

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

C1407 – February 26, 2014

The Jews Under Persia

Tonight, we come again to our study on the Intertestamental Times. The way I've set this class up is to think through God's kingdom program. God's purpose is to establish the kingdom of God on earth and to have it ruled over by a mediatorial human king who would trust and obey God in heaven. The kingdom was originally created in Genesis as a paradisiacal realm and given to the first human king Adam. However he failed to trust and obey the God of heaven and in an act of rebellion he handed the kingdom over to Satan. The rest of history is the story of how God intends to restore the kingdom to a second Adam through His plan of redemption. The plan is to restore the kingdom through a promised king whose lineage is narrowed from that of the woman, to that of Abraham, to that of Isaac, then Jacob, then Judah and eventually through David. The trouble is that David's kingdom is divided under his grandson Rehoboam and gradually plunges into Exile to Babylon in 586BC. At that time the promise to restore the kingdom seemed to be vanquished since the Davidic king was removed from office, the Davidic throne was empty and the Shekinah Glory had departed from the Temple. Every visible vestige of the kingdom of God was totally absent from earth and the Judean captives were scattered throughout the Babylonian kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the four metal statue was interpreted by Daniel as referring to four successive Gentile kingdoms that God granted dominion after which the kingdom of God would arrive suddenly, smash all four Gentile kingdoms and grow to encompass the whole earth. The four kingdoms historically are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. This structure is critical to understand when you come to the NT because what kingdom are the Jews living in when the NT Gospels occurred? Rome. And what is the Lord's Prayer requesting? What did Christ instruct the Jews to pray for? "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Was the kingdom of God present? No. Jesus was present but Jesus is not the kingdom.

Jesus is the king of the kingdom but the kingdom had only drawn near. The kingdom of Rome was still in authority, the fourth kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. What the Lord's Prayer captures is the fact that God was reigning in heaven but His reign on earth was not present at that time. But the instruction that they pray that His kingdom reign come upon the earth proves that the earthly kingdom of God is going to be restored. So what is being requested is that God's reign extend to the earth so that His will is done on earth as it is being done in heaven. Included in that prayer is the petition that David's line be re-established and David's throne be restored. Of course, the restoration of the kingdom was contingent on Israel's reception of their Davidic king and they received Him not. That's the whole theme of the gospels. So the kingdom was suspended, from the human point of view, and its coming remains for the future. During the interregnum we have the Church which was a mystery in that it was not revealed in the OT. It is therefore not a kingdom or a form of the kingdom in any sense despite the majority of Christian writings that say the kingdom is now in some form. There are only two concepts of the kingdom in Scripture; first, the kingdom of God as referring to God's sovereign rule in heaven and second, the kingdom of God as referring to the restoration of David's kingdom on earth. The church is not a kingdom. Failure to understand this point is what leads to the confusion of law and grace. The truth of the matter is that Nebuchadnezzar's dream is complex enough to reveal that there were two phases of the fourth kingdom of Rome; an ancient phase during which the 1st coming of the King occurred and a future phase during which the 2nd coming of the King will occur. In between these two comings is the Church. Only during the future phase of Rome will Israel receive her King and the kingdom will come!

We are looking at Israel under these four kingdoms as they lead up to and cover the IT. Last time we focused on the first of the four Gentile kingdoms when we reviewed Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of Judah in 606/5BC and the recurring dream of the four metal statue that was suddenly demolished by a stone cut out without hands in 603/2BC. The first Gentile kingdom would be Babylon and Daniel revealed to Nebuchadnezzar that he was the first and greatest representative of this kingdom. He ruled from 605-562BC. Truly he conquered many nations and trained the royal and noble captives of these nations in Babylonian thought and culture in order to establish them in administrative positions throughout his kingdom. Yet of all these royals and nobles none could surpass Daniel and his friends in wisdom and

understanding. Daniel was even able to interpret all kinds of dreams. Because of this he was promoted to a top ranking position in Babylon where he could intervene on behalf of his people Israel. It was in this context that Nebuchadnezzar arrogantly re-interpreted the statue. He envisioned that he was not merely the head of gold but the entire statue. This meant that he imagined his kingdom to be one of eternal succession of his dynasty. He did what so many pagan Gentiles do and that is take God's plan for history and re-formulate it for their own ends. The same strategy was used by Marxists in their vision of creating a utopian society through communism. This vision is known to be based explicitly on a re-interpretation of the Book of Daniel. The Marxists were not the first to envision this, Nebuchadnezzar was. His goal was to establish his kingdom as eternal. To accomplish this he had a golden statue built of himself and erected in the plain of Dura. He then brought all his administration to the statue to bow down and worship him in an act of obeisance. By securing their loyalty to him he hoped to secure an eternal succession of his dynasty and kingdom such that it would fill the whole earth. Daniel's three friends, however, courageously refused to bow down. Since Nebuchadnezzar could have no disloyalty in his administration they were removed from their posts by being cast in the fiery furnace. However, when they were seen walking about unhurt by the fire they were called out. The miracle was so stupendous that even Nebuchadnezzar recognized it was the hand of their God. As a result he promoted them in his administration and gave the Jews authorization to freely worship this God.

Near the end of Nebuchadnezzar's reign he had another dream, this one of a great tree that grew up, reached into the heavens, shaded the whole earth and provided food for all the beasts of the field and a dwelling place for every bird of the sky. Then suddenly the tree was cut down and all its branches cut off so that all that was left was a stump. The beasts and the birds fled away and a band of iron was put around the stump. Then he saw a man who began to act like a beast and go around on all fours grazing like an animal. The man acted this way for a set period of time. Daniel interrupted this dream by explaining that the tree referred to Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom growing great and providing support for all its conquered nations. But at some point the king would lose touch with reality and start acting like an animal by grazing from the field like a beast. During that time the conquered nations would revolt until the king humbly admitted that God was the one who had given him his kingdom. In due time this dream came to pass. One day

Nebuchadnezzar was walking around his palace and he began to exalt and praise himself in his mind for his mighty power in establishing his kingdom and so because of this arrogance God struck him and he lost his mind and acted like a beast going about on all fours. Without his leadership the conquered nations in his kingdom went into revolution until the king at last raised his eyes toward heaven and gave credit where credit was due. When he raised his eyes to heaven he was believing that God was sovereign and that He is the one who gives kingdoms and takes kingdoms away. He became a genuine believer at that time. So the first Gentile king became a genuine believer in the God of Israel and he was served by Daniel and his three friends and he was a friend to the Jews.

The next king was a son of Nebuchadnezzar, Evil-Merodach who reigned from 562-560BC. He also exercised kindness to the Jews. He even allowed the captive king Jehoiachin to be released from prison and given food and other provisions at the court for the remainder of his life. "Cuneiform tablets found by Weidner in Babylon...identify Jehoiachin as 'King of the land of Judah,' and indicate that he and his five sons received liberal allowances of oil and food." (Wood, 386). These acts by the king are the acts of friendship toward a friend and probably represent the continuation of Daniel's influence.

After Evil-Merodach's short reign the kingdom underwent several king changes and finally stabilized with Nabonidus who reigned from 555-539BC and his son Belshazzar who reigned as co-rex from 553-539BC. It was during the early reign of these two co-kings that Daniel in Dan 7 saw his vision of the four beasts that depicted the same four successive Gentile kingdoms as depicted by the four metal statue seen by Nebuchadnezzar. The first beast was like a lion with wings of an eagle who then lost his wings and stood up on two feet like a man and was given a human mind. The second beast was like a bear raised up on one side with three ribs in its mouth. The third beast was like a leopard with four wings on its back and it had four heads. The fourth beast was like a dreadful and terrifying beast with large iron teeth and brass claws and it had ten horns and then a small little horn grew up and pulled up three of the others, and the little horn had eyes and a mouth and uttered great boasts. Fifth, one like a Son of Man came up to the Ancient of Days and received a global kingdom over all the peoples of the earth. Daniel was astonished and approached an angel to understand the interpretation. The angel explained that the four beasts are four successive Gentile kingdoms

who would rule and then a fifth Kingdom, the kingdom ruled by the Son of Man would come and the Jewish believers would receive this kingdom and possess it forevermore. It was another picture of the course history must take before the restoration of the kingdom of God on earth, just like the dream of the four metal statue. However, the four metal statue looked at the four Gentile kingdoms from the human view point as great accomplishments of man whereas the four beasts looked at the four Gentile kingdoms from the divine view point as terrifying, oppressive kingdoms. Whether Daniel shared this vision with Nabonidus and Belshazzar is not known but we do know that Nebuchadnezzar did pass the events of his temporary insanity on to his grandson Belshazzar. Even in the vision of the beasts Nebuchadnezzar was portrayed as a lion that had wings of an eagle, who then lost his wings and then stood up on two feet like a man and was given a human mind. This pictured the progress of Nebuchadnezzar's rule. At first he was like a swift and fierce conqueror, then he lost his wings depicting his time of insanity and at last he stood up like a man and was given a human mind showing his faith and proper attitude toward God at the end of his reign. The lesson was critical to remember for later Gentile kings, in particular his sons and grandsons. Since their kingdom was given to them by God they should worship and serve Him as Nebuchadnezzar. Belshazzar forgot this lesson when on the final night of the Babylonian kingdom, in Dan 5, he was holding a great feast for a thousand of his nobles and drinking wine. When he tasted the wine he requested that the gold and silver vessels that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought so they could drink from them. When they drank from them they worshipped the gods of gold and silver and bronze and iron and wood and stone. This act of idolatry resulted in the appearance of a mysterious hand writing a cryptic message upon the wall. Belshazzar feared greatly, understanding that he had done something that prompted this ominous declaration. When none of his wise men could interpret it the queen suggested Daniel be brought in since he had formerly deciphered difficult dreams and visions for his grandfather. When Daniel arrived and understood the message he rebuked Belshazzar for not humbling his heart while knowing that the God of heaven had rebuked his grandfather by causing him to be temporarily insane until he recognized God's rule. The message on the wall was short and decisive; Belshazzar had been weighed and found wanting, the days of his kingdom had come to an end, it was being divided and given to the Medes and the Persians. At that time the Medo-Persian army, under the direction of Ugbaru, had already

diverted the channels of the Euphrates River that ran under the city walls. Within moments they entered the banquet hall and took Babylon without a fight. Daniel himself was transferred into the Persian administration and installed as one of the top advisors to aid in the kingdom transition. Thus, in 539BC the first of the four Gentile kingdoms had come to an end. It would not be long until the Jews would be restored from Babylon since Jeremiah predicted they would remain there seventy years (Jer 25:11).

Despite their exile to Babylon, life as a whole was pleasant for the Jews. This was due in the main to God's raising up Daniel and his three friends to work on their behalf from top administrative positions. Wood says that while Daniel held these high positions it is likely that he was "able to play a significant role in securing pleasant conditions for his captive countrymen." "Evidence exists that life for the Judean captives was comparatively pleasant; much different, surely, than the condition of bondage experienced by their ancestors in Egypt." Five such evidences are cited in support for this contention. First, "some of Judah's own institutions were maintained. For instance, elders, long employed in the local government of Judah, were still active." "Also, the institutions of the prophets and priests (in their respective teaching ministries) were retained; for when Jeremiah addressed a letter to the captives, he mentioned first the elders, then both prophets and priests, and finally the people generally (Jer. 29:1). Second, the "captives enjoyed freedom of movement in the land. Ezekiel...even having his own house (Ezek 8:1). Also, the elders were at liberty to visit him there. The freedom accorded Jehoiachin, after liberation from prison by Amel-marduk [aka Evil Merodach], testifies similarly. He was given food and other provisions at the court for the remainder of his life and may even have been granted some authority to rule, for it is stated that he was given a "seat" (throne?) above that of other kings with him in Babylon (II Kings 25:28)." Third, the Judeans retained "correspondence privileges...Jeremiah speaks of such letters (29:25) and also wrote to the captives in Babylon himself (29:1). That communication of this kind must have been carried on is evidenced also by people in Judah knowing of Jehoiachin's status, so that they were able to hope for his return as king (Jer. 28:3-4)." Fourth, a most significant evidences is the Judeans "favorable employment opportunities...One is found in the type of person Nebuchadnezzar chose to deport. He took craftsmen and artisans, particularly in the captivity of 597 B. C. (II Kings 24:14-16). Apparently Nebuchadnezzar planned to put them to work in skilled trades. The other is

found in the many business tablets, discovered at Nippur on the canal Kabari, which contain Jewish names in a context showing that they were active in business: renting, buying, and selling.” Fifth, the Judeans were “permitted to live on fine, fertile land. Many resided along or near the river Chebar (Ezek. 1:1, 3; 3:15, 23; etc.), which...likely...flowed out of the Euphrates...The canal supplied irrigation for a rich farming area, which means that Jews were favored by an advantageous land for farming, whether for themselves or in working for others.” In conclusion, as to life in Babylon, the picture emerges that it was a relatively pleasant one given the circumstances. Yet this picture does not mitigate the circumstances entirely. Wood says, “the experience did serve as a punishment, if only because the people had been uprooted from their homes and were forced to endure the kind of humiliation that comes with captivity under the best of conditions. This sense of humiliation would have been felt most keenly at the beginning of the period, probably the time when Psalm 137 was written, speaking as it does of weeping by the rivers of Babylon.” As the period progressed and Daniel and his friends rose in power their sense of humiliation would have lightened. By the close of the Babylonian period the Jews had established such a good situation in Babylon that few, proportionately speaking, would return when Cyrus issued his decree to return and rebuild the Temple.

This brings us to the second Gentile kingdom, Medo-Persia, and the life of the Jews under this kingdom which lasts through the rest of the OT canon and on until the time of the third Gentile kingdom of Greece (539-425 (OT) - 331BC (Greece)). The period from 539-425BC we are familiar with due to the canonical books of Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Esther, Nehemiah and Malachi being written in this period. However, the period from 425-331BC which takes us to the Greeks we are less familiar with because there are no canonical books written in that period. Thus the Intertestamental Times formally begins after Malachi about 425BC.

Let’s deal first with the familiar period during the final period of the OT. The Medo-Persian kingdom came to dominance in 539BC. It had already been predicted in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the statue recorded in Daniel 2. It was symbolized by the silver chest and arms. The silver indicated it was inferior in economics to the gold kingdom of Babylon but superior in military strength. The kingdom was also predicted in the vision recorded in Daniel 7. There it was depicted as a bear-like beast raised up on one side with three

ribs in its mouth. The bear indicates a slow but certain conquest. The fact that it was raised on one side indicates that one branch of the kingdom would be stronger and in time this turned out to be Persia. The three ribs in the bear's mouth indicated the three powers they would defeat in order to solidify their kingdom; Lydia, Egypt and Babylon. The Medo-Persian kingdom was also predicted in the vision of Daniel 8. Here it was depicted as a ram with two horns. Since horns represent power then two horns represent the great power of Medo-Persia. However, the ram with two horns was then defeated by a buck goat that symbolized Greece. So the picture of Medo-Persia is that it would be the second of the four successive Gentile kingdoms. From the human standpoint it would be inferior to Babylon economically but superior militarily. It would initially be composed of two peoples; the Medes and the Persians, but one branch, the Persian, would be more powerful than the Median. It would be a very powerful kingdom but eventually it would come to sudden defeat by the Greek conqueror, Alexander the Great.

The first king of Medo-Persia was Cyrus the Persian. He had not personally led the attack against Babylon, but it was led by his commanding officer Ugbaru. A few weeks later Cyrus personally entered Babylon. Daniel, as we mentioned, was quickly placed into the new administration because of his long years administering the Babylonian kingdom, his working knowledge of the kingdom, the people, the culture and the language. This Cyrus was actually named by Isaiah almost 200 years before as the one who would perform God's will by restoring the Jews to their land (Isa 44:28-45:7). Josephus records that Cyrus read the book of Isaiah and admired this prediction and sought to fulfill what was written. In 538BC, Cyrus issued the decree recorded in Ezra 1 that permitted the Jews to return to their land and rebuild their Temple. Perhaps Daniel played some role in showing Cyrus Isaiah's prophecy. In any case, as a result, 42,260 Jews returned to the land. This was a rather small number proportionate to the number of Jews at large. Probably few returned due to the fact that life had been so good and prosperous in Babylon that uprooting their lives now and moving back to the land was not seen favorably. Nevertheless, it was God's will for them to return and so Jews who did not return were living in rebellion against God, whereas those who did return were living in obedience to God.

The Jews who returned quickly rebuilt the altar and began to offer sacrifice. Then they restored the foundations and certain buildings in preparation to

rebuild the formal Temple. When the older generation saw the inferiority of this foundation and buildings to Solomon's they wept, while the younger generation cheered. It was at this time that Ezra 4 reports an incident that may be significant for furthering the breach between the Samaritans and the Jews. Remember, a Samaritan is one who had come from mixed marriages of Jews and Gentiles. The steps that led to the Jew/Samaritan problem in the NT were first, the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam around 930BC and second, the exile of the northern ten tribes into various parts of the Assyrian kingdom in 721BC. A third step is Ezra 4. Some of those who had settled in the region of the northern kingdom tried to join hands in completing the Temple. They said, "Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here." But the Jews turned them away and rejected their role in playing a part in the rebuilding. Consequently, they became angry and stirred up trouble for the Jews. In fear, the Jews stopped rebuilding, not trusting the Lord their God. If those who offered help were Samaritans then this event no doubt furthered the breach between Samaritans and Jews.

In 530BC Cyrus was wounded and died and the kingdom of Persia came to be ruled by his son, Cambyses II who reigned from 530-522BC. He is prophesied in Daniel 11:2 as the first of the three more kings to arise in Persia. He went to Egypt and waged a successful campaign, expanding the empire. While away a man named Guamata, also known as Pseudo-Smerdis (522BC), since he posed as the brother of Cambyses, seized the throne. He is prophesied in Daniel 11:2 as the second of the three more kings to arise in Persia. Then Darius Hystaspes successfully killed this pretender and solidified the kingdom ruling from 521-486BC. He is prophesied in Daniel 11:2 as the third of the three more kings to arise in Persia.

Now it was during his reign, about 520BC, that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah rose up and they prophesied to the Jews living in Jerusalem that they should complete the work (Ezra 5:1-2). When they faced opposition the enemies wrote to Darius informing him of the building activity and requesting that he search the king's library to see if indeed Cyrus had issued a decree authorizing the Jews to rebuild and restore the Temple. Darius subsequently discovered the decree in the archives and authorized the completion of the Temple. This encouraged the Jews and they completed and

dedicated the Temple in 515BC. At last Temple worship was finally restored in the Temple for the first time since 586BC. However, it seems from a reference in Nehemiah that the worship was either half-hearted or it quickly deteriorated. Darius nonetheless was favorable to the Jews because he followed the decree of Cyrus. Toward the end of his reign secular history tells us that Darius suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Greeks in 490BC at the Battle of Marathon. He vowed to get revenge but his attention was drawn to Egypt and he died in 486BC.

In his place came his son Ahasuerus who reigned over Persia from 486-465BC. He is prophesied in Dan 11:2 as a fourth king who would become very rich and would arouse his whole kingdom against Greece. He is the king in the Book of Esther who planned a great war against the Greeks to avenge his father's defeat and in the midst of the planning was enraged by Vashti's refusal to appear to display her beauty. In response he deposed her from her regal office. He then went off to wage war against the Greeks with a huge force to avenge his father's defeat at Marathon but he was defeated at Platea. His war against the Greeks enraged them and the rage would climax 140 years later when Alexander the Great rapidly conquered Persia. But before we leap ahead to the Greeks this Ahasuerus is the king in the Book of Esther who was chosen to replace Vashti when he returned from the war. Esther reveals the condition of the Jews in Persia, the populace's sentiment toward them and God's manner of working on behalf of them during this time. In general the Jews appear to be just another people group among many in Persia. The fact that Esther as a Jewess was able to enter into a beauty contest before the king shows that the Jews had freedom in Persia. The fact that she was chosen to be queen shows that the Jews were not discriminated against. The fact that Mordecai held a position at the palace of Susa also shows that the Jews were not discriminated against. Later he was even elevated to the highest post next to the king, more proof to the point. However, despite these favorable elements there was an anti-Semitic strain. Haman, the enemy of the Jews, served high up in Ahasuerus' administration. He secretly plotted genocide against the Jews on a particular day of the year. However, God cared for and protected them for His covenant purposes, even though they were not living in covenant obedience. His manner of protection was providence. Providence involves a complex series of events that are more than circumstantial. Wood summarizes, "Esther became queen just in time to lead in thwarting Haman's plot. Mordecai's attention was called to a previous

plot against the king just in time to give the king reason to honor him at a most opportune moment. The king, experiencing insomnia, had court records read to him, one of which concerned this good and unrewarded deed of Mordecai, the very night before Haman arrived to ask that Mordecai be hanged. This resulted in the king honoring Mordecai, in a manner most humiliating to Haman, just before Haman could make his own request to hang Mordecai. These crucial time sequences led to some remarkable reversals in expected happenings. The honor which the Jew-hating Haman believed was designed for himself came to be given to the Jew Mordecai. The gallows that Haman had made for Mordecai came to be used for himself. The edict that was designed by the Jew-hating Haman for doing away with all Jews became instead the instrument for slaying Jew-haters generally. Only God's special providence could account for such astonishing developments." (Wood, p 409) As a result the Jews established the Feast of Purim or lots wherein they commemorate the turn of events which led to the Jews salvation rather than desolation. And I would take it from Ahasuerus' favor toward the Jews that the favor continued till the end of his administration in 465BC.

In his place came Artaxerxes Longimanus IV who had a long and prosperous reign from 465-424BC. In his seventh year of 458BC he wrote a decree for Ezra permitting a second return of the Jews to the land. Ezra as a scribe and a priest would lead the return for the purpose of reforming the Temple worship which had fallen into disrepute. Whatever was needed Artaxerxes supplied initially out of the king's own treasury and from then on needs would be met by treasurers beyond the river. In obedience to the will of God probably 5-7,000 people, including priests and Levites, returned with Ezra to Jerusalem. Now interestingly Ezra is claimed by Jewish tradition to be the origin of the Pharisees. We'll challenge this origin but it is important to note that Ezra was both a scribe and a priest. Before Ezra's time the first scribes were composed of families that eventually organized in guilds and then taught the priests and Levites. Ezra being a priest was a result of this scribal attention to the priesthood. After Ezra's time the scribes developed oral tradition alongside the law and separated into various schools of thought and separated from the priests and Levites. By the time of the NT the scribes are almost entirely associated with the Pharisees. Christ opposes them for following their oral traditions in opposition to the law. We'll get into more detail with the scribes and Pharisees later but it's important to bring up here

because Ezra is a definite historical connection to the scribes and Pharisees we find in the NT. So when Ezra returned to Jerusalem from Babylon in 458BC his purpose was to reform the Jews and Temple worship and his purpose was largely successful, though only temporary.

Thirteen years later, in 444BC Nehemiah was serving as cupbearer to king Artaxerxes. When a report concerning the reproach of his people and the condition of the walls and gates in Jerusalem arrived, he requested that the king return him to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls. Artaxerxes granted his request in 444BC, issuing a decree to restore and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This formally started the seventy sevens or 490 year prophecy of Daniel. Through many leadership challenges Nehemiah and the Jews completed the walls in just fifty-two days. This put Israel back on the map. To have a fortified city was a huge step toward independence. Nevertheless, they would serve under Nehemiah as their governor for twelve years. When he departed we think Malachi wrote his letter to address the failures among the priests in particular and the people in general. Nehemiah then returned and served a second term as governor. At this time God goes silent and the voice from on high is not heard again until 425 years later when Gabriel speaks to Zechariah announcing the birth of John the Baptist, forerunner of the King. What was remaining of the Persian Empire had to run its course - Greece and finally Rome. Until then, the final exhortation to the Jews was to remember the law of Moses. The final instruction was that Elijah the prophet was coming before the great and terrible day of the Lord and then the kingdom would come. This message would have been on the minds of the people in the Gospels.

Now after God goes silent the records become sparse. Darius II Nothus comes to rule Persia from 423-404BC. During his reign there is evidence in the Elephantine papyri of a Jewish community in Upper Egypt. Elephantine was an island city in the middle of the Nile River. It had been established as a Persian military installation. The Jewish community produced a number of legal documents and personal letters that were discovered in 1843. In these letters we learn that they had correspondence with Jews in Judah. The governor in 419BC was a man named Hananiah. He was possibly Nehemiah's brother and ruled until 410BC. From 410 the governor was Bagoas. The high priest was Johanan who murdered his own brother in the temple precincts. This damaged Johanan's reputation and soon after his position was given to

Jaddua. As for the Jewish community in Elephantine we learn from the papyri that the Jews were polytheistic or syncretistic. They worshipped YHWH in a temple that they had built but they also worshiped other gods like Eshem-bethel, Herem-bethel and Anath-bethel (Bright, p 376). When their temple was destroyed in a rebellion that broke out in 410BC they sent letters to the high priest Johanan in Jerusalem asking for assistance. Since Johanan did not recognize any other temple than the one in Jerusalem there was no response. Three years later when Johanan was no longer governor letters were sent to the new governor of Judah and the governor of Samaria, begging for assistance in rebuilding the Temple. The Jews and Samaritans worked together to send funding. This demonstrates that the breach between Jew and Samaritan was not so serious that they could not work together. Eventually the temple at Elephantine was rebuilt and standing by 402BC. However, they did not offer animal sacrifices because this was detestable to Egyptians.

In summary of life under Persia, the Jews enjoyed relative tranquility except for the times of Esther. Cyrus worked on their behalf as he was raised up by God to give them the right of return and to rebuild the temple, even supplying monies from the royal funds and treasuries beyond the River. Darius Hystaspes confirmed Cyrus' decree by re-issuing the decree to rebuild the temple and supplying funding. Ahasuerus even married the Jewess Esther and in the wake of Haman's attempt at genocide of the Jews, promoted Mordecai to the highest place next to himself in all Persia. In the reign of Artaxerxes Ezra was permitted a second return of the Jews to restore the temple worship and Nehemiah, his trusted cupbearer, was permitted to return and serve as governor in the province of Judea. All in all the Jews fared quite well under Persia but that picture will change under the Greeks. The Greeks had visions of world domination that transcended that of either the Babylonians or the Persians.

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