

## THE PERSIAN PERIOD (539-331 BC)

### I. PRELUDE: THE BABYLONIAN EXILE (587-539 BC)

- A. Deported Jews Settled as Communities around Babylon
  - 1. Jehoiachin In Exile (2 Ki 25:27-30; Jer 52:31-34)
  - 2. The Prophets of the Early Exile
    - a. Daniel (Taken to Babylon in 604 BC; Dan 1:1)
    - b. Ezekiel, Ministered 593-563 BC (Ezek 1:1-2)
  
- B. Kings of the Neo-Babylonian Empire
  - 1. Nabopolassar (626-605 BC)
  - 2. Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC)
  - 3. Awel-Marduk (= Evil Merodach [562-560 BC]; 2 Ki 25:27)
  - 4. Neriglissar (560-556 BC)
  - 5. Labashi-Marduk (3 months in 556)
  - 6. Nabonidus (556-539 BC)
    - a. Ineffective Ruler
    - b. Forsook Babylonian god Marduk; Promoted Worship of Moon-god Sin: Temples at Ur, Haran
    - c. Spent 10 Years in Arabian Wilderness at Teimah
    - d. Belshazzar; Regent in Babylon under Nabonidus
    - e. Babylon under Pressure from Medes and Persians

### II. THE RISE OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

- A. The Medes & Persians: Indo-European Groups
  - 1. Medes
    - a. Became United in 7th Cent BC: Dominated Persians
    - b. Cyaxares (625-585 BC)
      - 1) Greatest King of Medes
      - 2) Alliance with Babylon vs. Assyria
      - 3) Expanded West into Asia Minor
    - c. Astyages (585-550 BC)
  - 2. Persians: Dominated by Medes
    - a. Achaemenes (ca 700-675 BC)
    - b. Cyrus I (ca 640-600 BC)
    - c. Cambyses I (ca 600-559): Married Astyages' daughter
  
- B. Cyrus the Great (559-530 BC), 1st King of Persian Empire
  - 1. Half Persian/Half Median
  - 2. 559 BC: Became King of Persia/Anshan
  - 3. 550 BC: Defeated and Became King of the Medes
  - 4. 539 BC: Babylon Surrendered Without Fight, Oct 12
    - a. Babylonian Gen. Ugbaru/Gubaru Defected to Persians
    - b. Cyrus Hailed as Liberator, Oct 29
  
- C. Darius the Mede (Dan 5:31; 6:1-2; 9:1-2; 11:1)
  - 1. = Cyrus?
  - 2. Confusion with Later Darius?
  - 3. = Gubaru (Greek Gobryas), Conqueror of Babylon

4. = Gubaru, Governor of Babylon

### III. THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS

- A. 538 BC: The Edict of Cyrus (Ez 1:1-4; 6:3-5)
  1. Jews Allowed to Return to Judah
  2. Temple in Jerusalem Could be Rebuilt
  3. Cyrus Cylinder
    - a. Clay Cuneiform Inscription Discovered in Babylon
    - b. Reflects Religious Toleration, Restoration
- B. The Initial Returns/Leaders
  1. Sheshbazzar (Ez 1:5-11) Prob. Led Small 1st Group
  2. Zerrubbabel (Ez 2:2; 5:2) Successor of Sheshbazzar
- C. The Rebuilding of the Temple
  1. Foundations Laid (Ez 3) by Sheshbazzar? (Ez 5:16)
  2. Opposition; Work Stopped (Ez 4:1-5 [vs 6, 7-23 = later])
  3. Revival Under Haggai, Zechariah c. 520 BC (Ez 5:1-2)
  4. Rebuilding Continued; Complaints to Darius (Ez 5:3-17)
  5. The Decree of Darius (Ez 6:1-12)
  6. 515 BC: Temple Completed Under Zerrubbabel (Ez 6:13-22)

### IV. THE EARLY PERSIAN EMPIRE

- A. Persia (= Iran): Ruled Most of the Near East Until 333 BC
  1. Also Called Achaemenid Empire
  2. Persian Royal Cities: Ecbatana, Susa, Persepolis
  3. Sources: Archaeology; Bible; Classical Writers: Herodotus
- B. Cyrus the Great (550-530 BC): See Above
- C. Cambyses II (529-522 BC): Killed His Brother Bardiya
  1. Conquered Egypt in 525 BC; An Army Lost in Sahara Desert
  2. In Persia, Gaumata Takes Throne Posing as Bardiya/Smerdis
  3. Tragic Figure; Stabbed Self on way to Remove Gaumata
- D. Darius I (521-486 BC): Ez 4-6; Hag 1:1; 2:1; Zech 1:1; 7:1
  1. Behistun Inscription: Trilingual Relief on Persian Cliff
    - a. Records Darius' Royal Lineage & Rise, Fall of Gaumata
    - b. Elamite/Old Persian/Akkadian: Key to Cuneiform
  2. Administrative Reform: Empire Divided into Satrapies
    - a. Provinces Ruled by Satraps; Army under Royal Officers
    - b. Inspectors, "King's Eyes" and "King's Ears," Kept Tabs
  3. Began Building Persepolis
  4. Standard Coinage; Royal Susa-Sardis Road; Postal Service
  5. Began Wars with Greece
    - a. 499-494 BC: Ionian Cities of Western Asia Minor Revolt
    - b. 492: Punitive Expedition Shipwrecked at Mt. Athos
    - c. 490 BC: Darius Crosses Hellespont; Battle of Marathon
- E. Xerxes I (485-465 BC)

1. = "Ahasuerus" of Esther, Ez 4:6
  2. 480 BC: War with Greece Stepped Up (Dan 11:2?)
    - a. Battle of Thermopylae; Athens Burned
    - b. Battle of Salamis: Persians Defeated in Naval Battle
  3. Killed in Palace Revolt
- F. Artaxerxes I Longimanus (465-425 BC)
1. 460 BC: Revolt in Egypt Aided by Athens
    - a. Megabysus: Persian General who Quelled Revolt
    - b. Megabysus Began Satrap, Revolted; Later Restored
  2. 449 BC: Peace of Callias with Greece
  3. Arrival of Ezra and Nehemiah in Jerusalem

## V. EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

- A. The Chronological Problem
1. Traditional Dating
    - a. Ezra: Ez 7:7 - 7th Year of Artaxerxes (I?) = 458 BC
    - b. Nehemiah: Neh 2:1 - 20th Year of Artaxerxes I
      - 1) Only Artaxerxes I had 20 Years
      - 2) Therefore Firm = 445/444 BC
  2. Alternative Dating
    - a. Nehemiah Preceded Ezra
    - b. Ez 7:7 = 7th Year of Artaxerxes II, i.e., 398 BC
- B. Ezra (Ez 7:1-10:16; Neh 8:1-10:36)
1. Ezra: Priest and Scribe (Ez 7:1-5; Neh 12:26)
  2. The Return to Jerusalem Under Ezra (Ez 7-8)
  3. Religious Reform (Ez 9-10); Reading of Law (Neh 8-10)
- C. Nehemiah (Neh 1:1-7:4; 11:1-13:30)
1. Commissioned Governor by Artaxerxes: 445 BC (Neh 1:1-2:10)
  2. Rebuilds the Walls of Jerusalem (Neh 2:11-7:4; 11-12)
  3. Nehemiah's 2nd Visit/Administration in Jerusalem (13:1-30)

## VI. THE LATER PERSIAN EMPIRE

- A. Darius II Nothus (424-407 BC): Contact with Elephantine Jews
- B. Artaxerxes II (407-361 BC)
1. Major Egyptian Revolt
  2. Failed Rebellion by Younger Brother Cyrus
    - a. Used 10,000 Greek Mercenaries
    - b. Recounted in Xenophon's Anabasis
- C. Artaxerxes III (361-338 BC)
1. Put Down Many Local Rebellions
  2. Judith may Relect Palestine During Egyptian Campaign
- D. Darius III (338-331 BC): Last Achaemenid King

## VII. PERSIAN RELIGION

### A. Zoroastrianism

1. Indo-Aryan Roots; Related to Hinduism
2. Zoroaster (Greek spelling)/Zarathushtra (Avestan name)
  - a. 7th Century BC?
  - b. Preached Worship of Ahuramazda, "the Wise Lord"
    - 1) Opposed by Angra Mainyu & Host = Daevas
    - 2) Helped by Angels
  - c. Revealed to Zoroaster through Angel
  - d. Ethical Demands
3. Theological Ideas
  - a. Resurrection and Judgement After Death
  - b. Trial by Fire; Apocalypticism
  - c. Heaven and Hell
  - d. Satan/Demons vs. Angels
4. Devolved to Complex Dualism & Polytheism in Persian Period
5. Avesta = Main Body of Zoroastrian Scriptures

### B. Mithras (= Hindu Mitras)

## VIII. JUDAISM IN THE PERSIAN PERIOD

### A. Jews in Egypt: The Elephantine Papyri

1. Aramaic Documents from Island in Nile Near 1st Cataract
2. Archives of Jewish Garrison There in 5th-4th cents BC
3. Contracts, Deeds, Letters Show Economic, Religious Life
  - a. Reveal the Existence of a Jewish Temple to "Yaho"
    - 1) Destroyed in 411 BC by Fanatical Egyptians
    - 2) Letter Requested Permission to Rebuild, 407 BC
  - b. Show Mixed Marriages and Religious Syncretism
  - c. Ostraca Mention Sabbath Observance and Passover

### B. Religious Developments in Judaism in Persian Period

1. Development of Strict Monotheism
2. Increased Emphasis on the Law
3. Development of Role/Office of Scribes
4. Formation of the Synagogue as Center of Jewish Life
5. Offices of Monarch and Prophet Disappeared
6. Emphasis on High Priesthood
7. Sanhedrin (Religious Council) Developed
8. Development of Exclusivism (Ez 9-10; Neh 13:1-3, 23-29)
9. The Samaritan Schism (Ez 4:1-3; Neh 4:7-23)
10. Theological Developments
  - a. Resurrection and Afterlife
  - b. Complex System of Angels/Demons
  - c. Messianic Expectations