

## Engaging Gospel Doctrine (Episode 124.2)

### LESSON 47 (STUDY NOTES)

#### “Let Us Rise Up and Build”

Hook	Similar to the tree in the woods question... is a true statement or good action still true or good if it doesn't bring any benefit, or even causes harm?
Goal	
Overview	
Conclusion	

The goal is to be unfailingly constructive. What WORKS? Even if something is right and good, if it doesn't WORK there is no point

“True or good matter not, if ineffective”

What does “oppose the work on the Lord” mean?

Manual Goal: To encourage class members to help build Zion and to show Christlike love to those who oppose the work of the Lord.

EGD Goal: To encourage members to reflect on how to constructively share truth, goodness, and love

Effective: What are reasonable goals

To understand the post exilic period: Imagine your grandparents moved into a house that had been abandoned. It is in a rough neighborhood, but they do their best. Your parents live in the house, and it is where you grew up as well.

Suddenly your third cousins (the grandchildren of your grandfather's sister) come into town and say that it is THEIR house and they have the right to live there. Also, you aren't as good as they are. Also, you need to divorce your wife and abandon your children. Also, they are going to rebuild a structure at the center of the conflict that destroyed your entire city.

Timeline:

597: Elites of Jerusalem and Judea exiled

586: Jerusalem and the temple destroyed

539: Cyrus conquers Babylon

538: Cyrus issues a decree that exiles can return to Judea and rebuild the temple

539-520: Efforts to rebuild the temple are frustrated (almost 20 years)

520: Returnees begin to rebuild the temple

516: temple is dedicated

458: Ezra arrives in Jerusalem (128 years after it was destroyed!)

445: Nehemiah sent to Jerusalem to rebuild the city

Cast of characters:

Sheshbazzar: 539, initial return of the Jews. He is called a “prince” (Ezra 1:8), possibly son of Jehoiachin, was given the temple ritual objects (“vessels”) to return. He was possibly removed from power by Cyrus’ son Cambyses

Zerubbabel (530-522): Governor of Judea, possibly grandson of Jehoiachin (Sheshbazzar would have been his uncle). Disappears very suddenly, likely perceived as a threat.

Jeshua: First high priest after exile. He and Zerubbabel held sacrifices and festivals and laid the foundations of the temple but were frustrated in their efforts.

Haggai: 29 August, 520. Prophesied awesome things would happen if the temple were rebuilt

Zechariah: Prophesied 520-518. Seeks to encourage returnees, assures them God will soon intervene and take care of things.

Ezra: Seen as an ideal priest-prophet-scribe-Proto-Rabbi, sent by Artaxerxes (458?) to “establish the Torah” among the Jews.

Nehemiah: Cupbearer for Artaxerxes, high Persian official (also likely a eunuch, which is why he was unwilling to flee to the Temple as protection from his enemies (Neh. 6.10-14). Asked Persian king for permission to protect his city and people, so was sent as the Persian governor of Judah, came with authority and even soldiers.

Sanballat: Led the Samaritans in opposition to Nehemiah’s attempts to rebuild Jerusalem (they likely saw themselves as Jews and lived in both Judea and Samaria; Ezra and Nehemiah considered them an impure mixed race)

## I. Sunday School

- a. Introduction (we don’t really know these stories, no primary songs about this period of Jewish history)
- b. Review the historical context (timeline, cast of characters)
- c. Review the reading
- d. Lessons from the reading
  - i. Encouragement in the midst of opposition
  - ii. Validity of multiple sides (read my grandparent example)
  - iii. Overzealousness and priorities (mixed marriages, abandoning families)
  - iv. Nehemiah’s character
- e. Focus: “Rise up and build” In ways do we do this in our lives?
- f. Remaining “constructive”: How do we determine, or more challenging, anticipate whether something is/will be constructive?
- g. Discuss: True or good matter not, if ineffective
- h. How do we navigate differing conceptions of truth constructively?
- i. How do we navigate differing conceptions of goodness constructively?
- j. Other comments on constructiveness in relationships

- k. What does “opposing the work of the Lord” even mean? (Challenge the Ezra-Nehemiah marriage issue) Do we label people adversaries before we even know them?
- l. Conclusion I

Discuss applying the old to new situations (people who think the Bible has all the answers, how that works)

## II. Scholarship

- a. Return to the reading
- b. Controversy around rebuilding the temple
- c. Rebuilding the temple and the composition of the Pentateuch (Read Ska, 223-229)

## III. Study Notes

- a. Expectations and disappointment (Ezra 3) And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. <sup>12</sup>But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy, <sup>13</sup>so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people’s weeping, for the people shouted so loudly that the sound was heard far away.

Two sections from the Happiness Hypothesis apply: We can call this “the progress principle”: Pleasure comes more from making progress toward goals than from achieving them. Shakespeare captured it perfectly: “Things won are done; joy’s soul lies in the doing.”

People’s judgments about their present state are based on whether it is better or worse than the state to which they have become accustomed.<sup>9</sup> Adaptation is, in part, just a property of neurons: Nerve cells respond vigorously to new stimuli, but gradually they “habituate,” firing less to stimuli that they have become used to. It is change that contains vital information, not steady states. Human beings, however, take adaptation to cognitive extremes. We don’t just habituate, we recalibrate. We create for ourselves a world of targets, and each time we hit one we replace it with another. After a string of successes we aim higher; after a massive setback, such as a broken neck, we aim lower. Instead of following Buddhist and Stoic advice to surrender attachments and let events happen, we surround ourselves with goals,

hopes, and expectations, and then feel pleasure and pain in relation to our progress.<sup>10</sup> When we combine the adaptation principle with the discovery that people's average level of happiness is highly heritable,<sup>11</sup> we come to a startling possibility: In the long run, it doesn't much matter what happens to you. Good fortune or bad, you will always return to your happiness setpoint—your brain's default level of happiness—which was determined largely by your genes. (But there are many things we \*don't\* adapt to. (such as noise, lack of control, shame, quality of relationships)

Haidt, Jonathan (2006-12-26). *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (pp. 85-86). Basic Books. Kindle Edition.

(Also, our expectations powerfully influence our happiness. We could even say that dissatisfaction or emotional distress comes from the difference between our expectations and reality)

- b. What does "opposing the work of the Lord" mean?
- c. Authenticity and constructiveness
- d. Are there times we should intervene in a situation, even if it may not work/if the cost is high?
- e. Truth, Goodness, and effectiveness, take 2 (Jonathan Haidt)
- f. Legitimizing use of the past, relationship between past and present (continuity idea)
- g. Ezra-Nehemiah and mixed faith marriages (Purity vs. prophetic love, justice emphasis)
- h. What value/priority does building temples have? (applying the historical context) (Monson conference comment)

As I mentioned in April, when all the previously announced temples are constructed and dedicated, we will have 170 operating temples throughout the world. Because we are concentrating our efforts on completing temples which were previously announced, we are not at the present time announcing any new temples. However, in the future, as we identify needs and locate properties, announcements of additional temples will be made.

#### i. Conclusion II

Continuity between past and present (is real continuity important, or just the idea of it?)

Study notes: What is the value/proper emphasis on the temple? (going to the historical context)

How to compose a successful critical commentary:

1. You should attempt to re-express your target's position so clearly, vividly, and fairly that your target says, "Thanks, I wish I'd thought of putting it that way."
2. You should list any points of agreement (especially if they are not matters of general or widespread agreement).
3. You should mention anything you have learned from your target.
4. Only then are you permitted to say so much as a word of rebuttal or criticism.

<http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/03/28/daniel-dennett-rapoport-rules-criticism/>