

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 65.2%

Weekly Readings will cover:

Sunday: 2 Chronicles 36:22 – 23, Ezra 1 & Ezra 6:3

Monday: Ezra 2 & Nehemiah 7:5 – 72

Tuesday: Ezra 3 & Ezra 4:1 – 5

Wednesday: Daniel 10 & Daniel 11:1 – 4

Thursday: Daniel 11:5 – 35

Friday: Daniel 11:36 – Daniel 12:13

Saturday: Ezra 4:6 – 24

Current # of email addresses in the group: 627

I hope everyone had a wonderful Sabbath and a great study week. We have now come to the 100th week of our study! Incredible!

For those of you who are current and have stayed with the program, I'm in awe! True dedication to learning God's precious Word!

Tomorrow you will complete another book as you finish 2 Chronicles!

Be warned, Thursday is a monster day as you take on the King of the North and King of the South prophecy.

Have a great week!

Current and archive of this reading program is available at:

<https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/announcements/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep>

The audio archive information is also available on our UCG Bay Area YouTube page here:

https://youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792?si=EA_tacLBfv1XR3jH

You may actually prefer accessing it directly from this Playlist tab:

<https://www.youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792/playlists>

3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 100

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

Day 673 – SUNDAY: June 15th

2 Chronicles 36:22 – 23, Ezra 1 & Ezra 6:3

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Introduction to Ezra and Nehemiah

We come now to the conclusion of Chronicles and the beginning of the book of Ezra, named after the priest and scribe who, as described in the book, led the second return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon. Just as the Jews had been taken into Babylonian exile in three stages, those who later returned to Judah under the Persians did so in three stages. The first group, under the governor Zerubbabel, returned when Cyrus issued his decree in 538 B.C. The second group returned with Ezra in 457 B.C. And the third group later returned in 444 B.C. under the leadership of Nehemiah, a Jewish official in the court of the Persian emperor Artaxerxes I. Nehemiah is the principal character in the biblical book bearing his name.

"The Book of Ezra does not name its author, but Jewish tradition ascribes the book to Ezra along with the books of Chronicles and Nehemiah. Modern scholars generally agree with this tradition. Despite some dissimilarities, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah form a connected work. The themes of the temple and the Levites, and the focus on lists, appear in all three books. In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are together as one book. Thus it seems that one author compiled all three books" (*Nelson Study Bible*, introductory notes on Ezra). "With such priestly interests, the one who masterminded this long document [with God's inspiration] may well have been a priest--like Ezra" (introductory notes on Nehemiah).

Ezra is the main character of major sections of the book of Ezra, yet he does not appear until the latter part of the book (chapters 7-10). He also appears in chapters 8-10 of Nehemiah. "Both passages are written in the first person and provide detailed descriptions. Such vivid descriptions point to an eyewitness as the author. It is generally agreed that these chapters at least were drawn directly from Ezra's memoirs" (introductory notes on Ezra).

The rest of the material is evidently a compilation from other sources--as Chronicles is. "The first half of Ezra records events that occurred

nearly sixty years before Ezra returned to Judah. If Ezra compiled the book, he had to consult other sources for those passages. In fact, much of the Book of Ezra consists of information obtained from other official sources: (1) the decree of Cyrus ([Ezra 1:2-4](#)), (2) the list of the articles of the temple ([Ezra 1:9-11](#)), (3) the list of those who returned to Jerusalem ([Ezra 2:2-58](#)), (4) the letter to Artaxerxes ([Ezra 4:11-16](#)), (5) the reply of Artaxerxes ([Ezra 4:17-22](#)), (6) the report of Tattenai ([Ezra 5:7-17](#)), (7) the decree of Cyrus ([Ezra 6:2-5](#)), (8) the reply of Darius ([Ezra 6:6-8](#)), (9) the genealogy of Ezra ([Ezra 7:1-5](#)), (10) the authorization of Artaxerxes ([Ezra 7:12-26](#)), (11) the list of the heads of the clans ([Ezra 8:1-14](#)), and (12) the list of those involved in mixed marriages. Over half the book of Ezra consists of official documents and lists. Moreover, the book is written in two languages. Most of the royal correspondence in the book is written in Aramaic, the international language of the Persian world, while the narrative sections are in Hebrew" (same notes). The Hebrew sections of Ezra are: 1:1-4:7; 6:19-7:11; 7:27-10:44. The Aramaic sections are: 4:8-6:18 and 7:12-26.

The compilation of various documentary sources helps to demonstrate that this is the recording of genuine history rather than folkloric storytelling.

Concerning Nehemiah, "many readers naturally conclude that the book was written by Nehemiah because of the words of the first verse, 'The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah.' It is widely believed that Nehemiah originated the following passages: 1:1-7:5; 12:27-43; 13:4-31" (introductory notes on Nehemiah). Ezra probably compiled Nehemiah's memoirs along with his own and other sources into his historical account.

Yet Ezra-Nehemiah "is not simply a string of historical facts about the returning exiles. Instead, the narrative shows how God fulfilled His promises announced by the prophets. He brought His people back from Babylon, rebuilt the temple at Jerusalem, restored the patterns of true

worship, and even preserved the reassembled community from fresh relapses into heathen customs and idolatrous worship. Through the prophets and leaders He had called, the Lord had preserved and cultivated a small group of returning exiles, the remnant of Israel" (introductory notes on Ezra).

The Bible Reader's Companion puts it this way: "The Book of Ezra, and then of Nehemiah, tells what happens when a small contingent of Jews returns to resettle the Promised Land. Despite opposition from neighboring peoples, discouragement, and even lapses into sin, a Jewish presence is restored in the Holy Land and another temple erected on the site of Solomon's earlier edifice. There, in a tiny district of what was once its own land, the little Jewish community struggles to survive and awaits God's promise of a coming Messiah, God's agent, who will see that all the ancient promises made to Abraham are fulfilled" (Lawrence Richards, 1991, introductory notes on Ezra). Indeed, the Jewish nation had to be restored to set the stage for the first coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Yet the restoration described in Ezra and Nehemiah was but a small foretaste of the great return and restoration of all Israel that will take place under Jesus Christ at His second coming.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah also provide inspiring lessons and parallels with the end-time work of building the New Testament spiritual "temple" of God, the Church, in preparation for Christ's return.

Cyrus' Decree

The book of Chronicles closes with the same wording that opens the book of Ezra--describing a remarkable proclamation by Cyrus that allows the Jewish captives to return to their homeland from Babylon, grants them religious freedom, encourages them to rebuild the Jerusalem temple and provides for funding of the move and reconstruction. Cyrus issued this decree in his first year ([2 Chronicles](#)

[36:22](#); [Ezra 1:1](#); [6:3](#)). "As Cyrus entered Babylon on 29 October 539 B.C., this was counted as his accession year. Babylonian and Persian scribes hold that his first regnal year over the Babylonians began on New Year's Day, 1 Nisan (24 Mar.) 538" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, introductory notes on Ezra).

We are told that God stirred Cyrus to issue this decree "that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled" ([Ezra 1:1](#); [2 Chronicles 36:22](#)). This has caused some confusion. God had foretold through Jeremiah that the Babylonian captivity and desolation of Jerusalem would last 70 years ([Jeremiah 25:11](#); [29:10](#)). Based on that, many assume that this decree must exactly mark the end of the 70-year period. Yet as explained in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on Jeremiah 25, the 70-year desolation of Jerusalem extended from the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple in 586 B.C. to the rebuilding of the temple in 516 B.C. There was also a 70-year subservience of nations to Babylon prophesied there--the length of the Babylonian Empire, from 609 B.C. to its fall to Cyrus in 539 B.C. [Jeremiah 29:10](#) states that "after seventy years are completed at Babylon" God would cause the people to return. This seventy could be the length of the Babylonian Empire--after which God would cause people to return. Yet notice that the prophecy did not specify *immediately* after. Given all this, to fulfill Jeremiah's prophecies, a way for the Jews to return had to come sometime after the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. and yet soon enough after to give ample time for the rebuilding of the temple by 516. Cyrus' decree in 538 is what began the process.

Moreover, Jeremiah's was not the only prophecy that Cyrus' decree fulfilled. For God specifically prophesied through Isaiah: "I am the LORD...who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built,' and to the

temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid'" ([Isaiah 44:24, 28](#)). God had also foretold Cyrus' overthrow of Babylon (45:1-5).

This particular decree of Cyrus is not attested to in any contemporary Persian or Greek documents. Archaeology has not as yet uncovered inscription evidence of it. That, however, should not surprise us, as hard evidence regarding vast numbers of ancient decrees--the overwhelming majority, in fact--has never been found. Most of the documents of antiquity were destroyed or lost over the centuries. Interestingly, this very decree had been forgotten within decades of its being issued. It was sought out and rediscovered around 520 B.C., as related in Ezra 6.

Nevertheless, historical factors attest to its genuineness. As *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* notes on [Ezra 1:2](#), "The formulation 'Jerusalem that is in Judah' is characteristic of Persian bureaucratic style." Moreover, the decree is consistent with what we do know of Cyrus and his policies as attested to in ancient sources. For on one level, Cyrus' decree reflected his patronage of religion and cultural pluralism in general. Biblical historian Eugene Merrill explains: "In the nineteenth century a barrel-shaped inscription which records Cyrus the Great's decree authorizing captive peoples in Babylonia to return to their places of origin was discovered. This inscription [known as the Cyrus Cylinder, currently housed in the British Museum] was primarily a propaganda piece designed to demonstrate that Cyrus had been called by Marduk, god of Babylon, and that his rule there and over all the earth was at the behest of the gods" (*Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 1987, p. 491).

Indeed, as Merrill also relates, "one reason for the ready capitulation of Babylon to Cyrus was the bitter antagonism that the Babylonians felt toward Nabonidus and his son [Belshazzar] for their anti-Marduk religious posture. Cyrus had already gained a reputation as an enlightened ruler who was extremely lenient and eclectic in his viewpoint. He maintained the status quo in lands which fell to his

control, at least as much as he could without jeopardizing his sovereignty. One feature of his policy was to recognize the claims of native gods over their followers and to make no effort to supplant them with gods of his own. In fact, he [supposedly] came to Babylon at the express wishes of Marduk himself, since Marduk had become angry at Nabonidus's irreverence and wished to replace him with another king, a shepherd who would more faithfully tend Marduk's human flock. That shepherd, of course, was Cyrus" (p. 480). "One cannot deny the political and psychological genius of the man; indeed, his policy of permitting aliens to return to their homelands and to establish self-rule within the larger structure of the empire was nothing short of brilliant" (p. 491).

"Cyrus's enlightened policy also had direct bearing on the plight of the exilic Jewish community in Babylonia, for Cyrus accorded to Yahweh, their God, the same deference he paid to Marduk and all other deities. A logical outgrowth of this policy was his decree that the Jews be allowed to return to their homeland. Only in a restored temple in Jerusalem could Yahweh function effectively as the God of Judah. And so, in eager solicitation of the favor of Yahweh, Cyrus repatriated the Jewish people and provided them with the authorization and wherewithal to rebuild their city and temple as a fitting place for their God" (p. 480).

The Nelson Study Bible further suggests that "Cyrus's decrees might have been part of a clever military strategy. At this point, he had not yet conquered Egypt. A strong settlement of loyal people between him and the Egyptians would have been wise. This was a novel political policy; for the first time in hundreds of years, a king permitted a subjected people to return to their homeland" ("INDepth: Cyrus, the King of Persia," comments on Ezra 1).

Of course, there was more to it than all that. The same source goes on to say, "But the point of [the] Scriptures is to assert that God was at work through this powerful ruler of the ancient world." The Bible, in

fact, explicitly states that God stirred Cyrus' spirit to issue the proclamation ([2 Chronicles 36:22](#); [Ezra 1:1](#)). While this could mean that God simply gave Cyrus a nudge to do what he was already likely to do anyway, it may well indicate--especially given the specific prophecies of Cyrus--that God had been working behind the scenes in Cyrus' life and in Medo-Persian politics in such a way that caused the king to adopt the outlook he had.

Moreover, it appears that Cyrus' proclamation regarding the Jews was specially inspired. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus says that God's command regarding Cyrus' rebuilding of the temple "was known to Cyrus by his reading the book which Isaiah left behind him of his prophecies.... Accordingly, when Cyrus read this, and admired the Divine power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfill what was so written" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, chap. 1, sec. 2). Indeed, it seems that Cyrus would have to have seen these prophecies in order to fulfill God's words in Isaiah. Speaking directly to Cyrus (45:1), God says He will give the king victory and treasures "that you may know that I, the LORD, who call you by your name [long before your birth], am the God of Israel" (verse 3). For this to make sense--for Cyrus to know from these words in the book of Isaiah that he was personally named in advance and for this to serve as a proof to him of God's divinity--the king must have personally read these words or listened to someone reading them to him.

"What role Daniel may have played in all this is unclear, but one cannot help feeling that it was major" (Merrill, p. 492). Daniel was now the prime minister of Babylonia serving under Cyrus' deputy king and governor Darius. There is no question that Daniel would have had contact with Cyrus. Indeed, it is almost certain that Cyrus had heard all about the recent episode with the lions' den. Would not Cyrus have inquired of Daniel regarding his religion? It seems rather likely that Daniel would then have shown the king that he was directly foretold in

Scripture. Indeed, Daniel may have gone further and pointed out the prophecies of Jeremiah regarding the Jewish return and the return of the temple vessels and utensils.

"We know that the Persian kings paid close heed to prophecies: Cambyses to Egyptian oracles, Darius and Xerxes to Greek oracles (*Herodotus* 8.133; 9.42, 151)" (*Expositor's*, note on [Ezra 1:1](#)). How much more closely would Cyrus have paid heed after staring at his own name in a prophecy written down about 150 years earlier--part of which had already been fulfilled? He would have been utterly astounded. And it seems most likely that he would have been motivated to act accordingly--"stirred" in his spirit by the Word of God.

Still, "no one should read into the accounts that Cyrus had become a worshiper of Yahweh; he was no more a worshiper of Yahweh than Nebuchadnezzar had been when he extolled Yahweh before Daniel. Both were syncretists who were willing for reasons of politics [and lack of full biblical and spiritual understanding] to welcome any new god into their respective pantheons. One cannot deny, however, that both were under the control of the sovereign God of heaven and earth who used them, witting or not, to achieve his holy purposes" (Merrill, p. 492).

First Return Under Sheshbazzar

God stirred the spirits of others too--causing a number of the Jews to enlist in the return to Judah (verse 5). Notice that the returning captives are described as being "of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites" (same verse). The return from captivity was not a return of all 12 tribes of Israel, as many today maintain. Rather, it was simply of those of the nation of Judah who had been taken captive by the Babylonians. In fact, we see in Ezra and Nehemiah that only a small portion of the Jewish people returned--those specially stirred by God.

This parallels the experience of Christians, who must be specially drawn by God (see [John 6:44](#)).

Why would the vast majority of Jews choose to remain in Babylon? Josephus remarks: "Yet did many of them stay at Babylon, as not willing to leave their possessions" (sec. 3). *Expositor's* comments: "A fascinating light on the Jews in Mesopotamia is shed by the Murashu tablets. In 1893, 730 inscribed clay tablets were found at Nippur.... The archive dates from the reigns of Artaxerxes I (464-424) and Darius II (423-404). Murashu and sons were wealthy bankers and brokers who loaned out almost any thing for a price. Among their customers are listed about sixty Jewish names from the time of Artaxerxes I and forty from the time of Darius II. These appear as contracting parties, agents, witnesses, collectors of taxes, and royal officials. There seems to have been no social or commercial barriers between the Jews and the Babylonians. Their prosperous situation may explain why some chose to remain in Mesopotamia. With the birth of a second and a third generation, many Jews established roots in Mesopotamia" (introductory notes on Ezra).

However, we should not be quick to fault everyone who remained. God did not stir them up as He did the others. It was evidently in His ultimate purpose that most *not* return to the Promised Land at that time. The Jewish Diaspora (Dispersion) through other countries caused by the exile provided the basis for a widespread Judaism-which would later provide a foundation for a widespread Christianity. We should also note that many of those who did not return at that time nevertheless supported those returning with gifts (1:4).

In [Ezra 1:8](#), Cyrus commits the Jerusalem temple articles to "Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah." And in verse 11 we see that this Sheshbazzar takes them with the captives in the return to Jerusalem. In an official letter to a later Persian emperor, Sheshbazzar is named as the governor of Judah and the one who lays the foundation of the

Jerusalem temple (5:14, 16). Yet earlier in the same chapter, the one who, along with the priest Jeshua or Joshua, "began to build the house of God" is Zerubbabel (verse 2; see 3:8-11). Zerubbabel and Jeshua had earlier been the ones to build the altar to God upon first arriving in the Promised Land (3:2). Zerubbabel is shown to be the leader of the first return in [Ezra 2:2](#). As the grandson of the former Jewish king Jeconiah (see [1 Chronicles 3:17-19](#)), Zerubbabel could properly be referred to as the prince of Judah.

Given all this, Sheshbazzar seems to be one and the same with Zerubbabel. While other possibilities are offered, this one seems to make the most sense: "The name Sheshbazzar occurs only in two passages...both related to official Persian actions. On the other hand, the name Zerubbabel is used in passages related to Jewish activity.... It is possible that Sheshbazzar was a name by which Zerubbabel was known in Persian circles" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 8).

Regarding the returned temple articles, "the separate items listed in vv. 9, 10 total 2,499. However, the total for all the articles given in v. 11 is 5,400. Probably vv. 9, 10 list only the larger and more important items that were transported back to Jerusalem" (note on verses 9-11).

Note the detailed cataloging and careful preservation of these items. As suggested earlier in the *Beyond Today Bible Commentary*, it seems likely that Daniel had a hand in this--as a high official of both Babylon and Persia. Yet of course the one mainly responsible was God. He was bringing to pass what He had foretold in [Jeremiah 27:22](#)--that the temple articles would be returned after Babylon's fall.

In the next chapter we will see a listing of the nearly 50,000 people who returned to Judea at this time. The journey probably took about three and a half to four months, as this is how long Ezra's group would later take (compare [Ezra 7:9](#); [8:31](#)). Historian Werner Keller writes in his book *The Bible as History* (1981, p. 302): "We can vividly imagine their

journey into the land west of the Jordan. Almost 800 miles have to be covered between Babylon and distant Jerusalem, with the clouds of dust churned up by the caravan as a faithful companion throughout the whole journey. One day they would pass the site of old Mari. They would reach the spot where, on the opposite side of the river, the Balikh, on whose lower reaches Haran was situated, enters the Euphrates. From then on the returning exiles were following the same track which had been taken by Abraham 1,400 years earlier, when he left the land of his fathers to go to Canaan, via Damascus and along the foot of Hermon to the Lake of Galilee. Then came the day when from among the brown peaks of the mountains of Judah the desolate ruins of the city of Zion rose before their eyes-it was Jerusalem. What fateful significance this journey had for the generations that were still to come!" [END]

Day 674 – MONDAY: June 16th

Ezra 2 & Nehemiah 7:5 – 72

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Ezra 2 lists those Jews enrolled in the return to the Promised Land under the Davidic prince Zerubbabel (apparently the Persian-appointed governor referred to in Ezra 1 as Sheshbazzar) and Jeshua or Joshua, the high priest (see [Haggai 1:1](#); [Zechariah 3:1](#)). Nearly a century later, Nehemiah finds a register of those in the first return. While the lists are nearly the same, they are not exactly the same. How do we account for the discrepancies?

The Nelson Study Bible comments: "*The people of the province* [[Ezra 2:1](#)] refers to the Jewish people of Judah (see 5:8; [Neh. 1:2](#), [3](#); [11:3](#)). The use of this phrase probably indicates that the register of ch[apter] 2 was compiled in Babylon. Nehemiah's list in [Neh. 7:4-73](#) would have been compiled after he arrived in Jerusalem, which could account for some of the differences between the two registers."

Ezra's list gives the number of the family of Arah as 775 (2:5). The list in Nehemiah says the number was 652. *Jamiesson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary* states in its note on [Ezra 2:5](#): "It is probable that all mentioned as belonging to this family repaired to the general place of rendezvous, or had enrolled their names at first as intending to go; but in the interval of preparation, some died, others were prevented by some sickness or insurmountable obstacles, so that ultimately no more than 652 came to Jerusalem."

The same commentary later notes on the variations in general: "The discrepancy is sufficiently accounted for from the different circumstances in which the two registers were taken: that of Ezra having been made up at Babylon, while that of Nehemiah was drawn out in Judea, after the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt. The lapse of so many years might well be expected to make a difference appear in the catalogue, through death or other causes" (note on [Nehemiah 7:5](#)).

"To be sure," says Gleason Archer in his *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, "regardless of the date when Nehemiah recorded this list (ca. 445 B.C.), his express purpose was to give the exact number of those who actually arrived at Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua back in 537 or 536 ([Neh. 7:7](#)). So also Ezra (in the 450s, apparently) recorded their numbers (2:1-2). But it may well be that Ezra used the earlier list of those who originally announced their intention to join the caravan of returning colonists back in Babylonia, whereas Nehemiah's list reproduces the tally of those who actually arrived in Judea at the end of the long trek from Mesopotamia.

"In some cases there may well have been some individual families who at first determined to go with the rest and actually left their marshaling field (at Tel Abib, or wherever it may have been in Babylonia) under Zerubbabel and proceeded to the outskirts of that province before new factors arose to change their mind. They may have fallen into disagreement as to the advisability of all of them going at once with the

initial group; others may have discovered business reasons to delay their departure until later. In some cases there may have been illness or death....

"In other cases there may have been some last-minute recruits from those who at first decided to remain in Babylonia. Perhaps they were caught up in the excitement of the return movement and joined the company of emigrants after the official tally had been taken at the marshaling grounds. Nevertheless, they made it safely back to Jerusalem, or wherever their ancestral town in Judea was, and were counted in the final list made up at the completion of the journey.

"Only four clans or city-groups came in with shrunken numbers (Arah, Zattu, the men of Bethel and Ai, and the men of Lod, Hadid, and Ono). All the rest picked up last minute recruits, varying from 1 (in the case of Azgad). It would be fascinating to know what special, emotional, or economic factors led to these last-minute decisions. At any rate, the differences in totals that do appear in these two tallies should occasion no surprise whatever. The same sort of augmentation and attrition has featured in every large migration in human history" (1982, pp. 229-230).

Archer also offers the possibility of copyist errors, but that consideration is unnecessary—and in fact unlikely given the number of variations. Indeed, one would think that scribes would have been scrupulous to check these figures given that there are two separate listings. It is more likely that there were legitimate differences in the original documents. Consider that Ezra is probably the one who compiled the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as one book. Why would he not have corrected any obvious errors? Ironically, the fact that there are differences in the lists is actually a proof of authenticity. No one fabricating the lists would have introduced such apparent discrepancies. These, then, obviously represent genuine historical documentation.

Details of the Returning Captives

Looking at some of the details of the lists, it should be noted that the Nehemiah of [Ezra 2:2](#) and [Nehemiah 7:7](#) is not the same as the Nehemiah after whom the book of Nehemiah is named. Mordecai in the same verses was not the later Mordecai of the book of Esther. [Nehemiah 7:7](#) lists an extra leader named Nahamani. Some maintain that the description "people of Israel" in these verses means all 12 tribes are indicated. Yet we have already seen that those returning were of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi ([Ezra 1:5](#)). Among the small remnant that returned to Judea from Babylon in this and subsequent returns, there were a few people whose ancestors had migrated to Judah from the northern 10 tribes. Yet the vast majority of the people of the northern tribes remained scattered throughout this period—and they have not returned to the Promised Land to this day. The Jews, as the remnant of Israel, were appropriately designated as people of Israel. All Jews are Israelites. Yet, as has been amply demonstrated in past readings and comments, not all Israelites are Jews.

The total number of returning priests was 4,289 (see 2:36-39; [Nehemiah 7:39-42](#)). This was around 10 percent of the total of those returning (see [Ezra 2:64](#); [Nehemiah 7:66](#)). "The relatively high proportion of priests amongst those who returned was doubtless due to the prospect of a new Temple, with its opportunities of service" (*New Bible Commentary: Revised*, 1970, note on [Ezra 2:36-39](#)). On the other hand, the total number of returning Levites is surprisingly listed as just 341 or 380 (see [Ezra 2:40-42](#); [Nehemiah 7:43-45](#))—much less than the 24,000 Levites involved in the worship of God in David's time (see [1 Chronicles 23:4](#)). Why did so few come, particularly as compared with the priests? We don't know, but perhaps it is significant that priests had leadership positions with a certain glory, whereas the

temple duties of the other Levites may have been viewed with comparatively little excitement or prestige.

We then see a listing of the Nethinim and the sons of Solomon's servants ([Ezra 2:43-58](#); [Nehemiah 7:46-60](#)). "Nethinim means 'Given Ones' or 'Dedicated Ones.' In [1 Chr. 9:2](#), the Nethinim are distinguished from the priests and the Levites. Jewish tradition identifies the Nethinim with the Gibeonites who had been assigned by Joshua to assist the Levites in more menial tasks (see [Josh. 9:27](#)).... The sons of Solomon's servants are linked with the Nethinim ([[Ezra 2](#)] v. 43). The numbers of the two groups are totaled together (see v. 58; [Neh. 7:60](#))" (*Nelson Study Bible*, notes on [Ezra 2:43-50](#), [55](#)). The latter, according to *The Expositor's Bible Commentary's* note on [Ezra 2:55](#), "may be the descendants of the Canaanites whom Solomon enslaved ([1 Kings 9:20-21](#)). But [another commentator]... argues that they were instead the descendants of the royal officers who were merchants in the service of Solomon ([1 Kings 9:22](#), [27](#))."

It is interesting to observe the care with which the priesthood was guarded. People had to prove their genealogy to serve in it. Even those reckoned as priests yet without the documentary evidence were excluded from priestly service and entitlement until the Urim and Thummim could be consulted (see [Ezra 2:59-63](#); [Nehemiah 7:61-65](#)). However, "the rabbis held that 'since the destruction of the first temple the Urim and the Thummim ceased' (*Tosefta Sota* 13.1). They held that [Ezra 2:63](#) expressed, not a historical possibility, but an eschatological [end-time] hope (b. *Sotah* 48a-b). Elsewhere in the Talmud (b. *Shebuoth* 16a), we read that Ezra had to reconsecrate the temple without benefit of the Urim and Thummim" (*Expositor's*, note on verse 63).

The word translated "governor" in verse 63 is transliterated as Tirshatha in the King James Version. This is "a Persian title, 'the One to

Be Feared,' which approximates to 'His Excellency'" (*New Bible Commentary*, note on verse 63).

The whole assembly totaled 42,360 ([Ezra 2:64](#); [Nehemiah 7:66](#)). Yet the individual numbers listed in Ezra 2 add up to just 29,818. In Nehemiah 7 they add up to 31,089. "It is possible that the larger total [42,360] includes women, who are not named in the lists" (*Nelson*, note on verse 64). "Some believe the [unaccounted-for] 12,000 were women and/or children. If so, this may account for the many marriages to pagan women which [later] took place (cf. Ezra 8-10)" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on [Ezra 2:64](#)).

Accompanying the 42,360 Jews were 7,337 slaves (verse 64; [Nehemiah 7:67](#)). "The ratio of slaves—one to six—is relatively high; that so many would return with their masters speaks highly of the relatively benevolent treatment of slaves by the Jews" (*Expositor's*, note on verse 65). "The singers listed here were not the temple choir of [Ezra 2] v. 41. These were professional singers employed for banquets, feasts, and funerals (see [2 Chr. 35:25](#); [Eccl. 2:7](#), [8](#)). Their presence could be an indication of luxury (see [2 Sam. 19:35](#)). It appears that many of the Jewish people had achieved some prosperity while living in Babylon.... The large number of horses listed here also suggests affluence among those who returned to Jerusalem. Prior to this time, horses in Israel had been used only for war and ceremonies. Only the very rich and well-armed owned horses. The rich also rode mules, for they were scarce in Israel.... The beasts of burden were camels and donkeys. Camels were expensive; the poorer classes rode donkeys" (*Nelson*, notes on [Ezra 2:65](#), [66](#), [67](#)).

On arriving in Judea, the people contribute gold, silver and garments for the rebuilding of the temple ([Ezra 2:68-69](#); [Nehemiah 7:70-72](#)). Yet the figures given in Ezra and Nehemiah don't match. "Apparently Ezra's list rounds off the figures, while Nehemiah's list presents them in more precise detail. It is also possible that the two lists give totals from

different times of collection—perhaps in Babylon and then later in Jerusalem" (*Nelson*, note on [Ezra 2:69](#)). Or perhaps Ezra's list, having larger numbers, presents the total from both times. As before, an apparent discrepancy is a mark not of made-up storytelling by a forger of later centuries who would make sure to iron out such problems. Rather, this again is a mark of genuineness.

Finally, we should notice the money described here.

As *Expositor's* explains in its note on [Ezra 2:69](#): "'Drachmas' translates the Hebrew *darkemonim* (cf. [Neh 7:70-72](#)). Another Hebrew word—*adarkonim*—is used for coins in [Ezra 8:27](#) and [1 Chronicles 29:7](#). The 'drachma' was the Greek silver coin worth a day's wage in the late fifth century B.C. More probably the coin intended here was the Persian daric, which was a gold coin, named either after Darius I, who began minting it, or after the Old Persian word for gold, *dari*. The coin was famed for its purity, which was guaranteed by the king. It was 98 percent gold with a 2 percent alloy for hardness. It was 3/4 of an inch in diameter and weighed 8.42 grams, or a little less than 1/3 of an ounce. Its value equaled the price of an ox or a month's wages for a soldier. Since the coin was not in use until the time of Darius I (522-486 B.C.), its occurrence here in 537 B.C. has been labeled anachronistic. Its use is better viewed as a modernization by terms current at the time of the book's composition of earlier values, perhaps the Median shekel. The total of 61,000 darics equals some 1,133 pounds of gold (about the same if the term represented the Greek drachma)."

Archaeology has recently lent support to the Jewish return from Babylon in the 6th centuries B.C. On February 20, 2004, an Associated Press article titled "Archaeologists find 2,500-year-old jewelry collection, makeup kit," reported: "Israeli archaeologists excavating caves near the Dead Sea have discovered a rare find—a woman's 2,500-year-old fashion accessories. The hoard of jewelry, a makeup kit and a small mirror apparently belonged to Jews who had returned from exile

in Babylon in the 6th century B.C., said Tsvika Tsuk, chief archaeologist for the Israel Nature and Parks Authority. 'This find is very rare. Both for the richness of the find and for that period, it is almost unheard of,' Tsuk said on Friday. Hidden under a stone-like accumulation of sediment thrown up by a nearby spring, archaeologists using metal detectors found a necklace made of 130 beads of semiprecious stones and gold, a scarab, an agate medallion of Babylonian origin and a silver pendant with an engraved crescent moon and pomegranates. They also found what appears to be a makeup kit containing an alabaster bowl for powders, a stick to apply the makeup and a bronze mirror. Tsuk said they also discovered a pagan stamp showing a Babylonian priest bowing to the moon. 'These finds confirm the (biblical) accounts of Jews returning from exile in Babylon,' Tsuk said.... Tsuk said the find shows that there was a wealthy and flourishing community of returnees living in the area at the time. 'These are not the belongings of a simple person,' he said.''' [END]

Day 675 – TUESDAY: June 17th

Ezra 3 & Ezra 4:1 – 5

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “Ezra 3 begins with the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar, Tishri, corresponding to September-October. Cyrus' decree had been delivered in 538 B.C., sometime after March-April. It probably took several months to prepare and mobilize for the return. If it then took three and a half to four months to actually travel to Judea—as it later took Ezra's group (see [Ezra 7:9](#); [8:31](#))—there is no way the Jews of the first return could have been settled in the Promised Land by Tishri of 538 B.C. More than likely it was 537. Many have even suggested 536. Probably the Jews had arrived in the land some months before—enough time for them to be resettled in the cities as noted in [Ezra 3:1](#).

Tishri is an important month on the sacred calendar, containing four of God's seven annual festivals. Mentioned first in this chapter, because of his religious duties relevant to the festivals, is Jeshua, or Joshua, the high priest ([Haggai 1:1](#); [Zechariah 3:1](#)). He is referred to as the son of Jozadak ([Ezra 3:2, 8](#)) or Jehozadak ([Haggai 1:1](#)). The high priest prior to the exile was named Seriah, who was captured by the Babylonians: "And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest" ([2 Kings 25:18](#)). He was executed along with others (verses 19-21). But his son survived. For in giving the high priestly genealogy, [1 Chronicles 6:14](#) says: "...Seraiah begot Jehozadak. Jehozadak went into captivity when the LORD carried Judah and Jerusalem into captivity by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar." And now we see that Jeshua or Joshua was the son of Jehozadak. Once more, it is worth noting how historically consistent the various books of the Bible are.

Zerubbabel, the governor, is referred to as the son of Shealtiel ([Ezra 3:2, 8](#)). In [1 Chronicles 3:17-19](#), Shealtiel is listed as a son of the former Jewish king Jehoiachin or Jeconiah. Yet the same passage in 1 Chronicles lists *Zerubbabel* as the son of *Pedaiah*—*another* son of Jeconiah. "It may be that Shealtiel died childless and his brother Pedaiah married his widow, following the custom of Levirate marriage (see [Deuteronomy 25:5-10](#); [1 Chronicles 3:18](#))" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on [Ezra 1:8](#)). That would make Zerubbabel the son of Pedaiah through biology and identification with him as the one who raised him—but the son of Shealtiel by name and inheritance. Note also that Zerubbabel, a Davidic prince, was appointed governor and not a vassal king under Cyrus. Recall God's stern dictate that no descendant of Jeconiah would sit on the throne of Britain and reign as king over Judah (see [Jeremiah 22:24-30](#)). The throne of Britain had been transferred elsewhere (see our online publication, [The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future](#)). In that light, it is interesting to see that there is no hint of the people trying to promote Zerubbabel as king—despite the desire for the restoration of Jeconiah's line at the

beginning of the exile. It seems they had come to accept the prophecies of Jeremiah as divinely authoritative.

Indeed, we see a restored religious zeal in Ezra 3—a genuine desire to please God. The returned Jews rebuilt the destroyed altar at the site of the Jerusalem temple. "They set the altar on its bases" (verse 3)—that is, on the foundations where it had originally stood—and reinstituted the sacrifices they had been unable to offer in Babylon (as Jerusalem was the only place God designated acceptable for such sacrifices). *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary* says: "This was of urgent and immediate necessity, in order, first, to make atonement for their sins; secondly, to obtain the divine blessing on their preparations for the temple, as well as animate their feelings of piety and patriotism for the prosecution of that national work" (note on verse 2). And this reinstitution of the sacrificial system was despite their fear of adversarial national neighbors (same verse). "We can measure our faith by what we do when we're afraid, despite our fears!" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on verse 3).

The sacrifices recommenced on the first day of Tishri (verse 6), which is the Feast of Trumpets (see [Leviticus 23:23-25](#); [Numbers 29:1-6](#)). The tenth day of the same month is the Day of Atonement ([Leviticus 23:26-32](#); [Numbers 29:7-11](#)). And from the 15th through the 21st is the Feast of Tabernacles, the 22nd then constituting another festival ([Leviticus 23:33-44](#)). The people kept the Feast of Tabernacles, which God always intended to be a major highlight of the year for His people, with the appropriate number of sacrifices (verse 4; see [Numbers 29:13-38](#)). The Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes the coming rule of Jesus Christ over all nations (see our free booklet [God's Holy Day Plan—The Promise of Hope for All Mankind](#)). Indeed, on one level, this observance of the Feast of Tabernacles by the returned exiles prefigures the wonderful observance of this same festival by a regathered Israel following Christ's return ([Zechariah 14:16](#)).

The foundation of the temple was not yet laid, but the obtaining of materials for the building's construction was underway. In building the first temple, King Solomon had purchased materials from Tyre and Sidon (in modern Lebanon) and had them shipped to Joppa (just south of modern Tel Aviv), paying for them with grain, oil and wine (see [2 Chronicles 2:10-16](#); [1 Kings 5:1-11](#)). We see almost the exact same details under Zerubbabel and Joshua, who had permission from Cyrus for such business (see [Ezra 3:7](#)).

Construction on the second temple began in the second month of the second year since returning to Judea (verse 8). The second month, Iyyar, corresponding to April-May, was also the month in which the building of Solomon's temple had begun (see [1 Kings 6:1](#)). "As the Jews probably returned to [Judea] in the spring of 537, the second year would be the spring of 536" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on [Ezra 3:8](#)). Yet some date the return to 536, which would make the second year 535. Interestingly, this is 70 years from the first captivity of Jews at the hands of the Babylonians in 605 B.C.

The Levites were appointed as overseers over the laborers (verses 8-9). The Jeshua of verse 9 is not the high priest but a Levite (see 2:40).

"The returnees to Jerusalem celebrated laying the temple's foundation in almost the same way that the previous generation had celebrated the first temple (see [2 Chronicles 5:13](#)). Two choruses were sung *responsively*. One group sang *For He is good*; the other group responded with *For His mercy endures forever* (see [Nehemiah 12:31](#))" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on [Ezra 3:10-11](#)). The New Bible Commentary says regarding this: "The singing was antiphonal, with either two choirs, or a choir and a priest-soloist. This is a feature of many psalms. The words preserved in our text would be the chorus (cf. [1 Chronicles 16:34](#); [2 Chronicles 5:13](#); [2 Chronicles 7:3](#); Psalm 136)" (note on [Ezra 3:11](#)).

"Laying the foundation was a cause of celebration. The descriptive 'great shout of praise' (v. 11) reflects the typically loud expression of both grief and joy in the Middle East. The old remembered the glory of Solomon's temple [destroyed 50 years before] and were heartbroken that this temple was less than half as large. The young were excited at the prospect of what lay ahead" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on verses 10-13). A lesser temple was better than no temple. God had brought judgment, but He had led a remnant here to begin again.

"It Is Not for You and For Us"

In chapter 4, the Jewish people encounter a serious problem. Note that the people are referred to as Judah and Benjamin (verse 1)—once again showing this was not a return of all the tribes of Israel but just those who, along with many of the Levites, had made up the southern kingdom of Judah.

Certain "adversaries" come to offer help on the temple's construction. These were evidently the people now inhabiting the territory of the former Israelite northern kingdom of Samaria, though that is not explicitly stated here. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus does explicitly refer to these people as Cuthaeans or Samaritans (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, chap. 2, sec. 1; chap. 4, sec. 3), people of Babylonia and Syria relocated by the Assyrians to the land of Israel after the deportation of the Israelites. Those in the delegation here mention their forefathers of nearly a century and a half earlier having been brought over by the Assyrian emperor Esarhaddon, who reigned from 681 to 669 B.C. (verse 2).

The governor, high priest and elders reject the Samaritan offer of help: "*You may do nothing with us* is not a rude rebuff; it is a righteous [and wise] refusal. The people offering help were not friends, but adversaries (v. 1). They may have sacrificed to the Lord, but they were idolatrous at the same time (see [2 Kin. 17:29-35](#))" (*Nelson*, note on [Ezra](#)

[4:3](#)). Indeed, [2 Kings 17:33](#) says of them, "They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away." Their offer of assistance may even have been a hypocritical ruse to infiltrate the Jews, gain more influence and sabotage their project. "A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet" ([Proverbs 29:5](#)).

Expositor's comments: "Even after the destruction of the temple, worshipers from Shiloh and Shechem in the north came to offer cereals and incense at the site of the ruined temple ([Jer 41:5](#)). Moreover the northerners did not abandon faith in Yahweh, as we see from the Yahwistic names given [in the book of Nehemiah] to Sanballat's sons, Delaiah and Shelemaiah.... But they retained Yahweh, not as the sole God, but as one god among many gods; Sanballat's name honors the moon god Sin. Though Ezra-Nehemiah does not explicitly mention the syncretistic character of the northerners, evidence suggests that the inhabitants of Samaria were syncretists.... In 1962 the Ta'amireh Bedouins who had found the DSS [Dead Sea Scrolls] discovered a cave in Wadi Daliyeh with fourth-century B.C. papyri. Paul Lapp in 1963 found there a great mass of skeletons, numbering between two hundred to three hundred men, women, and children: the remains of the leading families of Samaria who had fled in 331 from Alexander. A good proportion of their personal names included the names of such deities as Qos (Edomite), SHR (Aramaic), Chemosh (Moabite), Ba'al (Canaanite), and Nebo (Babylonian)" (note on [Ezra 4:1-2](#)).

Syncretism (blending of beliefs or ecumenism—compromising truth for the sake of cooperation and unity) was the sin that had led to the deportations of both Israel and Judah. It would have been foolish for the returned Jews to blend with those who were still practicing it. Yet interestingly, as was mentioned, this is not given as the reason for the refusal. According to *Expositor's*, the wording of verse 3 "is literally 'it is not for you and for us'.... The Jews tried tactfully to reject the aid

proffered by the northerners by referring to the provisions of the king's decree" (note on verse 3). In fact, Josephus says that the Jews replied "that it was impossible for them to permit them to be their partners, whilst they {only} had been appointed to build that temple at first by Cyrus...although it was indeed lawful for them to come and worship there if they pleased" (sec. 3).

Despite the non-condemnatory and even hospitable approach, the refusal nevertheless provoked hostility and opposition from the Samaritans. These adversaries "tried to *discourage* the people of Judah. They *troubled* them in building" (verse 4). "'To discourage' is literally 'to weaken the hands,' a Hebrew idiom.... The opposite idiom is 'to strengthen the hands'.... 'Make them afraid' [NIV, or 'trouble']—the verb *balah* means 'to terrify' and often describes the fear aroused in a battle situation" (*Expositor's*, note on verse 4). So it appears the Samaritans may have resorted to forms of sabotage or terrorism.

They also "hired counselors against them" (verse 5)—"or lawyers, probably to represent them against the Jewish community at the Persian court. The Samaritans persisted in these attacks until the reign of Darius as much as fourteen years later" (*Nelson*, note on verse 5). Before looking ahead to that time, however, the setting of our next few readings is still the reign of Cyrus." [END]

Day 676 – WEDNESDAY: June 18th

Daniel 10 & Daniel 11:1 – 4

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "The events and prophecy of Daniel 10-12 are set in the third year of Cyrus (10:1)—which must mean the third year of his reign as king of Babylon—in the first month (see verses 3-4). So the date was Nisan of 536 B.C. It is the 70th year since Daniel's captivity. He is now in his mid-80s. And here at the end of his life he receives an amazing prophecy of the future.

The NKJV translates a latter part of [Daniel 10:1](#) as "The message was true, but the appointed time is long." Yet an alternative rendering of the second clause here is given in the margin: "...and of great conflict." In fact, the NIV renders this: "Its message was true and it concerned a great war." This rendering makes sense considering the long interpretation given in chapter 11. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states: "We are not given any hint as to what symbols may have appeared in the vision (statues, beasts, trees, or whatever). We are simply told that it related to 'a great war' (*saba*). Since it is referred to simply as a *dabar* ('word,' 'message,' 'saying'), it may not even have come in a pictorial form at all. Its message, however, clearly portended times of testing and crisis for the people of God" (note on verse 1).

Daniel entered three weeks of "mourning," with this period, Nisan 4-24, overlapping the Passover (Nisan 14) and Feast of Unleavened Bread (Nisan 15-21). *Expositor's* states: "Daniel was so deeply impressed by this revelation that he resorted to three weeks of mourning (*mitabbel*, a word often used in connection with lamenting the death of a loved one). From v. 12 we know that this mourning and the semifast that accompanied it (v. 3) marked a prolonged period of intense supplication and prayer. Daniel abstained altogether from meat, wine and delicacies so that he might give himself over to beseeching and waiting on God. Daniel even neglected the usual niceties of personal grooming, such as fragrant oil on his hair or body. His consuming desire was to intercede for his people and obtain assurance from Yahweh that the nation would survive and carry out with honor and faithfulness its holy mission as God's witness to the world. He wanted to be certain that the remnant of forty-two thousand that had already gone back to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel and Joshua and had reinstituted public worship at the site of the temple would not fail in their trust, and that the commonwealth they had established would carry on till the last days and the coming of Messiah, the Son of Man" (note on verses 2-3).

At the end of the three weeks, Daniel receives a remarkable vision of a glorious being (verses 4-9). There are striking resemblances to Ezekiel's description of the glory of God (see [Ezekiel 1:4-28](#)) and to the apostle John's vision of the glorified Jesus (see [Revelation 1:9-20](#)). Yet the being of this vision seems to be a powerful angel, like the being of [Revelation 10:1](#), who is also robed in a cloud with a rainbow above his head, his face shining as the sun and his legs like fiery pillars. Indeed, both the being of Revelation 10 and the one in this section of Daniel raise hands to heaven and swear about a length of time (see [Daniel 12:7](#); [Revelation 10:5](#)).

Continuing in *Expositor's*: "Verse 7 tells us that when Daniel received his vision, he was not alone. His companions, however, did not see the vision of the angel but sensed his presence. Overwhelmed with terror, they fled. Similarly, in 2 Kings 6 at first Elisha alone saw the angelic host encircling Dothan [or perhaps by faith simply knew that they were there without actually seeing them]; only after intercessory prayer was his young assistant enabled to [actually] see them.... Also, in [Acts 9:7](#) the companions of Saul [i.e., Paul] saw something of the light but could not behold the vision of the risen Christ, they could only tell that there was a voice from heaven but could not distinguish its words ([Acts 22:9](#)).... [Daniel now] found himself emotionally overwhelmed (v. 8), just as he had been at the end of the vision in 8:27. His face paled and his strength left him. After hearing the angel speak to him—presumably some words of greeting—Daniel swooned (v. 9). Yet he was soon aroused, for the angel reached out and actually touched him (v. 10)" (note on verses 7-10).

The angel who now speaks to Daniel and later explains the prophetic message to Daniel appears to be the same glorious being of verses 4-6. The identity of this angel is not revealed here. He is often assumed to be Gabriel, as Gabriel had been dispatched to relate messages to Daniel before. And that may well be. Perhaps Daniel does not say so because,

if the angel is Gabriel, he has not come in the familiar human guise in which he has appeared before—appearing now instead as this glorious being so that there is less recognition. In any case, the being who speaks to Daniel does not appear to be the preincarnate Jesus, the One the ancient Israelites knew as God, as demonic forces are able to resist him.

This brings us to what is surely the most remarkable part of this entire exchange. The Bible here reveals that there are unseen spirit wars going on around us. The "prince of the kingdom of Persia" (verse 13; see verse 20) and the "prince of Greece" (verse 20) are evidently spirit rulers over these empires under the chief of demons, Satan the Devil. Jesus made it clear that Satan is the "ruler of this world" (see [John 12:31](#); [14:30](#); [16:11](#)). And within his demonic kingdom are various echelons of power—"forces and authorities and...rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world" ([Ephesians 6:12](#), Contemporary English Version). Mention is even made in [Daniel 10:13](#) of the "kings of Persia" (plural)—evidently demonic sub-kings under the leading prince of Persia, himself subject to Satan. These evil forces were able to impede the divine messenger until he received help from another powerful angel. (Though this was only within the limits that God permitted.)

Expositor's explains it this way: "The powers of evil apparently have the capacity to bring about hindrances and delays [when God allows it], even of the delivery of the answers to believers whose requests God is minded to answer. God's response was immediate, so far as his intention was concerned [as the messenger was dispatched when Daniel's prayerful seeking for help in understanding began]. But 'the prince of the Persian kingdom' (v. 13)—apparently the satanic agent assigned to the sponsorship and control of the Persian realm—put up a determined opposition to the actual delivery of the divine answer. While God can, of course, override the united resistance of all the forces of [evil] if he chooses to do so, he accords to demons certain

limited powers of obstruction and rebellion somewhat like those he allows humans. In both cases the exercise of free will in opposition to the Lord of heaven is permitted by him when he sees fit. But as [Job 1:12](#) and [2:6](#) indicate, the malignity of Satan is never allowed to go beyond the due limit set by God, who will not allow the believer to be tested beyond his limit ([1 Cor 10:13](#)). Verse 13 [of Daniel 10] shows that the angels of God have power to counteract and thwart the agents of the Devil. Here it was the archangel, Michael ('one of the chief princes'), who broke the hindrance put up by the demonic 'king of Persia' and paved the way for the interpreting angel to deliver God's answer to Daniel" (note on verses 12-13).

Michael is evidently one of the most powerful of God's angels. He is mentioned three times in the Old Testament, all in the book of Daniel ([Daniel 10:13](#), [Daniel 10:21](#); [Daniel 12:1](#)), and twice in the New Testament ([Jude 1:9](#); [Revelation 12:7](#)). The latter citation refers to a future spirit war in heaven. As for how spirit beings fight and what weapons they are able to use against one another we have no idea. But both sides evidently have powerful forces at their disposal. Of course, the omnipotent God will ultimately cause all wickedness to be overthrown. Indeed, He could have eliminated the resistance altogether in the case of delivering the message to Daniel. Yet He did not. He evidently saw some use in permitting it—perhaps for the sake of Daniel, for the messenger and His other angels or even for us reading the account today.

Returning to Daniel 10, observe that "one basic principle of prayer is set forth by this example of delayed response. It is the principle of undiscourageable persistence. Jesus taught his disciples that 'they should always pray and not give up' ([Luke 18:1](#)). There may be hindering factors of which a praying Christian knows nothing as he wonders why the answers to his requests are delayed. Nevertheless, he is to keep on praying. It may be that he will not receive an answer

because he has given up on the twentieth day when he should have persisted to the twenty-first day" (note on [Daniel 10:12-13](#)).

The draining of Daniel's strength due to being overwhelmed at the presence of the divine messenger finally ceases. "For the third time in this chapter Daniel is supernaturally strengthened by one who touched him (see also vv. 10, 16). The first touch enabled him to arise from the ground, the second to speak, and the third to carry on a conversation" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 18). At last, Daniel is able to hear the interpretation.

The angel begins by telling Daniel that the spirit war was not yet over (verses 20-21). This appears to have relevance to the message he brought. Consider that the angel was battling the spirit forces behind the Persian Empire. Next, he says, "the prince of Greece will come" (verse 20). The Persian Empire would eventually fall to the Hellenistic Greek empire of Alexander the Great. Perhaps the messenger's fight with its demons would not come until then. Interestingly, it may well be that Satan's forces fight against each other. Perhaps the demonic forces behind Persia were dominant at this time and those behind Greece would gain dominance later—all within God's ultimate allowance to fulfill prophecy.

Expositor's offers this interesting suggestion about the context of the spirit fight: "The occasion for the spiritual warfare [at this time of Persian dominance] was the restoration of the believing remnant of Israel to the Holy Land and their survival there as a commonwealth of the faithful, living in obedience to Holy Scripture. Knowing that such a development could lead to the ultimate appearance of the Son of God as the Messiah for God's redeemed, Satan and all his hosts were determined to thwart the renewal of Israel and the deliverance of her people from destruction. The supreme effort to exterminate them altogether was to take place some fifty-five years later, in the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), when Haman secured his consent to obliterate the

entire Jewish race. The conflict between Michael and the 'prince of Persia' (10:13) may have had some bearing on this event, and it may have been Michael's victory over his satanic foes that paved the way for Queen Esther to thwart this genocide. The second effort of Satan was to take place under [the Greek rule of] Antiochus Epiphanes, who sought to obliterate the Jewish faith by forbidding its practice on pain of death. The momentous events of 167-164 B.C. [or 168-165, foretold by the prophecy now explained to Daniel in chapter 11] may well have been profoundly affected by this supernatural warfare between the forces of heaven and [the demons]. Though this is not explicitly stated here, in the light of subsequent events it is reasonable to assume that these were some of the issues over which Michael was locked in combat with Satan's deputies to Persia and Greece" (note on 11:1).

Something else interesting to observe in this exchange is the angel's statement, "I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth" ([Daniel 10:21](#)). This was before Daniel even wrote it down. Evidently, the prophecy now being related to Daniel was, amazingly, already written down in the "Bible of heaven," so to speak. He was merely transcribing it for us.

The angel then begins the specifics of the prophecy. And what specifics they are! As *The New Open Bible*, quoted in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary's introduction to the book of Daniel, says, "Daniel 11 alone contains over one hundred specific prophecies of historical events that literally came true." This chapter is amazing proof of the divine inspiration of Scripture.

The prophecy begins by stating that "three more kings will arise in Persia, and the fourth shall be far richer than them all; by his strength, through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece" (verse 2). This is not to say that there would be only four more kings in the Persian Empire following Cyrus—for there were in fact 12 more. Rather, only the first four are being documented here before the fact.

First came Cyrus' elder son Cambyses (530-522 B.C.). Next an imposter named Gaumata or Bardiya reigned for a short time (522). He is often referred to as Pseudo-Smerdis because he passed himself off as Cyrus's younger son, Smerdis (the real Smerdis having been assassinated by his brother's agents). Next was Darius the Persian (522-486), a cousin of Cyrus, who killed the imposter and took his place as king. The fourth king was Darius' son Xerxes (486-465) who, being the wealthiest of them all, launched an all-out war against Greece. In fact his assault is reckoned to be one of the greatest in all of ancient history. The Greek historian Herodotus estimated his army at about a million men. Yet Xerxes did not ultimately triumph. After united Greek forces defeated his navy at the Battle of Salamis in 480 B.C., he was forced to beat a hasty retreat.

The period that followed saw the steady rise of Greece and the steady decline of Persia. According to the prophecy, a mighty king would arise (verse 3). It does not say he would come immediately. Nor does it say what nationality he would represent. However, the implication is that this ruler would be greater than Xerxes—and no such person would fit the bill until the conquest by the Greco-Macedonian ruler Alexander the Great. Moreover, when we compare this prophecy of how the mighty king would be broken and his empire divided into four parts (verse 4) with an almost identical prophecy given earlier in Daniel 8, it becomes rather obvious what is meant here. Alexander is the only one who could be meant. The empire ended up divided between Alexander's generals Ptolemy Soter, Seleucus Nicator, Cassander and Lysimachus. Ptolemy ruled Egypt and Palestine. Seleucus ruled Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia. Cassander ruled Greece and Macedonia. And Lysimachus ruled Asia Minor.

As we will see, the kingdoms of Cassander and Lysimachus drop out of the prophecy at this point, as they are no longer relevant to the story being revealed to Daniel. The rest of the prophecy follows the progress

of Seleucid Syria to the north and Ptolemaic Egypt to the south and their successors—and how God's people would fare through the infighting between them—all the way to the end time. As the angel had told Daniel in 10:14: "Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come."" [END]

Day 677 – THURSDAY: June 19th

Daniel 11:5 – 35

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Among the Jewish captives taken from Judah and exiled to Babylon was a young man whose Hebrew name was Daniel, renamed Belteshazzar by the Babylonians ([Daniel 1:1-7](#)). Daniel lived in the remarkable times of the downfall of the kingdoms of both Judah and Babylon. He served as a high official in both the Babylonian government and that of its successor, the Medo-Persian Empire.

Yet at the end of the book God instructed Daniel to "shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase" ([Daniel 12:4](#)). This indicates that certain major prophecies that previously wouldn't have made sense will be understandable as the end approaches.

The prophecies of Daniel provide proof of the accuracy of the Bible. Many of his prophecies are so detailed and specific that they have long confounded Bible critics.

In fact, some skeptics have not challenged the content of Daniel's prophetic accuracy. Rather than admit that his words are indeed inspired, they have simply labeled his book a fraud. They claim that it was not written by Daniel in the sixth century B.C.—timing which is evident by events written of in the book—but that it was penned by an unknown author in the 160s B.C., long after many of the events

prophesied in the book came to pass. This, the critics allege, is the real reason for the book's startling prophetic accuracy!

Daniel's testimony challenges the critics. But let's first consider the nature of the critics' approach. They dispute Daniel's authorship because he refers to himself in the early chapters in the third person, as if writing about someone else. However, as *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* points out, this "was the custom among ancient authors of historical memoirs ..." (1985, Vol. 7, p. 4). In relating some of his experiences Daniel did write in the first person ([Daniel 7:15](#); [Daniel 8:15](#); [Daniel 9:2](#); [Daniel 10:2](#)).

The identity of Daniel's critics is significant as well. The first person to question the authenticity of Daniel's authorship was the Greek scholar and historian Porphyry, who lived A.D. 233-304. He is labeled by historians as a Neoplatonist, which means he subscribed to the doctrines of the Greek philosopher Plato rather than the Bible. "Porphyry is well known as a violent opponent of Christianity and defender of Paganism" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, Vol. 22, p. 104, "Porphyry").

Since Porphyry was an enemy of Christianity, his objectivity is open to question. He had no factual basis for his opinion, and his view contradicted the testimony of Jesus Christ, who referred to Daniel as the author of the book ([Matthew 24:15](#)).

The biblical scholar Jerome (A.D. 340-420) refuted Porphyry's contention. Thereafter no one took Porphyry's remarks seriously again until many centuries later. "... He was more or less dismissed by Christian scholarship as a mere pagan detractor who had allowed a naturalistic bias to warp his judgment. But during the time of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, all supernatural elements in Scripture came under suspicion ..." (*Expositor's*, p. 13).

Some of today's scholars with liberal leanings have recycled these centuries- old arguments. Old Testament historian Eugene Merrill says their beliefs are built on feeble evidence. "[Daniel's] rhetoric and language are eminently at home in the sixth century [B.C.] ... It is only on the most subjective and circular lines of evidence that the man and his writing have been denied historicity" (*Kingdom of Priests*, 1996, p. 484).

Phenomenal prophecy and fulfillment

The accuracy of Daniel's prophecies of remotely distant events is spectacular. For example, in the "70 weeks" prophecy recorded in [Daniel 9:24-27](#), "Daniel predicts the precise year of Christ's appearance and the beginning of his ministry in A.D. 27" (*Expositor's*, p. 9).

Another amazing prophecy recorded by Daniel is his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2. In the second year of his reign the Babylonian king had a troubling dream that none of his counselors could explain. Babylonian culture placed considerable emphasis on dreams, and Nebuchadnezzar was convinced that this one was of great importance ([Daniel 2:1-3](#)).

His dream gives us a "disclosure of God's plan for the ages till the final triumph of Christ" and "presents the foreordained succession of world powers that are to dominate the Near East till the final victory of the Messiah in the last days" (*Expositor's*, pp. 39, 46).

Without prior knowledge of its content, Daniel explained the details of the dream to Nebuchadnezzar: "You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay" ([Daniel 2:31-33](#)).

Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that his Babylonian Empire was represented by the head of gold ([Daniel 2:37-38](#)). The silver, bronze and iron components of the image, or statue, represented three powerful empires that were to follow mighty Babylon ([Daniel 2:39-40](#)).

This interpretation provided an astounding preview of history. Nebuchadnezzar's dream occurred and was interpreted by Daniel about 600 B.C. The image represented, in symbolic form, the sequence of great empires that would dominate the region's political scene for centuries.

"The silver empire was to be Medo-Persia, which began with Cyrus the Great, who conquered Babylon in 539 ... This silver empire was supreme in the Near and Middle East for about two centuries" (*Expositor's*, p. 47).

"The bronze empire was the Greco-Macedonian Empire established by Alexander the Great ... The bronze kingdom lasted for about 260 or 300 years before it was supplanted by the fourth kingdom" (ibid.).

"Iron connotes toughness and ruthlessness and describes the Roman Empire that reached its widest extent under the reign of Trajan" (ibid.). Trajan reigned as emperor A.D. 98-117, and the Roman Empire itself ruled for many centuries.

The fourth empire was depicted as having 10 toes. The feet and toes were composed partly of iron and partly of clay, as verse 41 explains. "Verse 41 deals with a later phase or outgrowth of this fourth empire, symbolized by the feet and ten toes—made up of iron and earthenware, a fragile base for the huge monument. The text clearly implies that this final phase will be marked by some sort of federation rather than by a powerful single realm" (ibid.). (For more details, request or download our free booklet [The Book of Revelation Unveiled](#).)

Another dream adds important details

Additional aspects of this succession of world-ruling empires were revealed to Daniel in a later dream. This time the four empires were represented by four beasts: a lion (Babylonian Empire), a bear (Medo-Persian Empire), a leopard (Greco-Macedonian Empire) and a fourth beast described as "terrible" and unlike the other three ([Daniel 7:1-7](#)).

Notice what verse 7 says about this fourth creature: "After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth [paralleling the iron legs of the prior dream]; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns."

What does this description mean? It too is a reference to the great power of Rome, which crushed all who opposed it. "Thus the superior power of the colossus of Rome ... is emphasized in the symbolism of this terrible fourth beast" (*Expositor's*, p. 87).

[Daniel 7:8](#) elaborates on the 10 horns: "I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots." Later in the chapter we see that this little horn exalts himself to the position of an internationally powerful religious leader ([Daniel 7:24-25](#)), even commanding a false religious system that persecutes the true followers of God.

[Daniel 7:9-14](#) takes us right through to Christ's establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth: "Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed." So this Roman system, through its periodic revivals down through history,

continues right to the time of the end when Jesus Christ returns to rule the earth.

Revelation 17 also helps us in understanding this end-time power. In this chapter it is again depicted as a beast, but now we see that its final manifestation includes 10 "kings"—leaders of nations or groups of nations—who "receive authority for one hour" with the ruler of this end-time superpower, an individual the Bible refers to as "the beast" ([Revelation 17:12-13](#)). This final revival of the Roman Empire leads into Christ's return as they "make war with the Lamb" ([Revelation 17:14](#)).

All of this concurs with [Daniel 2:44](#), which obviously indicates that the second coming of Christ will occur in a time during which vestiges of the fourth beast or kingdom (the Roman Empire) still exist: "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."

The greater part of these prophetic events, as detailed by the two dreams, has already been fulfilled. Their detailed completion affirms the divine inspiration of the Bible. The odds of any person foreseeing this on his own defy credibility. "... There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days" ([Daniel 2:28](#)).

The Bible's most detailed prophecy

Daniel 11 records another phenomenal prophecy. The chronological setting is given in [Daniel 10:1](#) as the "third year of Cyrus king of Persia." A "man" ([Daniel 10:5](#)), no doubt an angel (compare [Daniel 9:21](#)), came to tell Daniel what would occur "in the latter days" ([Daniel 10:14](#)).

The prophecy that follows is the most detailed in all the Bible. The third year of Cyrus was more than 500 years before the birth of Christ. Yet this prophecy foretells events that began to occur almost immediately and will continue until the return of Christ. The initial stages of the prophecy confirm the Bible because they have already been fulfilled, as can be verified by a study of the Persian and Greek empires. No man could foresee such fine historical detail.

Some elements of what follows are intricate, requiring close attention. But a comparison of the prophetic words with the historical record makes them clear.

Protracted political intrigue

The first 35 verses of Daniel 11 give an account, written years in advance, of the intrigue between two political entities— the "king of the South" and the "king of the North." In secular history, the king of the South is often referred to as Ptolemy. The Ptolemaic dynasty ruled from Alexandria in Egypt. The king of the North ruled from Antioch in Syria under the name Seleucus, or Antiochus.

With this in mind, let's examine some of the details of the prophecy. It is important because it reveals the political climate and tensions in the Middle East preceding both the first and second appearances of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. In both instances, Jerusalem is at the center of the political conflicts of the time.

You can find more information on the historical fulfillment of much of this prophecy in resources such as *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, which we quote below, or other reliable reference works. Rather than our quoting the entire scriptural passage, we recommend that you read in your own Bible the verses we cite, and remember that these details were foretold far in advance of their occurrence.

Daniel 11:2: The "three more kings" are Cambyses, the elder son of Cyrus; pseudo-Smerdis, an impostor who passed himself off as Cyrus's younger son, who had been secretly killed; and Darius the Persian. "The Persian king who invaded Greece was ... Xerxes, who reigned 485-464 B.C." (*Expositor's*, p. 128).

Daniel 11:3-4: "Verse 3 introduces us to ... the rise of Alexander the Great" (*ibid.*). The language in verse 4 "clearly suggests that this mighty conqueror was going to have a comparatively brief reign ... In seven or eight years he accomplished the most dazzling military conquest in human history. But he lived only four years more; and ... died of a fever in 323 ..." (*ibid.*).

Alexander's kingdom was divided "among four smaller and weaker empires" (*Expositor's*, p. 129). Alexander's infant son had been murdered in 310 and an illegitimate brother assassinated in 317. "Thus there were no descendants or blood relatives to succeed Alexander himself" (*ibid.*). So his kingdom was not divided among his posterity (verse 4).

Alexander's generals warred for control of his empire. The ensuing struggles for domination eliminated all but four, who became heads of the four divisions of his empire. The four were Cassander, reigning in Greece and the West, Lysimachus in Thrace and Asia Minor, Ptolemy in Egypt and Seleucus in Syria. Of these four, two—Ptolemy and Seleucus—expanded their rule and territory. These were the kings of Egypt and Syria, respectively.

The machinations that follow relate to these two. They are referred to as the king of the South (Ptolemy) and the king of the North (Seleucus) because of their location relative to Jerusalem.

Daniel 11:5: "The king of the South was to be Ptolemy I" (*Expositor's*, p. 130). The biblical expression "one of his princes" refers to Seleucus. He

had originally served under Ptolemy. In the intrigue after Alexander's death, Seleucus ultimately gained control over Syria and became king of the North. Seleucus eventually wielded more power than Ptolemy. The dynasty of the Seleucid line was to continue until 64 B.C.

The Laodicean war

[Daniel 11:6](#): A state of tension and hostility existed between the king of the South and the king of the North. Ptolemy I died in 285 B.C. In 252 the two powers attempted a treaty under which Berenice, the daughter of Ptolemy II, was to marry Antiochus II, the king of the North. Laodice, the first wife of Antiochus II, was angry because he had divorced her. In retaliation, she manipulated a conspiracy from her place of banishment. She had Berenice and her infant son assassinated. "Not long afterward the king himself [Antiochus II] was poisoned ..." (ibid.).

Laodice established herself as queen, because her son Seleucus II was too young to rule. The prophecy "she [Berenice] shall be given up" refers to the coup that Laodice engineered to effect the execution of Berenice. Some nobles who had supported Berenice as queen were also brought down.

[Daniel 11:7-9](#): Retaliation followed. A series of military actions, which came to be known as the Laodicean War, resulted. Ptolemy II died soon after Laodice killed his daughter, Berenice. Ptolemy III sought to avenge his sister's death. He attacked the king of the North and captured the Syrian capital of Antioch. Verse 8 describes the recapture by Ptolemy of "long-lost idols and sacred treasures" (*Expositor's*, p. 131) that had been stolen from Egypt by Cambyses in 524 B.C.

Peace was concluded between Ptolemy III and Seleucus II in 240, and hostilities ceased until 221, when Ptolemy III died.

Daniel 11:10-12: The sons of Seleucus II attacked the king of the South after their father died. One of these sons, Seleucus III, reigned for only three years. His military activity was relatively minor. He died by poisoning. Another son, Antiochus III (the Great), did "overwhelm and pass through." He conquered Judea.

Ptolemy IV, the king of the South, retaliated (verse 11) and defeated the larger army of Seleucus III at the Battle of Raphia. After his victory Ptolemy turned to a life of debauchery during which he slaughtered tens of thousands of Jews in Egypt (verse 12). Through all this he weakened his kingdom.

Daniel 11:13-16: The phrase "at the end of some years" refers to an incident when, 14 years after his defeat, Antiochus III came against Ptolemy V, still a young boy. (Ptolemy IV had died in 203.) The Egyptian provinces were in turmoil because of the wretched rule of Ptolemy IV. Many of the people—including Jews sympathetic to the king of the North—joined with Antiochus against the king of the South. The rebellion was ultimately crushed by the Egyptian general Scopos (verse 14).

Scopos also rebuffed the forces of Antiochus during the winter of 201-200. The king of the North responded with another invasion. He captured the city of Sidon ("a fortified city"), where Scopos surrendered (verse 15). Antiochus acquired complete control of the Holy Land, the "Glorious Land" (verse 16).

Daniel 11:17: The Revised English Bible reads: "He [the king of the North] will resolve to advance with the full might of his kingdom; and, when he has agreed terms with the king of the south, he will give his young daughter in marriage to him, with a view to the destruction of the kingdom; but the treaty will not last nor will it be his purpose which is served." Having defeated Scopos, Antiochus desired to gain control of Egypt itself. He gave his daughter, Cleopatra, to Ptolemy V in marriage.

Antiochus believed she would act in his favor and betray the interests of her husband. But she frustrated his plans by siding with Ptolemy.

[Daniel 11:18-19](#): In his frustration, Antiochus attacked islands and cities of the Aegean area. He also gave asylum to Rome's enemy, Hannibal of Carthage, who assisted him in landing in Greece. Rome responded by attacking Antiochus and inflicting defeat on his forces. The Romans deprived him of much of his territory and took several hostages to Rome, including Antiochus's son. Rome exacted heavy tribute of him (verse 18).

Antiochus returned in disgrace to his stronghold, Antioch. Unable to pay the heavy fees exacted by the Romans, he attempted to plunder a pagan temple. His action so enraged local inhabitants that they killed him, bringing him to an inglorious end (verse 19).

[Daniel 11:20](#): While not Scripture, the apocryphal book of [2 Maccabees 3:7-40](#) says that Antiochus's other son, Seleucus IV, was also unable to pay the taxes. Seleucus sent a Jew, Heliodorus, to plunder the temple at Jerusalem. Heliodorus went to the holy city but obtained nothing. Seleucus was later poisoned by Heliodorus, and so killed, "but not in anger or in battle."

Antiochus Epiphanes

[Daniel 11:21-35](#): These verses speak of the infamous Antiochus IV (known also as Epiphanes), the brother of Seleucus IV, who had earlier been taken hostage to Rome. He was a "tyrannical oppressor who did his utmost to destroy the Jewish religion altogether" (Expositor's, p. 136).

Antiochus passed laws that forbade the practice of the Jewish religion, under penalty of death. He was a man of incredible cruelty. On his orders "an aged Scribe, Eleazar, was flogged to death because he

refused to eat swine's flesh. A mother and her seven children were successively butchered, in the presence of the governor, for refusing to pay homage to an image. Two mothers who had circumcised their newborn sons were driven through the city and cast headlong from the wall" (Charles Pfeiffer, *Between the Testaments*, 1974, pp. 81-82).

Daniel 11:31: This refers to the momentous events of Dec. 16, 168 B.C., when a crazed Antiochus entered Jerusalem and killed 80,000 men, women and children ([2 Maccabees 5:11-14](#)). He then desecrated the temple by offering a sacrifice to the chief Greek god, Zeus. This outrage was a forerunner of a comparable event that Jesus Christ said would occur in the last days ([Matthew 24:15](#)).

Daniel 11:32-35: These verses appear to describe, on one level, the indomitable will and courage of the Maccabees, a family of priests who resisted Antiochus and his successors. The Maccabees' revolt against the Syrian king was triggered when "Mattathias, the leading priest in the city of Modein ..., after killing the officer of Antiochus who had come to enforce the new decree concerning idolatrous worship ..., led a guerrilla band that fled to the hills ..." (*Expositor's*, p. 141).

Mattathias was aided in his cause by five sons, most notably Judah or Judas, nicknamed Maqqaba (Aramaic for hammer, whence derives the name Maccabees). Many of these patriots died in this cause, but their heroics ultimately drove the Syrian forces from the country.

On another level, these verses could even refer to the New Testament Church, with their references to mighty works, persecution and apostasy.

Indeed, at this point Daniel's prophecy definitely takes on a different tone, referring explicitly to "the time of the end" near the end of verse 35. To quote *Expositor's*: "With the conclusion of the preceding pericope [extract] at v. 35, the predictive material that incontestably

applies to the Hellenistic empires and the contest between the Seleucids and the Jewish patriots ends. This present section (vv. 36-39) contains some features that hardly apply to Antiochus IV, though most of the details could apply to him as well as to his latter-day antitype, 'the beast.'

"Both liberal and conservative scholars agree that all of chapter 11 up to this point contains strikingly accurate predictions of the whole sweep of events from the reign of Cyrus ... to the unsuccessful effort of Antiochus Epiphanes to stamp out the Jewish faith" (*Expositor's*, p. 143).

From this point forward a little more than a century would pass before the Roman general Pompey would conquer Jerusalem. Much of the Middle East passed to the control of the Roman Empire, and much of its power in turn passed to its eastern leg, the Byzantine Empire, in the following centuries.

But then, as we'll see in the next chapter, a remarkable new power and religion arose on the scene to dominate the Middle East for centuries—the Islamic Empire.

Supplementary Reading: "[Daniel 11 \(NKJV\) With Explanation, verses 1-35](#)”." [END]

Day 678 – FRIDAY: June 20th

Daniel 11:36 – Daniel 12:13

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Please read the supplementary material listed below for this section first before proceeding to the highlights in the commentary that follows, which gives some additional details not thoroughly covered in the supplementary reading."

Verses 36-39 of Daniel 11 appear to show the Roman emperor, as the next king of the North, proclaiming himself divine and later honoring and expanding the power of a previously unrecognized "god" in a high religious office, the former occurring early in the succession of Roman emperors and the latter commencing with Constantine the Great in the fourth century A.D. The honoring of this false religion would progress through various resurrections of the western part of the Roman Empire until the end time. This "god" seems parallel to the "little horn" of Daniel 7, which appears to be the Roman papacy.

Yet has anyone actually ever looked on the pope as a god? Consider that the pope is called "Holy Father"—the name of God the Father ([John 17:11](#); compare [Matthew 23:9](#))—as well as the "Vicar of Christ," meaning *substitute for* Christ. According to one Catholic publication, "all the names which are attributed to Christ in Scripture, implying His supremacy over the church, are also attributed to the Pope" (Bellamin, *On the Authority of Councils*, Book 2, chap. 17, quoted by A. Jan Marcussen, *National Sunday Law*, 58th ed., p. 77). He has been called "another God on earth" (Labbe and Cossart, *History of the Councils*, Vol. 14, col. 109) and "our Lord God the Pope" (*Extravagantes of Pope John XXII*, title 14, chap. 4, *Declaramus*, quoted by Marcussen, p. 77). Furthermore, Catholic teaching has in the past claimed that "the Pope is not only the representative of Jesus Christ, but he IS Jesus Christ, hidden under a veil of flesh" (*The Catholic National*, July 1895). All of this is a forerunner to the blasphemy of the end time, when, as the apostle Paul foretold, the leader of the false religious system will sit "as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" ([2 Thessalonians 2:4](#)).

Verses 40-45 detail events of the end time, where the European beast power of the north is ultimately brought to his end at Christ's return.

In [Daniel 12:1](#), the events of the last days are related to the unparalleled "time of trouble," synonymous with "Jacob's trouble"

in [Jeremiah 30:7](#) and the "great tribulation" of [Matthew 24:21](#). After this will come the resurrection ([Daniel 12:1-3](#)). Some are resurrected to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt (verse 2). It is important to note that this does *not* say that those raised to life and those raised to contempt are all raised at the same time. From other passages, it is evident that these are different resurrections.

Daniel is then told to seal up the scroll of his book, the understanding of which would not be unlocked until the end time (verse 4). The work of his long life is at last done. But then we are told of two more angels in addition to the first. Apparently they have been listening to this amazing prophecy. One asks how long it would be to the end of "these wonders"—evidently the final trials ending in the resurrection (verses 5-6). Notice the answer: "It shall be for a time, times, and a half. And when they have made an end of scattering the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished" (verse 7, Green's Literal Translation). This ties directly back to the prophecy of Daniel 7, where it was said that the saints would be given into the hands of the persecuting "little horn" for this exact same period (7:25)—which, as was explained in the comments on that verse, equates to three and a half years, the last three and a half years before Christ's return (equating also to the 1,260 days or 42 months of other prophecies in Revelation).

Daniel, however, is quite confused. Though he has been told to seal the prophecy, he still has questions. He asks how it's all going to work out ([Daniel 12:8](#)). The order to seal the prophecy is then reiterated (verse 9). Nevertheless, a few more things are told to him at this point—which Daniel may have found even more confusing. The angel explains that the wise of the end time would understand the time frame being described.

In verse 11, Daniel is specifically told that the time from the taking away of daily sacrifices and the setting up of the end-time abomination of

desolation would be 1,290 days. Verse 12 then mentions an enigmatic 1,335 days. The key to understanding appears to be verse 13, where Daniel is told that he will rise to his inheritance "at the end of the days." This seems to mean the end of the various groupings of days mentioned. That is, the three and a half years (1,260 days), the 1,290 days and the 1,335 days all seem to end at the time Daniel is resurrected at Christ's return. A possible scenario is that breaking of the power of the saints—the cutting off of their public preaching—will come 1,335 days before Christ's return. Then, 45 days later, 1,290 days before Christ's return, the abomination of desolation will be set up. And then, 30 days later, 1,260 days before Christ's return, the Great Tribulation will commence. Thankfully, Christ will return in just three and a half years from this point to bring deliverance to the people of Israel and Judah (as the commencement of His deliverance of all mankind) and everlasting life to his saints. The dead in Christ will live again.

Daniel, whose time to rest came not long after the sealing of his prophecy, will at that future time be raised—but then, with all of us who remain faithful, to perfect understanding. At last, all of Daniel's questions will be answered—and, as amazing as it is to contemplate, so will all of ours.

Supplementary Reading: "[War and Peace in the Middle East](#)," *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*, pages 25-32; "[What Is the 'Abomination of Desolation'?](#)," *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*, pages 26-27; "[Daniel 11 \(NKJV\) With Explanation](#)," verses 36-45." [END]

Day 679 – SATURDAY: June 21st

Ezra 4:6 – 24

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "The chronology of this passage is debated based on differing opinions regarding the identity of the Persian kings mentioned within it. Recall from verses 4-5 that the Samaritans were constantly attempting to thwart the Jews who had returned to Judea (the tiny Persian district of Yehud), efforts that often included accusing them before the Persian court. This continued throughout the reign of Cyrus the Great.

Yet Cyrus, whom God had foretold would give the word to restore Jerusalem and its temple, was not swayed by the Samaritan arguments. But he eventually passed from the scene. As historian Werner Keller writes: "Cyrus, the liberator, died on an expedition to the east in 530 B.C., and was buried in the royal palace of Pasargadae near Persepolis [30 miles northeast of Shiraz in southern Iran]. His palace was built in the form of individual pavilions: each one lay in the centre of a magnificent garden: the whole area was enclosed by a high wall. On the southern slopes of a long range of hills there still stands among the rough grass of the highlands a small unpretentious stone building dating from the time of Cyrus. Six square blocks form the steps which lead up to a small chamber, above the entrance to which there could at one time be read the following plea: 'O man, whoever you are and whenever you come, for I know that you will come—I am Cyrus, who gave the Persians their empire. Do not grudge me this patch of earth that covers my body.' Alas, the small stone chamber in which a golden sarcophagus enclosed the mortal remains of the great Persian is now as empty as the place above the entrance which bore the inscription. Occasionally shepherds with their flocks pass unconcernedly by this forgotten spot, as they did in olden times, across the wide plateau where the lion is still lord of the chase.

"Cyrus was followed by his son Cambyses II. With the conquest of Egypt [in 525 B.C.] Persia became under him the greatest empire that the

world had ever seen: it stretched from India to the Nile" (*The Bible As History*, 1980, p. 303).

According to verse 5, the Samaritans would continue to present their grievances against the Jews "until the reign of Darius king of Persia." This is generally recognized as referring to Darius Hystaspes (Darius I)—not to be confused with the earlier Darius the Mede mentioned in Scripture.

Royal Identity Dispute

The identity controversy mentioned above starts in the very first verse of our present reading, verse 6, with the identity of the Ahasuerus mentioned there and continues through the rest of the chapter over the identity of Artaxerxes. The Darius of verse 24 is the same as the one in verse 5 (as the temple was rebuilt during the reign of Darius I).

Notice the succession of Persian emperors (dates are B.C.):

Anglicized Greek Form	Persian Form	Dates of Reign
Cyrus II (the Great)	Koorush	559-530
Cambyses II	Kambujiya	530-522
<i>Pseudo-Smerdis (Comates)</i>	Bardiya (<i>Gaumata</i>)	522
Darius I (the Great) Hystaspes	Darayavahush/Darryoosh	522-486
Xerxes I (the Great)	Khashayarsha	486-465
Artaxerxes I (Longimanus)	Artakhshathra or Ardashir	465-425
Xerxes II	Khashayarsha	424
Secydianus/Sogdianus	(Known only in Greek)	424

Darius II (Ochus/Nothus)	Darayavahush/Darryoosh	423-404
Artaxerxes II (Mnemon)	Artakhshathra	404-359/8
Artaxerxes III (Ochus)	Artakhshathra	359/8-338/7
Artaxerxes IV (Arses)	Artakhshathra	338/7-336
Darius III (Codomannus)	Darayavahush/Darryoosh	336-330

So who is the Ahasuerus of [Ezra 4:6](#)? This name is now generally understood as a parallel to the Greek name Xerxes. Notice that the Persian form is *Khashayarsha*. Where the name Ahasuerus occurs in Scripture, the actual Hebrew form is *Akhshurosh*, much closer to the Persian form of *Khashayarsha*. Of Xerxes the *Jewish Encyclopedia* states, "The Babylonian tablets spell his name Khisiarshu, Akhshiyarshu, etc." ("Ahasuerus," [JewishEncyclopedia](#)).

And what of the name Artaxerxes? Where this name appears in Scripture, the actual Hebrew form is *Artakhshasta*. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* explains: "In the Persian name Artakhshathra...the 'thr'...is pronounced with a hissing sound, and is therefore represented in other languages by [an s or sh]. Thus in Babylonian, Artakhshatsu, Artakhshassu, and numerous variations; in...Hebrew... Artakhshasta...in Greek, [Artaxesses]...and by assimilation with the name Xerxes [it becomes Artaxerxes]" ("Artaxerxes I," [JewishEncyclopedia](#)).

It would seem, then, that Ahasuerus in [Ezra 4:6](#) is King Xerxes I, the husband of Esther. And Artaxerxes in verses 7-23 would appear to be Artaxerxes I, the king under whom Nehemiah later served. If that is the case, as most scholars now maintain, then chapters 4-6 are out of sequence. Here's how *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* explains Ezra 4: "This chapter summarizes various attempts to thwart the efforts of the Jews. In vv. 1-5 the author describes events under Cyrus (539-530),

in v. 6 under Xerxes (485-465), in vv. 7-23 under Artaxerxes I (464-424). He then reverts in v. 24 to the time of Darius I (522-486), when the temple was completed (cf. Hag 1-2). The author drew on Aramaic documents from [Ezra 4] v. 8 to 6:18, with a further Aramaic section in 7:12-26" (note on 4:1-5). Chapters 5-6 concern events during the reign of Darius I. Chapter 7 advances the story to the time of Artaxerxes I.

Following the above interpretation, *Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible* has this to say in its note on Ezra 4: "Verses 1-5, 24: the opposition succeeds in bringing the work [on the temple] to a standstill for 15 years, until Darius is king. Verses 6-23 interrupt the chronological sequence to carry the account of the opposition through to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Here the bone of contention is the rebuilding of the city walls ([verse] 12)." This would mean Ezra interrupted the sequence of the book to drop in an overview of the antagonism even beyond the time of Darius, which seems a likely conclusion, especially given the mention of the city and its walls in the correspondence rather than the temple.

However, there is another school of thought that sees Ezra 4 as presented in chronological order—wherein the Ahasuerus or Xerxes of verse 6 is another name for Cyrus' son Cambyses (530-522) and the Artaxerxes of verses 7-23 is a reference to the imposter king Gaumata (522), who posed as Cambyses' slain brother Bardiya (Smerdis). *Expositor's* notes: "Some scholars claim that the parallel account in Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, chapters] 21-25...), which substitutes Cambyses for Artaxerxes I, gives the correct order" (note on verse 7). Yet what of the fact that the names Xerxes and Artaxerxes are specifically applied to other kings? "Some historians believe that the names Akhshurosh [Ahasuerus/Xerxes] and Artahshasta [Artaxerxes] were general titles for kings, such as 'Pharaoh' and 'Shah' or 'His Majesty' and that they were not specific names" (Allyn Huntzinger, *Persians in the Bible*, p. 32).

Yet it seems more likely that the majority opinion is correct—that these names refer to Xerxes I and Artaxerxes I. This would seem to be more consistent with other passages and avoids the problem of assigning these appellations to whomever "seems" to fit. Indeed, one might wonder why these names are used in Scripture if they provide no identification of particular kings. Regarding Josephus' identification, *Expositor's* notes: "[H.G.M.] Williamson (*Israel [in the Books of Chronicles]*, 1977), p. 50) points out that 'at Ezra [4]...it seems likely that the author has grouped by theme rather than by chronology. Josephus' corrections, therefore, which rest from one point of view on accurate historical knowledge, result in the end in unhistorical confusion' (cf. also [C.G.] Tuland, ["Ezra-Nehemiah or Nehemiah-Ezra?" *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 12] 'Josephus,' [1974]" (note on verse 7).

The truth is that we can't know the answer to this matter for sure either way. It should be noted that if the majority opinion is correct, as seems likely, then we are reading the current passage out of chronological sequence. However, that is really no dilemma since, in any case, we are reading the verses in order of scriptural arrangement—which, if not in chronological sequence, is nevertheless thematically consistent here. We will note these verses again where they more likely occur chronologically.

Letter Writing Campaign Against Jewish Rebuilding

Whoever the Ahasuerus of verse 6 is, whether Cambyses or the great Persian emperor known as Xerxes I (see previous comments), he apparently paid no heed to the Samaritan complaints. In verse 7 Artaxerxes, whether pseudo-Smerdis or Artaxerxes I (again see previous comments), at first pays no heed either. But another letter in verses 8-16 gets his attention.

Verses 9-10 identifies the plaintiffs as descendants of those the Assyrians had transplanted from the east into the land of Samaria after the northern tribes of Israel had been deported. Osnapper is evidently another name for the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (668-626 B.C.). His resettlement of people into Samaria was in addition to that of Esarhaddon (681-668 B.C.) mentioned in verse 2. Where the NKJV has "the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the people of Persia and Erech and Babylon and Shushan, the Dehavites, the Elamites" (verse 9), the NIV has instead, "the judges and officials over the men from Tripolis, Persia, Erech and Babylon, the Elamites of Susa" (see *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* for a technical explanation of the differences here). In identifying their nationalities, the Samaritans emphasize the kinship many of them share with the Persian authorities.

Furthermore, the Samaritans refer to themselves in the letter as "your servants" (verse 12)—implying a faithful vassal relationship. By contrast, they refer to Jerusalem as "the rebellious and evil city" (verse 12) and warn that the Jews will again revolt if they manage to rebuild and fortify it (verses 13-14). "A search of the king's official records confirmed the Samaritans' allegation of rebellion and sedition on the part of the people of Jerusalem, no doubt referring to the revolts under Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah (see [2 Kings 24:1-20](#)). The fact that these revolts were against the Babylonians and not against the Persians was not important. The Persians had become the heirs of the Babylonian Empire, and they would take such a report seriously" (*The Nelson Study Bible*, note on [Ezra 4:19](#)). Evidently Cyrus' decree regarding the Jews and Jerusalem had been forgotten by this point, as the Persians had an important precedent of unchangeable law (see [Daniel 6:8](#), [12](#), [15](#)).

It is also interesting to note in the king's response that he discovered that past kings of Jerusalem had ruled over all the region west of the Euphrates River ([Ezra 4:20](#))—evidently referring to David and Solomon

and perhaps a few later kings who had experienced periods of dominance over nearby nations.

The Persian ruler commands that the restoration of Jerusalem be brought to a halt but he leaves open the possibility of a change in policy, saying that "this city may not be rebuilt *until the command is given by me*" (verse 21). If the Artaxerxes here is pseudo-Smerdis, it would appear that the directive is later overturned when the next king, Darius I, finds the earlier decree of Cyrus (see Ezra 6). If the Artaxerxes in chapter 4 is the one known to history as Artaxerxes I, as most scholars believe, then the king ends up reviewing his own decision and issuing commands regarding rebuilding to Ezra and Nehemiah.

One important factor to note is that if the chapter is in chronological sequence, then the Jews were evidently forced to stop work on the temple ([Ezra 4:24](#)) when imperial decree and force of arms brought the rebuilding of Jerusalem to a halt (verses 17-23). But if the chapter is, according to the majority view, out of sequence, then the Jews simply gave up in the face of ongoing resistance ([Ezra 4:4-5](#), [24](#)). Once again, the latter seems more likely given that there is no reference to the work having been forced to cease when the rebuilding is questioned in chapter 5. The latter also seems more in line with Haggai's criticism of the Jewish neglect of temple reconstruction in the second year of Darius (see [Haggai 1:1-11](#)).

In any case, Ezra 4 ends with the fact of temple reconstruction ceasing until Darius' second year (verses 24). The recommencement and completion of the temple during the reign of Darius is the subject of the next two chapters in Ezra.

It may be of interest to note significant events transpiring elsewhere in the world at this time. It was during this period that Gautama Siddharta (Buddha) lived and taught in India (ca. 563-483 B.C.) and K'ung Fu-tzu (Confucius) lived and taught in China (ca. 551-479 B.C.). This was nearly

a thousand years after the time of Moses (and nearly half a millennium from Solomon's building of the first temple).” [END]