

# Peace and Justice Reign

**Bible Background • ZECHARIAH 8**

**Printed Text • ZECHARIAH 8:1–8, 11–17 | Devotional Reading • ZECHARIAH 8:18–23**

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **COMPREHEND** the impact of God’s presence in a community, **YEARN** for God’s perpetual presence and the promise of justice it brings, and **PRAY** for God’s presence to result in a communal sense of justice, prosperity, and unity.

## In Focus

Christine and Michael walked slowly through the immense destruction of their house. They were searching and hoping to find some photos of their children and Michael’s wedding ring. He had just taken the ring off to work on their car when the tornado siren sounded. Michael’s only thought was to run to the house to gather his children and wife. They met as he bounded up the steps of the porch. They went to the special room he had just completed for a storm like this. He never thought they would really use it or at least not this soon. After two minutes that felt like forever, the winds ceased. Michael slowly opened the door and walked cautiously up the steps. The darkness was replaced with bright sunshine. As his eyes adjusted, he had seen utter destruction. In the midst of this chaos and calamity, how would they ever find his wedding ring or the pictures?

Michael decided he and Christine should stop and pray. As they prayed, others joined them. After the prayer, they walked and found the family photo of all the children and themselves. They smiled and hugged each other. Even if they did not find the ring, the picture was a reminder of how God had shown mercy and blessed them in many ways.

*What would you look for if your possessions were devastated in a powerful storm or an unbelievable situation? Do you pray and trust God right away, or do you turn to God later? What are ways God blesses people even when all hope is lost?*

## Keep in Mind

“So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not” (Zechariah 8:15, KJV).

## Focal Verses

**KJV** Zechariah 8:1 Again the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying,

2 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury.

3 Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain.

4 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age.

5 And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.

6 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts.

7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country;

8 And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.

11 But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts.

12 For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.

13 And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye

shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong.

14 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the LORD of hosts, and I repented not:

15 So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not.

16 These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates:

17 And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD.

### The People, Places, and Times

**Zechariah.** One of the twelve minor prophets whose collective work concludes the Old Testament. Zechariah wanted to motivate the Jews to rebuild the Temple after their return from exile in Babylonia, but he used a different approach from that of his contemporary Haggai. Prophesying between August and December of 520 BC, Haggai promised the Jews an end to their crop failures and economic misery, giving God's message that "from this day will I bless you" (Haggai 2:19). Zechariah, prophesying from 520 BC to perhaps 480 BC, promised them a Messiah and a return to the glorious days of King David.

### Background

Zechariah's prophetic ministry began in the summer of 520 BC in Jerusalem, in the years between the arrival of the first group of returning captives from Babylonia (536 BC) and the completion of the rebuilding of the temple (516 BC). Both Zechariah and Haggai prophesied about the situation in

Jerusalem immediately after the Babylonian captivity. Most of the city was still desolate. There was no Temple; it had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Everything around them was in ruins. The people found this situation too daunting; could this land ever recover? Could the Lord ever return to Zion? Could life come back to these dried bones (Ezekiel 37)? Ezra tells us that soon after the remnant Jews arrived in Jerusalem, they embarked on the work of restoring the Temple, starting with the altar (Ezra 3). Their intention was to rebuild the Temple as well, but their drive to work petered out. There were too many distractions, especially from the numerous enemies around them. Haggai, who prophesied at the same time as Zechariah, tells us of the state of the Temple at the time. The people had settled down in durable houses while the Lord's house remained in ruins (Haggai 1:3-5). Zechariah emerged to be one of the prophets speaking hope and encouragement to the people. He is generally characterized as a prophet who challenges the remnants to believe that the Lord would actually remember Zion. He was a visionary prophet who inspired the people as they sought to rebuild the Temple.

*Think of a situation in your life, your neighborhood, or even in your state/the country that seems desolate. What is your innermost response to the desolation?*

## At-A-Glance

1. God is Jealous for Judah (Zechariah 8:1-2)
2. God will restore Judah (vv. 3-8, 11-12)
3. Judah must Return to God (vv. 13-17)

## In Depth

### 1. God is Jealous for Judah (Zechariah 8:1-2)

Zechariah ministered among a discouraged and indifferent community of people who had returned from Babylon to a city they called home but that looked nothing like it. When the people were too discouraged to care about God's house, God still cared for them enough to send prophets to help them build the Temple (for the people's own good). The Lord is quite stern in his assertion, "I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury." God is jealous with a true kind of jealousy and, here, we see how that jealousy shapes God's relationship with Judah. On the one hand, God wants to be the only one receiving Judah's worship. Israel was not supposed to worship any other gods because the Lord, their God, is a jealous God. When they showed interest in other gods or started to follow the gods of the Gentiles, God's wrath was unleashed upon them, and they were severely punished. These punishments often took the form of foreign invasions by other nations that God used to chastise Israel. However, here we learn that God's jealousy compels Him to return to His people and bring them hope for the future.

*Do you ever feel God being jealous over other things that try to take His place in your life?*

### 2. God will Restore Judah (vv. 3-8, 11-12)

God does not just rescue Judah from captivity both in the east and in the west. God's people will return to Jerusalem. They will rebuild the city, and God will dwell in it again. The Temple that lay in ruins at the time of the Babylonian captivity was to be rebuilt. The worship of Yahweh would take place in Jerusalem again. But with all this, the Lord would restore the people of Jerusalem. There will be peace and economic growth again in the city even though it seems desolate at the time of Zechariah. Where there is

now only death and destruction, God will bring life and hope. Joy and gladness will replace the sorrow and mourning that characterized life for the captives. There will be large families again in the city, with grandparents and grandchildren seen in the streets of the city without a care for their safety. The earth will yield her increase. This is a far-fetched “dream” of a future that seems unrealistic to the hearers, yet God is asking for the people’s trust.

*How do you respond when God says something to you that sounds impossible?*

### 3. Judah must Return to God (vv. 13–17)

God is eager to bless Israel as they re-establish themselves and re-devote themselves to rebuilding the Temple. He reminds Israel why they are in this state: God had to punish their ancestors for their sin, but now their punishment is complete, and He is pleased to bless His people again. However, the Israelites do have a part to play in their restoration. They must promise to obey the God who is blessing them. The Lord requires the Jews to avoid the negative policies that precipitated their fall into exile. They must reform their justice system so that the truth is told and peace is sought. Schemes and perjury have no place in a nation God is restoring to fellowship with Him.

### Search the Scriptures

1. Zechariah promises the day when the Lord will dwell in Jerusalem. Who else makes such a prophecy? What were the circumstances that caused the Lord to leave Zion?
2. What scenes of peace does Zechariah’s prophecy highlight (vv. 4–5, 12)?
3. What must Israel do now that God is with them again (vv. 16–17)?

### Discuss the Meaning

The Lord has previously told the Israelites that His name is Jealousy (Exodus 34:14),

which He reaffirms here. Yet, in our culture today, jealousy is usually spoken of as a negative emotion that should be avoided. Is there such a thing as healthy or holy jealousy?

### Liberating Lesson

The principle theme of the text is that God will return to Jerusalem to be the God of His people once again. This is unbelievably good news to the people. Thus, we are reminded that God’s wrath does not endure forever. Only His-loving kindness does (Psalm 136). He forgives, and if we return to the covenant that we have with Him, He rescues us from whatever or whoever is holding us captive, drawing us back to Himself. We must return to all parts of the covenant though to protect us from falling again into a place removed from God’s presence. Covenant keepers do not lie. Covenant keepers practice good judgment, especially in a legal setting. Covenant keepers want good and not evil for our neighbors. What social systems that God set up in His covenant with Israel could help us today bring good judgment to our courts?

### Application for Activation

God is with us, and He is in control. That is the chill-pill that we all need: to know that God is with us. We are in a covenant with the faithful God who can never break a promise. He will cause the sun to shine on us again and the dew to water our efforts. He will heal us from our sicknesses and save us from the schemes of the enemy. However, He asks us to trust Him with our very lives and obey His every word. How different would our lives be if we trusted Him in everything? Take some time, this week, to think and write about an area where you can give God more trust. Share your desire with someone close to you so they can help encourage and remind you.

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

**Zechariah 8:1–8, 11–17**

Zechariah paints a picture of the radical change for the better that had begun in Jerusalem, while the nations that chastised Judah would soon be punished. He looks forward to the future in hope. Against the negative and pessimistic tone of his message in Zechariah 7, here the message is balanced with a positive and optimistic series of oracles. The rebuke of chapter 7 changes into a promise of a glorious future for Judah in chapter 8. Indeed, in chapter 7, Judah was admonished to repent and live righteously after the punishment of her time in captivity, while in chapter 8, she is to repent and live righteously because of the promise of her future restoration—a restoration that apparently has already started. In this spirit of optimism, each of the seven oracles in chapter 8 contains a few words of encouragement for the remnant—those who

have returned from Babylonia. Overall, these seven oracles are thought to form a theological summary of the book; language and themes are rehearsed in this chapter in a rapid staccato style that emphasizes the centrality of Zion in God’s plan, the need for ethical living, and the need to see God’s hand at work in the midst of current events. Zechariah 8:1–17 promises that the Lord will return to Zion, focuses on the changes that the Lord’s presence in Jerusalem will produce and then implores the people to be faithful to God and one another in this restored city of Jerusalem.

**1 Again the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, 2 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury.**

The situation is dire. There is no hope in the city, and there is no hope for the city. Each person takes care of their own property and has no desire or energy to pay attention to the larger community projects, the most important of which is the house of the Lord. Yet, to these people in this condition, the word of the Lord of hosts comes through Zechariah. Here and in five other oracles, the Lord is called the “LORD of hosts,” Yahweh who commands angel armies. This Lord of the mighty heavenly hosts always comes through for God’s people, and often, when the Lord breaks through to deliver God’s people, it is through the word of the prophet. The presence of the prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and later, Malachi—shows that God still cared for Judah. As a matter of fact, it is this passionate caring that causes the Lord to be jealous for His people.

Here, as in Zechariah 1:14, the Lord’s jealousy is declared. The dispiriting situation of Israel as a renewed political state caused the people to doubt that God would uphold His covenant with them, choosing to favor the

nations instead. The Lord being a jealous God is a well-known fact among the remnant. Jehovah was always known to be a jealous God whose possessiveness and extreme intolerance to idols often expressed themselves in anger. The first of the Ten Commandments essentially states, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me ... for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:3, 5). Later, we learn that one of the Lord’s names is “Jealous” (34:14). Over and over again, we read of the Lord being a jealous God who threatens to punish Israel if provoked to anger (Deuteronomy 6:15; Joshua 24:19; Ezekiel 39:25; Nahum 1:2). The Lord’s jealousy is a result of the covenant relationship that exists between God and Israel. The Lord cares so passionately for Zion that exclusive worship is expected, and when Israel went after other gods, punishment followed. Thus, in the past, God’s jealousy had brought many great hardships upon Israel whenever she broke her covenant.

This time though, God’s wrath is directed not to God’s people but to the surrounding nations who took advantage of Judah when God punished her. This jealousy promises comfort to Jerusalem since it leads to the punishment of the nations oppressing her. Just like a jealous husband would protect his wife, God’s protective love over Judah now causes God’s wrath to go after the nations that oppressed her. The Lord promises to act on Zion’s behalf and to protect her from the surrounding nations that threaten her welfare. This burning love results in an exclusive relationship between the Lord and Judah and would ultimately result in a glorious future.

**3 Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain.**

Here, Zechariah recalls the theme of the Lord’s return to Jerusalem as had already been prophesied (1:16; 2:10). Earlier on, Ezekiel revealed that the Lord left both the Temple and Jerusalem, allowing the city to be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezekiel 10:18–19; 11:22–23). Now, the Lord is promising to return to Jerusalem just as Ezekiel (43:1–5) and Haggai (1:8) had said. The sin that is spoken of by the prophets, even by Zechariah himself (Zechariah 7), has been reversed. The Lord now promises not just to return to Zion, but also to dwell among God’s people in Jerusalem. This promise of the Lord’s return to an abandoned city offers the strongest imaginable encouragement that the Lord is still with Judah and that, because of this, her future is secure.

With the Lord living in Jerusalem, the city will be renamed the city of truth. Thus, with the change of name comes the transformation of character. Jerusalem will no longer be only the city of peace; it will also be the truthful city—or a city of faithfulness, since “truth” (Heb. *’emet*, **EH-met**) can also be translated “faithfulness.” Elsewhere, the city is a prostitute (Isaiah 1:21; Hosea 1–3), but this is not the case anymore. Her reputation is restored. The mountain of the Lord will again be known as the holy mountain of the Lord in the new city characterized by faithfulness. The Lord and the people will be faithful to the covenant between them. The Lord’s faithfulness would be an assurance to the people that God will execute judgment to Israel’s enemies on her behalf (Psalm 146:6). It would give them confidence in God’s protection from all external threats. In return, Judah’s faithfulness means that the people will be obedient to God like never before. Consequently, they should no longer fear that the Lord will abandon them.

**4 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in**

**the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. 5 And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.**

The Lord continues here to make promises to Zion. There is a shift in the promises made from the spiritual type in the preceding verses—like the faithfulness that will cover the city—to some real-life implications of the Lord’s presence in the city. Life will return to an unbelievable normalcy; there will be large, growing families in the city, for blessings always mean fertility. Old men and women will sit in the streets peacefully while young boys and girls play in the same streets. There will be no need to be concerned about their health or safety. Peace will reign, and people will live to an old age once again. The mention of the extreme ends of a human lifespan suggests that the entire population will enjoy an atmosphere of renewal and blessings. When the young and the old thrive, it shows the entire population is doing well. Rather than measuring the city’s health by business or commerce, its wealth will be in two often-overlooked groups: the old and the young. May we measure the significance of our cities by their effect on how the young and the old live!

**6 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts.**

It seems here that Zechariah’s audience found it difficult to believe the oracles given in the chapter so far. To them, it was “marvellous” (Heb. *pala’*, paw-LAW), a word referring to things that are remarkable or difficult, and by extension, a miracle of God. In all fairness, the promises seem impossible. It should make sense then that the people’s response to Zechariah’s message is that of wonder and

doubt. Could far-fetched prophecies like these actually come to pass? Everything around them says otherwise. Their circumstances are discouraging—it is almost impossible to have hope. But the Lord answers their questions before they verbalize them. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Should an action be too difficult for the Lord to accomplish merely because it exceeds human reach? Zechariah had prophesied earlier that the reestablishment of the people and the Temple in Jerusalem would happen “not by power, nor by might, but by the spirit of the Lord” (Zechariah 4:6).

God Almighty, the Lord of hosts, can do what the remnant of His people thinks is impossible. There is nothing too hard for the Lord (Genesis 18:14, Jeremiah 32:27). Doubting the Lord simply shows that these people did not know the Lord for who He truly is. Doubt often weakens our faith and causes us to look to other “false gods” for support.

**7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; 8 And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.**

Again, the Lord of hosts is speaking through Zechariah, making a four-fold promise to God’s people that (1) the Lord will save His people from the east and the west, (2) the Lord will bring His people back to Jerusalem where they will dwell, and that (3) the Lord will be their God and they will be the Lord’s people and (4) all this will happen in truth and righteousness. Indeed, this is more than a promise; it is a declaration, hence the word “Behold” (Heb. *hennei*, heh-NYE), which could also be translated “Look at me.” It is likely the phrase “east and west” means the land of the sun’s rising and setting—the entire known world. Thus, the promise is

not just to those who remain in Babylonia; it is to all scattered sons and daughters of Abraham around the world. The Lord will deliver these people, scattered in many places around the world, and bring them back to Jerusalem.

Once back in Jerusalem, they will live in truth (*'emet*) and righteousness (Heb. *tsedeqah*, **tseh-daw-KAW**; justice, salvation, truthfulness). Both the Lord and the people will be recognized and celebrate their covenant relationship. This fulfills the Lord's promise going all the way back to Abraham, "I will be their God" (Genesis 17:8). The same promise is also found throughout the Old Testament Scriptures (Exodus 6:7; Jeremiah 24:7; Ezekiel 11:20). Once again, the Lord declares that He will be their God and they will be His people. No other statement could evoke stronger memories of the covenant than this one. In saying, "I will be their God," the people are reminded of God's faithfulness—of how God kept them through the generations. They would also be encouraged to trust God for their future. If God is with them, nothing can destroy them.

**11 But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, says the Lord of hosts. 12 For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. 13 Just as you have been a cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you and you shall be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.**

The Lord continues to make promises to the remnants; things would change for Israel now that the Temple is being rebuilt and worship is being restored. Their fortunes are about to change because the Lord will deal differently with them from the former days. These "former days" are

likely the days of the exile, which Zechariah will soon reference more clearly (v. 14).

Now that they have returned, the Lord's attitude toward Israel is changing, and with it, the Lord's actions among the people. The Lord is reversing the economic depression that has made life difficult for the remnant. Again, in this promise, the Lord moves beyond the rebuke we find in the previous chapters. The people will do their farming in peace on fertile soil and with great weather conditions. Economic growth will return and with it, prosperity and normalcy. In its scattered state, Israel was like a curse, a byword, and a laughing stock among the nations, but the Lord reversed their condition. The Lord would rescue His people and change the attitudes of the nations toward them. Instead of being a curse, both Israel and Judah (as a people reunited) would become a blessing after the Lord had delivered them. Here, Zechariah once again evokes the covenant, echoing the promises that God gave to Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3), that he would be blessed to become a blessing among the nations. Furthermore, Zechariah realizes that the fulfillment of the promises may take both time and work and, therefore, he urges his audience to let their hands be strong.

**14 For thus says the LORD of hosts: Just as I purposed to bring disaster upon you, when your ancestors provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the LORD of hosts, 15 so again I have purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; do not be afraid. 16 These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: 17 And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD.**

Here, the Lord is reconfirming the desire and the purpose to bless Israel. It is a strong commitment to do them good, and the Lord cannot relent from it. Before then, when the Lord purposed to bring disaster upon the people, it surely came to pass. There was no turning back. Here, it is with the same resolution that the Lord wants to bless His people. In response, the Lord wants the people to not be afraid. In other words, the Lord calls the people to put their trust in God's faithfulness. He had made a promise, and it would be fulfilled.

Still, the Lord places some ethical requirements upon the people. The people should, as a society, be truthful and just to one another, and seek to live in peace with one another. The Lord adds that the people should not devise evil against each other, nor should they love false oath, for the Lord hates these things. Indeed, the people should hate them as well, since they were covenanted to the Lord. In so doing, there seems an expectation of health and peaceful relationships among the people. This leads to further normalcy among the remnant.

### Say It Correctly

Zechariah. ze-ka-REYE-uh.

Nebuchadnezzar. NEH-buh-kad-NEZZ-ar.

#### Sources:

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## Daily Bible Readings

### MONDAY

God's Worldwide Covenant with Abraham  
(Genesis 12:1–8)

### TUESDAY

A New Covenant of the Heart  
(Jeremiah 31:31–34)

### WEDNESDAY

Divided Peoples to Become One  
(Ezekiel 37:15–23)

### THURSDAY

Just Living in Church and World  
(Romans 12:9–21)

### FRIDAY

Cultivate Peaceful and Just Relations  
(1 Thessalonians 5:12–22)

### SATURDAY

Joyful Feasts Draw Newcomers  
(Zechariah 8:18–23)

### SUNDAY

Enjoy Fruits of Peace and Justice  
(Zechariah 8:1–8, 11–17)

## Notes