

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

ZECHARIAH

DISTRESSING DREAMS



ZECHARIAH: DISTRESSING DREAMS

I am afraid of kangaroos. Yes, the weird Australian animals that look like a science experiment gone wrong. They're a Frankenstein-like mixture of a deer and a human with a pouch like a purse. However, I'm not scared of them because of their looks. It's far more personal than that. I fear them from personal experience, sort of.

My kangaroo fears go back to a nightmare. Tossing and turning in my car-shaped toddler bed, visions of a kangaroo haunted me night after night when I was a child. You see, I had a reoccurring nightmare where a giant kangaroo carried my twin brother and me away from my mom while she cried in the driveway. If she tried to intervene, it would kick her. If we tried to crawl out of the pouch, it would blow fire from its nostrils. Yes, I know kangaroos don't breathe fire, but that's what happened in the dream. To this day, I get really anxious whenever I see a kangaroo at the zoo or even on an online video.

You have been there, right? You woke up in a cold sweat with a pounding heart due to a nightmare. You tried to run, but you were stuck. You tried to fight, but you were paralyzed. Dreams can be caused by a whole list of triggers like food, stress, or the books we read before bed.

However, sometimes dreams can be caused by God. That was the case for an Old Testament prophet named Zechariah. His prophetic book contains a series of vivid dreams, called oracles. These weren't just strange dreams; they were God-given visions about the future of God's people.

Zechariah experienced these dreams during a time when Israel's situation looked like a nightmare. About twenty years before receiving these visions, God's people were on cloud nine. Their time in exile was over! King Cyrus of Persia announced that the Jewish refugees were able to return home to Jerusalem. Restoration was coming to their nation! They were going to rebuild their city and plant roots for generations to come. Reality smacked them in the face, though. Israel's homeland looked like a scene from a horror movie.

Haggai, a colleague of Zechariah, explained that their crops were dying, their economy was crashing, and their confidence was diminishing. They desperately needed a

glimmer of hope, which is why God sent a series of visions to Zechariah. During one of his last visions, the prophet offers a reason to rejoice despite a city in ruins.

READ: Zechariah 9:9

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.

This passage, a powerful prophecy of King Jesus, gives us two observations about hope despite horrible circumstances.

Hope Appears Gradually

This prophecy was exactly what Israel wanted to hear. Their Messiah, which translates to Savior, was coming! All of their years in exile were about to be worth it. There was no need to stress about the shambles of their Temple when the true King of Israel was going to establish a worldwide reign. Reading these words led to rejoicing and worship on a national scale. However, the clock kept ticking and ticking and ticking some more. Jesus didn't appear in 100, 200, or even 300 years. Over 500 years later, Jesus finally made His appearance in the world. Their promise took some time to come to pass.

That's how hope works. God often delivers His promise in bite-sized pieces. God sent them judges, prophets, and teachers to instill hope, but it still took some time. We often want God to deliver us immediately, but that's seldom His strategy.

Like the people of Israel, God wants your struggles to strengthen you. Hope is coming. God wants your affliction to cultivate affection. Hope is coming. God wants resistance to make you more resilient. Hope is coming. In all things, we can be confident that hope is on the horizon for us. It may just appear gradually.

Hope Appears Unexpectedly

Zechariah helped Israel contextualize their conflict by offering them hope from his visions. These confusing dreams were given by God to help him better understand what the future holds for His people. After a series of dark visions in chapters 1-9, the tone turns to hope as He discusses the coming king, riding on a donkey into Jerusalem. This is a prophecy of Jesus — specifically his Triumphant Entry into

Jerusalem. This passage is a direct foreshadowing of Jesus entering Jerusalem on the back of a donkey one week before his crucifixion (Luke 19:28-40).

No one imagined a savior would enter a city in such a strange way. Contrary to their beliefs, Israel's savior would not appear on a horse, in a chariot, or in a military caravan. Their hope was going to ride into their city on a donkey. Talk about unexpected. Donkeys are stubborn and strange; no national leader would ever choose one as their vehicle of choice. But Jesus did.

This prophecy foretells the triumphant entry during Palm Sunday. Jesus, riding on a donkey, paraded into Jerusalem while crowds chanted, "Save Us! Hosanna!" Ultimately, that's exactly what Jesus did. Christ entered the city on Sunday, was arrested on Thursday, murdered on Friday, and conquered death on Sunday. Jesus saved His people from the power of sin and the sting of death. Salvation came to the entire universe, and Zion, modern-day Jerusalem, was at the center of our redemptive story.

Sometimes our Savior works in strange ways. They wanted a soldier, but they got a savior. They wanted a warrior to overthrow a brutal dictator, but they got the prince of peace who overthrew the Enemy. Even the moment that Zechariah foretold was strange. Jesus' parade featured a donkey. Jesus ruled with humility. Jesus didn't overthrow Rome; they actually murdered Him.

Everything about it is strange, and that's good news for us. Sometimes our lives look pretty unexpected, don't they? You never expected your college career to look this way. You never expected to lead a Bible study in a Dunkin Donuts. You never expected to have to reset your life after a move across country. The only thing we can expect is the unexpected. That's good news for us! Why? Because God loves working in the unexpected.

So what do we do with this? When your surroundings look a little strange, thank God. He thrives in unexpected circumstances with unlikely people. Zechariah gave the Israelites hope, but they had to wrestle with the fact that it didn't look like they expected. It was strange and it happened slowly. It wasn't exactly what they wanted, but it was exactly what they needed. That's how our God operates. He gives us what we need, when we need it, and how we need it. Find hope in trusting His process.

TALK IT OUT

Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week and what was the lowest part of your week?

Q1: What's one thing that stood out to you from today's message?

Q2: Israel was facing very difficult emotional, physical, and spiritual circumstances when Zechariah shared God's hopeful message of a Savior being on his way. What do you think they expected to happen? What happened instead?

Q3: How do you maintain hope when God is taking a long time to answer your prayers?

Q4: How can God use those seasons of waiting for good in unexpected ways?

Application: What's one area in your life where you've lost hope because God has taken a long time to answer your prayer? Commit to begin praying about that again every day this week.

READING PLAN

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

1 John 4:7-12

1 John 5:1-15

Romans 5:1-11

Romans 12:9-11

John 15:1-11

John 17:20-26

Matthew 5:16-26

Hebrews 13:1-6

Galatians 6:16-24

1 Peter 4:7-11

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

