

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 78
Daniel; Psalm 126; Zechariah 9-14

Key Concepts: The key concepts in this section are that God will, even in the face of great odds, save God's people and that God will send a hero to help lead the people.

Stories: Daniel opens with a series of hero stories which include Daniel and his friends taken captive, the battle of the vegetables, Daniel interpreting a dream and being promoted, the fiery furnace episode, a dream and an interpretation, a wild party and a strange sentence, the lion's den episode, a visions of four beasts and a ram and a male goat, a prophecy about seven weeks, a vision of the end times, and an interpretation of the vision of the end times. Zechariah includes the destruction of Israel's enemies, the coming of a messianic figure, reminders that God alone controls history, laments from Jerusalem over their sins, the transformation of Jerusalem, the idols are cut off, God's shepherd is struck down, a messianic oracle concerning the final battle and the final restoration of all the earth. Psalm 126 is a Psalm of joy in God's restoring work.

Brief Summary: Daniel is a book written around 164 BCE. We know this because in the final chapter in which the writer is offering up a vision of the future, he gets everything right to a point and then is wrong about everything else. We can pretty much pinpoint this moment to be somewhere around 164 BCE. In addition there are Persian and Hellenistic influences in the stories themselves and the second half of the book is a full blown apocalyptic vision; one in which heaven and earth are merged, Daniel is shown symbolic animals and is given mysterious numbers, and the struggle for the hearts and minds of the people is waged on a cosmic scale. This type of literature only emerges in Judaism at a very late date.

The heart of the stories are that Daniel and his friends, by being absolutely faithful to God, are elevated in status and protected from all evils. This includes not being consumed in a fiery furnace and not eaten by lions. Daniel is also the new Joseph, able to interpret dreams and being rewarded for so doing. And as with Joseph, Daniel will be the almost comic book-like hero who will save his people. These stories and visions have been used by both Jews and Christians as a source of hope during some of their most difficult moments.

Zechariah 9-14, unlike the first half of the book, is not tied to any specific historical period. There is speculation that it could have been written during the period of the return or at a much later date. I have placed it here at the end of the Old Testament readings because it contains descriptions of the "apocalyptic" battle in which the nations of the earth attack Jerusalem, are defeated by God, and then the new age dawns. This is one of the characteristics of apocalyptic literature and it will be found in much of the book of Revelation.

Zechariah contains images of a messianic king figure, *"Lo, your king comes to you triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass..."* The book also focuses on God's absolute sovereignty. *"Ask rain of the Lord in the season of the spring rain, from the Lord who makes the storm clouds..."* This section of Zechariah also moves between God's punishment of Israel (*So I, God, said I will not be your shepherd*) and restoration (*..and every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be sacred to the Lord of hosts...*). In a sense the writer of these prophecies carries on the great traditions of first holding Judah accountable for its way of life; second reminding the people of God's anger for their lack of faithfulness; and third assuring them that in the end, God will be faithful to God's people.

1. What is your favorite story in Daniel and why?
2. How does Daniel remind you of Joseph?
3. Where do you see "Christ" references in Zechariah?