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— April 2004 —

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
1-12 Apr	PREPARATION FOR AND OBSERVANCE OF PASSOVER AND THE DAYS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD	Personal study
13-15 Apr	Decree of Cyrus; Return of temple articles; First Jewish return to the Promised Land	2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1; 6:3
16-18 Apr	Listing of those in the first Jewish return from exile	Ezra 2; Nehemiah 7:5-72
19-21 Apr	Jerusalem worship reestablished; Temple restoration begins but encounters resistance	Ezra 3:1-4:5
22-24 Apr	Vision of the glorious man; Angelic confrontation; Kings of North and South prophecy (Persia, Greece & successors)	Daniel 10:1-11:4
25-27 Apr	Kings of North and South prophecy continued	Daniel 11:5-35
28-30 Apr	Kings of North and South prophecy continued; End-time trouble and resurrection	Daniel 11:36-12:13

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Highlights to Think About From This Month's Reading

12-DAY BREAK: Preparation for and Observance of

Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread (Personal study)

April 1-12

Passover will be observed this year on Sunday, April 4, after sunset. The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins Monday, April 5, at sunset, and continues until the sunset of Monday, April 12. The Bible Reading Program will pause to allow time for relevant personal study in the days before and during these spring festivals. For more information on these important sacred occasions, please see our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

Introduction to Ezra and Nehemiah (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1; 6:3)

April 13-15

We come now to the conclusion of Chronicles and the beginning of the book of Ezra, named after the priest and scribe who, as described in the book, led the second return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon. Just as the Jews had been taken into Babylonian exile in three stages, those who later returned to Judah under the Persians did so in three stages. The first group, under the governor Zerubbabel, returned when Cyrus issued his decree in 538 B.C. The second group returned with Ezra in 457 B.C. And the third group later returned in 444 B.C. under the leadership of Nehemiah, a Jewish official in the court of the Persian emperor Artaxerxes I. Nehemiah is the principal character in the biblical book bearing his name.

“The Book of Ezra does not name its author, but Jewish tradition ascribes the book to Ezra along with the books of Chronicles and Nehemiah. Modern scholars generally agree with this tradition. Despite some dissimilarities, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah form a connected work. The themes of the temple and the Levites, and the focus on lists, appear in all three books. In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are together as one book. Thus it seems that one author compiled all three books” (*Nelson Study Bible*, introductory notes on Ezra). “With such priestly interests, the one who masterminded this long document [with God’s inspiration] may well have been a priest—like Ezra” (introductory notes on Nehemiah).

Ezra is the main character of major sections of the book of Ezra, yet he does not appear until the latter part of the book (chapters 7–10). He also appears in chapters 8-10 of Nehemiah. “Both passages are written in the first person and provide detailed descriptions. Such vivid descriptions point to an eyewitness as the author. It is generally agreed that these chapters at least were drawn directly from Ezra’s memoirs” (introductory notes on Ezra).

The rest of the material is evidently a compilation from other sources—as Chronicles is. “The first half of Ezra records events that occurred nearly sixty years before Ezra returned to Judah. If Ezra compiled the book, he had to consult other sources for those passages. In fact, much of the Book of Ezra consists of information obtained from other official sources: (1) the decree of Cyrus (1:2-4), (2) the list of the articles of the temple (1:9-11), (3) the list of those who returned to Jerusalem (2:2-58), (4) the letter to Artaxerxes (4:11-16), (5) the reply of Artaxerxes (4:17-22), (6) the report of Tattenai (5:7-17), (7) the decree of Cyrus (6:2-5), (8) the reply of Darius (6:6-8), (9) the genealogy of Ezra (7:1-5), (10) the authorization of Artaxerxes (7:12-26), (11) the list of the heads of the clans (8:1-14), and (12) the list of those involved in mixed marriages. Over half the book of Ezra consists of official documents and lists. Moreover, the book is written in two languages. Most of the royal correspondence in the book is written in Aramaic, the international language of the Persian world, while the narrative sections are in Hebrew” (same notes). The Hebrew sections of Ezra are: 1:1–4:7; 6:19–7:11; 7:27–10:44. The Aramaic sections are: 4:8–6:18 and 7:12-26.

The compilation of various documentary sources helps to demonstrate that this is the recording of genuine history rather than folkloric storytelling.

Concerning Nehemiah, “many readers naturally conclude that the book was written by Nehemiah because of the words of the first verse, ‘The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah.’ It is widely believed that Nehemiah originated the following passages: 1:1–7:5; 12:27-43; 13:4-31” (introductory notes on Nehemiah). Ezra probably compiled Nehemiah’s memoirs along with his own and other sources into his historical account.

Yet Ezra-Nehemiah “is not simply a string of historical facts about the returning exiles. Instead, the narrative shows how God fulfilled His promises announced by the prophets. He brought His people back from Babylon, rebuilt the temple at Jerusalem, restored the patterns of true worship, and

even preserved the reassembled community from fresh relapses into heathen customs and idolatrous worship. Through the prophets and leaders He had called, the Lord had preserved and cultivated a small group of returning exiles, the remnant of Israel” (introductory notes on Ezra).

The Bible Reader's Companion puts it this way: “The Book of Ezra, and then of Nehemiah, tells what happens when a small contingent of Jews returns to resettle the Promised Land. Despite opposition from neighboring peoples, discouragement, and even lapses into sin, a Jewish presence is restored in the Holy Land and another temple erected on the site of Solomon’s earlier edifice. There, in a tiny district of what was once its own land, the little Jewish community struggles to survive and awaits God’s promise of a coming Messiah, God’s agent, who will see that all the ancient promises made to Abraham are fulfilled” (Lawrence Richards, 1991, introductory notes on Ezra). Indeed, the Jewish nation had to be restored to set the stage for the first coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Yet the restoration described in Ezra and Nehemiah was but a small foretaste of the great return and restoration of all Israel that will take place under Jesus Christ at His second coming.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah also provide inspiring lessons and parallels with the end-time work of building the New Testament spiritual “temple” of God, the Church, in preparation for Christ’s return.

Cyrus’ Decree (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1; 6:3)

April 13-15 Cont’d

The book of Chronicles closes with the same wording that opens the book of Ezra—describing a remarkable proclamation by Cyrus that allows the Jewish captives to return to their homeland from Babylon, grants them religious freedom, encourages them to rebuild the Jerusalem temple and provides for funding of the move and reconstruction. Cyrus issued this decree in his first year (2 Chronicles 36:22; Ezra 1:1; 6:3). “As Cyrus entered Babylon on 29 October 539 B.C., this was counted as his accession year. Babylonian and Persian scribes hold that his first regnal year over the Babylonians began on New Year’s Day, 1 Nisan (24 Mar.) 538” (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, introductory notes on Ezra).

We are told that God stirred Cyrus to issue this decree “that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled” (1:1; 2 Chronicles 36:22). This has caused some confusion. God had foretold through Jeremiah that the Babylonian captivity and desolation of Jerusalem would last 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10). Based on that, many assume that this decree must exactly mark the end of the 70-year period. Yet as explained in the Bible Reading Program comments on Jeremiah 25, the 70-year desolation of Jerusalem extended from the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple in 586 B.C. to the rebuilding of the temple in 516 B.C. There was also a 70-year subservience of nations to Babylon prophesied there—the length of the Babylonian Empire, from 609 B.C. to its fall to Cyrus in 539 B.C. Jeremiah 29:10 states that “after seventy years are completed at Babylon” God would cause the people to return. This seventy could be the length of the Babylonian Empire—after which God would cause people to return. Yet notice that the prophecy did not specify *immediately* after. Given all this, to fulfill Jeremiah’s prophecies, a way for the Jews to return had to come sometime after the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. and yet soon enough after to give ample time for the rebuilding of the temple by 516. Cyrus’ decree in 538 is what began the process.

Moreover, Jeremiah’s was not the only prophecy that Cyrus’ decree fulfilled. For God specifically prophesied through Isaiah: “I am the LORD...who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, ‘You shall be built,’ and to the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid’” (Isaiah 44:24, 28). God had also foretold Cyrus’ overthrow of Babylon (45:1-5).

This particular decree of Cyrus is not attested to in any contemporary Persian or Greek documents. Archaeology has not as yet uncovered inscription evidence of it. That, however, should not surprise us, as hard evidence regarding vast numbers of ancient decrees—the overwhelming majority, in fact—has never been found. Most of the documents of antiquity were destroyed or lost over the centuries. Interestingly, this very decree had been forgotten within decades of its being issued. It was sought out and rediscovered around 520 B.C., as related in Ezra 6.

Nevertheless, historical factors attest to its genuineness. As *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* notes on Ezra 1:2, “The formulation ‘Jerusalem that is in Judah’ is characteristic of Persian bureaucratic style.” Moreover, the decree is consistent with what we do know of Cyrus and his policies as attested to in ancient sources. For on one level, Cyrus’ decree reflected his patronage of religion and cultural pluralism in general. Biblical historian Eugene Merrill explains: “In the nineteenth century a barrel-shaped inscription which records Cyrus the Great’s decree authorizing

captive peoples in Babylonia to return to their places of origin was discovered. This inscription [known as the Cyrus Cylinder, currently housed in the British Museum] was primarily a propaganda piece designed to demonstrate that Cyrus had been called by Marduk, god of Babylon, and that his rule there and over all the earth was at the behest of the gods” (*Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 1987, p. 491).

Indeed, as Merrill also relates, “one reason for the ready capitulation of Babylon to Cyrus was the bitter antagonism that the Babylonians felt toward Nabonidus and his son [Belshazzar] for their anti-Marduk religious posture. Cyrus had already gained a reputation as an enlightened ruler who was extremely lenient and eclectic in his viewpoint. He maintained the status quo in lands which fell to his control, at least as much as he could without jeopardizing his sovereignty. One feature of his policy was to recognize the claims of native gods over their followers and to make no effort to supplant them with gods of his own. In fact, he [supposedly] came to Babylon at the express wishes of Marduk himself, since Marduk had become angry at Nabonidus’s irreverence and wished to replace him with another king, a shepherd who would more faithfully tend Marduk’s human flock. That shepherd, of course, was Cyrus” (p. 480). “One cannot deny the political and psychological genius of the man; indeed, his policy of permitting aliens to return to their homelands and to establish self-rule within the larger structure of the empire was nothing short of brilliant” (p. 491).

“Cyrus’s enlightened policy also had direct bearing on the plight of the exilic Jewish community in Babylonia, for Cyrus accorded to Yahweh, their God, the same deference he paid to Marduk and all other deities. A logical outgrowth of this policy was his decree that the Jews be allowed to return to their homeland. Only in a restored temple in Jerusalem could Yahweh function effectively as the God of Judah. And so, in eager solicitation of the favor of Yahweh, Cyrus repatriated the Jewish people and provided them with the authorization and wherewithal to rebuild their city and temple as a fitting place for their God” (p. 480).

The Nelson Study Bible further suggests that “Cyrus’s decrees might have been part of a clever military strategy. At this point, he had not yet conquered Egypt. A strong settlement of loyal people between him and the Egyptians would have been wise. This was a novel political policy; for the first time in hundreds of years, a king permitted a subjected people to return to their homeland” (“INDepth: Cyrus, the King of Persia,” comments on Ezra 1).

Of course, there was more to it than all that. The same source goes on to say, “But the point of [the] Scriptures is to assert that God was at work through this powerful ruler of the ancient world.” The Bible, in fact, explicitly states that God stirred Cyrus’ spirit to issue the proclamation (2 Chronicles 36:22; Ezra 1:1). While this could mean that God simply gave Cyrus a nudge to do what he was already likely to do anyway, it may well indicate—especially given the specific prophecies of Cyrus—that God had been working behind the scenes in Cyrus’ life and in Medo-Persian politics in such a way that caused the king to adopt the outlook he had.

Moreover, it appears that Cyrus’ proclamation regarding the Jews was specially inspired. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus says that God’s command regarding Cyrus’ rebuilding of the temple “was known to Cyrus by his reading the book which Isaiah left behind him of his prophecies.... Accordingly, when Cyrus read this, and admired the Divine power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfill what was so written” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, chap. 1, sec. 2). Indeed, it seems that Cyrus would have to have seen these prophecies in order to fulfill God’s words in Isaiah. Speaking directly to Cyrus (45:1), God says He will give the king victory and treasures “that you may know that I, the LORD, who call you by your name [long before your birth], am the God of Israel” (verse 3). For this to make sense—for Cyrus to know from these words in the book of Isaiah that he was personally named in advance and for this to serve as a proof to him of God’s divinity—the king must have personally read these words or listened to someone reading them to him.

“What role Daniel may have played in all this is unclear, but one cannot help feeling that it was major” (Merrill, p. 492). Daniel was now the prime minister of Babylonia serving under Cyrus’ deputy king and governor Darius. There is no question that Daniel would have had contact with Cyrus. Indeed, it is almost certain that Cyrus had heard all about the recent episode with the lions’ den. Would not Cyrus have inquired of Daniel regarding his religion? It seems rather likely that Daniel would then have shown the king that he was directly foretold in Scripture. Indeed, Daniel may have gone further and pointed out the prophecies of Jeremiah regarding the Jewish return and the return of the temple vessels and utensils.

“We know that the Persian kings paid close heed to prophecies: Cambyses to Egyptian oracles, Darius and Xerxes to Greek oracles (*Herodotus* 8.133; 9.42, 151)” (*Expositor’s*, note on Ezra 1:1). How much more closely would Cyrus have paid heed after staring at his own name in a prophecy written down about 150 years earlier—part of which had already been fulfilled? He would have been utterly astounded. And it seems most likely that he would have been motivated to act accordingly—“stirred” in his spirit by the Word of God.

Still, “no one should read into the accounts that Cyrus had become a worshiper of Yahweh; he was no more a worshiper of Yahweh than Nebuchadnezzar had been when he extolled Yahweh before Daniel. Both were syncretists who were willing for reasons of politics [and lack of full biblical and spiritual understanding] to welcome any new god into their respective pantheons. One cannot deny, however, that both were under the control of the sovereign God of heaven and earth who used them, witting or not, to achieve his holy purposes” (Merrill, p. 492).

First Return Under Sheshbazzar (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1; 6:3) April 13-15 Cont’d

God stirred the spirits of others too—causing a number of the Jews to enlist in the return to Judah (verse 5). Notice that the returning captives are described as being “of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites” (same verse). The return from captivity was not a return of all 12 tribes of Israel, as many today maintain. Rather, it was simply of those of the nation of Judah who had been taken captive by the Babylonians. In fact, we see in Ezra and Nehemiah that only a small portion of the Jewish people returned—those specially stirred by God. This parallels the experience of Christians, who must be specially drawn by God (see John 6:44).

Why would the vast majority of Jews choose to remain in Babylon? Josephus remarks: “Yet did many of them stay at Babylon, as not willing to leave their possessions” (sec. 3). *Expositor’s* comments: “A fascinating light on the Jews in Mesopotamia is shed by the Murashu tablets. In 1893, 730 inscribed clay tablets were found at Nippur.... The archive dates from the reigns of Artaxerxes I (464-424) and Darius II (423-404). Murashu and sons were wealthy bankers and brokers who loaned out almost any thing for a price. Among their customers are listed about sixty Jewish names from the time of Artaxerxes I and forty from the time of Darius II. These appear as contracting parties, agents, witnesses, collectors of taxes, and royal officials. There seems to have been no social or commercial barriers between the Jews and the Babylonians. Their prosperous situation may explain why some chose to remain in Mesopotamia. With the birth of a second and a third generation, many Jews established roots in Mesopotamia” (introductory notes on Ezra).

However, we should not be quick to fault everyone who remained. God did not stir them up as He did the others. It was evidently in His ultimate purpose that most *not* return to the Promised Land at that time. The Jewish Diaspora (Dispersion) through other countries caused by the exile provided the basis for a widespread Judaism—which would later provide a foundation for a widespread Christianity. We should also note that many of those who did not return at that time nevertheless supported those returning with gifts (1:4).

In Ezra 1:8, Cyrus commits the Jerusalem temple articles to “Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.” And in verse 11 we see that this Sheshbazzar takes them with the captives in the return to Jerusalem. In an official letter to a later Persian emperor, Sheshbazzar is named as the governor of Judah and the one who lays the foundation of the Jerusalem temple (5:14, 16). Yet earlier in the same chapter, the one who, along with the priest Jeshua or Joshua, “began to build the house of God” is Zerubbabel (verse 2; see 3:8-11). Zerubbabel and Jeshua had earlier been the ones to build the altar to God upon first arriving in the Promised Land (3:2). Zerubbabel is shown to be the leader of the first return in Ezra 2:2. As the grandson of the former Jewish king Jeconiah (see 1 Chronicles 3:17-19), Zerubbabel could properly be referred to as the prince of Judah.

Given all this, Sheshbazzar seems to be one and the same with Zerubbabel. While other possibilities are offered, this one seems to make the most sense: “The name Sheshbazzar occurs only in two passages...both related to official Persian actions. On the other hand, the name Zerubbabel is used in passages related to Jewish activity.... It is possible that Sheshbazzar was a name by which Zerubbabel was known in Persian circles” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 8).

Regarding the returned temple articles, “the separate items listed in vv. 9, 10 total 2,499. However, the total for all the articles given in v. 11 is 5,400. Probably vv. 9, 10 list only the larger and more important items that were transported back to Jerusalem” (note on verses 9-11).

Note the detailed cataloging and careful preservation of these items. As suggested previously in the Bible Reading Program, it seems likely that Daniel had a hand in this—as a high official of both

Babylon and Persia. Yet of course the one mainly responsible was God. He was bringing to pass what He had foretold in Jeremiah 27:22—that the temple articles would be returned after Babylon’s fall.

In the next chapter we will see a listing of the nearly 50,000 people who returned to Judea at this time. The journey probably took about three and a half to four months, as this is how long Ezra’s group would later take (compare Ezra 7:9; 8:31). Historian Werner Keller writes in his book *The Bible as History* (1981, p. 302): “We can vividly imagine their journey into the land west of the Jordan. Almost 800 miles have to be covered between Babylon and distant Jerusalem, with the clouds of dust churned up by the caravan as a faithful companion throughout the whole journey. One day they would pass the site of old Mari. They would reach the spot where, on the opposite side of the river, the Balikh, on whose lower reaches Haran was situated, enters the Euphrates. From then on the returning exiles were following the same track which had been taken by Abraham 1,400 years earlier, when he left the land of his fathers to go to Canaan, via Damascus and along the foot of Hermon to the Lake of Galilee. Then came the day when from among the brown peaks of the mountains of Judah the desolate ruins of the city of Zion rose before their eyes—it was Jerusalem. What fateful significance this journey had for the generations that were still to come!”

Resolving the Differences in the Return Lists (Ezra 2; Nehemiah 7:5-72) April 16-18

Ezra 2 lists those Jews enrolled in the return to the Promised Land under the Davidic prince Zerubbabel (apparently the Persian-appointed governor referred to in Ezra 1 as Sheshbazzar) and Jeshua or Joshua, the high priest (see Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 3:1). Nearly a century later, Nehemiah finds a register of those in the first return. While the lists are nearly the same, they are not exactly the same. How do we account for the discrepancies?

The Nelson Study Bible comments: “*The people of the province* [Ezra 2:1] refers to the Jewish people of Judah (see 5:8; Neh. 1:2, 3; 11:3). The use of this phrase probably indicates that the register of ch[apter] 2 was compiled in Babylon. Nehemiah’s list in Neh. 7:4-73 would have been compiled after he arrived in Jerusalem, which could account for some of the differences between the two registers.”

Ezra’s list gives the number of the family of Arah as 775 (2:5). The list in Nehemiah says the number was 652. *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary* states in its note on Ezra 2:5: “It is probable that all mentioned as belonging to this family repaired to the general place of rendezvous, or had enrolled their names at first as intending to go; but in the interval of preparation, some died, others were prevented by some sickness or insurmountable obstacles, so that ultimately no more than 652 came to Jerusalem.”

The same commentary later notes on the variations in general: “The discrepancy is sufficiently accounted for from the different circumstances in which the two registers were taken: that of Ezra having been made up at Babylon, while that of Nehemiah was drawn out in Judea, after the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt. The lapse of so many years might well be expected to make a difference appear in the catalogue, through death or other causes” (note on Nehemiah 7:5).

“To be sure,” says Gleason Archer in his *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, “regardless of the date when Nehemiah recorded this list (ca. 445 B.C.), his express purpose was to give the exact number of those who actually arrived at Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua back in 537 or 536 (Neh. 7:7). So also Ezra (in the 450s, apparently) recorded their numbers (2:1-2). But it may well be that Ezra used the earlier list of those who originally announced their intention to join the caravan of returning colonists back in Babylonia, whereas Nehemiah’s list reproduces the tally of those who actually arrived in Judea at the end of the long trek from Mesopotamia.

“In some cases there may well have been some individual families who at first determined to go with the rest and actually left their marshaling field (at Tel Abib, or wherever it may have been in Babylonia) under Zerubbabel and proceeded to the outskirts of that province before new factors arose to change their mind. They may have fallen into disagreement as to the advisability of all of them going at once with the initial group; others may have discovered business reasons to delay their departure until later. In some cases there may have been illness or death....

“In other cases there may have been some last-minute recruits from those who at first decided to remain in Babylonia. Perhaps they were caught up in the excitement of the return movement and joined the company of emigrants after the official tally had been taken at the marshaling grounds. Nevertheless, they made it safely back to Jerusalem, or wherever their ancestral town in Judea was, and were counted in the final list made up at the completion of the journey.

“Only four clans or city-groups came in with shrunken numbers (Arah, Zattu, the men of Bethel and Ai, and the men of Lod, Hadid, and Ono). All the rest picked up last minute recruits, varying from 1 (in the case of Azgad). It would be fascinating to know what special, emotional, or economic factors led to these last-minute decisions. At any rate, the differences in totals that do appear in these two tallies should occasion no surprise whatever. The same sort of augmentation and attrition has featured in every large migration in human history” (1982, pp. 229-230).

Archer also offers the possibility of copyist errors, but that consideration is unnecessary—and in fact unlikely given the number of variations. Indeed, one would think that scribes would have been scrupulous to check these figures given that there are two separate listings. It is more likely that there were legitimate differences in the original documents. Consider that Ezra is probably the one who compiled the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as one book. Why would he not have corrected any obvious errors? Ironically, the fact that there are differences in the lists is actually a proof of authenticity. No one fabricating the lists would have introduced such apparent discrepancies. These, then, obviously represent genuine historical documentation.

Details of the Returning Captives (Ezra 2; Nehemiah 7:5-72)

April 16-18 Cont'd

Looking at some of the details of the lists, it should be noted that the Nehemiah of Ezra 2:2 and Nehemiah 7:7 is not the same as the Nehemiah after whom the book of Nehemiah is named. Mordecai in the same verses was not the later Mordecai of the book of Esther. Nehemiah 7:7 lists an extra leader named Nahamani. Some maintain that the description “people of Israel” in these verses means all 12 tribes are indicated. Yet we have already seen that those returning were of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi (Ezra 1:5). Among the small remnant that returned to Judea from Babylon in this and subsequent returns, there were a few people whose ancestors had migrated to Judah from the northern 10 tribes. Yet the vast majority of the people of the northern tribes remained scattered throughout this period—and they have not returned to the Promised Land to this day. The Jews, as the remnant of Israel, were appropriately designated as people of Israel. All Jews are Israelites. Yet, as has been amply demonstrated in past readings and comments, all Israelites are not Jews.

The total number of returning priests was 4,289 (see 2:36-39; Nehemiah 7:39-42). This was around 10 percent of the total of those returning (see Ezra 2:64; Nehemiah 7:66). “The relatively high proportion of priests amongst those who returned was doubtless due to the prospect of a new Temple, with its opportunities of service” (*New Bible Commentary: Revised*, 1970, note on Ezra 2:36-39). On the other hand, the total number of returning Levites is surprisingly listed as just 341 or 380 (see Ezra 2:40-42; Nehemiah 7:43-45)—much less than the 24,000 Levites involved in the worship of God in David’s time (see 1 Chronicles 23:4). Why did so few come, particularly as compared with the priests? We don’t know, but perhaps it is significant that priests had leadership positions with a certain glory, whereas the temple duties of the other Levites may have been viewed with comparatively little excitement or prestige.

We then see a listing of the Nethinim and the sons of Solomon’s servants (Ezra 2:43-58; Nehemiah 7:46-60). “Nethinim means ‘Given Ones’ or ‘Dedicated Ones.’ In 1 Chr. 9:2, the Nethinim are distinguished from the priests and the Levites. Jewish tradition identifies the Nethinim with the Gibeonites who had been assigned by Joshua to assist the Levites in more menial tasks (see Josh. 9:27)... The sons of Solomon’s servants are linked with the Nethinim ([Ezra 2] v. 43). The numbers of the two groups are totaled together (see v. 58; Neh. 7:60)” (*Nelson Study Bible*, notes on Ezra 2:43-50, 55). The latter, according to *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary’s* note on Ezra 2:55, “may be the descendants of the Canaanites whom Solomon enslaved (1 Kings 9:20-21). But [another commentator]... argues that they were instead the descendants of the royal officers who were merchants in the service of Solomon (1 Kings 9:22, 27).”

It is interesting to observe the care with which the priesthood was guarded. People had to prove their genealogy to serve in it. Even those reckoned as priests yet without the documentary evidence were excluded from priestly service and entitlement until the Urim and Thummim could be consulted (see Ezra 2:59-63; Nehemiah 7:61-65). However, “the rabbis held that ‘since the destruction of the first temple the Urim and the Thummim ceased’ (*Tosefta Sota* 13.1). They held that Ezra 2:63 expressed, not a historical possibility, but an eschatological [end-time] hope (b. *Sotah* 48a-b). Elsewhere in the Talmud (b. *Shebuoth* 16a), we read that Ezra had to reconsecrate the temple without benefit of the Urim and Thummim” (*Expositor’s*, note on verse 63).

The word translated “governor” in verse 63 is transliterated as Tirshatha in the King James Version. This is “a Persian title, ‘the One to Be Feared,’ which approximates to ‘His Excellency’” (*New Bible Commentary*, note on verse 63).

The whole assembly totaled 42,360 (Ezra 2:64; Nehemiah 7:66). Yet the individual numbers listed in Ezra 2 add up to just 29,818. In Nehemiah 7 they add up to 31,089. “It is possible that the larger total [42,360] includes women, who are not named in the lists” (*Nelson*, note on verse 64). “Some believe the [unaccounted-for] 12,000 were women and/or children. If so, this may account for the many marriages to pagan women which [later] took place (cf. Ezra 8-10)” (*Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on Ezra 2:64).

Accompanying the 42,360 Jews were 7,337 slaves (verse 64; Nehemiah 7:67). “The ratio of slaves—one to six—is relatively high; that so many would return with their masters speaks highly of the relatively benevolent treatment of slaves by the Jews” (*Expositor’s*, note on verse 65). “The singers listed here were not the temple choir of [Ezra 2] v. 41. These were professional singers employed for banquets, feasts, and funerals (see 2 Chr. 35:25; Eccl. 2:7, 8). Their presence could be an indication of luxury (see 2 Sam. 19:35). It appears that many of the Jewish people had achieved some prosperity while living in Babylon.... The large number of horses listed here also suggests affluence among those who returned to Jerusalem. Prior to this time, horses in Israel had been used only for war and ceremonies. Only the very rich and well-armed owned horses. The rich also rode mules, for they were scarce in Israel.... The beasts of burden were camels and donkeys. Camels were expensive; the poorer classes rode donkeys” (*Nelson*, notes on Ezra 2:65, 66, 67).

On arriving in Judea, the people contribute gold, silver and garments for the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 2:68-69; Nehemiah 7:70-72). Yet the figures given in Ezra and Nehemiah don’t match. “Apparently Ezra’s list rounds off the figures, while Nehemiah’s list presents them in more precise detail. It is also possible that the two lists give totals from different times of collection—perhaps in Babylon and then later in Jerusalem” (*Nelson*, note on Ezra 2:69). Or perhaps Ezra’s list, having larger numbers, presents the total from both times. As before, an apparent discrepancy is a mark not of made-up storytelling by a forger of later centuries who would make sure to iron out such problems. Rather, this again is a mark of genuineness.

Finally, we should notice the money described here. As *Expositor’s* explains in its note on Ezra 2:69: “‘Drachmas’ translates the Hebrew *darkemonim* (cf. Neh 7:70-72). Another Hebrew word—*adarkonim*—is used for coins in Ezra 8:27 and 1 Chronicles 29:7. The ‘drachma’ was the Greek silver coin worth a day’s wage in the late fifth century B.C. More probably the coin intended here was the Persian daric, which was a gold coin, named either after Darius I, who began minting it, or after the Old Persian word for gold, *dari*. The coin was famed for its purity, which was guaranteed by the king. It was 98 percent gold with a 2 percent alloy for hardness. It was 3/4 of an inch in diameter and weighed 8.42 grams, or a little less than 1/3 of an ounce. Its value equaled the price of an ox or a month’s wages for a soldier. Since the coin was not in use until the time of Darius I (522-486 B.C.), its occurrence here in 537 B.C. has been labeled anachronistic. Its use is better viewed as a modernization by terms current at the time of the book’s composition of earlier values, perhaps the Median shekel. The total of 61,000 darics equals some 1,133 pounds of gold (about the same if the term represented the Greek drachma).”

Archaeology has recently lent support to the Jewish return from Babylon in the 6th centuries B.C. On February 20, 2004, an Associated Press article titled “Archaeologists find 2,500-year-old jewelry collection, makeup kit,” reported: “Israeli archaeologists excavating caves near the Dead Sea have discovered a rare find—a woman’s 2,500-year-old fashion accessories. The hoard of jewelry, a makeup kit and a small mirror apparently belonged to Jews who had returned from exile in Babylon in the 6th century B.C., said Tsvika Tsuk, chief archaeologist for the Israel Nature and Parks Authority. ‘This find is very rare. Both for the richness of the find and for that period, it is almost unheard of,’ Tsuk said on Friday. Hidden under a stone-like accumulation of sediment thrown up by a nearby spring, archaeologists using metal detectors found a necklace made of 130 beads of semiprecious stones and gold, a scarab, an agate medallion of Babylonian origin and a silver pendant with an engraved crescent moon and pomegranates. They also found what appears to be a makeup kit containing an alabaster bowl for powders, a stick to apply the makeup and a bronze mirror. Tsuk said they also discovered a pagan stamp showing a Babylonian priest bowing to the moon. ‘These finds confirm the (biblical) accounts of Jews returning from exile in Babylon,’ Tsuk said.... Tsuk said the find shows that there was a wealthy and flourishing community of returnees living in the area at the time. ‘These are not the belongings of a simple person,’ he said.”

The Restoration Begins (Ezra 3:1–4:5)**April 19-21**

Ezra 3 begins with the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar, Tishri, corresponding to September-October. Cyrus' decree had been delivered in 538 B.C., sometime after March-April. It probably took several months to prepare and mobilize for the return. If it then took three and a half to four months to actually travel to Judea—as it later took Ezra's group (see Ezra 7:9; 8:31)—there is no way the Jews of the first return could have been settled in the Promised Land by Tishri of 538 B.C. More than likely it was 537. Many have even suggested 536. Probably the Jews had arrived in the land some months before—enough time for them to be resettled in the cities as noted in Ezra 3:1.

Tishri is an important month on the sacred calendar, containing four of God's seven annual festivals. Mentioned first in this chapter, because of his religious duties relevant to the festivals, is Jeshua, or Joshua, the high priest (Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 3:1). He is referred to as the son of Jozadak (Ezra 3:2, 8) or Jehozadak (Haggai 1:1). The high priest prior to the exile was named Seriah, who was captured by the Babylonians: "And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest" (2 Kings 25:18). He was executed along with others (verses 19-21). But his son survived. For in giving the high priestly genealogy, 1 Chronicles 6:14 says: "...Seraiah begot Jehozadak. Jehozadak went into captivity when the LORD carried Judah and Jerusalem into captivity by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar." And now we see that Jeshua or Joshua was the son of Jehozadak. Once more, it is worth noting how historically consistent the various books of the Bible are.

Zerubbabel, the governor, is referred to as the son of Shealtiel (Ezra 3:2, 8). In 1 Chronicles 3:17-19, Shealtiel is listed as a son of the former Jewish king Jehoiachin or Jeconiah. Yet the same passage in 1 Chronicles lists *Zerubbabel* as the son of *Pedaiah*—another son of Jeconiah. "It may be that Shealtiel died childless and his brother Pedaiah married his widow, following the custom of Levirate marriage (see Deut. 25:5-10; 1 Chr. 3:18)" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Ezra 1:8). That would make Zerubbabel the son of Pedaiah through biology and identification with him as the one who raised him—but the son of Shealtiel by name and inheritance. Note also that Zerubbabel, a Davidic prince, was appointed governor and not a vassal king under Cyrus. Recall God's stern dictate that no descendant of Jeconiah would sit on the throne of Britain and reign as king over Judah (see Jeremiah 22:24-30). The throne of Britain had been transferred elsewhere (see our online publication, *The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future*). In that light, it is interesting to see that there is no hint of the people trying to promote Zerubbabel as king—despite the desire for the restoration of Jeconiah's line at the beginning of the exile. It seems they had come to accept the prophecies of Jeremiah as divinely authoritative.

Indeed, we see a restored religious zeal in Ezra 3—a genuine desire to please God. The returned Jews rebuilt the destroyed altar at the site of the Jerusalem temple. "They set the altar on its bases" (verse 3)—that is, on the foundations where it had originally stood—and reinstated the sacrifices they had been unable to offer in Babylon (as Jerusalem was the only place God designated acceptable for such sacrifices). *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary* says: "This was of urgent and immediate necessity, in order, first, to make atonement for their sins; secondly, to obtain the divine blessing on their preparations for the temple, as well as animate their feelings of piety and patriotism for the prosecution of that national work" (note on verse 2). And this reinstatement of the sacrificial system was despite their fear of adversarial national neighbors (same verse). "We can measure our faith by what we do when we're afraid, despite our fears!" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on verse 3).

The sacrifices recommenced on the first day of Tishri (verse 6), which is the Feast of Trumpets (see Leviticus 23:23-25; Numbers 29:1-6). The tenth day of the same month is the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:26-32; Numbers 29:7-11). And from the 15th through the 21st is the Feast of Tabernacles, the 22nd then constituting another festival (Leviticus 23:33-44). The people kept the Feast of Tabernacles, which God always intended to be a major highlight of the year for His people, with the appropriate number of sacrifices (verse 4; see Numbers 29:13-38). The Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes the coming rule of Jesus Christ over all nations (see our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan—The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*). Indeed, on one level, this observance of the Feast of Tabernacles by the returned exiles prefigures the wonderful observance of this same festival by a regathered Israel following Christ's return (Zechariah 14:16).

The foundation of the temple was not yet laid, but the obtaining of materials for the building's construction was underway. In building the first temple, King Solomon had purchased materials from Tyre and Sidon (in modern Lebanon) and had them shipped to Joppa (just south of modern Tel

Aviv), paying for them with grain, oil and wine (see 2 Chronicles 2:10-16; 1 Kings 5:1-11). We see almost the exact same details under Zerubbabel and Joshua, who had permission from Cyrus for such business (see Ezra 3:7).

Construction on the second temple began in the second month of the second year since returning to Judea (verse 8). The second month, Iyyar, corresponding to April-May, was also the month in which the building of Solomon's temple had begun (see 1 Kings 6:1). "As the Jews probably returned to [Judea] in the spring of 537, the second year would be the spring of 536" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on Ezra 3:8). Yet some date the return to 536, which would make the second year 535. Interestingly, this is 70 years from the first captivity of Jews at the hands of the Babylonians in 605 B.C.

The Levites were appointed as overseers over the laborers (verses 8-9). The Jeshua of verse 9 is not the high priest but a Levite (see 2:40).

"The returnees to Jerusalem celebrated laying the temple's foundation in almost the same way that the previous generation had celebrated the first temple (see 2 Chr. 5:13). Two choruses were sung *responsively*. One group sang *For He is good*; the other group responded with *For His mercy endures forever* (see Neh. 12:31)" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Ezra 3:10-11). The New Bible Commentary says regarding this: "The singing was antiphonal, with either two choirs, or a choir and a priest-soloist. This is a feature of many psalms. The words preserved in our text would be the chorus (cf. 1 Ch. 16:34; 2 Ch. 5:13; 7:3; Ps. 136)" (note on Ezra 3:11).

"Laying the foundation was a cause of celebration. The descriptive 'great shout of praise' (v. 11) reflects the typically loud expression of both grief and joy in the Middle East. The old remembered the glory of Solomon's temple [destroyed 50 years before] and were heartbroken that this temple was less than half as large. The young were excited at the prospect of what lay ahead" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on verses 10-13). A lesser temple was better than no temple. God had brought judgment, but He had led a remnant here to begin again.

"It Is Not for You and For Us" (Ezra 3:1-4:5)

April 19-21 Cont'd

In chapter 4, the Jewish people encounter a serious problem. Note that the people are referred to as Judah and Benjamin (verse 1)—once again showing this was not a return of all the tribes of Israel but just those who, along with many of the Levites, had made up the southern kingdom of Judah.

Certain "adversaries" come to offer help on the temple's construction. These were evidently the people now inhabiting the territory of the former Israelite northern kingdom of Samaria, though that is not explicitly stated here. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus does explicitly refer to these people as Cuthaeans or Samaritans (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, chap. 2, sec. 1; chap. 4, sec. 3), people of Babylonia and Syria relocated by the Assyrians to the land of Israel after the deportation of the Israelites. Those in the delegation here mention their forefathers of nearly a century and a half earlier having been brought over by the Assyrian emperor Esarhaddon, who reigned from 681 to 669 B.C. (verse 2).

The governor, high priest and elders reject the Samaritan offer of help: "*You may do nothing with us* is not a rude rebuff; it is a righteous [and wise] refusal. The people offering help were not friends, but adversaries (v. 1). They may have sacrificed to the Lord, but they were idolatrous at the same time (see 2 Kin. 17:29-35)" (*Nelson*, note on Ezra 4:3). Indeed, 2 Kings 17:33 says of them, "They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away." Their offer of assistance may even have been a hypocritical ruse to infiltrate the Jews, gain more influence and sabotage their project. "A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet" (Proverbs 29:5).

Expositor's comments: "Even after the destruction of the temple, worshipers from Shiloh and Shechem in the north came to offer cereals and incense at the site of the ruined temple (Jer 41:5). Moreover the northerners did not abandon faith in Yahweh, as we see from the Yahwistic names given [in the book of Nehemiah] to Sanballat's sons, Delaiah and Shelemaiah.... But they retained Yahweh, not as the sole God, but as one god among many gods; Sanballat's name honors the moon god Sin. Though Ezra-Nehemiah does not explicitly mention the syncretistic character of the northerners, evidence suggests that the inhabitants of Samaria were syncretists.... In 1962 the Ta'amireh Bedouins who had found the DSS [Dead Sea Scrolls] discovered a cave in Wadi Daliyeh with fourth-century B.C. papyri. Paul Lapp in 1963 found there a great mass of skeletons, numbering between two hundred to three hundred men, women, and children: the remains of the leading families

of Samaria who had fled in 331 from Alexander. A good proportion of their personal names included the names of such deities as Qos (Edomite), SHR (Aramaic), Chemosh (Moabite), Ba'al (Canaanite), and Nebo (Babylonian)" (note on Ezra 4:1-2).

Syncretism (blending of beliefs or ecumenism—compromising truth for the sake of cooperation and unity) was the sin that had led to the deportations of both Israel and Judah. It would have been foolish for the returned Jews to blend with those who were still practicing it. Yet interestingly, as was mentioned, this is not given as the reason for the refusal. According to *Expositor's*, the wording of verse 3 "is literally 'it is not for you and for us'.... The Jews tried tactfully to reject the aid proffered by the northerners by referring to the provisions of the king's decree" (note on verse 3). In fact, Josephus says that the Jews replied "that it was impossible for them to permit them to be their partners, whilst they {only} had been appointed to build that temple at first by Cyrus...although it was indeed lawful for them to come and worship there if they pleased" (sec. 3).

Despite the non-condemnatory and even hospitable approach, the refusal nevertheless provoked hostility and opposition from the Samaritans. These adversaries "tried to *discourage* the people of Judah. They *troubled* them in building" (verse 4). "'To discourage' is literally 'to weaken the hands,' a Hebrew idiom.... The opposite idiom is 'to strengthen the hands'.... 'Make them afraid' [NIV, or 'trouble']—the verb *balah* means 'to terrify' and often describes the fear aroused in a battle situation" (*Expositor's*, note on verse 4). So it appears the Samaritans may have resorted to forms of sabotage or terrorism.

They also "hired counselors against them" (verse 5)—"or lawyers, probably to represent them against the Jewish community at the Persian court. The Samaritans persisted in these attacks until the reign of Darius as much as fourteen years later" (*Nelson*, note on verse 5). Before looking ahead to that time, however, the setting of our next few readings is still the reign of Cyrus.

Spirit Wars and Geopolitics (Daniel 10:1–11:4)

April 22-24

The events and prophecy of Daniel 10–12 are set in the third year of Cyrus (10:1)—which must mean the third year of his reign as king of Babylon—in the first month (see verses 3-4). So the date was Nisan of 536 B.C. It is the 70th year since Daniel's captivity. He is now in his mid-80s. And here at the end of his life he receives an amazing prophecy of the future.

The NKJV translates a latter part of Daniel 10:1 as "The message was true, but the appointed time is long." Yet an alternative rendering of the second clause here is given in the margin: "...and of great conflict." In fact, the NIV renders this: "Its message was true and it concerned a great war." This rendering makes sense considering the long interpretation given in chapter 11. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states: "We are not given any hint as to what symbols may have appeared in the vision (statues, beasts, trees, or whatever). We are simply told that it related to 'a great war' (*saba*). Since it is referred to simply as a *dabar* ('word,' 'message,' 'saying'), it may not even have come in a pictorial form at all. Its message, however, clearly portended times of testing and crisis for the people of God" (note on verse 1).

Daniel entered three weeks of "mourning," with this period, Nisan 4-24, overlapping the Passover (Nisan 14) and Feast of Unleavened Bread (Nisan 15-21). *Expositor's* states: "Daniel was so deeply impressed by this revelation that he resorted to three weeks of mourning (*mitabbel*, a word often used in connection with lamenting the death of a loved one). From v. 12 we know that this mourning and the semifast that accompanied it (v. 3) marked a prolonged period of intense supplication and prayer. Daniel abstained altogether from meat, wine and delicacies so that he might give himself over to beseeching and waiting on God. Daniel even neglected the usual niceties of personal grooming, such as fragrant oil on his hair or body. His consuming desire was to intercede for his people and obtain assurance from Yahweh that the nation would survive and carry out with honor and faithfulness its holy mission as God's witness to the world. He wanted to be certain that the remnant of forty-two thousand that had already gone back to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel and Joshua and had reinstated public worship at the site of the temple would not fail in their trust, and that the commonwealth they had established would carry on till the last days and the coming of Messiah, the Son of Man" (note on verses 2-3).

At the end of the three weeks, Daniel receives a remarkable vision of a glorious being (verses 4-9). There are striking resemblances to Ezekiel's description of the glory of God (see Ezekiel 1:4-28) and to the apostle John's vision of the glorified Jesus (see Revelation 1:9-20). Yet the being of this vision seems to be a powerful angel, like the being of Revelation 10:1, who is also robed in a cloud with a rainbow above his head, his face shining as the sun and his legs like fiery pillars. Indeed, both

the being of Revelation 10 and the one in this section of Daniel raise hands to heaven and swear about a length of time (see Daniel 12:7; Revelation 10:5).

Continuing in *Expositor's*: “Verse 7 tells us that when Daniel received his vision, he was not alone. His companions, however, did not see the vision of the angel but sensed his presence. Overwhelmed with terror, they fled. Similarly, in 2 Kings 6 at first Elisha alone saw the angelic host encircling Dothan [or perhaps by faith simply knew that they were there without actually seeing them]; only after intercessory prayer was his young assistant enabled to [actually] see them.... Also, in Acts 9:7 the companions of Saul [i.e., Paul] saw something of the light but could not behold the vision of the risen Christ, they could only tell that there was a voice from heaven but could not distinguish its words (Acts 22:9).... [Daniel now] found himself emotionally overwhelmed (v. 8), just as he had been at the end of the vision in 8:27. His face paled and his strength left him. After hearing the angel speak to him—presumably some words of greeting—Daniel swooned (v. 9). Yet he was soon aroused, for the angel reached out and actually touched him (v. 10)” (note on verses 7-10).

The angel who now speaks to Daniel and later explains the prophetic message to Daniel appears to be the same glorious being of verses 4-6. The identity of this angel is not revealed here. He is often assumed to be Gabriel, as Gabriel had been dispatched to relate messages to Daniel before. And that may well be. Perhaps Daniel does not say so because, if the angel is Gabriel, he has not come in the familiar human guise in which he has appeared before—appearing now instead as this glorious being so that there is less recognition. In any case, the being who speaks to Daniel does not appear to be the preincarnate Jesus, the One the ancient Israelites knew as God, as demonic forces are able to resist him.

This brings us to what is surely the most remarkable part of this entire exchange. The Bible here reveals that there are unseen spirit wars going on around us. The “prince of the kingdom of Persia” (verse 13; see verse 20) and the “prince of Greece” (verse 20) are evidently spirit rulers over these empires under the chief of demons, Satan the Devil. Jesus made it clear that Satan is the “ruler of this world” (see John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). And within his demonic kingdom are various echelons of power—“forces and authorities and...rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world” (Ephesians 6:12, Contemporary English Version). Mention is even made in Daniel 10:13 of the “kings of Persia” (plural)—evidently demonic sub-kings under the leading prince of Persia, himself subject to Satan. These evil forces were able to impede the divine messenger until he received help from another powerful angel. (Though this was only within the limits that God permitted.)

Expositor's explains it this way: “The powers of evil apparently have the capacity to bring about hindrances and delays [when God allows it], even of the delivery of the answers to believers whose requests God is minded to answer. God’s response was immediate, so far as his intention was concerned [as the messenger was dispatched when Daniel’s prayerful seeking for help in understanding began]. But ‘the prince of the Persian kingdom’ (v. 13)—apparently the satanic agent assigned to the sponsorship and control of the Persian realm—put up a determined opposition to the actual delivery of the divine answer. While God can, of course, override the united resistance of all the forces of [evil] if he chooses to do so, he accords to demons certain limited powers of obstruction and rebellion somewhat like those he allows humans. In both cases the exercise of free will in opposition to the Lord of heaven is permitted by him when he sees fit. But as Job 1:12 and 2:6 indicate, the malignity of Satan is never allowed to go beyond the due limit set by God, who will not allow the believer to be tested beyond his limit (1 Cor 10:13). Verse 13 [of Daniel 10] shows that the angels of God have power to counteract and thwart the agents of the Devil. Here it was the archangel, Michael (‘one of the chief princes’), who broke the hindrance put up by the demonic ‘king of Persia’ and paved the way for the interpreting angel to deliver God’s answer to Daniel” (note on verses 12-13).

Michael is evidently one of the most powerful of God’s angels. He is mentioned three times in the Old Testament, all in the book of Daniel (10:13, 21; 12:1), and twice in the New Testament (Jude 9; Revelation 12:7). The latter citation refers to a future spirit war in heaven. As for how spirit beings fight and what weapons they are able to use against one another we have no idea. But both sides evidently have powerful forces at their disposal. Of course, the omnipotent God will ultimately cause all wickedness to be overthrown. Indeed, He could have eliminated the resistance altogether in the case of delivering the message to Daniel. Yet He did not. He evidently saw some use in permitting it—perhaps for the sake of Daniel, for the messenger and His other angels or even for us reading the account today.

Returning to Daniel 10, observe that “one basic principle of prayer is set forth by this example of delayed response. It is the principle of undiscourageable persistence. Jesus taught his disciples that ‘they should always pray and not give up’ (Luke 18:1). There may be hindering factors of which a praying Christian knows nothing as he wonders why the answers to his requests are delayed. Nevertheless, he is to keep on praying. It may be that he will not receive an answer because he has given up on the twentieth day when he should have persisted to the twenty-first day” (note on Daniel 10:12-13).

The draining of Daniel’s strength due to being overwhelmed at the presence of the divine messenger finally ceases. “For the third time in this chapter Daniel is supernaturally strengthened by one who touched him (see also vv. 10, 16). The first touch enabled him to arise from the ground, the second to speak, and the third to carry on a conversation” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 18). At last, Daniel is able to hear the interpretation.

The angel begins by telling Daniel that the spirit war was not yet over (verses 20-21). This appears to have relevance to the message he brought. Consider that the angel was battling the spirit forces behind the Persian Empire. Next, he says, “the prince of Greece will come” (verse 20). The Persian Empire would eventually fall to the Hellenistic Greek empire of Alexander the Great. Perhaps the messenger’s fight with its demons would not come until then. Interestingly, it may well be that Satan’s forces fight against each other. Perhaps the demonic forces behind Persia were dominant at this time and those behind Greece would gain dominance later—all within God’s ultimate allowance to fulfill prophecy.

Expositor’s offers this interesting suggestion about the context of the spirit fight: “The occasion for the spiritual warfare [at this time of Persian dominance] was the restoration of the believing remnant of Israel to the Holy Land and their survival there as a commonwealth of the faithful, living in obedience to Holy Scripture. Knowing that such a development could lead to the ultimate appearance of the Son of God as the Messiah for God’s redeemed, Satan and all his hosts were determined to thwart the renewal of Israel and the deliverance of her people from destruction. The supreme effort to exterminate them altogether was to take place some fifty-five years later, in the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), when Haman secured his consent to obliterate the entire Jewish race. The conflict between Michael and the ‘prince of Persia’ (10:13) may have had some bearing on this event, and it may have been Michael’s victory over his satanic foes that paved the way for Queen Esther to thwart this genocide. The second effort of Satan was to take place under [the Greek rule of] Antiochus Epiphanes, who sought to obliterate the Jewish faith by forbidding its practice on pain of death. The momentous events of 167-164 B.C. [or 168-165, foretold by the prophecy now explained to Daniel in chapter 11] may well have been profoundly affected by this supernatural warfare between the forces of heaven and [the demons]. Though this is not explicitly stated here, in the light of subsequent events it is reasonable to assume that these were some of the issues over which Michael was locked in combat with Satan’s deputies to Persia and Greece” (note on 11:1).

Something else interesting to observe in this exchange is the angel’s statement, “I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth” (10:21). This was before Daniel even wrote it down. Evidently, the prophecy now being related to Daniel was, amazingly, already written down in the “Bible of heaven,” so to speak. He was merely transcribing it for us.

The angel then begins the specifics of the prophecy. And what specifics they are! As *The New Open Bible*, quoted in the Bible Reading Program’s introduction to the book of Daniel, says, “Daniel 11 alone contains over one hundred specific prophecies of historical events that literally came true.” This chapter is amazing proof of the divine inspiration of Scripture.

The prophecy begins by stating that “three more kings will arise in Persia, and the fourth shall be far richer than them all; by his strength, through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece” (verse 2). This is not to say that there would be only four more kings in the Persian Empire following Cyrus—for there were in fact 12 more. Rather, only the first four are being documented here before the fact. First came Cyrus’ elder son Cambyses (530-522 B.C.). Next an imposter named Gaumata or Bardiya reigned for a short time (522). He is often referred to as Pseudo-Smerdis because he passed himself off as Cyrus’s younger son, Smerdis (the real Smerdis having been assassinated by his brother’s agents). Next was Darius the Persian (522-486), a cousin of Cyrus, who killed the imposter and took his place as king. The fourth king was Darius’ son Xerxes (486-465) who, being the wealthiest of them all, launched an all-out war against Greece. In fact his assault is reckoned to be one of the greatest in all of ancient history. The Greek historian Herodotus estimated his army at

about a million men. Yet Xerxes did not ultimately triumph. After united Greek forces defeated his navy at the Battle of Salamis in 480 B.C., he was forced to beat a hasty retreat.

The period that followed saw the steady rise of Greece and the steady decline of Persia. According to the prophecy, a mighty king would arise (verse 3). It does not say he would come immediately. Nor does it say what nationality he would represent. However, the implication is that this ruler would be greater than Xerxes—and no such person would fit the bill until the conquest by the Greco-Macedonian ruler Alexander the Great. Moreover, when we compare this prophecy of how the mighty king would be broken and his empire divided into four parts (verse 4) with an almost identical prophecy given earlier in Daniel 8, it becomes rather obvious what is meant here. Alexander is the only one who could be meant. The empire ended up divided between Alexander's generals Ptolemy Soter, Seleucus Nicator, Cassander and Lysimachus. Ptolemy ruled Egypt and Palestine. Seleucus ruled Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia. Cassander ruled Greece and Macedonia. And Lysimachus ruled Asia Minor.

As we will see, the kingdoms of Cassander and Lysimachus drop out of the prophecy at this point, as they are no longer relevant to the story being revealed to Daniel. The rest of the prophecy follows the progress of Seleucid Syria to the north and Ptolemaic Egypt to the south and their successors—and how God's people would fare through the infighting between them—all the way to the end time. As the angel had told Daniel in 10:14: "Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come."

Ongoing Wars Between North and South (Daniel 11:5-35)

April 25-27

To help in understanding this section, please refer to the supplemental reading items, which go into considerable detail. One of the items gives the entire New King James Version text of Daniel 11 with explanatory notes provided in bracketed inserts. It also provides a timeline of the ancient rulers mentioned in the chapter as well as a map of the divisions of Alexander's empire. More information on Antiochus Epiphanes and the Abomination of Desolation is available in the supplementary material for our next reading.

Supplementary Reading: "Chapter Three: The Four Empires of Daniel's Prophecies," *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*, pages 8-11 (especially pages 10-11, beginning with the subhead "The Bible's most detailed prophecy"); "Daniel 11 (NKJV) With Explanation," verses 1-35.

End-Time Events (Daniel 11:36–12:13)

April 28-30

Please read the supplementary material listed below for this section first before proceeding to the highlights in the commentary that follows, which gives some additional details not thoroughly covered in the supplementary reading.

Verses 36-39 of Daniel 11 appear to show the Roman emperor, as the next king of the North, proclaiming himself divine and later honoring and expanding the power of a previously unrecognized "god" in a high religious office, the former occurring early in the succession of Roman emperors and the latter commencing with Constantine the Great in the fourth century A.D. The honoring of this false religion would progress through various resurrections of the western part of the Roman Empire until the end time. This "god" seems parallel to the "little horn" of Daniel 7, which appears to be the Roman papacy.

Yet has anyone actually ever looked on the pope as a god? Consider that the pope is called "Holy Father"—the name of God the Father (John 17:11; compare Matthew 23:9)—as well as the "Vicar of Christ," meaning *substitute for* Christ. According to one Catholic publication, "all the names which are attributed to Christ in Scripture, implying His supremacy over the church, are also attributed to the Pope" (Bellamin, *On the Authority of Councils*, Book 2, chap. 17, quoted by A. Jan Marcussen, *National Sunday Law*, 58th ed., p. 77). He has been called "another God on earth" (Labbe and Cossart, *History of the Councils*, Vol. 14, col. 109) and "our Lord God the Pope" (*Extravagantes of Pope John XXII*, title 14, chap. 4, *Declaramus*, quoted by Marcussen, p. 77). Furthermore, Catholic teaching has in the past claimed that "the Pope is not only the representative of Jesus Christ, but he IS Jesus Christ, hidden under a veil of flesh" (*The Catholic National*, July 1895). All of this is a forerunner to the blasphemy of the end time, when, as the apostle Paul foretold, the leader of the false religious system will sit "as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

Verses 40-45 detail events of the end time, where the European beast power of the north is ultimately brought to his end at Christ's return.

In Daniel 12:1, the events of the last days are related to the unparalleled “time of trouble,” synonymous with “Jacob’s trouble” in Jeremiah 30:7 and the “great tribulation” of Matthew 24:21. After this will come the resurrection (Daniel 12:1-3). Some are resurrected to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt (verse 2). It is important to note that this does *not* say that those raised to life and those raised to contempt are all raised at the same time. From other passages, it is evident that these are different resurrections.

Daniel is then told to seal up the scroll of his book, the understanding of which would not be unlocked until the end time (verse 4). The work of his long life is at last done. But then we are told of two more angels in addition to the first. Apparently they have been listening to this amazing prophecy. One asks how long it would be to the end of “these wonders”—evidently the final trials ending in the resurrection (verses 5-6). Notice the answer: “It shall be for a time, times, and a half. And when they have made an end of scattering the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished” (verse 7, Green’s Literal Translation). This ties directly back to the prophecy of Daniel 7, where it was said that the saints would be given into the hands of the persecuting “little horn” for this exact same period (7:25)—which, as was explained in the comments on that verse, equates to three and a half years, the last three and a half years before Christ’s return (equating also to the 1,260 days or 42 months of other prophecies in Revelation).

Daniel, however, is quite confused. Though he has been told to seal the prophecy, he still has questions. He asks how it’s all going to work out (12:8). The order to seal the prophecy is then reiterated (verse 9). Nevertheless, a few more things are told to him at this point—which Daniel may have found even more confusing. The angel explains that the wise of the end time would understand the time frame being described.

In verse 11, Daniel is specifically told that the time from the taking away of daily sacrifices and the setting up of the end-time abomination of desolation would be 1,290 days. Verse 12 then mentions an enigmatic 1,335 days. The key to understanding appears to be verse 13, where Daniel is told that he will rise to his inheritance “at the end of the days.” This seems to mean the end of the various groupings of days mentioned. That is, the three and a half years (1,260 days), the 1,290 days and the 1,335 days all seem to end at the time Daniel is resurrected at Christ’s return. A possible scenario is that breaking of the power of the saints—the cutting off of their public preaching—will come 1,335 days before Christ’s return. Then, 45 days later, 1,290 days before Christ’s return, the abomination of desolation will be set up. And then, 30 days later, 1,260 days before Christ’s return, the Great Tribulation will commence. Thankfully, Christ will return in just three and a half years from this point to bring deliverance to the people of Israel and Judah (as the commencement of His deliverance of all mankind) and everlasting life to his saints. The dead in Christ will live again.

Daniel, whose time to rest came not long after the sealing of his prophecy, will at that future time be raised—but then, with all of us who remain faithful, to perfect understanding. At last, all of Daniel’s questions will be answered—and, as amazing as it is to contemplate, so will all of ours.

Supplementary Reading: “Chapter Seven: War and Peace in the Middle East,” *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*, pages 25-32; “What Is the ‘Abomination of Desolation’?,” *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*, pages 26-27; “Daniel 11 (NKJV) With Explanation,” verses 36-45.

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