

Why study Zechariah?

*Rejoice Greatly O daughter of Zion
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem
behold your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey*

Zechariah 9 v 9

Many of us will be familiar with the words of this famous prophecy, fulfilled when the Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday, a few days before he was crucified. Indeed, Zechariah is the most quoted part of the Old Testament in the Gospels.

Christians struggle. We struggle with ridicule and being ignored in a 'day of small things'; with opposition to the message that Jesus is the only way to God; with our own failures and the devil's accusations that make us question whether God accepts us. False teachers, false religion, and false priorities plague and distract us.

In Zechariah's day, Israel had returned from exile, but home was certainly not all they had hoped for. They were a people who were struggling to follow God when everything seemed to be against them. They were a people who found it difficult to understand how God could be fulfilling His great promises, when all they could achieve seemed so pitiful and weak. They were a people who were crushed by their own difficulties, and couldn't see the larger plan that God had for the whole world. They were believers who needed to see a bigger picture of God's character and purposes to put their own struggles in context. Zechariah's task was to bring comforting words to the struggling people of God.

These six Bible-studies open up Zechariah's reassuring and revitalising message for God's discouraged people—God's great international building project; His solution to sin; His promised Shepherd-King; His great Day of judgment and salvation. Constantly focusing on what these things mean practically for Christians today, Zechariah aims to help Christians live a life shaped, not by 'these days', but by 'that day' when God's plan comes to its glorious fulfillment.





1 Zechariah 1-2:

SURVEYING THE PLOT

talkabout

1. Have you ever felt homesick? If so, what did you miss?

Zechariah is talking to people who had come home. But home is not proving all they had hoped it would be.

investigate

Read Zechariah 1 v 1-6

Verse 1 sets the scene. Darius is not an Israelite king. He is the ruler of the Persian Empire. In 587 BC God's people were taken into exile in Babylon. Seventy years later, when Babylon fell to Persia, they were able to return. A few years on, things are not going well for those who have returned. They face opposition and hardship. The rebuilding work has stalled. Their hopes are fading and their spirits are low. So Zechariah's task is to bring comforting words to struggling people.

2. Imagine you were a citizen of Babylon. How would you explain why Israel had been taken into exile?

3. How does Zechariah explain the exile into Babylon?



4. What does Zechariah tell those who had returned from exile to do? In what way were they still in exile?

The real problem of the exile was the sin of the people, resulting in God's judgment. These underlying issues remained unresolved. The people had still not 'come home' to God. The exile in Babylon is a picture of mankind's plight. We are away from God because of sin and judgment. We need to hear Zechariah's word just as much as the Jews did.

▶ Read Zechariah 1 v 7-17

Zechariah tells us about a series of visions that describe a great building project that God is undertaking. These visions are full of rich imagery. The first involves a man with coloured horses. They are God's 'scouts', whom God sends to report on the world.

5. What do God's 'scouts' find throughout the earth?

6. Look at verse 12. All seems well with the world, but what is the reality?

7. What is God's response?



➔ apply

8. How would you use the ideas in Zechariah's visions to help you communicate the gospel to someone who feels 'restless' in their life?
- Why do even affluent and successful people feel restless and not 'at home' in the life they have carved out for themselves?
 - What about those who seem to be 'at rest and in peace'?
 - What do God's words for Israel in v 2-4 mean for us today? See Mark 1 v 14-15
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getting personal

How do you see the people around you who don't know God—as healthy, prosperous and successful? Or adrift in the universe without understanding, security, or hope in the face of death? How can you help? Start praying for individuals and planning what to do.

⬇ investigate

In verse 3 we saw that those who had returned to Jerusalem were still in exile—they had to return to God. Now in verse 16, we discover that God has exiled Himself from His people. But He will return and start building. The people knew all about building! They were struggling to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple ('my house'—v16). Now God promises His own building project. He has surveyed the ground and found it ripe for redevelopment.

▶ Read Zechariah 1 v 18 – 2 v 13

9. Look at 1 v 18-21. What will the four craftsmen in this vision do?
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10. Look at 2 v 1-5. What is this vision all about?

11. Look at 2 v 6-13. What two points does Zechariah make about the nations?

The people to whom Zechariah speaks have returned from exile in Babylon. They are small in number and under pressure, struggling to rebuild Jerusalem. Zechariah promises that God will return to His people and begin a building project. But God's building project is far bigger than the mere city of Jerusalem—it includes the nations!

12. Read Ephesians 2 v 19-22. How are Zechariah's visions being fulfilled today?



explore more

- ▶ **Read Revelation 21 v 9-27.** What are the similarities with Zechariah's visions? How will Zechariah's visions ultimately be fulfilled?



➔ apply

13. Christians often respond to the world either by cutting themselves off or by joining in and following its agenda. Use Zechariah 1 and 2 to explain how Christians *should* respond.

14. What does 2 v 11 mean for the way in which Christians live and churches minister?

☞ getting personal

In which aspects of your life are you tempted either to join in with the world, or to cut yourself off completely? How does your attitude to the world need to change? What about your involvement with people from other nations?

↑ pray

Thank God...

- for His passionate concern, mercy and plans for His people.
- for opening up a way for sinners to return from our exile from God, through Jesus.
- for the hope of the glorious fulfilment of God's great building plan, in heaven.

Ask God...

- to help you have the right attitude of 'in, but not of, the world'.
- to help you and your church reach those around you in exile from God.
- to help you and your church get involved with bringing the gospel to the nations.

