

Exploring Ezra

5. Ezra 5.1-15: The Prophets Intervene II Zechariah 1-3

Last week we looked at the prophecies of Haggai and how they inspired the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem when enthusiasm waned. This week considers further prophecies from the same time period - this time those of the prophet Zechariah.

Aim: To see how God responds when opposition to the building occurs and think about what that says about who he is, how he communicates and how this might affect us.

To start with

Think of a time when you were enthused with an idea or project but that enthusiasm later waned.

What was it and what caused it to wane?

How common do you think waning enthusiasm is in our society? Why?

Engaging with the Text

Ask the group to summarise the story of Ezra so far (Ezra 1-4). Or, if you haven't done enough studies for this to work, ask a few people to read the following verses to summarise these chapters: *Ezra 1.1-5, 3.10-11, 4.4-5, 4.24*

1. Imagine you were one of the returned remnant; the courageous few who had left their homes in Babylon to rebuild the temple in a hostile land. Describe how you would be feeling at this point and what you would be thinking about God at this time.

Read Ezra 5.1

We will be reading the first two chapters of Zechariah which are part of a series of eight visions (1.7-8.23) It can be difficult to work out who is speaking to whom here so to make it clearer, a dramatised version of 1.7-2.13 is provided. To read it, you will need:

- a Narrator (who speaks from Zechariah's point of view)
- Zechariah himself

- An angel
- A 'man amongst the trees'
- Some horses
- God
- A 'man with a measuring line'
- A second angel

(If you don't have enough people, the man amongst the trees, the horses, the man with a measuring line and the second angel are small parts and could be played by one or two people.)

Read Zechariah 1.7-2.13 using the dramatised script. (See Study 5: Handout 1)

2. Divide into groups to discuss the three visions (1.8-17, 1.18-21, 2.1-6)
If you have time, each group could discuss all three visions, but if you have less time one group could take each vision and then feedback.
In these groups, consider the questions:

- What is the message of each vision?
- What does it tell us about God and his plan for the Jews?

Leaders Note:

Vision 1: God is jealous for Zion, he will return and rebuild, and prosperity will overflow

Vision 2: Other nations that exiled Judah to be thrown down

Vision 3: Jerusalem will be a city without walls, but protected by God (the wall of fire)

3. How would you summarise God's message to the people through these three visions?

Read Zechariah's Message (2.7-13) again

4. These verses are Zechariah speaking to the people. How is he exhorting the people on God's behalf?
- [5. If you have time, read Zech 3.1-7 - the 4th vision.
 - a) How is this vision different from the first three?

b) How does it further reveal God's plan and desire for his people?]

6. To what extent have you experienced or do you believe that God still communicates through visions (or dreams) like this? How far should we be cautious and how far should we embrace visions today?
7. Often as Christians we can take prophecies like these out of context - but if we believe that God is the same yesterday, today and forever, how might we wisely apply God's message in these visions to our own lives?