

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*
- *The Return of the Heroes (part 2)*



The Return of the Heroes

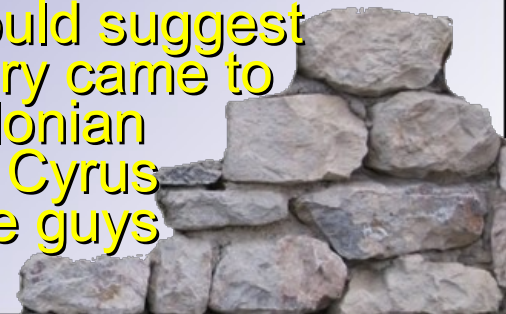


Funky little teaching moment...

- So last week, we talked about Darius the Great, who may have been the king who interacted with Daniel and the lions' den—then again, he may not have been
 - Remember our quick chronology of foreign 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

- Technically, Daniel 5:31 (and 6:28) would suggest that the “King Darius” of the Daniel story came to power between the reigns of the Babylonian King Belshazzar and the Persian King Cyrus—but there was no king between those guys



The Return of the Heroes



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- 1) Maybe the Bible just made this King Darius up
 - The book of Daniel needed a king that learned to like the Jews, so the writer just invented one
 - This presupposes that you can't really trust the Bible to be historically accurate—which is actually the *opposite* of what we *clearly* see throughout most of the Bible
(including the totally historical King Nebuchadnezzar[s] seen earlier on in the book)
(remember—Nabonidus was also called “Nebuchadnezzar” in official court records)



The Return of the Heroes



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 - This presupposes that you can't really trust the Bible to be historically accurate—which is actually the *opposite* of what we *clearly* see throughout most of the Bible
 - Besides, both Cyrus and the *real* Darius would've worked *at least* as well for the story as a *fake* guy would have—and everyone in Israel would've known their neo-Babylonian kings well enough to recognize a fake one



The Return of the Heroes



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- 2) Maybe “Darius” is just another name for Cyrus
 - An alternate reading of Daniel 6:28 could be—
“Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, i.e.; the reign of Cyrus the Persian”
(as if “Darius” were a common metonym for Persian kings back then—which may even explain the “Darius the Mede” comment from Daniel 9:1... which could then be describing Artaxerxes?)



The Return of the Heroes

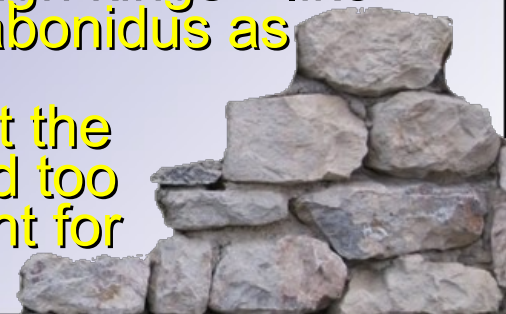
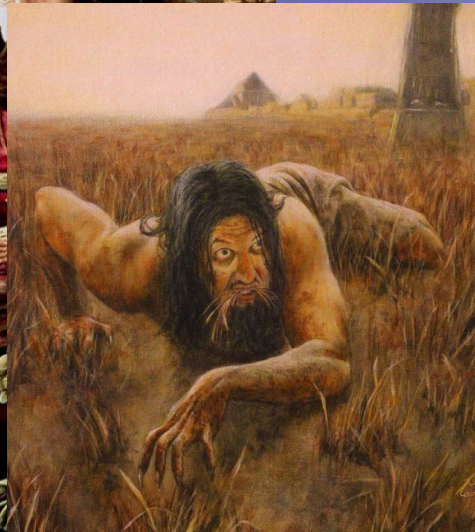


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- 2) **Maybe "Darius" is just another name for Cyrus**
 - An alternate reading of Daniel 6:28 could be—
"Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, i.e.; the reign of Cyrus the Persian"
 - Remember that the writer of Daniel is a little imprecise in his naming of foreign kings—like when he appears to refer to Nabonidus as "Nebuchadnezzar" in Daniel 4
(which, again, we know that the Babylonians themselves did too —which creates a precedent for using metonyms in Daniel)



The Return of the Heroes

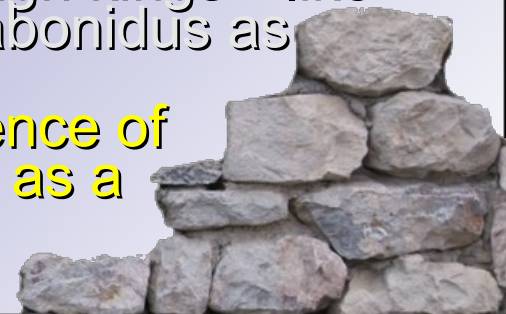


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 - Remember that the writer of Daniel is a little imprecise in his naming of foreign kings—like when he appears to refer to Nabonidus as “Nebuchadnezzar” in Daniel 4
 - **But we have no historical evidence of the Babylonians using “Darius” as a royal metonym like this**



The Return of the Heroes



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- 1) Maybe the Bible just made this King Darius up
- 2) Maybe “Darius” is just another name for Cyrus
- 3) **Maybe this is a general named Gaubaruva**
 - He was crucial in Cyrus' invasion and conquest of Babylon, and may have served as a temporary ruler over parts of the empire (and when he did, maybe they gave him the “kingly” metonym of “Darius”?)



The Return of the Heroes



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 - He was crucial in Cyrus' invasion and conquest of Babylon, and may have served as a temporary ruler over parts of the empire
 - **But that's a lot of “maybe” arguments—and no historical records indicate that he ever ruled over anything (or that he ever would've ever been called “Darius” —especially since he later served under Darius when he was older)**



The Return of the Heroes



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- 3) Maybe this is a general named Gaubaruva
- 4) **Maybe it's the Median King Cyaxares II**
 - He was the king of the Medes when their kingdom was subsumed into Neo-Babylon when Cyrus took over everything
 - So maybe he was “a” king of the *Assyrian region* who interacted with Daniel in chapter 6 and could thus *also* be our “Darius the *Mede*” from Daniel 9



The Return of the Heroes



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 - He was the king of the Medes when their kingdom was subsumed into Neo-Babylon when Cyrus took over everything
 - But the “Darius the Mede” in Daniel 9 is specifically a son of the Persian King Xerxes, and only a Mede “by descent” and doesn’t match anything else that we know about Cyaxares



The Return of the Heroes



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- 3) Maybe this is a general named Gaubaruva
- 4) Maybe it's the Median King Cyaxares II
- 5) **Maybe it really is actually Darius the Great**
 - But we know that Darius came 17 years *later*, and *not* right after Belshazzar was slain, as in Daniel 5:31, or right before Cyrus in 6:28
 - Then again, as we said, Daniel is fairly consistently imprecise—and 7:1 then takes us back all the way to the first year of Belshazzar's reign, so we *know* that he's jumping around



The Return of the Heroes



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- 3) Maybe this is a general named Gaubaruva
- 4) Maybe it's the Median King Cyaxares II
- 5) Maybe it really is actually Darius the Great
 - If so, then we should read 6:28 and 7:1 together as if the writer is *working backwards* "Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and of [his predecessor] Cyrus the Persian—and [hey, even way back] in the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream..."



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- Whatever is the case here, we're left with thinking that by the time Darius the Great issues his edict in Ezra 6, God had made a profound impact on a king called "Darius"—which, at the very least would have affected Darius the Great when he performed his requested review of the official royal archives...



The Return of the Heroes



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- Whatever is the case here, we're left with thinking that by the time Darius the Great issues his edict in Ezra 6, God had made a profound impact on a king called “Darius”
- So I'm standing by our “Daniel in the lions' den probably influenced Darius supporting rebuilding God's Temple” argument



The Return of the Heroes



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 - So we've got options
 - Twenty years after the death of Darius the Great came King Artaxerxes—a generation *after* the completion of the Temple in Jerusalem—and that's where we'll pick things back up in Ezra 7...



The Return of the Heroes

- We've met several characters so far in our study of Ezra-Nehemiah
 - Ironically, two people we *haven't* met yet are Ezra and Nehemiah
 - Please read Ezra 7:1-6
 - What do we know about Ezra from his lineage?
 - What do we know about Ezra *that he's sharing* his lineage—and his *résumé*—with us like this?



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 - Please read Ezra 7:7-10
- (so apparently, it takes about four months to travel from Babylon's seat of power in Susa to Israel —which might help explain why Tattenai hadn't gotten Darius' decree by the time he wrote his damning report against Israel)
- (but if Tattenai got Darius' decree *after* he'd sent off his report but *before* he received Darius' official response, does that explain what happened in Ezra 6:13?)



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 - What do we know about Ezra from *these* verses?
 - Why does he *keep* sharing his résumé with us?
 - Why is he such a detail freak?
 - Should it surprise anyone that verses 11-26 provide the text of *yet another* letter that Ezra has kept in his file boxes?



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 - Anyone remember the text of the *last* letter that we'd gotten from Artaxerxes, back in chapter 4?
 - Ezra 4:7—"Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his associates wrote a letter to Artaxerxes..."
(warning him not to let the Jews rebuild, and encouraging him to check out the archives about the problems from Israel in the past)



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 - Ezra 4:7
 - Ezra 4:17-19—"The king sent this reply: To Rehum the commanding officer, Shimshai the secretary and the rest of their associates living in Samaria and elsewhere in Trans-Euphrates: Greetings. The letter you sent us has been read and translated in my presence. I issued an order and a search was made, and it was found that this city has a long history of revolt against kings and has been a place of rebellion and sedition..."
(though both Cyrus and Darius had been cool with them)



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 - Ezra 4:7
 - Ezra 4:17-19
 - Ezra 4:20-22—"Jerusalem has had powerful kings ruling over the whole of Trans-Euphrates, and taxes, tribute and duty were paid to them. Now issue an order to these men to stop work, so that this city will not be rebuilt until I so order. Be careful not to neglect this matter. Why let this threat grow, to the detriment of the royal interests?"



The Return of the Heroes



Funky little teaching moment...

- The letter here in chapter 7 is much more positive —so why the dramatic change in Artaxerxes between chapters 4 and 7?
 - Well, who ended up becoming a trusted *cupbearer* for Artaxerxes?
 - And who ended up becoming a trusted *archivist* for Artaxerxes?



The Return of the Heroes



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 - And who ended up becoming a trusted *archivist* for Artaxerxes?
(who maybe found an old decree about impalements and such from Darius?)



The Return of the Heroes



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(who maybe found an old decree about impalements and such from Darius?)

(or even an official account of what his own father Xerxes had decided in Esther 8:11?) (NOTE: 10:2)
(and what was the legal procedural context for that decree in Esther 8:7-8?)



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(which actually suggests that Ezra had his own copy of the Law of God with him—so how important was this guy?)
(or maybe they didn't even *have* a complete copy back in Jerusalem, so he was bringing it with him—think about how precious *that* cargo was...)



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 - Please read Ezra 7:11-14
 - Please read Ezra 7:15-16
 - Note that this is *not* the more than \$20 million that Zerubbabel had brought back a generation earlier —this is *even more* money coming from Babylon now (ultimately, something like another \$3 million)



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 - God clearly made a very strong impression on Darius—and Artaxerxes' scribe, Ezra, brought that to the king's attention
 - Maybe he read him the accounts from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar about the God who saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace
 - Or the accounts from the reign of Darius about the God who protected Daniel from the mouths of the hungry lions
 - Is that a God you really want *against* you... or one you *really* want on *your* side...?



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 - In verse 21, Artaxerxes uses an interestingly familiar word to make his point—
“Now I, King Artaxerxes, order all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates to provide with **diligence**”
 - Where have you heard that word used in a letter before?



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- In verse 21, Artaxerxes uses an interestingly familiar word to make his point—
“Now I, King Artaxerxes, order all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates to provide with diligence”
- In 6:12, Darius had told the unhappy neighbors to support Israel and obey his decree “with diligence”
“[And] I decree that if anyone defies this edict, a beam is to be pulled from their house and they are to be impaled on it. And for this crime their house is to be made a pile of rubble.” (Ezra 6:11)
 - How did the neighbors respond?

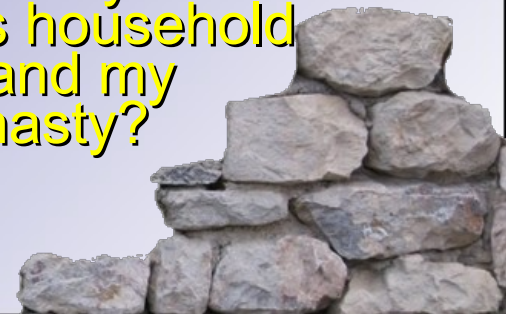


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 - Please read Ezra 7:17-20
 - Please read Ezra 7:21-23

- What's the most *immediate* rationale that drives Artaxerxes to be this generous to Israel?

- The God who overwhelmed the great Egyptians who spectacularly protected Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from Nebuchadnezzar's furnace and who protected Daniel from the mouths of hungry lions during the reign of Darius the Great and even who protected the Jews in my father's time and led to the ruin of Haman's household—do I want *that* God to be *for* me and my dynasty, or *against* me and my dynasty?



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- What's the most *immediate* rationale that drives Artaxerxes to be this generous to Israel?
- How did the king close out his letter in verse 26?
(and how did that echo what Darius had written a generation earlier?)



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- What's the most *immediate* rationale that drives Artaxerxes to be this generous to Israel?
- How did the king close out his letter in verse 26?
- What was Ezra's response to all of this in verses 27-28?
(and how did that echo what we read in 6:22 from a generation earlier?)



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- How can we actively apply all of this to our own lives today?

