

# ZECHARIAH DEVOTIONAL

By Pastor Phil Emerson

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

## OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

*“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6*

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

**Lifegroup 12s**

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

**Lifegroup 3s**

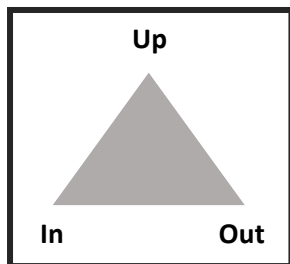
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

## A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily walk in the ways of Jesus, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus taught and modelled out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

### Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

### In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

### Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

# HOW TO USE THE BOOK

## First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

## Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

## Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

## Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

**This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.**

## INTRODUCTION TO ZECHARIAH

If you ever grow weary doing God's will, then the book of Zechariah can refresh and strengthen you. It was written to the 50,000 Jews who had returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. God had called them to rebuild the temple, and initially they responded with great energy and zeal. But as they faced one problem after another, their zeal turned to apathy, and the work on the temple ceased. God sent the prophet Zechariah (whose name means 'the Lord remembers') to turn the people back to the Lord and to the task they needed to complete.

Zechariah is one of the most messianic books in the Bible. In order to encourage His people, the Lord looks beyond their immediate circumstances to the time when all God's enemies will be vanquished and all His purposes fulfilled, when the whole earth will acknowledge His rightful rule as King.

If your spiritual motivation has been running low, this is a great study. Get your Bible, journal, and, of course, your coffee.

I trust you enjoy!

Phil

## Read

# Zechariah 1

## Live

A number of Old Testament prophetic books begin with this statement, *“The word of the Lord came to ...”* Hosea, Joel, Jonah, Zephaniah, Micah to name a few. This statement becomes a trademark for the great prophetic book of Zechariah and is an affirmation of his authority and commission as a deliverer of the Word of God to His people. It would be easy, but incorrect, to interpret Zechariah's messages as if they were merely his own personal words and desires. No. This is the pure, undefiled, sacred Word of the Lord Yahweh Himself, so we need to sit up and take heed, as these people ought to have done. Zechariah and Haggai both wrote around the year 520 BC during the Restoration of Israel. Ezra and Nehemiah were also key in this period. Both Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the returned exiles from Babylon to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple, encouraging particularly their leaders – Joshua, the high priest and Prince Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah.

Zechariah has two visions in this chapter. In the first, he saw a man on a red horse in a dark, shady grove of myrtle trees, hidden by hills, almost inconspicuous. This was symbolic of the low, dark condition of the Jewish people at this time. These people were buried in loads of stuff. What friends they had were hidden, and there appeared no way of relief for them. In a similar way today, the church has not always been visible, but sometimes hidden under a mountain of stuff. The man on the horse is none other than the man Christ Jesus, the same who appeared to Joshua as Captain of the host of the Lord with His sword drawn in His hand. I love that Jesus keeps turning up prophetically in the Old Testament to show He was in total control. In the second vision, Zechariah saw four horns and four craftsmen, which signify kingdoms or kings that are very powerful and mighty. Some understand these to be the four monarchies – Babylonian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman, spoken of in Daniel's prophecies.

## Pray

Father, Your love greets me like a cascading waterfall of grace; Your faithfulness is the anchor and hope of my life; Your generosity is the storehouse to which I return again and again. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# Zechariah 2

## Live

I love the prophet Zechariah. History tells us he was younger than most other prophets and he may also have been a priest. Little else is known other than what's in this book, but he was by far the most inquisitive of the prophets. At this point in history, Jerusalem lay in ruins because of the Babylonian conquest seventy years earlier. "*The land of the north*" in verse 6 is Babylon, the place of Israel's former captivity.

Do you feel unworthy to stand before the Lord? Do your sins seem to be used as evidence against you, proving that you have no right to be called God's child? Do you ever feel unacceptable to God because of your sins? Express your feelings to the Lord and ask Him to use this passage to see yourself as He sees you. Zechariah 2-3 offers cleansing to those who feel defiled, hope to those who feel despair, and joy to those overwhelmed with sorrow.

I love how God speaks in this passage with such passion for His chosen nation. There are times when His righteous anger boils over, but here it's an expression of His love. I absolutely love this statement, "*He who touches you touches the apple of His eye*". The phrase "*apple of His eye*" describes something precious and easily injured, demanding protection. Spurgeon put it this way, "*He esteems them as much as men value their eyesight, and is as careful to protect them from injury, as men are to protect the apple of their eye. The pupil of the eye is the tenderest part of the tenderest organ, and very fitly sets forth the inexpressible tenderness of God's love.*"

As this chapter closes, God is expecting some jubilation, "*Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion*". God doesn't expect His people to be passive in light of His powerful promises. God's desire to bless Israel was never intended to stop with Israel, but to use them as a channel of blessing for many nations. Incidentally, this is the only mention of the term 'Holy Land' in the Bible.

## Pray

Father, bring clarity of vision to the eyes of my heart where there's been a loss of vision of late. Throw the curtains wide open, lift the clouds and show me more of Jesus – that's all I really need. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# Zechariah 3

## Live

This passage is full of prophetic imagery that you should let really bless you today. The dirty clothes were symbolic of the nation's sinfulness and apostasy. The fact that Satan is mentioned would seem to imply that he was pointing to these dirty clothes and declaring the unfit nature of Joshua to stand in the presence of God. One of Satan's names is 'the accuser of the brethren' and that's just what he does. I love how God removes Joshua's filthy clothes and gives him fine new clothes.

Oh, how I love this God of ours; He removes our filth through the Cross of Christ and clothes us in His glorious righteousness; *beautiful* does not even describe this fully. Imagine that. Today YOU are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. We would do well to meditate on this portion of Scripture often for it calls out our unbelief, confronts our complacency, and deconstructs every excuse we offer for giving up on difficult situations and people. We are but brands plucked from a fire, as this passage shows us well. The devil tries to destroy, but Jesus our Redeemer draws near to plead our cause and restore us. When John Wesley was six years old, he was trapped in a burning house and was rescued when a neighbour climbed on another's shoulders and pulled him out of a window. A picture of the scene, that he kept until he died, was drawn for Wesley and under the picture he had written the words from verse 2, *"Is this not a brand plucked from the burning?"*

I love the mention of the 'Branch'. It is used several times in Isaiah and Jeremiah as a title for the Messiah and is associated with fruitfulness and life. Jesus used the same image when He said in John 15 that He is the vine and we are the branches. And then, just in case a branch seems weak, God gives us another picture of a stone having seven eyes. The seven eyes speak of the perfection and fullness of the knowledge and wisdom of the Messiah.

## Pray

Father, I declare today that Jesus is the resurrection and life, my righteousness and hope, my Good Shepherd, and reigning King. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, the hope of Your resurrection, and a passion for Your glory. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# Zechariah 4

## Live

Here, the prophet is woken up out of a deep sleep. This angel had some more stuff to show him. God gave Zechariah a vision of the golden lampstand that was meant to stand in the temple. This was different from anything the prophet had ever witnessed. It was a self-feeding system. In addition to the lampstand, Zechariah saw two olive trees that supplied the seven lamps with oil through seven pipes, something that was never in the temple. One of the more tedious duties of temple service was the constant care of the lamps on the golden lampstand. They had to be continually refilled, cleaned, and maintained. In this vision, Zechariah sees lamps fed directly from two olive trees. The temple lamps were fuelled by pure, specially prepared olive oil; the lampstand Zechariah saw in his vision was fed straight from the trees.

I love the simplicity of this rather complicated vision when it is explained. This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel who was the civic leader of Jerusalem and had the responsibility of finishing the work of rebuilding the temple. The work had stalled and Zerubbabel needed encouragement to carry on. God spoke to him about the issue of purity, but purity alone is not enough to accomplish the work of God; it also needs resources, and not the resources of human might or power. God says to Zerubbabel, *“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the LORD of hosts.* Might focuses on collective strength like that of an army, while power focuses on individual strength. God is saying, ‘It will not be by the resources of many or one, but by My Spirit. It will not be by your cleverness, your ability, or your physical strength that the temple will be rebuilt, but by the Spirit of God.’

Sometimes we face obstacles that seem insurmountable: challenges at work, at church or in our communities that are overwhelming. How should we respond in these situations? How can we have the strength to be victorious? Bring that situation to the Lord, asking Him for the strength you need.

## Pray

Father, what more could I want than for Your grace to be with me? By Your grace I received eternal life; by Your grace I’m being transformed into Your likeness; by Your grace I’ll spend eternity with You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# Zechariah 5

## Live

From horses to horns and blacksmiths, filthy clothes and clean clothes, lampstands and olive trees ... now we have a flying scroll and a woman in a basket! Not just any old scroll; this one is around 30 by 15 foot. (Interestingly, the dimensions are the same as the holy place in Moses' tabernacle and the porch in Solomon's temple. I'm not sure of the significance of this, but it's worth a further study!) We are told the scroll contained a curse; that is one huge curse! The scroll mentioned two sins: stealing and swearing falsely. To steal was to harm your neighbour; to swear falsely was to dishonour God because you had sworn in His name. I am reminded that when Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, He answered, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul and your mind and love your neighbour as yourself."* The two sins of stealing and swearing falsely are from each side of the tablets of the Ten Commandments, thus representing all of Israel's sin. God will curse those who commit these sins.

Zechariah prophesied to those who had returned from Babylonian exile. God's people came back with a materialism problem, and the next vision speaks to this problem. The woman, basket, and weight are associated with wickedness. They personify greed, materialism, and dishonesty for profit.

It is good to remember that sin is the greatest obstacle to accomplishing God's work. When confronted with problems, why are we tempted to trust in human might or power? Think of a mountain of difficulty you are facing. How can you rely on God's Spirit to level that mountain? Is there any sin in your life you need to confess and forsake before God anoints you with power?

In conclusion, the flying scroll vision means God's blessings are dependent upon honouring God's law; and the image of a woman means wickedness is enthroned in the evil city, and God's people need to abandon such places.

## Pray

Father, may my love for You and for my neighbour increase. Open my ears to hear the sounds of heaven and help me cease from my labours long enough to bask in the celebrations of Your love. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# Zechariah 6

## Live

In this chapter, we see the last of eight visions, the vision of four chariots coming out of two mountains. This is a very different sort of revelation from God to Zechariah where the Branch, the Messiah, the Holy One who is both Priest and King is presented to us. Horses and chariots are what we would call 'tank warfare', significant for entering battle. It is majestic, breath-taking and powerful, and these four chariots are representative of the power of God. I wonder, why four? Maybe they are coming from the four corners of the earth. Why two mountains? There is no real explanation, but I suggest they may be figures of the Law and the prophets that Moses and Elijah represented.

In the Old Testament, priests offered sacrifices and represented the people before God; kings were divinely appointed leaders and shepherds over Israel. In today's chapter, the Lord combines the offices of priest and king. The symbolic crowning of Joshua, the high priest, foreshadows the coming of the ultimate Priest and King, Messiah Himself. Like the people in Zechariah's day, we look forward to the coming of the Messiah, though we anticipate His *Second Coming*.

*"Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH!"* I love this. We saw this Branch in chapter 3, referencing the Messiah. The BRANCH is associated with fruitfulness and life. These words in verse 12 are the very words Pilate used to present the mutilated Christ to the people of Jerusalem, *"BEHOLD THE MAN"*. Here in Zechariah's vision, it isn't the humiliated Jesus we are asked to behold, it is the triumphant Jesus. The Branch will rebuild the temple, not the same temple Zerubbabel worked on, but the temple of His people, the Church, *us*, the living stones of 1 Peter 2.

## Pray

Father, once again, I bring my thirst to You. I'm thirsty to know Jesus better. I'm thirsty to be filled with the Holy Spirit. I'm thirsty to be quicker in my repentances and slower in my excuses. I'm thirsty to be more generous and less fearful. I'm thirsty to love others as You love me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# Zechariah 7

## Live

Do you ever feel as though you are merely going through the motions as you serve God? Ask the Lord to purify your motives as you study this passage. In what areas are you practicing religious rituals rather than obeying from the heart? Ask for insight into areas of your life where your "obedience" is really self-serving or mere ritual. Pray for opportunities to administer true justice and show mercy, while avoiding oppression and thinking evil of others.

The most important thing about all of these fasts was that God had not authorised any one of them! There was only one day in the year, the Day of Atonement, when God commanded His people to fast, yet they had added all these others. Sounds familiar, doesn't it! True fasting, the only type God requires, consists not in an abstinence from eating and drinking as some kind of religious ordinance, rather, it is to call out to a Holy God. This preoccupation with mourning and fasting represented a radical change in Jewish religious life. Weeping and sorrow replaced hymns and thanksgivings, continuing to the present day with the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem.

What a desperate condemnation verse 11 holds as the people refused to listen and respond to the voice of the Almighty God Himself. I don't think there is a sin greater than stubbornness, manifested in a refusal to hear God's Holy Word. The reason undergirding these words of the prophet was to show his listeners the utter stupidity of their pointless fasts. As a matter of fact, the events those fasts commemorated were the direct result of Israel's rebellious refusal to heed the Word of God in the first place. Is it any wonder Scripture tells us in 1 Samuel 15 that the act of rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft? These people were now so deluded they had stepped into self-preservation, which was total folly. Let's keep our spiritual antennas tuned in and ready to hear and respond to our Master.

## Pray

Father, may the gospel so liberate my heart I will welcome wherever You send me and whatever You're pleased to use to make me more like Jesus, the fairest of 10,000, the rose of Sharon, the Bright and Morning Star, the One for Whom I long and in Whom I delight. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

This chapter is a continuation of chapter 7 with the prophet's take on the Lord blessing Jerusalem. Maybe this prophecy has already begun to be fulfilled with the provision of the Church from Acts 2 to this very day. Oh how we need to avoid vain religion and follow after relationship!

Verses 4 and 5 of this chapter have been in my top ten favourite passages for many years. I quote, *"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.'"* When I first got married in 1978, our first home was out in the countryside. On summer nights, old men from the area would come and sit on the wall in front of our home and talk about everything and anything. We were both working hard trying to build a new home together, but we loved making the time when we could to join with these legends. Forty years have sped past and I still remember those beautiful nights. Verses 4 and 5 make me think about this memory.

Passages such as this leave us with no doubt that God has the restoration of Israel in His heart and plans. Some people believe that God's plans are special for these people alone. While there is no doubt God has planned to bless Jerusalem, I struggle to hold the view of them being higher in God's plans than anyone else who loves Him. 1 Corinthians 2:9 tells us, *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."* We can see the purpose of the prophet in questioning fasting in their present day; there was a need to repent of the sins of their forefathers. It points to the future when the fast will become a feast as God restores all and draws people from all over the world back to Himself.

### Pray

Father, I look forward to the Day when I'll never again get defensive or reactive; never again take things too personally, or not seriously enough; when I'll never again think that I need more than Jesus and what He chooses to give me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

Difficult times don't last forever, and those who come against us will not always have the upper hand. Israel had been defeated and humiliated by her enemies, however, in Zechariah 9 and 10, the Lord promises to conquer those who had conquered Israel and to restore peace to those troubled by war. But the high point of this passage looks beyond Israel's immediate future to the coming of the Messiah, the true King. When we are in the middle of difficult times or have experienced defeat, the Lord's presence and promises can give us hope. Ask the One who is Lord of all to extend His Lordship to every area of your life, and thank Him for His great promises and infinite care. Though life will always involve spiritual warfare, and though God has given us resources to fight well (Ephesians 6:10-18), it is Jesus we must trust as the Divine Warrior. The battle belongs to the Lord. Fear and discouragement are not the order of the day; faith and peace are. We have a permanently installed King and an occupied throne in heaven which shuts up all our fears. When we are under attack by the seducer, accuser, and condemner of the brethren, it pays us well to remember that Jesus is the Author and Perfecter of our faith. He is our wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption and all our boast should be in Him alone.

Alexander the Great was rapidly moving south toward Egypt after defeating the Persians in 333 BC. The whole world was worried about what he would do next, especially the cities of Palestine that were in his path. All eyes were on Alexander, but he was only the Lord's instrument. Yahweh would rule over Israel, and His dominion would be worldwide, from the Euphrates River in the East to the ends of the earth. Of course, we know the Messiah is our true King, the King of kings and the fulfilment of this prophecy!

**Pray**

Father, when I get pulled into petty fights, bring me back to faith expressing itself in love. When I'm in the presence of evil and very broken people, keep me centred in You. When my heart wages war inside of me, come to me in the storm and make peace. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# Zechariah 10

## Live

For Zechariah's audience, these promises seemed so far removed from their present situation as to sound like fairy tales. Most of the Jews were still scattered across the Persian Empire, and the land was still devastated from the Babylonian conquest. But Zechariah predicts that Israel will someday trample her enemies and be regathered to the extent that no more room will be found (verse 10). The Jews must have thought, "Zechariah has lost the plot." Perhaps some of you feel that way too. When you hear of God's abundant promises, you think, "That could never happen." If you can identify with that, then our text today is for you!

This passage reminds me of Proverbs 12:18, *"The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."* My love affair with the Word goes back a long way, but I especially love the way God uses the Word to bring us life and healing, freedom and hope. He never shames, manipulates, or flatters us with words. He neither minces nor wastes words. He always speaks truth and grace, for He is the fullness of truth and grace. Oh that we all could have greater stewardship of our words and allow God to speak life to us, and through us. Our words can be a source of hope and life, and, if we are not careful, our words can bring decay and death.

John Piper says this, *"The church is engaged in spiritual warfare, but most believers have a peacetime mentality. Having this mindset, we use prayer as a domestic intercom rather than as a wartime walkie-talkie."* Piper pictures Jesus, the field commander, issuing each of His troops a walkie-talkie tuned to the general's headquarters. If they have any need on the battlefield, they can call for help. But what have millions of Christians done? Stopped believing we are in a war. No urgency, no watching, no vigilance, no strategic planning. Just easy peacetime and prosperity. Challenging stuff to ponder!

## Pray

Father, I realise, yet again, how important tending my own heart really is, fixing my gaze on You, and searching out the unsearchable riches of grace with which You are full. May I always bring my wandering thoughts into captivity to You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# Zechariah 11

## Live

The sheep and shepherd scenario is pretty well-known in Scripture. Like sheep, people need constant care; someone to look for us when we get lost, feed us, and tend to our injuries. Today we read of two kinds of shepherd, the Good Shepherd, who represents the Messiah, and the worthless shepherd, who represents falseness – people who are in it for what they can get and who prey on the flock with impure motives. Surprisingly, the prophet tells us that God's people treat both shepherds with equal contempt.

I struggle to read this chapter without a feeling of grief in my soul. This chapter, penned not after the event, but 500 years before it, is stunning in its accuracy. One commentator calls this chapter, 'History's greatest tragedy'. It outlines with amazing detail the tragedy of Israel rejecting Jesus as their Messiah and the awful consequences that would follow. It teaches us a vital lesson: the greatest tragedy possible is to reject Christ, the Good Shepherd.

We can be ever thankful for the Good Shepherd, Jesus, the One who does all things well. Isaiah reminds us that we are all like sheep that have gone astray; we have all turned to our own ways. Yet we are sought out by One who would leave the ninety-nine safe sheep in the shelter of the fold and go after the one that is lost. Think about how many times that has been us in our lifetime and how thankful we ought to be to be sought out by the Lover of our souls. It is one thing to be loved; it is quite another to be pursued. The writer C.S. Lewis refers to God as 'the hound of heaven'; He will never give up, rather He will hound you down the back allies of your life where all else fear to tread. We are reminded in Scripture that God will never leave us or ever forsake us. I find myself singing that quite controversial song that portrays heaven meeting earth like a sloppy wet kiss, and my heart turns violently inside my chest when I think about the way that He loves us, oh how He loves us, how He loves us so.

## Pray

Father, thank You today that I can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my Shepherd; what more do I need?' What a Shepherd Jesus is. Thank You eternally for Your pursuit and love. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Live

It's hard to read passages like this one and not focus on heaven. It is like a scene unfolding as the Lord stands on the threshold of eternity about to step into time and reveal Himself to a world that doesn't often reflect on heaven. When I read the first verse, it's like the premier of a blockbuster movie, *"The Lord, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth and who forms the human spirit within a person..."* Just think of the majesty in these few words. He created the heavens, the earth, and humanity. He is returning, sooner than we maybe expect, and I want a ready heart, a heart that yearns for His return like a waiting spouse for the return of their lover. When trials come, we can ask, 'Why this? Why me?' And we can begin to doubt either God's love or His sovereign power. It is clear today that God is stronger by far than all the armies in the world, and that He cares for His people, whom He will save. The Bible is also clear that God sometimes uses Satan to carry out His will, but Satan can go no further than God permits (as Job teaches us).

Verse 10 is somewhat stunning and can I say, one of the most profound statements in this book. The speaker here is Yahweh Himself, the Giver of these prophecies and He says, *"They will look on Me, the One they have pierced"*. The only explanation of this can be the birth, life, death, and resurrection of One who is both God and man. Obviously, no one can pierce God unless God first takes on a human form. Herein is the gospel story ... God must become flesh, die, be pierced through, and must also rise again for them to be able to gaze on the One they pierced. I hope you get that, as it is stunningly profound. When the soldier thrust his sword through Jesus' side as He hung on the Cross, he fulfilled this prophecy in remarkable detail.

## Pray

Father, may my heart always remain an open door to You. You are welcome to sit at the supper table of my soul today to dine and dialogue together. I need and want You, so help me stay alert for You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Live

For generations, Israel was plagued by both sin and false prophets. Verses 1-6 tell us how the Lord deals with both of these problems. My mum used to say, *"To compare is to despair."* If we compare ourselves with others, we might think we are doing okay, but Scripture has a way of checking us in this. I learned Romans 3:23 as a boy in Sunday School, *"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."* I used to ponder that little statement, *"fallen short"*. I would read what happened to Isaiah, the prophet who got a glimpse of the Lord in a vision. He said he saw God high and lifted up and His train filled the temple, and Isaiah's only response was to fall down and cry, *"I am undone!"* One of the first evidences that God's Spirit is at work in your heart is that you recognise your sinfulness and your need for cleansing. The fountain in this chapter today is a beautiful picture of the grace of God that will flow into the life of any recipient willing to open their heart to it.

The scene shifts in verse 7 to a different point in time, and we see Zechariah describe both the death of the Messiah and the events that will follow. The Lord speaks of a time when He will refine His people *"like silver and test them like gold."* Trials and testing purify us and make us fit for the Lord's return.

Our God is incomparable and superior in every way. The name of Jesus is higher than every other name; it holds the place of highest honour and all else must bow at His feet. He is the Everlasting Creator King, yet He chooses to commune with us. Our God is so worthy of our diligent devotion; He is so worthy of our unashamed love. May the Holy Spirit search our hearts and show us where we've failed to ascribe to God the highest place. May He reveal the ways in which we have compromised our commitment to Him and forsaken our first love.

## Pray

Father, my heart's desire is that in all things You would have the pre-eminence. Without Your grace I am lost. Without Your loving leadership I am incomplete. Let nothing else replace the pleasure of Your company. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

# Zechariah 14

## Live

I love the little phrase, *“the day of the LORD”*. It reminds me of big birthdays (one of which I have just had) that start new decades. Every day is a day of the Lord but there is one that is going to be the big one! As history began in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve led all of humanity in a rebellion against God and rejected His rule. When it comes to the end of history, the Lord will return to the earth and re-establish His place as King of kings and Lord of lords. Verse 1 describes the *“day of the LORD”* as a day that will wrap it all up, the climax of both evil and of God's eternal salvation. When that happens, the Lord will reign for ever and ever.

Think about how it encourages you to know that God is working to re-establish His rule over all the earth. According to verse 16, worship and celebration will be the central events of life on earth after the Lord's return. To what extent do these activities characterise your life on earth now? In what ways can you make worship and celebration more central and part of your daily activities? How lovely is God's dwelling place; that's where our hearts long to be, learning His heart and His ways, beholding His majestic beauty. Maybe we need to repent for letting the busyness of life take us from the most important thing ... time spent in devotion to Christ in sincerity and simplicity. I'm sure you're like me and don't want to be just a casual listener, but rather to sit at His feet and listen intently as He speaks.

As we close this book off, the conclusion is this: if Christ is returning as King to defeat His enemies and establish His righteous reign over all the earth, then we must walk in holiness before Him. As John puts it in 1 John 3:3, *“All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”* And Revelation 22:17 says, *“Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.”* Let's be that one!

## Pray

Father, I choose to slow down today and invite You to connect my heart to Yours. I ask for wisdom and revelation that I may come to know Your voice clearer. Once again, let me enjoy the pleasure of Your company. In Jesus' strong name I pray. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

