

## Supplementary Materials for KOOL Journal for Parents/Adults

Week 2: 29 January to 4 February, 2018 (pp.18 – 25)

### Context

Foreigners had been forced to settle in the northern kingdom of Israel after Israel was defeated and her people were taken captive in 722 BC (Ezra 4:1-2). This accounts for the assimilation and disappearance of the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel. Ashurbanipal (Ezra 4:10) was the Assyrian monarch who sent alien people into Samaria. The resettlement procedure was a common tactic of the Assyrians to prevent strong nationalistic uprisings by conquered peoples. Some of the resettled people in Israel had migrated south near Jerusalem and deemed the returning exiles a threat to their claim on the land.

### Key Character No. 1: Zerubbabel

Zerubbabel (meaning “planted in Babylon”) led the first and largest group back to the Promised Land. He was a leader by right (being a descendant of David) and recognition (he had personal leadership qualities). The returned exiles were given time to establish their living quarters before they were called to begin work. They did not start with building the city walls for defence nor the official government buildings. They began with rebuilding the altar, worshipping together and celebrating a feast. Under Zerubbabel’s leadership, they established a spiritual foundation for their building efforts. He demonstrated his wisdom in the help he accepted and refused. But he needed constant encouragement in order not to allow problems and resistance to stop the rebuilding work. So God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to be his encouraging companions. “So he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty. What are you, mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘God bless it! God bless it!’” Zech 4:6-7.

### Other Key Characters: Persian Kings

The reign of **Darius** (4:5, 24) lasted 36 years (522 to 486 BC) during which time the Persian Empire reached its peak. Besides military prowess, Darius also improved the legal and economic system and conducted impressive construction projects across the Persian Empire, including the precursor to the Suez Canal. He used the Babylonian Hammurabi as a model and copying some of his laws completely but in his legal system all laws were created in the name of the Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda. In the lands that were under Persian control, all other religions were tolerated as long as they remained submissive and peaceful. He supported the building of the Temple in Jerusalem and thanks to him, Aramaic (4:7) became the language widely spoken in the Persian empire and through the Greek, and Roman empires. It was the lingua franca for more than fifteen hundred years. Jesus spoke Aramaic, and so did most everyone he knew during His lifetime.

**Xerxes** (4:6) or **Ahasuerus** was the husband of Esther. Artaxerxes was one of his sons.

During the reign of **Artaxerxes** (4:7), the people enjoyed prosperity and peace because he was able to keep control of the lands of Persia. But he (4: 21-22) did not support the rebuilding of a rebellious

city (Jerusalem) and nation (Israel). He noted that Solomon had ruled a huge empire and Jerusalem's kings had rebelled against mighty powers, e.g. Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar despite his oath of loyalty (2 Chr 36:13). The Artaxerxes who gave full support to Ezra for the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 7:11-28) could be a different Artaxerxes: Artaxerxes I. (Refer to Week 5.)

**Ezra Chapters 3 – 4**

**Watch video** (for historical context)

DocumentaryDude, **Ancient History Persian Empire Documentary**, Published on Oct 10, 2016 (for Cyrus' and Darius' achievements: 10:14-19:53), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKFMo3eB82o>

**Review Verse of the Week** **Ezra 4:24**

*Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.*

Date/Passage	Reflection and Response (R & R)
<p><b>Mon. 29</b> 3:1 – 6 {3:3,6}</p>	<p>The returning exiles first built an altar even before laying the foundation of the Temple. They had learnt the hard lessons during their Babylonian captivity that God does not offer special protection for people who ignore Him. The altar symbolized God's presence and protection. It also demonstrated their purpose as a nation and commitment to serve God alone. The sacrifices were essential because they demonstrated that the people were seeking God's guidance, rededicating themselves to living as He has commanded and daily asking Him to forgive their sins. The Festival of Shelters/Feast of Tabernacles reminded the people of God's past protection and guidance in the wilderness and His continued love for them.</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If we want God's help when we undertake large tasks, do we first make God our top priority?</li> <li>• Note the boldness of the people in restoring their worship despite the opposition (3:3). In what ways can we be bold and uncompromising in our commitment to Christ and yet be wise and sensitive in the way we live among those who do not accept our faith?</li> </ul> <p>Paul in 2 Tim 1:7-8 encouraged Timothy in the face of persecution not to be fearful: "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God." But as Christ's followers, we are also to be wise in the way we relate to unbelievers (Col. 4:5-6)</p>
<p><b>Tue. 30</b> 3:7 – 9 {3:7-9}</p>	<p>When Solomon built the first Temple (2 Chr 2), he also exchanged food and olive oil (plentiful in Israel) for wood (lacking in Israel). The wood came from Tyre and Sidon at that time too. It took September to April just to prepare the plans to build the Temple which required great effort on the part of all involved (including descendants of Hodaviah or Yehuda, i.e. sons of Judah).</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why did the exiles take such a long time to make the plans?</li> <li>• Why was the Lord's Temple begun first even before the city wall?</li> </ul>

<p><b>Wed. 31</b></p> <p>3:10 –13</p> <p>{3:10-13}</p>	<p>David had given clear instructions concerning the use of music (both instrumental and vocal) in worship services in the Temple (1 Chr 16; 25). Upon completing the Temple’s foundation, everyone praised God for His provisions – talents, abilities, strength and leadership, with no one claiming more credit. However, some people wept as they remembered the glorious Solomon’s Temple that had been destroyed (Ezra 3:12).</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the beauty of the building as important as the attitudes of the builders and worshipers?</li> <li>• What does God care more about: our accomplishments or who we are and how we serve Him?</li> </ul> <p>In a changing world, once magnificent accomplishments decay and disappear but what we render to God wholeheartedly outweighs them. (In fact, the Second Temple was razed to the ground in AD 70.)</p>
<p><b>Thu. 1 February</b></p> <p>Ezra 4:1– 5</p> <p>{ 4:1-5}</p>	<p>When we are doing God’s work, we should expect opposition from those who are threatened by our activities. The first temptation the returned exiles faced was to enter into a compromising alliance with the people who were already in the land (enemies of Judah and Benjamin), enticing the Jews to depart from true worship and return to the sin of syncretism and idolatry. The enemies rightly claimed they worshipped the same God (2Kgs 17:27-29), but they also worshipped many other gods (2Kgs 17:33, 41). When compromises did not work, the opposition tried to intimidate and discourage the returned exiles from completing the work.</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How should we be on the alert for people who claimed to be Christians but whose actions show clearly that they are using Christianity to serve their own interests?</li> <li>• How do we overcome fear and discouragement and fulfill God’s purposes for our life?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Fri. 2</b></p> <p>4:6 – 24</p> <p>{ 4:6, 18-22, 24}</p>	<p>Note that this section of scripture is not chronological (with reference to the Persian kings Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes or Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes) and what the author of Ezra wrote in these paragraphs happened years later, before Nehemiah returned to build the walls of Jerusalem. This section adopted a thematic approach, focusing on the opposition that God’s people had faced throughout history. The narrative started in verses 1-5 is resumed at verse 24. The rebuilding stood still till 520 BC. When compromises failed, the opposition turned to false accusations.</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setbacks and standstills are painful and discouraging to God’s workers and these exiles received a double dose. (The Temple stood for 18 years unfinished). If you were a leader there and then (like Zerubbabel), what would you do?</li> <li>• In the face of opposition and persecution, how do we apply Paul’s exhortation (1 Tim 2:1-3) to pray for government leaders so that we will have a peaceful environment to worship God and share the Gospel?</li> </ul>

<b>Sat. 3 February</b>	<p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What and where is the temple of God today? Paul tells us: “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).</li> <li>• What effort and time do we put in to build/maintain our temple?</li> </ul>
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**References:**

Ancient History Encyclopaedia, **Darius I**, [https://www.ancient.eu/Darius\\_I/](https://www.ancient.eu/Darius_I/)

G A Getz, **Life Essentials Study Bible: Biblical Principles to Live By**, Holman Bible Publishers, 2011.

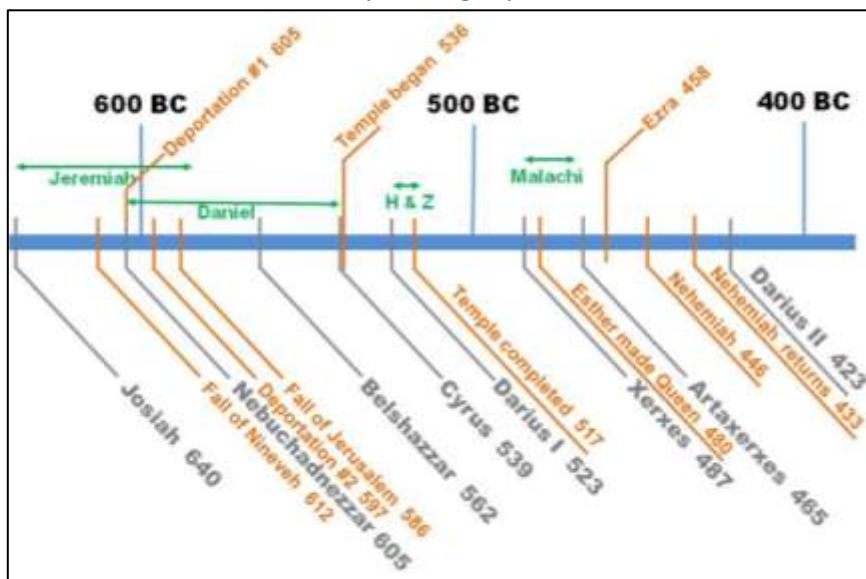
David Tollen, <https://pintsofhistory.com/2011/09/25/aramaic-the-humble-language-that-overcame-the-persian-greek-and-roman-empires/>, September 25, 2011

Tyndale House Publishers, **Chronological Life Application Study Bible**, 2004.

<http://www.muncherian.com/ChronologyofEzraNehemiahEsther.pdf>

Marvin Williams, **By the Spirit’s Power**, <https://odb.org/2018/01/19/by-the-spirits-power/>

Note: Different references may cite slightly different dates of the various events.



**Gray** print shows rulers of Palestine (Jewish, Babylonian & Persian).

**Orange** print shows the biblical events.

**Green** shows the ministry of the biblical prophets (“H & Z” represents Haggai and Zechariah).

Source: <https://pastorglenn.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/timeline-of-ezra-nehemiah.jpg>