

Advent

Santa Barbara Community Church
December 2013



Study Schedule

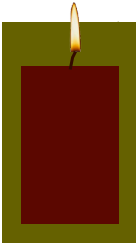
Sermon Date	Study	Topic	Schedule
12/1	1	Hope	Homegroups meet
12/8	2	Peace	Homegroups meet
12/15	3	Joy	Individual study
12/22	4	Love	Individual study

Sources

Webb *The Message of Zechariah*, (2003), by Barry G. Webb

Gregory *Longing for God in an Age of Discouragement: The Gospel According to Zechariah*, (2010), by Bryan R. Gregory

The Advent 2013 Study Guide was written by Reed Jolley.



Advent in a Day of Small Things

For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice... Zechariah 4:10

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

Luke 1:31-33

As we prepare for Christmas we are invited into more than a holiday that closes stores, shuts down businesses and provokes celebrations, family reunions and culinary extravagance. Christmas, for the Christian church, is the culmination of a season of Advent, a season of expectation, a season of waiting. Advent celebrates that the waiting is over, the Christ has come.

The word Advent is not a biblical word. It comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning *coming* or *arrival*. Furthermore, Advent is not prescribed in the Bible. There is no chapter and verse that instructs us to observe a season of Advent. But Advent was practiced in the Bible. Not for a month, but for hundreds, even thousands of years, as the people of God waited expectantly for their Messiah to come.

The focus of the season is upon the birth of Jesus in his first Advent and the future return of Christ in his second Advent. When we recognize Advent, therefore, we are not only

mindful of the first and second Advents of our savior but also his unique and powerful presence in our lives today. A focus on the past and the future must affect our lives in the here and now.

This brief study guide is intended to lead us, as a church, into a season of preparation for the coming one, the Christ. Advent is a season of anticipation, of expectation, of celebration and of preparation. Let the party begin!

Zechariah and the Coming Messiah

Toward the end of what we call the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was grappling with dashed expectations. Five hundred years before the time of Zechariah, the nation of Israel was in her prime. Israel was in the center of geopolitics and was respected by the world powers. King David was on the throne and was known to be a mighty warrior. The territory of the nation was expanding and the people enjoyed prosperity.

By the time of Zechariah, Israel's strength and affluence were a distant memory. The nation had endured a civil war and divided into two kingdoms (the northern kingdom of Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah). Now the northern kingdom was no more, having been obliterated by the Assyrians. And the southern kingdom of Judah was a faint echo of what once was. The people had been captured and exiled to Babylon (586 BC). By the time of Zechariah the Babylonian empire had fallen to the Persians and the exiles are back in their own land.

Zechariah was a priest, the son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo. He returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel in about 538 BC (see Nehemiah 12:4). This priest-prophet began his ministry in 520 BC.

It was, as the prophet put it, a day of small things... It was into this context that Zechariah spoke a message of hope, a message of expectation. Zechariah, serving God in a Jerusalem devoid of glory, spoke of a coming one who would bring the very kingdom of God!

Zechariah is, truly, a remarkable book in our Bible. The book, set in a period of deep despair, emanates brilliant rays of hope that the kingdom of God is coming in a person, a messiah who will make things right. A day is coming when God will reign, not only in an enfeebled kingdom called Judah, not even in a restored territory once called Israel, but over the whole earth! As Zechariah prophesies,

And the Lord will be king over all the earth.
Zechariah 14:9

How to read Zechariah

Zechariah is a medium-sized prophetic book that will confuse as well as inspire us when we read it. It is filled with *vivid images and enigmatic visions*. (Gregory, p. 3) The prophet's fourteen chapters can be divided as follows:

Zechariah 1-8 consists of 8 visions experienced by the prophet that give a picture of what God is going to do in the future.

Zechariah 9-14 speak of a coming king, one like David, who will come to Jerusalem and rule and reign. Most of the quotations and allusions from Zechariah in the New Testament come from this portion of the book.¹

¹ The New Testament references to this prophet whom we may hardly have noticed are impressive indeed. One scholar believes there are at least eleven direct quotations and sixty-four allusions to Zechariah in the New Testament. See Webb, p. 48.

How to use this Advent Guide

This brief study has been written for our homegroups and for individual use. The first two studies are intended for group use while weeks three and four are intended to prompt individual reflection. May God bless us as we enter into a season of waiting.



Hope: 1:7-17

Longing for a New Jerusalem

This passage contains Zechariah's first vision. Before we get to the vision itself, the prophet commands the people of Judah to repent.

Read 1:1-6. What is Zechariah's strategy to get the people to move toward repentance? Explain this passage to one another in your homegroup.

Why is repentance appropriate during Advent? What does repentance look like for one who had been a *Christian* for many years?

Zechariah 1:7-17

This is the first of eight visions that came to Zechariah. The passage is clear that he is not recounting a mere dream, *the word of the LORD came to the prophet...* (1:7).

Read this vision and describe what it says. Explain the vision back to yourself.

There are, probably, many confusing elements of this vision. Let us attempt to clarify one of them. Who is *the angel of the LORD* in verse 12?

[This is] a rather mysterious figure who appears many times in the Old Testament, from Genesis onwards. Sometimes he speaks and acts so like God that we must assume, I think, that he *is* God, manifesting himself in human form. At other times he is clearly distinguished from God. Here in Zechariah's first vision, as we have seen, he is the leading horsemen. But he is also an intercessor. He is the one who cries, *how long?*, appealing to God to turn his anger away from Jerusalem. (Webb, p. 68)

What is the promise made in this vision?

Look at Zechariah 1:14 What do we learn about God's heart for is people?

Barry Webb summarizes the themes of this first vision:

First, God's anger at the nations who have mistreated his Jerusalem and its people, and second, his own intense (jealous) determination to bless and prosper them, especially by ensuring that their work of rebuilding his temple is brought to a successful conclusion. (Webb, p. 74)

Zechariah was preaching during a time when Jerusalem was unfortified, its walls needed to be rebuilt. Furthermore, the new temple was small and unimpressive. Again, it was a *day of small things*. (Zechariah 4:10)

Zechariah's first vision promises *big things*.

Thus says the Lord of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.
Zechariah 1:17

Notice, again, how Advent was the answer to the people's longings.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.
Luke 1:31-33

When Messiah comes there will be no more wagging with the powers of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon or Persia. The coming one will rule and reign forever! Hope is fulfilled in a person!

Advent questions to ponder and discuss:

- In what ways should Zechariah's first vision lead us to Advent hope?

- The people living in Judah during the time of Zechariah must have been filled with anxiety and fear. What anxious thoughts do you find in your heart? How does Advent, that is, the coming of Christ, speak to those fears?

- How does the future Advent of Christ dispel your fears?

Pray for Advent hope in your own heart and soul as we approach Christmas.



Peace: 2:1-13

Longing for God's Peace

In a very real sense, the whole book of Zechariah is about Jerusalem, the geographical and theological character of Jewish life. Zechariah speaks about the Jerusalem of old, the Jerusalem of this own day and the coming *new* Jerusalem.

As Webb writes,

Jerusalem was nothing without the temple, and the temple was nothing without God's presence. It was God's presence that made both the temple and the city glorious. (Webb, p. 34)

With this in mind, read Zechariah's third vision (2:1-13). The notes of the ESV Study Bible call this vision, *Jerusalem Unwalled*. Look for this theme as you read. Bryan Gregory's outline of this vision may help as you read:

Zechariah 2:1-5 A Populated and Protected City

Zechariah 2:6-13 A Magnetic City

As best you are able, explain this vision to your homegroup.

How big is the future Jerusalem? See 2:5? What does a *city without walls* convey? Gregory writes,

Normally this would be a city's disgrace, but in this vision it is the source of glory because of its overflowing numbers of people and cattle. Part and parcel of this scenario is that the city would be considerably prosperous. Common to the restoration picture that the prophets painted was a [future] Jerusalem bursting at the seams from the number of people (and animals) streaming back from exile. (Gregory, p. 62)

But there is more here. In 2:4 the city is without walls. What do we see in 2:5? Ponder this image and ask how this should lead you to have peace in your own life.

Read Zechariah 2:6-13. Notice the magnetism of Jerusalem. This section begins with a command to the Jews who are still in Babylon to come home. How does this section describe God's love for his people? Elsewhere in the message of the Old Testament prophets we find Jerusalem to be a magnet for all the nations of the earth. From Jerusalem peace will emanate outwards. Consider, for example, Isaiah 2:1-4.

How might this truth give us peace as we celebrate Advent in 2013?

Three times in this passage God promises to come and dwell with his people (vv. 5, 10, 11). These are promises that assured the people they would be protected, empowered and prosperous.

When, ultimately, was this promise fulfilled? Read Matthew 1:23.

With the above in mind, read what is almost the last word in the Bible.

Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God...., for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'

Revelation 21:3-5

Zechariah 2:10 is a grand Advent statement. Notice how the tense of the passage is reflected in the ESV. *Behold I come...* Reflect on this as a homegroup. Consider the tense of the hymn we sing at Christmas time.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

The promise of peace in verse 9 means that the enemies of God's people will become plunder for those who served them. Zechariah has a vision of the peace Messiah will bring. God's people will no longer live with the fear of war.

In the Gospel of Luke we learn that messiah will, indeed, bring peace. First, the forerunner to messiah will guide the people into the *way of peace* (Luke 1:79) and then, when the angels announce that messiah has been born, what do they say?

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!

Luke 2:14

Advent questions to ponder and discuss:

- Describe a time when the *walls* of your own life were broken down.
- How might Zechariah's third vision have spoken to your lack of peace during that time?
- How does the Christmas story, Advent, speak to your need for peace?
- In what ways can God's church be a force for peace as we wait for the second Advent?



Joy: 9:9-17

The Coming King

For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women.

Zechariah 9:17

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Luke 2:10

Zechariah 9 contains the most famous verse from the from the lips of the prophet:

*Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Zechariah 9:9

Readers of the New Testament know that the verse points to the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem. (See Matthew 21:5; John 12:15). And, just as the people in Jerusalem celebrate the arrival of Jesus, so also Zechariah's prophecy is surrounded with great celebration. Verse 9 itself speaks of great rejoicing and loud shouting! The section concludes with a picture of a multitude of crops for the people to eat and wine for the people to drink. The king comes! Joy!

This particular prophecy is set in the context of Israel's lesser enemies. Babylon, Assyria, Egypt and Persia are not mentioned. But rather Hadrach, Damascus, Hamath, Tyre and Sidon.

The general import of this opening salvo of the first oracle is that when God comes to rule the world, all his enemies will be as these nations and cities are. His people will no longer have any cause either to fear or to envy them. (Webb, p. 129)

Notice the expansiveness of this vision! This coming king will not merely rule over Jerusalem, or tiny Judah. Notice the breadth of this king's kingdom in Zechariah 9:10.

In our Advent liturgy we light the third candle of the wreath which is pink or rose-colored. The candle symbolizes *joy* at the coming of Christ. Indeed, we have many reasons to be joyful. Every good and perfect gift comes from the gracious hand of the Father and brings great *joy* to our lives. Yet all of the joys of life are like fireflies compared to the light of the sun. The true *joy* giver is our Lord Jesus Christ.

Advent Exercise

Read Zechariah 9:1-11:3

Note all the reasons this section would have brought joy to the people of Jerusalem.

Make a list of all the reasons Advent brings you joy.

Read and enjoy the follow quotation:

Gratitude and joy are the twin children of grace, organically joined both theologically and spiritually. In Greek they are even related linguistically: the words for grace, gratitude and joy all have the same root, *char*, a noun that refers to health and well-being. *Grace* is *charis*, *gratitude* is *eucharistia*, and *joy* is *chara*.

What is merely a linguistic relationship in Greek is a burning reality in the kingdom of God. Grace is God's mercy, his unmerited favor. It is what Frederick Buechner calls the *crucial eccentricity* of Christian faith, the unique and wonderfully odd thing God does to forgive sinners: he doesn't give them the bad things they deserve but the incredibly good things they don't deserve.

Exult in this *burning reality* in your life.



Love: 14:1-21

Longing for Love

The latter chapters of Zechariah are concerned with the coming *day of the Lord*, the Advent of Messiah! As Webb notes, if chapters 9-13 have focused on the end, chapter 14 brings us to the final straight, the last lap of the race. The chapter is concerned *with the final coming of God himself, to judge the world and reign in glory.* (Webb, p. 176)

Read Zechariah 14. These 21 verses assure us that God will have the last word in history. As Gregory writes,

Zechariah 14 points a dramatic picture of the Divine Warrior defending Jerusalem against attacking enemies, triumphantly proceeding with his holy ones to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, inaugurating a new order of creation in which the Lord's enemies are conquered and converted and all things profane become sacred.

As you read this chapter look for the repetition of the phrase, *On that day...* What does this tell you about Advent?

Notice how this chapter is fulfilled and will be fulfilled in Jesus².

- Jesus begins his journey into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives (Mark 11:1, see Zechariah 14:4).
- Jesus proceeds into Jerusalem with his disciples in tow (Mark 11:1, see Zechariah 14:5).
- Jesus cleanses the temple by driving out the money changers (Mark 11:15-17, see Zechariah 14:20-21).

Zechariah 14 contains many violent images. It might surprise you to be called to read this chapter at Christmastime. But think of the real joy of Advent. Our Lord himself saw his coming as a self-substitution. The wrath of God would be poured out on him, the eternal Son of God, so that all who place their faith in him would be forever free from their sins. Advent. Here we find that the love we long for is ultimately a person who suffered and died so that we might live! Read, ponder, rejoice. The Lord is come!

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

John 3:16-19

2 From Gregory, p. 212.

