

Minor Prophets, Major Message

3. I will bring them back (Zechariah 8. 1-23)

Welcome (10 mins)

Where's your 'happy place'? Can you describe to the group how you feel when you're there?

Worship (10 mins)

We're looking at some of God's promises to Israel in this passage. Two options for worship -

1. Look up this list of God's promises in Scripture. Ask people to read out some of them and allow the words to slowly sink in before praying in thankfulness. <https://www.compassionuk.org/blogs/gods-promises/>
2. Listen/sing 'Yes and Amen.' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OUZtPjSR54>

Word (30 mins)

Set the scene:

The first week of two in Zechariah (though no notes for wk 2) who was contemporary with Haggai but went on prophesying much longer. Concerned with the same themes - physical and spiritual renewal for Israel as they returned from exile. The first half of the book draws attention to the current problems, and the second half what will come because of these problems. But ch 8 stands out as an oasis of blessing and promise for Israel, and the church beyond.

Read Zechariah 8. 1-23 (longer than the Sunday reading)

Q) Zechariah announces 10 blessings for the people here, each beginning with 'this is what the Lord Almighty says.' Can you pick them out?

Note: Together they paint a complete picture of restoration - physical, spiritual, ritual, ethical. It is not just for Israel, but all nations. It's a BIG picture!

Q) Do any of these promised blessings particularly resonate most with you? Which feel very far off?

Q) What is the response to all this blessing that the Lord is looking for from the people? (V9, 13, 16-17)

Note: The term 'be strong' is elsewhere translated 'be encouraged'. The people needed encouragement to get back to building, and to address their moral integrity.

Q) What do we do with the blessing we receive from God?

Verse 8 gives THE key promise of God in salvation history - he will be with us because he is faithful. God upholds his part of the covenant despite the failings of the people. His presence can be trusted.

Q) What difference could it have made to the returning Exiles to know that God was with them? When are you/have you been most confident of God's faithful presence in your life?

Look at verse 19 again. These four festivals previously commemorated four disastrous chapters of Israel's life. Look them up if you have time (Jer. 52.6-7, Jer. 52. 12-14, Jer. 41. 1-3, Jer. 52. 4-5). This could be described as fast to feast, but is more like the redemption not just of the future but of Israel's past experience too.

Q) What is there in your life which acts as an annual marker of famine, a reminder of past hurt and grief? Can you imagine, or allow others to pray that God would redeem this history too?

Note: This is a very personal question of course, so may be good to leave with people or do in pairs if trust is sufficient within your group.

Witness (10 mins)

Verse 23 describes how those who are very far from God will be attracted by and cling to his people in order to go and meet him for themselves. Read it again, and then imagine, or write down, the names of 10 people who you would love to take hold of your hem and be led in God's promised blessing.

Pray for them together now.