

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 (part 2)*



Letters to Kings



Funky little teaching moment...

- Let's address some concerns in chapter 4—
 - Here's a quick chronology of the relevant kings—

Assyrians	Tiglath-Pileser III	745-727 BC
	Shalmaneser V	727-722 BC
	Sargon II	721-705 BC
	Sennacherib	705-681 BC
	Esarhaddon	681-669 BC
	Ashurbanibal	669-627 BC
Babylonians	Nebuchadnezzar II	605-562 BC
	Nabonidus	556-539 \ co-regents
	Belshazzar	553-539/
Persians	Cyrus the Great	559-530 BC
	Cambyses	530-522 BC
	Darius the Great	522-486 BC
	Xerxes (Ahasuerus)	486-465 BC
	Artaxerxes	465-424 BC

- At the end of chapter 4, our writer tells us that the neighbors caused problems from the reign of Cyrus the Great into the reign of Darius the Great (in chapter 5, he'll then focus on what goes down with King Darius, since that's the crux point of what he's leading up to)



Letters to Kings



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- At the end of chapter 4, our writer tells us that the neighbors caused problems from the reign of Cyrus the Great into the reign of Darius the Great
- But in the meantime, he quotes a letter written years later during the time of Artaxerxes that best articulates the neighbors' arguments—which *also* shut down the Jews' work.



Letters to Kings



Funky little teaching moment...

- Let's address some concerns in chapter 4—
 - We have reason to believe that this book is being written by Ezra, but do you remember who in this story was a member of the court of King Artaxerxes and would have certainly read—possibly even helped *translate*—the letter quoted in chapter 4?
 - His Jewish cup-bearer, Nehemiah
 - So, narratively speaking, it would make sense for Nehemiah to share this letter with his compatriot, Ezra, as a perfect example of the problem at hand
 - But—crucially—it's not the *only* letter that was getting sent back and forth with the neo-Babylonian Persian kings...



Letters to Kings



Funky little teaching moment...

- Let's address some concerns in chapter 4—
 - We have reason to believe that this book is being written by Ezra, but do you remember who in this story was a member of the court of King Artaxerxes and would have certainly read—possibly even helped *translate*—the letter quoted in chapter 4?
 - So our story now backs up to what was going on during the reign of Darius the Great...

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and that's where chapter 5 picks things back up, telling us about *more* messages to and from kings...



Letters to Kings

- The people of God have returned home
 - They had 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
 - But then, just as they laid the foundation of the Temple, their neighbors turned against them, afraid that a re-established Judah would mean a bad future for the rest of them
 - And after such a good (seeming) start, all work on the Temple was forced to stop “until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia”
 - What would that do to the people of God—and to their faith?



Letters to Kings



Funky little teaching moment...

- Jesus told a parable that's relevant here
 - In Mark 4:16-17, Jesus said that some people are “like seed sown on rocky places, [who] hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.”
 - How is this relevant to the situation that the people of God were facing here in Ezra-Nehemiah?
 - How is this relevant to the situations that the people of God are facing today?
 - How do we avoid becoming like those who “quickly fall away” when trouble or persecution come?



Letters to Kings



Funky little teaching moment...

- Jesus told a parable that's relevant here
- But isn't it a question of the context?
 - It's one thing to stand up to your antagonistic neighbors when the King of Persia is *supporting* you but it's quite another thing to stand up to them when the King of Persia is on *their* side, right?
 - Because, as we all know, it's the King of Persia who's been sovereign over their fate the whole time, right?
 - Remember our Quiz:
 - Which King carried the people of God off into exile in Babylon—was it Cyrus or Nebuchadnezzar?
 - Jeremiah 29:14 tells us that it was YAHWEH, wasn't it?
 - So how do we apply this in every context in our lives? (even when the road gets a little bit rocky around us... or *in us*...)



Letters to Kings

- The people of God have returned home
 - They have a written decree from good King Cyrus II
 - So God's people have stopped building the Temple
 - Please read Ezra 5:1
 - I love how the Bible informs the Bible, 'cuz this isn't just a bunch of “wisdom stories”—it's *history*



Letters to Kings



Funky little teaching moment...

- To understand what comes next, read Haggai 1
 - In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of YAHWEH came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest: This is what YAHWEH Almighty says: "These people [who oppose you] say, 'The time has not yet come to rebuild YAHWEH's house.' ... Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while *this* house [YAHWEH's house] remains a ruin?"
 - They'd spent time and money building permanent, comfortable houses for themselves, but God's Temple remained only a slab of concrete on the ground
 - Which part of their lives were they tacitly considering permanent, and which part were they seemingly considering more transitory?
 - How can we apply this to our own life contexts today?



Letters to Kings



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Now this is what YAHWEH Almighty says...

- And I love that parallel here—*these* people say the time hasn't yet come to do the right thing—but now *this* is what YAHWEH Almighty says...



Letters to Kings

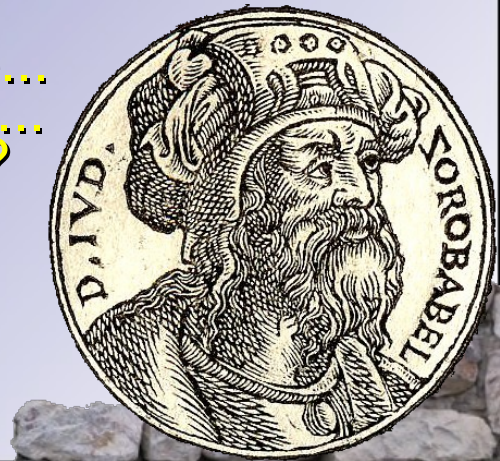


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Now this is what YAHWEH Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."

- You neglected God to feel comfortable... and yet, now you feel *less* comfortable...
 - How can we apply *this* to our lives?



Letters to Kings



Funky little teaching moment² ...

- Jesus told a parable that's relevant here
 - In Mark 4:18-19, Jesus said that *other* people are “like seed sown among thorns, [who] hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”
 - How is this relevant to the situation that the people of God were facing here in Ezra-Nehemiah?
 - How is this relevant to the situations that the people of God are facing today?
 - How do we avoid becoming like those who let the Word get “choked” in our lives by all of the stuff that we do to make ourselves more comfortable and stable?



Letters to Kings



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"You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares YAHWEH Almighty.

- What crucial pronoun(s) do you see here?
 - How can we apply *this* to our lives?



Letters to Kings



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"You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares YAHWEH Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew..."

- What crucial pronoun(s) do you see here?
 - How can we apply *this* to our lives?



Letters to Kings



Funky little teaching moment...

- To understand what comes next, read Haggai 2
 - On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of YAHWEH came through the prophet Haggai: "Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, 'Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?'
 - It's so easy to give up in life, to give in, since it often seems like so little is to be gained by trying
 - I mean, think about it—did it look *like* a Temple?
 - Look at your own life, or at our church family—would the world think that any of this really looks "impressive" to them?



Letters to Kings



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But—

- How important is that tiny, huge little word here?



Letters to Kings



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 - What does God repeat *three times* here?
 - What would that do to you to hear God tell you that *by name*...?



Letters to Kings



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 - What does God repeat *three times* here?
 - Interestingly, this echoes what David had said to Solomon when he began construction on the first Temple, back in the day—

"Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for YAHWEH God, *my* God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of YAHWEH is finished."
 - Why might God want to consciously draw their memory back to *that* moment?
 - How can we apply this concept?



Letters to Kings



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 - But how could this lesser Temple ever be on par with the original one—much less have even *greater* glory?
 - How do we judge the "glory" or "magnificence" of a Temple, or a church, or a ministry?
 - How *should* we, keeping in line with how God judged the relative glories of the old and the new Temples?



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Letters to Kings



Funky little teaching moment...

- To understand *how* to do that, read what the priest-prophet Zechariah says in Zechariah 4
 - This is the word of YAHWEH to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says YAHWEH Almighty.
 - How can we apply that concept to our own contexts?
 - Can you trust in that—just in that much—even if God doesn't give you any more details to make you *comfortable* enough to trust Him?

