Contemporary Comments on the Adult Sabbath School Lesson

[Title] "Worship: From Exile to Restoration"
[Text] Nehemiah 1, Jeremiah 29:10-14; Ezekiel 8; Daniel 3; Haggai 1; Zechariah 1:1-6
[Use] September 3, 2011

She certainly wasn't welcome but she came anyway. And she came with a vengeance. From the Caribbean to the United States East Coast, and as far north as Atlantic Canada, Hurricane Irene left a path of destruction.

The National Hurricane Center began to initiate public advisories on August 20. Evacuations began while houses and businesses were boarded up. Two days later, Irene struck near Puerto Rico at hurricane strength. When it made landfall on North Carolina August 27, it had been downgraded to a tropical storm—yet considerable damage was caused by its high winds and flooding.

Now that the storm has passed, we can see damage and destruction. The Caribbean’s monetary losses could be as high as $3.1 billion, while damages in the U.S. may reach $7 billion. And then there are the losses that can’t be measured in dollars—at least 44 deaths.1

Although Hurricane Irene is gone, hundreds of thousands of residents are still dealing with losses: loss of electricity, loss of transportation, loss of historic bridges, loss of roads, and loss of homes and businesses.

There’s major rebuilding to be done for weeks, months, and maybe even years ahead. A positive aspect from all this upheaval is that rebuilding will give the U.S. economy a boost. At a time when unemployment rates are high, and construction and building materials industries are suffering, it’s estimated that $7 billion will be released in new direct private spending. Many home and business owners will choose to build bigger and better the second time around.2

The Israelites also knew about destruction and rebuilding. They experienced it when the Babylonians destroyed the temple. And just as the East Coast has a chance to rebuild, God promised them that in spite of all the devastation, their nation would be restored, the temple rebuilt, and they would be given a second chance to fulfill prophecy.

The rebuilding of the temple—the place where the plan of salvation was taught—wasn’t quick or easy. Rebuilding didn’t begin for seventy long years. The actual construction took another twelve years. God had long been ready to rebuild, but the Israelites weren’t. Their own selfish desires and lack of dedication kept them from doing what they needed most—a place where they could worship God.

God had a better plan for Israel, but it had to wait until they were ready to follow that plan. Their future would have been completely different had they been trusting from the start. One of the most beautiful texts on trust is found in Jeremiah 29:11. These words were for Israel—and they are for us: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’ We have the benefit of learning from the Israelites’ mistake. We can choose to set self aside. We can choose to trust. And if we do, we’ll be spared a lot emotional and spiritual rebuilding in our own lives.
Additional resource: MSNBC

1. Wikipedia
2. Fox Business

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