

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

(This lesson helps one see the overall picture of Israel’s repeated pattern of Exiles and Returns.)

I. One of the most repeated patterns in the Old Testament is that of “Exile” and “Return.” Not only is this theme repeated, but it builds, 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 later Exodus 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. But the prophets repeatedly 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 their blessings by Him.

II. Not only did the Lord’s prophets repeatedly teach these things, but the Lord actually demonstrated 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 as 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 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 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 the Latter-day Saints from the first, even in their great poverty, were commanded by the Lord to build a temple. For it was one of the major, prophesied manifestations that they were indeed the Lord's Latter-day Israel.*
- D. *And in truth, Joseph Smith himself was as a new Cyrus.*

VI. Furthermore, as in the return from Babylon, they were blessed with a new understanding of the true meaning of their scriptures (See Nehemiah 8).

- A. When the Lord finally restored His Latter-day Israel, he also gave them a new scripture (The Book of Mormon) whose simplicity and power helped them 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.

VII. The True Latter-day Israel would show by their teachings and works that they 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).
 - 3. Man who rules with God.
 - 4. 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 with the atoning help of Jesus the Christ.**

IX. Thus the true Latter-day Re-gathering of Israel can be determined by these witnesses given in the pattern of ancient Israel:

- A. They would begin immediately to build temples.
- 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." And they would work toward achieving that goal for every believing, faithful soul.