain about what, if any, blessing God has in store for them.

But is God the God of second chances? Yes! That's what Zechariah's message is all about. God gives Zechariah the task of giving the people hope. They are to remember the glorious promises that God made in the past and are yet to be fulfilled. What we'll discover as we work our way through Zechariah—there is a future day to look forward to, a better day, a beautiful day. In the words of Zechariah, wonderful blessing for the nation of Israel, and the whole worlds will be poured out, 'on that day'.

## How to Read Zechariah

As we come to the text of Zechariah or any book in the Old Testament, the key thing to remember is that it's all about Jesus. In describing Jesus' teaching to his disciples we're told, "*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself*", Luke 24:27. So the Old Testament teaches us about Jesus. And in fact, an amazing thing to remember is that Zechariah is most quoted Old Testament prophet in the gospels accounts of when Jesus goes to Jerusalem—to die on the cross. We need Zechariah to fully understand Jesus!

So as we come to this sometimes bewildering book we're going to take a fairly simple approach. In each study, we're going to:

Step 1: Work out what the book of Zechariah is saying

Step 2: Discover what Zechariah says about Jesus. And only after we understand what this says about Jesus, can we...

Step 3: Think about what Zechariah says about living today as followers of Jesus

**1.** What does God desire of the remnant of Israel? (1:1-6)

**2.** When Israel does that, what will God do? (v3)

It's worth noting that this word of 'Return to me and I will return to you' was promised back in Deuteronomy 30. Even before Israel entered the land, God gave a word of warning and a promise of restoration:

<sup>1</sup> When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, <sup>2</sup> and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, <sup>3</sup> then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. <sup>4</sup> Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back.

**3.** From your knowledge of the bible, do we ever see the nation as a whole displaying true repentance and turning to the Lord?

The sad reality is by time we get to Jesus, the nation still doesn't have its heart right. Leaders throughout the Old Testament were corrupt and leading the people astray and it was exactly the same in Jesus' day. **Read Matthew 23:33-39** to hear Jesus' word of condemnation. Take particular note of what Jesus says about what eventually happened to Zechariah.

4. But despite the nation's on-going rebellion, God will work out a way of fulfilling his promises of blessing to Israel. This is what the visions are about. **Read Zechariah 1:7-2:13**, then draw a masterpiece to show what each of these visions are about.



Your Title:

What is the message of this vision?:



Your Title:

What is the message of this vision?:

What would be your title for Vision 3, 2:1-13?

What is the vision for this vision?

**5.** What would you say is God's attitude to the nations throughout these visions?

**6.** According to the first vision (1:16), what is God's construction plan?

**7.** In the third vision (2:1-5), a man goes out with a measuring line. He eagerly wants to get going with the construction and it seems he wants start with the walls. But how are God's plans different to what this man with the measuring line has in mind? What will this temple/city be like?

By the time we get to the first century AD, Israel is onto its third temple (see appendix 2), but still the temple is seen as the centre point of God's relationship with Israel. But then along comes Jesus who totally redefines the importance of it. In fact in Mark 13 he promises that one day the temple will be destroyed. This takes place in 70AD.

**8.** Read Revelation 21:1-4; 9-11; 22-27. How do these verses confirm that we are still waiting for what's promised in Zechariah?

**9.** When the first temple was built, the glory of the Lord filled the temple (1 Kings 8:10). God was with his people! But because of ongoing rebellion and idolatry, the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. In the period before that, the prophet Ezekiel had the terrible vision of the glory departing from the temple (Ezekiel 10:18-19). The people deserted God so God deserted them. But what is it about Zechariah 2:5 and Revelation 21:23 that says there will be a future day when God will fully return to be with his people?

**10.** Does the prospect of being in the presence of the glory of the Lord excite you? Why / Why not?

**11.** What's the danger for Christians today if we don't have a Zechariah-type hope for the future?

**Pray** None of us has yet received all that has been promised, but that's the nature of faith. And like all the people of the Old Testament, we still have to look forward to 'the city whose architect and builder is God' (Hebrews 11:10). Pray that we would be a people with preserving, hope-filled, future-looking faith.