

Old Testament 47
“Let Us Rise Up and Build”
(Ezra 1-8; Nehemiah 1-2; 6; 8)
By Lenet Hadley Read

(Here is the explanation of Israel’s repeated patterns of Exile and Return.)

I. One of the most repeated patterns in the Old Testament is that of “Exile” and “Return.” And because it is prophetic, it deliberately presents new details , layer upon layer.

A. An early example is that of Abraham and Isaac whose **wives**, when in foreign lands, **came under subjection to the power of that land. That power then suffered plagues, the wives’ true identity became manifest, the wives returned to their husbands and thus to their homelands, and were blessed with abundance.** (Genesis 12:14-13:2; 20:1-18; 26:6-16).

B. This was actually a preview of what would transpire later with the **whole** House of Israel. **For remember that Israel was considered as a “bride” to the Lord.**

C. Israel’s bondage in Egypt and its later Exodus out with wealth was a major development of this theme, as well as a real event.

1. Note that it was “plagues” upon their oppressors, which brought them out.

D. The prophets repeatedly and clearly warned that Israel would again return to bondage, if they were not faithful to their covenants.

E. They also prophesied that as before, they would not be forgotten by the Lord, but after being humbled, would be returned and restored to far greater blessings by Him.

II. Not only did the Lord’s prophets repeatedly teach these things, but the Lord gave an addition demonstration of this truth.

A. After the ten tribes were exiled and Judah later made captive to Babylon, Judah was allowed to return --- partially to witness that **God would bring a far greater future return.**

B. For, it was only after Christ’s rejection and crucifixion, that *complete* banishment occurred. With the identities of the ten tribes already lost among the nations of the world, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. left the Covenanted Land desolate.

C. **All of Israel was now in exile.**

III. But there were promises, as shown by these patterns and by consistent prophecy, that **a repentant Israel would be brought back to their concrete identity and to their God from out of the world. This event was repeatedly stated to be fulfilled in the latter-days.**

A. Many signs were given that this would ultimately only be possible because of Christ. Many scholars see the rebuilding of Jerusalem under Cyrus (King of Persia) as prophetic of Christ.

B. Dr. Victor Ludlow says, “[Cyrus did]... fulfill his foreordained mission to assist the Jews. He served well as a model or type of the Anointed One, the Messiah, who would follow him; just as Cyrus freed the Jews from political bondage and restored them to their homeland, Christ freed men from spiritual prison and prepared the way for them to return to Heavenly Father’s presence” (Ludlow, *Isaiah, Prophet, Seer and Poet*, p. 384).

- C. But the redemption of the House of Israel was only partially accomplished through Christ's atonement, death, and resurrection. **In fact, it was *after* Christ's saving work that Israel was totally scattered.**
- D. **Cyrus was indeed a foreshadowing of Christ, but Christ's final work would be to re-gather a religious, genetic, Israel in the Latter-days, as well.**

IV. Many religious groups in the modern age, who studied the Bible closely, recognized the prophecies of this Latter-day re-gathered Israel.

- A. Many groups believed they were this latter-day Israel. Among them were the Pilgrims who as Puritans had tried to purify the apostate Church, then were persecuted. They fled from what they considered the new Egypt/Babylon. They saw in their experience a repetition of all the experiences of ancient Israel.
- B. They felt they were led by God across a great deep --- the ocean. They felt they were led by God to a new Promised Land. They even felt they were like Joshua. He had explored the Promised Land and found grapes; they explored the new Promised Land and found corn.
- C. **And in truth, these things had occurred by the hand of God. But they were only a preliminary beginning to the Lord's real Restoration of Latter-day Israel.**

V. For there were additional and very important steps, as had been prophesied too.

- A. When ancient Israel (Judah) returned from ancient Babylon, their prime objective was to build a temple (See Ezra 1-6).
- B. Both Cyrus and the Jews knew this was God's will. **And in truth, no religious body is truly Israel if the Lord's temple is not in their midst.**
- C. **Now we understand why we Latter-day Saints from the first, even in times of great poverty, were commanded by the Lord to build a temple. For it was one of the major, prophesied manifestations that this is indeed the Lord's Latter-day Israel.**
- D. **And in truth, Joseph Smith himself was the new Cyrus.**

VI. Furthermore, as in the return from Babylon, we have been blessed with deeper understanding of the scriptures, as foreshadowed by Ezra's reading them their scriptures anew, and their receiving new understanding (See Nehemiah 8).

- A. When the Lord finally restored His Latter-day Israel, he also gave us a new scripture (The Book of Mormon) whose simplicity and power blesses us to understand in greater clarity, The Bible.
- B. In fact, this new scripture, the Book of Mormon, came into the hands of Joseph Smith **on the very same day that Nehemiah presented the scriptures to Israel --- the first day of the seventh month**, or the time of The Feast of Trumpets. (For more details, see Lenet Hadley Read, "The Golden Plates and the Feast of Trumpets, January, *Ensign* 2000, or "Joseph Smith's Receipt of the Plates and the Israelite Feast of Trumpets," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, Vol. 2, Number 2, Fall, 1993, pp. 110-120).
- C. **Likely it is no coincidence that the prophet most known for encouraging the Saints to be more diligent in studying The Book of Mormon was also named Ezra --- Ezra Taft Benson.**

VII. In the Latter-days, as in ancient times, **there would be two re-gatherings**, just as there had been two exiles.

- A. The beginning of the re-gathering of **Ephraim would be primarily a spiritual re-gathering**, though for a time it was a physical gathering too. This is the re-gathering of Israel into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; once mostly in Utah, but now gathering throughout the world.
- B. Judah has also experienced a Latter-day physical return to their homeland. The fact that one has occurred is a witness the other is also occurring.
- C. In fact, some of Judah have also joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

VIII. **The True Latter-day Israel would show by our teachings and our works that we really are “Israel.”**

A. For the very name “Israel” has highly significant meanings.

1. “Prince of God”; and “Man who prevails with God” (See Genesis 32:28; *BD* 708).

2. “Man who is God [or can become like God].” (Hugh Nibley, *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless*, p. 83).

B. **A major sign that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints truly is “Israel” is that it teaches the principles that Man can reach this potential.**

C. In fact, the major purpose of Israel’s temple is to help man **reach the potential signified by the very name, “Israel.”**

D. We should note that when Jacob was given the name of “Israel,” it was because he had struggled with God [likely spiritually more than physically], and prevailed (Gen. 32:28). And this prevailing occurred at Beth-el, a site which later came to be a holy sanctuary, where there was an altar, and was called the “House of God,” a name usually reserved for temples (Gen. 35).

E. **These were witnesses that in the Lord’s Temple, man could prevail in becoming like the Lord Himself --- of course, only because of the atoning work of Jesus the Christ.**

IX. Thus the true Latter-day Restoration of Israel can be determined by these witnesses given in the pattern of ancient Israel, and shown in particular in the writings of Ezra and Nehemiah:

A. They would begin immediately to build a temple.

B. They would be blessed with a clearer and truer understanding of the meaning of the scriptures.

C. They would be blessed to understand what it truly means to be “Israel.”

D. **And they would work diligently toward achieving that goal for every believing, faithful soul.**