

“LET US RISE UP AND BUILD”

Ezra 1-8; Nehemiah 1-2; 4; 6; 8

by Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: I have taken particular delight in pointing out to my students places in the scriptures that are about them. Last week as my New Testament students studied John 17, I suggested that certain verses in this great prayer were about them.

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (John 17:20-23).

I believe that Jacob 5:72 refers to those being sent to labor in the vineyard in our day.

And it came to pass that the servants did go and labor with their might; and the Lord of the vineyard labored also with them; and they did obey the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard in all things.

Here are some other prophecies of modern events and people you might want to read:

- A. 2 Nephi 3:6-15
- B. 2 Nephi 27:12
- C. Isaiah 29:11
- D. Daniel 2:44
- E. Deut. 33:7
- F. Isaiah 4:1,2
- G. Isaiah 5:27-29
- H. Micah 4:13; 5:8

I have always been delighted to find these passages that speak to me and of me, and I have looked into my life to see if I meet the descriptions suggested in such verses. But these passages are nearly all general in nature—messages to all the faithful of our day. Imagine what you would feel to find your own name in a scriptural passage written many years before your birth. That is what happened to Cyrus.

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. 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; 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: 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 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. I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me:(Isaiah 44:28-45:1-5).

Cyrus had access to the Jewish records and read this passage, written 150 years before he was born, and it certainly got his attention. Notice his reaction:

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, 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. 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. 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 (Ezra 4:1-4)

President George A. Smith said of this

Having access to the Jewish records, Cyrus learned that the God of Israel had decreed that he was to rebuild Jerusalem. He promptly issued a proclamation to the Jews to return to Jerusalem and for the nations to assist them in rebuilding the city and the temple. This was

accomplished exactly seventy years after Jerusalem was destroyed, thus fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy uttered more than one hundred years before (C.R., April 1945).

Did you notice the first requirement made of Cyrus? He was to make it possible for the covenant people to “ build the house of the LORD God of Israel” at Jerusalem. This building was to come first, and to be the center of the reconstruction of Jerusalem. We mentioned in an earlier lesson that the communities of Independence and Far West and Nauvoo and Salt Lake were all intended to be built around a place designated for the temple.

We have a prophet who has a sense of the importance of congregations who have access to temples.

I have a burning desire that a temple be located within reasonable access to Latter-day Saints throughout the world (Gordon B. Hinckley, “Of Missions, Temples, and Stewardship,” Ensign, Nov. 1995, 52–53).

President Kimball shared at least some Of that vision.

The day is coming soon when no one will need to die without a temple marriage . . . The day will come when there will hundreds of temples all over the world, when there ill not be one soul in the world, probably, who is more than a thousand miles away; and for a one-time experience in all one’s life, a thousand miles is not far to go. It wouldn’t be far to crawl if one knew what he was getting and what he was missing if he didn’t go (“Marriage is Honorable,” BYU Speeches, 1973, p. 269).

The temple build by Solomon was probably one of the most expensive buildings ever constructed. This new temple would not involve the same level of expenditures, but it would still be expensive. Cyrus knew that.

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. 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; Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth . . . And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a

thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives, Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. 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 (Ezra 1:6-11).

People of the covenant gave freely according to their resources.

And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place: They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments (Ezra 2:68, 69).

Notice the reaction of the people when they laid the foundation of the Temple.

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. 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. 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: 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 (Ezra 3:10-13).

This passion for the Temple ought to move us and teach us. What a joy we ought to feel with every new dedication. Our excitement ought to be as powerful as the dismay in “the dark and benighted dominion of Sheol” (D&C 121:4). Brigham said “we never begin to build a temple without the bells of hell beginning to ring” (JD vol. 8, 355, 356).

Those bells were ringing around Jerusalem.

Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel; Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither. . . . Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and unto the rest beyond the river, Peace, and at such a time. The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me. And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein. There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them. Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me. Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings? Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia (Ezra 4:1,2,4,8,17-24).

So the work ceased for a time but once again the Lord provided help and support for the rebuilding.

Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon . . . and therein was a record thus written [by Cyrus] . . . Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid . . . Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shetharboznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence: Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and

the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place. Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail: That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons. Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this (Ezra 6:1-12).

But political support is not enough. The people must be willing. These many temples that now dot the earth will sit empty and useless unless we do what the Lord has asked us to do. Who, according to Ezra 5:1, reminded the Jews of their duty in the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem?

We have at least a part of the teachings of Haggai on this matter.

In the second year of Darius the king . . . came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel . . . Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built. Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled [paneled] houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the

corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands (Haggai 1:1-11).

This message seems to direct the Israelites to put first things first. How will we explain new cars and new houses and new toys to the Lord if our ancestors wait in the Spirit World with their work undone? The Lord chastened the Jews because they had built themselves houses, but the House of the Lord was unfinished. These prophetic instructions also remind them (and us) that much of our effort will be unproductive if we neglect the work of the temple. Crops will be meager. Clothes will not keep us warm. It will be as though we put our money in bags with holes. The rain will not fall as it should. I suspect that as a people we sometimes suffer needlessly because our hearts are not on the House of the Lord as they should be.

After Haggai delivered this stirring message,

The LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God (Haggai 1:14).

2. NEHEMIAH GOES TO JERUSALEM AND LEADS THE PEOPLE IN REBUILDING THE WALLS TO PROTECT THE CITY

And we must all go to work. Nehemiah gives us a wonderful picture of the rebuilding of the city and the temple.

The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build . . . Nehemiah 2:20).

Read the first twelve verses of Nehemiah 3. Notice that every person is in his or her (3:12) place, building. They build where they are assigned to build. These verses describe work on the walls of Jerusalem. Can you see what would happen if one person failed to complete his or her assigned portion? When an enemy attacked, where would the attack come? In our own day, we must not neglect our duties, lest by our lack of diligence we allow the enemy entrance into our lives or our families or our congregations.

The Lord our God wants the children of men to do something. He

wanted Noah to build an ark, and Noah built it. You cannot build ark and temples, you cannot gather Israel and establish the kingdom of God, on one principle of the Gospel alone. You cannot make a watch or clock go with only one of its wheels. You cannot make the human body active by separating the head or the feet from it. The body as created is perfect, in beautiful symmetry, and it cannot be complete if we take one part of it and reject the rest; it takes the whole to make the perfect man. It is so with the kingdom of God (Elder John W. Taylor, C.R., Oct. 1903, p. 40).

Where are your places to build? Are your home and visiting teacher families safe behind the walls you have built for them? Have you given yourself to the building of the kingdom wherever you are?

In the Latter-day Saint colonies in Mexico, after the groundbreaking for the Colonia Juarez Chihuahua Mexico Temple, members helped clear boulders, dead trees, and branches from the dry, hard-packed earth. Robena Ortiz and her family were among those who helped. “My mother, who is 92 years old, brought a rake and raked the ground in the heat of the summer,” says Sister Ortiz. “I encouraged her to stop and rest in the shade, but she said, ‘No. I am doing it for *mi templo* (*my temple*)’” (“Taking Temples to the People,” Ensign, March 2000, p. 15).

The Lord, through Haggai, commanded his people to “go up to the mountain . . . and build the house . . . (Haggai 1:8). Now the actual building is done by others. We will not be required to make many trips to the mountains. The granite will be cut from the canyon walls by others. Professionals will lay the blocks and the carpet and the lawns. But when the temples are completed, what will you do?

But there are many areas of the Church that are remote, where the membership is small and not likely to grow very much in the near future. Are those who live in these places to be denied forever the blessings of the temple ordinances? While visiting such an area a few months ago, we prayerfully pondered this question. The answer, we believe, came bright and clear.

We will construct small temples in some of these areas, buildings with all of the facilities to administer all of the ordinances. They would be built to temple standards, which are much higher than meetinghouse

standards. They would accommodate baptisms for the dead, the endowment service, sealings, and all other ordinances to be had in the Lord's house for both the living and the dead (Gordon B. Hinckley, "Some Thoughts on Temples, Retention of Converts, and Missionary Service," *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 49).

But this new order of building temples does not mean we do not have our own work to do and our own places to build. How far are you from a temple? What would the Lord command you to do? Have the bells of Hell and the enemies of righteousness kept you from your duty to the dead? We live in a day when there are more temples on the earth than have existed in all other ages combined. What a blessing and a responsibility this is.

CONCLUSION: The Lord made powerful promises to the Jews regarding their temple. He said

Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts (Haggai 2:6-9).

This work in the House of the Lord is a high and holy work, one that is continuously and bitterly opposed by the enemies of righteousness. If you elect to involve yourself in it, you will be required to swim against the current and climb the steep hills. It will not often be easy to resist the opposition that will arise. Nehemiah learned this and taught a lesson.

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;) 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. 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? Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner.

The world will invite and encourage us to come down—to descend from the lofty halls and hallowed rooms of the temple to engage in activities of lesser significance. Let us say with Nehemiah. “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease whilst I leave it, and come down . . .?”

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