

## Parishes of St Philips and All Saints Kew with St Luke's Kew

Where all God's Children are Welcome

Bible Study for the thirteenth week of the Covid 19 church building closure

### Section 1: Zechariah 9: 9-12

Prayer: Open your word to us, living God. Speak to us as you spoke to your people centuries ago. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, that we may understand all that you have to say to us today. Amen.

*Read the passage through twice:*

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

<sup>10</sup> I will take away the chariots from Ephraim

and the warhorses from Jerusalem,

and the battle bow will be broken.

He will proclaim peace to the nations.

His rule will extend from sea to sea

and from the River to the ends of the earth.

<sup>11</sup> As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you,

I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

<sup>12</sup> Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope;

even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.

### Background

Zechariah is the eleventh of the 12 minor prophets of the Old Testament. He is one of three – Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi – who are clearly delivering their messages from God after the return of Israel from exile in Babylon. Zechariah shares with Haggai a deep concern for the Temple in Jerusalem and for the collective worship of Israel. However, he has a much broader vision than Haggai, with Messianic themes as well as some fairly bloodcurdling apocalyptic sections. In a time when prophecy was limited, Zechariah speaks with a clarity and a power few can match.

### Some questions

- When do we normally read this passage? And why?
- The previous verses of this chapter detail the passage of God through the pagan lands that surround Israel to destroy them and to bring the survivors into membership of Israel by adoption.
- Some regard this as an account of Alexander the Great's progress south from Lebanon in 333BC on his way to conquer Egypt.
- Given all of that, what has the prophet done with these events?
- Is it right to treat historical events in this way? Can we spiritualise what is happening around us like this?
- If all of the above is the case – and it is very hard to argue definitively one way or the other – what precisely is Zechariah saying about the Messiah?
- And why Jerusalem? There were plenty of other capitals around – Damascus is mentioned, for example, which was just as ancient a capital as Jerusalem.

- We read last week of Jeremiah's challenge to Hananiah, that to prophecy peace is the hardest thing for a prophet to proclaim, as only a real peace can prove that he was speaking the words of God. How does that challenge sit with Zechariah's vision of the Messiah?
- Why does the Messiah ride on a "colt, the foal of an ass"? What sets him apart from other world leaders? (remember, we even know the name of Alexander the Great's horse).
- This is poetry, so there is greater freedom of imagery than prose. Why is Jerusalem female?
- God speaks in the first person in this passage – why? There is no standard prophetic introduction, "thus says the Lord ...".
- God removes the weapons and trappings of war, but the Messiah brings peace. Are they two separate identities?
- What are the four corners of the earth, as envisaged by the prophet? I.e. which "river" does he mean?
- What is the "blood of my covenant with you"?
- Why does the prophet give this as the reason for the return of prisoners to Israel, rather than simply saying that they are his people and God is going to bring them back home?
- What is their "fortress", these "prisoners of hope"?
- What is the hope that sustains these prisoners? Do we share it?
- What is the principle behind double restitution?
- Given all of the above, how does this increase the power of the actions of Jesus on Palm Sunday?
- If this passage was written/referring to events of 333BC, what does it say about God's speed of delivery?
- If this prophecy took 300 years to come true, what does that say about God's promises to us now?
- This is a message of hope, of liberation, of potential. Does it speak to us today in practical ways?
- Do we need a messianic figure to get us through our current situation? If so, who?
- If Christ has fulfilled this text, is it still alive and valuable? Can it not be set aside as "completed"?
- What positive features of God does this text highlight? Can these be used as part of our daily worship and encouragement? If so, how?

*Read the passage through again, out loud if possible*

#### Review

What has this passage taught you about

- God?
- Jesus Christ?
- The Church?
- Our current situation?

Prayer: Loving God, you keep your promises across generations, and your love remains faithful through centuries of history. Give us encouragement and hope in our anxieties, and enable us to trust ourselves to your good purposes. Amen.