

# Lesson 47 - “Let Us Rise Up and Build”

## Ezra and Nehemiah

Purpose: To encourage us to help build Zion.

My lessons take a different path than the Gospel Doctrine lesson manual. The lesson outline looks closer at the doctrinal topics included in the lesson purpose and scripture block. The lessons are designed to challenge mature, active Latter-Day Saints who have a solid Gospel foundation and are looking for insights into the scriptures that will broaden their faith and understanding.

If you are interested in downloading the PowerPoint file, links to source material or reading posts about improving Gospel Doctrine class preparation, delivery and engagement, you can join my Facebook Group and have full access to the content posted there. The link is <https://www.facebook.com/groups/188904648521022/>

# Last Week's Lesson Challenge

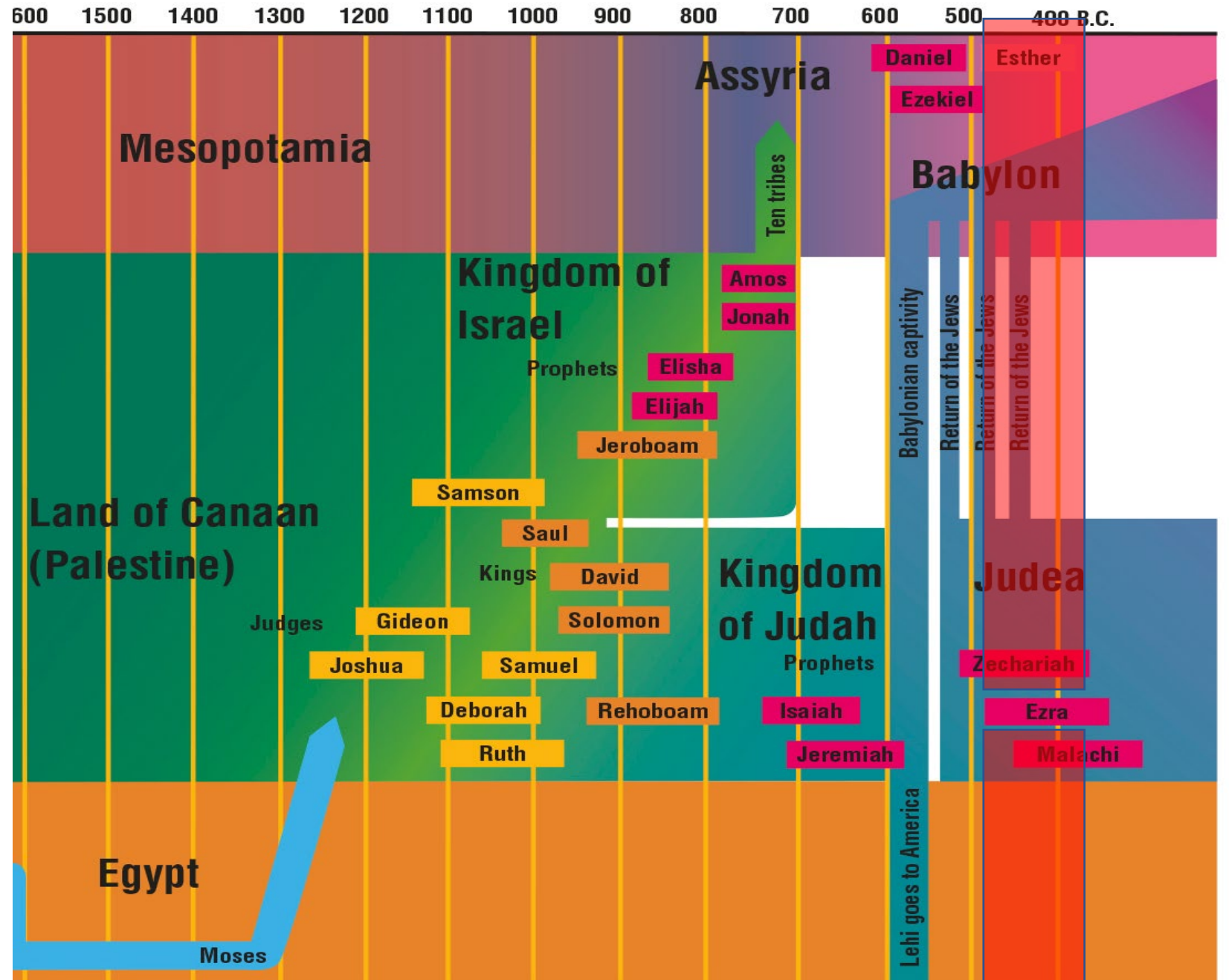
We were asked to consider what it takes to have faith in Jesus Christ the way Daniel did. Is it impossible? Is Daniel just more faithful than we are? Was he closer to Jehovah than we are?

Daniel's faith is possible because he did it. He sacrificed and made the right choices all of the time.

We were also asked to consider what you can do to begin walking on the path of faith that Daniel walked upon.

Would anyone wish to share their thoughts at this time?

# Ezra and Nehemiah



*“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land? “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. “If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.” (Psalm 137:1, 4–6.)*

While in captivity the faithful Jews wept by the rivers of Babylon. Because of sorrow, they could not bear to sing the songs of Zion, for their hearts yearned to be back in their land of promise and in their holy city.

But how could they go back? They were captive to the powerful nation of Babylon. Yet the Lord rules in the heavens and watches over His chosen people. He would provide a way for the faithful of Judah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple and the city.

The Lord had foreordained a person to make possible the return of the Jews. This person was not of the house of Israel, but the Lord nonetheless had chosen him before he was born to bless the house of Israel. His name was Cyrus, known in history as Cyrus the Great.

## Where Do the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah Fit in the Old Testament?

The books of the Bible do not fall into chronological order. Their position is determined usually by whether they are historical or prophetic books. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally part of a compilation that included 1 and 2 Chronicles. Ezra 1:1–3 and 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 are almost identical.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are actually the last two historical books of the Old Testament. Zechariah and Haggai were prophets during this same period. Malachi is the only prophet known to have served in Israel between the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and the beginning of the New Testament.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of Israel's history from the first return to Jerusalem until the end of Nehemiah's second term as governor of Judah (538 B.C. to shortly before 400 B.C.). Esther's sojourn in Persia belongs to the time between the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem and Ezra's return (beginning in Ezra 7:1).

## What Was Jeremiah's Prophecy?

In Jeremiah 25:11–12 and 29:10 the prophet Jeremiah spoke of seventy years of Babylonian captivity. Isaiah [44:28; 45](#) likely influenced his actions toward the Jews.

## Did All of the Jews Return?

Ezra 2:64–65 indicates that approximately fifty thousand people made the first trip back to Jerusalem. Ezra 1:4 tells of the responsibilities of the Jews who remained in Babylonia. By far, most of the expatriated Jews chose not to return to Jerusalem at this time, a decision that indicates how well they had been absorbed into the Babylonian way of life.

## [Jeremiah 25:11-12, 29:10](#)

11 And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

12 ¶ And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations.

10 ¶ For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.

## [Isaiah 44:28,45:1-4](#)

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.

1 Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut;

2 I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron:

3 And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.

4 For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.

## Ezra

A famous priest and scribe who brought back part of the exiles from captivity (Ezra 7–10; Neh. 8; 12). The object of his mission was “to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.” In 458 B.C. he obtained from Artaxerxes an important edict (Ezra 7:12–26) allowing him to take to Jerusalem any Jewish exiles who cared to go, along with offerings for the temple with which he was entrusted, and giving to the Jews various rights and privileges. He was also directed to appoint magistrates and judges. On arriving in Jerusalem his first reform was to cause the Jews to separate from their foreign wives, and a list is given of those who had offended in this way (Ezra 10). The later history of Ezra is found in the book of Nehemiah, which is a sequel to the book of Ezra. Along with Nehemiah he took steps to instruct the people in the Mosaic law (Neh. 8). Hitherto “the law” had been to a great extent the exclusive possession of the priests. It was now brought within the reach of every Jew. The open reading of “the book of the law” was a new departure and marked the law as the center of Jewish national life.

The book of Ezra contains also an introductory section (Ezra 1–6) describing events that happened from 60 to 80 years before the arrival of Ezra in Jerusalem, that is, the decree of Cyrus, 537 B.C., and the return of Jews under Zerubbabel; the attempt to build the temple and the hindrances due to the Samaritans; the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah and the completion of the temple, 516 B.C. There is no record in the book of any events between this date and the mission of Ezra.

# Nehemiah

Comfort of the Lord. (1) A Jew (either a Levite or of the tribe of Judah) who held the important office of “cupbearer” at the court of Artaxerxes, from whom he obtained a royal commission authorizing him to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The book of Nehemiah (which is a continuation of Ezra, the two being regarded by the Jews as forming one book) contains an account of the progress and difficulties of the work and its final completion. The book divides into four parts: (a) 1:1–7:73, Nehemiah’s first visit to Jerusalem, and the rebuilding of the walls in spite of much opposition; (b) 8:1–10:39, religious and social reforms; (c) 11:1–13:3, lists of names, and account of the dedication of the wall; (d) 13:4–31, Nehemiah’s second visit after 12 years’ absence, and his further reforms.



## Ezra 1:1-6

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.

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.

## Ezra 1:7-11

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;

8 Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

9 And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives,

10 Thirty basins of gold, silver basins of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand.

11 All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

## Nehemiah 1:4-11

4 ¶ And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

5 And said, I beseech thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments:

6 Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.

7 We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.

8 Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:

9 But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.

10 Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand.

11 O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

## Who Were the Samaritans Who Hindered the Work on the Temple?

“At the final captivity of Israel by Shalmaneser, ... the cities of Samaria were ... depopulated of their inhabitants in B.C. 721, and ... they remained in this desolated state until ‘the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon and other foreign places and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel. The new Samaritans were Assyrians by birth or subjugation.”

The Assyrian foreigners were idolaters and had no desire to serve Jehovah or worship rightfully in the temple. Later when these foreign Samaritans intermarried with some of the Israelites, both a mixed race of Samaritans and a variant form of the worship of Jehovah developed. Such were the circumstances in the New Testament times. This variant religion was heavily intermingled with pagan and other unauthorized religious practices, which the Jews saw as highly offensive. When Zerubbabel refused their help, the Samaritans were understandably angry and sought revenge by writing to the king of Persia and accusing the Jews of rebellion.

Elder James E. Talmage explained: “The claim was made that of old the people of Judah had been a trouble to other nations, and that with the restoration of their Temple they would again become seditious” (The House of the Lord). Eventually the Jews proved that they had received permission to rebuild the temple and the problem was resolved, but this incident reveals the foundations of the tremendous bitterness between the Samaritans and the Jews so evident in Christ’s time.

When Ezra approached the Persian monarch for permission to lead a colony to Judah, “the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him” (Ezra 7:6). “Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” (Ezra 7:10). Truly, Ezra was an inspired instrument in the hands of the Lord!

Ezra took with his colony millions of dollars (at today’s values) worth of gold, silver, and other precious items. Seemingly, this treasure could reach Jerusalem only if it had a large military guard. The route he had to take was infested with bands of robbers.

But Ezra could not ask the king for an army guard to protect him. Adam Clarke commented on Ezra’s dilemma: “He had represented God, the object of his worship, as supremely powerful, and as having the strongest affection for his true followers: he could not, therefore, consistently with his declarations, ask a band of soldiers from the king to protect them on the way, when they were going expressly to rebuild the temple of Jehovah, and restore his worship. He therefore found it necessary to seek the Lord by fasting and prayer, that they might have from Him those succours without which they might become a prey to their enemies; and then the religion which they professed would be considered by the heathen as false and vain. Thus we see that this good man had more anxiety for the glory of God than for his own personal safety.” (Commentary, 2:746.)

## **This Week's Lesson Challenge**

The story of Ezra and Nehemiah is an historical record of the Jews' return from Babylon to Jerusalem. Upon their return, they would set to build a new temple as close to the Temple of Solomon as they could afford.

There was opposition, but they trusted in Jehovah to help them overcome it. Ezra and Nehemiah are examples of placing trust in Jehovah to help them overcome adversities.

Consider what you can learn from the examples of Ezra and Nehemiah and their trust in the Lord.