

July 18-25, 2022

Ezra 1; 3–7; Nehemiah 2; 4–6

“I AM DOING A GREAT WORK”

Summary: *Ezra 1. King Cyrus of Persia lets the Jews go back to Jerusalem to build the temple—Cyrus returns the vessels of the house of the Lord taken by Nebuchadnezzar.*

Ezra 3. The altar is rebuilt—Regular sacrifices are reinstated—The foundations of the temple are laid amid great rejoicing.

Ezra 4. The Samaritans offer help, then hinder the work—The building of the temple and of the walls of Jerusalem ceases.

Ezra 5. Haggai and Zechariah prophesy—Zerubbabel renews the building of the temple—The Samaritans challenge the Jews’ right to continue their building work.

Ezra 6. Darius renews the decree of Cyrus to build the temple—It is finished and dedicated, and sacrifices and feasts commence again.

Ezra 7. Ezra goes up to Jerusalem—Artaxerxes provides for beautifying the temple and sustains the Jews in their worship.

Nehemiah 2. Artaxerxes sends Nehemiah to Jerusalem—Sanballat and others oppose Nehemiah in rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 4. The Jews’ enemies seek to prevent them from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem—Nehemiah arms the laborers and keeps the work progressing.

Nehemiah 5. Many Jews are in bondage to their fellow Jews—At Nehemiah’s direction they are freed, their lands are restored, and the taking of usury is discontinued.

Nehemiah 6. Sanballat engages in intrigue against Nehemiah and the building of the wall—The Jews finish the construction of the wall.

Nehemiah 8. Ezra reads and interprets the law of Moses to the people—They keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

How important is the return to Israel and Temple building?

Background

information on Cyrus shows the respect and honor he has in Jewish history. There are some interesting parallels between his proclamation and that of the proclamation

given by the Foreign Minister of England, Sir Arthur James, Earl of Balfour. In 1917, his declaration called for the return of the Jews to their homeland. “Cyrus, king of Persia from 559 to 529 B.C.E., holds a special place in the history of Israel.” “The Jews, having been denied the right to return to their home in *Erez* (land of) Israel, anxiously and hopefully watched

the steady advance of the Persian conqueror. Cyrus seized control of Media and then, in 539 B.C.E. conquered Nebuchadnezzar's huge Babylonian empire." "Cyrus was a humane conqueror. In keeping with his general policy of benevolence toward his subject peoples, he not only granted permission to the Jews to return to their homeland, but he restored to the exiles the sacred vessels belonging to the Temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken and placed as trophies of victory in the temple of Bel. With the return of a large group of the exiles, a new chapter in the history of Israel began—the period of the Second Temple." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) Notice, how the Bible teaches that the Temple was meant to be the center of true worship and also recognize the behaviors of those who promoted as well as opposed its construction!

What is one way that can I recognize the pre-eminent Temple restoration and arrival of the Messiah?

"The small community of Jews who had remained in Israel throughout the exile period was bolstered by the influx of a large number of the exiled who were now able to return and, under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, began to rebuild the Temple, repair Jerusalem, and revive a sense of religious and national consciousness." "The *Talmud* (written interpretations of Jewish law) teaches that the ingathering of the exiled kingdoms will be part of the coming of the Messiah. The great exile to Babylonia in the sixth century B.C.E. was ended by Cyrus the Great of Persia. However, the rabbis did not consider his proclamation and the return at that time to be the Ingathering of the Exiles since it was incomplete. The day of the ingathering, the rabbis write, will be "as great as the day on which heaven and earth were created." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) The subject of the ingathering of the Jews rippled

through Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century.

How did the extreme dislike of the Jews, precipitate a prophetic gathering?

Schemes were hatched to "get the Jews out" of Europe. Maybe they should gather to Uganda! "In 1903 the Zionist movement was shaken by the introduction of the Uganda Scheme, which proposed that the Jews settle in the East African Protectorate of Uganda rather than the disputed territory of Palestine. Weizmann was among the opponents of this plan, unwilling to agree to Zionism without Zion. By a quirk of fate this adamant stand gained him an introduction to British leader Arthur James Balfour, who was later to play an important role in the establishment of the Jewish state. Balfour had been puzzled by the Zionist rejection of the Uganda plan and asked Weizmann to explain this step. Weizmann then asked Balfour whether, if he were offered Paris he would abandon London. Balfour answered, "No, London is the capital of my country." Weizmann replied, "Jerusalem was the capital of our country when London was a marsh." Subsequently, the Balfour Declaration, calling for the ingathering of the Jews, brought exhilaration to Jews and others who cherished the biblical prophecies of the gathering of the children of Israel. "Lord Balfour, who was a British statesman, first began to take an interest in the Jewish question in 1902—1903, when Theodor Herzl spoke with Joseph Chamberlain, the British colonial secretary and with Lord Lansdowne, the foreign secretary, about a homeland for the Jews. Lord Balfour was prime minister at that time." "He listened sympathetically to both Theodor Herzl and Chaim Weizmann. The latter met Balfour in 1906 and spoke to him about the need to build a Jewish homeland on the soil of what was then Palestine." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

What prompted the “Balfour Declaration?”

“Lord Balfour’s interest in Zionism grew more intense during World War I, when he became foreign secretary.” “The meetings with Weizmann eventually led to the Balfour Declaration, which he signed in 1917. This was England’s declaration of approval that “a national home for the Jewish people” be built in Palestine. In 1925 Balfour accepted an invitation to open the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem. He made the then difficult journey to Jerusalem at the age of 77, in the company of his niece and her husband, who served as Balfour’s private secretary. Another niece, Blanche Dugdale, worked closely with Chaim Weizmann.” “News of Balfour’s letter brought joy to Jewish communities throughout the world. Copies of the Declaration were showered from airplanes over Jewish townships in Germany, Austria and Poland, and on the shores of the Black Sea. 200,000 Jews rallied at Odessa, Russia, bearing banners inscribed “Land and Freedom in *Erez Israel!*” (Their enthusiasm was soon silenced when the Communists came to power in the same year.) The Declaration was compared to the Persian King Cyrus’ permission to the exiled Jewish captives in the sixth century B.C.E. to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.”
([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

How rapidly did opposition to the “Gathering of the Jews” arise?

There were several negative “white papers,” that members of the British government presented to the UK Parliament regarding Mandatory Palestine, that were issued between 1922 and 1946. “The tension which has prevailed from time to time in Palestine is mainly due to apprehensions, which are entertained both by sections of the Arab and by sections of the Jewish population. These apprehensions, so far as the Arabs

are concerned are partly based upon exaggerated interpretations of the meaning of the [Balfour] Declaration favouring the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine, made on behalf of His Majesty’s Government on 2nd November, 1917.” ([British White Paper of June 1922, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/brwh1922.asp](#)) “A British policy paper issued by the British government in May 1939, following suppression of the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939, stating the British objective of establishing an “independent Palestine State” bound to Britain and encompassing both Jews and Arabs. It also nullified the promise of the Balfour Declaration for establishment of a Jewish National Home. “. . . the Paper recommended a five-year plan for limited Jewish immigration of 15,000 a year, including a requirement of Arab consent to immigration after the plan expired. It also placed limits on the rights of Jews to buy land from Arabs. It represented British policy until the United Nations Partition Plan of 1947.”
([https://justvision.org/glossary/white-paper-1930](#)) It is notable that the British Empire begins its decline about this time.

How did prophets bring leaders back on track to rebuild the temple, or not?

“Zerubbabel, leader of a group of Jews returning from Babylonian exile in the sixth century B.C.E. to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. *Zerubbabel* (whose name means “scion of Babylon”) was a descendant of exiled King Jehoiachin of Judah. He and Joshua, son of Jehozadak the high priest, brought the first group of Jews back to the Holy Land and began the formidable task of reconstructing the Temple. Despite the harassment of neighboring peoples and the depressing barrenness and desolation of Jerusalem, they managed to set up the altar, reinstitute the sacrificial service and celebrate the Feast of Sukkot. In the second year of their return, they began

laying the foundations of the Temple, but their efforts were soon forced to a halt. Distrustful of the non-Jewish tribes, Zerubbabel refused their offer of help and, in retaliation, these neighboring groups blocked all further construction attempts.” “For years the site remained untouched until finally the prophets Haggai and Zechariah began exhorting the Jews to complete the unfinished task. Once more Zerubbabel and Joshua took up the challenge and this time the Temple was erected.” “Zerubbabel is fondly remembered by the Jews for his accomplishment. The Second Temple is often referred to as the Temple of Zerubbabel and in the *Hanukkah* hymn *Ma’oz Zur*, lauding Israel’s past redeemers, the “end of Babylon” is associated with Zerubbabel” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#)) The building of the temple, as well as the city walls, was met with resistance by some inside and outside the Israel community. The Samaritans, who were denied the right to assist in the temple construction and later worked against it, still claim to be part of Israel.

What are the rules for Israeli citizens being armed?

As with the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its walls, “For the builders, everyone had his sword girded by his side, and so builded . . .” ([Nehemia 4:18](#)), so, the rebuilding of Israel has a mentality of carrying firearms. “While many Israelis have weapons, they are not available to everyone and anyone. To receive a gun license . . . an individual must live or work in a geographic area deemed to pose a higher terror risk. Next, a doctor . . . who has been treating an individual for many years, must complete a detailed health evaluation certifying that the applicant is both physically capable and mentally stable enough to carry a weapon. An applicant also needs to complete a shooting course with a certified instructor and demonstrate sufficient mastery of handling and

shooting a weapon. Before a license is granted, a detailed security check is performed on applicants by Israeli authorities. Once granted, a license then permits an individual to own and carry . . . the specific weapon purchased by the gun owner is embedded in the license. Only the licensee may use that specific pistol. If the individual wishes to change handguns, the license must be amended. Furthermore, the license permits the gun owner to store a maximum of 50 bullets at any given time. A licensed owner may carry a weapon exposed (open carry) or concealed without limitation. The license must be renewed every two years and requires periodic shooting instruction and proof of proficiency (and) . . . must be able to present their license at any time. Private citizens are not allowed to own assault weapons. The rules of engagement are extremely strict and limited to life-threatening situations. If a terrorist is coming toward any individual with a weapon, a licensed private citizen may shoot. If the terrorist is no longer in possession of the attack weapon, a licensed private citizen or soldier could go to jail for firing a shot, even if the attacker was in the act of attempted murder just seconds earlier.” (<https://www.israelhayom.com/2019/08/07/theres-much-to-be-learned-from-israeli-gun-culture>)

Who are the Samaritans, nowadays?

“Samaritans (are) a small religious group residing in Israel whose members consider themselves to be direct descendants of the Israelite tribes.” “According to Samaritan history, they broke away from the Israelites in the 11th century B.C.E., refusing to accept a change in the location of the religious capital. To this day the Samaritans maintain that Mount Gerizim near Shechem (Nablus, north of Jerusalem) is the place chosen by God as the center of Israelite worship and not Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. They have therefore continued

to live around Shechem and to make pilgrimages to Mount Gerizim.” “The Samaritans refused to accept any of the Jewish religious writings which followed their split with the Israelites. Their religion is therefore based mainly on the Five Books of Moses. Neither the *Mishnah* (written Jewish oral traditions) nor the *Talmud* (written interpretations of Jewish law) is regarded as valid. But Samaritans adhere strictly to the laws of the Pentateuch and have maintained biblical traditions and rituals for thousands of years. Thus, while the Jews ceased to offer sacrifices after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Samaritans still celebrate the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb on Mount Gerizim each Passover, and all Samaritan families share in the ritual slaughter and feasting. The Samaritans also make pilgrimages to Mount Gerizim on the three pilgrim festivals of *Passover*, *Shavuot* and *Sukkot*, and continue to observe *Rosh Ha-Shanah*, *Yom Kippur* and *Simhat Torah*. They do not celebrate *Purim* or Hanukkah, however, because these festivals are not mentioned in the *Pentateuch* (Old Testament) and were instituted only after the split between the Samaritans and the Jews.” “As they use a different calendar system, the Jews and Samaritans rarely celebrate their holidays at the same time. Yet there is a distinct similarity between the two groups. The Samaritans also observe the Sabbath on Saturday and also maintain *kashrut* (Kosher – health) laws. They even have a *bar mitzvah* ceremony, but instead of on the boy’s 13th birthday, they celebrate upon the completion of his basic religious studies, which can take place any time between the ages of six and ten.” “The Samaritan community is headed by priests who are interpreters of the law and keepers of the secret calendar. Until the 17th century these priests claimed direct descent from Aaron. But the last descendant died in 1624 and the

priesthood passed to another family.” “The Samaritan population has remained small due to persecutions and plagues throughout the centuries. By the beginning of the 20th century there were only 150 of them left. With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 this minute community was split into two centers—one under Jordanian rule and the other in Israel. But the Six-Day War in 1967 ended the isolation of the two branches and under the protection of the Israel government, their population has grown to about 500 persons.”

([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

How does modern Jewish opposition express itself?

There is an amazing parallel today of “enemies of the Jews preventing them from building the wall” (or settling their ancient country) nowadays with the ancient days. Even Orthodox Jews maintain that the State of Israel is not legitimate because the Messiah did not restore it! A similar example of dissent and subsequent success is when the State of Israel’s government had approved the building of the Jerusalem center on Mount Scopus where the BYU Study program is currently located. The building was well under way when an Orthodox Jewish group (dedicated to crushing Christian activities) started a twofold campaign. First, they discredited the government (which they did not support anyway) for allowing the BYU facilities to be built. Secondly, striking a chord of antisemitism, they called the center a “missionary activity.” (There are three kinds of antisemitism; **1**) kill the Jews, **2**) let someone else kill the Jews, and **3**) convert the Jews.) This same Orthodox group has attempted to pass a law against proselytizing in Israel and have failed. There is NO Israeli statute prohibiting missionary activity. Let it be known, however, that missionary activity is deemed highly insensitive and frankly,

antisemitic. They did manage to pass a law that prohibits any type of bribe or payment to induce Jews to change their religion. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not pay people to become members—they charge them!) BYU signed a statement announcing they had no intention of doing missionary activities. President Howard W. Hunter also signed a statement to the same effect with the statement added, “. . . so long as such activity is prohibited by the government of Israel.”

What is a biblical reason there is no anti-missionary law in Israel?

The real reason Latter-day Saints are not proselytizing in Israel is because it is the Lord’s will. “And the time cometh that he shall manifest himself unto all nations, both unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles; and after he has manifested himself unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles, then he shall manifest himself unto the Gentiles and also unto the Jews, and the last shall be first, and the first shall be last.” (1 Nephi 13:42) Israeli government leaders kept their commitment to allow the building. This Orthodox group did not manage to convince the government to stop the BYU project. No legal precedent was established that affected the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or, for that manner, any other church. Likewise, latter-day attempts at undermining the existence of Israel, such as calling for the

elimination of Jerusalem as its capital or calling for the annihilation of Jews, are met with the same response as in older times. “And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. Nevertheless, we made our prayer unto our God...” (Nehemiah 4:8-9) “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.” (Psalms 122:6)

What Holidays “bring us back” to the Temple?

The Feast of Tabernacles is also called *Sukkot* because the Jews build a hut, a booth, a tabernacle (temporary structure). *Sukkot* is a *Torah*-commanded holiday celebrated with a high day (extra Sabbath) at the beginning and ending of the seven days from the 15th day of the month of *Tishrei*. That is about the time of the first full-moon after the first day of the fall-equinox. It is a sequel to Passover, the first full moon after the first day of the Spring-equinox, likewise, a *Torah*-commanded holiday celebrated with a high day (extra Sabbath) at the beginning and ending of the seven days from the 15th day of the month of *Nissan*. *Sukkot*, *Passover* and *Shavuot* (50-days after *Passover*) are the three Pilgrimage Festivals on which those Israelites who could were commanded to make a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem to review the covenants and instructions Moses gave them from Mount Sinai.