I. **Persian Society**—All societies have their own peculiar characteristics. Persia was no different

A. **General characteristics.**

1. *Womanhood* held a higher position than she usually hold in other societies; women moved about in public freely and unveiled

2. Persians could be brutal, but they were also known for their generosity and fidelity to agreements.

3. They were a mannerly, a warm and hospitable people.
   
   a. Equals, when meeting, embraced and kissed each other.

   b. “To a person of higher rank, the Persians made a deep obeisance, to those of lower rank, they offered the cheek, to commoners, the bowed.”

4. Cleanliness was considered very important; to spit or blow the nose was considered improper.

5. The laws of Persia also spoke against prostitution, onanism and other similar evils.

B. **Family life:**

1. Virgins and bachelors were discouraged, while polygamy and concubinage were encouraged.

2. Polygamy and concubinage were a luxury of the rich.

3. Matches were made by the parents when their children reached puberty.

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4. “The range of choice was wide for we hear of the marriage of brother and sister, father and daughter, mother and son.”

5. As to children, boys were desired over girls.
   a. Abortion was a crime which was to be punished by death.
   b. Children remained under the control of the mother until five years of age, and under the care of the father from five to seven.

C. **Industry:** Persians were not an industrious people.
   1. They were content to allow the people of other cultures to produce the handicrafts, which they purchased
   2. Commerce was abandoned to the Babylonians, the Phoenicians, and the Jews because the market place was considered a breeding ground of lies and hypocrisy.
   3. In contrast, Persia did show expertise in transportation and communication
      a. Great roads were built for the purpose of uniting the main cities of the empire.
      b. The majority of these were built by Darius Hystaspes.
      c. "The development of roads and the postal system was another of the projects which Darius designed to facilitate the government of his far-flung empire. Several great roads were inherited from the old Assyrian Empire. One of those extended from Babylon to Carchemish, with a connecting spur to Nineveh and was prolonged westward and southward to Egypt. Another bound Babylon to the heart of Media. Darius rebuilt the road which connected Nineveh to Ecbatana, passing over the Zagros Mountains, and the road from Ecbatana to Sardis passing through Haran with a spur going down to Susa." 

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2Ibid., 38.

d. These roads also served to be very effective in carrying the royal mail.

(1) The road was measured by parasangs (3.4 miles).

(2) At every 4th parasang a fresh relay of horses stood ready to carry the mail.

(3) The ordinary traveler required ninety days to travel from Susa to Sardis, a distance of about sixteen hundred miles.4

(4) Yet the royal mail covered the distance in a little less than a week.

D. Political characteristics

1. "The Persian Empire was the most successful experiment in the imperial government that the Mediterranean world would see before the coming of Rome — which was destined to inherit much of the earlier’s political structure and administrative forms."5

2. The Persian government was so successful that Rome later based its government on Persia's political structure and administration

3. The king stood as the head of the government.

   a. Under him ruled “lesser kings.”

   b. So the Persian ruler was the “King of Kings.”

   c. The power of the "King of Kings" was absolute.

      (1) He could kill without a trial or reason.

4Measurements of this distance vary; some writers show fifteen hundred miles while others show sixteen hundred.

(2) He could choose his own successor, though many times assassination an revolution made the changes.

4. Under the “King of Kings” were the satraps.
   a. Each satrap or governor ruled over a satrapy or province.
   b. "The satrap was a civil governor only. The military chief in the satrapy was independent of the governor, and responsible directly to the king. The chief satrapies were filled by members of the royal house. Where such was not available the king’s daughters might be married to a satrap.\(^6\)

5. In addition to the satrap and military chief, a secretary was appointed in each province by the king; he was independent of both the military chief and the satrap, and was to report their behavior directly to the king.

6. As a further precaution against an uprising, the “King of Kings” employed an intelligence service, the “King’s Eyes and Ears,” which could appear at any moment, without notice, at any satrap in the empire to examine the affairs and records of that satrap.

7. “So complete was the process of appointing in the first instance and of hedging about with surveillance within and without that we hear astonishing little of malfeasance in the office among the satraps.”\(^7\)

E. Religious characteristics may be divided into two periods — before Zoroaster; after Zoroaster

1. Before Zoroaster
   a. The sacred book of the Persian religion is called the “Avesta,” of which only a small part has survived.

\(^6\)Pfeiffer, *Between*, 32.

b. Though the Avesta has survived one partial and two total destructions "what remains seems to be based on a collection of passages derived from oral tradition."\(^8\)

c. "There are clear indications in the Avesta that the religion of the Medes and Persians before Zoroaster’s time agreed in most respects with that of the Indian Aryans, And in a less degree with the beliefs of the Aryans in general."\(^9\)

d. They worshiped the forces of nature such as the wind, fire, water, the sky, and many others.

2. **After Zoroaster**

\(^8\)Burton S. Easton, "Zoroastrianism," *ISBE* 5 (1960), 3157

\(^9\)W. St. Clair Tisdall, "Persian Religion (Ancient)," *ISBE* 5 (1960), 2331
a. Zoroaster, who lived about 600 B.C. was the reformer of the ancient Persian religion.

(1) For the 1st 20 years of his life he lived in the Elburz Mountains.

(2) "At the age of thirty he started out to preach . . ., but no one would listen to him. About twelve years later he converted King Vishtasp, and the king spread the . . . religion by force. Zoroaster is believed to have been killed at the age of seventy-seven during an invasion of Persia by the Turanians.\(^\text{10}\)

b. The reformation accomplished by Zoroaster was great.

(1) Many of the deities worshiped in Persia he considered, "unworthy of adoration, being evil in character, hostile to all good and therefore to the 'All-Wise' Spirit (Ahura Mazda) and to men."\(^\text{11}\)


\(^{11}\) Tisdall, 2332.
(2) He taught a system of dualism in which he divided "all beings, spiritual and material, into two classes, the creatures of Ahura Mazda and those of the 'Destroying Mind' (Anro Mainyus)."\textsuperscript{12}

(3) These two creatures (Ahura Mazda or Ormazd, and Anro Mainyus or Ahriman) are opposites.

(4) Thus in the creation, Abriman created something bad for everything good created by Ormazd.

(5) These opposites extended into every phase of life.

c. Though the above, no doubt, was influenced by the Mosical account of creation and the Jewish teachings concerning Yhwh and Satan, Zoroaster did not teach monotheism.

d. The monotheism for which Zoroaster is commonly given credit came about in such later Zoroastrian works as the \textit{Zaratust-Namah}, which was composed in 1278 A.D.\textsuperscript{13}

e. Zoroastrian morality may be summarized as follows:

(1) \textbf{Avestic morality} "encourages the destruction of all hurtful things, as being of Ahura Mazda's creation, and the propagation of everything good. Hence agriculture is esp. commended, together with the rearing of cattle and sheep. Somewhat later the whole duty of man was said to consist in good thoughts, good words, good deeds. Fierce opposition to every other religion was enjoined as a religious duty."\textsuperscript{14}

(2) \textbf{Heaven/Hell}: "After judgement by Mithra, Rashnu and Sraosha, the souls of the dead must cross the \textit{chinvat}-bridge
(“Bridge of the Judge”), which is guarded by two dogs and is narrow and difficult for the unjust, but wide and easy for the just. The righteous man then advances through three Paradises, those of good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Works . . . , until, led by Sraosha, Atar, and Vohu Mano, he finally reaches Ahura Mazda’s abode of light and glory, . . . where Ahura Mazda himself receives him with the words: “Greeting to thee; well hast thou come to this pure, bright place”. . . . But the soul of the wicked man, passing through regions of Evil ‘Thoughts, Evil Words and Evil Deeds, finally reaches a dark and gloomy Hell. . . . In later tines it was believed that those not yet fit for heaven waited in Misvānō Gāttis, an intermediate place where the extra merits of the just were stored up for the benefit of the less fortunate.”

f. Zoroastrianism permitted no idol worship nor were temples permitted in their ceremonies.

g. The ceremonies were rather simple, consisting of fire-priests who served at their fire-altars by feeding the fire with costly wood and pouring into it libations, taking care to cover their mouths in order to keep the fire from being polluted by their breath.

h. The Zoroastrian concept of the end of the world: "The Avesta states that, 1,000 years after Zoroaster’s death, a prophet named Ukshyat-ereta will arise from his seed to restore his religion. After another 1,000 years another, Ukhshyat-nemanh, will appear for the same purpose. The end of the world will come 1,000 years later. Then a third prophet, Saoshyant, will be born, and will usher in the Restoration . . . of the world to its primitive happiness and freedom from the evil creatures of Anro Mainyus. This process will be completed in 57 years, during which 6 other prophets will perform in the other 6 Karshvares the work which will here be accomplished by Saoshyant. But mention of this Restoration occurs only in very late parts of the Avesta. . . ."
II. Kings of the Rising Empire — Acahemenes (700-675; Teispes 675-664)

A. The Medo Persian Empire in the time of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther:

B. Cyrus (558-529 B.C.), 29 years.

1. The history of the Persian Empire begins with Cyrus
2. He is called the “father of the Medo-Persian Empire.”
3. "Cyrus first appears in history when in 559 B.C., at the age of forty, he inherited the small kingdom of Anshan. This territory was tributary to the Median Empire, one of the eastern rivals of Babylon."  

4. "In 550 B.C. Cyrus revolted against Astyages, his Median overlord."  
   a. Astyages then sent Harpagus with an army against Cyrus.  
   b. However Harpagus deserted with most of his army to Cyrus.  
   c. Then Astyages personally led an army against Cyrus, but this army revolted and handed Astyages over to Cyrus.  
   d. Thus Media fell to Cyrus along with other key areas such as Assyria, Mesopotamia, Syria, Armenia, and Cappadocia.  
   e. These areas having fallen, only Lydia, Greece, and Babylonia remained to be captured.  

5. Cyrus next turned his attention to Lydia; he appeared suddenly before Sardis, the capital of Lydia, took it and condemned its king, Croesus, to be burned to death.  

6. Having conquered Lydia, Cyrus turned his attention to Greece.  
   "The conquest of Lydia brought Cyrus into contact with the Greek cities of Asia Minor which had made their peace with Croesus. Cyrus demanded that the coastal cities recognize his sovereignty but they refused, only to be conquered one by one by the might of Persian arms or the diplomacy of Persian gold. . . . With the conquest of Greek Asia Minor, two Persian satrapies were formed. The Ionian satrapy was joined to Sardis, and the area south of the Hellespont was organized into a satrapy named "Those of Sea."  

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17 Pfeiffer, Between, 11.  
18 Ibid., 13.  
19 Ibid., 15.
7. Cyrus next turned his attention to Babylon.

a. Isaiah had prophesied of the fall of Babylon and the rise of Cyrus.

   (1) **NRS Isaiah 41:2** Who has roused a victor from the east, summoned him to his service? He delivers up nations to him, and tramples kings under foot; he makes them like dust with his sword, like driven stubble with his bow.

   (2) **NRS Isaiah 43:14** Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sake I will send to Babylon and break down all the bars, and the shouting of the Chaldeans will be turned to lamentation.

   (3) **NRS Isaiah 44:24-28** Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who by myself spread out the earth; 25 who frustrates the omens of liars, and makes fools of diviners; who turns back the wise, and makes their knowledge foolish; 26 who confirms the word of his servant, and fulfills the prediction of his messengers; who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be inhabited," and of the cities of Judah, "They shall be rebuilt, and I will raise up their ruins"; 27 who says to the deep, "Be dry-- I will dry up your rivers"; 28 who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd, and he shall carry out all my purpose"; and who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."

   (4) **NRS Isaiah 45:1-5** Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him-- and the gates shall not be closed: 2 I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, 3 I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. 4 For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me.
I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me,

(5) *NRS Isaiah 45:13* I have aroused *Cyrus* in righteousness, and I will make all his paths straight; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward, says the LORD of hosts.

(6) *NRS Isaiah 46:11* calling a bird of prey from the east, the man for my purpose from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have planned, and I will do it.

(7) *NRS Isaiah 48:14-15* Assemble, all of you, and hear! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he shall perform his purpose on Babylon, and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans. 15 I, even I, have spoken and called him, I have brought him, and he will prosper in his way.

b. Daniel had also prophesied that the Babylonian Empire would fall and be divided between the Medes and the Persians

*NRS Daniel 5:25-28* And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. 26 This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; 27 TEKEL, you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting; 28 PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

c. This is corroborated by secular history:

(1) Herodotus (1.189-91) states the Persians entered the city by diverting the Euphrates

(2) He further observes (1.91), "owing to the great size of the city the outskirts were captured without the people in the center knowing anything about it; there was a festival going on, and even while the city was falling they continued to dance and enjoy themselves."
(3) Xenophon (7.5.15), "all Babylon was accustomed to drink and revel all night long."

d. Thus, Babylon, in keeping with the prophecies of Isaiah and Daniel, fell to the armies of Cyrus

8. Cyrus not only conquered the city of Babylon in the name of its God, Marduk, but he restored the gods, which had been taken to Babylon by Nabonidus, to their own shrines.

a. He allowed the captive peoples to return to their homelands.

b. The Cyrus Cylinder states, "I returned the images of the gods, who had resided there [i.e., in Babylon], to their places and I let them dwell in eternal abodes. I gathered all their inhabitants and returned to them their dwellings" (32).20

c. While the cylinder "does not refer to the restoration of foreign temples," recorded in Ezra 1:1-4 and 6:3-5, it does appear to be general policy.21

20http://www.livius.org/ct-cz/cyrus_I/cyrus_cylinder2.html#TEXT (Accessed, December 22, 2008); cf. ANET, 315-316; COS, 2;

21Mervin Breneman, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, (NAC; Broadman and Holman, 1993), 19.
d. This policy had special application to the Jews — the year was 535.

e. 

NRS Ezra 1:7 King Cyrus himself brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. King Cyrus of Persia had them released into the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. And this was the inventory: gold basins, thirty; silver basins, one thousand; knives, twenty-nine; gold bowls, thirty; other silver bowls, four hundred ten; other vessels, one thousand; the total of the gold and silver vessels was five thousand four hundred. All these Sheshbazzar brought up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem.

f. "The policy of restoration of captive deities and captive peoples had special application to the Jews, whose religious ideals were respected by Cyrus and his successors as superior to those of the other nations with whom they dealt. To be sure, the Jews had no image that must be restored to its shrine, but Nebuchadnezzar had taken utensils from the Temple at Jerusalem. They had been used in Belshazzar’s feast. If the gods of the other nations wore restored, certainly the vessels used in the worship of the God of Israel must receive similar treatment."22

g. Therefore, as a result of an official decree of Cyrus, some fifty thousand Jews left Babylonia in 535 B.C., under the leadership of Zerubbabel, for the purpose of rebuilding their temple (cf. Ezra 1-3)

9. After the conquest of Babylon, Cyrus turned his attention toward Egypt.

a. He entrusted the campaign against Egypt to his son, Cambyses, while he set out to put down a revolt of the nomads on the eastern frontier.

b. There he was wounded and died.

22Pfeiffer, Between, 19.
c. His body was carried back to one of the capitals of the empire where it was buried according to Persian custom.

10. The influence that Cyrus had upon his people was far reaching:

"Few world conquerors have been regarded as highly as Cyrus. The Persians called him father. The Greeks regarded him as a master and lawgiver. When Alexander the Great found that Cyrus’ tomb had been rifled, he ordered that they be replaced and the contents of the tomb be restored as far as possible. To the Jews he was the Lord’s anointed who ended the Babylonian exile and opened a new era of history in Israel. Cyrus did not force Persian ideas on his subjects, but rather formed a synthesis of the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia, Syria, Asia Minor, the Greek cities, and parts of India.”

11. **Cyrus and the Jews:**

a. Not only had Isaiah prophesied of Cyrus (see above), but his decree allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem, Ezra 1:8

b. 49,697 returned with Zerubbabel, Sheshbazzar, to rebuild the temple, Ezra 2:64-68

   (1) They were primarily of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi

   (2) They constituted some of the most earnest, godly, and enterprising members of the nation

   (3) They took approximately 4 months to travel the 700 miles between Babylon and Jerusalem, Ezra 3:1, 8

c. One year after they arrived they began to build the temple, Ezra 3:8

C. **Cambyses (529-522 B.C.), 7 years:**

1. Cambyses was the eldest son of Cyrus; for 8 years prior to the death of Cyrus had lived in Babylon and acted as the representative of his father.

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23Pfeiffer, Between, 21.
2. Upon hearing of the death of his father Cambyses assumed his father’s title, “King of Babylon, King of the lands.

3. Disorder broke out; evidence indicates that Cambyses murdered his brother, Bardiya, who had been entrusted with the eastern provinces, because he felt that Bardiya was challenging his throne.

4. In about four years after his accession, and with the question of succession settled, Cambyses was ready to start an expedition against Egypt.
   a. While planning this expedition unexpected help came. Polycrates of Samos deserted Amasis, who was one of the co-reigning kings of Egypt.
   b. "In this way one of the best Greek generals in the service of Pharaoh came to Cambyses to reveal the secrets of the Egyptian defense. This general, Phanes of Halicarnassus, put Cambyses in touch with the Sheikh of the Bedouin who arranged to station relays of camels with water along the route of the march. The fifty-five miles of desert were quickly traversed, and Cambyses approached the walls of Pelusiun where the Greek mercenaries were commanded by a son of Amasis, Psammeticus. . . . After a fierce battle at Pelusium, Psammeticus and his armies fled to Memphis.”
   c. At Memphis Cambyses attacked in full strength; the city fell to Cambyses and Egypt began a new era of history.

5. Following the conquest of Egypt, Cambyses started one more campaign which covered the African areas west of Egypt.
   a. An army of fifty thousand was sent against the Oasis of Ammon, but was overwhelmed by a sandstorm.
   b. Cambyses then led an expedition into Ethiopia; he had to retreat early because the army ran short of provisions.

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24Pfeiffer, *Between*, 24-25.
6. During the above campaign Cambyses received news that one “Gaumata” had usurped the throne and claimed to be his brother, Bardiya.

   a. However, Cambyses died before he reached home.

   b. There are two accounts of his death: accounts.

      Herodotus says his death resulted from a wound accidently self-inflicted when mounting his horse. The Persian record suggests suicide. We know that Cambyses suffered from epileptic fits, and there are evidences of insanity in his latter days, particularly if the reputed atrocities committed in Egypt after his return from the Ethiopian campaign are to be believed.\textsuperscript{25}

7. \textit{Cambyses and the Jews:}

   a. The opposition of the Samaritans to the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem continued throughout his reign

   b. Cambyses took the throne of the pharaohs as the 1\textsuperscript{st} of Manetho's Dynasty XVII during his conquest of Egypt

   c. His presence there and the cautions necessary due to the Egyptian campaign may in part account for the success of the Sarmaratians in stopping the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple

   d. \textsuperscript{NRS}\textit{Ezra 4:5, 24: and they bribed officials to frustrate their plan throughout the reign of King Cyrus of Persia and until the reign of King Darius of Persia. . .} \textsuperscript{NRS}\textit{Ezra 4:24 At that time the work on the house of God in Jerusalem stopped and was discontinued until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia.}

D. \textit{Gaumata or Pseudo-Smerdis (522-521 B.C.), 8 months.}

   1. Bardiya, the brother of Cambyses, was called "Pseudo-Smerdis by the Greeks; therefore, the usurper, Gaumata, assumed both names."\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., 27.

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., 23, 27.
2. Gaumata had hardly anytime to establish himself in his new position, or to make a name for himself in history.

3. The army of Cambyses remained loyal to him and upon its arrival in the Persian capital (two months later) took Gaumata prisoner and had him executed.

E. Darius Hystaspes Darius ("the Great'; 521-486), 35 years:

1. He had great difficulty establishing himself as the legitimate successor to Cambyses.
   a. With the assassination of Gaumata the empire begun to split apart.
   b. Thus the first two years of his reign were used to establish Darius as tho Persian monarch.
   c. "To accomplish this, he adopted a policy . . . reminiscent of the cruelty of Assyrians such as Ashurbanipal. More than once we read of the treatment of a rebel in which Darius boasts that he "cut off his nose and his ears and his tongue and put out his eyes," and cast him in fetters at the royal court to be gazed at by the people as a warning that rebellion does not pay."

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22Behistun Inscription, Col. 2, line 13. 27

2. Even so he attempted to continue Cyrus' policies
   a. He is known for the "Behistun Inscription," located on the route from Mesopotamia to Iran 28

      (1) 225 feet above the plain
      (2) 3 languages: Elamite, Akkadian, Old Persian
   b. Image of the Behistun Inscription:
3. **Darius and the Jews**

   a. During the reign of Darius, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah began to prophesy to the returned exiles that they should finish their work of rebuilding the temple (Hag 2:1-9; Zech 1:12-17)

   (1) The people had become discouraged at the interference of the Samaritans, who had written letters to Cambyses and Pseudo-Smerdis waning them that the Jews were rebuilding the “rebelliuous city” (Ezra 4:5-16)

   (2) Smerdis ordered the work to cease (Ezra 4:17-22).

   (3) Daniel's fast (Dan 10) may have been the occasion of his having heard of the opposition.

   b. However, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah accomplished a fruitful labor, for the people began again to rebuild the temple.

   (1) This aroused the suspicion of the Persian governor, Tattenai, who made a trip to investigate the activities of the Jews, Ezra 5:3-5.
(2) To be sure, anything that favored rebellion would be dealt with promptly.

(3) Tattenai asked the Jews, “Who gave you a decreed to build this house, and to finish this wall?” Ezra 5:3

(4) The Jews replied that Cyrus had decreed that they should rebuild the temple, Ezra 5:6

(5) Tattenai requested that Darius search in Babylon for such a decree, Ezra 5

(6) Darius caused a search to be made for the decree, found it, determined that it must be honored, and decreed that the Jews should receive help in rebuilding the temple, Ezra 6:1-12

c. The temple was completed in the 6th year of Darius, Ezra 6:15

(1) From Nebuchadnezzar's 1st invasion in 605 to the edict of Cyrus in 535 were 70 years

(2) From the total destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 to the rebuilding to the temple in the 6th year of Darius in 516 were 70 years

4. **Military Accomplishments of Darius**

a. Darius “could not stand inactivity.”**29**

b. Therefore, around 516 B.C. Darius determined to attack the Scythians.

(1) No doubt, tales of Scythian gold and plunder excited his desire for war.

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**29Ibid., 34.**
(2) He raised an army of 700,000 men (according to Greek sources) in order to begin this first military encounter between Asia and Europe.

(3) "Darius crossed over to Europe. . . . Proceeding in a northward direction he traversed Thrace to the Danube and effected the speedy submission of the natives. . . . But instead of pausing on the Danube to consolidate his gains he pushed on at once into Scythia. The Scythians, not daring to face him in battle, drove off their herds and left their primitive timber shacks to be fired by the invader, and by this elusive strategy they won the campaign. After a protracted but in effectual pursuit Darius was forced to turn back by the failure of his supplies; and as the Scythians doubled back upon him he had to race for the Danube, abandoning his . . . sick."^30

(4) Though Darius had lost, his invasion was not a complete failure; he conquered Thrace and Macedonia as well as the Greek coastal cities of Asia Minor.

(5) Thus Darius had control of the entire Grecian world, with the exception of Greece proper.

5. Beginning in the fifth century, the mainland Greeks (whom Darius was never able to conquer) sparked a revolt of the Ionians, who had been under Persia rule.

a. This revolt was quickly put down, but Darius felt that he must take action against the instigators of the revolt.

b. "A fleet of 500 ships left Asia Minor with the avowed purpose of strengthening the pro-Persian elements in Greece by a show of force. Half the ships and about 20,000 men were lost in a severe storm off Mt. Athos. A second attempt was more successful Datis, the Median admiral, besieged the Greek city of Eretria. When it

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was betrayed into his hands, Datis made the mistake of burning the temples, destroying the town, and selling its inhabitants as slaves to Susa. This served to unite the various factions of Greeks against Persia. They saw clearly that the Persians would show no mercy toward the conquered Greeks.\(^{31}\)

6. Darius then met the Athenian array at Marathon.

   a. Greece was now united against Persia.

   b. The other city states sent reinforcements, but before these arrived the Athenian army had defeated Persia.

   c. Darius was bound to avenge this rebuff, but troubles in Egypt and later his death prevented his doing so.

   d. "As an organizer of the civil government he has seldom been equaled. The royal palace which he built at Persepolis was one of the great structures of antiquity. Darius could be cruel. He ruled as an absolute monarch. Organizationally, the Persian Empire reached its peak of efficiency under Darius, but decay had already begun to set in."\(^{32}\)

F. Xerxes (486-465), 21 years.

1. The Ahasuerus who chose the Jewish maiden, Esther, as his queen.

   a. He was the son of Darius and thus was his successor, "the son of Darius by Atossa, a daughter of Cyrus."\(^{33}\) .

   b. He had been especially groomed to be his father’s successor

2. Just prior to the death of Darius, Egypt and other areas of the empire rebelled.

\[^{31}\text{Pfeiffer, Between, 36.}\]

\[^{32}\text{Ibid., 37.}\]

\[^{33}\text{Ibid., 39.}\]
a. Xerxes acted quickly to bring these under control

b. He turned his attention toward Greece, making careful preparations for an attack.

c. "For three years Xerxes planned for the impending invasion. A canal was built to avoid the tempestuous cape of Athos where Darius had lost a large portion of his fleet. Bridges were erected and provisions were assembled at strategic places in preparation for the attack." 34

d. Herodotus states that the size of the army of Xerxes was 5,283,220 which is no doubt an exaggeration. The invading army was probably no more than 180,000 men. 35

3. In 480 B.C. Xerxes invaded Greece.

a. He sent ahead heralds to the Greek cities giving them an opportunity to surrender.

b. A few surrendered but most were willing to fight for their independence.

c. Athens and Sparta joined hands to fight Persia and asked others to join them.

d. Greece lost most of the early battles

(1) Thessaly and Tempe were first lost.

(2) Leonidas, king of Sparta determined to fight the Persians at Thermopylae with 10,000/300 men.

(3) "[T]he Athenians decreed to meet the invader in full force in their ships with the assistance of what other Greeks

34Ibid., 40.

35Cf. The Persian Empire and the West, CAH, 4: 271-273.
would join them, and the allies decided by a majority of votes to occupy Thermopylae. Leonidas, the aged king of Sparta, led forth 4000 Peloponnesian hoplites including his royal guard of 300 Spartiates. He picked up 700 Thespians and 400 Thebans in Boeotia, and found 1000 Phocians and the whole levy of the Opuntian Locrians mustered in response to a massage in advance at Trachis. We may reasonably add the Trachinians, who appear in Diodorus as 1000 Malians. With Helots and light-armed troops, who are not reckoned, the total force may have amounted to 10,000 men.36

e. "The Spartans under Leonidas, were prepared to check the advance of the Persians into central Greece, but Greece was betrayed by a Malian named Sphtaltes. The Persians were shown a path over the mountain to the rear of the Greeks. The Spartans fought to the end, and Leonidas became a hero by dying at his post. The Persians, however won an important objective, for mid-Greece had opened before then. By August Xerxes was in Athens. He burned the temples on the Acropolis, allegedly in revenge for the burning of Sardis."37

4. With victory almost in sight Xerxes moved to attack the Greek fleet at Salamis.

a. This battle proved to be the turning point of the war.

b. The Greeks, though outnumbered both on land and sea, defeated the Persian army and caused Xerxes to flee.

5. The only hope loft for Xerxes now was his land army.

a. This army was placed under Mardonius.

b. Mardonius attacked and despoiled Attica.

36Bury, 282; emphasis added.

37Pfeiffer, *Between*, 41.
c. At Meggara the Greeks took the offensive, Mardonius was killed, and the Persian army fled, leaving Greece in control of the territory.

6. **Xerxes and the Jews** — Married Esther

G. **Artaxerxes Longimanus (465-425), 41 years.**

1. He succeeded to the throne of his father after killing the usurper, Artabanus.

2. Artaxerxes was called “Longimanus,” which means, “the long handed' because his right hand was reputedly longer than his left hand.”

3. When Artaxerxes ascended the throne, rebellions broke out and a brother, Hystaspes, rebelled in Bactria.
   a. Seeing this as an opportunity, Egypt also revolted.
   b. Achemenes, an uncle of Artaxerxes, raised an army, went to Egypt, and defeated Inaros, the leader of the revolt.
   c. Greece came to the aid of Egypt
   d. Eventually putting down the rebellion, Artaxerxes was unable to strengthen his in the western part of the empire.
   e. Thrace governed herself while Ionia was in Greek hands.
   f. Thus the decline of the Persian empire is usually dated f his reign.

4. **Artaxerxes and the Jews**
   a. In the 7th year of Artaxerxes (458 B.C.), Ezra, having the objective to reestablish the Law of Moses, arrived in Jerusalem with 7000 Jews, Ezra 7:7
   b. Zerubbabel and his company had arrived some 80 years before, Neh 2:1-16

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38Pfeiffer, *Between*, 45.
c. Most of his company had long since died.

d. 13 years later, during the 20th year of Artaxerxes (445 B.C.), Nehemiah obtained permission to go to Jerusalem to aid Ezra in his work and rebuild the walls of the city.

(1) Nehemiah was the king's butler, Neh 2:1
(2) This was a honored and trusted position
(3) Ezra was in Jerusalem when Nehemiah arrived, Neh 8:2
(4) Nehemiah had obtained a limited leave of absence in order to rebuild the walls

e. Nehemiah, after rebuilding the walls of the city, stayed 12 years before he returned to his duties in Susa (433 B.C.), cf. Neh 2:1-6 with 13:6-7

f. Later he returned to Jerusalem (for how long is not known) and with this return the Old Testament comes to an end, Neh 13:7.

(1) Whether or not he continued in Jerusalem is not known
(2) The book of Malachi should be read in conjunction with Nehemiah
(3) With Malachi and Nehemiah, the Old Testament comes to a close.

III. Excursus: Chart Summarizing the Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Began Reign</th>
<th>King</th>
<th>Length of Reign</th>
<th>Event/Prophet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) 606/605</td>
<td>Nebuchadnezzar</td>
<td>43 years</td>
<td>1st Exile; Jehoiakim Exiled; Jeremiah, Daniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) 598</td>
<td>Nebuchadnezzar</td>
<td>43 years</td>
<td>2nd Exile; Jehoiachin Exiled; Jeremiah, Ezekiel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) 587/586</td>
<td>Nebuchadnezzar</td>
<td>43 years</td>
<td>3rd Exile; Zedekiah; Jerusalem Destroyed;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
562 | Evil Merodach | 2.5 years | Lifted up Jehoiachin from Prison, setting his throne above all other kings; 2 Kgs 25:27-30

556 | Neriglissar | 3 years | Killed Evil Merodach; Daniel

555 | Laborosoarchod | 1 year | Daniel

554 | Nabonidus | 16 years | Married Daughter of Nebuchadnezzar; Belshazzar, his Son, is Co-Regent; Daniel 5

538 | Belshazzar | 1 year | Belshazzar Killed; Daniel 5

538-536 | Darius The Mede | Rules Babylon Until Cyrus Arrives

(1)536/535 | Cyrus | 7/9 years | 1st Return—Cyrus issued decree for return under Zerubbabel Exactly 70 Years from 1st Exile of 606/605

529 | Cambyses | 7 years | Ahauerus of Ezra 4:6; Not Esther's Husband

522 | Pseudo Smerdis | 1 year | Artaxerxes of Ezra 4:7; not king of Ezra/Neh's time

521 | Darius Hystaspes | 35 years | In his 2nd yr Hag/Zech prophesied to complete temple; it was completed in Darius' 6th year (516) Exactly 70 Years from the 3rd Exile of 587/586

485 | Xerxes/Ahasuerus | 21 years | Husband of Esther

(2)465 | Artaxerxes-Longimanus | 41 years | 2nd Return—Ezra travels to Jerusalem in 7th year (458)

(3) 445 | Artaxerxes-Longimanus | 41 years | 3rd Return—Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem in 20th year (445); returned to Susa & later returned to Jerusalem; Malachi, last book of OT written

A. Kings of the Declining Empire—a period of assassination and anarchy

1. Xerxes II (425 B.C.), 25 days
2. Sogdianus (425-424 B.C.), 6 months
3. Darius II (424-405), 19 years
4. Artaxerxes II (405-359), 66 years
5. Artaxerxes III (359-338), 21 years
6. Arses (338-336)
7. Darius III (336-331), 6 years
8. The Battle of Arbela won by Alexander the Great (331 B.C.)
IV. Some Observations Relative to Zoroasterism, Persian Culture, and Persian Law

A. Zoroasterism:

1. The religion flourished during the reign of Darius Hystaspes.

2. Zoroaster lived in retirement in the Elburz Mountains for the first twenty years of his life.

3. During this time he was supposed, according to his followers, to have been taken up to heaven where God’s law was revealed to him.

4. This tradition had its origin, no doubt, in the revelation of the law of God to Moses on Mount Sinai.

5. The Hebrew scriptures were well known in Persia at that time.

6. Zoroaster seems to have labored to restore the ancient religion of Persia, which had either become greatly neglected or had been corrupted by image worship.

7. Zoroaster’s system of religion consisted of the following:
   
a. There was one eternal God.

   b. There are two principles in the universe—the one of good, the other of evil.

   c. The emblem of good, Ormuzd, was light.
   
   d. The emblem of the bad, Ahriman, was darkness.

   e. Between these opposites there was a contest which would continue to the end of the world.

   f. At the day of judgment the followers of both would be judged and separated forever.

   g. The good would be rewarded, and the evil would be punished.

   h. In the ultimate end, the good would prevail.

   i. Ormuzd was always worshiped in the presence of fire.
j. Darkness was held in detestation.

k. One will immediately observe that many things peculiar to Zoroasterism have been derived from the Jewish scriptures.

8. The doctrines of Zoroaster were set forth in Zend-Avesta, the sacred book of the Persians.

a. Darius Hystaspes fostered the creed of Zoroaster.

b. At Zoroaster’s death, Darius became the Archimagus or high priest.

c. The religion spread rapidly.

d. The revival of the Persian religion had little effect in purifying the morals of the Persian nation.

(1) The manner of the court was marked with excessive luxury and revolting cruelty.

(2) The barbarity of women was frightful.

(3) The woman's character was most depraved, and yet her influence was great.

(4) Formerly the Persians had been remarkable for the purity and simplicity of their manners, and their children had been taught from childhood to repeat the praises of truth and justice.

(5) Excessive wealth and prosperity were sapping the foundations of the ancient virtues.

(6) The nation was sinking into a state of utter weakness and corruption which caused its ultimate fall to the Greeks.

B. Persian Culture

1. The Persian Empire dates from 536 B.C. to 332 B.C., a period of 200 years.
2. This 200 years may be logically divided into two periods.
   
a. The 1st lasted 30 years, ending with Malachi and Nehemiah, closes the Old Testament.

b. The 2nd lasted 70 years, extending from Malachi and Nehemiah till Alexander the Great arrived at Jerusalem.

3. The 1st 30 years:
   
a. Cyrus made an edict permitting the Jews to return to their home country, Ezra 1.

b. Of the Jews in Babylon, 42,360 returned.

c. Those who returned were:
   
   (1) Chivalrous churchmen.
   (2) Zealous patriots
   (3) The poorer class, not the most wealthy or socially prominent.
   (4) They had a new name—Judeans or Jews.
   (5) A much larger Jewry were left behind.
   (6) All the people who returned hated idolatry.
   (7) These Jews returned to a hotbed of hostilities.
      
      (a) In the western corner were the Philistines.
      (b) In the South, the Edomites had taken of Judah the territory of Hebron and had pushed their settlements along the Jordan valley.
      (c) In the East, were the Moabites and the Ammonites.
(d) On the North, were the Samaritans — who became bitter enemies

(e) Only Jerusalem was unoccupied by enemies.

d. Ezra, a ready scribe, left Babylon with a company during the reign of Artaxerxes

e. 13 years after Ezra went up from Susa, Nehemiah also went up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

f. This was in the 20th year of Artaxerxes

g. At the end of a 12 year stay, Nehemiah returned to Susa.

h. Later Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem

i. Esther, a Jewess, was married to Ahasuerus or Xerxes.

4. The last seventy years

a. Were a period of peace.

(1) There were no hostilities between Mesopotamia and Egypt.
(2) The Great King ruled both lands.
(3) Otherwise, Palestine would have been a battle-field.

b. The course of Israel was downward.

(1) There was a decline in the national tone and the religious life.

(2) Formalism was doing its deadly work.

(3) About the middle of the seventy years, Judas, the elder son of the High priest, killed his brother Joshua within the temple.

(4) Joshua was favored over Judas for high priest by Bagos, the resident representative of Persia.
(5) The high priesthood continued to grow in dignity and power.

(6) The high priest became not only the sacred head of the church, but also the secular head of the state.

(7) Jewish pride and Persian policy united to enhance the importance and dignity of the office.

(8) The Sanhedrin probably originated during this period.

C. Persian Law, so significant in studying Ezra-Nehemiah-Esther, may be summarized as follows:

1. Persian Law reached its zenith during the reign of Darius Hystaspes.
   a. Darius not only made the laws available to citizens, but also reorganized her government more efficiently.
   b. This efficiency of government, coupled with the availability of the laws for the citizens, produced an orderliness the world had never known,
   c. By 519 B.C. this law was in force among the Babylonians.

2. The Law Defined
   a. The ancient law book of Darius has never been found, and yet there are enough references to it which indicate that it not only existed, but was called the Ordinance of Good Regulations.

   (1) Evidently Darius copied much from Hammurabi in order to bring his law into being.

   (2) "When . . . we compare the prologue and epilogue of Hammurabi's law book, we discover so many parallels in

vocabulary and phraseology (as in thought and order) that we are convinced the younger statesman copied the elder, and it becomes possible to reconstitute in large degree those sections of Darius’ own composition.  

b. Little is known of the actual details of the *Ordinance of Good Regulations* but the following seem noteworthy

1. **First**, the sacred scripture records that the laws of Persia never changed. (Est 1:19; Dan 6:8, 15)
   
   a. Evidently, the meaning is that the king of Persia was so bound by the law that he himself could not change it.  
   
   b. By way of comparison, Nebuchadnezzar was not bound by the laws of Babylon in any degree; his mere whims were quickly carried out; Daniel stated concerning Nebuchadnezzar, *"He killed those he wanted to kill, kept alive those he wanted to keep alive, honored those he wanted to honor, and degraded those he wanted to degrade"* (Dan 5:19b)
   
   c. Therefore, Persian law bound the king to itself, thus causing more respect for law and order than any empire preceding Persia.

2. **Second**, Darius placed much emphasis on evidence and impartiality in judgements.
   
   a. "Darius proclaims that he . . . is impartial, punishing the wicked but rewarding the good. In the Persian edition this passage appears as: 'What a man says

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40Ibid., 122; cf. 122-128 for a comparison of Hammurabi's law with that of Darius.

against a man does not convince me until he satisfies the Ordinance of Good Regulations. What a man does or performs for others according to his ability, I am satisfied and my pleasure is great and I am well satisfied.”

(b) “On account of one crime not even the king himself may slay anyone, nor may any of the other Persians inflict upon his own slaves a fatal punishment for a single crime. Rather, not until he has reckoned then up and found that the unjust deeds are more numerous and greater than his services may he give rein to his wrath.”

Third, Herodotus relates a tale which shows that some of the predecessors of Darius insisted on the incorruptibility of the royal judges.

(a) According to this tale, Sisamnes, a royal judge, had given an unjust judgement in return for a bribe. Cambyses "slaughtered him like a sheep," flayed him, tanned the skin, covered the judgement seat with it, and appointed Otones, the son of Sisamnes, to his father’s office with the admonition to remember on what he sat.

(b) If the predecessors of Darius were this concerned with the incorruptibility of the royal judges, how much more concerned would Darius be, seeing that he regarded himself as a new lawgiver?

Fourth, Darius, made his new lawbook available to his subjects.

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42 Olmstead, Persia, 125.

43 Herod., i.137, cited by Olmstead, 129.

"Thus says Darius the king: By the will of Ahuramazda I made stelae of other sorts, which was not done before, on baked tablets and, on prepared leather. My name and my seal I ordered affixed upon them. Writing and order were read before me. Then I had those stelae carried into all distant lands to my subjects." The law book was therefore intended for all people of western Asia and not for the Babylonians alone. The parchments were, of course, in Aramaic, and thus the lawbook was made available for all who knew the language of current business and diplomacy.\(^{45}\)

c. By way of summary, Persian law included the following:

1. Persian law is regarded in the sacred scripture as a law that did not change, meaning that the king himself was bound by law and could not rule according to his whims and desires without acquiring grave consequences.

2. More emphasis was placed on evidence and impartiality in legal cases than had been expressed by any prior empire.

3. Much emphasis was placed on the incorruptibility of judges, thus causing a greater fairness for the citizens than had been expressed by any prior empire.

4. The Ordinance of Good Regulations, when completed, was placed at the disposal of all responsible citizens of the empire.

3. The Purpose of the Law of Persia

a. The brilliance of the Persian Law regarding evidence, impartiality, incorruptibility, and availability of the law to the citizens is easily seen.

1. Those were great accomplishments for a rugged empire, living in a rugged age.

\(^{45}\)Olmstead, *Persia*, 128.
(2) Of course, other empires had insisted on those attitudes in one form or another, yet not to the degree that Persia insisted upon them.

(3) Therefore, if other empires and nations insisted upon these attributes, they could easily be called the common denominator of the laws of humanity.

(4) Insistence on evidence, impartiality, incorruptibility, availability, is humane.

(5) Furthermore, it is fair.

b. The fact that the Persian law bound even the king by its statutes is a point in the history of man that was without precedent.

c. The main purpose of this law, no doubt, was to enforce the idea that the king was infallible, and thus more than a mere man.

4. **Governmental Organization:**

a. Was extremely efficient from the founding of the empire by Cyrus

b. This organization was based primarily on the Assyrian Empire's organization, although Cyrus made changes.

c. "Cyrus was now monarch of the greatest empire yet known to history. For the government of this wide-extending territory he adopted in principle the organization first devised by the Assyrians, who replaced the states they conquered by formal provinces. Each was ruled by a governor with a full staff of subordinates, and all kept in close touch with the central power through frequent exchange of orders and reports. The chief difference between those Assyrian provinces and the twenty satrapies established by Cyrus lay in the fact that the satrapies took the place of far larger independent monarchies. Each was ruled by a satrap whose title meant literally 'protector of the Kingdom.' As successor to a former king, ruling a truly enormous territory, he was in point of fact himself a monarch and was surrounded a miniature monarch. Not only did he carry or the civil administration but he was also commander of the satrapal
levies. When his office became hereditary, the threat to the central authority could not be ignored. To meet this threat, certain checks were instituted; his secretary, his chief financial official, and the general in charge of the garrison stationed in the citadel of each of the satrpal capitals were under direct orders of, and reported directly to the great king in person. Still more effective control was exercised by the 'king’s eye' (or 'king’s ear' or 'king's messenger'), who every year made a careful inspection of each province.46

V. Summary: Jews in the Exile.47

A. Those Exiled to Babylon:

1. Often think that the exile began in 605, 597, and 587
2. Jews were already in the area because, when Israel fell in 721, Assyria settled many in Halah, at Gozan on the Harbor River and the towns of the Medes (2 Kgs 17:6; 18:11)
3. The Judean/Jerusalem Jews were settled in different locations in Babylonia to provide labor and economic growth — Tel Aviv on the Kebar River.
4. These were free to engage in trade and prosper and Jeremiah had encouraged; cf. Jeremiah 29
5. We should not be surprised that many chose to reside in Mesopotamia rather than return to Judah

B. Influences on the Jewish Captives:

1. These captives were influenced by the Babylonia and Persian cultures
2. They finally realized that the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel were correct

46Olmstead, Persia, 59

47Breneman, 26-32
a. Both predicted the fall of Jerusalem and stated it was punishment for disobedience (Jer 1:11-19; 4:5-31; 25:1-14; Ezek 5:1-12; 12:1-16)

b. Both included messages of hope for the future (Jer 3:14-17; 23:3-8; 30:1-33:26; Ezek 34:11-16; 36:8-12)

c. Ezekiel's particular themes of worship at the temple, the land of Israel, and the Lord's people are carried through in Ezra-Nehemiah

C. Jews Remaining in the Land:

1. With only the poorest remaining a power vacuum was created

2. Some who escaped the captivity by fleeing to neighboring lands were probably able to return

3. There were also the descendants of those the Assyrians had settled in the area (cf. 2 Kgs 17:23ff.; Ezra 4:2)

4. The temple site was still considered holy and visited by pilgrims, Jer 41:4-8

D. Jews in Egypt:

1. Since Joseph's days Jews had been in Egypt, 1 Kgs 11:17, 40; Jer 24:8

2. Some may have migrated there after 721

3. Manasseh sent troops there according to Ashurbanipal (ANET, 294)

4. Jeremiah and some left in the land went there after 586, 2 Kgs 25:25-26; Jer 41:16-18

5. The Elephantine papyri records a colony there

E. Jews Returning to Judah: these are what Ezra-Nehemiah are all about
VI. Theology of Ezra-Nehemiah — the books emphasize.\(^{48}\)

A. Continuity of God's plan and people

B. Separation from sin and anyone who would corrupt the pure worship of God

C. The authority of scripture

D. The importance of proper worship in one's life and culture

E. The significance of prayer in one's personal, social, and religious life

F. The importance of history — what we owe to others before us

G. Ezra — focuses on the religious

H. Nehemiah — focuses on the socio-political and its relationship to the religious

\(^{48}\)Breneman, 50-51