Handout: The (Partial) Return of the Jews to Jerusalem in Cyrus' Reign

In this lesson, we will trace the return of some of the Jews from Bavel to Jerusalem and Judah after Cyrus' proclamation. This will allow us to see that many of the same issues that are live issues for Jews today were live issues for Jews 2500 years ago, as well.

 The return was led by Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:7-8): ז וְהַמֶּלֶךְ כּוֹרָשׁ הוֹצִיא אֶת-כְּלֵי בֵית-ה' אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיא נְבוּכַדְנֶצַר מִירוּשָׁלַם וַיִּתְּנֵם בְּבֵית אֱלֹהָיו. ח וַיוֹצִיאֵם כּוֹרָשׁ מַלֶךְ פַּרָס עַל-יִד מַתַרִדַת הַגַּזַבּר וַיָּסְפַרֵם לְשֵׁשׁבַצַר הַנַּשִׂיא לִיהוּדַה.

King Cyrus brought out all the vessels of the Temple of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought from Jerusalem and placed in his god's temple. Cyrus had them brought out by Mitredat, the treasurer, and gave them to Sheshbazzar, prince of Judah.

2. Many thousands of people went (Ezra 2:1-2, 64-66):

א וְאֵלֶה בְּנֵי הַמְדִינָה הָעִלִים מִשְׁבִי הַגּוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר הֶגְלָה עֲבוֹכִדנִצור (נְבוּכַדְגָצֵר) מֶלֶדְ-בָּבֶל לְבָבָל וַיָּשׁוּבוּ לִירוּשָׁלַם וִיהוּזָה אִישׁ לְעִירוֹ. ב אֲשֶׁר-בָּאוּ עִם-זְרָבָּבָל יֵשוּעַ נְחֶמְיָה שְׁרָיָה רְעֵלָיָה מְרְדֵּכַי בְּלְשָׁן מִסְפָּר בְּגְוַי רְחוּם בַּעַנָה... סד כָּל-הַקָּהָל כְּאֶחָד אַרְבַּע רְבּוּא אַלְפַּיִם שְׁלש-מֵאוֹת שִׁשִׁים. סה מִלְבַד עַבְדֵיהֶם וְאַמְהֹתֵיהֶם אֵלֶה שָׁבָעַת אֲלָפִים שְׁלש מָאוֹת שְׁלשִים וְשִׁבְעָה וְלָהֶם מְשׁרְרִים וּמְשׁרְרוֹת מָאתָיִם. סה מִלְבַד עַבְדֵיהֶם וְאַמְהֹתֵיהֶם אֵלֶה מֵאוֹת שְׁלשִׁים וְשִׁבְעָה וְלָהֶם מְשׁרְרִים וּמְשׁרְרוֹת מָאתָיִם. סו סוּסֵיהֶם שְׁבַע מֵאוֹת שְׁלשִים וְשָׁבָע אַרְבַּעִים וַחֵמְשָׁה. סז גְּמֵלִיהֵם אַרְבַּע מָאוֹת שְׁלשִׁים וּמָבִיהם מָאתַיִים

These were the people from the province who went up from captivity in exile, whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had exiled to Babylon, and they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town, who came with Zerubbavel, Yeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Re'elya, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvay, Rehum, Ba'ana....

The whole population as one, 42,360, in addition to their male and female slaves, these were 7,337, and 200 male and female singers. Their horses numbered 736; their mules 245; their camels 435; their donkeys 6,720.

3. This was a time of great joy for those who journeyed (Tehillim 126);

א שִׁיר הַמַּעְלוֹת בְּשׁוּב ה' אֶת-שִׁיבַת צִיּוֹן הָיִינוּ פְּחֹלְמִים. ב אָז יִמָּלֵא שְׁחוֹק פִינוּ וֹלְשׁוֹנֵנוּ רְנָה אָז יֹאמְרוּ בַגּוֹיִם הְגְדִיל ה' לַעֲשׁוֹת עִם-אֵלֶה. ג הִגְדִיל ה' לַעֲשׁוֹת עִמְנוּ הָיִינוּ שְׁמֵחִים. ד שׁוּבָה ה' אֶת-שבותנו (שְׁבִיתֵנוּ) כַּאֲפִיקִים בַּגָּבָר ה הַזֹּרְעִים בְּדִמְעָה בְּרְנָה יִקְצֹרוּ. ו הָלוֹךְ יֵלֵךְ וּבָלה נֹשֵׁא מֶשֶׁרָ-הַזָּרַע בֹּא-יָבֹא בְרְנָה נֹשֵׁא אֶלָמּתִיו. A Song of Ascents, when the Lord brought back the remnant of Zion, we were like dreamers! Then our mouths were filled with song, and our tongues with joy, then it was said among the nations, the Lord has done great things with these people! The Lord has done great things with us, we were rejoicing. Lord, return our remnant, like streams running through the Negev! Those who sowed with tears shall harvest with joy. The one who carried the bag of seed, walking and crying all the way, shall enter with joy, bearing his bundles!

4. They began to build the בית המקדש (Ezra 3:8-11) with much pomp:

ח וּבַשָּׁנָה הַשֵּׁנִית לְבוֹאָם אֶל-בֵּית הָאֱלֹהִים לִירוּשָׁלִם בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי הַחֵלּוּ זְרַבָּבָל בֶּן-שָׁאַלְתִּיאֵל וְיֵשׁוּע בֶּן-יוֹצָׁדָק וּשְׁאָר אֲחֵיהֶם הַפֹּהֲנִים וְהַלְוּיִם וְכָל-הַבָּאִים מֵהַשְׁבִי יְרוּשָׁלִם וַיַּעַמִידוּ אֶת-הַלְוּיִם מִבֶּן עָשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וָמַעְלָה לְנַצֵּחַ עַל-מְלָאכֶת בֵּית-ה׳. ט וַיַּעֲמִד יֵשׁוּע בָּנָיו וְאָחָיו קַדְמִיאֵל וּבָנָיו בְּנֵי-יְהוּדָה כְּאָחָד לְנַצח הָאֶלהִים בְּנֵי חֵנָדָד בְּנֵיהֶם וַאֲחֵיהֶם הַלְוּיִם. י וְיִסְּדוּ הַבּנִים אֶרָייִהוּדָה כְּאָחָד לְנַצֵּח הָאֱלהִים בְּנֵי חֵנָדָד בְּנֵיהֶם וַאֲחֵיהֶם הַלְוּיִם. י וְיִסְּדוּ הַבּנִים אֶת-הַיַּכָּל ה׳ וַיַּעֲמִידוּ הַכּהְנִים מְבָּלָשְׁהַים בַּחֲצִירוֹת הָאֵלהִים בְּנֵי-אָסָף בַּמְצִלְתַיִם לְהַלֵּל אֶת-ה׳ עַל-יְדִי דָּוִיד מֶלֶוּיָם אֶת-הַיַּכָּל ה׳ וַיַּעַמִידו וְהַלְוּיִם בְּנֵי-אָסָף בַּמְצִלְתַיִם לְהַלֵּל אֶת-ה׳ עַל-יְדִי דָּוִיד מֶלֶדְ-יִשְׁרָנִים אָרָהוֹים הַבּרָוֹ

כִּי-לְעוֹלַם חַסִדּוֹ עַל-יִשְׂרַאֵל!

וְכָל-הָעָם הֵרִיעוּ תְרוּעָה גְדוֹלָה בְהַלֵּל לַה' עַל הוּסַד בֵּית-ה'.

In the second month of the second year after their arrival at the house of God in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak and the rest of their brothers, the priests and the Levites and all who had returned from the captivity to Jerusalem, began the work. They appointed Levites twenty years old and older to supervise the building of the house of the Lord. Joshua and his sons and brothers and Kadmiel and his sons, descendants of Hodaviah, and the sons of Henadad and their sons and brothers, all Levites, joined together in supervising those working on the house of God. 10 When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites, sons of Asaph, with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David king of Israel. They sang to the Lord with praise and thanksgiving:

"He is good;

his love toward Israel endures forever."

And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

5. For some time they did not make much progress (Haggai 1:1-3):

א בִּשְׁנַת שְׁתַּיִם לְדָרְיָוֶשׁ הַמֶּלֶדְ בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁשִׁי בְּיוֹם אֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הָיָה דְבַר-ה' בְּיַד-חַנִּי הַנָּבִיא אֶל-זְרָבָּבָל בֶּן-שְׁאַלְתִּיאֵל פַּחַת יְהוּדָה וְאֶל-יְהוֹשֵׁעַ בֶּן-יְהוֹצָדָק הַפֿהֵן הַגָּדוֹל לֵאמר. ב פֿה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת לֵאמר הָעָם הַזֶּה אָמְרוּ לא עֶת-בּא עֶת-בֵּית ה' לְהִבָּנוֹת. ג וַיְהִי דְּבַר-ה' בְּיַד-חַנֵּי הַנָּבִיא לֵאמר. ד הַעֵת לָכֶם אַתֶּם לָשֶׁבֶת בְּבָתֵיכֶם סְפוּנִים וְהַבַּיִת הַזֶּה חָרֵב.

In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first of the month, the word of the Lord came through Haggai the prophet to Zerubbavel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak the high priest, saying: "Thus said the Lord of hosts, This nation has said that the time has not come – the time for the Temple of the Lord to be built. But the word of the Lord through Haggai the prophet is: Is it the time for you to live in your paneled houses, while this House lies destroyed?!"

6. This may have been because of the poor economic situation in Jerusalem and surrounding areas (Haggai 1:6, 9):

ו זְרַעְתֶּם הַרְבֵּה וְהָבֵא מְעָט אָכוֹל וְאֵין-לְשָׂבְעָה שָׁתוֹ וְאֵין-לְשָׁכְרָה לָבוֹשׁ וְאֵין-לְחֹם לוֹ וְהַמִּשְׁתַּכֵּר מָשְׁתַּבֵּר אֶל-צְׂרוֹר נֶקוּב. ... ט פָּנה אֶל-הַרְבֵּה וְהִגֵּה לִמְעָט.

You have planted much, but harvested little, eat but never to satisfy, drink but never enough for inebriation, dress but are not warm; the one who earns wages puts them in a purse with holes. ... You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little.

7. The work eventually got underway in earnest, and was completed in the sixth year of Darius (Ezra 6:13-18):

ּיג אֱדַיִן תַּתְּנַי פַּחַת עֲבַר-נַהְרָה שְׁתַר בּוֹזְנֵי וּכְנָוָתְהוֹן לָקֲבָל דִּי-שְׁלַח דָּרְיָוֶשׁ מַלְכָּא כְּנֵמָא אָסְפַּרְנָא עֲבַדוּ. יד וְשָׁבֵי יְהוּדָיֵא בָּנַין וּמַצְלְחִין בִּנְבוּאַת חַגַּי נְבָיָאה וּזְכַרְיָה בַּר-עִדּוֹא וּבְנוֹ וְשַׁכְלָלוּ מִן-טַעַם אֱלָה יִשְׁרָאֵל וּמִטְעֵם כּוֹרֶשׁ וְדַרְיֵוֵשׁ וָאַרְתַּחְשַׁשִׁתָּא מֵלֶך פַּרָס. טו וְשֵׁיצִיא בַּיִתָה דְנָה עַד יוֹם תִּלָתָה לְיַרֵח אָדָר דִי-הִיא שְׁנַת-שֵׁת לִמַלְכוּת דָרְיָוָשׁ

מִלְכָּא. טז וַעֲבַדוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׁרָאֵל כָּהֲנַיָּא וְלֵוָיֵא וּשְׁאָר בְּנֵי-גָלוּתָא חֲגֵכַּת בֵּית-אֱלָהָא דְנָה בְּחֶדְוָה.

Then, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar-Bozenai, and their associates, because of the decree King Darius had sent, diligently carried it out. The elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, son of Iddo, and they finished

building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia. This temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. The people of Israel – priests, Levites, and the rest of the exilic community – celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy.