

Rebuilding What Was Lost
The Book of Ezra-Nehemiah



Rebuilding What Was Lost

- *A Little Bit of Background*
- *The Return*
- *Laying the Foundation*
- *Letters to Kings*



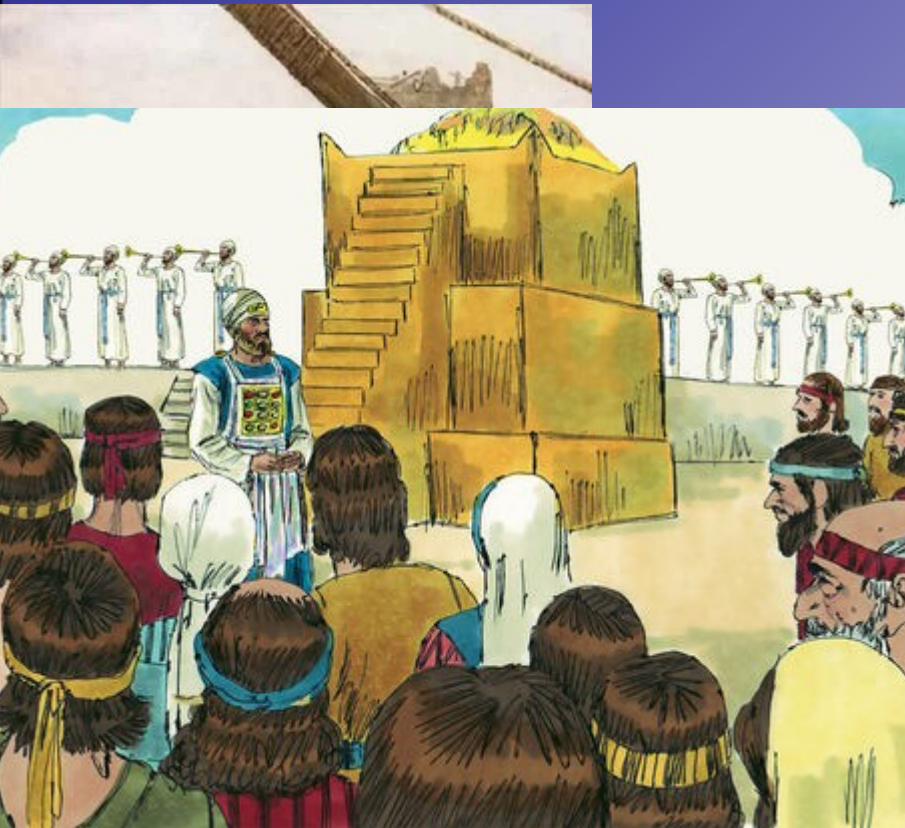
Letters to Kings

- The people of God have returned home
 - They have a written decree from good King Cyrus II so they're returning home with a guarantee of safe conduct and with literally *tons* of treasure for use in rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem
 - So everything's good, right?
(why or why not?)



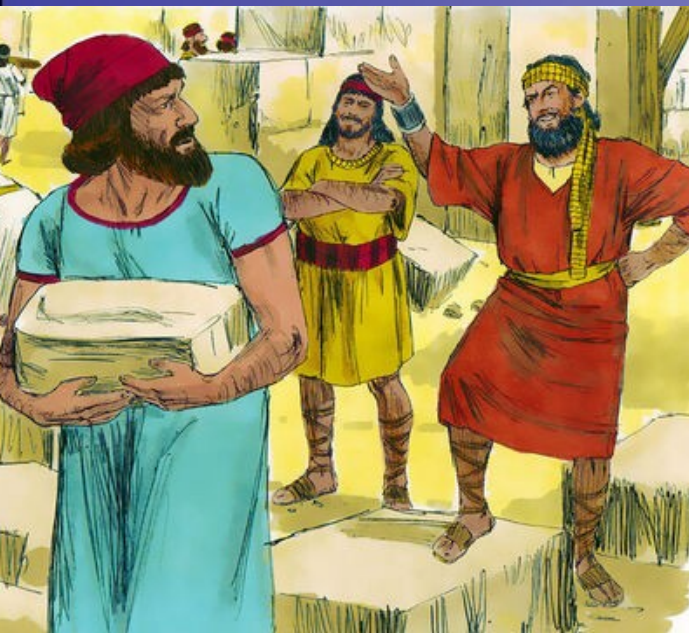
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 - Please read Ezra 3:10-11
 - So how would you describe this scene in terms of how it might happen today?



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 - Please read Ezra 3:12-13
 - How is this a beautiful, poetic way to describe the end of this bittersweet day?
 - And yet, there's more to it than that
 - Let's cheat and read this together with the *next* verse, Ezra 4:1...
 - “The sound was heard far away. When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for YAHWEH, the God of Israel...
 - So which drew their enemies' attention more—their shouts of joy or their weeping?



Letters to Kings



Funky little teaching moment...

- So who were these enemies?
 - Remember on that first day of class, when we talked about how Assyrian King Tiglath-Pileser III (and a succession of others) had invaded in 733-722 BC?
 - King Aššur-aḥa-iddina (Esarhaddon) invaded Israel in 672 BC, on his way to the southwest to invade Egypt and his successor Aššur-bāni-apli (Ashurbanipal) later invaded *again* in 668 BC—*also* on his way southwest to re-invade Egypt
 - And each time one of these guys invaded, they brought with them more and more Assyrians to repopulate Samaria (formerly Israel) (again, much like England later did with Northern Ireland)

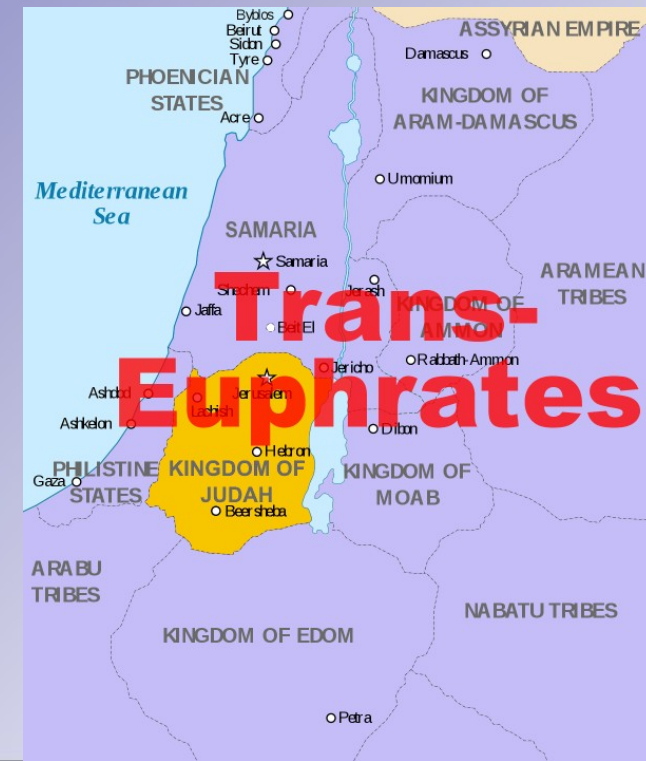
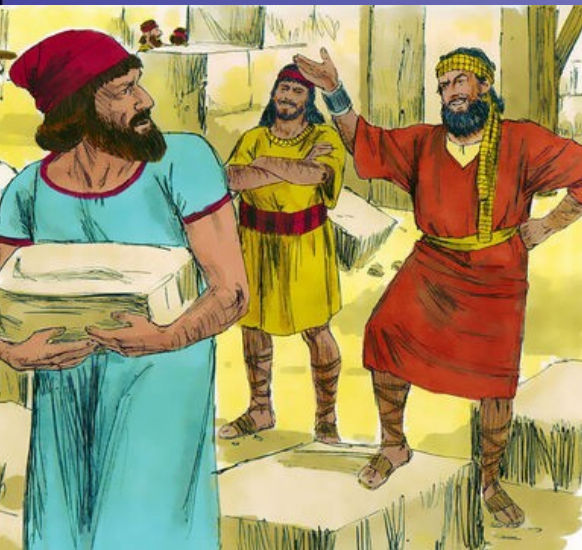


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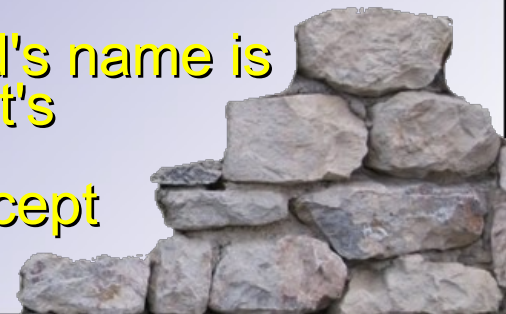
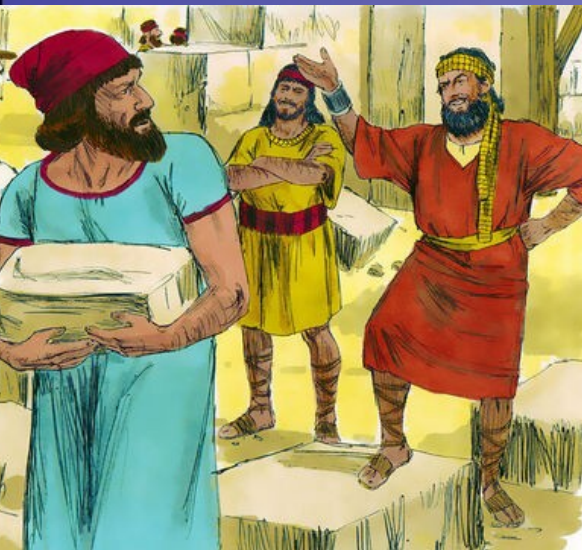
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- So who were these enemies?
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 - So there were whole generations of people imported from Assyria/Babylon/Persia/etc. into the region who had been squatting in Israel for centuries while the Jews were in exile
 - Not to mention all of those tribes who had been living in the area since before the Jews even left
 - To see the Jews come back kinda messed with their own plans for the area
 - And yet, what did Ezra 3:3 say...?



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 - Please read Ezra 3:12-13
 - Please read Ezra 4:1-2
 - That sounds great—your neighbors want to help you rebuild the Temple!
 - But there are some red flags here
 - Even if they're *not* just straight-up *lying* about making sacrifices to the Lord, the fact that they still refer to Him as "*your* God" is more than just a little fishy
 - Maybe they do make sacrifices to YAHWEH but if so, it's *in addition* to sacrifices to other gods like Baal and Molech and Asherah...
 - Why is that a problem?
(isn't it enough that God's name is being honored, even if it's alongside *other* gods?)
 - How can we apply this concept in our *own* lives today?




Letters to Kings



Funky little teaching moment...

- Messing around with the neighbors and letting *their* priorities overwhelm *God's* priorities was a large part of what the Jews had screwed up before, ultimately leading to their exile to Babylon
- So here's a good rule of thumb about breaking unhealthy cycles—
 - If you want to avoid the same mistakes that you made in the past, then you need to avoid the same relational situations that you had in the past (i.e.; if you want to reach different conclusions this time around, then you need to actively choose to take different actions this time around)
 - How could we apply this concept to our *own* lives today?



Rule of
thumb



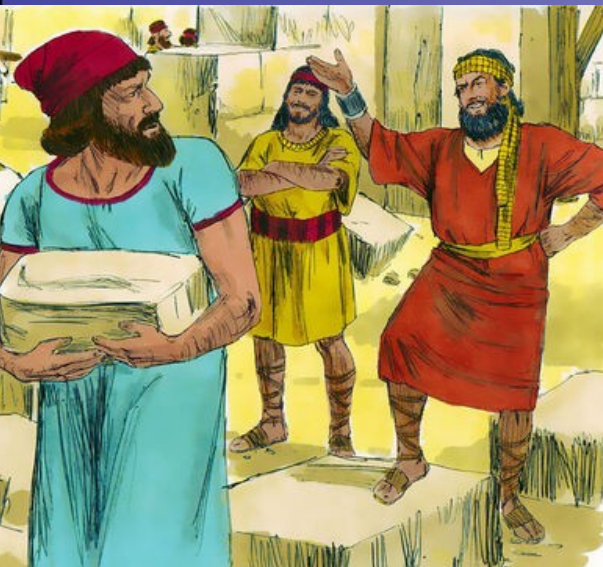
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 - Why are they being so hard-nosed about this? Couldn't they *use* a little help?
 - Now, if the neighbors had been being sincere, then this would've been the end of this part of the story, right?



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 - Please read Ezra 4:3
 - Please read Ezra 4:4
 - So they probably never *really* wanted to help get the Temple built in the first place
 - So then why had they even *offered* to help?
 - What can we learn about that today?



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 - Please read Ezra 4:3
 - Please read Ezra 4:4
 - Please read Ezra 4:5
 - So they actively caused trouble about this for years (from the reign of our good Persian King Cyrus all the way through to Darius the Great)



Letters to Kings



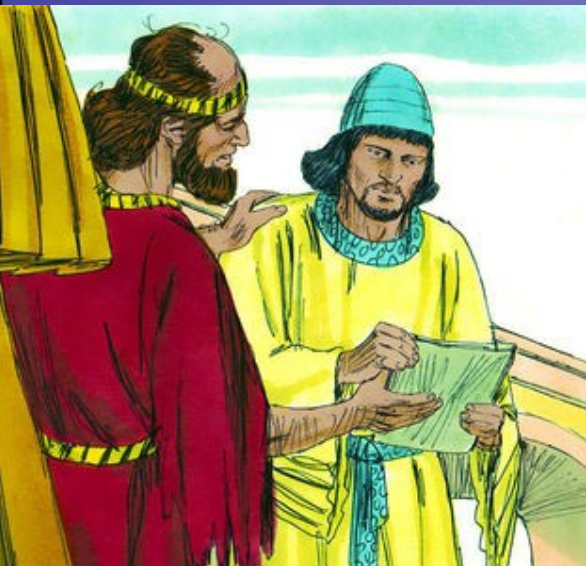
Funky little teaching moment...

- I'm not sure how you want me to pronounce the name of King Darius the Great
 - Common American pronunciation is "DARE-e-us"
 - Fancy-pants scholarly pronunciation is "Də-RYE-us"
 - Both of those are derived from the original Greek pronunciation of "DAH-ray-os" (Δαρειός)
 - Though the Hebrew version here is "Dār-YA-vesh" (דָּרְיוֹשׁ)
 - All of which really just tries to translate the original Persian "DAR-a-YA-va-hush" (𐎠𐎡𐎹𐎷𐎡𐎴𐎧𐎺𐎠𐎹)
 - So let's give one another a break and just let people pronounce the name however their mouths work



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 - Please read Ezra 4:5
 - So they actively caused trouble about this for years
 - Over the next several verses, the writer tells us about a series of letters written over the span of about a century from the neighbors and Persian officials back to the various Neo-Babylonian kings, bad-mouthing the Jews and asking the kings to make them stop their rebuilding efforts
 - How can a hatred last that long?



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 - Please read Ezra 4:11-16

Written by the official Babylonian commissioner, Rehum, dictated to his official Babylonian scribe, Shimshai, outlining the concerns of the official Babylonian judges and leaders in the area, this would've been quite the damning letter

- Here's my sticky question for the day:
 - Is anything arguably entirely *inaccurate* in this letter?
 - Hadn't the Jews had a long history of *not* being very good at bowing to foreign powers?



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- Please read Ezra 4:11-16
- Please read Ezra 4:17-22



- How did the newer king, Artaxerxes, respond to their letter-writing campaign?
 - Doesn't this fly in the face of everything that Cyrus had promised years before?
 - What can we learn from that today?
(remember, Cyrus had made these promises to every exiled people in Babylon—he hadn't researched *Judah specifically* before he'd included them)



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 - Please read Ezra 4:11-16
 - Please read Ezra 4:17-22
 - Please read Ezra 4:23-24
 - Depending on how you count that, that's about 16 years of not doing what God told them to do...
 - Half a generation of *not* doing what they were *supposed* to do, after trying to start off on such a good foot—how would that affect them?
 - How would that affect *us today*?

