

July 18–24: Ezra 1; 3–7; Nehemiah 2; 4–6; 8, “I Am Doing a Great Work”

Rebuilding the Temple

Cyrus, king of Persia, is inspired to allow Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple

Ezra 1:1-2

1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,

2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Why do you think that Cyrus encourages having the temple rebuilt in Jerusalem?

(the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia
he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem)

Henry B. Eyring

“God does not rule in nations, but He is mindful of them. He can and does place people in positions of influence who want what is best for the people and who trust in the Lord.” (CR, Oct. 2010)

He probably knew that Isaiah prophesied that he would do this work and that he was named in the prophecy

George Albert Smith

“It was a strange thing that in the days of Isaiah the Lord revealed to him that the greatest of all the nations in the earth should be humbled, and He gave the name of the man, Cyrus, whom the Lord referred to as His anointed, and told Isaiah that Cyrus would overthrow Babylon and rebuild Jerusalem. The prophet had said that Jerusalem would be in bondage seventy years. It was just seventy years when Cyrus gathered together and took back to Jerusalem the Jews who had been taken captive to Babylon.” (CR, Oct. 1943)

Isaiah 44:28

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.

We have many examples in our dispensation of world leaders who’s hearts have been softened and allowed missionary work and temples in their country

[Example: Thomas S. Monson, "Thanks be to God", CR, April 1989]

Ezra 1:3-7

3 Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

5 ¶ Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.

6 And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

7 ¶ Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods

In what ways did Cyrus encourage Judah to rebuild their temple?

(his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem,
whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his
place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods
Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD)

Ezra 3:10-13

10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

13 So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

It appears that there was a ceremony after the foundation of the temple had been laid

(after the ordinance of David king of Israel
set the priests in their apparel with trumpets

the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD
And all the people shouted with a great shout)

This reminds us that building temples is always a joyous event for true believers

David E. Sorensen

“The Church has now entered the most committed era of temple building in its history....

“This is an extraordinary blessing for us as members of the Church. The Old Testament describes some of the joy that comes from people building these holy places: ‘And they sang together ... in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; ... And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.’

“Watching these new temples being built, I believe that we too will have occasion to praise the Lord and weep for joy.” (CR, Oct. 1998)

The Jews faced great opposition from the people who then occupied the area around Jerusalem, particularly the Samaritans. But eventually they finished and were able to dedicate their second temple

Ezra 6:15-22

15 And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

16 ¶ And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy,

17 And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

18 And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses.

19 And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.

20 For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.

21 And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat,

22 And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

How did the Jews know the process for dedicating the temple and performing the temple ordinances?

(as it is written in the book of Moses)

Note again how this was possible because softened the heart of the Assyrian kings

(turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them)

Ezra 7:6-10,25

6 This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.

7 And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king.

8 And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.

9 For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him.

10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

25 And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not.

What did Ezra do that made it possible to for him do the work of the Lord and teach the statutes and judgments to the Israelites?

(Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD)

Spencer J. Condie

“Leaders can make a difference! Faith in the Lord and high expectations can bring about a mighty change of heart among an entire people.

“One of the great teachers and prophet-leaders in Israel was Ezra, who “had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.” As Saints of the latter days, we are grateful for a modern-day Ezra, even our beloved prophet... who, like Ezra of old, has prepared himself to receive the word of the Lord and is prepared to do the Lord’s will. I bear you my witness that there is a living prophet in Israel today.” (CR, April 1990)

Nehemiah Fortifies Jerusalem

Nehemiah, who was the cupbearer for the king, ask the king for permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls. He receives it and seeks support from Jewish

leaders

Neh 2:5-6,17-18

5 And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.

6 And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

17 ¶ Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.

18 Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.

Just as with the rebuilding of the temple, those who currently occupied Jerusalem, primarily the Samaritans, opposed the work

Neh 4:1-3,6-9

1 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.

2 And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?

3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.

6 So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.

7 ¶ But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth,

8 And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.

9 Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.

What did the Jews do to insure that their enemies did not disrupt their work?

(we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night)

Boyd K. Packer

“When the Israelites returned from their long captivity in Babylon, they

found their city in ruins. The protecting walls of Jerusalem lay in rubble. Their enemies moved among them with great influence and the Israelites were subject to them.

“Then came Nehemiah the prophet, known now as ‘the wall builder.’ He rallied the Israelites to their own defense. Under his direction they began to rebuild the wall.

“At first their enemies ridiculed them. Tobiah, the Ammonite, mocked them, saying, ‘Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.’

“But Nehemiah consoled his people and set to work. The enemy was everywhere. ‘Nevertheless,’ he recorded, ‘we made [a] prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them.’

“Sisters, think carefully upon that. They ‘made a prayer,’ and ‘set a watch,’ and proceeded with their work.” (CR, Oct. 1980)

But this isn’t all they had to do. Nehemiah and the Jews with him fought off their enemies while, at the same time, they rebuilt the city walls

Neh 4:14-18

14 And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.

15 And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.

16 And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah.

17 They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.

18 For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.

Dieter F. Uchtdorf

"Nehemiah of the Old Testament is a great example of staying focused and committed to an important task....

“As the walls of the city began to rise, opposition intensified. Nehemiah’s enemies threatened, conspired, and ridiculed. Their threats were very real, and they grew so intimidating that Nehemiah confessed, ‘They all made us afraid’ (Neh 6:9). In spite of the danger and the ever-present threat of

invasion, the work progressed. It was a time of stress, for every builder ‘had his sword girded by his side, and so builded.’” (CR, April 2009)

George Q. Cannon

“The Saints erected [the Nauvoo temple] in the midst of poverty, destitution, sickness, death, and, I may say, with the sword or rifle in one hand and the trowel in the other, their enemies surrounding them on every hand. They had slain Joseph and Hyrum, and attempted to destroy others of the servants of God, and they were continually burning and destroying the houses and property of the Saints, and were determined to expel them from the State. But in the midst of these tribulations the Saints continued their labors until that temple was roofed in, and until within its walls they could attend to the ordinances for the living and the dead.” (JD, 14:310)

After the breaches in the wall were fixed the enemies of the Jews tried to get them out of walled city where they would have an advantage in a battle. Nehemiah’s response is profound.

Neh 6:1-4

1 Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;)
2 That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief.
3 And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?
4 Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner.

What reason does Nehemiah give for not leaving Jerusalem to meet his enemies?

(I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?)

Boyd K. Packer

“The wall now stood. No longer could their enemies threaten nor destroy. When their enemies saw that they grew strong, they worried, and they turned to other tactics.

“And here is the lesson. It is a type, it is symbolic, it is a warning! In it is a message... for every member. Consider it very, very carefully....

“His answer to them holds counsel for every sister in Relief Society. It is a message as well to the brethren of the priesthood. ‘I sent messengers unto them,’ Nehemiah recorded, ‘saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come

down to you?’

“Sisters, you have a great work to do. Build Relief Society! Strengthen its organization! Do not be enticed to leave it and go down to the worldly plains of Ono.

“Do not allow yourselves to be organized under another banner. Do not run to and fro seeking some cause to fulfill your needs. Your cause stands under the authority of the priesthood of Almighty God; that is the consummate, the ultimate power extant upon this earth!” (CR, Oct. 1980)

Robert D. Hales

“Nehemiah wisely refused their offer with this message: ‘I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?’ We too have a great work to do, which will not be accomplished if we allow ourselves to stop and argue and be distracted. Instead we should muster Christian courage and move on. As we read in Psalms, ‘Fret not thyself because of evildoers’ (Psalm 37:1).” (CR, Oct. 2008)

Ezra Reemphasizes the Laws and Ordinances

With Jerusalem fortified and the new temple completed, Ezra again teaches those who have been held hostage the commandments and ordinances of the law of Moses.

Neh 8:1,5-6,8,18

1 And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.

5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:

6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

8 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

18 Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.