

OLD TESTAMENT GOSPEL DOCTRINE CLASS

Green Mountain 1st Ward, Lakewood, Colorado

26 December 2010

Page 1

Lesson 47: "Let Us Rise Up and Build" (Ezra 1–8; Nehemiah 1–2; 4; 6; 8)

Introduction



Cyrus the Great of Persia

Elder Dallin H. Oaks: *"We may ... find that a specific verse of scripture that was spoken for quite a different purpose in an entirely different age will, under the interpretive influence of the Holy Ghost, give us a very personal message adapted to our personal needs today. ... If we seek to liken the scriptures to our own circumstances, 'that it might be for our profit and learning' (1 Nephi 19:23), a loving Father in heaven can use them to bless us in highly individual ways"* (Studying the Scriptures [devotional given in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, 24 Nov. 1985])

Have you ever been reading the scriptures and felt that a particular passage spoke directly to you? Consider how the scriptures helped provide direction specifically for your life.

The events discussed in this lesson were set in motion by a man (Cyrus the Great of Persia) who found that a passage of scripture written 150 years before his birth spoke to him personally—in fact, it mentioned him by name.

King Cyrus allows the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. (Ezra 1–6)

Background: In 721 B.C., when the kingdom of Israel (the Northern Kingdom, or ten tribes) was taken captive by Assyria, the Assyrian empire was the greatest in the world. By 612 B.C., however, the Assyrian empire had been destroyed by the Babylonians. Under King

Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon ruled most of the lands that had been conquered by the Assyrians. The Babylonian conquest of the kingdom of Judah (the Southern Kingdom) extended from about 605 B.C., when they took many Jews captive, to 587 B.C., when they destroyed

Jerusalem. After Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C., Babylon declined rapidly in power. In 539 B.C., Babylon fell to the Medes and the Persians, united under the leadership of Cyrus. Unlike Nebuchadnezzar, who treated those he conquered with cruelty, Cyrus was a

Lesson Highlights

- King Cyrus allows the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.
- Ezra leads another group of Jews back to Jerusalem.
- Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem and leads the people in rebuilding the walls to protect the city.
- The people rejoice as Ezra reads the scriptures to them.

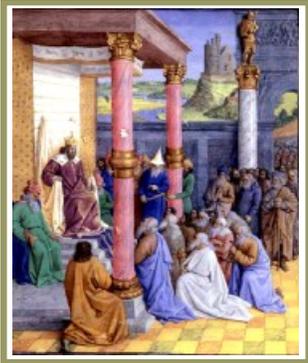
A study of this lesson will encourage us to help build Zion and to show Christlike love to those who oppose the work of the Lord.

Next Week

#48: "The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord", Zechariah 10–14; Malachi

That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.

—Isaiah 44:28



Cyrus the Great liberated the Hebrews from the Babylonian captivity so they could resettle and rebuild Jerusalem

benevolent ruler. By treating conquered peoples kindly and respecting their religions, Cyrus won the loyalty of those he ruled.

Shortly after conquering Babylon, Cyrus decreed that the temple in Jerusalem should be rebuilt. He invited the Jews in his empire to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, and he returned the vessels of gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar's troops had stolen from the temple. (See 2 Chronicles 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–3, 7. The prophecy of Jeremiah that is referred to in these verses is that the Jews would return to Jerusalem after 70 years of Babylonian captivity; see Jeremiah 25:11–12; 29:10.)

Ezra 1:1-2 - Cyrus decreed that the Lord had charged him to build a temple in Jerusalem again.

The words of Cyrus that are recorded in Ezra 1:2 refer to a prophecy in Isaiah 44:28 that mentioned Cyrus by name (see also Isaiah 45:1–5; although the story of Cyrus comes before the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament, Isaiah lived

about 150 years before Cyrus was born). The ancient Jewish historian Flavius Josephus reported that Cyrus read his name in Isaiah's prophecies, was touched by the Spirit of the Lord, and desired to fulfill what was written (The Works of Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, trans. William Whiston [n.d.], bk. 11, chap. 1, pars. 1–2).

Consider how you would feel if you were reading the scriptures and read a prophecy that gave your name and described specific things you would do.

When Zerubbabel and Jeshua led the first group of Jews back to Jerusalem, they found the Samaritans there. The Samaritans were descendants of Israelites who had escaped at the time of captivity and had intermarried with Assyrian and Babylonian colonists whom the kings had sent to occupy the land.

Ezra 4:1-2 - The Samaritans asked to be included in the temple building project.

Ezra 4:3 - The Jews refused to let the Samaritans help rebuild the temple because

they felt the Samaritans were not true Israelites since they had intermarried with those outside the covenant.

Ezra 4:4-7, 11-24 - When the Jews refused to let them help, the Samaritans tried to stop the rebuilding of the temple by complaining to the kings who succeeded Cyrus. Work on the temple eventually ceased.

Ezra 5:1-2; Haggai 1 - The Jews were prompted to resume their work several years later when the prophets Haggai and Zechariah provided inspired direction.

Haggai 1:3-4, 7-8 - The Lord, through Haggai, told the Jews in Jerusalem that it was time to rebuild the temple. A disbelieving attitude among the Jews was hindering the rebuilding of the temple (see Haggai 1:2.)

The Samaritans again tried to stop the rebuilding of the temple when construction resumed. But the Jews explained the decree of King Cyrus, and King Darius allowed the work to continue.

Ezra 6:15-22 - When the temple was finished, the Jews celebrated with a joyful feast.

Ezra leads another group of Jews back to Jerusalem. (Ezra 7–8)

Just as the Lord had earlier moved the heart of King Cyrus to free the Jews, He moved the heart of King Artaxerxes to let Ezra's group of Jews return to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:27-28; see also verses 11-26).

Softening the hearts of government leaders toward the Church also occurs in the lat-

ter days (See, for example, Thomas S. Monson, Ensign, May 1989, 50-53.)

To encourage government leaders' hearts to be softened toward the Church, we can obey the laws of the land, do good, prepare to teach the gospel to all the world, and pray for the Lord to soften the hearts of the

leaders. (See D&C 58:21, D&C 58:27; D&C 98:4-6.)

Ezra 8:21-23, 31 - Ezra proclaimed a fast to ensure that the group of Jews he was taking to Jerusalem was protected.

Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem and leads the people in rebuilding the walls to protect the city. (Nehemiah 1–2; 4; 6)

Nehemiah was the cupbearer for King Artaxerxes of Persia. This was a position of great trust and responsibility, requiring Nehemiah to ensure that the king's food and drink were safe. Even though Ne-

hemiah was in a position of importance in Persia, he cared about his people in Jerusalem and sought to help them when he heard of their difficulties.

Nehemiah 1:4-11; 2:1-5 - When Nehemiah heard of the difficulties of his people in Jerusalem, he mourned and fasted for them and then asked the king for permission to go to Jerusalem.



Rebuilding the City Walls

Nehemiah 2:6-8 - King Artaxerxes responded to Nehemiah's request by granting Nehemiah permission to go, providing guards and an escort for safety, and authorizing the use of timber from the forest to rebuild the city walls.

Nehemiah 2:17-18 - Nehemiah encouraged the people to rebuild the walls around the city by testifying of the truth and sharing his spiritual experiences.

Sanballat was the governor of Samaria, and he and his people were enemies of the Jews who had returned with Zerubbabel. Sanballat opposed the plans to rebuild the city walls. The Jews re-

sponded to the efforts to stop the construction of the walls by preparing for battle to protect themselves (See Nehemiah 4:9, 13-15.) Sanballat asked Nehemiah to stop working and meet with him to try to distract him from the work (See Nehemiah 6:1-4.)

Some people try to distract Church members from the Lord's work today. Because that happens, **Elder Marvin J. Ashton** counseled:

"Certain people and organizations are trying to provoke us into contention with slander, innuendos, and improper classifications. How unwise we are in today's society to allow ourselves to become irritated,

dismayed, or offended because others seem to enjoy the role of misstating our position or involvement. Our principles or standards will not be less than they are because of the statements of the contentious. Ours is to explain our position through reason, friendly persuasion, and accurate facts. Ours is to stand firm and unyielding on the moral issues of the day and the eternal principles of the gospel, but to contend with no man or organization. ... Ours is to be heard and teach. Ours is not only to avoid contention, but to see that such things are done away" (Ensign, May 1978, 8).

The people rejoice as Ezra reads the scriptures to them.

After the people had finished rebuilding the city walls, they requested that Ezra read the scriptures to them. Most of the Jews had been in captivity so long that they had nev-

er heard or read the scriptures. Ezra read to the people for days. (See Nehemiah 8:3, 17-18.) The people responded by listening attentively, bowing their

heads, weeping, and being joyful. (See Nehemiah 8:3, 6, 9, 12.)

Nehemiah 8:8 - Ezra read distinctly to help his people understand the scriptures.

Conclusion

"Nehemiah's energy, ability, unselfish patriotism, and personal integrity brought a new, exuberant Judah into existence once again. The restoration of Jerusalem, which had lain in ruins for a century and a half, was begun. Ezra, a righteous, dedicated priest, joined Nehemiah in this work, and together they succeeded in restoring a Jewish community in Jerusalem once again" (Old Testament Student Manual: 1 Kings-Malachi [1982], 314).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie

suggested a pattern for scripture study:

1. Study the scriptures daily. Drink directly from holy writ. Learn the word as it is found in the scriptures.
2. Mark a new set of the standard works. Learn to use the footnotes and teaching aids in our new editions of the scriptures. Pay particular attention to the inspired changes made by the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Bible. Be sure any quotations you make include the new textual changes.
3. Apply what you learn to your life and to your administrative assignments in the Church. Act and live as the scriptures decree.
4. Use the scriptures in all your sermons and teaching. Rely on the scriptures. Quote the scriptures. Believe the scriptures. Choose your illustrations from them.
5. Ponder the revealed word in your hearts. Pray about its deep and hidden meanings. Let the things of eternity be your constant meditation.
6. Expound the scriptures. Explain their meanings. Let others know what you know. Raise your voice in testimony.
7. Get others to go and do likewise with reference to all of these things. (Sermons and Writings of Bruce R. McConkie, p240)

Gospel Doctrine Notebook

Record your thoughts on the teachings discussed in this lesson.

- How would you feel if you were reading the scriptures and read a prophecy that gave your name and described specific things you would do?
- What attitudes hinder you from regular worship and service in the temple?
- How have you, your family, or others you know been blessed by fasting?
- How have the scriptures caused you to rejoice?