

Advent Devotional December 13, 2021

Scripture

Zechariah 1:7-17

⁷On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo; and Zechariah said, ⁸In the night I saw a man riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen; and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses. ⁹Then I said, "What are these, my lord?" The angel who talked with me said to me, "I will show you what they are." ¹⁰So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, "They are those whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth." ¹¹Then they spoke to the angel of the LORD who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have patrolled the earth, and lo, the whole earth remains at peace." ¹²Then the angel of the LORD said, "O LORD of hosts, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which you have been angry these seventy years?" ¹³Then the LORD replied with gracious and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. ¹⁴So the angel who talked with me said to me, Proclaim this message: Thus says the LORD of hosts; I am very jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. ¹⁵And I am extremely angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was only a little angry, they made the disaster worse. ¹⁶Therefore, thus says the LORD, I have returned to Jerusalem with compassion; my house shall be built in it, says the LORD of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. ¹⁷Proclaim further: Thus says the LORD of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity; the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.

Devotional

Sarah Knapp '21

After seventy years in exile, the generation of Jewish survivors stolen from Israel had lived out the rest of their days in Babylon, despairing of their plight and of an angry God who had seemingly forsaken them. Those who now remained had little hope to cling to and no memory of what their forefathers and mothers had once called home. Nevertheless, when King Darius decreed that the Jewish people were finally free to return to their motherland, most of the remnant took up the offer and made the long trek back.

At the end of their journey home, in place of where Jerusalem once stood, they instead found an abandoned city in shambles, vulnerable to the surrounding hostile neighbors. Now stranded in an unfamiliar land where they would need to rebuild their lives from the ground up, it would be natural for them to despair. In the face of this great uncertainty, the Lord sent the prophet Zechariah, whose name translates to "The Lord Remembers". As the Jews returned to Israel and began to rebuild their temple, their walls, and their lives, the prophet called upon the people to return to their God. A series of eight visions and dreams relayed by Zechariah reveal that the LORD of hosts has not rejected her people and has always been for Israel. Despite the trials, adversity, and even discipline they endured, the Jewish people were never forgotten. These visions serve as a powerful reminder of God's faithfulness to her people, a message of encouragement needed now more than ever.

The first vision takes us to the depths of a dark, abandoned ravine overgrown with myrtle trees (v.8), haunted by an unsettling stillness and a lingering fear of what lurks in the shadows. In a scene reminiscent of what the Jews now faced in Jerusalem, a man is seated on a red horse (v.8) flanked by three more horses and their riders. We are told these three riders are angels patrolling the earth (vv.9-10) who report that the nations are peaceful and quiet, apathetic and complacent. It seems that no one cares about the plight of God's people as they struggle to survive.

Yet in verse 12, the angel of the LORD—Christ, our High Priest—stands in the gap to offer an intercessory prayer on Israel’s behalf. This prayerful inquiry is met with an intense passion and an infallible promise. God is “exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and Zion” (v.14); she has returned to Jerusalem with compassion and does not rejoice in their suffering. When no other nation will come to Israel’s aid, God will do it herself with the promise to once again make great the nation where her name dwells. The Jews can still trust in their God, who never fails and never forgets.

The Lord Remembers. The Lord Remembers Israel. The Lord remembers her people. Through Zechariah’s visions, the Jewish refugees are reassured in their faith—just as we can be reassured in ours—that the Lord never forgets her children.

Prayer

Holy Protector and Divine Promise-Keeper, thank you for reminding your children that we are not alone in our suffering, not forsaken in the adversity we face, nor abandoned in the discipline we endure. As we face the inner turmoil of daily anxieties and the crippling fears of uncertain futures, may we know that it is not a solitary struggle. May we find rest in the embrace of the Divine, support in your unfailing arms, and comfort in your steadfast promise. The Lord Remembers. Amen.