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Next Weeks Lesson: "The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord", [Zechariah 10-14](#); [Malachi](#)

Today's Lesson: "Let Us Rise Up and Build", [Ezra 1-8](#); [Nehemiah 1-2](#); [4](#); [6](#); [8](#)

Have you ever been reading the scriptures and felt that a particular passage spoke directly to you?

Elder Dallin H. Oaks said, "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]).

There was a man that found a passage of scripture written 150 years before his birth which spoke to him personally—in fact, it mentioned him by name, who was he?

1. [Ezra Chapter 1-6](#) **King Cyrus allows the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.**

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 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](#), [Ezra 1:7](#). 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](#); [Jeremiah 29:10](#).)

- A. [Ezra 1:1-2](#) - Why did Cyrus decree that a temple should be built again in Jerusalem? How did Cyrus know the Lord wanted him to do this?
- B. The words of Cyrus that are recorded in [Ezra 1:2](#) refer to a prophecy in [Isaiah 44:28](#) that mentioned Cyrus by name (Although the story of Cyrus comes before the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament, Isaiah lived about 150 years before Cyrus was born)
- C. 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?

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.

- D. [Ezra 4:1-2](#) - What did the Samaritans ask of the returning Jews?
- E. [Ezra 4:3](#) - How did the Jews respond to the Samaritans' request? (The Jews refused to let the Samaritans help rebuild the temple because they felt the Samaritans were not true Israelites.)
- F. [Ezra 4:4-7](#), [Ezra 4:11-24](#) - What did the Samaritans do when the Jews refused to let them help? (They tried to stop the rebuilding of the temple by complaining to the kings who succeeded Cyrus. Work on the temple eventually ceased.)
- G. [Ezra 5:1-2](#); [Haggai 1](#) - What prompted the Jews to resume their work several years later? (The prophets Haggai and Zechariah provided inspired direction.)
- H. [Haggai 1:3-4](#), [Haggai 1:7-8](#) - What did the Lord, through Haggai, say to the Jews in Jerusalem about the temple?
- I. [Haggai 1:2](#) - What attitude among the Jews was hindering the rebuilding of the temple? What attitudes hinder us from regular worship and service in the temple?

2. [Ezra Chapter 7-8](#) **Ezra leads another group of Jews back to Jerusalem.**

- A. [Ezra 7:27-28](#) - 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
- B. What are some examples of the Lord softening the hearts of government leaders toward the Church in the latter days?
 - a) Example - Thomas S. Monson, in Conference Report, Apr. 1989, 65-69; or [Ensign, May 1989, 50-53](#).
- C. What can we do to encourage government leaders' hearts to be softened toward the Church?
- D. [Ezra 8:21-23](#), [Ezra 8:31](#) - What did Ezra do to ensure that the group of Jews he was taking to Jerusalem was protected? How have you, your family, or others you know been blessed by fasting?

3. [Nehemiah Chapter 1-2](#); [4](#); [6](#) **Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem and leads the people in rebuilding the walls to protect the city.**

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 Nehemiah 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.

- A. [Nehemiah 1:4-11](#); [Nehemiah 2:1-5](#) - What did Nehemiah do when he heard of the difficulties of his people in Jerusalem?
- B. [Nehemiah 2:6-8](#) - How did King Artaxerxes respond to Nehemiah's request? (The king granted Nehemiah permission to go, provided him guards and an escort for safety, and authorized him to use timber from the forest to rebuild the city walls.) What can we learn from Nehemiah that can guide us when we are troubled by the suffering of others?
- C. [Nehemiah 2:17-18](#) - How did Nehemiah encourage the people to rebuild the walls around the city? Why do you think testifying of the truth and sharing spiritual experiences have such power to inspire others to do good? How have the testimonies and spiritual experiences of others inspired you?
- D. [Nehemiah 2:10](#), [Nehemiah 2:19](#); [Nehemiah 4:1-3](#), [7-8](#), [11](#) - Sanballat was the governor of Samaria, and he and his people were enemies of the Jews who had returned with Zerubbabel. How did Sanballat react to the plans to rebuild the city walls?
- E. [Nehemiah 4:9](#), [Nehemiah 4:13-15](#) - How did the Jews respond to these efforts to stop the construction of the walls?

- F. [Nehemiah 6:1-4](#) - What did Nehemiah do when Sanballat asked him to stop working and meet with him? How do some people try to distract Church members from the Lord's work today? How should we respond to such distractions?

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" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1978, 10; or [Ensign, May 1978, 8](#)).

4. [Nehemiah Chapter 8](#) **The people rejoice as Ezra reads the scriptures to them.**

- A. [Nehemiah 8:1-2](#) - After the people had finished rebuilding the city walls, what did they request of Ezra? (Note that most of the Jews had been in captivity so long that they had never heard or read the scriptures.)
- B. [Nehemiah 8:3](#), [Nehemiah 8:17-18](#) - How long did Ezra read to the people?
- C. [Nehemiah 8:3](#), [Nehemiah 8:6](#), [Nehemiah 8:9](#), [Nehemiah 8:12](#) - How did the people respond? How can we be more attentive as we read the scriptures? How can we develop the kind of excitement for the scriptures that these people had?
- D. [Nehemiah 8:8](#) - What did Ezra do to help his people understand the scriptures? What has helped you in your efforts to understand the scriptures and to help your family understand them?
- E. [Nehemiah 8:9-11](#) - What did Ezra and the other leaders say when the people began to weep as they heard the scriptures? How have the scriptures caused you to rejoice?

"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).

Just as the Jews had the responsibility to rebuild Jerusalem, Latter-day Saints have the responsibility to build Zion throughout the world. To help us do this, we need to follow the teachings in the scriptures and participate in temple work.

5. [Nehemiah Chapter 4:19](#) **"The work is great and large, and we are separated"**

- A. [Nehemiah 3](#); [Nehemiah 4:19](#) - While rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem, the Jews separated themselves so they could work simultaneously on different sections of the wall. At times they were far apart, but they were all working toward the same goal, and by working together they were able to complete the wall. The Church is divided into different units (such as families, wards, branches, stakes, districts, and quorums) throughout the world. Sometimes a unit may seem far from other units. But all the Saints are working toward the same goals, and if each individual and each unit works diligently, the entire Church will continue to grow.