

May 10
Lesson 11 (NIV)

PROMISING PEACE

DEVOTIONAL READING: [Zechariah 8:18-23](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Zechariah 8](#)

ZECHARIAH 8:1-8, 11-17

¹The word of the LORD Almighty came to me.

²This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.”

³This is what the LORD says: “I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain.”

⁴This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. ⁵The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.”

⁶This is what the LORD Almighty says: “It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?” declares the LORD Almighty.

⁷This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I will save my people from the

countries of the east and the west. ⁸I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.”

.....

¹¹“But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as I did in the past,” declares the LORD Almighty.

¹²“The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people. ¹³Just as you, Judah and Israel, have been a curse among the nations, so I will save you, and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.”

¹⁴This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Just as I had determined to bring disaster on you and showed no pity when your ancestors angered me,” says the LORD Almighty, ¹⁵“so now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid.

¹⁶These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; ¹⁷do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,” declares the LORD.

KEY VERSE

I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid.
—**Zechariah 8:15**

JUSTICE AND THE PROPHETS

Unit 3: Called to God’s Work of Justice

LESSONS 10–14

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe the expressions of the peace that God promises.
2. Explain why jealousy is not a sin or character defect when applied to God.
3. Write a couplet that dedicates his or her life to embracing God’s “new normal.”

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Don’t Forget Me!
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Stability (ZECHARIAH 8:1–8)
 - A. Return to Zion (vv. 1–3)
 - B. Restoration of Jerusalem (vv. 4–8)
- II. Prosperity (ZECHARIAH 8:11–17)
 - A. Reversal of Fortunes (vv. 11–15)
Used to Be Poor

- B. Renewal of Responsibility (vv. 16, 17)

Conclusion

- A. God Dwells with Us
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

athazagoraphobia **ay**-thaz-uh-gor-uh-foe-bee-uh.
Haggai Hag-eye or Hag-ay-eye.
Zechariah Zek-uh-**rye**-uh.

Introduction

A. Don’t Forget Me!

There’s a little-known psychiatric condition called athazagoraphobia. It refers to an irrational fear of being forgotten. The associated anxiety can be debilitating. Sufferers may feel the need to check in with family constantly while traveling. Or they might excessively remind a coworker about an upcoming meeting. Changes in plans can bring on panic attacks. Sufferers’ lives are filled with anxiety and fear.

A few passages of the Bible speak of a fear of being forgotten by God (example: [Lamentations 5:20](#)); many more speak of the reality of people forgetting him (example: [Jeremiah 3:21](#)). That fact speaks directly to an important role of prophets:

pointing out the reality of God's memory and its implications for us (example: [Zechariah 10:9](#)).

B. Lesson Context

By one count, there are at least 30 men in the Bible by the name of Zechariah. The one who wrote the book of today's study was a prophet from a priestly family; his recorded ministry occurred after the Babylonian exile ([Ezra 5:1, 2; 6:14; Nehemiah 12:12, 16](#)). The datings in [Zechariah 1:1, 7; 7:1](#) compute to a time between late 520 BC and late 518 BC.

The setting in post-exilic Jerusalem is essential to understanding Zechariah's prophecies. Twenty years after returning from exile, signs of God's continued favor seemed to have disappeared ([Ezra 4:24; Haggai 1:1-11](#)). Many of those who returned undoubtedly wondered if God had forgotten them.

I. Stability ([ZECHARIAH 8:1-8](#))

A. Return to Zion (vv. 1-3)

1. The word of the LORD Almighty came to me.

The phrase *the word of the Lord ... came to* occurs dozens of times in the Old Testament as a standard introduction to a prophecy. Much rarer is inclusion of the

description *Almighty*, most occurring in this book (compare [Isaiah 39:5; Zechariah 7:4; 8:18](#)). It serves to stress God's power. God is therefore both fully present and fully capable to accomplish whatever he determines to do.

2a. This is what the LORD Almighty says:

As if to doubly stress the Lord's power, the prophet uses the phrase *the Lord Almighty* again. A more literal translation of "hosts" ([2 Chronicles 33:5](#)) or "army" ([33:11](#)) reveals the military connotations of this title. God is the warrior who fights for his people. This is a favorite phrase of Zechariah, occurring more than 50 times in his book.

2b. "I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her."

There is no doubt in the prophet's mind that the Lord has the right to be *jealous for* his people; they are his exclusively (see [Joel 2:18](#)). God's jealousy is not like that of a boy who has a fit if he sees his girlfriend flirting with someone else. The biblical concept of jealousy when applied to God indicates a profound sense of caring and commitment.

This is even more apparent where a word in the original language is translated "jealousy" in one passage but "zeal" in another. For example, the Hebrew noun translated "jealous" here and "jealousy" in [Ezekiel 8:3, 5](#) is rendered "zeal"

in [Isaiah 9:7](#); [37:32](#); [59:17](#); [63:15](#). The Greek noun translated “jealousy” in [2 Corinthians 11:2](#) is the same one translated “zeal” in [Philippians 3:6](#).

Overlap in meaning is affirmed in English by a dictionary entry that offers one meaning of *jealousy* as “zealous vigilance.” The common idea is one of ferocity. God’s jealousy implies his right to protect his people and to be angry at those who would hurt them ([Zechariah 1:14, 15](#)). God will show what it means to have him fully present in his infinite power, intent on keeping safe those who are his own.

3a. This is what the LORD says: “I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem.

Zechariah’s ministry includes encouraging the returned exiles to finish rebuilding the temple (see [Ezra 4:24–5:2](#)). When God declares his intention to *dwell in Jerusalem*, he refers specifically to the temple (see also [Zechariah 1:16](#)). *Zion* can refer to the entire city of *Jerusalem* or to only the temple area. Both of these represent the entire nation. For the returned exiles, God’s presence signifies the restoration of his favor (compare [Isaiah 52:8](#); [Zechariah 2:10](#); contrast [Ezekiel 10](#)).

3b. “Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City,

Though the Jews had suffered judgment, Zechariah reinforces God’s inten-

tions on their behalf. God’s renaming of *Jerusalem* uses a term that evokes themes of loyalty and trustworthiness (compare [Isaiah 1:26](#); [Jeremiah 33:16](#)). Post-exilic *Jerusalem* is to have a reputation of residents who keep faith with one another. That trustworthiness is to be without limit as the covenant between God and his people is fully honored.

In the New Testament, the “new *Jerusalem*” represents the final, complete fulfillment of God’s intention ([Revelation 3:12](#); [21:2, 10](#); compare [Galatians 4:26](#)). In this sense, the city reflects the mountain about which Zechariah prophesies next.

3c. “and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain.”

The renaming continues. The *mountain* to which Zechariah refers is the hill upon which the temple will be rebuilt. A comparison of the date in [Ezra 6:15](#) (which computes to March 12, 515 BC) with that in [Zechariah 7:1](#) (which computes to December 7, 518 BC) indicates that this rebuilding project is not yet complete.

To designate *the mountain of the Lord Almighty* as *the Holy Mountain* serves to set it apart from normal human activity; it is to be reserved wholly for God’s use. Such an image of God’s holy mountain shows up several times in prophecy in this regard (examples: [Isaiah 66:20](#); [Ezekiel 20:40](#); [Joel 3:17](#); contrast [Isaiah](#)

65:11).

The redesignations of both the city and the mountain project the idea of uncompromised loyalty to God—true faithfulness.

B. Restoration of Jerusalem (vv. 4–8)

4. This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age.”



Visual for Lessons 11 & 12. As you reach the end of the lesson, point to this visual and ask how the imagery applies to today's study.

A noticeable effect of God's active presence will be the longevity of God's people. Only a country enjoying peace and stability sees its citizens reach *old age*. Disease, war, and injustice attack the hardest those least able to protect themselves, and this certainly includes those of advanced age. But in the future proph-

esied, no one is neglected.

5. “The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.”

Similarly, there will be no injustice in *the city* to threaten the safety of *boys and girls*. Referring to the oldest and youngest is a way of expressing the totality of the security and stability in God's kingdom (compare [Jeremiah 30:20](#)). All God's people are to be deeply invested in extending his security and care toward one another. From the last generation to the next, all are to be safe from harm (compare [31:13](#)). This is a powerful promise for those who had experienced the violence of exile.

What Do You Think?

What's the single most important thing your church can do right now to make it a welcome haven for people of all ages?

Digging Deeper

Is it important to know the demographics of your area before taking that action? Why, or why not?

6. This is what the LORD Almighty says: “It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?” declares the LORD Almighty.

The new normal God is instituting is so *marvelous* as to seem fantastical, even impossible, to the original readers. The original word being translated “mar-

velous” is also translated “wonders,” referring to miracles, in [Psalm 78:11](#). People will undoubtedly struggle to believe what God promises to do. Perhaps doubt is here expressed in the model of Gideon’s question in [Judges 6:13](#). But for God it is no problem; *the Lord Almighty* has the power to fulfill each promise he makes.

7. This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west.

Again we see the imagery of extremes. The phrasing of *the east and the west* indicates a complete whole (compare [Psalm 107:3](#); [Isaiah 43:5](#)). For the returned exiles, this likely recalls their fellow Israelites’ being taken into exile in Assyria, as well as other migrations that seem permanent (compare [11:11](#)).

The word translated *save* is frequently used in contexts of liberation from foreign oppressors (examples: [Exodus 14:30](#); [Judges 6:14](#)). This association causes problems in the first century AD for those who think of this connection rather than that of being saved from the oppression of sin (compare and contrast [Luke 1:71](#); [Acts 1:6](#); [Colossians 1:13](#)).

8. “I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.”

The powerful themes presented thus

far are repeated. To exist fully as God’s *people* suggests their taking his characteristics of being *faithful* and *righteous* as their own. God’s loyalty to his people is thus to come full circle in their loyalty to him. That has been God’s intent since the first sin (compare [John 12:32](#)). In the New Testament, God’s intent to include Gentiles is sharply clear. Even so, that inclusion is nothing new, as underlined by quotations from the Old Testament in the New (see [Acts 13:47](#); [Romans 15:12](#); etc.). Zechariah’s prophecy finds its ultimate fulfillment in the church.

II. Prosperity ([ZECHARIAH 8:11-17](#))

A. Reversal of Fortunes (vv. 11-15)

11. “But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as I did in the past,” declares the LORD Almighty.

Here God moves the new normal a step further. This time of restoration will not follow any pattern expected by *the remnant*. God has a change in mind that vastly exceeds what their recent experience may predict. Thus far, they have faced the uphill battles of reclaiming their land, rebuilding their heritage, and maintaining priorities while doing so (see [Ezra 4](#); [Haggai 1:2-4](#)). The result has been poor harvests and inadequate clothing ([1:5-11](#)).

12. “The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people.

This promise reads like a reversal of the curse God put on all the earth after Adam and Eve’s sinning ([Genesis 3:17-19](#)). Similar prophecies draw even clearer parallels (see [Ezekiel 34:25-29](#); [Haggai 2:15-19](#)). Lists of blessings elsewhere reflect similar promises (example: [Leviticus 26:3-10](#)).

The promise of good harvests goes hand in hand with the promise of stability in the land. That in turn implies no war, no raids, and no political unrest to destroy the fruitfulness of the land.

What Do You Think?

What can Christian teachers do to head off misunderstandings of the “remnant” concept?

Digging Deeper

What forms might such misunderstandings take? Why do you say that?

USED TO BE POOR

When I was a kid, my family was poor. But we didn’t know it because all our friends were also poor. I was born in the midst of the Great Depression. My par-

ents provided for us what they could and taught us to be grateful to God.

When the post-World War II recovery came, being not quite as poor as we used to be made us think we were rich. How much richer could a family be than to have a new Chevrolet in the driveway, a 10-inch (black and white) television set in the living room, and two pairs of shoes for every child in the family?

Zechariah’s people knew what it was to be poor. They had been political exiles and had returned to a land that had been plundered by the enemy. So when the prophet told them of peaceful prosperity that was coming, they would appreciate it as God’s gift when it became reality.

What “poor” experiences help you anticipate the spiritual riches God is yet to give you?

—C. R. B.

13. “Just as you, Judah and Israel, have been a curse among the nations, so I will save you, and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.”

Bringing the themes of blessing and curse full circle, God reminds his people of his original promise to bless the nations through Abraham ([Genesis 12:2, 3](#)). They had been a *curse* in that while claiming to belong to God, they were disloyal and followed every kind of wrong behavior.

No one could have looked at pre-exilic Judah and understood either who God is or what belonging to him really means. Instead of drawing the nations toward God, their behavior ridiculed him. But now God's people will prove his love and his power in this new normal of living in God's presence. Just as Abraham was a blessing to the world by demonstrating a life lived in loyalty to God, so will they be. Despite their history of disobedience, God promises restoration without fear of reprisal.

Hands is frequently a symbolic reference of strength and ability in the Old Testament (see lesson 10). To strengthen one's hands is to renew one's power and motivation to act. This results in a person being encouraged and empowered to act confidently in the service of God.

14. This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Just as I had determined to bring disaster on you and showed no pity when your ancestors angered me," says the LORD Almighty,

God reiterates the old pattern of relationship that characterized Israel and Judah before their exiles (compare [Zechariah 8:11, 13](#), above). The phrase *showed no pity* emphasizes that God did not give them "comfort," as the same Hebrew word is translated in [Isaiah 52:9; 66:13](#); etc.

15. "so now I have determined to do

good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid.

Passages such as [Jeremiah 4:27, 28](#) reveal God's former resolute intention to punish the people of the covenant. In something of a parallel, the verse before us now reveals God's resolute intent to do the polar opposite. On *do not be afraid*, compare the discussion on fear in lesson 10.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to respond to those who resist the gospel on the basis that God is inconsistent in bestowing blessings?

Digging Deeper

Which contexts of response will call for discussion of Scriptures (such as [Matthew 20:1-16](#)) and which contexts will not (example: [Acts 17:16-33](#))? Explain.

B. Renewal of Responsibility (vv. 16, 17)

16, 17. "These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this," declares the LORD.

God's people must reflect his character in their relationships. This is why the themes of *judgment* and *truth* turn up

again. These two concepts go hand in hand and should define the lives of God's people.

The word *courts* refers to a city's entrance where legal issues were settled (example: [Ruth 4:1, 2, 11](#)). To practice justice there is to set the proper example for everyone watching to do so as well. There will be no bribes, no partiality shown to anyone (see [Exodus 23:8](#); [Isaiah 33:15, 16](#); etc.). For God to state what he hates establishes boundaries of human behavior. This is reminiscent of other blessing/curse and love/hate declarations (examples: [Deuteronomy 12:31](#); [16:22](#); [Proverbs 6:16–19](#)).

Ancient covenants established between kings and citizens frequently listed the positive attributes and actions of the ruler before listing the expected reciprocal responsibilities of the citizens. Zechariah's prophecy is essentially a covenant in miniature: it institutes a new normal of peace in light of God's presence with his people.

What Do You Think?

Which kind of change should you work on most: learning to love what the Lord loves, or learning to hate what the Lord hates? Why?

Digging Deeper

With two weeks having passed since posing this same question in lesson [9](#), is your response now the

same, or different? Why?

Conclusion

A. God Dwells with Us

When a relationship needs to go from bad to good, someone has to make the first move. The text for today tells of a time when God did just that. The bad relationship between God and his covenant people was wholly the fault of the people. Logically, therefore, they should have made the first move. But God in his compassion took the initiative, promising great things to his people. And so it still is: God promises great things for us when we actually deserve quite the opposite. He is determined to redeem all who are willing to acknowledge him as sovereign Lord. Do you?

B. Prayer

Father, may our allegiance be to you alone! Strengthen us to reflect that value and your character daily. We pray for this in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Only God offers true restoration and peace.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

Into the Lesson

Give each of four learners a slip of paper on which you have written the following, one per slip:

I feel most at peace when ...
My greatest hope for peace is ...
Peace seems most out of reach when ...
The best way to get peace is ...

Begin class by calling on the four students to read their statements aloud; then ask class members how they would complete it.

Alternative. Inform the class that you saw a bumper sticker that you can't understand. You need their help in deciphering it. Say "Here's what it said" as you write *Envision Whirled Peas* on the board. Learners should quickly see that this is a sarcastic recasting of *Envision World Peace*.

After either activity, lead into Bible study by saying, "If you're interested in hearing what God has to say about the concept of peace, today's study is for you!"

Into the Word

Using the Lesson Context, deliver a quick summary of the who, where, and when regarding the prophet Zechariah. Follow that by having two learners take turns reading the lesson text aloud: one learner can do the even-numbered verses, the other can do the odd-numbered ones.

Then distribute identical handouts (you prepare) on which are printed the list of symbols and statements below. *Be sure to arrange the statements in a different order from what's here, but keep each symbol with its original statement.*¹

@ God is jealous for what is (or should be) already His.

§ God's people won't worry about the scorn of nations.

• God will once again be present in Jerusalem.

‡ Jerusalem will be a place of peace for all generations.

& God's desire to restore shouldn't be a surprise.

◇ God will protect Jerusalem from potential enemies.

Δ Agricultural efforts will flourish once

¹ Note: The listing here is in the order the answers occur in the text, for the teacher's convenience in working through the answers later. The statements have symbols rather than numerals so learners won't have a sequence crutch to lean on.

again.

% God will not continue to express anger as before.

√ Certain traits must characterize God's people.

Tell class members that each statement is an explanation or paraphrase of a different verse or two in today's text. Ask them to work in pairs for two minutes to answer as many as possible. After two minutes, call time and have each learner switch to a different partner to keep working. (Each learner should be filling out his or her own handout to take along when the switch occurs.) Continue to call "switch" every two minutes until most or all handouts are complete.

Reconvene the class for whole-class discussion of the answers: @—verse 2; \$—verse 2; •—verse 3; †—verses 4, 5; &—verse 6; ◇—verses 7, 8; Δ—verse 12; %—verses 14, 15; √—verses 16, 17.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Turn Lies into Truth" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in triads to complete as indicated. Include in the ensuing whole-class discussion a consideration of how easy it is to allow nonbiblical folk wisdom to direct our talk and actions.

Into Life

Ask class members which of the text's principles brings them the greatest assur-

ance and which offers the greatest challenge. After everyone has had a chance to respond, distribute handouts (you prepare) on which are printed these directions: "Having considered your greatest assurance and greatest challenge from the text, write a couplet that dedicates your life to embracing God's "new normal."

Option. As learners depart, distribute copies of the puzzle "Jesus Gives What I Know I Really Need" as a take-home. (This should not be an in-class exercise.)

To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on your hard drive. Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

[Activity Page \(May 10—Promising Peace\)](#)
