

## Devotions for June 27-July 3, 2011

### **Monday, July 4, 2011: Overview Daily reading: Zechariah 8:1-5**

The book of Zechariah encourages and convicts returning exiles. It focuses on temple reconstruction, but sometimes rises above national interest to include all creation. Chapters 1-8 are encouraging: visions targeted toward real people doing the real work for restoration, and God's promise of a restored Jerusalem in which peace, security and fertility are so abundant that surrounding nations are drawn to it. Chapters 9-14 are distinctly different, and many scholars doubt they were written by Zechariah. These closing chapters speak of attacks on Jerusalem. Leadership is suspect, though in the end it will be God's leadership bringing peace and prosperity to Jerusalem. Isn't it great to read a positive prophecy? Ask God to connect you deeply to the story of Zechariah and the people of Israel.

### **Tuesday, July 5, 2011: The Prophet Daily reading: Zechariah 8:6-8**

Zechariah is a contemporary of Haggai. Both are among the 42,360 Jews who return to Judah from Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Both are frequently called prophets of restoration because their writings focus on the restoration of Israel, specifically Jerusalem and the temple. Zechariah, which means "the Lord remembers," is a common name in the ancient world; there are 27 Zechariahs in the Bible. Little is known about this Zechariah. It appears that he is young when he returns to Judah. His father probably died young because Zechariah is named as the immediate successor of his grandfather, Iddo, in the list of heads of the priestly families in Nehemiah 12. Zechariah's focus as a prophet is the rebuilding of the temple and a rebirth of the people of Israel. Is there someone who has a prophetic voice for you today? Ask God for ears to listen to the voices of truth around you.

### **Wednesday, July 6, 2011: Tyre Daily reading: Zechariah 9:3-4**

The city of Tyre is great in Zechariah's time, but he declares that it will no longer be the powerful city it once was. Chapter 9 describes the march of Alexander the Great's army through the area north and east of Palestine. Alexander defeats the Persians in 333 B.C. at the Battle of Issus, and then turns to conquer the leading cities in Phoenicia. Jerusalem can feel the hot breath of Alexander's troops sweeping down the Mediterranean coast. Despite the enemy's power, Zechariah 9 promises that the Lord will come like a warrior and defeat every enemy of God's people. God will surround the temple and the city of Jerusalem with his strong presence, and no enemy will defeat him. Do you hear the hoofbeats of an approaching enemy? Ask God to help you discern what may be threatening to you.

### **Thursday, July 7, 2011: Messiah Daily reading: Zechariah 9:9**

The prophet speaks of a future King presenting himself to Jerusalem while riding on a humble donkey. This foreshadows events about 500 years later. In Luke 19:35-37, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, presenting himself as the Messiah, the King. This good news brings the rejoicing that opens our text. God's people can rejoice because their victorious King is entering the holy city. This King will not ride the customary war horse, but a young donkey, symbolizing that this King comes in peace. This great King will initiate a reign of peace covering not only Judah, but the surrounding nations. This King's dominion will be "from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth." Where do you need this King of peace to enter your life? Ask God to make you open to his arrival.

### **Friday, July 8, 2011: Crucifixion Daily reading: Zechariah 12:10**

This text refers to a time when Jerusalem will lament the one who is "pierced" as one mourns the loss of a firstborn son. Christians have understood this as a reference to the return of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, pierced when he was crucified by the Romans 2,000 years ago. We also anticipate the day when Christ will return, and heaven and earth come together in the redemption of all things. The Talmud, which offers Judaism-related commentary about Old Testament passages, makes a very Christian-like assessment of the prophecy found in the book of Zechariah: "What is the cause of the mourning (Zechariah 12:10)? It is well according to him who explains that the cause is the slaying of Messiah, the son of Joseph, as it is written, 'And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son.'" (- *Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 52a.*) Isn't God's story incredible; how the time of Zechariah is directly connected to

### **Saturday, July 9, 2011: Power Daily reading: Zechariah 9:11-12**

This is a proclamation of God's promise to restore and protect the Israelites because of the "blood of my covenant with you," referring to the blood sacrifices sealing the covenant relationship between God and his people. The certainty of God's restoration is so profound that God's people are called "prisoners of hope," unable to escape the hope that God's promises have placed in their hearts and minds. They are free to return to the city of Jerusalem despite the threat of more powerful armies. But no army is a match for God's power. Where do you need the power of God in your life? Ask God to give you the strength and courage to live this day to the fullest.

### **Sunday, July 7, 2011: Hope Daily reading: Zechariah 14:1-5**

While Alexander's armies don't threaten us, we can identify enemies pressing in. We all struggle to hold onto hope. Fear is far more prominent than hope in many lives, making our current situation similar to the one Zechariah faces. The call of this message is two-fold. First, to be as lovingly bold in speaking the truth as Zechariah. That won't go down any better in our culture than it did then. Second, to spread hope in a hopeless time. We have the privilege of anchoring people in the good news of the Kingdom of God, which carries the promise of abundant life and ultimate victory over sin and death. Where do you need hope? Where will you go to find it? Ask God to reveal where true hope can be found for you.