

## LESSON 6: LEARNING ABOUT: ZION AND BABYLON

**INTRODUCTION:** Babylon was a city in the land of Shinar (present day Iraq). It has a history of being a great and notable city for many millennia before Christ. Genesis tells us that after Noah's flood men settled this area and began to build a city. (Gen 11:1-4) This city included a tower "whose top may reach unto heaven," thus representing man's attempts to reach heaven and the gods by their own power and wisdom. The Lord changed their plans by confusing their language so that the various language groups separated and scattered throughout the earth. Babel (or its Greek transliteration *Babylon*) became a powerful city-state under the "Mighty Hunter" Nimrod the Great. This man was a conquering tyrant king who sought to increase his empire by subjugating other peoples. The religions of this culture included worship of a female goddess Ishtar or Inanna, which brought the degrading practice of temple prostitution, and of a male god, Marduk or Bel, that was a king and warrior god. We see here the twin enticements of Satan's attempts to enslave mankind, power and pleasure. At one time in Israel's history, the nation of Judah was taken captive into Babylon because of their sins: they had not kept the Sabbath day holy, and they had worshipped false idols. Unlike the Assyrian nation that had captured the other 10 tribes 100 years before, the Babylonian captivity was not "hard slavery." There were no whips and brick making. The people were just relocated from the land of Israel to Babylon, where they lived for 70 years as subjects of the King of Babylon, (Remember Daniel and Esther, etc.?) before they were told they could return to Israel by the king of the Medo-Persian Empire, Cyrus. But guess what? They didn't really *want* to go back. Babylon was beautiful, lush and very technologically advanced in comparison with their simple lives before. They had businesses. They were prosperous. They were happy there. And so only a "remnant" returned. Every few years a few more Jews would trickle back under the influence of some man of God, but it is important to realize what God means when he repeatedly tells his people, "Go ye out of Babylon!" For the first 70 years they *had* to stay in Babylon. After that, they *wanted* to stay. The choice was theirs and they chose the world and all its attractions rather than the harder way of serving God. All of them never did return, leading to the "Diaspora" or scattering of the Jews through many parts of the Middle East and Greco-Roman world. In this lesson we will focus on what it means when the Lord tells us today: "Go yet out of Babylon." (D&C 133:5)

1. **Read 1 John 2:15-17, Jeremiah 51:6, D&C 133:1-5 & 14**
  - a. What does Babylon represent symbolically to the Lord? Cite verse.
  - b. What does the word "flee" imply about leaving Babylon?
  - c. In the early days of the Church, men and women could literally flee Babylon by joining with the Saints in their own city, and eventually their own state—Utah. They were separate. How can an LDS woman today "go out from Babylon" even though she and her family live in the midst of a wicked culture? (After all, the Mormons are not the Amish.)
  - d. How do we keep from loving the things of the world including the "lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes and the pride of life"?
  
2. **Read D&C 1:16** After the severe punishment of 70 years captivity, the Jews never again worshipped idols. Instead, Babylon itself became an "idol" to them. They loved Babylon the beautiful and Babylon the prosperous. Her fame had spread over the world.
  - a. What does the Lord say in this scripture that Babylon has in common with an idol?
  - b. How can a person tell if something has become an idol in their lives?
  - c. Why are God's people not supposed to "walk in their own way"?
  
3. Often in the scriptures, the Lord pairs the command to "go out of Babylon" with "be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." In ancient Israel, worship involved handling many vessels and dishes, for incense, ashes, blood, water, etc. This was the job of the priests and they were under the strictest commands to cleanse and sanctify themselves before serving in the temple. They were "consecrated" individuals.

a. We don't serve God with literal vessels anymore, but the phrase, "ye that bear the vessels of the Lord," is meant symbolically. Who do you think are the equivalent in our day of Latter-day Saints who "bear the vessels of the Lord"?

b. So, is the message to "go out of" or "flee Babylon" a message to :

1. inactive members of the church
2. lukewarm members of the church
3. active, temple recommend-holding members of the church,
4. super-active members of the church (think temple workers and leaders)
5. all of the above

c. Look up the word "consecrate" in a good dictionary. (Dictionary.com will do) What is the first meaning of the word?

d. The priests in Ancient Israel were consecrated, set apart for the service of God. Should Latter-day Saint women be consecrated?

d. How can you flee or "go out from" the culture of Babylon? (And might this not be a good thing to pray about?)

4. **Read Ether 8:16; D&C 56:8; 1 Timothy 6:10; Mormon 8:37; Helaman 6:17; D&C 19:26; D7C 117:4 ; 3 Nephi 11:29**  
Different principles motivate those in Zion from those in Babylon. These scriptures reveal some of the heart attitudes and character traits of those in Babylon, or "the world." List as many as you find.

5. **Read Moses 7:18; Colossians 3:15; D&C 38:24-27; D&C 78:3-8; Mosiah 4:13-16; D&C 70:14**

a. What are the heart attitudes and character traits of a Zion people? List as many as you can.

b. What do you think it means to "covet your own property"? (**D&C 19:26**)

c. **Read D&C 51:3** The Lord says he wants his saints to be equal in earthly things. According to this verse, what is His definition of "equality"?

d. There is a marvelous passage in 1 Corinthians where Paul admonishes the brethren not to be "puffed up ...one against another." Then to prove his point he says, "For who made you different, one from another? And what do you have that you have not been given?" (see 1 Corinthians 4:7) What if we *really* could realize that every educational or financial advantage, every talent, every blessing, was not *us*, but something *given* to us. So the talented athlete would not think, "I am a talented athlete." She would think, "God has given me great athletic talent." One is an *owner* of all she possesses; but the other is a *steward* over what she has been given. How would the two different mindsets influence what a person did with their life?

e. How can we help our children or others in our sphere of influence, to develop a “stewardship” way of looking at life?

6. **Read D&C 78: 3-7 and D&C 82:14-20** The Lord established the law of Consecration for what purpose?

7. Scripture records three instances of God's people actually succeeding in living according to these principles. Tell something about each of these three societies from the following scriptures:

a. The City of Enoch: Moses 7:17-21.

b. The Early Christian Church: Acts 4:31-35

c. Christ's Church in America after His resurrection: 4 Nephi 1-18

8. **Read 4 Nephi 1:22-27.** Describe the way in which the Zion society of the American continent failed.

9. **Read Jacob 2:17-19.** Can you think of an example of someone you know or know of, who has personified this scripture? (You may, if you wish, leave out names to protect the anonymity of people we know.)

10. Here is the American Heritage Dictionary's definition of *competition*:

1. The act of competing, as for profit or a prize; rivalry. 2. A test of skill or ability; a contest: *a skating competition*.

3. Rivalry between two or more businesses striving for the same customer or market. 4. *Ecology* The simultaneous demand by two or more organisms for limited environmental resources, such as nutrients, living space, or light.

a. How much of an influence does the spirit of competition have in our culture?

b. How is this a bad thing?

c. How is this a good thing?

d. How do all these definitions involve a lack or scarcity of something?

e. Is there a competition to see who makes it to exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom of God? Explain your answer.

f. **Read D&C 1:10.** What is the ultimate measure against which God will judge our lives?

11. The Laws of Consecration are explained in various places in the Doctrine & Covenants. One good summary is in D&C 42:30-42.  
a. List two or three key principles that you find there.

b. **Read D&C 51:1-6** From this section and the previous reading in Sec. 42, which verses explains the way in which people still had what we call "private property"?

12. The early saints failed to keep the law of consecration in Kirtland and in Missouri. They didn't attempt it in Nauvoo. In Section 105 the Lord releases them from the command to consecrate all their property to the bishop in Zion.

a. Read verses 1-13. What was the cause of the failure of the Saints to live the law of consecration?

b. By giving the people a Celestial Law, the Lord gave them the goal He wanted them to aim at. From verses 10-12, what was the Lord planning to do for them to enable them to progress to the point where they could live such a law?

c. The Lord does not require us to live the Law of Consecration anymore by deeding our property to the church. But he still requires the *principle* of consecration to be lived voluntarily by everyone who seeks exaltation. That is, he asks us to regard all we have as belonging to the Lord and being at His disposal. What makes this hard to do?

13. In Mosiah we read, "Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man shall not think himself above another." (Mosiah 23:7) We can agree that this kind of charity and equality in how we treat and view one another is difficult to achieve. **Read D&C 88:107.**

This scripture reveals the stunning reward reserved for those who are able to live this "law of the celestial kingdom."

a. What is it?

b. How does that make you feel?

c. **Read Mosiah 4:11-25.** In this passage King Benjamin explains the underlying doctrinal basis for thinking of all men as equals. It is not based on the fact that every one is the same, for obviously, we are *not* all the same. What then, is the basis for this doctrine of not "thinking [oneself] above another"?

14. CHALLENGE QUESTION: Under Communism, Socialism and other analogous political systems, resources are taken from some individuals and given to others who do not have as much, by the power of the government. The stated goal of these systems is equality for all. While many people have been fooled by the seeming compassion represented by these systems, church leaders have repeatedly warned that they are Satan's counterfeits of Zion. How then are they different?

15. What have you learned from this study of Zion and Babylon that was new to you or that is something you can put into use in your life?