

## Judaism Under the Persians (539 BC to 333/332 BC)

### Lecture

- Government of Judea
  - In his *Antiquities of the Jews, Volume III*, Josephus describes the Jewish government of Judea as an aristocratical oligarchy.
    - The high priests were the heads of the Jewish government.
    - Descendants of the high priests served in the position.
    - The high priest as head of the Jewish government is going to carry forward into the Greek and Roman periods. We will see this altered during the Roman period, when Romans co-opted the office and appointed Caiaphas as High Priest during Jesus' life.
  - Josephus lists the following high priests during the Persian period. Josephus' list parallels that of Nehemiah 12:1-11. Note that this chronology has been disputed by some scholars and may not be a complete list of high priests.
    - Joshua, son of Jehozadak, after the building of the Second Temple.
    - Joiakim, son of Joshua (Nehemiah 12:10).
    - Eliashib, son of Joiakim (Nehemiah 12:10).
    - Joiada, son of Eliashib (Nehemiah 12:10). Nehemiah drove one of his sons out of the community because he was married to a Samaritan.
    - Johanan, son of Joiada (Nehemiah 12:11).
    - Jaddua, son of Johanan (Nehemiah 12:11).
  - Judea was also governed by a Persian official, most of whom were Jews. Here is a list of these governors from Wikipedia. This may not be a complete list, as coins and seals from the Persian period had the Jewish names Elnathan, Hananiah (?), Jehoezer, Ahzai, and Urio.

- Sheshbazzar
  
- Zerubbabel. He led the first wave of Jewish exiles back to Judea after the Edict of Cyrus.
  
- Ezra ben Seraiah, the subject of the Book of Ezra.
  
- Nehemiah ben Hachaliah (second half of the fifth century BC), the subject of the Book of Nehemiah.
  
- Hezekiah or Yehezqiyah, identified by the script on a coin type dated to the late fourth century, possibly around 335 BC.
  
- What is important about this list of governors is that both Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel were descendants of the last king of Judah, Jehoiachin, who was taken captive to Babylon and later released from prison by the Babylonian king Awel-Marduk after serving 37 years.
  
- Darius I ended the policy of using native princes as governors circa 500 BC.
  
- The main jobs of the Persian governors were to maintain order, report back to the Persian king, and collect tribute, in the form of taxes on the subjects. We know, however, from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah that these 2 men injected themselves heavily in the affairs of the Judean citizens and their religious practices.
  
- The Persians did not object to their conquered nations observing their own religious practices. They felt that doing this and appointing governors who were from those nations would prevent uprisings.
  
- The Persian period after Artaxerxes, who ruled 464-424 BC, which coincided with Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi, was one of the last relatively peaceful periods in Persian history.

- Following Artaxerxes, there was a succession of rulers, including one who reigned for only 45 days, who were frequently assassinated. There were frequent wars with the Greeks and the Egyptians. This period of instability might have been beneficial to Judah, as the Persians were occupied with weightier matters than what was happening in Judah. As long as the Judeans did not rebel, Persia was happy.
  
- Important Religious Developments
  - The synagogue
    - With the destruction of the 1<sup>st</sup> Temple (Solomon's Temple) by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC and the forced exile to Babylon of most Jews, the Jews were left without a place for their sacrifices.
    - Ezra cemented the form of Judaism which exists today, which is focused on the Torah, not in the Temple, but in synagogues. Synagogues as places of worship and education had their beginnings during the Babylonian exile and were established in Judah by the returning exiles.
    - Synagogues are places of prayer, study, and worship. Today, they are also places for special celebrations such as weddings, funerals, bar mitzvahs, and bat mitzvahs.
  - Construction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple (Zerubbabel's Temple)
    - The 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple was completed in 516/515 BC during the reign of Darius I (see Ezra Chapter 6).
  - The Hebrew Canon
    - Books which would later become part of the Hebrew Canon were written during the Persian period include:
      - Daniel
      - 1 and 2 Chronicles
      - Ezra
      - Nehemiah
      - Haggai
      - Zechariah
      - Joel

- Malachi
  - Possibly Esther (late 5<sup>th</sup> century BC or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC)
  - 1 and 2 Chronicles cover much of the same historical information as 1 and 2 Kings, but its focus is on Judah and the importance of the Temple.
- The End of Prophetic Literature
    - Malachi was the last prophet of the Old Testament. His book can be dated roughly 445 BC to 433 BC.
    - After Malachi, there were 400 years of silence from God until the arrival of the last of God's prophets, John the Baptist.
  - The Reform of the Priesthood and Its Supporting Members
    - Nehemiah, and to a lesser extent Ezra, reformed the priesthood and its supporting members such as the Levites, gatekeepers, and musicians.
    - Ezra was careful to ensure that only those men who could document their Levitical descendance from Aaron could serve as priests. (see Ezra 2)
    - Ezra ensured that when he left Babylon for Judah that he took with him sufficient numbers of Levites to perform important Temple duties such as supporting the priests, managing Temple articles and storerooms, and instructing the people. (see Ezra 8)
    - Nehemiah organized the people in recommitting themselves to observing all of God's commands, regulations, and decrees. They bound themselves with a curse and an oath to do so. (see Nehemiah 10).
    - This recommitment was critical to the reform of the priesthood.
      - Malachi rails against priests who accepted improper sacrifices from the people. (see Malachi 1).
      - Ezra, Malachi, and Nehemiah chastised the priests and the people of Judah for intermarrying with foreigners.

- Ezra set up a tribunal to investigate these abuses and forced the men to put aside (likely divorce) their foreign wives. (see Ezra 9 and 10).
- Nehemiah rebuked them, cursed them, pulled out their hair, and drove 1 member of the high priest's family out of the community. (see Nehemiah 13)
- Nehemiah barred the selling of goods on the Sabbath and even closed the gates of the city of Jerusalem to prevent this. (see Nehemiah 10 and 13)
- Nehemiah ensured that the people brought their tithes, offerings, and first fruits to the Temple which provided support for the Levites and the priests. (see Nehemiah 10 and 12)
- Separation
  - Ezra, Malachi, and Nehemiah worked mightily to remove the sin of intermarriage with foreigners from the Judean community. Their reforms were not permanently successful, because the practice occurred again during the Greek period.
  - One of Nehemiah's final reforms noted in Nehemiah 13 was to exclude from Judah all who were of foreign descent.
    - Likely due to their lax controls on intermarriage with foreigners, some non-Jews had been allowed into the Temple, which violated God's statute from Deuteronomy 23:3-6, which prohibited any Ammonite or Moabite or their descendants from entering the Tabernacle (later the Temple), even down to the 10<sup>th</sup> generation.
  - The animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans began at the time that the Jews returned from exile in Babylon.
    - The Samaritans strongly objected to the completion of the wall around Jerusalem, and they felt threatened by power Nehemiah exerted over the returning exiles in Judah.

- The Samaritans had an ally in the Jewish High Priest Eliashib, who wanted to bring Judah’s non-Jewish foreign neighbors closer to the Temple. It is likely Eliashib who welcomed foreigners into the Temple to worship. Nehemiah forbid this practice.
- Eliashib even allowed a grandson (a son of Joaida) to marry a daughter of Sanballat, the governor of Samaria. Nehemiah exiled this grandson from the community.
- Samaritan worship then moved to Shechem, a site hallowed in the Old Testament as a place of worship, as Abram had first built an altar to the Lord there. (see Genesis 12) The Samaritans built their own temple on nearby Mount Gerizim.
- We see this in the New Testament in John 4:1-26, which records Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman. She talks about her place of worship:
  - “Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”  
John 4:20
- This separation practice became ingrained during the later Persian period and heavily influenced later Jewish actions during the Greek and Roman periods.

# Judaism Under the Persians

## 539 BC to 333/332 BC

# Government of Judea

- Josephus Describes the Jewish Government of Judea as an Aristocratical Oligarchy
  - The High Priests Were the Heads of the Jewish Government
  - Descendants of the High Priests Served in the Position
- Josephus Lists the Following High Priests; Parallels Nehemiah 12:1-11; Chronology Disputed by Some and May Be Incomplete
  - Joshua, Son of Jehozadak, after the Building of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple
  - Joakim, Son of Joshua (Nehemiah 12:10)
  - Eliashib, Son of Joiakim (Nehemiah 12:10)
  - Joiada, Son of Eliashib (Nehemiah 12:10); Nehemiah Drove One of His Sons Out of the Community for Marrying a Samaritan
  - Johanan, Son of Joiada (Nehemiah 12:11)
  - Jaddua, Son of Johanan (Nehemiah 12:11)

# Government of Judea

- Also Governed by a Persian Official, Most of Whom Were Jews
  - Sheshbazzar
  - Zerubbabel; Led the First Wave of Exiles Back to Judea After the Edict of Cyrus
  - Ezra Ben Seraiah (Book of Ezra)
  - Nehemiah Ben Hachaliah (Book of Nehemiah)
  - Hezekiah; From Script on a Coin, Circa 335 BC
  - Others: Elnathan, Hananiah (?); Jehoezer; Ahzai; Urio

# Government of Judea

- Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel Were Descendants of the Last King of Judah, Jehoiachin; Imprisoned in Babylon for 37 Years
- Darius I Ended the Policy of Using Native Princes as Governors Circa 500 BC
- The Main Jobs of the Governors: Maintain Order; Report Back to the Persian King; Collect Tribute (Taxes)
  - Ezra and Nehemiah Also Injected Themselves in the Affairs of Judean Citizens and Their Religious Practices
- The Persians Did Not Object to Conquered Nations Observing Their Own Religious Practices
- They Thought Doing This and Appointing Native Governors Prevented Uprisings

# Government of Judea

- The Period After Artaxerxes (464-424 BC), Which Coincided with Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi, Was One of the Last Relatively Peaceful Periods
- Following Artaxerxes, A Succession of Rulers; 1 Ruled Only 45 Days; Frequently Assassinated
- Frequent Wars with the Greeks and the Egyptians
- This Period of Instability Might Have Been Beneficial to Judah
- The Persian Were Occupied with Weightier Matters
- As Long as Judah Did Not Rebel, Persia Was Happy

# Important Religious Developments

- The Synagogue

- With the Destruction of the 1<sup>st</sup> Temple and the Forced Exile to Babylon, the Jews Had No Place for Sacrifices
- Ezra Cemented the Form of Judaism Which Exists Today
- Focus on the Torah, Not in the Temple, but in Synagogues
- Synagogues Had Their Beginnings During the Babylonian Exile and Were Established in Judah by the Returning Exiles
- Synagogues Are Places of Prayer, Study, and Worship
- Today, Also Places for Special Celebrations Such as Weddings, Bar Mitzvahs, and Bat Mitzvahs

# Important Religious Developments

- Construction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple (Zerubbabel's Temple)
  - Completed 516/515 BC During the Reign of Darius I (Ezra Chapter 6)
- The Hebrew Canon; Books Written During the Persian Period:
  - Daniel
  - 1 and 2 Chronicles
  - Ezra
  - Nehemiah
  - Haggai
  - Zechariah
  - Joel
  - Malachi
  - Possibly Esther (Late 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC or Early 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC)
  - 1 and 2 Chronicles Cover Much of the Same Historical Information as 1 and 2 Kings, but Focus on Judah and the Importance of the Temple

# Important Religious Developments

- The End of Prophetic Literature
  - Malachi Was the Last Prophet of the Old Testament; Book dated 445 to 433 BC
  - After Malachi, There Were 400 Years of Silence until John the Baptist
- The Reform of the Priesthood and Its Supporting Members
  - Nehemiah and Ezra Reformed the Priesthood and the Levites, Gatekeepers, and Musicians
  - Ezra Ensured Only Those With Documented Descendancy from Aaron Could Serve as Priests (Ezra 2)
  - Ezra Brought Sufficient Numbers of Levites to Judah to Support the Priests, Manage the Temple Articles and Storerooms, and Instruct the People (Ezra 8)

# Important Religious Developments

- The Reform of the Priesthood and Its Supporting Members
  - Nehemiah Organized the People in Recommitting Themselves to Observing All God's Commands, Regulations, and Decrees with a Curse and an Oath (Nehemiah 10); Critical to the Reform of the Priesthood
    - Malachi Rails Against Priests Who Accepted Improper Sacrifices from the People (Malachi 1)
    - Ezra, Malachi, and Nehemiah Chastised the Priests and the People of Judah for Intermarrying with Foreigners
    - Ezra Set up a Tribunal to Investigate and Forced the Men to Put Aside Their Foreign Wives (Ezra 9 and 10)
    - Nehemiah Rebuked Them, Cursed Them, Pulled Out Their Hair, and Drove 1 Priest out of the Community (Nehemiah 13)
  - Nehemiah Barred the Selling of Goods on the Sabbath and Closed the Jerusalem City Gates (Nehemiah 10 and 13)
  - Nehemiah Ensured the People Brought Their Tithes, Offerings, and First Fruits to the Temple, which Supported the Levites and the Priests (Nehemiah 10 and 12)

# Important Religious Developments

## • Separation

- Ezra, Malachi, and Nehemiah Worked to Remove the Sin of Intermarriage with Foreigners
- Their Reforms Were not Permanently Successful
- One of Nehemiah's Final Reforms Was to Exclude from Judah All Who Were of Foreign Descent (Nehemiah 13)
  - Some Non-Jews Had Been Allowed into the Temple, a Violation of Deuteronomy 23:3-6

# Important Religious Developments

## • Separation and the Samaritans

- The Animosity Between the Jews and the Samaritans Began at the Time the Jews Returned from Exile in Babylon
- The Samaritans Strongly Objected to the Completion of Jerusalem's Walls and Felt Threatened by Nehemiah's Power
- The Samaritans Had an Ally in the Jewish High Priest Eliashib, Who Wanted to Bring Judah's Non-Jewish Neighbors Closer to the Temple; Nehemiah Forbid this Practice
- Eliashib Allowed a Grandson (a son of Joaida) to Marry a Daughter of Sanballat, the Governor of Samaria; Nehemiah Exiled This Grandson
- Samaritan Worship Moved to Shechem; They Built Their Own Temple on Mount Gerizim
- This Separation Practice Became Ingrained During the later Persian Period and Heavily Influenced Later Jewish Actions in the Greek and Roman Periods