

Responsibility

OUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE TO REIGN

Focal Verses • ZECHARIAH 8:1-8, 11-17

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

Robbie and Chanel walked slowly through the immense destruction of their house. They searched and hoped to find photos of their children and Robbie’s wedding ring.

When the tornado siren sounded, Robbie had just removed his ring to work on their car. At the sound of the siren, his only thought was to run to the house to protect his wife and children. Chanel and the kids met him as he ran up the porch steps. They went to the special room Robbie had just completed underneath the staircase. He never thought they would have to use the reinforced safe room, or at least not this soon. After a few minutes that felt like forever, the winds ceased. Robbie slowly opened the door and walked cautiously up the steps. The darkness he saw in the sky while running up the porch was replaced with bright sunshine. As his eyes adjusted to the light, all Robbie could see was utter destruction. In the midst of this chaos and calamity, how would they ever recover?

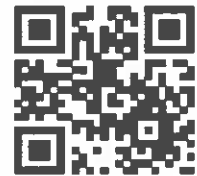
As the memories flooded back into his mind, Robbie knew it was his responsibility to turn to God with his emotions. “Chanel, let’s stop and pray,” Robbie mumbled. As they prayed in the middle of the rubble, others joined them from their neighborhood. After the prayer, Robbie and Chanel turned and found a tattered family photo and a wedding photo. They smiled and hugged each other. Thankfully, Chanel had just recently uploaded digital copies of all their family photos and important documents in case of such a catastrophe. Even if they did not find Robbie’s wedding ring, the picture reminded them how God had shown mercy and blessed them in many ways.

What is our responsibility in catastrophic loss? What would you look for if your possessions were devastated in a powerful storm or an unbelievable situation? Do you pray and trust God immediately or 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).

SCAN FOR VIDEO



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, KJV). 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 or 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:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

- Collins, John J. Joel, Obadiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. *The New Collegeville Bible Commentary Old Testament*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013.
- Klein, George L. Zechariah: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture. *The American Commentary*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008.
- Nogalski, James. *The Book of the Twelve: Micah—Malachi. The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2011.
- Smith, Ralph L. *Micah-Malachi. Word Biblical Themes*. Dallas, TX: Word Pub., 1990.

Say It Correctly

Zechariah. ze-ka-REYE-uh.
Nebuchadnezzar.
NEH-buh-kad-NEZZ-ar.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 204

Hosea 1–7
Psalm 81:13–16

DAY 205

Hosea 8–14
Psalm 82

DAY 206

Joel
Psalm 83:1–8

DAY 207

Amos 1–5
Psalm 83:9–18

DAY 208

Amos 6–9
Psalm 84:1–7

DAY 209

Obadiah, Jonah
Psalm 84:8–12

DAY 210

Micah, Nahum
Psalm 85:1–7