

The Jews Under Persia

Ezra; Nehemiah;
Haggai; Zechariah

Where We Left Off...

DANIEL

- The work of rebuilding the Temple, begun as a result of the edict of Cyrus, had come to a halt.
- The last days of Cyrus and the reign of Cambyses, his successor, were times of disillusionment and adjustment for the Jews.
- Harassed by unfriendly neighbors, they found they had all they could do to provide for the necessities of life.

Haggai 1:2

DANIEL

2 Thus says the Lord of hosts, “This people says, ‘The time has not come, even the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt.’”

A Spirit of Defeatism

DANIEL

This was not shared by two prophets, who began to prophecy to Judah in the 2nd year of King Darius.

- Their names:

Haggai & Zechariah

Haggai 2:4-5

DANIEL

4 But now take courage, Zerubbabel,' declares the Lord, 'take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,' declares the Lord, 'and work; for I am with you,' declares the Lord of hosts. **5** 'As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!'

The Prophets' Words

DANIEL

- Stirred Judah to renewed activity, and the rebuilding of the Temple began in earnest.
- But at the instigation of the enemies of Judah and Benjamin, the Persian “governor of the province beyond the river,” Tattenai, made a visit to investigate the activities of the Jews.
- Any potential rebellion would not be tolerated.

Ezra 5:3

DANIEL

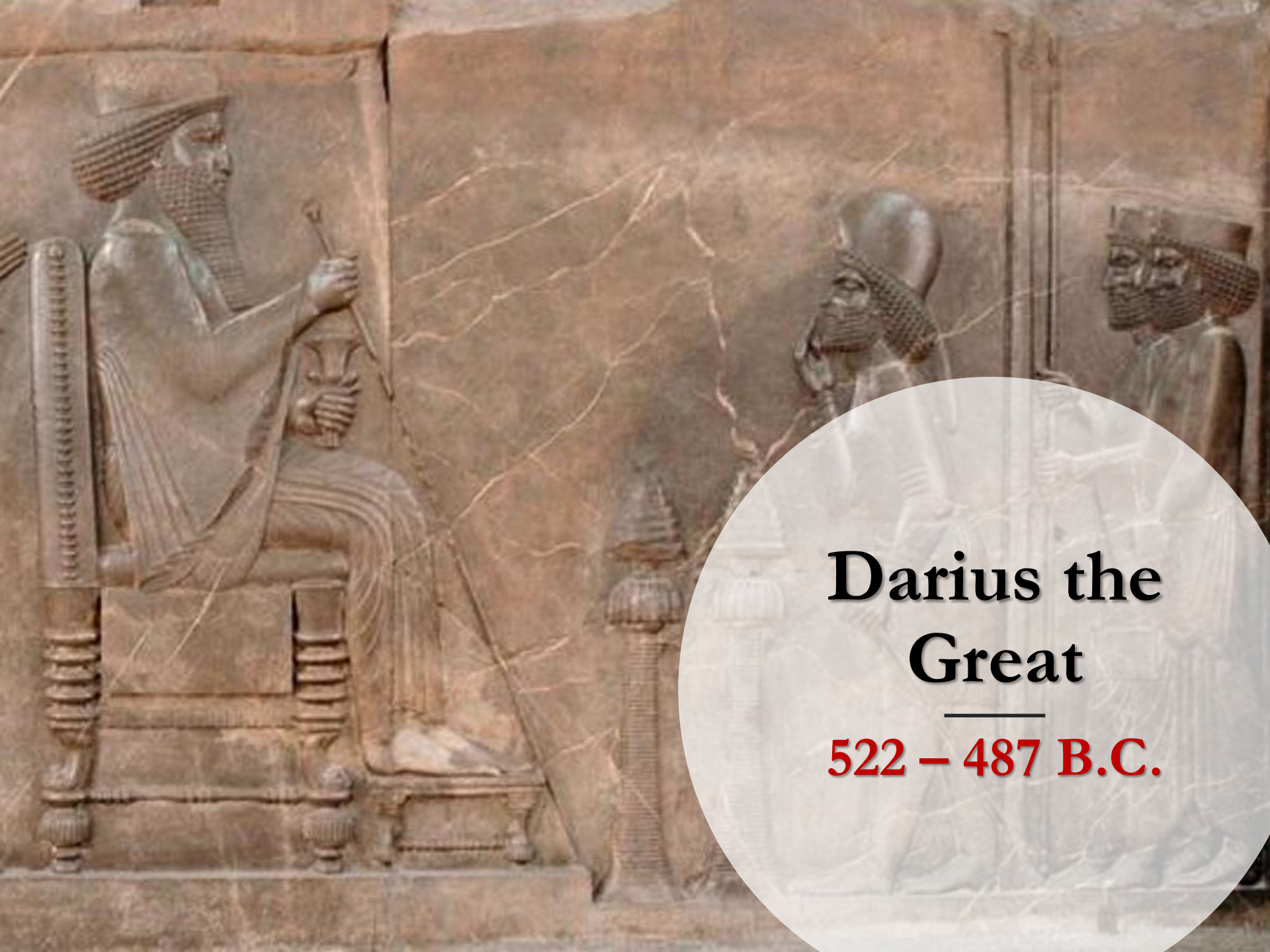
3 At that time Tattenai, the governor of the province beyond the River, and Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues came to them and spoke to them thus, “Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?”

Remember Exodus 1:8?

DANIEL

“Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.”

The Jews find themselves in a similar situation...



Darius the Great

522 – 487 B.C.

Ezra 6:1-2

DANIEL

1 Then King Darius issued a decree, and search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. **2** In Ecbatana in the fortress, which is in the province of Media, a scroll was found...

Look At

DANIEL

Ezra 6:6-12

Enemies Continued...

DANIEL

- To stir up trouble, but it is to the credit of Darius that he honored the decree of Cyrus and encouraged the Jews in their labors.
- And in the 6th year of Darius (516 B.C.) the Temple was completed, special dedicatory sacrifices are offered, and Levites were assigned their respective tasks.

Ezra 6:15-18

DANIEL

15 This temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar; it was the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. **16** And the sons of Israel, the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. **17** They offered for the dedication of this temple of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats, corresponding to the number of the tribes of Israel. **18** Then they appointed the priests to their divisions and the Levites in their orders for the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses.

Under Darius

DANIEL

- The Persian Empire reached peak efficiency in terms of administration.
- His civil government was a model of organization.
- He built a royal palace at Persepolis which ranks among the greatest architectural feats of antiquity.
- But despite his efforts, decay had already begun to spread through the empire...

Darius' Successor



- Xerxes I (486 – 465 B.C.)
- Succeeded his father at the age of 35
- He was the son of Darius and Atossa, a daughter of Cyrus
- The Hebrew form of his name is Ahasuerus

Xerxes in the Bible

DANIEL

- Ezra 4:6 –

“Now in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.”

It Seems

DANIEL

- Xerxes was too busy elsewhere (namely Greece) to trouble himself with the problems of Judah.
- And therefore, his reign was a period of frustration and disappointment for the Jews who were looking for assistance against their enemies.
- Xerxes does, however, make an important appearance in another OT book...

It is Xerxes

DANIEL

- That deposes the virtuous Vashti and searches the realm for a suitable replacement.
- That marries a young Jewess named Esther who, according to her cousin Mordecai, had “come to the kingdom for such a time as this.”
- Xerxes is swayed by Esther, saves the Jews’ from Haman’s unjust persecution, as he perishes on the gallows prepared for Mordecai.

What Jewish Feast
commemorates this deliverance
of the Jews?

Purim

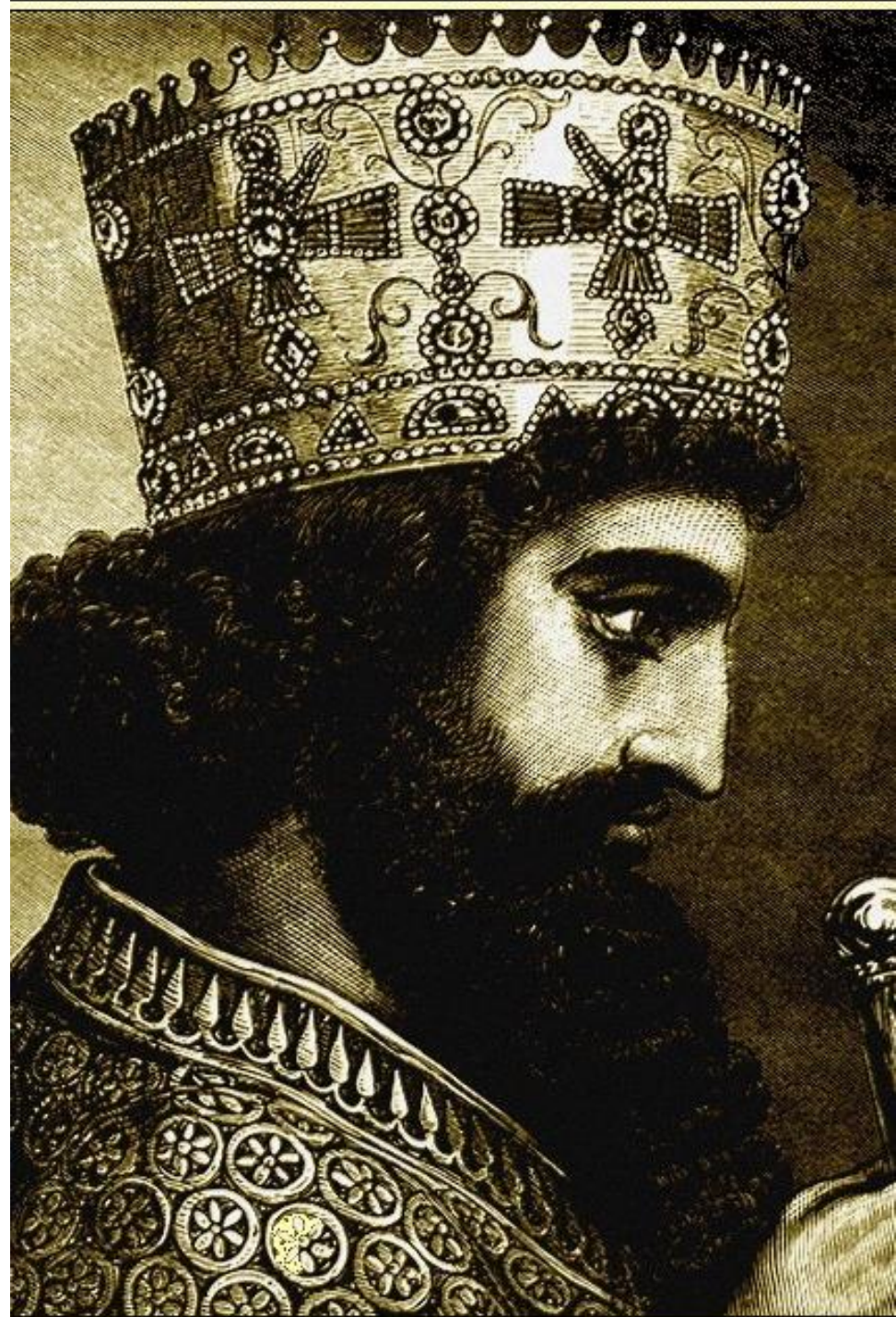
Xerxes is Assassinated

DANIEL

- By his bodyguard, Artabanus, who rules for several months.
- Artabanus is killed by Xerxes' brother Artaxerxes, who becomes his rightful successor.

Artaxerxes I Longimanus

- “the long handed” because his right hand was reputedly longer than his left hand)
- He ruled from 465 – 424 B.C.



During his Reign...

DANIEL

- A scribe named Ezra requested permission to lead a fresh group of Jews back to Judea.
- Ezra is called “the scribe of the law of the God of heaven.”
- In other words, he is the chief envoy for the Jewish community to the king.

Jews Were Prosperous

DANIEL

- In Babylon under Persian rule.
- Cuneiform texts detail extensive Jewish business enterprises.
- And so, worldly Jews would have little interest in returning to their homeland, however, the spiritually-minded Jew would have recognized the significance of a return.

Ezra Gathers 1,500

DANIEL

- In the 7th year of Artaxerxes I (458 B.C.), the group gathered gold, silver, and Temple utensils, and embarked on the 5 month journey to Jerusalem.
- They arrived on the 12th day of the 7th month, and Ezra lost no time in beginning his ministry.

Ezra's Ministry

DANIEL

- The reading and interpretation of the Law and its enforcement
- Dealing with the numerous “mixed marriages”
- He is also acting on behalf of the empire, so his decrees were binding both politically and religiously

“Mixed Marriages”

- Men who had returned from Babylon were frequently guilty of divorcing their lawful Jewish wives and marrying the women of the land.
- In pre-exilic days, mixed marriages had been a temptation, i.e., Solomon.
- Ezra cannot allow this practice to continue.
- Turn to Ezra 9.

Enemies Still Abound

DANIEL

- Ezra 4:1-21 records a decree from Artaxerxes commanding a stop to the rebuilding operations out of fear of rebellion fomented by Judah's enemies.
- Ezra 4:23 says that the enemies were emboldened by the decree and go to Jerusalem to stop the rebuilding "by force of arms."

Meanwhile in Susa

DANIEL

- A Jew named Nehemiah, serving as a royal cupbearer to the king, was grieved by the situation in the holy city.
- Artaxerxes apparently loved Nehemiah, and he gave him leave to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the broken walls of the city.
- With an armed escort, Nehemiah leads another group of exiles back to Judah in 445 B.C.

The Book of Nehemiah

DANIEL

- Records the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.
- Judah's enemies rebelled, and Nehemiah was charged with overstepping his authority.
- He ignores the charges and continues the work.
- Despite opposition, the walls went up, the gates were set in place, and the city was secure once more.

Ezra & Nehemiah

DANIEL

- Headed processions which moved around the walls in opposite directions, meeting near the site of the Temple.
- Sacrifices were offered, and the sound of rejoicing was heard afar off.



With Pomp &
Ceremony

- The people gathered in the Temple courts to hear the reading of the Word of God and to pledge their covenant obedience to the Lord.
- **The Feast of Tabernacles is reinstituted and observed.**

After 12 Years...

DANIEL

- Nehemiah returns to Susa to report to the king (Neh. 13).
- He had no sooner left Jerusalem than the old problems began to reappear.
- The enemies came back; the Levites did not receive the dues they were entitled; the laws of the Sabbath were forgotten; foreign marriages became common again.

Nehemiah: Part Two

DANIEL

- He accomplishes a 2nd reformation of the religious and civil life of Jerusalem.
- And with this, both the book of Nehemiah and the history of the Old Testament comes to a close.
- Malachi tells us that by about 420 B.C., the corruption of the land and the Temple had returned.

The Persian Empire

DANIEL

- Continued to weaken as Egypt and Greece overthrew Persian authority.
- Darius III becomes the last Persian king in 336 B.C. (probably “Darius the Persian” in Nehemiah 12:22).
- That same year a young king named Alexander ascended the throne in Greece.
- Darius would fall to Alexander, and the empire founded by Cyrus the Great came to an end.



Next Week

Problems and Progress in Jewish Culture

DANIEL