

Summary Handout

“O God, Where Art Thou?”

Lesson

28

Summary

Scripture Summary:

Doctrine and Covenants 121:1–10; 29; Prayer and prophecies written by Joseph Smith the Prophet, while he was a prisoner in the jail at Liberty, Missouri, dated March 20, 1839. HC 3: 289–300. The Prophet with several companions had been months in prison. Their petitions and appeals directed to the executive officers and the judiciary had failed to bring them relief. 1—6, The Prophet pleads with the Lord for the suffering saints; 7—10, The Lord speaks peace to him; 26—32, Glorious revelations promised those who endure valiantly; 33—40.

Doctrine and Covenants 122; The word of the Lord to Joseph Smith the Prophet, while he was a prisoner in the jail at Liberty, Missouri, March 1839. HC 3: 300—301. 1—4, The ends of the earth shall inquire after the name of Joseph Smith; 5—7, All his perils and travails shall give him experience and be for his good; 8—9, The Son of Man hath descended below them all.

Alma 7:11–12; Christ shall be born of Mary—He shall loose the bands of death and bear the sins of his people—Those who repent, are baptized, and keep the commandments shall have eternal life—Filthiness cannot inherit the kingdom of God—Humility, faith, hope, and charity are required.

Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–19; Revelation given through Joseph Smith, at Manchester, New York, March 1830. HC 1: 72—74. In his history the Prophet introduced it as “a commandment of God and not of man, to Martin Harris, given by Him who is Eternal.” 13—20, Christ suffered for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent.

Hebrews 4:15–16; The gospel was offered to ancient Israel — Saints enter into the rest of the Lord — Though tempted in all points, Jesus was without sin.

1 Peter 5:6–11; The elders are to feed the flock of God—Humility and godly graces lead to perfection.

Supplemental Holy Land and Jewish insights:

“Sinking to New Heights:” A phrase comes to mind that may help explain the apparent helplessness of many of God’s choicest leaders, it is “sinking to new heights.” The Savior’s exquisite atonement for us has been somewhat foreshadowed or mirrored in the depths to which Job, Jonah, Nephi, Alma, Peter, Joseph Smith and many others, sank.

Learning to Focus on The Lord: The experiences of the Prophet Joseph Smith, like the essence of the Book of Job, really focuses on the Lord rather than on Job or any other individual. The agency that mankind was given allows a choice of following the Lord with progress that develops Godlike characteristics or of following our own inherent aptitudes and the less-than-maximum possibilities God gave us. “The Book of Job is the story of one man . . . his acceptance of the sufferings God brings upon him and his family. But the problem of the final meaning . . . of the book has over the centuries aroused a wide variety of responses. To some sages . . . Job is to be regarded as one of the few truly God-fearing men of the Bible . . . to others he was a blasphemer.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Testing Develops Patience: “Job’s patience in his suffering has become proverbial and the phrase ‘the patience of Job’ is used to refer to anyone with a great deal of patience. In the *aggadah*, most references to the Book of Job do not consider its hero to have been a real person. Job’s sufferings are considered to be a test rather than a punishment, and he is frequently compared with Abraham, who was also tested.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

How Does God Allow This? “One of the most serious challenges to religion is the problem of suffering. If God is all-powerful and good, as Judaism claims He is, how is it possible that He allows His creatures to suffer? This is not a new problem. The Bible is aware that suffering and pain are characteristic of human existence and many of the books of the Bible are concerned about the theological issues involved. The Book of Habakkuk . . . says that ‘the righteous man must live by his faith.’ This seems to mean that it is beyond the ability of human intelligence to understand the question and that man must have faith that God is doing the right thing . . .” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Suffering: “The rabbis of the Talmud believed that it is a great religious virtue to bear one’s suffering ‘with love,’ i.e., patiently and without becoming rebellious. “Whatever the solution to the theological problem of suffering, Judaism absolutely forbids inflicting suffering on other people and even on animals. Also, no man may ignore the suffering of others but must do everything in his power to help remedy the situation. This applies to physical suffering, to poverty and to psychological suffering. Furthermore, no man has the right to enjoy himself if the rest of the community is suffering.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Who Can Atone for Me? In Judaism today, there is a definite trend away from an atonement of our sins by someone else. Obviously, the effort to steer away from Jesus who paid the ransom as the atoner has amplified this. The LDS view is beautifully expressed as follows. “When the prophets speak of an infinite atonement . . . its effects cover all men, the earth itself and all forms of life thereon . . . ‘The word atonement . . . signifies deliverance, through the offering of a **ransom**, from the penalty of a broken law . . . expressed in Job 33:24: ‘. . . I have found a **ransom**.’ . . . Redemption from death, through the sufferings of Christ, is for all . . . righteous and the wicked; for this earth, and for all things created upon it.’ (Compendium pp. 8-9.)” (*Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, Pg.64*)

Scapegoat, Day of Atonement, Jonah: Jewish tradition indicates that a “scapegoat” was tied with a red ribbon and led out the “Gate of Mercy,” also known as the “Gate of Forgiveness” as well as the “Gate Beautiful.” It was led into the wilderness to “die on its own,” “bearing the sins of the people.” What is even more interesting is that on the Day of Atonement, the Book of Job is read in its entirety. Jonah’s account is a simple chiasmus - a lesson in opposition. Jonah was sent “up and north” to preach repentance. Instead, he went “down and south.” He went “down into the sea,” “down to his death.” Yet, he was saved. He came back up after three nights and three days. That was the only sign Jesus of Nazareth gave the Scribes and Pharisees of his Messianic role as their Redeemer, the author of the plan of Atonement (Matthew 12:38-40).

Message in the Names of the Temple Gate: The divine scapegoat, carrying the sins of the people is led away, in His mercy, He forgives us. Believing and knowing that is beautiful. After three nights, on the third day, He arose!

Jonah Sinks to Learn: “Jonah is known for the incident involving the whale, or large fish, but that episode is secondary to the lesson the Book comes to teach. Jonah learned through bitter experience that non-Jews are also God’s creatures and one must not begrudge them God’s love and forgiveness. Also to be learned is the fact that true repentance is accepted by God and earns His pardon for almost any sin.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*) There are a few “sea and storm stories” in the scriptures. Their meanings and lessons for us, nowadays, have a common connection. Noah is saved by the Lord, Jonah is saved by the Lord, the Apostles on the Sea of Galilee are saved by the Lord. When “sinking,” remember, we are saved by the Lord.

Peter Sinks to Learn: The worst experience Peter had was when the cock had just crowed. In fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy, Peter had just denied the Savior the third time. Then, turning and looking into Jesus’ face, Peter turned again and ran out into the break of dawn, weeping bitterly (Matthew 26:74-75).

Raised to New Heights: The next three nights may have been the lowest period of Peter’s life. Was this part of teaching the leading Apostle of the Savior’s great atonement? Were the three denials part of the experience to teach a “Special Witness” of what Jesus’ mission was all about? The Lord’s suffering had to be understood by Peter. How exquisite did this experience become as later the Savior allowed Peter to tell him, the resurrected Messiah, in person, “I love you?” Peter was being raised to new heights.

Chosen to Suffer: On one occasion, a professor of religion went to the Western (wailing) Wall, microphone in hand, and began asking religious Jews why they were chosen. One responded, “We are chosen to suffer.” Later, in making a point, about the suffering of the Savior, the professor said, “No one is chosen to suffer other than the Lord.” Yet, the difficulties, calamities, and sufferings of the Jews will ultimately bring them closer to the Lord who covenanted to remember and save His people. Our sufferings bring us closer to Him and those that have the highest responsibilities of serving Him often suffer greatly. They “sink to new heights.”

“Art Thou Greater Than He?” “And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?” (*Doctrine & Covenants 122:7-8*)

Daniel Rona, born in Israel and living in Jerusalem has authored Old & New Testament, Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Supplement Study Materials to be used in conjunction with the weekly LDS Gospel Doctrine Lesson study. NOTE: Three versions of the supplemental study materials are available FREE at www.HolyLandsRevealed.com. (Just click “LDS SUPPLEMENTS”)

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