



“I Am Doing a Great Work”

Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

Follow Him: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith & John Bytheway

Do you ever feel that preparing for your weekly *Come, Follow Me* lesson falls short? Join hosts Hank Smith and John Bytheway as they interview experts to make your study for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ *Come, Follow Me* course not only enjoyable but original and educational. If you are looking for resources to make your study fresh, faithful, and fun--no matter your age--then join us every Friday and Saturday.

Podcast Episode Descriptions:

Part 1:

Do we ever simultaneously rejoice and weep? Dr. Jared Ludlow explores the Jewish people returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and rejoicing to have what they had lost, as well as feeling sorrowful for the years of exile and the loss of the glory of Solomon’s temple.

Part 2:

Dr. Ludlow returns to discuss the Apocrypha, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah and the importance of remaining steadfast while completing the Lord’s work.

Timecodes:

Part 1

- 00:00 Part 1–Dr. Jared Ludlow
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- 03:34 Timeline of Ezra and Nehemiah
- 06:15 The Writings
- 09:05 Recap since 2 Kings
- 13:43 Jewish worship practices after Babylonian captivity
- 17:52 Synagogue vs. temple worship in modern Judaism
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- 33:33 The Second Temple Period
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- 48:48 Nehemiah’s challenges to rebuild the city walls
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Part 2

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- 00:07 Israelites reaction to rebuilding the temple
- 02:56 “The Tongue of Angels” by Jeffrey R. Holland
- 07:55 Israelites chose to focus on the positive
- 11:42 Temple worship is worth any price
- 13:46 Ezra is an expert scribe
- 17:46 Feast of Tabernacles
- 20:56 Academic and spiritual learning
- 23:01 The Book of Esther and the Apocrypha
- 29:50 Nehemiah’s great work
- 32:59 The Lord needs people like Nehemiah
- 34:41 Parallels between story of Leonti and Nehemiah
- 39:59 Desire for a religious community
- 45:10 Dr. Jared Ludlow shares his spiritual and academic journey
- 51:51 End of Part II–Dr. Jared Ludlow

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Biographical Information:



Jared has been teaching in the Ancient Scripture Department at BYU since 2006. Previous to that, he spent six years teaching Religion and History at BYU Hawaii, and served the last two years as Chair of the History Department. Jared received his Bachelor's degree from BYU in Near Eastern Studies, his Master's degree from the University of California at Berkeley in Biblical Hebrew, and his PhD in Near Eastern Religions from UC-Berkeley and the Graduate Theological Union. His primary research interests are in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity. His dissertation was published as a book, *Abraham Meets Death: Narrative Humor in the Testament of Abraham*, by Sheffield Academic Press. He has also produced a World History textbook, *Revealing World History to 1500*, and a book related to the Apocrypha, *Exploring the Apocrypha from a Latter-day Saint Perspective*.

Jared has regularly presented papers at the Society of Biblical Literature Meetings and has participated in Sperry and similar symposia at BYU. He enjoys teaching Bible courses, Book of Mormon, World Religions, and World History. Jared served a Latter-day Saint mission to Campinas Brazil, and has also lived in Germany and Israel, teaching twice at the BYU Jerusalem Center 2011-2012, 2016-2017. He

likes sports, hiking, snorkeling, and traveling. He is married to Margaret (Nelson) and they have five children: Jared Jr., Joshua, Joseph, Marissa, and Melia.

Courses Taught: Jesus Christ and the Everlasting Gospel, Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon, World Religions, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, Hebrew Bible Theories

Areas of Expertise: Bible, Second Temple Judaism, Early Christianity, World Religions

Areas of Research: Second Temple Judaism, Pseudepigrapha, Early Christianity, Ancient Narrative

Languages: Hebrew (reading); Greek (reading); Aramaic (reading); Portuguese (reading and speaking); German (reading)

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Hank Smith:	00:01	Welcome to Follow Him, a weekly podcast dedicated to helping individuals and families with their Come Follow Me study. I'm Hank Smith.
John Bytheway:	00:09	And I'm John Bytheway.
Hank Smith:	00:10	We love to learn.
John Bytheway:	00:11	We love to laugh.
Hank Smith:	00:13	We want to learn and laugh with you.
John Bytheway:	00:15	As together-
Hank Smith:	00:16	We follow him. Hello, my friends. Welcome to another episode of Follow Him. My name is Hank Smith. I am your host. I am here with my co-host, who I say is doing a great work and cannot come down. John, that is you. You are doing a great work, and I don't know what the second half means. But you cannot come down.
John Bytheway:	00:40	No. That's when they call, "Dad, will you come down and do the dishes?" "I'm doing a great work. I can't come down."
Hank Smith:	00:45	Yeah, really. "I'm doing a great work up here on my podcast."
John Bytheway:	00:48	It's a good application.
Hank Smith:	00:50	I cannot come down. Well, John, that phrase comes from the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah, say that a bunch of times in a row. We have a wonderful friend of ours and a brilliant scholar to join us on our podcast this week. Tell our audience who is with us.
John Bytheway:	01:11	Yes, we have Dr. Jared Ludlow with us. He's been teaching in ancient scripture since 2006. Previous to that, he spent six years teaching religion and history at BYU Hawaii. Sounds like a wonderful assignment. And served as chair of the history

department in Hawaii. He received a bachelor's degree from BYU in Near Eastern studies, a master's from UC Berkeley in biblical Hebrew, a PhD in Near Eastern religions from UC Berkeley and Graduate Theological Union.

- John Bytheway: 01:42 His primary research interests are in ancient Judaism and early Christianity. His dissertation was published as a book: Abraham Meets Death, Narrative Humor in the Testament of Abraham by Sheffield Academic Press. We got to hear about that. He's also produced a world history textbook, Revealing World History to 1500, and a book related to the Apocrypha, Exploring the Apocrypha from a Latter-day Saint Perspective. He has regularly presented papers at the Society of Biblical Literature meetings, has participated in Sperry and similar symposia at BYU.
- John Bytheway: 02:19 He enjoys teaching Bible courses, Book of Mormon, world religions and world history. He served a mission to Campinas, Brazil and also lived in Germany and Israel, teaching twice at the BYU Jerusalem Center. He likes sports, hiking, snorkeling, and traveling. He's married to Margaret Nelson. They have five children: Jared Jr., Joshua, Joseph, Marissa, and Malia. I have a great feeling of love and appreciation for the Ludlow family and just want to thank you and your whole family for the influence you've had on my life. So welcome, Dr. Ludlow.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 02:52 Well, thank you. Yeah. That's some tough footsteps to follow in, but I'm hoping I'm not ruining it. Thank you for having me. And I appreciate all that you do, Hank and John, to help strengthen the faith of others, youth, young adults, adults, and really look forward to having this conversation.
- Hank Smith: 03:12 I think everyone at the faculty at BYU and elsewhere would say that Jared Ludlow is the pure example, the epitome of humility. Jared, the lesson this week is in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. And if I'm correct here, we just jumped a long ways into the future. Is that right?
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 03:34 We did do a little bit of a jump there, and I think probably most significantly, we're at the end of the Old Testament chronological period. In the 400s BC, that's where Ezra and Nehemiah is placed.
- Hank Smith: 03:49 If you're going to say, "Hey, I'm reading the Bible chronologically," you wouldn't put Ezra and Nehemiah right here in almost the middle, would you?

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 03:56 Yeah. That's certainly not how the Jews place it. In their Bible, they do the law first, the first five books of Moses, and then they have all the prophets, and then they have what they call the Writings. So the Writings, the last part of their Hebrew Bible is Ezra and Nehemiah. Malachi's back there, Haggai, Zechariah, all of these are pushed right at the end. Of course, that's where our Malachi sits. And those are the last verses we tend to read before we flip a page, jump 400 years, and start the New Testament.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 04:33 But what we're going to do here in Come Follow Me, we're following the order of what most Protestant and other Christian Bibles have. They consider this a historical book, continuation of First and Second Kings, First and Second Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. So it's included among these historical books, and then we'll come back and hit a lot of the prophets and where they fit. So we'll have like Amos up in the Northern Kingdom before the tribes are taken away or we'll have Isaiah with King Hezekiah or Jeremiah around the time of Josiah and others, and so later on, we'll fill in the gaps with these prophets.

Hank Smith: 05:16 Let's make sure our listeners understand this, John. So we're doing history right now. We've been doing history. Joshua, Judges, First and Second Samuel, which we found out was First and Second Kings. And then there was First Kings, which is known as Third Kings and Second Kings, which is known as Fourth Kings.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 05:35 Oh, let me tell you, it gets even more confusing with Ezra and Nehemiah. You look at different Bibles and you have up to Fifth Ezra depending on which denomination you go to.

John Bytheway: 05:45 Oh, wow.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 05:46 And some just have one book of Ezra that includes Ezra and Nehemiah. Others break it down into First, Second, Third, Fourth, and even a Fifth. It's just open to how you want to break it down and where you're going to put the breaks between them. I think it makes sense to have Ezra and Nehemiah in this case because we do focus a lot on Nehemiah in the second part. But if you look at the end of Ezra, it really doesn't end as a book. It's just a continuation on into Nehemiah.

Hank Smith: 06:15 Okay. And then what we're going to do is we're going to stop everything for a minute, and we're going to do Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, which aren't historical books per se. They're not telling us a history. They're called... What did you say?

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 06:32 The Writings.

Hank Smith: 06:32 They're called the Writings. How would you define writing since... Let's try to place this. So we've done history up to this point. We're going to continue to do history today, but then we're going to get into writings?

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 06:42 I think writings is a catchall topic that they used. You have Proverbs, Psalms. These wisdom sayings is how a lot of them are classified, wisdom literature. Job probably jumps back in time a much earlier period. It's got its own teaching story of-

Hank Smith: 07:03 Kind of separate, right?

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 07:05 Yeah. Can somebody be good in the face of all this evil and bad coming upon them, and tackling the issue of theodicy, the justice of God and those kinds of things. So these writings, I think, tend to be tackling certain topics, if you will, and exploring God's wisdom.

Hank Smith: 07:26 So Jared, would it be possible then, because the next part after Psalms and Proverbs, is going to be what you called the Prophets, and would it be possible to take Joshua through Nehemiah and then place each book of the Prophets in that history somewhere?

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 07:44 Yeah, definitely. You could put Isaiah with King Hezekiah's reign, and Jeremiah later on and they classify some as the great prophets or major prophets and minor prophets. That's more just not by how wonderful they were, or not, but just the size of the book. So Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel, these are all major prophets because we have lots of chapters from them. Whereas, the minor prophets sometimes were included all on one scroll, the 12 prophets at the end, because they were short enough that you could just include them all on one scroll.

Hank Smith: 08:24 This is excellent because I think our listeners love to just understand the setup and where we're coming at this. So we're still in the history, not in the Writings yet, not in the Prophets. We're still in the history. Joshua through Nehemiah, you could say, is the history books.

John Bytheway: 08:40 I was just sitting here thinking how we get used to the Book of Mormon, and the Book of Mormon does have a flashback or two, and then the Jaredites at the end, chronologically could be at the first. But it's a little easier. My son's trying to go through the Old Testament and he's doing Kings and Chronicles and I'm

like, "Yeah, there's some repetition." So it's nice to have somebody categorize it a little bit so we know what we're looking at.

- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 09:05 Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 09:05 So Jared, the last we left, the Northern Kingdom looked like things were about to fall down or they were coming down and the Southern Kingdom, just a century or so later, things look like they were going to come down too. Fill us in. What has happened since we left off in Second Kings?
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 09:26 The kingdom of Israel really becomes a story of empires. They just get conquered one empire by the next, by the next. So you mentioned the Northern Kingdom taken away by the Assyrians. A lot of the 10 tribes were taken away. They become lost to history. So, we call them the Lost Ten Tribes. The Southern Kingdom barely survived, and that's under King Hezekiah. Then, like you mentioned, about a century later, the Babylonians come because they've now conquered the Assyrians. So then they basically inherit and take over the same territory that the Assyrians had, but they want to expand. So they want to take over the Southern Kingdom, and Jerusalem is the prize jewel of that Southern Kingdom. And so they want to conquer it, and they eventually are successful.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 10:14 I think it's important to connect here with the Book of Mormon, because this is the time period of Lehi and Nephi, and this is why they have to leave Jerusalem is because the Babylonians are coming and are going to conquer. They receive these prophecies that if they don't leave, they could be taken into captivity or worse killed, as a part of that. One of the worst parts of this Babylonian invasion ends up being the destruction of the temple, Solomon's Temple is a magnificent building, particularly by ancient standards, is destroyed around 586, 587 BC. A bunch of the inhabitants of the land are taken away to Babylon. So they're put into exile, and this begins the period of the Babylonian exile. Jeremiah the prophet prophesied that this would happen. He said it would be about 70 years before they could come back. Depending, I guess, on when you... Because Babylon comes several times to attack Jerusalem, they actually come back maybe a little bit sooner unless you count it from one of the earlier attacks of Babylon.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 11:17 The Persians then conquer the Babylonians, and the Persians decide that they're going to have maybe a little bit more tolerant policy towards their conquered peoples. They're going to allow them to go back to their homelands if they had been

exiled under Babylon or Assyria, before. They're going to allow them to rebuild their religious temples. King Cyrus has a decree and we even have the cylinder, the clay cuneiform cylinder that this decree is written on. It's in the British Museum. So you can go and read it. We sometimes mistakenly think it's just for the Jews. It's not. It's for all the peoples of their land. So the Jews of course say, "Well, we're part of this, so we we'll take that to mean that we can return to Jerusalem and we are going to rebuild our temple." That's what a lot of the beginning of the book of Ezra talks about, is the return of some of these exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem so that they can rebuild their temple, rebuild their community, rebuild Jerusalem.

- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 12:23 In a nutshell, that's what Ezra and Nehemiah is all about is those rebuilding efforts. But, and here's another point we sometimes miss, not all the Jews wanted to go back. Some were perfectly comfortable in Babylon. They had a lot of water there. It was plentiful as far as agriculture and some other things.
- Hank Smith: 12:45 Yeah, the gardens.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 12:46 Yeah, the gardens of Babylon. So that's why, for example, Nehemiah is going to come back later because he just stayed there in the Persian empire. By the way, the Persians are a little bit further east than the Babylonians. Today, if you think of modern Iraq, that's kind of the area of Babylon, Southern Iraq. Persia was more the modern Iran. So, they've come from the east and they've now conquered the Babylonians, and so they inherit again all of their empire, and they push even down into Egypt. Cambyses's the successor to Cyrus, pushes down and even conquers Egypt for a while. Their empire gets even bigger. They're going to last for a couple of hundred years until Alexander the Great comes on the scene. Then of course, he takes over and it becomes Greek empires. Then the Romans are going to come. So it's just one empire after another.
- John Bytheway: 13:43 This reminds me of something that I appreciated from the manual said, "The Jewish people had been held captive in Babylonia for about 70 years. They had lost Jerusalem and the temple and many had forgotten their commitment to God's law. But God had not forgotten them." I'm glad you commented on this. They were taken captive, but we might assume, and they just practiced their religion there. But it sounds like when we read Nehemiah stuff they're, "Oh, hey, wait, we're supposed to do this?" It's like they had lost a lot of what they were supposed to be about. Is that a fair way to put it?

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 14:19 Yeah. I think you had some continuation of worship, but suddenly they're without a temple.

Hank Smith: 14:24 Huge.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 14:26 When two thirds of your law revolves around the temple, suddenly you're like, what am I supposed to do? We kind of experienced this lately as Latter-day Saints with COVID, when all of a sudden the temples shut, and we're like, "Wait, what am I supposed to do? This is where I drew a lot of spiritual strength was by going to the temple regularly. And what about all these family names that I'm accumulating? What do I do about this and how do I worship without the temple?" That's kind of the crisis that they faced was what do I do? Now, some continued to certainly practice and worship. And maybe this is the beginning of where we get the synagogues and more focus on scripture study because those in Babylon, that's what they had. That's what they could develop.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 15:12 If you fast forward, the Jews have the Talmud, which is a collection of their laws and interpretations of the laws and so forth. We have a Babylonian Talmud and a Palestinian or a Jerusalem Talmud that develop later on. Now we're talking about 4 or 500 AD because there's still such a community in Babylon of Jews that studied scripture, that tried to practice the law as much as they could without the temple, but they didn't have the temple there. As far as we know, they never tried to build a temple in the Babylonian area, but they had Jews there all the way up until the 1900s.

Hank Smith: 15:51 Wow.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 15:51 It really was when the State of Israel was formed when suddenly Jews didn't feel so comfortable in some Arab country because of the backlash against the formation of the State of Israel in 1948. When I was in grad school, you mentioned I went to UC Berkeley, and one summer to earn some money, I just did odd jobs. I got hired by an Iraqi Jewish family just to do yard work and things around their house. They had fled from Iraq because of the tension that they now felt in this Arab country.

Hank Smith: 16:24 Their ancestors went back to Iraq all the way back to the exile.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 16:28 Yeah. As far as you can tell. They were there for centuries and centuries from that time period.

John Bytheway: 16:34 This brings up another question that my students sometimes ask that I'd love to get your perspective on. That is that they often ask, "Well, what do the Jews do today without the temple? Or do they still do sacrifices?" It sounds like the Babylonians had to come up with a we don't have the temple type of worship. Then what do the Orthodox Jews do today regarding the temple?

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 16:56 They've kind of faced the same thing because the Jerusalem temple that we know from the time of Jesus and the New Testament, Herod's Temple, as we often call it, that gets destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans. Since then, there hasn't been a temple functioning like it was before then. Now, sometimes you'll see synagogues called temples. temple Emmanuel. But that's just a name that they use for synagogue. It doesn't mean that it's a temple like in Jerusalem. Throughout time there have been certain Jewish groups that may continue to do sacrifices on the side or whatever. The Samaritans, that we'll talk a little bit more about today, they continued to do sacrifices on Mount Gerizim. Every Passover, they have a major sacrifice of lambs and all getting ready for Passover on top of the Mount. So, sacrifices continued off and on in different groups.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 17:52 But a vast majority of Jews today, it's all about synagogue worship. It's all about prayer, scripture study, those kinds of things. Frankly, if you ask particularly Western Jews, are they excited to rebuild the temple? A lot of them would say, "Why? Are we going to go back to animal sacrifice? That's ancient stuff that's passed." And others will say, "Well, when the Messiah comes, maybe something will happen with the temple." Then there's others that are very actively, particularly those in Jerusalem, actively trying to rebuild the temple. Of course, that can cause some political issues today.

John Bytheway: 18:30 In the same spot where the old one was. Yeah.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 18:33 Yeah. We'll just get rid of the Dome of the Rock.

John Bytheway: 18:34 It's currently occupied.

Hank Smith: 18:36 I like how you said that. It's currently occupied. If you'll both help me with this. We came back in with Joshua, and then Samuel came along and we chose a king and we went three kings in a row and they didn't seem to go very well. Saul, David, and Solomon. Then we divided. Then we divided into two kingdoms, the North and the South. Eventually the Northern Kingdom-

John Bytheway: 19:00 Israel in the north.

Hank Smith: 19:01 Yeah, Israel in the north.

John Bytheway: 19:01 Judah in the south. Ten tribes in the north. Two tribes in the south.

Hank Smith: 19:05 The Northern Kingdom was destroyed by Assyria 721 years before Jesus. Then the Southern Kingdom barely hangs on. And we just did that last week under King Hezekiah. But then they eventually fall in 586 to Babylon, who had taken Assyria, as Jared just told us. I can see why Laman and Lemuel didn't think Jerusalem could be destroyed because Hezekiah and Isaiah preserved them.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 19:32 Yeah. God is on our side. Why would he allow his city, his people, his temple to be taken over?

John Bytheway: 19:40 It's one of my favorite lines in the whole Old Testament, the army of the Assyrians, "And behold, when they arose in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses."

Hank Smith: 19:47 Yeah. Sennacherib. He's like, "We can't fight this. Let's go home." And also you mentioned that some Jews are taken captive in 586, just after Lehi is preaching. That's where we get the stories of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Is that right?

John Bytheway: 20:05 They're in Babylon.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 20:07 Correct. Yeah. So they could have had a young men's group in Jerusalem with Nephi and Daniel and others there.

Hank Smith: 20:13 All about the same age.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 20:14 Yeah.

Hank Smith: 20:16 So now Israel, you would say, is in exile. The Northern Kingdom is no more. The Southern Kingdom is no more. And Babylon, from what I've read, Jared, is a pretty brutal, how would you... occupier?

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 20:28 Yeah. I think the Assyrians were worse-

Hank Smith: 20:31 Oh, really?

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 20:31 ... but Babylon still was pretty harsh, especially compared to the Persians that are going to come. Now, the Persians of course are going to maintain an empire. So, they're still going to have soldiers and expect taxes and things like that. It's not just kumbaya and we're all hugging and... Compared to Assyria and Babylon before, it's a different administration, you could say.

Hank Smith: 20:53 Okay, so Babylon rules for about 70 years. Then here comes King Cyrus and the Persians saying, "Go home, go rebuild." And did Cyrus see himself as a liberator?

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 21:05 I think you could say that. I think certainly that's how the Jews viewed him. In fact, he's viewed very favorably in the book of Isaiah. So we could maybe read a couple of verses. He's called a shepherd. He's called an anointed one, somebody who could come and deliver them. In Isaiah 44:28, it says, "That sayeth of Cyrus, he is my shepherd and shall perform all my pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, 'Thou shall be built,' and to the temple, 'Thy foundation shall be laid.'" And so Isaiah and the Jews certainly had a very positive view, and God used, as he does throughout history, non-covenant people to accomplish his purposes, sometimes unknowingly by themselves. Sometimes it's in justice; sometimes it's in mercy. And certainly I think in this case, we see more of the mercy side of bringing them back and allowing them to rebuild. So Cyrus is viewed, I think, very favorably by the Jews.

Hank Smith: 22:15 What year would that be, for Cyrus saying, "I'm here, you can go home"?

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 22:20 That's around 525. I think it was 538 that the Persians take over the Babylonians. Just about a decade later, he issues this decree. It's exciting to see it in the British Museum, frankly.

John Bytheway: 22:36 Wow.

Hank Smith: 22:36 Yeah.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 22:36 I'd had read about it so much, and then all of a sudden here I'm in this room. I kind of walked by it at first and I thought, "Oh, it's another cuneiform clay tablet." And then I circled back and I was like, "Wait, no. This is the Cyrus cylinder. This is the one that we always talk about."

Hank Smith: 22:51 That's cool.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 22:52 It's kind of cool that we have it preserved.

- Hank Smith: 22:54 Let's keep going with our story because I think we're almost to Ezra. So, when we say Cyrus allows the Jews to return, we're not talking the kingdom of Israel is back. We're talking a small portion of those who are exiled returned to just Jerusalem. Jared, do they return to the whole land?
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 23:12 They're primarily just returning to Jerusalem and its environs. It's the area around Jerusalem because that had been the capital city and they wanted to strengthen it. In fact, later on, I think it's in Nehemiah that they even have to like cast lots to get people to move out of Jerusalem, to start settling more of the areas around because they just want to expand the territory a little bit. But people are feeling like, "I feel safer inside the city. I'm safer with more people around me." In our own Latter-day Saint history, we maybe see that, that sometimes everybody wants to be in the city and sometimes it's hard to expand, or some want to expand when Joseph says, "No, you need to stay in the city for protection."
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 23:57 I think one important point is we mentioned that there's the exiles from the North Kingdom; there's exiles from the Southern Kingdom, but that doesn't mean everybody. It mostly means the upper class, the elite, the ones that they're worried about revolting, leading-
- John Bytheway: 24:15 Organizing.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 24:15 ... the leadership. Yeah. They can organize some kind of rebellion and so forth. So, they want them closer, in a different part of the empire that they're not comfortable with; they don't have the same connections to the land and they don't have the same knowledge about where's the defensive places and so forth, and so they can keep tabs on them better. But that means they leave a lot of people behind, mostly lower class, mostly so that they can continue working the land because you want to tax the land. If nobody knows what grows where and where the water sources are and where's the best place to herd your animals, these kinds of things, then you don't have much revenue. So they leave the lower class there.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 25:00 What the Assyrians particularly did, and the Babylonians did this a little bit as well, is they brought peoples from other part of their empire into the land. Suddenly, you have a mixture of peoples left in the land with outside peoples, non-Israelites, coming in, kind of for the same purpose. They're not going to know this land. They're not going to have the same knowledge of defense and these kinds of things. It's that intermarriage that occurs between the people left in the land and these outsiders

that become a big problem for Ezra particularly, and a little bit in Nehemiah as well. This is the beginnings of what later become known as the Samaritans, this intermarriage between people left in the land, people from outside.

- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 25:51 They continue having many of the same worship practices, traditions, trying to follow the law of Moses. But they're also bringing in some other ideas. It's becoming this mixture. So, when some of these Jews come back from Babylon to rebuild the temple, there's people here in Jerusalem that want to help, that say, "Well, this is part of our tradition, too."
- Hank Smith: 26:19 We're Jewish, too. Right.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 26:21 And they don't want their help because they feel like they've corrupted themselves, I guess you could say.
- John Bytheway: 26:28 You're not real Israelites anymore.
- Hank Smith: 26:30 That's what Harry Potter would call a half-blood. Some Jewish blood, some non-Jewish blood.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 26:37 It's a major tension. I think historians tend to call them Sumerians earlier on, and then they become known as the Samaritans. As we open the New Testament, we know that these two groups are antagonistic towards each other. Why? Well, just go back a few hundred years and you see this is the beginning of it because they're not welcome to rebuild the temple. So then they finally say, "Well, okay, we'll build our own temple." And so they go to Mount Gerizim and they build their own temple. That's where they go to worship until that temple gets destroyed by later Jews who decide no, that's an illegal temple. So, that adds to this antagonism between them because at the root they're both following the law of Moses. They both have the Torah. But they start practicing some things differently, or they're just viewed as not as pure.
- John Bytheway: 27:34 That Gerizim temple comes up in Jesus's conversation with the woman at the well.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 27:39 Exactly. Because she says, "We've worshiped here. You worship in Jerusalem. So which is it?" And Jesus' response is, "Well, in a little while, it's going to be neither place. It's going to be in your heart, really, that you worship."
- John Bytheway: 27:52 God and spirit and in truth and... Yeah.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 27:54 Yeah.

Hank Smith: 27:54 Jared, and when Cyrus allows this small portion of Jews to return, he's not saying go back and have a kingdom of your own. There's still Persians that are going to pay their taxes. Why is he allowing them to return then? Just because he's trying to... How to win friends and influence people and saying, "Listen, if I give you this, you'll probably not rebel"?

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 28:16 Yeah. I think that's exactly it. He thinks if they're happy where they're at, then they will be less likely to rebel. Yes, he's still going to require taxes from them. They still will have a governor over them that's going to be from under Persian control. There will be military garrisons nearby and things like that. But he just thought if you oppress the people too much, then they're going to want to rebel, and so let's ease up a little bit. Let them practice some of the worship that they want to do, but keep being loyal to Persia. For the most part, it worked for 200 years, much longer. Babylon only lasted not even a 100 years.

Hank Smith: 29:02 They were just too brutal.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 29:04 And the Assyrians as well. These were very powerful, short-lived flames that rose up and then burned out pretty quick. But Persians tended to last until Alexander came and had a series of wars with them and eventually took them over.

Hank Smith: 29:21 Jared, do you feel like we're ready to get into the text here?

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 29:23 Well, let's start with just Ezra 1 just because it is the retelling of this commission to rebuild the temple and the return of temple instruments. I guess that's one thing we haven't mentioned is that when Babylon conquered the temple, they took a lot of the temple vessels. So, things used for the sacrifices and altar of incense type things, and they took them off to Babylon and now they're being allowed to bring them back. For example, in verse 7, it says, "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 by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer and numbered them under Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. Sheshbazzar is this local ruler that's going to be set up in Jerusalem area, and they're going to bring back these vessels.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 30:23 One thing that frankly gets a little tedious, I guess you could say, about Ezra and Nehemiah is we have these lengthy lists of

offerings that are brought back, donations made for the temple, people. These can be kind of tedious, but this is what a historical source is. It tries to record all of these things that happen. It will repeat some of the decrees of the Persian rulers. We could easily be cynical and say, "Oh, well that's just all made up." But I think a lot of historians think actually, no, this is probably pretty accurate of retelling some of these decrees. Granted, it's gone through a translation into Hebrew and then now into English, and so it's going to look a little different that way, but the core elements of it would remain. So that's kind of what happens in chapter 1 is just finally this coming back and starting to rebuild the temple Ezra.

- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 31:26 Ezra 3 talks about they start with the altar. What they want to do first is offer sacrifices again. I think we see that throughout scripture, starting with Adam. What's one of the first things he does after he's kicked out of the garden of Eden? Build an altar, give thanks and pray. Lehi and his family, when they get to the promised land, they build an altar. They want to rebuild the altar there so that they can offer thanks for being back in the land, and this is where it can get confusing. It seems like they start rebuilding the temple, but it's not going to be done for a while. I think most put it about 515 is when the temple's finally completed. And so that's a good 10 years.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 32:16 In fact, here we get a little overlap. We have Haggai, prophet from later in the Old Testament, but from this time period, obviously. He comes along and he says, "Wait, look at your houses and then compare that to the house of the Lord. You're building your houses before you're rebuilding the house of the Lord. Let's get our priorities straight here and let's get the temple." So Haggai the prophet, in Haggai 1, starting in verse 3, "Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet saying, Is it time for you, oh, ye to dwell in your sealed houses," or as the footnote there reads, paneled houses, nicely adorned houses, I guess, is probably how we could say it. "And this house," meaning the temple, "lie waste. Now therefore, thus sayeth the Lord of hosts, consider your ways." In other words, let's rethink this. Let's rebuild this. So, it took a little prompting from Haggai and Zachariah, another prophet of this time period, to light the fire under the Israelites to remember part of why you're back here is to rebuild the temple.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 33:33 Even though probably they had started some of the worship going on there, the temple still needed to be completed. So, they eventually do that. This is what we refer to often as the Second Temple and it starts a new historical period. This is the period I love to study. This is my main area, is the Second

Temple period. It's basically from mid-400s BC to around 70 AD when the temple is destroyed. So it straddles the end of the Persian, all of the Greek period, and the beginning of the Roman period in the land here. When they rebuilt it, it's interesting because there's different reactions. Some were tremendously excited. Well, I think all were excited. "Yes! We have a temple again." But some that knew the old temple, knew that this new temple wasn't the same as Solomon's Temple. They didn't have the resources that Solomon had. Solomon was wealthy. He had connections all over the Eastern Mediterranean, bringing in the finest craftsmen and supplies and things. This is just an exilic group coming back, barely trying to rebuild their houses and city and the temple.

- Hank Smith: 34:47 That reminds me, Jared, of Nephi when he says he tried to build the temple, but he said it was not like Solomon's.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 34:56 Yeah. It was patterned after Solomon's, but he knew it wasn't the same as Solomon's.
- Hank Smith: 35:00 Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 35:01 So the First Temple we talk about, we call Solomon's Temple.
- Hank Smith: 35:04 From Solomon all the way to the destruction by Babylon.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 35:08 Correct.
- John Bytheway: 35:09 And then trying to rebuild it, we're going to call that the Second Temple. But that's not the same as Herod's Temple, right?
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 35:16 Well, it is the same temple. Same as-
- John Bytheway: 35:19 Yeah. Ground, real estate.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 35:21 What Herod does when he comes on the scene is he wants to make it magnificent again, more like Solomon's Temple. By his time, he did have the resources that he could do that. He expands the courtyards. He expands the stoa, the porches around. He can add to the facade. He can do all of these things to make it a truly magnificent building. I think his real intention is to show off to the Romans, "Look at our beautiful temple." So he makes all of this, and we often call it Herod's Temple. The structure didn't change. It just was like the outside and the area around it changed.
- Hank Smith: 36:05 Courtyard.

Dr. Jared Ludlow:	36:06	Exactly.
John Bytheway:	36:07	So, we would say Solomon's Temple. And then we would say the Second Temple. When we say Second Temple, Herod's Temple, we're not talking about two different things?
Hank Smith:	36:17	Yeah, we're talking about the same building.
Dr. Jared Ludlow:	36:19	A remodel, if you will.
Dr. Jared Ludlow:	36:21	The remodel. I like that.
John Bytheway:	36:23	He fixed up the grounds and the...
Dr. Jared Ludlow:	36:24	Yeah, Provo has announced that they're going to redo our temple. It's going to look a lot different than it did before, but it's going to be in the same space. That's going to be even more radical than I think what Herod did to the Jerusalem temple.
John Bytheway:	36:41	Yeah. If it looks like Ogden, it's going to look a lot different.
Dr. Jared Ludlow:	36:44	Yeah. Maybe to think of how they reacted to this new temple, the Second Temple, let's think about the Salt Lake Temple. What if we, rather than trying to remodel and refurbish it and strengthen the foundational, what if we just raised it and then just put up a little temple, like during President Hinckley's era, when we had the small temples. It still would be a temple. It'd still be functioning and we'd be happy to have a temple, but anybody who knew the Salt Lake Temple would be like, "It's not the Salt Lake Temple. Well, it's not the same as it was before." That's what I think a lot of them were going through was feeling this lacking of that.
John Bytheway:	37:30	Yeah.
Hank Smith:	37:30	It's hard to get excited. If any of our listeners ever hear First Temple period, think Solomon down to the Babylon. If you ever hear Second Temple period, think of this returning under Cyrus all the way down past Jesus to when the temple is destroyed after Jesus dies. So we have two basic temple periods. We're giving our audience a little mini doctorate degree in Jewish history. Jared, I'm rebuilding the temple. It doesn't feel like I'm rebuilding the big, beautiful temple. Then I've got these other Jews who are half-Jewish, half... What would you call? Half-Gentile, I guess.
Dr. Jared Ludlow:	38:08	Half-Gentile.

Hank Smith:	38:09	They want to help as well. So this whole return, this has been stressful.
Dr. Jared Ludlow:	38:14	It is a very stressful period. We in our day could look at how these people of the land are treated and say, "Well, that's not very fair. That's not very tolerant." To a certain extent, that's true. However, there's a whole political layer that's underneath this. By allowing them to help rebuild the temple, you're allowing them more political power because frankly, they kind of filled in a power vacuum when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took all the upper class and the royalty away, they had their own local rule under of course the imperial rule over them. But they had quite a bit of power on their own underneath that system.
Dr. Jared Ludlow:	39:04	But suddenly, you've got this whole other group coming back, some of which are related to Davidic lines and so forth. Now, they are the top dogs. So, it's also a clash of political power. I think part of the reason they weren't allowed to help rebuild the temple is not for spiritual reasons, although that is how the text points out. But I think for the political reason, no, we are in charge here. So, these local people try to stop these rebuilding projects by claiming you don't have permission to do this. We're here.
Hank Smith:	39:44	We've been here.
Dr. Jared Ludlow:	39:45	They have to appeal back to Persia. That's where you get some of these chapters where we have a repetition of the decrees. In fact, you don't see this in the King James version, but there's several chapters, I think chapter 4 through 6 in Ezra that is actually written in Aramaic rather than Hebrew in the Hebrew Bible. There's different parts of the Hebrew Bible where they just have kept the Aramaic from these decrees because under the Persian empire, Aramaic became the dominant lingua franca of the day. That's why, by the time of Jesus, Aramaic was a common spoken language because they had been dominated by the Persians for so long. It maintains some of these Aramaic decrees and letters back and forth. But the Persians, as they check their archives and check probably Cyrus's cylinder, they find no, they are given permission to do this. So they do have the Persian backing to allow them to continue to rebuild.
John Bytheway:	40:49	I'm looking at the synopsis for Ezra chapter 4. The Samaritans offer help, then hinder the work. It's a little more complex than we think about this relationship with the Samaritans going way back to these Old Testament times, like we're talking about. I think that helps us when we get to Jesus and the Samaritans

and that history they have of that rival temple, like you said, in Gerizim.

- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 41:11 It's been going on for 400 years.
- John Bytheway: 41:13 Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 41:14 Right. If I'm of a lower class family, let's just say I've lived really long. I've seen Assyria come in. I've seen Babylon come in. Then Madeline, my daughter, fell in love with-
- John Bytheway: 41:27 A Persian.
- Hank Smith: 41:27 ... Truman the Babylonian. Yeah. Truman, the Persian. They had children. So now I've got children who are half-Jewish, half non-Jewish. Here comes this rebuilding group. I want to be part of it. And they say, absolutely not. You can't be part of it. So do I leave then, at that point? Is that when I go to the north and go live in what's called Samaria, or am I already there?
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 41:50 I think a lot of the people are wherever they are, and a lot of them are in Samaria, but I think some of the movers and shakers, if you will, of that group had moved into the Jerusalem area. So, they still are there antagonizing. Some of this is groups of neighboring Ammonites, for example, that can come in and assert some authority now that a lot of the Jews are gone. So they are in the mix here as well as there's the people of the land that I think are more just the people left over that have now intermarried. But then there's also some of these other groups that are coming in and trying to assert more authority.
- Hank Smith: 42:31 Goodness, this is messy.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 42:33 It gets really messy.
- Hank Smith: 42:35 Sometimes when I've thought about this history, I've thought just everybody get along. Just everybody rebuild the walls and everybody rebuild the temple. It's awesome. We all get to go back. But we do complicate things. It was interesting that you said that they're supposed to rebuild the temple and yet they build their own homes first. Because we saw that so often last year, John, where the Lord said in the Doctrine and Covenants, "Build the temple," and then two years later, "Hey, is anybody going to..."
- John Bytheway: 43:01 Is anybody going to get started on this?

Hank Smith: 43:03 Then another time, "I was serious about that." Jared, does that feel the same to you as when we read those church history stories?

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 43:10 Yeah. I think that's exactly it because it's a sacrifice. If you're going to work on the temple, then that means you're not working on your own things. And so being able to have faith enough to put the Lord's house first and then that you'll still be able to do your own, that's a challenge. Then attitude is this opposition that helps delay things. It's like not getting the right permit or something, so you have to go through the permit process until finally the Persians say, yes, they can go on. It's like a factor as well, is just the natural opposition that's coming against them.

Hank Smith: 43:47 That's interesting. And what an awesome way we could apply this to it's a sacrifice to put the house of the Lord first. That's the same way today, isn't it? You've got to make time to go to the temple because, like you said, I've got to sacrifice what I could be doing in my own life to go do the Lord's work.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 44:06 Sacrifices will vary as far as how hard that is. That's one of the efforts of the church is to get temples as close to members as possible, but still some people have to travel incredible amounts of time and make incredible efforts to attend the temple. Yet sometimes, I'm five minutes away from a temple, and I realize, "Wait, I haven't done my part yet for a while. I need to get to the temple and..."

Hank Smith: 44:32 They didn't have to make appointments, though, to build the temple. We have to make appointments. Our life is really hard, John.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 44:38 I know.

Hank Smith: 44:38 We have to go online and make an appointment, and...

John Bytheway: 44:42 Gee, I need some names. I can print out my own family members just like that.

Hank Smith: 44:46 But John, I mean that takes ink and just give me a break here, John, let me know. I mean, my life is hard.

John Bytheway: 44:52 Yeah. Another way to look at it is interesting to me is like in Ezra 4, it talks about the Samaritans hired counselors or the people of the land hired counselors against them to frustrate their

purpose of going. Yeah. Whenever we want to build a temple in the world, everybody just loves it.

- Hank Smith: 45:12 Yeah. No one ever hires counselors to stop the work.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 45:16 There's never local opposition. Right?
- John Bytheway: 45:18 Never.
- Hank Smith: 45:19 Yeah. Isn't that right out of the manual? "The Lord's work rarely goes unopposed. And this was certainly true of the efforts led by Zerubbabel." Jared, tell us who Zerubbabel is.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 45:32 Zerubbabel is one of these local governor that is under the Persians. The name sounds like it's related to Baal, but it's actually related to Babel, Babylon. Zeru is seed, so seed of Babylon. So, he's come from that area but now is here in Jerusalem, and he helps start the community and get things going here because Ezra doesn't show up himself until chapter 7. What the first chapters are, are just all this background from when the Persians had taken over up until Ezra comes on the scene, and Ezra's about 458. So almost a 100 years after Persia had conquered the Babylonians, Ezra finally comes on the scene. Even among seasoned biblical scholars, the chronology of Ezra and Nehemiah is one of the most confusing things in the Bible. It's listing a lot of kings, but it doesn't list if this is the Artaxerxes the First, the Second, Third. There's Darius, we see in the book of Daniel, but this is not the same Darius that's mentioned here, and there's going to be a later Darius that Alexander conquers.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 46:49 So, that gets confusing. Then we have a Nehemiah that's mentioned that's not the Nehemiah that the book's named after, and which came first and when? If you feel at all confused, you're not alone. We just try to keep it pretty basic and say the Persians came; they start to rebuild the temple; it finally gets rebuilt, but then Ezra's going to come. Nehemiah's going to come. Particularly, Ezra's going to focus on the law, on the worship aspect of it. Okay. Now that we have the temple, let's make sure we're following the law in our daily lives in what we're doing. Nehemiah's going to come back because he's heard that the city still is in ruins as far as the walls of the city and so forth. He's like, "Wait, this is Jerusalem. It can't be that way." Nehemiah is a cup bearer to the Persian king, a cup bearer, as you know, is the one that basically taste tests the food and the wine, the drink for the king so that if anything's poisoned, he's out before the king gets it.

Hank Smith: 47:53 He's like a canary in a mine. Yeah.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 47:55 Uh-huh. It's a dangerous position, but it's also a very trusted position because you could imagine that a cup bearer could easily turn against the king and pass on food that he himself has poisoned, and so it has to be somebody that's trusted. So it's quite amazing that a non-Persian is given this very trusted position. But because of this connection to the king, the king one day notices, "Wait, Nehemiah, why are you so down? What's up?" Finally, Nehemiah shares, "I've heard from some of my colleagues back in Jerusalem that came that things are not good there. The walls are still in ruins." And so the king says, "Well, why don't you go back and help rebuild them," with, it sounds like, the intention that Nehemiah would return. And he does actually return. We just aren't sure how long he stays.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 48:48 He will return back to Jerusalem later. Nehemiah's efforts are primarily with the walls of the city. My wife, Margaret, this is one of her favorite parts of the story, and partly I think because of our time in Jerusalem. Because of the opposition, Nehemiah has to go out at night and inspect the walls of the city and figure out, "Okay, where do we need to rebuild and strengthen the walls? How can we do this?" Kind of does a reconnaissance trip at night, going around the walls and inspecting them and so forth. Then he begins this rebuilding effort that included not only how we're going to construct, but how are we going to defend ourselves from this opposition while we're building? It's kind of like the Kirtland temple when they had to build the temple and they had to-

John Bytheway: 49:35 Have guards.

Dr. Jared Ludlow: 49:36 ... to protect them. So you have a tool in one hand and maybe a weapon in another. It describes that in Nehemiah of some of these efforts to rebuild the walls. Nehemiah's main project was getting the city back to where it was. But again, the local opposition is trying to tell the Persians, "Look, if you let them rebuild the walls, then of course they're going to rebel. They now have a fortified city." Because of Nehemiah's position, I think he's able to assure the king, "No, we're just trying to make the city what it was. And we're still loyal to you. It provides a fortified city for you because we're under your empire." So he finally does get the permission and the resources and everything, and they're able to finish with a lot of rejoicing once it's finally done.

Hank Smith: 50:22 This is fantastic. I didn't realize so much opposition, and it wasn't necessarily enemies because it seems to me that they're

not enemies of Persia who are fighting against this rebuilding a temple. It's the locals.

- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 50:35 I would say it's internal opposition. We have in the church some that are outside of the church that may attack or not agree with us and try to thwart our purposes. But then we have some within the church that also oppose some of the things and sometimes those are even harder to deal with. So they're trying to carry out what they feel they should be doing with the temple and the walls and everything amidst all of this opposition, again, because there's a political layer underneath all this. He who can rebuild the walls, controls the walls and the city and gates. That's one of the things Nehemiah does is he decrees when the gates can be open, when they're going to be closed, and those kinds of things. So it gives power to whoever has that control.
- Hank Smith: 51:28 Interesting. This makes the book so much more accessible. Like, you can understand as you read. It's a historian wanting to tell us... How long after the fact were these books written, do we know?
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 51:39 We don't know. Ezra follows in the same vein as First and Second Kings and others where it's just a third person narrative redactor, and we don't know who's exactly recording this. Nehemiah is interesting in that it's more of a first person account. I think it's a little bit more like First Nephi, maybe reflecting back on some of the events that had happened earlier and so forth. I can't imagine it's going to be that much later than the time period it's recording, but it's obviously going to go through some editorial process in the transmission.
- Hank Smith: 52:18 And it's very pro those who are trying to return and rebuild.
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 52:22 Yeah, definitely from that perspective.
- Hank Smith: 52:25 What would a Samaritan history sound like? "We had our own city and..."
- Dr. Jared Ludlow: 52:28 Yeah. Who are these outsiders that think that they can come in and take over and... Yeah.
- Hank Smith: 52:34 Yeah, right.
- John Bytheway: 52:38 Please join us for part two of this podcast.



- John Bytheway: 00:02 Welcome to part two of this week's podcast.
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 00:07 At the end of chapter three, we get a little bit more of the reaction of the people at this rebuilding of the temple. Because you can imagine, if you've been away from the temple for a while and now have the temple rebuilt, it's going to be a huge deal. Just like our reopening of the temples slowly but surely after the pandemic, I think we feel a little more gratitude for this opportunity to go to the temple and fill that spirit and be strengthened and the peace and the beauty of the temple.
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 00:36 And so at the end of chapter three, we get some of their reaction. Let's pick up in verse 11. We have all these priests there, Levites and others and they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord. Why? Because he is good. For his mercy endure forever toward Israel. This is probably a little excerpt from a Psalm there. And that mercy in English is this word *Hesed* that I think you've talked about before on a previous podcast. It's this everlasting kindness. This covenantal love that God shows his people.
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 01:17 John, I think earlier today you mentioned that even though the Israelites were off in exile, God hadn't forgotten them. He still would remember them and help bring them back. And that's, I think, what that phrase gets at because he is good and his mercy endure earth forever 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, old guys, like some of us, that had seen the first house when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes wept with a loud voice.
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 01:58 And so some are sad at this. It's not going to be the same, but then the next phrase, and many shouted aloud for joy. So this mixed feeling there 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 of far off. So there's so much jubilation and so forth that it's hard to tell who's weeping for joy, who's weeping for sadness, that this isn't quite the same. And so it's kind of an interesting portrayal, I guess, of how the scene might have been for these people.

- Hank Smith: 02:35 That's fascinating. We have some, "Yay. The temple." The others, "it's never going to be the same."
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 02:41 Maybe we go through that a little bit when we get a change of a prophet or a Bishop or Relief Society present, that gets changed.
- Hank Smith: 02:50 It's never going to be the same.
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 02:52 Yeah. We're like, "Wait, we're kind of happy, but no, we're sad."
- Hank Smith: 02:56 That's fascinating. The, the mixed feelings of Ezra chapter three, I like that. I've never seen that before this, yay and this, boo, and yay. And that's life. I can imagine those who are really happy looking at those who are sad saying, "Come on, it's something."
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 03:12 Let's rejoice.
- Hank Smith: 03:13 Yeah. Be happy that it's something. And others saying, "Yes, it is something, but it's not what we've once had." That reminds me of Jeffrey Holland's talk, The Tongue of Angels where he says, "Speak hopefully, speak encouragingly. Our word should be full of faith, hope, and charity." I'm kind of siding with those who are excited about the rebuilding.
- John Bytheway: 03:35 Yeah. Strengthen your brethren in all your conversations and all your doings.
- Hank Smith: 03:39 Focus on the positive. Here, there is going to be another temple. Maybe it's not going to be like Soloman's temple, but it's still a temple.
- John Bytheway: 03:47 I love how Elder Bednar kind of took apart a mission call, you are called to serve and you are assigned to labor. And because of COVID, many were called to serve and didn't labor in the place where they were originally called. My daughter, Natalie was called to serve a mission, which she's doing, was called to labor in Tahiti. Spent the first, almost half of her mission, in Tucson. And she ended up when the possibility came that she might actually get to go to Tahiti, she was like, "But I have really

loved Tucson. And I've loved these people in Tucson.", It was so nice to hear that. And I hope that all those listening that have had a mission modified by circumstances can rejoice in the call to serve and the assignment to labor might change, but rejoice in the call to serve.

- Hank Smith: 04:40 Oh, I love that, John. I think this idea of I'm so happy. I'm kind of sad, but I'm so happy. Jared, do you feel like we're misapplying the scripture here with kind of saying, look, be grateful for what you have instead of focusing on what you don't have?
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 04:58 Yeah. I think that's probably what we should take from this experience is that even though Haggai and Zecharia don't chastise them for their attitude, their words before was no, we need the house of the Lord. And I don't think they were worried about whether it was as grand as king Solomon's temple or not. They just wanted the house of the Lord completed. That's probably one of the messages we take from it is just be grateful that we have it now again, so that this worship can continue and progress.
- Hank Smith: 05:33 And I can understand this, I think Jared and John, there are times and both of you I'm sure understand this where my father passed away just a year and a half ago. My brother, just 90 days before him. And there are times where I'm so happy with the situation we have, we get together for a holiday, our family, but there is that sense of, oh, what could have been, had that not occurred. So I think you can have these feelings of joy and weeping at the same time, because you're joyful for what is occurring and the blessings that you do have right now in front of you and the people that are around you. But there's a sense of sadness for what was lost. Does that make sense?
- John Bytheway: 06:15 Hank, our friend, Meg Johnson's father passed away, and I sent her a text and said, "It's a very interesting mixture, isn't it, of sadness and celebration because a life well lived, but now they're gone from us anyway." Maybe a lot of life is that way. There's a mixture there.
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 06:35 What makes experiences great is often the people that we're sharing them with. And so there's often a tinge of sadness when people we love aren't with us anymore, whether that's because of passing on or having left the church or something. We miss that, but we also need to live in the moment and be with the people that we are with. The phrase today, be present. Let's be content with what we have now. Yes, we miss how it was, but we need to move forward and make this a great temple.

Hank Smith: 07:14 I have a good friend who lost her husband in a sudden unexpected way. And I think she's doing this. She is trying to live in the moment, give thanks, shout for joy when she gets all of her children and grandchildren together. But there's that sense of I miss my husband whenever we get together. So I can see them looking at this smaller version of the temple going, I love it. I also miss the big one. I miss the one we had.

John Bytheway: 07:43 But I like what you said, Dr. Ludlow about, you used the phrase, living in the moment. There's something in looking at what we have right now and being so grateful for that.

Hank Smith: 07:55 Look at this in verse 11, they give thanks. They shout for joy in verse 12, they shout for joy in verse 13. They're focused on the positive, on the blessing.

John Bytheway: 08:05 Joy and weeping is that's so interesting in the same verses. It reminds me at the end of the war chapters, some were softened because the great length of the war and some were hardened. There can be a mix of emotions there.

Hank Smith: 08:21 And some were half-softened and half-hardened. Some were just mildly-hardened.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 08:29 It does show that people can go through the same experience and have different reactions based on how they enter into that.

Hank Smith: 08:37 And where their focus is.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 08:38 In chapter six, starting like in verse 16 and all it talks about this dedication of the house of God with joy. So there's that joy again. And all these offerings that they brought, and they have organized the priesthood in verse 18 in all their courses, divisions, what we call temple shifts today. So everybody's ready, and they keep the Passover in verse 19. This was their Exodus experience. They've now come back from exile. God has delivered them back to the land, to the promised land. And now they're back at the temple. And so they're celebrating this Passover with this jubilation verse 20, the priest and Levites were purified. Everybody's purified. They kill the Passover, meaning the Passover lamb for all the children of the captivity and for their brethren, the priests, and for themselves. And for the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity and all such as had separated themselves under them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land. For what purpose? To seek the Lord God of Israel.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 09:57 And they did eat of this Passover lamb, and they kept the feast of unleavened bread. So that follows the Passover. Technically Passover's a one day holiday. And then this feast of unleavened bread is a week. So they kept the feast of unleavened bread, seven days with joy. There's joy again. For the Lord had made them joyful. And he had turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. And probably that king of Assyria, probably more meaning king of Persia that had taken over from these earlier empires. And we think of the saints with the Kirtland temple and the great rejoicing and spiritual manifestations that occurred there in Doctrine & Covenants section 109. It's also interesting that happened around Passover time in 1836, and some of the experiences that they had with that rebuilding of the temple.

John Bytheway: 10:54 Wow, that's great.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 10:55 Or in their case, the building of the temple.

John Bytheway: 10:57 You just helped me. I was a little foggy about what's the difference between Passover and the feast of unleavened bread. And you just helped me. So the Passover was, you said like verse 19, a day. The feast of unleavened bread is a seven day week, but it's kind of centered on the same event of the children of Israel.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 11:19 They're both related to the Exodus, and we've kind of combined them today. When we use the word Passover, we kind of say this whole week long thing, but technically, if you look back at Exodus 12, the Passover is just that first night, the 14th day of the month. And then they start this feast of unleavened bread.

Hank Smith: 11:42 Jared, John, I found this quote from Elder David A. Bednar. Does this not sound like the Jews of old returning to the temple? Listen to this. He says, quote, "Returning to the temple is something we have prayed for and looked forward to with great anticipation. We rejoice in the opportunity to, again, serve and worship in holy temples. Even if our experience will be different because of constraining circumstances and additional sacrifices we are asked to make." He then quotes President Thomas S. Monson, who says, "Those who understand the eternal blessings which come from the temple know that no sacrifice is too great, no price too heavy, no struggle too difficult in order to receive those blessings. There are never too many miles to travel, too many obstacles to overcome or too much discomfort to endure." This feels like it could be said in 2022, or it could have been said in 515, BC. This anticipation of returning to the

temple, how interesting that it has such a direct parallel to our day.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 12:49

Yeah.

Hank Smith: 12:50

Let's get to the temple and find that joy for ourselves so we can feel that. I have a lot of joy in maybe a season two or season three of a season of Netflix, but I don't think that's the same thing the Lord wants for me, when he offers a chance to come to the temple. So I can see why they'd be so happy. How long have they been away? It's been over 70 years since the temple has been up and running?

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 13:13

Well, since it gets destroyed, it's a little bit less. But again, they start with the altar worship and then eventually expand to other things so many decades. Much longer than any Latter-day Saint absence from the temple in our day.

John Bytheway: 13:30

It's almost like a mini restoration. Especially, I mean, when I'm reading, Nehemiah, he's going back and going, oh, we're supposed to do this. Oh, we're supposed to do this and kind of rediscovering what they can do, because now they have the temple there that they couldn't do in Babylon.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 13:46

I think that idea of mini restoration really does cover a lot of what goes on in these books, because they're not just trying to rebuild a temple. They're trying to reconstitute a religious community. They're trying to reconstitute the priesthood. They have to check lineages. Today, we don't have priesthood by lineage, but we do by line of authority. And so we try to keep track of these kinds of things. But for them, it was of course of certain priestly families and Levitical families. And that's where I think Ezra particularly comes in, because he's concerned about a law of Moses and maybe picking up in chapter seven is when Ezra finally shows up in the story. Verse six, this Ezra went up from Babylon and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses. Now the ready scribe in the King James version means one who is expert.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 14:44

So he is expert in the law of Moses. So he's a scribe. Now it's interesting in the New Testament, we kind of have this negative view of scribes, because they're often antagonizing Jesus and his followers as far as interpretation of the law. And that's basically what scribes were, is they were educated. They were literate. They could study the law and they could interpret the law based on their study. And if you have a good scribe, then obviously you have good results. You have good teachings. And Ezra seems to be this expert in the law of Moses, a good scribe.

And he's treated, I think, in this book like a Moses. He's bringing the law to the people. It's emphasizing his priestly lineage.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 15:36 Now we mentioned that Haggai and Zachariah are mentioned in these books, but they have their own books that we'll cover later in the year.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 15:45 But this is a story about a scribe, Ezra, and a governor, Nehemiah. And so those are the two main characters here, not prophets per se, but Ezra is going to help the people follow the law. And if we look later on in Nehemiah 8, this is where we kind of get Ezra and Nehemiah put together. They show up together in this. Ezra is going to read the law to all the people that are gathered there. And so verse one of chapter eight in Nehemiah says, "And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the watergate. And they spake unto Ezra, the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. And Ezra, the priest brought the law before the congregation, both of men and women." So it's both genders are there to learn. And all that could hear with understanding upon the first day of the seventh month. And then he reads to them from morning until midday, et cetera.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 16:57 And he stood in verse four on a pulpit of wood, which they had made for this purpose. What does that make you think of from the Book of Mormon? King Benjamin standing up on a platform so that he can teach the people the law. And in verse five, he opens the book in the sight of all the people for he was above all the people on this platform. And when he opened it, all the people stood up and he blesses the Lord and the people answer, amen, amen. They lift up their hands, they bow their heads. They worship the Lord with their faces to the ground. And on goes this teaching of the law to them so that they could remember the Lord on his holy day, that they could remember the different festivals.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 17:47 This is around the time of what we call the feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot. And he's trying to make sure that if we've come back to this land and if we've come back to the covenant, let's make sure we keep the covenant. What's also interesting is they had elders and some Levites that help transmit and interpret the law to the general public. Maybe because of language differences. Some now spoke Aramaic more than Hebrew. Aramaic was the Persian language of the day. But what it certainly emphasizes is this centrality of scripture in the community, that there are people that can help to not only read the scriptures, but understand them as well. And so Ezra, I think, plays this

important role in helping the people understand the scriptures to kind of come back to the scriptures, come back to, like I said, the different aspects of the law with the Sabbath, with keeping the festivals and so forth.

John Bytheway: 18:53 I'm looking at Nehemiah 8:8. "So they read in the book in the law of God, distinctly," which footnote 8B says Jacob 4:13, which I remember is things as they really are and things as they really will be the spirit speaks with things as they really are. So they distinctly and gave the sense. So footnote 8C for gave the sense, says gave a commentary by the power of the holy ghost. It's what you were just saying, Jared, was that they're reading the scriptures and getting inspired commentary from them, from our leaders. That's a great verse, with those footnotes makes it even better.

Hank Smith: 19:33 Personally, I really like Nehemiah 8:7 because it lists some people who perhaps aren't prophets or apostles, but these are people who are teachers, and they're trying to help the people understand scripture. Anthony Sweat, and his book Seekers Wanted. He says this, "I assume that if you're reading this book, you are academically-minded. But to those who may be skeptical about turning to academic scholars for religious learning, I share the following from President M. Russell Ballard." So now Tony is quoting President Ballard. "Consult the works of recognized, thoughtful, and faithful LDS scholars." We have one of those right here. Jared Ludlow is a recognized, thoughtful, and faithful LDS scholar. President Ballard continues. "We should ask those with appropriate academic training experience and expertise for help. This is exactly what I do," President Ballard says, "when I need an answer to my own questions, that I cannot answer myself. I seek help from my brethren in the quorum of the 12, and from others with expertise in fields of church history and doctrine." I don't know. Someone like me, John, someone like Jared, those of us who do this, we like this part. Nehemiah 8 where these others are coming to help.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 20:56 Yeah. And I think it's a tool. It's a resource. President Ballard said when he has studied something and still has some questions about it. In other words, that's not the only source that he goes to, but it's a resource when he needs specific things. And I think that's where it can come in. I think we can swing the pendulum too far and say, "Well, I'm only going to listen to what the academics say and not study the scripture myself," or hear what the brethren say, because they're not experts in this. I don't think President Ballard gained his testimony of Jesus Christ through just going to somebody else's

commentary and reading it. For certain things, he gained his testimony through his own spiritual experiences and his own pondering and studying it out. But then for other things, he sought out these resources. And I think that's probably a good model for us that we shouldn't be scared of looking for other resources, especially when we have questions. I've been studying scriptures for many years, but I still don't know everything about all the scriptures and especially history and context and these kinds of things. And that's where these resources are very valuable. But of course, the scriptures are the primary thing first and foremost.

- Hank Smith: 22:19 Would you say that Jeshua, Binnui, Sherebiah, they see themselves as someone who can help you understand the law, but they don't see themselves as-
- John Bytheway: 22:28 As the law.
- Hank Smith: 22:29 Yeah. The end all. Yeah.
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 22:31 The law comes from God through Moses and now through Ezra, but they're just trying to help the people get a sense.
- John Bytheway: 22:40 I love that. They gave the sense of what's in there and taught it distinctly.
- Hank Smith: 22:45 That's something we try to do here on our podcast. Right, John? We try to help anyone listening to get the sense of what they're reading to understand what they're reading.
- John Bytheway: 22:54 Yeah. A companion to your study of Come Follow Me. That's what we're trying to do.
- Hank Smith: 22:58 Exactly. Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 23:01 We've been talking about Persia, which plays into the book of Esther a little bit. Could you talk about that?
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 23:08 Sure. Yeah. The book of Esther's solidly set within the Persian empire and again, the chronology of the kings is a little fuzzy, I guess you could say, because we have Ahasuerus mentioned in Esther and also in these books. Is it the same one or is it one named after him later on? But as you remember in the story of Esther, there's been an attack basically against the Jews by Haman, one of the ministers of the land. We've unfortunately seen throughout history, even into our day of persecutions, pilgrims against Jews, they've just often been treated as these

others, these outsiders, and as the scapegoats for problems in a society. The worst example of that of course, would be the Holocaust last century. So this is an example of that anciently, where they want to eliminate the Jews from the land. We might not have had Ezra and Nehemiah if they had been successful in that plan.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 24:19

But Esther comes on the scene and was born for a moment like that, and was able to reverse the plan and save the people. And so we see her very close to the king. We see Nehemiah later on, a cup bearer, very close to the king. Jews often were trusted and close to the leadership, but also people within the government were suspect of them. We saw this the same thing with the Babylonians, with Daniel, these contests between Daniel who's rising in power as an outsider and others from Babylon saying, "Wait, we don't want him." Trying to eliminate him. And so I think those dynamics are going on.

Hank Smith: 25:07

I think that's perfect when it comes to introducing us to Esther.

John Bytheway: 25:12

Jared, we've talked about this, I think before about the Apocrypha. You have written a book about the Apocrypha. I know the Doctrine and Covenants, there was an inquiry made about it and the Lord, what did he say? There's some things in there. You have to read it by the spirit, and even Esther ties into that. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 25:30

Sure. The Doctrine and Covenants section is as Joseph Smith is coming to the end of the Joseph Smith translation project. In his Bible, he has a section on the Apocrypha, which are basically, I mean, this is over simplification, but these are books found in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that we call the Septuagint that aren't found in the Hebrew Bible. And a lot of these end up getting transmitted down through the centuries, particularly among Christians. And so Joseph Smith's Bible had this section on the Apocrypha, and he asked the Lord, should I translate this as part of the Joseph Smith translation? And the Lord says, "No, it's not needed," but he, like you said John, does say there are good things in it. And if you read it by the spirit, you will find benefit from it. But then he goes on and says, "But they're also, not fabrications, but something of men."

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 26:23

And so interpolations of men and these kinds of things. The problem is he doesn't say which is which, so we're left kind of open. We need to look at this book and decide which are things that can benefit us, and which aren't. I wrote this book because there's sections about Daniel. There's another version of Esther, there's even another version of Ezra and Nehemiah. It's called 2

Ezra usually. So there's additional stories related to the Old Testament that show up in these later accounts.

- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 26:59 And particularly in the case of Esther, it's interesting because the later translators into Greek include a lot more about Esther's religiosity, because we don't really get in our King James version, which is based on the Hebrew Bible version, we don't really get Esther's reactions about here she is a Jewish woman in a foreign King's harem. And so she's among Gentiles, and we don't really get what is her feeling towards this? Whereas the Greek version brings that out a lot more that she struggles with it. It's not easy. She doesn't want to put on the crown just to parade in front of people. And she does a lot more fasting and prayer in the Greek version than we see in the Hebrew version.
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 27:44 It's interesting to see how even ancient Jews seem to have been somewhat a little uncomfortable with some of the aspects of the story of Esther. It's kind of addressed in this translation version of it.
- Hank Smith: 27:57 Beautiful. What's the book called, Jared?
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 27:59 The book is called Exploring the Apocrypha from a Latter-day Saint Perspective. So I try to just give a basic intro to each of the books in the common list of books in the Apocrypha. Some denominations will add another book or two to it. And then I try to, at the end of each chapter say, well, how could this maybe relate to Latter-day Saint teachings and doctrine? And so it's just kind of an introduction to the Apocrypha with the hope that then if people are interested, they can then go read these stories themselves and hopefully find benefit there from.
- Hank Smith: 28:36 Hmm. Well, wonderful. FollowHIM listeners are really good at getting books. It has the FollowHIM stamp of approval, right John?
- John Bytheway: 28:43 That's right. I remember speaking of the Apocrypha, when I had my economy Bible for my mission that didn't have thumb indexes, but you could buy sticker tabs and put on the outsides of the pages. So I'm putting all these stickers, and I'm just a teenager and I'm going, what's Esther. What's the shepherd of Hermes? What's? And that was my first introduction to the what are these? Hey Dad, what are these? And that's when he first told me, "Oh, well there's these bunch of books called the Apocrypha. And then I had tabs for them, but I didn't have them in my King James Bible.

Hank Smith: 29:22 There was a landmark talk, just a wonderful talk given by then President Uchtdorf back in 2009. I remember sitting in priesthood session and listening to this talk and just having it kind of seared into my heart. It's called quote, "We are doing a great work and cannot come down." Taken from Nehemiah 6:3. Jared, could you kind of set this up for us? What great work is Nehemiah doing?

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 29:50 Yeah. So this is Nehemiah with the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem, trying to strengthen the city and bring it back to its former glory, I guess you could say. And again, there's this local opposition, and verse one sets up, even names, three of the main leaders that are opposing this, including an Arabian, if you will. So again, it's not just Israelites, but others local, I would say, small, regional, political powers that are trying to assert authority over Jerusalem. And so they try to get him to meet with them. Come down into the valley. Let's just have a nice little chat here. And we don't exactly know what their intentions were, but I think Nehemiah sensed that it was not good. It just says at the end of verse two, "but they thought to do me mischief." So Nehemiah sees this it's not going to be good.

Hank Smith: 30:47 They thought to do me mischief.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 30:49 So he sends messengers instead. And that's where we get this phrase. "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?" And they tried four times to do this. And he keeps answering the same way.

John Bytheway: 31:11 I love that Nehemiah said, "I'm doing a great work." That phrase should remind us of another verse that was actually the theme for the young men and young women last year, Doctrine and Covenants, section 64, verse 33 says, "Be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work." And it's the same work in the restoration. And so yeah, the same work of laying a foundation for that. I see that with Nehemiah here talking about this great work he was doing to rebuild, in this case the walls around the temple, but that same sort of a thing. This is part of the great work.

Hank Smith: 31:48 Beautiful. That's awesome, John, I'm glad you included that. Yeah. I've always liked this situation and Nehemiah's answer. And then to hear President Uchtdorf create such a wonderful message out of that. John, I'm going to let you talk about it because I know it talks about a jumbo jet, and it talks about the war chapters in the Book of Mormon. This is a John Bytheway favorite, I bet.

- John Bytheway: 32:12 Yeah. I always love to hear President Uchtdorf talk about airplanes, because I love airplanes. And he talked at the beginning about a little warning light and a really bad accident with an L-1011. But the part I love, this idea of I'm doing a great work and I cannot come down. It reminds me of the Aaronic priesthood theme. The very first line, I am a beloved son of God and he has a work for me to do. Which is so great. I'm here for a reason.
- John Bytheway: 32:39 So in the talk President Uchtdorf said, "Think of the power we would have as individuals and as a body of the priesthood, if," this was a talk at general priesthood conference, "if in response to every temptation to lose focus or lower our standards, the standards of God, we responded, I'm doing a great work and cannot come down. We live in a time of great challenges and great opportunities. The Lord is seeking men like Nehemiah, faithful brethren who fulfill the oath and covenant of the priesthood. He seeks to enlist unfaltering souls who diligently go about the work of building the kingdom of God. Those who, when faced with opposition and temptations say in their hearts, I am doing a great work and cannot come down. When faced with trial and suffering, they respond, I am doing a great work and cannot come down. When faced with ridicule and reproach, they proclaim, I am doing a great work and cannot come down. Our Heavenly Father seeks those who refuse to allow the trivial to hinder them in their pursuit of the eternal. He seeks those who will not allow the attraction of ease or the traps of the adversary to distract them from the work he has given them to perform. He seeks those whose actions conform to their words. Those who say with conviction, I am doing a great work and cannot come down."
- John Bytheway: 33:58 So President Uchtdorf loved that little story. And do you know what it reminds me of, Hank and Jared? There's a speaker I heard years ago on a cassette tape. Teacher named Jim Rohn, R-O-H-N. And he said in the scriptures, we find examples and warnings. An example says, do what this person did. A warning says, don't do what this person did. And he said, the lesson is if your name ever ends up in someone else's book, make sure it's an example and not a warning. But this is an example. Nehemiah is an example. Who's a warning, Hank, in the Book of Mormon?
- Hank Smith: 34:35 Yeah. When I saw this, I knew you would bring this up. Because you wrote a book on the war chapters. Where is it? We're in...
- John Bytheway: 34:41 Alma 46 and 47. There's this Amalickiah, the time of captain Moroni who wants to be a king. And they're under the reign of

the judges, and they chase him out. Captain Moroni gets some of them, but not all of them out. Amalickiah goes over to the king of the Lamanites and persuades him to give him his whole army to go and march against the Nephites, force him to become a king. On the way, half the army, like actually the more part of the army kind of defects. And they go up to the top of the Mount Antipas and appoint a man named Lehonti to be their leader. And Lehonti says, "We are fixed in our mind with a determined resolution. We will not be subjected to go against the Nephites," which sounds like an example. This is awesome. Lehonti is strong and Amalickiah down below sees I got to have the rest of the army or I'll never overcome the Nephites.

John Bytheway: 35:29 So he sends delegations up to Lehonti three times, come down from your mountain, come down to the plain of Ono in Nehemiah words, which I think is funny. Ono. I mean, what does that tell you? Oh no. He says three times to come down and Lehonti will not come down. And Amalickiah finally says in the Book of Mormon seeing that he could not get Lehonti to come down off from the Mount. He went up into the mountain, nearly to Lehonti's camp. And sent again the fourth time an embassy to Lehonti designed that he would come down and he would bring his guards with him. So you've got this come down. No. Come down. No. Come down. No. So he goes up and says, basically I'm using some application here, come down just a little and you can just hear, oh. Come down just a little, bring your guards. You'll be fine.

John Bytheway: 36:20 And Lehonti comes down just a little and Amalickiah is cunning and flattering and says, "Hey, you're such a good leader. I want to be second in command to you. Bring your army down in the nighttime. Surround my army. We will surrender. I will surrender my army to you." And Amalickiah says, "If I can just be your second in command, because you're such a great leader." And oh, Lehonti goes from example to warning. He falls for it. And then the great phrase, not great because it's good but great because it's frightening and teaches us something. The servant of Amalickiah that administers poison by degrees to Lehonti that he died. So he got poisoned by degrees.

John Bytheway: 37:01 And so here's a warning. He did. He came down even, he just came down a little bit, but it meant eventually the end of his life. Nehemiah never came down. You know who else it reminds me of Hank is Jesus on the pinnacle of the temple, and Satan inviting him three different ways to come down, and Jesus never came down. So those stories, all kinds of applications fit together. But let's be an example, not a warning. Nehemiah is

an example, not a warning. That's what President Uchtdorf is trying to persuade us to do.

- Hank Smith: 37:32 I can see a seminary teacher, or Sunday school teacher, or a parent saying let's as a family compare Nehemiah in Nehemiah 6:3 to Leonti in Alma 47. Let's compare. Where did he fall? It's where he came down just a little bit.
- John Bytheway: 37:50 You know what's so interesting to me about that story, Hank, is that Mormon is an abridger, he could have said the servant of Amalickiah killed Leonti, and it would've been factually accurate, but he gave us that wonderful little phrase. I mean, poisoned by degrees. If I come at you with a javelin or a spear, you know my intention, but what if I come at you with a refreshing beverage? And that's why I love the story because it's so subtle that I imagine that's how they poisoned him with some sort of something to drink, and he didn't even know it was happening. Scary story. So don't come down from your mountain. Don't get poisoned by degrees.
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 38:30 I think that's a great parallel, or I guess actually polar opposite.
- John Bytheway: 38:33 Yeah.
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 38:34 We want to avoid. Sticking to what we know is right, and holding firm to that foundation, even with the temptations or the efforts by others to call us away knowing that no, I'm in a solid place. I don't want to get on a shaky foundation or sandy foundation, but just holding on to that firm foundation.
- Hank Smith: 38:59 Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 38:59 And I think seeing what we're doing is not just our Sunday hobby, but seeing it as we are part of a great work, the way Nehemiah phrased it, I think is helpful. This is a great work we're involved in. This isn't just this thing I do on Sunday. This is the greatest work we can possibly be involved in, President Nelson said, right, is the gathering of Israel.
- Hank Smith: 39:23 That's beautiful. So the next time you're tempted, just look at whatever that temptation is and say no way Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, I will not come. I will not come down to the plain of Ono. I know you want to cause me mischief.
- John Bytheway: 39:41 You want to do me mischief. I'm staying up here.

- Hank Smith: 39:44 You want to poison me by degrees? I will stay right where I am. That's awesome. What a great lesson. Jared, this has been fantastic. If I'm a listener at home and I've read my chapters of Ezra, Nehemiah, what do you hope my major takeaways are?
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 39:58 I think probably the biggest takeaway I get from these two books is this desire to have a religious community. They have to come back and reconstitute it. They have to reform it, both form it again, but also maybe to change some things that had crept in in the meantime. And there's certainly our personal worship and that's very important and vital, and we should try to enliven that every day, but there's also a community aspect to our worship. We're part of a broader community, both a Latter-Day Saint community, a Christian community, even a believer in God community. It can just look at all these different aspects and it's those interactions in the broader community that can help strengthen us where we can serve and love others. And I think that's what Ezra and Nehemiah were about. We're trying to create a community that can grow and be strong and support one another.
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 41:10 After this upheaval that had happened, they were torn away from their covenant land, from their temple. And so they had to figure out what do we do now, and how do we get some of these things back? So I hope each one of us can try to see what we can contribute to the community around us, whether that's our specific neighborhood community, whether that's the ward family or just the broader human family, what can we do to help others and to strengthen those communities.
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 41:45 And of course at the center of all this was the temple. And so that's a big takeaway I get from it, is as soon as they could get back there, there's some delays with maybe focusing on some of their own things or the opposition delaying things, but eventually they did get the temple rebuilt and made that a focus again of their worship.
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 42:07 And so when I think of my children, Jared, Joshua, Joseph, Marissa, Malia, their spouses, that's what I hope they always focus on is having the temple at the center of their worship. And again, it starts with a personal worship. If we're married with our spouses, then with our families, but then we're serving in the temple a much broader community, whether that's extended family, ancestors beyond the veil, or names that we don't even know, but that we can do service for. And that's where I draw strength from, participating in this wider work that's centered in the temple.

- John Bytheway: 42:52 I love that these chapters have become so much about the temple, because I just feel like as we look at the New Testament, that was the center of things. Here it's the center of things they're coming back to it. They're finding opposition and trying to come back to it. I love that part of the newly articulated mission of the church is live, care, invite, unite. Live the gospel of Jesus Christ, care for those in need, live care, invite all to come under Christ, and unite families for eternity. That temple component of it is so great. And it's never been easier to go to family search and find our own families. And I think that's part of the joy of it that you talked about, Hank, is because after our first time, it's not just about us, it's about others and uniting them together to their ancestors, which I think brings us joy. I love this focus today.
- Hank Smith: 43:52 Yeah. These two books mean a lot to me. As we saw the opposition they faced, it reminded me of what Joseph Smith said. And most of our listeners will recognize this. He says, "The standard of truth has been erected. No unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing. Persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear till the purposes of God shall be accomplished. And the great Jehovah shall say the work is done." They were able to rebuild right, Jared? They got it done.
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 44:39 Yeah. I mean it wasn't automatic. It wasn't easy obviously with all that opposition, but with the Lord's help, and that's one thing maybe we haven't mentioned is there's several prayers included within these texts where they praise God and give him thanks and acknowledge that it's through his hand, through his power, that they were able to do this. Like the Israelites in ancient Egypt, they couldn't have freed themselves alone. And they recognized that we needed God's help in order to be able to do what we're doing.
- Hank Smith: 45:11 Well said. Dr. Ludlow, this has been fantastic. I'm so glad that our listeners got to hear from you. Just so brilliant. I think everyone listening would be interested in your journey, that doctorate degree from UC Berkeley, and here you are an all-in believing Latter-day Saint. What's that been like for you?
- Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 45:33 It's been a fun journey. What I've appreciated about my opportunity for education is particularly when it comes to the Bible, members of different denominations and faiths, Jews, Christians, and even Muslims to a certain extent have studied

these stories for centuries and they've studied the historical context. They've studied the languages associated with them. And so there's a lot of gems, a lot of insights that I can glean from these works and from their efforts. And it just has enriched my understanding of scripture of what's maybe getting a little better sense of what's going on around the text, as well as within the text.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 46:24

And yet it doesn't come without its challenges, because sometimes these interpretations are different than what I've grown up with and heard in the church. And so sometimes it's a wrestle or working through figuring out how that interpretation compares with mine. And why do I believe this way? Or why does the church believe this way and so forth? But in that wrestling, I think it just strengthens overall my faith in the restoration, in a prophet who didn't have much educational opportunity, and yet could produce incredible things by the power of God.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 47:07

Now, one thing that I think has helped me, besides a very faithful spouse, Margaret, who is a strong believer and has a strong testimony of her own and loves to study the scriptures herself. I think it can be an occupational hazard in our field to only study scripture to teach it to others. And so sometimes I have to make a conscious effort that no, this is my scripture study time. And then I will study scripture other times for my classes, because I study scripture a lot in my job. I get paid to study scripture, which is kind of cool.

Dr. Jared W. Ludlow: 47:47

But if I only study it for what I can offer others, then I failed and my testimony can weaken, and I won't have that holy spirit strengthening me. And my wife often reminds me is make sure you don't just learn this to teach students and strangers, but that you are teaching your kids these things, too. And I do need to do a better job of that to make sure that I'm passing on some of these things that I feel are important that I'm learning and passing those on to my own family. And I think just being grounded in the things that all of us are asked to do regularly has helped me to maintain my testimony, to maintain my faith, to realize that if I just take a biblical scholar's word, there's another biblical scholar, that's going to have a different opinion. And so if I just place all importance on, well, this scholar said X, then it must be true. Then I could be led astray and feel like, well, what the brethren have taught isn't as important, or female leaders of the church. And so I try to keep devotional in my personal life and then study all of these aspects for my professional life. And then to augment what I study in my personal life.

Hank Smith:	49:14	Excellent.
John Bytheway:	49:14	It just made me smile, because sometimes I think when I'm studying to teach, like you said, I'm kind of like in the back of my head, this doesn't count as scripture study.
Dr. Jared W. Ludlow:	49:25	That's right.
John Bytheway:	49:26	Because you're just preparing your class, and this isn't the same thing. So I'm glad you said that.
Hank Smith:	49:32	John, I have a feeling, I had this vision in my head of me bringing this big book of scripture study and saying, look at all that. And he's like, well of course, none of this counts because it was your job. So let's... And I'm like, wait, that's all of it. What are you doing? He's like, and then let's see what we have left here. I'm happy you said that too, Jared. And just to have someone who has the education and background that you have say this boy prophet Joseph Smith produced incredible, incredible work. I think that is helpful for our listeners to hear you say, "Look, I've read, I've studied. What this kid produced is undeniably astonishing."
Dr. Jared W. Ludlow:	50:14	The Book of Mormon is incredible.
Hank Smith:	50:15	And this from a Bible scholar. That helps our listeners say, you know what, I'm in the right place. I'm doing the right things. So thank you.
Hank Smith:	50:21	We want to thank Dr. Jared Ludlow for joining us today. Wow. What a great day. I now feel like Ezra and Nehemiah are my friends, John.
John Bytheway:	50:33	They were doing a great work.
Hank Smith:	50:35	Jared did a great work for us in helping us understand these books. We want to thank you for listening. Thank you for staying with us. We want to thank our executive producers, Steve and Shannon Sorensen and our sponsors, David and Verla Sorensen. And come back next week as we study the book of Esther on our next episode of FollowHIM.
Hank Smith:	50:55	We have an amazing production crew we want you to know about. David Perry, Lisa Spice, Jamie Nielsen, Will Stoughton, Krystal Roberts and Ariel Cuadra. Thank you to our amazing production team.

HOW CAN I PREPARE TO GO TO THE TEMPLE FOR THE FIRST TIME?



- Hank Smith: 00:05 Hello, everyone. Welcome to FollowHIM Favorites. My name is Hank Smith. I'm here with the incredible wonderful John Bytheway. We are doing FollowHim Favorites where we take a single question from each week's lesson to talk about. The two books we're covering in this week's lesson are Ezra and Nehemiah. These are ones that I'm sure you've spent a lot of time in John, Ezra and Nehemiah. They talk a lot about rebuilding the temple. So the question that I get, and I'm sure you get it too, is I'm going through the temple soon, how do I prepare? What do you think I should do? What advice do you have for me to prepare to go to the temple? John, when someone comes to you with that question, what do you say? I bet there's a couple things you say every time.
- John Bytheway: 00:48 What I love from these chapters, before I answer that, is just how excited they were to rebuild the temple. This is, in a nutshell, there's the Babylonian captivity, well, King Cyrus says, "Let them leave Babylon." And they're, "We're going to go back to Jerusalem. We're going to rebuild the temple." I just love the feeling of excitement for that and discovering things in the Scriptures and trying to put that all together. I'm glad people are asking that question. There ought to be some great excitement for going to the temple. How do you prepare for that? You stay on the covenant path. You be where you're supposed to be. You tell your Bishop, "I want to go to the temple." For me, you show up at the sacrament table every week, that's a great way to prepare. You are prepared.
- John Bytheway: 01:33 If you want to learn more, because maybe you're a little nervous. What is that? We don't talk about it because we feel it's too sacred. If you're nervous about it, there's a book our friend wrote. Tony Sweat wrote a book called The Holy Invitation. I've given that to my students before who are asking that same question. That I think could calm any nervousness you might have about going, because it's something really to look forward to, expect to feel the presence of the Lord in such a wonderful place. The people who will open the doors and greet you will be so nice and so kind and so loving. When I was a

Bishop, I just loved it when somebody wanted to come and get or renew a recommend. I just always had that feeling, the Lord wants this person in the temple.

- Hank Smith: 02:21 Our friend, Matt Gray came onto our podcast when we talked about the ancient tabernacle, if you remember John. He had some great visuals. If a student comes to me or a young person comes to me and says, "Hey Brother Smith, I'm going through the temple soon. What advice do you give?" I usually say, "How much time do you have? How much time do you want to give to this preparation? If it's five minutes, then watch this little film. If it's an hour, then do this or that." We're going to assume you want to put hours in for preparing and not a 10 minute quick preparing. I'll give you a couple of things. John, you mentioned our friend, Anthony Sweat, he just gave a BYU devotional called We Need an Endowment. First thing I would do if I was going to go through the temple soon is I would sit down with that devotional and I would read it and listen to it at the same time. I would walk through it carefully because of what Anthony does there.
- John Bytheway: 03:17 Speeches.byu.edu, right? They could go find that.
- Hank Smith: 03:21 Yeah. Yep. Our friend Alonzo Gaskill has also written a book about 75 questions and answers to prepare to go to the temple. There's another few hours you can put in. This week we talk about the book of Nehemiah and how he says, "I'm doing a great work." That's part of what's got to be in your mind, is that what we're doing here is not something small something, "Oh, I just got to get this done so I can go on a mission or I just got to get this done so I can get married." No, what you are doing in that temple is a great work. Let me read to you, John, Nehemiah 8:6, "And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered amen, amen, with lifting up their hands and they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground." They are understanding that this is a great work that they're about to begin. They're getting a sense of isn't that what it says in verse eight, John, they have teachers there to give them a sense of what they're doing. BYU devotional from Anthony Sweat, The Holy Invitation by Anthony Sweat. I don't know if you know this, John, but he wrote another book called The Holy Covenants. The Alonzo Gaskill book and our episode with Matt Gray. So right there, you've got a few hours of preparation.
- John Bytheway: 04:41 You've got some homework to do. Yeah.

Hank Smith: 04:43 There's also one of my favorite YouTube channels made by a friend of mine named Daniel Smith, is called Messages of Christ. I would go and look up that YouTube channel and look up anything you can with the ancient tabernacle. What he's done there and we're talking millions of views.

John Bytheway: 05:04 Oh, they're beautiful visuals on there.

Hank Smith: 05:06 The tabernacle. Yeah. Solomon's temple explained. There's a video called Aprons of Fig Leaves and Coats of Skins. He's got the high priest and his clothing all laid out. He's got Yom Kippur all laid out. Man, if you could come into your temple experience understanding all of that, well you're prepared.

John Bytheway: 05:28 You're going back to an ancient time. I love what you just said, Hank, because that the Old Testament was the center of everything, physically anyway, was the temple, the presence of the Lord symbolically there. The New Testament, Jesus taught in the temple. Even after he was gone, where did the apostles go? They went back to the temple. It's so interesting to see in the restoration, how we got to build a temple and the Lord, "You got to build that Kirtland temple." And they get kicked out. They lay cornerstones at Farr West, they get kicked out. They build one in Nauvoo, they get kicked out. Brigham Young comes into the valley, sticks his cane down, you've seen the movie. "Here, we build the temple of our God." Job one, we got to build the temple because temple blessings are something you want. You want those, so I'm glad you're asking the question.

Hank Smith: 06:13 I would say this too John, when I first went through the temple, versus when I go through the temple now, it is a very different experience just because I kept going. I kept going and I kept learning. What's interesting is I found Ezra three to be a little bit more true now when I go to the temple than it was when I first started. It says, "They sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord because He is good for His mercy endureth forever 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." And they go on verse 12, "They shouted for joy." Verse 13, "They shouted for joy." The more I have been to the temple, the more excited I've become about the temple and the education I receive. I think when I first went, it must have been like a kindergartner going to his first day of class. Just kind of eyes up going, "Wow. I don't know if I'll ever understand all of this." And now, over the years, as I've just line by line, piece by piece, just like we get an education, I can say, "God is good. He is really good." More so than probably I've ever felt before in my life.

John Bytheway: 07:29 Yeah. Some of our listeners might know the name John H. Groberg. They've seen the other side of heaven. Well, Elder Groberg tells a wonderful story, a book he wrote called Refuge and Reality about being the Idaho Falls temple president and hearing people as they're leaving the temple, breathing a sigh and saying, "Well back to the real world." He said, "I knew what they meant, but something about that bothered me." And over time, somebody again, "Oh, back to the real world." And he came out of his office and he said, "Wrong, you are leaving the real world. Only that which is permanent is real. Here in the temple, this is the real world. That world out there is going to end. Come back soon to the real world." And they said, "Okay, thanks President." I love that idea of the real world and the eternal world is what you're going to learn about in the temple.

Hank Smith: 08:23 Beautiful, beautiful. We've given you a lot of homework. Go back to the beginning of this video, write down all those resources that John and I talked about and go through every single one of them. I promise you, you're going to be prepared as ever to go to the temple, put the time in. I promise you it's worth it. Now, you know what else is worth it? It's our full podcast. Come over and join us. It's called FollowHIM. You can get it wherever you get your podcast. This week we're with Dr. Jared Ludlow. We brought him on, he's an Old Testament expert and he's going to walk us through these two books, Ezra and Nehemiah. Then come back here and join us next week for another FollowHIM Favorites.