

Ezra, Esther & Leonidas

“The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are one book in the Hebrew Bible and should be seen as a unit. They were written by Ezra the priest, and Jewish tradition says he wrote the books of Chronicles, as well as Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra [like Jeremiah in the fall of Jerusalem] was an eyewitness to many of these events and was a key character in the later events. These books were written some time in the 5th century BC...” [*The Word For Today Bible, NKJV, p. 588*] This is going to be a history, which will include in it the books of Ezra and Esther, as well as covering some of the critical history of the Persian Empire, along with the struggle of the Greek city-states to maintain their freedom against the vast and powerful Persian Empire under both Darius and his son Xerxes. This will fill in the historic gap between Kings & Chronicles and the historic events, fulfilled prophecies, found in the book of Daniel. As such, part of this will be an expository study of Ezra and Esther, but will also read like an exciting history text. So let’s step into a sort of historic time-machine and go back to where the story of Kings & Chronicles end and this one starts off.

Part I: The Fall of Jerusalem, then Babylon, the Rise of Persia

2nd Chronicles 36:15-23, “And the LORD God of their fathers sent *warnings* to them by his messengers, rising up early and sending *them*, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till *there was no remedy*. Therefore he brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; he gave *them* all into his hand. And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all *these* he took to Babylon. Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.”

Proclamation of Cyrus

“Now in the first year of Cyrus [539BC] king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying,

‘Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the LORD God be with him, and let him go up!’”

Cyrus Prophecied in Isaiah

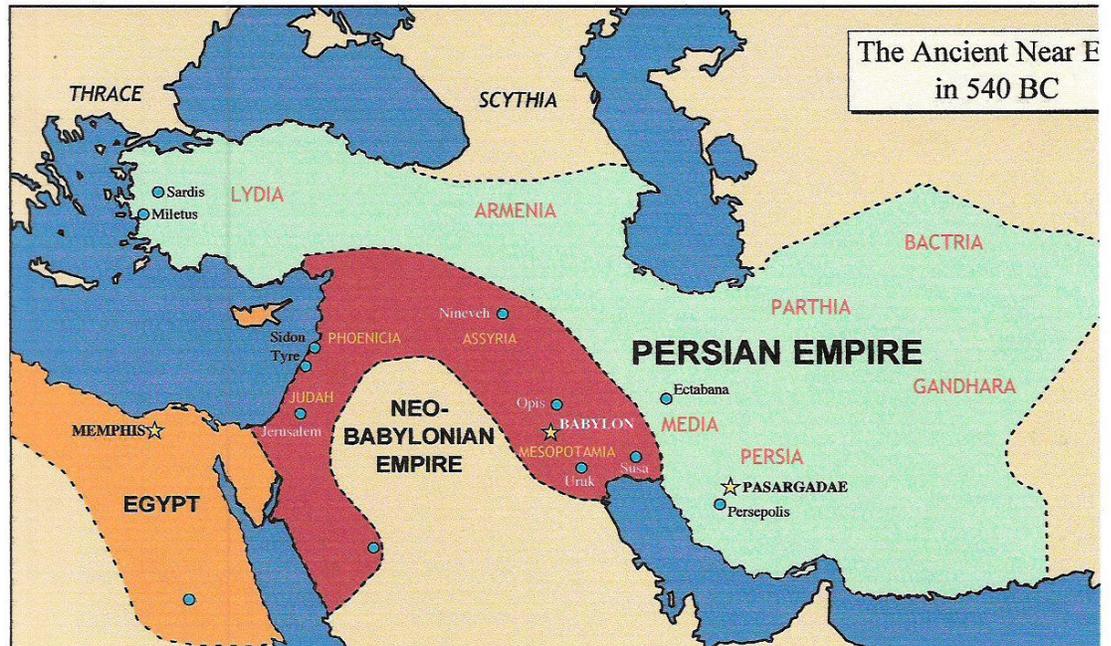
But long before, during the lifetime of Isaiah, during the reign of Hezekiah king of Judah (715-686BC), God prophecied through Isaiah about this proclamation of Cyrus, naming Cyrus long before he was born. So let’s say God prophecied this around 700BC through Isaiah. In Isaiah 44:24-28 God is promising Judah and Jerusalem, and the Temple will be re-inhabited and rebuilt, long before they fell under Nebuchadnezzar. Cyrus was born either 600BC or 576BC, so God prophecied through Isaiah about Cyrus 100 years before his birth, bare minimum. **Isaiah 44:24-28, “Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and he who formed you from the womb: I am the LORD, who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth by myself; who frustrates the signs of babblers, and drives diviners mad; who turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolishness; who confirms the word of his servant, and performs the counsel of his messengers; who says to Jerusalem, ‘You shall be inhabited,’ to the cities of Judah, ‘You shall be built,’ and I will raise up her waste places; who says to the deep, ‘Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers’; Who says to Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he shall perform all my pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, ‘You shall be built,’ and to the temple, ‘Your foundations shall be laid.’”** In Isaiah 45:1-5 the LORD is speaking directly to Cyrus, who is not yet born. This is fascinating. If ever there is a proof of the Bible, fulfilled prophecy is one of the major proofs. **Isaiah 45:1-5, “Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held---to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be**

shut: ‘I will go before you and make the crooked places straight; I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the LORD, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel. [The LORD, the God of Israel had just called Cyrus, Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, by name through this prophecy in Isaiah 45, verses 1-5. Isaiah wrote and lived during the reign of king Hezekiah of Judah, and was killed by his evil son Manasseh. Hezekiah reigned from 715-686BC. So at the very latest, 686BC, this prophecy predated the birth of Cyrus the Great by 86 years, as Cyrus was born 600BC at the earliest date. Some date him as being born 576BC, which would make Isaiah’s prophecy at the very latest, predate Cyrus’ birth by 90 years. Could be more, as we don’t know when Isaiah 44 and 45 were penned, perhaps even earlier.] For Jacob my servant’s sake, and Israel my elect. I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides me. I will gird you, though you have not known me. That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other...’”

About Cyrus and the end of the Babylonian Empire

First we will look at how Cyrus conquered into the Babylonian territory, and then took the city of Babylon. From Wikipedia we get “The Battle of Opis, fought in September 539BC, was a major engagement between the armies of Persia under Cyrus the Great [Cyrus II] and the Neo-Babylonian Empire under Nabonidus during the Persian invasion of Mesopotamia. At the time, Babylonia was the last major power in western Asia that was not yet under Persian control...At the time of the Battle of Opis, Persia was the leading power in the Near East. Its power had grown enormously under its king, Cyrus II, who had conquered a huge swathe of territory to create an empire that covered an area corresponding to the modern countries of Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan. The only remaining significant unconquered power in the Near East was the Neo-Babylonian Empire, which controlled Mesopotamia and subject kingdoms such as Syria [the territory which had been] Judea, Phoenicia and parts of Arabia.” While the children of Judah were in captivity in Babylon, the Babylonian Empire was conquered by the Persians under Cyrus the Great in 539BC, this same Cyrus mentioned by name in Isaiah chapters 44 and 45, one hundred years before his birth. The Persians at Cyrus’ command began to allow the Jews to

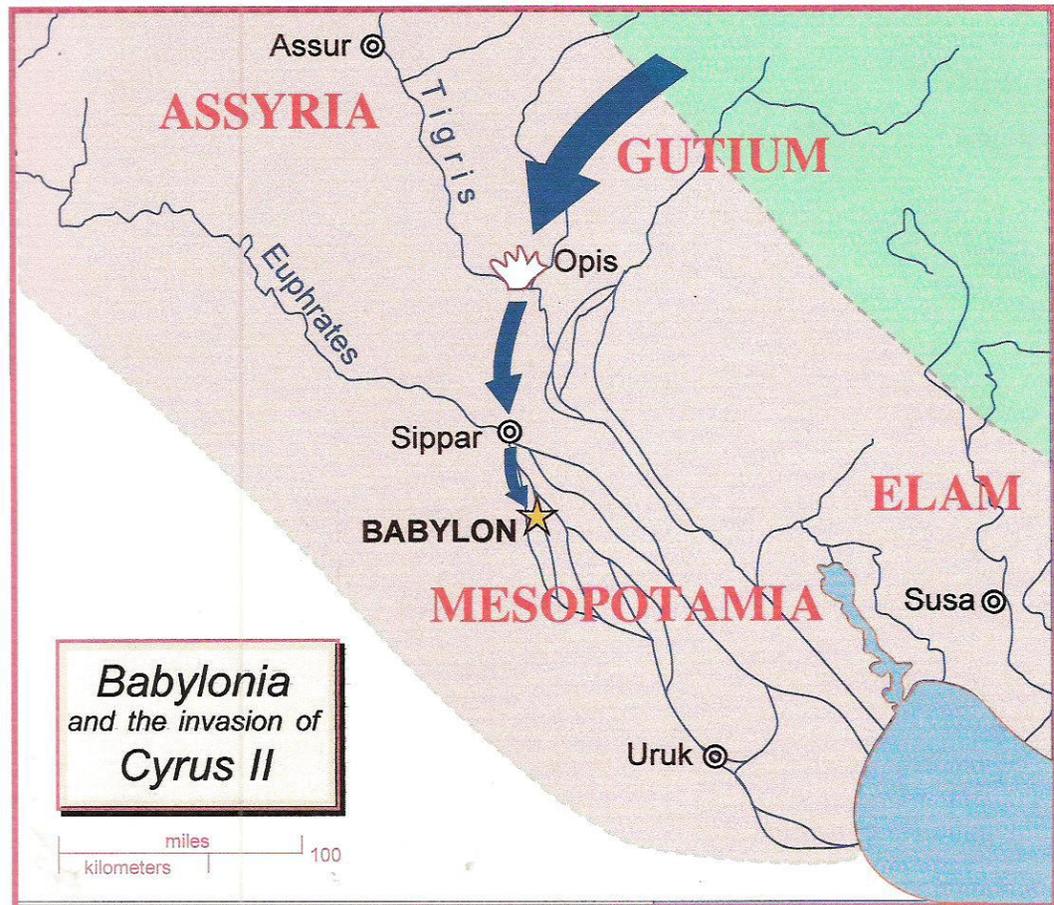
return. Zerubbabel took around 50,000 people back to begin work on the construction of the temple. Later, Ezra followed with about 2,000 more people to aid in rebuilding the temple, and Nehemiah would follow to help restore the city walls of Jerusalem. The book of Ezra begins with the declaration that came from Cyrus, the founding king of the Medo-Persian Empire, which gave the Jews permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple. This was the declaration of which Daniel prophesied in Daniel 9:25. It started the clock ticking which would culminate in the coming of the Messiah, Yeshua haMeshiach, Jesus Christ. The book of Ezra follows the efforts of Zerubbabel and those with him to institute the building project of the Temple, and the first six chapters chronicle the problems they went through. Then chapters 7 through 10 tell of Ezra's involvement as he came to encourage the people and to complete the restoration of the Temple, and is about how he led them in spiritual reform. He wasn't just interested in finishing a building project, he cared about the spiritual condition of the people. Ezra is a great example of a man who led by following the Word of God and by encouraging others to obey the Word of God.



Now back to how Cyrus conquered the Babylonian Empire, and its capital city, Babylon, the last of his major conquests, and installed his uncle, Darius the Mede, as ruler over the province of Babylon. After the conquest of Babylon, Darius the Mede continued to live in the city of Babylon up until his death in 536BC. He is the king Darius spoken of in the Book of Daniel.

Cyrus' Conquest into Babylonia, the Battle of Opis

This is the way in which Cyrus and his army started conquering the Babylonian Empire. First he secured an ally in a ruler of a province of the Babylonian Empire called Gutium. This man was named Gubaru, or known to us as general Gobryas, the one who actually led Cyrus' army under the walls of Babylon through its famous river-gates, at either end of the city, where the Euphrates entered and exited this 70-square mile city. But this all began with the Battle of Opis, after Cyrus, Gobryas and the army had crossed the Tigris river, approaching the city of Opis. "The battle was fought in or near the strategic city of Opis, north of the capital Babylon. It resulted in a decisive defeat for the Babylonians. A few days later, the city of Sippar surrendered to the Persians and Cyrus's forces entered Babylon apparently without a fight...The Nabonidus Chronicle records that the battle took place in the month of Tashritu (27 September-27 October) *"at Opis on the [bank of the] Tigris."*...The Persian army under Cyrus fought "the army of Akkad" (meaning the Babylonians in general, not the city of that name)...The outcome of the battle was clearly a Babylonian defeat, possibly a rout, as the defeated Babylonian army is not mentioned again in the chronicle...The defeat at Opis appears to have ended any serious resistance to the Persian invasion. The Nabonidus Chronicle states that following the battle, *"on the fourteenth day [6 October] Sippar was captured without battle. Nabonidus fled."* Cyrus remained in Sippar, and *"on the sixteenth day [12 October] Ug/Gubaru, governor of Gutium [general Gobryas], and the army of Cyrus without battle entered Babylon."* Nabonidus himself was captured shortly afterward when he returned to Babylon. Herodotus and Xenophon present broadly similar versions of events. According to Herodotus, Cyrus marched to Babylon along the side of the Diyala river (past Opis), though the battle is not mentioned), where the Persians fought a battle with the Babylonians near the capital. Cyrus subsequently laid siege to Babylon, ordering his troops to dig a canal to drain off part of the Euphrates to enable his troops to penetrate the city through weak points in its defenses...Herodotus, Xenophon and the Biblical Book of Daniel all assert that the Babylonians were taken by surprise while celebrating a festival." [Full Wikipedia account at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Opis]



**Babylonia
and the invasion of
Cyrus II**

Herodotus' account

We will now look at the account of Herodotus. “The histories by the Greek researcher Herodotus of Halicarnassus, who wrote in the fifth century BC on the Persian conquest of Babylon:

“Cyrus on his way to Babylon came to the banks of the Gyndes, a stream which, rising in the Matienian mountains, runs through the country of the Dardanians, and empties itself into the river Tigris. The Tigris, after receiving the Gyndes, flows on by the city of Opis [i.e. Baghdad], and discharges its waters into the Erythraean sea [i.e. the Persian Gulf]. When Cyrus reached this stream, which could only be passed in boats, one of the sacred white horses accompanying his march, full of spirit and high mettle, walked into the water, and tried to cross himself; but the

current seized him, swept him along with it, and drowned him in its depths. Cyrus, enraged at the insolence of the river, threatened so to break its strength that in future even women should cross it easily without wetting their knees. Accordingly he put off for a time his attack on Babylon, and, dividing his army into two parts, he marked out by ropes one hundred and eighty trenches on each side of the Gyndes, leading off from it in all directions, and setting his army to dig, some on one side of the river, some on the other, he accomplished his threat by the aid of so great a number of hands, but not without losing thereby the whole summer season. Having, however, thus wreaked his vengeance on the Gyndes, by dispersing it through three hundred and sixty channels, Cyrus, with the first approach of the ensuing spring, marched forward against Babylon. The battle was fought a short distance from the city, in which the Babylonians were defeated by the Persian king, whereupon they withdrew within their defenses. Here they shut themselves up, and made light of his siege, having laid in store of provisions for many years in preparation against this attack; for when they saw Cyrus conquering nation after nation, they were convinced that he would never stop, and that their turn would come at last. Cyrus was now reduced to great perplexity, as time went on and he made no progress against the place. In this distress either someone made the suggestion to him, or he bethought himself of a plan, which he proceeded to put into execution. He placed a portion of his army at the point where the river enters the city, and another body at the back place where it issues forth, with orders to march into the town by the bed of the stream, as soon as the waters became shallow enough: he then drew off with the unwarlike portion of his host, and made for the place where [former queen] Nitocris dug the basin for the river, where he did exactly what she had done formerly: he turned the Euphrates by a canal into the basin, which was then a marsh, on which the river sank to such an extent that the natural bed of the stream became fordable. Hereupon the Persians who had been left for the purpose at Babylon by the river-side, entered the stream, which had now sunk so as to reach about midway up a man's thigh, and thus got into the town. Had the Babylonians been apprised of what Cyrus was about, or had they noticed the danger, they would never have allowed the Persians to enter the city, but would have destroyed them utterly; for they would have made fast all the street gates which gave upon the river, and mounting upon the walls along both sides of the stream, would so have caught the enemy, as it were, in a trap. But, as it was, the Persians came upon them by surprise and so took the city. Owing to the vast size of the place [reportedly, 70 square miles],

*the inhabitants of the central parts (as the residents at Babylon declare) long after the outer portions of the town were taken, knew nothing of what had chanced, **but as they were engaged in a festival, continued dancing and reveling until they learnt the capture but too certainly.** Such, then, were the circumstances of the first taking of Babylon.*" [Herodotus, Book I, par. 189-191. See http://www.bible-history.com/quotes/herodotus_2.html.

The Last Night of Babylon, Daniel's Account

Next, in Daniel chapter 5, verses 1-30 we'll see the account of what was going on in the royal palace at Babylon, with the famous "handwriting on the wall" while general Gobryas was right outside the wall, and in the process of entering the city of Babylon proper through the river-gates at either end of the city. (Babylon was a 70-square mile city which had the Euphrates running right through the middle of it.) Belshazzar is the nephew of Nabonidus, who was the real king of the Babylonian Empire at this time. Nabonidus had been outside of the city of Babylon trying to deal with Cyrus and his army, and he and his army had just retreated into the city after losing a battle just outside the city, while his nephew was preparing to have this big party, which we will read about. **Daniel 5:1-30, "Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which *had been* in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which *had been* in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, 'Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and *have* a chain of gold around his neck, and he shall be the third ruler in the**

kingdom.’ Now all the king’s wise *men* came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. Then king Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished [*perplexed*]. The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, ‘O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. There is a man in your kingdom in whom *is* the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and king Nebuchadnezzar your father---your father and king---made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, *and* soothsayers. Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation.’”

The Writing on the Wall Explained

“Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, ‘Are you that Daniel who is one of the captives of Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God *is* in you, and *that* light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. Now the wise *men*, the astrologers, have been brought before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and *have* a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.’ Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, ‘Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation. [Comment: Daniel was offered the third highest position in Babylon, plus riches and honor, if he could interpret the handwriting that was on the wall in Belshazzar’s party. But his response was very pointed, just before he read and interpreted the writing. He told Belshazzar, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another.” In other words, “Keep you stuff. My ministry is not for sale.” He then interpreted it for free. So many ministries today seem to be for sale. The motivation seems to be

financial. Jesus said in Matthew 10:8, "Freely you have received, freely give." Ministries of God should not be charging money for the Gospel or the Word of God that they give out to the world, or are giving out for the spiritual nourishment of members of the Body of Christ.] **O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. And because of the majesty that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling *was* with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever he chooses. But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of his house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who *holds* your breath in his hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. Then the fingers of the hand were sent from him, and this writing was written. And this is the inscription that was written:**

**MENE, MENE, TEKEL,
UPHARSIN**

This *is* the interpretation of *each* word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.' Then Belshazzar gave command and they clothed Daniel with purple and *put* a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Belshazzar's Fall

That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom *being* about sixty-two years old."

Who was this Darius the Mede?

The Bible is clear that this Darius the Mede played a key role in the downfall of Babylon, and yet he is apparently missing from secular history. Or is he?

(A) *Darius was not his real name but was given more as a title and reflection for the kingdom of which he governed.* You can see clearly in the original names attached to the rest of the “Dariuses” yet to come, i.e.: Darius I, The Great; Darius II, Ochus; and Darius III, Codomannus...Yet, the irony of the name of Darius the Mede goes even farther than a mere title of recognition. For just as “Darius” is attached to Persia, so “the Mede” is attached to the kingdom of Media. Thus in merely pronouncing the name, you can get a picture of the patriotism of his heritage as well as his loyalty to his newfound government. “Yes I am Darius, an established ruler of Persia, but you may call me the Mede, for this I will forever be.”

(B) As Cyrus the Great also was recorded as having conquered the kingdom, the two had to have worked closely together in some form or another, as well. And from an excerpt taken from the Greek historian Xenophon, we can read the following two paragraphs:

[8.5.17] “And now when the march had brought them into Media, Cyrus turned aside to visit Cyaxares. After they had embraced, Cyrus began by telling Cyaxares that a palace in Babylon, and an estate, had been set aside for him so that he might have a residence of his own whenever he came there, and he offered him gifts, most rich and beautiful. [18] And Cyaxares was glad to take them from his nephew, and then he sent for his daughter, and she came, carrying a golden crown, and bracelets, and a necklace of wrought gold, and a most beautiful Median robe, as splendid as could be. [19] The maiden placed the crown upon the head of Cyrus, and as she did so Cyaxares said: ‘I will give her to you, Cyrus, my own daughter, to be your wife. Your father wedded the daughter of my father, and you are their son; and this little maid whom you carried in your arms when you were with us as a lad, and whenever she was asked whom she meant to marry, she would always answer “Cyrus.” And for her dowry I will give her the whole of Media: since I have no lawful son.’ “---Xenophon (translated by H. G. Dakyns,) The project Gutenberg Etext of Cyropaedia, Book 8, C-4, line 17-19---
<http://www.gutenberg.net/etex00/cyrus10.yxt>

The Encyclopedia Britannica informs us that “according to Ctesias, an ancient historian, the wife of Cyrus (mother of

Smerdis and Cambyses) was the daughter of a Median king.” If so, it would seem no more than natural that Cyrus, under moral obligation, should grant his father-in-law (and uncle) the first place in the united kingdom (Cyrus being king of Persia all the same) till after Darius’ death, only two years later (536BC), when Cyrus became head of the empire.” [John Kofal, *Help & Food*, vol. 40, p. 314]
[researched by Kelly Santee at
<http://www.presenttruth.com/2008/06/darius-the-medehis-identity-revealed/>]

So it appears that Darius the Mede, also known as Cyaxares II, was the uncle of Cyrus the Great, and Cyrus married his daughter, named Cassandane. Darius the Mede, the uncle of Cyrus, was then placed over the city of Babylon, and perhaps the whole province of Babylon (and Cyrus was married to his uncle Darius’ daughter [she was Cyrus’ first cousin]). Darius the Mede was a co-ruler with Cyrus. Naturally, Cyrus was very much in love with Cassandane. From this marriage, Cyrus had four children, two sons and two daughters: Cambyses II, Bardiya (Smerdis), Atossa, and another unnamed daughter. Cyrus’ sons Cambyses II and Smerdis both later became kings of Persia, and his daughter Atossa married Darius the Great and bore him Xerxes I. The book of Ezra, covering the repopulation of Judah and Jerusalem, and the rebuilding of the temple, has a lot to do with the kings of Persia and Persian history involving Cyrus, his sons and grandson, Xerxes, which will take us, interestingly enough, into the book of Esther.

Death of Cyrus the Great

Cyrus’s reign lasted between 29 and 31 years. Cyrus did not venture into Egypt, as he himself died in battle, fighting the Massagetae along the Syr Darya in December 530BC. He was succeeded by his son Cambyses II, who managed to add to the empire by conquering Egypt, Nubia, and Cyrenaica during his short rule. As seen from our study in Kings & Chronicles (see <http://www.unityinchrist.com/kings/3.html> and <http://www.unityinchrist.com/kings/4.html>) we all know who the Scythians and Massagetae were. Cyrus, trying to expand the borders of his empire into the Russian steppes, attempted to invade the Scythians. He chose to attack the eastern Scythians, called the Massagetae, a really stupid mistake. Later on, Darius the Great (married to Cyrus’ daughter Atossa) tried to attack the Black Sea Scythians, again a huge mistake. The account of these

two battles follows. This same Darius the Great, father of Xerxes, would then go on to attack the Greeks at Marathon in 490BC, and lose badly again. The Persian Empire wanted to expand north and northwest into southern Europe---they wanted a truly worldwide empire, as we'll see during Xerxes reign.

The Scythian-Persian Wars

These next two historic accounts taken straight from Herodotus will amaze you.

1st Major Scythian-Persian War: 530BC (or "don't mess with the Scythians," part I)

King Cyrus was trying to expand the northern border of the Persian Empire. He was one of the founding military rulers of the Persian Empire, and he was trying to expand it. He went north with a good-sized army and attacked a Scythian tribe called the Massagetae, along with another one called the Dahae. Tamara Rice shows that the Scythians were expanding into the region east of the Caspian Sea soon after the Black Sea Scythians returned to their new homeland just north of Armenia (just after their 28 year sojourn in the Middle East during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah). She says in her book *The Scythians*:

"The Scythians had ruled a large portion of western Asia for twenty-eight years. They were now back in Urartu...at this date...some turned eastward again, to occupy the tract of steppe lying between the Caspian and Sea of Aral, blending there with the Dahai kinsmen to form an ethnic group from which the Parthians were to spring some three hundred years later. Others may have pushed as far as India...whilst others remained in Armenia."

So just around 530BC king Cyrus of Persia invaded the Scythians who were located east of the Caspian Sea. The specific tribes mentioned as being attacked by Cyrus were the "Massagetae" as well as the "Dahae", which would equate to the Israelite tribes of Manasseh and Dan. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says the "Dahae" are also called the "Dana" or "Dahans." Their queen was named **Tomyris**. Herodotus tells us the Massagetae were Scythians, so again we have another identifying name that ties the Scythians to the ten tribes of Israel. These eastern Scythians were the descendants of the three and a half tribes who were taken captive

in 745BC, east past Assyria and they were sunworshippers. This fits when we read the next quote. Just before the Persian invasion Queen Tomyris sent this message to Cyrus: **“King of the Medes, cease to be so eager to do what you are doing...rule over your own people, and endure to look upon us governing ours.”** After the fighting began she sent another message to Cyrus, warning him, **“If you do not so, I swear by the sun, the lord of the Massagetae, that, for all your insatiability of blood, I will give you your fill of it.”** Cyrus should have listened to Queen Tomyris’ warning. Herodotus went on to describe the bloody battle that followed. Obviously this invading Persian army was annihilated on the spot. We don’t have casualty figures, but we do know Persia wielded huge armies, most conscripts coming from the conquered countries which they brought into their empire. Here is Herodotus’ description of the battle:

“Tomyris, since Cyrus would not listen to her, gathered all her host together and fought him. Of all the battles that were fought among the barbarians, I judge this to have been the severest...finally the Massagetae got the upper hand. The most of the Persian army died on the spot, and among them, Cyrus himself...Tomyris sought out his corpse among the Persian dead, and...she filled a skin with human blood and fixed his head in the skin, and, insulting over the dead, she said: ‘I am alive and conqueror, but you have...rob[bed] me of my son [Tomyris’ son died in the war]...Now...I will give you your fill of blood, even as I threatened.’ There were many stories of the death of Cyrus, but this...seems to me the most convincing.”

Part II: Book of Ezra

1st Emigration of Jews Back to Judea under Zerubbabel and Joshua, 536BC

Ezra 1:1-11, “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all the kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying,

‘Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And he has commanded me to build him a house at Jerusalem which

is in Judah. Who is among you of all his people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.'

Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem. And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered. King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; and Cyrus the king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. This is the number of them: thirty gold platters, one thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives, thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins of a similar kind, and one thousand other articles. All these Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem." This decree was signed by Cyrus the Great in 536BC, and 50,000 Jews under Zerubbabel and Joshua begin their march back to Judea and Jerusalem. Cyrus now has six years left to his life, because he foolishly decides to attempt to expand 'the Empire' by attacking the Massagetae and Dahai Scythians to the north and gets himself and his army killed in 530BC [536BC + 70 years captivity = 606BC the year of Nebuchadnezzar's 1st invasion of Judah and Jerusalem]. This date---536BC---marks the beginning of the return of the Jews to the land of Judah.

The Captives Who Returned to Jerusalem, 536BC

In Ezra chapter 2, verses 1-70 are mentioned the 50,000 Jews who were repatriated back into the various cities of Judah, including Jerusalem. Verse 2 mentioned the one assigned as the leader of this group. **Verses 2-3, "Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordicai** [not the Mordicai of the book of Esther, he was much later, and I don't think that Nehemiah is the one who is Nehemiah in the book by that name], **Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai..."** and so the list goes on

through verse 67, all adding up to 49,897 people, plus some people who couldn't be officially numbered because they weren't certain of their genealogy, their records having been lost during the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple (verses 59-63). So fifty thousand is a good estimate of those who returned under Zerubbabel and Jeshua, or Joshua. The actual number might have been slightly higher. This same Zerubbabel and Joshua are mentioned in Zechariah chapter 3, verses 1-5. The prophecies found in the book of Zechariah, although most if not all directly apply to the 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ, were written to the Jews who had returned to the land of Judah and Jerusalem. These returning Jews had no concept of the Messiah's first or second coming, and all Jews to this day only think there is going to be one great coming of the Messiah (since they don't recognize Jesus of Nazareth as being the Messiah). Zechariah's prophecies, even though most, if not all, apply to the 2nd Coming, were written to help inspire the returning Jews to get busy rebuilding Jerusalem and particularly the Temple. Both Zechariah and Haggai were what we call "post-exilic prophets", and their God-given job was the same, to help inspire and motivate the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem, and specifically the Temple itself. So as the Jews heard the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, they were led to believe that the LORD was visibly going to return to this temple they had been sent back to rebuild. The book of Haggai in particular was written to inspire them to get going. All these glorious 2nd Coming prophecies, pointing to the ultimate fulfilling of the Messiah coming to actually live on earth in the Temple, were written to get them going, even though they were ultimately written depicting a much later event, a time we may be living in right now, just before the 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ. Little did the poor Jews realize that these prophecies given to Zechariah and Haggai by God, given to help inspire them to get going on construction of the Temple, wouldn't be fulfilled for thousands of years. Jesus, the Messiah, would ultimately come to the Temple they were constructing during his first coming, and he is yet to come again, to another temple yet to be constructed. That's what messed up the Jews so much, many if not all the Old Testament prophecies about the great coming of the Messiah had elements of both his first coming and his second coming woven together in them [see http://www.unityinchrist.com/prophecies/2ndcoming_2.htm and

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/prophecies/1stcoming.htm>].

Zechariah 3:1-5, "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. And the LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen

Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?’ Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. Then he answered and spoke to those who stood before him, saying, ‘Take away the filthy garments from him.’ And to him he said, ‘See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes.’ [Comment: Only God, God the Son, Yahweh, can forgive sins. So this is Yahweh speaking to Joshua in this prophecy. Obviously there was some kind of sin in his life that needed forgiving, covering, just like all of us.] **And I said, ‘Let them put a clean turban on his head.’ So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by.”** This short prophecy found in Zechariah 3, verses 1-5 is addressing this same Zerubbabel and Jeshua, who were leading these 50,000 Jewish captives back to the land of Judah and Jerusalem. I can’t wait to get to the Minor Prophets in these studies. But realize the LORD was inspiring these prophecies to be written by Haggai and Zechariah, writing about 520BC, addressing the Jews who had returned. These 50,000 Jews were facing local opposition from the Gentiles who had come into the land of Judah during their 70 years absence, many probably coming from the region of Samaria, which the king of Assyria had repopulated with pagans in the 720s BC. This is going to be an ongoing problem as we read through Ezra and Nehemiah. We pick up the story again in Ezra 2, verse 68. [Comment: About the use of the term “Israel” as found in verse 70 and elsewhere in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. In Ezra and Nehemiah the word “Israel” was used to apply to the Jews, who were made up of part of the tribes of Benjamin, Levi and Judah, basically three tribes which had made up the southern “House of Judah.” Throughout the books of Samuel, Kings & Chronicles, the name “Israel” either referred to all 12 tribes (before 931BC, Judah only being one of the twelve) or the ten tribed nation composing the “House of Israel” to the north of the “House of Judah” (after 931BC). That House of Israel is no longer in Palestine (after 721BC), but is mainly residing up in the Russian steppes at this time. But in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, when the term “Israel” is used, it denotes “the House of Judah”, which had returned from Babylonian captivity. This throws people a historic “curve ball” in the sense that most Gentile Christians, due to this, think of Israel as just referring to Jews, which in the historic sense is very inaccurate. For some reason the Jews even go along with this historic interpretative error, even though privately they will argue amongst themselves about where the “lost ten tribes” could have gone, and which nations they could be now in the world---“*for certainly any child of Abraham was promised to become a nation or a group of nations, even look at the*

Arab nations, they came from Ishmael, son of Abraham and Hagar, and God promised twelve nations would come of Ishmael.” The Jews are aware of this distinction. But if you try to tell a Jew this, he gets angry with you. Always got to scratch my head over that one.]

Gold and Silver Offered for Temple Reconstruction

Ezra 2:68-70, “Some of the heads of the fathers’ houses, when they came to the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God, to erect it in its place: According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for the work sixty one thousand gold drachmas, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priestly garments. So the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.” A drachma was about sixty grains, or an ounce. So this would be sixty-one thousand ounces of gold, or about 1.9 tons of gold, and 5,000 minas of silver would be about 2.88 tons of silver. That’s just to get things started. Remember, the Temple had a lot of gold and silver contained in its construction. Even the Tabernacle in the wilderness had tons of gold and silver used in its construction (see Exodus 26). Innumerable tons of brass or bronze was used in Solomon’s Temple as well, in the two massive pillars and the Sea of Bronze, held up by twelve bronze bulls. This brass or bronze was never returned to Jerusalem for temple re-construction. The Babylonians broke it up, took it to Babylon, where it was obviously absorbed into Babylonian construction, and perhaps arms and tools manufacture. Bronze was the metal of choice back then. So we will see that this temple will not come close to the glory of the previous Temple of Solomon, which will upset some of the Jews who are old enough to remember the former Temple. These Jews had prospered in Babylon. God had allowed them to prosper. Remember in Jeremiah when the first two captivities took place under Nebuchadnezzar, God through Jeremiah had instructed them in a letter Jeremiah wrote to them, to settle down, build houses, plant vineyards, because you’re gonna be in Babylon for 70 years. Well they took Jeremiah’s letter to heart, and a lot of them prospered and made a lot of money. Babylon was the 70 square mile capital city of the Babylonian Empire, and the wealth of the Babylonian Empire flowed through the city. The Jews weren’t treated like slaves in the city, but were allowed a great deal of freedom of movement within the city, freedom to own property, houses, and businesses. It wasn’t like they were cooped up in

concentration camps or made slaves of the Babylonians. Daniel and his three companions were chosen by king Nebuchadnezzar to be his servants, but they were very well compensated, and actually held ruler status. The status and living conditions of the Jews in Babylon was nothing like what the slavery of the 12 tribes of Israel had been like in Egypt. So Temple re-construction was started when these 50,000 Jews returned from Babylon under the leadership of Zerubbabel their appointed governor, and Joshua their high priest. Zerubbabel had lineage going to the last kings of Judah and going back to King David through Solomon. But he was never crowned as a king of Judah, he was merely their governor. The House of Judah would never crown a king again, and for the most part, would always be a vassal country under the ruling Empire of the whole Middle East and Mediterranean. These empires would be the ones prophecied in Daniel 2, 7, 8 and 11, and would be the Babylonian (which conquered them, deposing their last king), the Persian Empire (from 536BC to 330BC), Alexander the Great's Greco-Macedonian Empire, and later one of its offshoots (330BC to 65BC), and lastly the Roman Empire (65BC to 135AD, when the vassal nation of Judah would totally cease to exist and Jews were driven totally out of the land, scattered worldwide into every nation. In a very real sense, the LORD God became their King again, at least under the wise spiritual care of Zerubbabel and Joshua, and then later, Ezra, and again later under Nehemiah.

Worship Restored in Jerusalem at the beginning of the Seventh Month

Ezra 3:1-7, “And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel [again, Judah, Levi and Benjamin] *were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.*”

The beginning of the seventh month in the Hebrew calendar occurs at the first appearing of the crescent of the new moon, and this marks the Feast of Trumpets, the beginning of the Fall Holy Day season, as listed in Leviticus 23. The Levitical priesthood had been in charge of the Hebrew calendar since the time of Moses, and this is a fascinating story all in itself, how they have accurately calculated the lunar months and seasons for these past 3464 years from Moses time in the wilderness to our present time of year 2018 (see

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/calendar/HebrewCalendar.htm>

for a more complete description of this subject---they've had almost 4,000 years to tweak it, so let me tell you, it's accurate). But the people under Zerubbabel and Joshua were gathering in

Jerusalem for the observance of the first of the Fall Holy Days, which was the Feast of Trumpets, which always falls on the first day of the seventh month in the Hebrew Calendar. Jeshua or Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel, as we see here, were officiating on the first Holy Day they've been able to observe outside of captivity for 70 years, in Jerusalem. This is an exciting moment for them. **“Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak [Jehozadak] and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and the evening burnt offerings. They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day. Afterwards they offered the regular burnt offering, and those for New Moons and for all the appointed feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and those of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to the LORD. From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, although the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid. They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia.”** Again the expertise of the Phoenicians from the city-states of Tyre and Sidon were being used to help construct the Temple, and supply the cedar wood that was needed. They were experts in stone masonry and carpentry, the best shipwrights, carpenters and stonemasons in the world. But the Jews under Ezra and Nehemiah are going to be real careful now not to absorb any of the Baal worshipping practices of the Phoenicians from Tyre and Sidon again. They had learned their lesson.

Restoration of the Temple Begins

Verses 8-13, “Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began work and appointed Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the LORD. Then Jeshua with his sons

and brothers, Kadmiel *with* his sons, and the sons of Judah, arose as one to oversee those working on the house of God; the sons of Henadad *with* their sons and their brethren the Levites. When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD:

**‘For *he is* good,
For his mercy
endures forever
toward Israel,’**

Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers’ *houses*, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.” As noted before, this temple was a mere shadow of the Temple of Solomon which Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed in 586BC. None of the innumerable tons of bronze had been returned from Babylon. They had some gold and silver, but not nearly the amount that had gone into the construction of Solomon’s Temple. Don’t forget, King David spent the latter part of his life putting aside gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood for the construction of the temple Solomon his son built. And Solomon added to that wealth of material sizeable amounts from his treasury. So all the people who were old enough to remember the Temple of Solomon were weeping at what they saw being built. The Jews were doing the best with what they had, which is all God expects of anyone. The Bible says “Make a joyful noise to the LORD”, but this was a confused noise which came forth from this crowd. This confused attitude must have put a damper on things, coupled to the resistance they were starting to encounter from the local pagan population, which is what we’ll take a look at next.

Local Resistance to Rebuilding the Temple

Ezra 4:1-5, “Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and

the heads of the fathers' *houses*, and said to them, 'Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you *do*; and we have sacrificed to him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.' But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' *houses* of Israel said to them, 'You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.' Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia." As I pointed out before, and clearly seen in this short passage, these people who were troubling the Jews in rebuilding had been brought into the northern territory, which had belonged to the House of Israel, by Esarhaddon king of Assyria. 2nd Kings 17:1-23 relates the final siege and conquering of the capital city of the House of Israel, depicting the fall of the House of Israel, referred to as "the land of Samaria." This repopulating of the region of Samaria with pagans by the king of Assyria is corroborated in 2nd Kings 17:24, "Then the king of Assyria brought *people* from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed *them* in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities." So these people who were harassing the Jews weren't Israelite, but pagans from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath and Sepharvaim, now amalgamated into one pagan race which sort of claimed roots to the deported Israelites, but in reality had no such roots whatsoever. Isn't it interesting about the region of Samaria today? This same region is not actually in the possession of the current nation of Israel, but is populated with Palestinians. And those same Palestinians are a very similar thorn in the side of the Israelis as this group of pagans was to the Jews who had returned to the land of Judah and re-inhabited the cities of Judah. Some people think the Jews stole this land from the Palestinians during the early part of the 20th century, leading up to the founding of the Israeli nation in 1948. There were a lot of Palestinian Arabs living in the land which became Israel, but the Jews bought the land fair and square from the owners of the land. There is one sad event during the Israeli war of independence which occurred, which caused a mass exodus of most Palestinian Arabs from the territory now making up the nation of Israel. It was the Irgunist attack and slaughter of innocent civilians living in the peaceful Arab village of Deir Yassin. These Arabs were pro-Israeli. This foolish mistake caused a massive exodus of Arab civilians, families, from the whole of Israeli held Palestine. The mentality

behind the flight, was 'If the Jews are going to kill Arabs who are friendly to them, we don't stand a chance.' The account of this is found on pages 138-150 of Dan Kurtzman's thorough account of the 1st Arab-Israeli War, **Genesis 1948**. For the most part, though, the Jews had bought most of the land of Israel before this first war of independence was fought, fair and square. The following one page article is copied from the Israeli Messianic Jewish magazine ***israel today***. I believe it is a truthful representation of the facts. But again, the interesting point, that the region called Samaria is again a real thorn in the side of the current Jewish nation of Israel, just as it was back in the time of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Funny how this situation is repeating itself 2,500 later. We can use the current situation in modern-day Samaria to understand what Zerubbabel, Joshua, Ezra and Nehemiah and those 50,000 returning Jews were going through.

Did the Jews Steal the Land from the Arabs?

It is said that during the 1930s, as well as when the State of Israel was established in 1948, the Jews drove the Arabs out of their land. The goal of these allegations is to make anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism socially and politically acceptable. Any factual counter-arguments are dismissed as being biased and are ignored by the media, so only the anti-Israel narrative remains in the public eye. So-called “peace activists” accept the claims of the Palestinians without checking them out, and then condemn Israel.

A reliable account of the situation in *Eretz Israel* (the Land of Israel), which at that time was called Palestine, can be found in a 1937 report of the British Palestine Royal Commission which, as is well known, was not a friend of the Jews. The report says that the Hula Valley in the north of the country was infested with mosquitoes. The landowners were Syrians in Damascus, who leased out the marshes to Arab or Egyptian peasants (*fellahs*), who lived in primitive mud huts and inevitably fell sick with malaria.

The first thing the Jewish National Fund did in 1934 was to purchase 51 square miles of this marshland for 900,000 Palestinian pounds (\$4.5 million) and set up 20 Jewish settlements on it. These Jews battled malaria, yellow fever and the Middle Eastern sun to drain the swamps and reclaim the land.

What the swamps were in the north, the desert, which had to be artificially irrigated, was in the south; and the center of the country was a stony, desolate wasteland. The Arab landlords, who lived abroad and owned large estates, did nothing to solve these problems.

The Turkish Ottoman Empire was in such a poor state after ruling over the Holy Land for 400 years (1517-1917), that wealthy Arab landowners from Syria, Egypt and Lebanon were able to kick out the fellahs and Bedouins and acquire enormous tracts of real estate. Then they made a huge profit by selling the land to Jews from Europe and America.

According to Turkish government records, in 1915, 3,130,000 *dunams* of Palestinian land was owned by 144 Arab landowners; so on average, each family owned 22,000 *dunams*. From early times, the *dunam* was the only valid unit for measuring land area in Palestine. One *dunam* is 1,000 square meters and there are 4 *dunams* in an acre.

The farmers who leased the properties were forced to pay onerous interest rates to the Arab landlords of up to 60 percent, and many tenants were left destitute, losing both house and home. Ultimately, the Arab landowners drove out their Muslim brothers so that they could sell the land for large amounts of money to the Jews.

The Jewish National Fund set up blue and white (Israel’s national colors) collection boxes all over the world and received generous contributions from Jewish patrons, which were used to buy property in the Holy Land. Of the 429,887 *dunams* that the Palestine Jewish Colonization Association purchased from private owners, 293,545



JEWISH NATIONAL FUND collection box

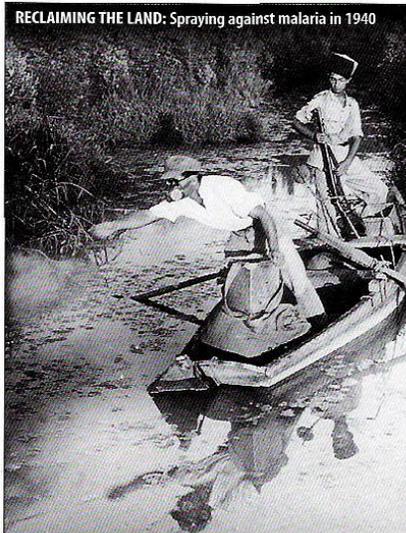
dunams—almost 70 percent—was uncultivated land that Arab proprietors living abroad had sold to Jews.

By 1935 the amount purchased by Jews increased to 579,492 *dunams*, and by 1948 almost 80 percent of the land available for sale had been bought up by the Jewish people. The rest of the land was ownerless desert, which was taken over by Israel after the establishment of the state.

When the League of Nations handed the mandate over to Britain in 1922, it stipulated firmly in Article 6 that the “Palestine administration should work together with the Jewish Agency to encourage intensive settlement of the land by Jews, which should include the land owned by the state and the uncultivated or waste land, as long as this land is not needed for official purposes.”

It is astonishing that nowadays nobody seems to be interested in the *facts*. While everyone has an opinion about this conflict, few take the trouble to check out how the Land of Israel legally became Jewish property. People prefer to embrace the stereotypical Palestinian lies which accuse the Jewish state of forcibly driving the Palestinians out of their homes, although this was mostly done by Arab landlords who cared nothing about “Palestine.” Today, the Arab world is trying to push the “crimes” of their ancestors, who effectively “sold out” Palestine 80 years ago, onto the Jews and the State of Israel. ✪

By LUDWIG SCHNEIDER



Rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple Opposed--How Civil Governments of Man Can Oppose a Work of God

First of all, we must get a clear understanding of the Persian line of kings which are mentioned in Ezra. The Bible translators called some kings by the same names when they were different people entirely, but this is straightened out by the order of succession which is mentioned if you understand who ruled in Persia and when. First you start with Cyrus the Great, which provides a historic benchmark to pin the beginning of the book to. If you take it from Cyrus to Darius the Great, from Ezra chapter 4 through chapter 5, which are the real kings going by their real names, then everyone inbetween had to fall into the Persian line of kings who where were clearly inbetween Cyrus the Great and Darius the Great, Cyrus' son-in-law. So we need a little bit of history here to straighten things out. Cyrus ruled from about 560BC, consolidating the Empire, and finally conquered the city of Babylon, collapsing its empire, in October 539BC. Cyrus the Great, as we observed, died at the hands of Queen Tomyris, queen of the Massagetae in 530BC. Cambyses II, his son took over the reigns of the Persian Empire and he ruled from 530BC to 523BC according to Herodotus, and 522BC according to other sources. He died under uncertain circumstances, Herodotus and other historians disagreeing with each other. Either the brother of Cambyses II (Smerdis, also called Bardiya) or an imposter who some say had killed Smerdis, and was thus called Pseudo-Smerdis, took over the reigns of the Persian Empire for a very short reign of 7 months, 522/521BC. It is then that Darius, a former lance-bearer of Cambyses II, takes over the reigns of government, marries Atossa daughter of Cyrus the Great (perhaps to legitimize his office), and then this Darius, now Darius the Great, rules the Persian Empire from 521BC to 486BC. Darius the Great and Atossa his wife bear Xerxes and his brothers (most of whom died at Thermopylae at the hands of Leonidas and his 300 Spartiates).

Cyrus the Great, reigned 559/60BC to 530BC

Cambyses II, reigned 530BC to 522/21BC

Smerdis (Bardiya) or Pseudo-Smerdis, 522/21BC
(reigned 7 months)

Darius the Great, reigned 521BC to 486BC
(wife Atossa, daughter of Cyrus)

Xerxes, reigned 486-465BC
(wife, **Esther** (Hebrew *Hadassah*))

Artaxerxes (long-hand) I, reigned 465BC to 424BC
(Persian king who wrote the two decrees, one to Ezra
in 458BC, the other to Nehemiah in 445BC)

So, in Ezra 4:6, this person called Ahasuerus is really Cambyses II (not the same person as the Ahasuerus mentioned in the Book of Esther, who is Xerxes). So these malcontents from Samaria write an accusation to Cambyses II (called Ahasuerus in Ezra 4:6). That is as much as we know. This accusation, as we see from the verse had to have been written around 529BC. **Ezra 4:6, “In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.”** Obviously Cambyses II pays no attention to the accusation, knowing his fathers’ intentions toward the Jews, and honoring it. But in 523/522 Cambyses II dies. In verse 7 of Ezra 4 it says **“In the days of Artaxerxes”** and then in Ezra 5, verse 7 the detractors are writing to Darius, which is Darius the Great. So this Artaxerxes is none other than Smerdis or Pseudo-Smerdis, and he reigns for a very short period of time, 7 months. But due to a change in rulership these malcontents in Samaria give it another try, and they write to this new ruler who is really either Smerdis or Pseudo-Smerdis, and they appear to make some headway in stopping the Jew’s Temple construction project. **Ezra 4:7-24, “In the days of Artaxerxes [either Smerdis or Pseudo-Smerdis, 522-521BC] also, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the letter was written in Aramaic script, and translated into the Aramaic language. Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to king Artaxerxes in this fashion:**

‘From Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions---representatives of the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the people of Persia and Erech and Babylon and Shushan, the Dehavites, the Elamites, and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnapper [Asnapper, king of Assyria in the 700sBC] took captive and settled in the cities of Samaria and the remainder beyond the River--- and so forth.

(This is a copy of the letter that they sent him)

To King Artaxerxes [i.e. Pseudo-Smerdis] from your servants, the men of the region beyond the River, and so forth: Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its

walls and repairing the foundations. Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished. Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we have sent and informed the king, that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city *is* a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited sedition within the city in former times, for which cause this city was destroyed. We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River.'

The king sent an answer:

'To Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and to the remainder beyond the River:

Peace and so forth. The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me. And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it. There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all *the region* beyond the River [Euphrates]; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them. Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me. Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the kings?'

Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' [Pseudo-Smerdis] letter *was* read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease. Thus the work of the house of God which *is* at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia." Now this "Darius king of Persia" was none other than Darius the Great, who reigned from 521BC to 486BC, and was the father of Xerxes the Great, who reigned from 486BC to 465BC. This means the two previous kings, Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes, mentioned in verses 6, 7 and 11 of Ezra 4, fall inbetween Cyrus the

Great and Darius the Great. Consider Cyrus the Great and Darius the great like historic bookends, and between these two known bookends, the identification of the two kings named Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes can be accurately and properly identified. Only two kings fell between that reign, Cambyses II and either Smerdis or Pseudo-Smerdis. Then came Darius the Great. This account in Ezra gives us a historic example of people from the land stirring up civil government against a work of God which was being performed by the Jews. This mixed race of rabble living in Samaria since the 720s BC was stirring up trouble, and influencing the civil government of the Persian Empire to stop the Jews from doing a work God had commanded them to do. Are there any modern counterparts to this happening today? You bet there are. In Sweden a pastor was almost jailed back in 2005 merely for preaching through the Word of God, and when he happened to come to a text that forbade homosexuality, he faithfully preached about the meaning of that passage, preaching the truth of God as written in the Bible. This was prosecuted by the Swedish government as a "hate crime." Similar laws exist in Canada and Australia, attempting to muzzle the clear preaching of the Word of God in private churches! What was God's, Yahweh's reaction to this? It's very interesting. The LORD had two prophets living with the Jews in Jerusalem at the time, Haggai and Zechariah. When God is doing a work with his people, whether those are his people racially, or his people now, believers in Yeshua, Jesus Christ, he always has his prophets or leaders in place to inspire and lead his people. The LORD has a major reaction here, he will not be muzzled by any man, or any government of man. Let's see how the LORD reacted to these rabble-inspired government sanctions. **Ezra 5:1-2, "Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them."** God went into action, through his prophets. What could these men have prophesied to these Jews that would get them to potentially defy a decree from the king of the Persian Empire? Fortunately, we can read just exactly what Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews, for they are written in the Books of Haggai and Zechariah. Let's just read a sampling from Haggai. Defying a king of Persia was serious business, and the tattle-tail rabble in Samaria were sure to tell on the Jews when they went back to work on the Temple.

*First Problem Haggai Addresses, Jews Doing Their Own Thing
Instead Of Supporting the Work of God---Message For Our Time As
Well*

First of all Haggai addresses a problem we all seem to get into (although this problem was inspired initially by the decree from Smerdis to cease construction in Jerusalem and on the Temple). This admonition from Haggai applies to believers in Jesus now, as well as to the Jews back then, for God is doing works all around the world through believing Christians, and that is the work of evangelism, proclaiming the Gospel of Salvation to all the world, that's the Work of God today, being done by many differing parts of the Body of Christ. What is the Gospel Jesus told us to be proclaiming? See

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/misc/WhatIsTheGospel%20.htm>.

What are some of the major works carrying this Gospel to the world? See

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/missionstatement.htm> for a

short-list, and a suggestion on how everyone from every denomination can support International Evangelism. But let's read Haggai 1, verses 1-11, and as you read it, see if this applies to you. For as you'll see, when we get further into Haggai, these prophecies also apply to the future right ahead of us---they have dual meaning---as well as to the Jews back then. **Haggai 1:1-11, "In the second year of king Darius, in the sixth month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, 'Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: This people says, The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built.'" Oh isn't that a common excuse people make when it comes to really supporting the work of God in their lives? Almost all of us are guilty of having said that and done that, if we'd really be honest with ourselves. From the period of time from the sending of the first letter to Pseudo-Smerdis in 522/521BC by the Samaritan rabble, and his decree to cease construction of the Temple, to the 2nd year of Darius the Great, another letter has been sent to Darius by this rabble from Samaria. It causes, as we'll read in Ezra 5 and 6, Darius to countermand the decree Pseudo-Smerdis made commanding cessation of construction, and commands the construction of the Temple to resume, uninterrupted. But in that space of time the people have ceased work on the temple and gone about planting crops and trying to make a good living for themselves. They weren't even putting aside some of their earnings for Temple construction when it would resume. They were thinking, 'Ah, that's it guys, the king of the Persian Empire ordered**

us to stop, this project is going nowhere, let's get busy making money for ourselves and forget this foolish project. As we'll see, Darius commanded construction to resume, but with the people having this attitude, God needed to stir them up to get going and finish rebuilding the Temple. So Haggai's message, in time order, is being given to the people at the end of Ezra 6, but it also fits into this whole Ezra 5 through 6 portion of Ezra. So we can read it now. Let's resume, and see the LORD's admonition, for amazingly, it is for us believers in Jesus right now as well. Don't think it is just for the Jews of this time, it's for us as we'll see in Haggai 2. Because it also applies to the period of time coming up to the 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ.

*The People Need an Attitude Adjustment---same as we
Christians*

Haggai 1:3, "Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 'Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins? Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Consider your ways!

You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes.'

Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified,' says the LORD. 'You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?' says the LORD of hosts. 'Because of my house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his house. Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds the fruit. For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, and on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.'" I'm going to give a comment by Pastor Chuck Smith here, as it fits, titled

"CONSIDER YOUR WAYS"

"God pointed out to the people that things hadn't been going so well for them lately. Their lives hadn't been fruitful. "You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe

yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes.” As God pointed out that their lives weren’t fruitful, he suggested “Consider your ways!” Then he told them to get to work on the temple. They had built and decorated their own houses, but had neglected the house of God. Their priorities were turned around. Sometimes it is a good thing for us to consider our ways and to reflect on our lives. Is life really **working** for us? Do we see the blessings of God on our lives? Or does it seem like we are coming up short? Not enough money, too small a house, a lack of joy and fulfillment? These can all be signs that we aren’t putting first things first. Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” In other words, put God first and everything else will be taken care of. Do you feel like you have holes in your pockets? Maybe a little more attention to the Lord’s work would be in order. Think about it. Consider your ways.” (p. 1195, *The Word For Today, NKJV Bible*)

Now I would like to add to that good comment, following up on what the Temple of God represents.

Spiritual Counterpart to the Physical Temple of God---this applies to us, folks!

We are called the Temple of God by Paul, and we as Christians, believers in Jesus Christ, are a holy building God is building up for himself. Don’t believe me? Let’s see what the apostle Paul had to say on the subject. **1st Corinthians 3:16-17**, “**Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.**” **2nd Corinthians 6:16**, “**And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’”** The analogy is that each one of us is a holy temple for the Holy Spirit to reside in. But Paul also makes the analogy that all of us, collectively, are being fashioned into a holy Temple whom the Lord will dwell in and amongst at his return, a building fitly fashioned, as Scripture says. **Ephesians 2:19-22**, “**Now therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the**

Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” How much clearer can you get. The physical Temple is a mere type of what God is doing in us and through us. How is this spiritual Temple being built? Through evangelism, and God’s calling of a people to become believers, individual building stones, being added to his holy Temple. You see, in the Bible physical things represent spiritual things, especially when you come to something as significant as the House of God, the holy Temple. In Mark **16:15-16a** we see Jesus Christ’s major commission to the Church, all believers in him, **“And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved...”** That’s evangelism, folks, plain and simple. And then what does he say. **“He who believes and is baptized will be saved...”** Is that it though? for those who are saved and have been baptized into the Body of Christ? Is that all we have to do is evangelize to the world? No, we get the rest of the answer in **Matthew 28:19-20**, **“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...”**---*How? Evangelism, plain and simple*---**“...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...”** So, we see in this cross-reference to Mark 16:15-16 a few more details which Matthew fills in. In Mark we are told we are to preach “the gospel” to the world. In Matthew 28 we’re told what to do with those who respond favorably to our preaching of the Gospel. 1), first, we’re told in whose name we’re to baptize everyone who believes the gospel message we’ve been preaching, and then, 2) we’re also told to spiritually nourish those who have responded to the gospel we’ve preached, those who have been baptized---**“teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you...”** This is how we are to build the spiritual Temple of God Jesus is going to dwell in.

What is the Gospel, and how can we support it?

What is the Gospel we are supposed to preach to the world? Well in Acts 2 we see Peter preached about the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (there were elements of the 2nd Coming in Peter’s Gospel message as well). Paul reiterated the same message in the beginning of the 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians. **1st Corinthians 15:1-4**, **“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are**

saved [i.e. pretty clear here, we are saved by hearing this gospel], **if you hold fast that word which I preached to you---unless you believed in vain.** [another important part of salvation people often ignore, even though God will never let go of you, you must never let go of God, you have to see the process through, salvation is a lifetime deal, not a one-time confession (cf. Matthew 24:13)] **For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received; that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,...**” To see a good article which explains the Gospel of salvation more thoroughly log on: <http://www.unityinchrist.com/misc/WhatIsThrGospel%20.htm>. How can we support the various works of God within the Body of Christ which are preaching this Gospel message worldwide? What does God’s Word have to say about principles of giving? see these links:

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/gifts.htm>

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/missionstatement.htm>

How Did the Jews Respond to Haggai’s Message From God?

Haggai 1:12-15, “Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him; and the people feared the presence of the LORD. Then Haggai, the LORD’s messenger, spoke the LORD’s message to the people, saying, ‘I am with you, says the LORD.’ So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of king Darius.” The second year of king Darius II would equate to 521BC – 2 years = 519BC, in the 6th month, the 24th day of that month. This is when the people ‘got with it’ and took Haggai’s message from the LORD to heart. You can make the spiritual connections of these verses to getting serious in supporting evangelism of all kinds within the Body of Christ before the 2nd Coming of Jesus, which is an accurate connection to make, based on the passages we’ve already looked at in 1st Corinthians 3:16-17, 2nd Corinthians 6:16, and Ephesians 2:19-22. You take it from there. It’s God’s message to you, and it’s your life, as they say. We find one prophecy in Zechariah, the

companion prophet to Haggai, about Jesus Christ's first coming, and how this BRANCH (Christ) would go about building "the temple of the LORD." Based upon what the apostle Paul has told us, this "Temple of the LORD" is a spiritual Temple, made without hands, and that's us, folks! Let's read this short prophecy. It ties right in with Joshua and Zerubbabel's rebuilding of the 2nd Temple, but then looks forward to Christ at his first coming and his building of this "temple of the LORD" (which is an ongoing process from Pentecost 31AD to the 2nd Coming). We see elements of Jesus Christ's first coming, and what he is doing now, from the start of the Church up until the 2nd coming, and also we see elements which occur after Jesus Christ's 2nd coming, all contained in this very short prophecy about the BRANCH. It's fascinating, when taken in context with what we just read Paul stating. **Zechariah 6:9-13, "Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Receive *the gift* from the captives---from Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah, who have come from Babylon---and go the same day and enter the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah. Take the silver and gold, make an elaborate crown, and set *it* on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Then speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, saying:**

'Behold, the man whose name *is* the BRANCH! From his place he shall branch out, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on his throne; so he shall be priest on his throne. And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.'"

More Incentive Given by the LORD Through Haggai to the Jews, And To Us

The LORD gives Haggai one more message for the people, to kind of kick them into high gear and really give them some incentive. **Haggai 2:1-9, "In the seventh *month*, on the twenty-first of the month** [this is the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, when the Lord is giving a special message through Haggai to the people], **the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying: 'Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying: Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now?** [Remember, all those who had seen the former Temple of Solomon were crying when they saw the foundations being laid for this Temple? God's calling their attention to that, and is about to tell

them something really important and inspiring.] **In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing? Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says the LORD of hosts. 'according to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remains among you; do not fear!' For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine,' says the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts.'"** Now here in verses 6-7 this can only be a direct reference to the 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ. These two verses portray worldwide upheaval only found described in the Book of Revelation, and some in Isaiah. God at the end of Haggai pronounces a blessing on Zerubbabel for his efforts and service in bringing the people back to the land of Judah and constructing the 2nd Temple. Strong 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ pronouncements are included in this blessing. **Haggai 2:20-23, "And again the word of the LORD came to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying, 'Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, 'I will shake heaven and earth, I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms. I will overthrow the chariots and those who ride in them; the horses and their riders shall come down, everyone by the sword of his brother. In that day,' says the LORD of hosts, 'I will take you, Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel,' says the LORD, 'and will make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you,' says the LORD of hosts."** This prophecy ties right into the end-time destruction of nations which we see taking place in the Book of Revelation (see <http://www.unityinchrist.com/revelation/revelation4-10.html> ; and <http://www.unityinchrist.com/revelation/Pentecost-Revition1.htm>). Almost all of the Book of Zechariah, the companion prophet of Haggai, is about the time of the Tribulation (World War III) and the 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ. When the LORD preached what he did here in Haggai and then what we see written in Zechariah chapters 12 through 14, well, these poor Jews thought this was all about to occur in their lifetimes, and so they got real busy and finished the construction of the Temple. Just take some time and read through those three chapters in Zechariah, with statements like **"Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all**

peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it...The LORD will save the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall not become greater than that of Judah. In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the one who is feeble among them in that day shall be like David, and the house of David *shall be* like God, like the Angel of the LORD before them. It shall be in that day *that* I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem” (Zechariah 12:2-3, 7-9) and also, “Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. And in that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, *making* a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half toward the south...And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be---‘The LORD is one,’ and his name one...And it shall come to pass *that* everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zechariah 14:1-4, 9, 16). But we know these prophecies, as almost all of them do in Zechariah, apply directly to the 2nd Coming of Jesus Christ. And we have also just seen *how* the Lord Jesus Christ is building his spiritual Temple, which is us, folks! And God wants all of us to be busy helping the Lord build his spiritual Temple just before the end, when no man can work, and there will be a famine of the Word of God, as Amos said in **Amos 8:11-12**, “Behold, the days are coming,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it.” We don’t have forever to finish the proclamation of the Gospel message to the world. There will be a time when the Lord allows our works for him to be cut off, a time when there is time no more. This will be like *the calm before the storm*, just before the Tribulation strikes. Those prophecies in Zechariah are more for us now, those of us who are building the Temple of the LORD that the apostle Paul spoke of, they were written to give us our incentives toward the

Temple Jesus is using us to help him build. But we don't have forever to get the job done. It behooves us all to find out for ourselves what the Gospel of Salvation is, and be promoting it however and wherever we can, as well as helping to nourish the Body of Christ, those precious building blocks Jesus has already gathered for his Temple. That's the whole purpose of this website (see <http://www.unityinchrist.com/missionstatement.htm> and <http://www.unityinchrist.com/memphisbelle.htm>). I'm doing my best to do both of those things. What are you doing?

*Promised Blessing Because They Heeded the LORD's
Message Through Haggai---does it apply to us today?*

Now you remember how God had cursed the Jews' crops, clothing and everything they were doing to make an income in Haggai chapter 1? Then it says they heeded the LORD's message through Haggai and Zechariah. What was God's response? We find it in **Haggai 2:15-19**, **"And now, carefully consider from this day forward: from before the stone was laid upon stone in the temple of the LORD---since those *days*, when *one* came to a heap of twenty ephahs, there were *but* ten; when *one* came to the wine vat to draw out fifty baths from the press, there were *but* twenty. I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not *turn* to me,"** says the LORD. **"Consider now from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation was laid---consider it: Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree has not yielded *fruit*. But from this day I will bless you."** The United States, and a lot of the rest of the world, but particularly the United States, has been in a huge economic downturn. Now in the spiritual sense, God is not judging the United States nor any physical nation yet. But is he judging 'the household of God'? Have we as believers in Jesus been more interested in pursuing our careers than the things of the Lord, the two major things he's interested in, nourishing the Body of Christ, and evangelizing the world? Have we been more interested in fixing up our houses than supporting the various Works of God which promote those two central parts of Jesus Great Commission for believers? I am quite sure, if we heeded Haggai's and Zechariah's message of encouragement for us by doing so, we'd be equally blessed in our physical harvests as well. Just think how much more Haggai's and Zechariah's messages apply to our time than theirs. God can bless in lean times, and curse in fat times. The economy of the nation and world doesn't have to pick up for

God to bless your physical harvest, although he may just chose to do so. Don't try to put God in a box. Just do his will in your life and see what happens. Now let's continue on in **Ezra 5**. In **verses 1-2** we saw that **"the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem"**, we just covered that.

The Jews Get Busy With Temple-Construction, Samaritan Opposition Begins Again

Now we pick up with Ezra 5:3-17. Whenever you're doing a real work for the Lord, and begin in earnest, opposition always seems to rear its ugly head. It just goes with the territory, as they say. **Ezra 5:3-17**, **"At the same time Tattenai the governor of the region beyond the River and Shethar-Bozni and their companions came to them and spoke thus to them: 'Who has commanded you to build this temple and finish this wall?' Then, accordingly, we told them the names of the men who were constructing this building. But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease till a report could go to Darius."** So Smerdis or Pseudo-Smerdis is dead, and Darius the Great is reigning in his place. Darius the Great reigned from 521BC to 486BC, and the 2nd Temple was completed in 515BC, so this correspondence that took place between this Tattenai tattle-tail/busy-body and Darius probably occurred between 521BC and 519BC, is my educated guess. **"This is a copy of the letter Tattenai sent:**

'The governor of the region beyond the River, and Shethar-Bozni, and his companions, the Persians who were in the region beyond the River, to Darius the king.'

(They sent the letter to him, in which was written thus)

'To Darius the king: All peace. Let it be known to the king that we went into the province of Judea, to the temple of the great God, which is being built with heavy stones, and timber is being laid in the walls; and this work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands. Then we asked those elders, and spoke thus to them: 'Who commanded you to build this temple and to finish these walls?' We also asked them their names to inform you, that we might write the names of the men who were chief among them. And thus they returned us an answer, saying: 'We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and completed. But because our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath, he gave them

into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, *who* destroyed this temple and carried the people away to Babylon. However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to build this house of God. Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple that *was* in Jerusalem and carried into the temple of Babylon---those King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon, and they were given to one named Shesbazzar, whom he had made governor. And he said to him, 'Take these articles; go, carry them to the temple *site* that *is* in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its former site.' Then the same Shesbazzar came *and* laid the foundation of the house of God which *is* in Jerusalem; but from that time even until now it has been under construction, and it is not finished.' Now therefore, if *it seems* good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasure house, which *is* in Babylon, whether it is so that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send us his pleasure concerning this *matter*.'"

Darius' Response and Decree

Ezra 6:1-12, "Then king Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives [lit. *the house of scrolls*], where the treasures were stored in Babylon. And at Achmetha [*Ecbatana*, the ancient capital of Media], in the palace that *is* in the province of Media, a scroll was found, and in it a record *was* written thus:

'In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree *concerning* the house of God at Jerusalem: 'Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid, its height sixty cubits *and* is width sixty cubits, *with* three rows of heavy stones and one row of new timber. Let the expenses be paid from the king's treasury. Also let the gold and the silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple which *is* in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and taken back to the temple which *is* in Jerusalem, *each* to its place; and deposit *them* in the house of God'---

'Now *therefore*, Tattenai, governor of *the region* beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and your companions the Persians who *are* beyond the River, keep yourselves far

from there. Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God on its site. Moreover I issue a decree as to what you shall do for the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of God: Let the cost be paid at the king's expense from taxes on the region beyond the River; this is to be given immediately to these men, so that they are not hindered. And whatever they need---young bulls, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the request of the priests who are in Jerusalem---let it be given them day by day without fail, that they may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons.'

'Also I issue a decree that whoever alters this edict, let a timber be pulled from his house and erected, and let him be hanged on it; and let his house be made a refuse heap [King James, *dung hill*, i.e. a compost pile where cow and/or sheep manure is composted] because of this. And may the God who causes his name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it, or to destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem. I Darius issue a decree; let it be done immediately.'"

Wow! The tables have turned against the Samaritans. They are now to raise taxes from their lands and pay them to the Jews to assist Temple construction, and they are to stay in their own lands, and mind their own business. And anyone who tries to alter this decree from Darius the Great will have a timber pulled from his house and he'll be hung on it (by the neck until dead, like in the wild west), and his house will be turned into a dung heap, compost pile where cattle and sheep manure is composted. God took action through the king of the Persian Empire to see that the Temple construction continued, and even gave them tax money collected from their enemies. There is a proverb that says that when our ways please the Lord, he will even make our enemies be at peace with us.

Temple Completed and Dedicated, 515BC

Ezra 6:13-18, "Then Tattenai, the governor of the region beyond the River, Shethar-Boznai, and their companions diligently did according to what king Darius had sent. So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of

Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. [Artaxerxes may be a reference to Pseudo-Smerdis, or it could be a reference to Xerxes, who would be the son of Darius the Great, and a young boy at this time, a prince.] **Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which is the sixth year of the reign of king Darius.** [The sixth year of the reign of Darius the Great would be 521BC – 6 = 515BC] **Then the children of Israel** [again, the children of Israel means the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi, not the ten tribes of Israel who have disappeared into the Russian steppes], **the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.** [i.e. they were sacrificing for all 12 tribes, even though ten of them are not present, sacrifices were made for them as well, in absentia.] **They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions, over the service of God in Jerusalem as it is written in the Book of Moses.”** The Book of Moses is composed of the first five books of the Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. This was a big hoopla, a gala occasion with steaks, mutton and lamb on the Barbie as our Aussie brothers would say. The priests and Levites were reinstated and officiating over the whole celebration.

The Passover Celebrated

Verses 19-22, “And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. [Comment: the Jews now currently observe their Passover Seder at the beginning of the 15 day of the first month. Ezra was observing it according to the commands in Exodus 12, on the 14th day of the first month as it should be. For more about the Passover see <http://www.unityinchrist.com/lamb/exodus1.html>] **For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them were ritually clean. And they slaughtered the Passover lambs for all the descendants of the captivity, for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the LORD God of Israel. And they kept the**

Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the LORD made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.” So we find that Zerubbabel the governor of Judah and Joshua the high priest finished the job they had set out to do, when they first left the region of Babylon with the 50,000 Jewish captives who had just been released by Cyrus in 536BC. Cyrus died in 530BC in his ill-fated war with the Massagetae and Dahai Scythians. The Temple was finished and dedicated in 515BC, and the Passover has just been celebrated in the first month of the Hebrew Calendar probably at the beginning of 514BC. From about 515BC to 512BC. Then in 513/512BC he attempts to invade the Black Sea Scythians.

*The 2nd Scythian-Persian War: 512BC
(or “don’t mess with the Scythians,” part II)*

This time, Darius, the father of Xerxes, attempted to attack the Black Sea Scythians. The Persians having learned the hard way, he did not consider attacking the Massagetae and Dahae again. So Darius marched north to the Bosphorus with a 700,000 man army, having his army engineers construct a bridge-of-ships across the Bosphorus. He then marched his army through northern Greece (Thrace) and up the western coast of the Black Sea, in what is now Bulgaria and Romania. The Black Sea Scythians, wishing to avoid a direct battle fought a battle of deadly skirmishes coupled to strategic retreats farther and farther northward into the Russian Steppes, until the Persian supply-lines were stretched dangerously thin. The Scythians finally sent Darius a strange message in the form of a bird, a mouse, a frog and five arrows. The Persians were told to discern the meaning of the message themselves, which they accurately deduced to mean “If you do not become like birds and fly away into the sky or become like mice and burrow into the earth or become frogs and leap into the lakes, there will be no homecoming for you, for we will shoot you down with our arrows.” The Black Sea Scythians had also attempted to get the Greeks to destroy a strategic bridge across the Danube which would have cut off the Persian’s retreat, but the Greeks refused to cooperate. If they had cooperated, the entire Persian army would have been cut off in their retreat and destroyed. The Persians did manage to flee across the bridge, abandoning their wounded as they ran for safety. We have a break in the timeline between Ezra chapter 6 and chapter 7. Currently the most widely accepted period for the arrival of Ezra is in the “seventh year of Artaxerxes.” This would be the real Artaxerxes, who was the son of Xerxes, who reigned from

465BC to 424BC. Where we are now after Darius' defeat at the hands of the Scythians, Darius now attempted to invade the Greeks in Attica who had inspired a revolt of the Ionian Greeks in Asia Minor who were vassals under the Persian Empire. Darius' forces were soundly defeated in 490BC at the famous battle of Marathon, where the Persians ran into their first encounter with heavily armoured Greek troops, hoplite infantry heavily armed with Greek armour. We'll learn more about this a now. Darius the Great dies in 486BC, and his son Xerxes takes over the reigns of the Persian Empire. This is where history gets exciting. The birth of democracy, a new form of government takes place here amongst the Greek city-states. There's a lot taking place on the world scene, being driven by Persia's insatiable desire to expand it's Empire and truly become a world-empire. To do this, Europe must be conquered and added to the Empire. The Persians under both Cyrus and Darius tried unsuccessfully to expand to the north into the Russian steppes, the territory of the Scythians, and got mauled badly, twice. So now their plan for empire expansion is to attempt to invade southern Europe through its 'back door', Greece. They already have a score to settle with the tiny, disunited city-states of Greece for their losses suffered at Marathon, as well as for a revolt and rebellion the mainland Greeks had stirred up in their former colonies, the Ionian Greeks in Asia Minor. So Xerxes spends a few years amassing a huge amount of supplies and war material for his planned invasion of the Greek mainland, which if it succeeds, will grant him entrance into Europe. The amount of supplies Xerxes amassed was not duplicated until World War II, when the Allies amassed a similar huge amount of supplies just prior to the Normandy Invasion. This was a huge undertaking of Xerxes. That is what we will look at next. This takes place inbetween the events depicted in Ezra chapters 6 and 7. And Esther, of the Book of Esther, becomes Xerxes queen. So the Book of Esther must be inserted between Ezra chapters 6 and 7 as well this history of Xerxes' invasion of the Greek homelands. Also, one of the results from their battle with Greece is the survival of democracy against tyranny. So many very important events are taking place in this period of time between Ezra chapters 6 and 7.

Part III: Book of Esther

Historically, we find Xerxes, son of Darius, strongly desiring to continue his father's expansion of the Empire's northwestern borders through the southeastern "back door" of Europe (Greece), and end up finally conquering all of Europe. That was his overall aim. There was a vengeance factor in getting back at the Greeks

for his father's defeat at Marathon and the Aegean Greeks assisting their Ionian Greek cousins in their unsuccessful rebellion against Persian occupation and dominion in Asia Minor. This vengeance factor has been over-estimated as the main motive of Xerxes for attacking mainland Aegean Greece. The preparations for this massive invasion were really huge, and we will get into this a little bit later. But in preparation for the preparation, it is thought that Xerxes needed to confer with all the various prince-leaders of his satrapies, as well as all the vassal kings under Persian rule (i.e. Egypt, Libya, Phoenicia, just to name three). This gives us the setting for what occurs in Esther chapter 1. Darius died in 586BC and Xerxes took the throne in the same year, shortly afterward. **Verses 1-4 of Esther chapter 1 says that Xerxes had a huge feast for all "his officials and servants---the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces *being before him....for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all.*"** Now probably not everybody showed up at this huge feast all at the same time, but on a schedule, and this would have given Xerxes time to confer with all the leaders under his authority in the Persian Empire, even the vassal kings of all the vassal nations under his rule. Why? For this vast military undertaking he was about to embark on personally. And when a Persian king went to war, all his nobles and princes, and all of the vassal kings, along with all their personal armies had to go along with him, no one could stay behind. So this feast, timed at 483BC was a "conference-feast" with all who would accompany him on his invasion of Europe through its southeastern back door, mainland Greece. **Esther 1:1-4, "Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia), in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan [Susa] the citadel, that in the third year of his reign [484-483BC] he made a feast for all his officials and servants---the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces *being before him---when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all.*"** One hundred and eighty days is just about six months. Since the massive preparations for the invasion of Europe through Greece began shortly after this giant "feast", this feast was what we'd call in business a "corporate lunch meeting" to discuss the business at hand. And that business, soon to follow, was the massive preparation for the invasion of Greece and then Europe, and then the invasion itself in the spring of 480BC. After this huge conference feast was over with, which was filled with military planning and discussions with all the

various princes, nobles and kings under his rule (Xerxes was probably getting pretty tired), he had a celebratory feast lasting only seven days, time to relax and party it up, now with all the invasion preparations being put into motion. At this point God is going to start the process of placing someone special into Xerxes life through a strange set of circumstances, to save the Jewish people who lived throughout the Persian Empire. Most of the Jews, having prospered in Babylon during their 70 year captivity, did not move back to Judea with Ezra and Nehemiah (nor did they want to), but remained in Babylon and throughout the provinces of what was now the Persian Empire. In Esther chapter 3 we will see that all the Jews in the Persian Empire become at risk for their very lives, when Xerxes appoints what we would call a new Prime Minister, a guy named Haman. This Haman character would put a plan into operation which would have killed all the Jews, destroying the entire Jewish race, even those who had moved back to Judea and rebuilt the Temple of God. So we have Xerxes in 483BC planning a huge military invasion of Greece, which was meant to go onward from there into southern Europe, if he succeeded. We have this character Haman obviously working his way up the political ladder into the great king's graces. Even before the massive invasion of Greece, Haman had to have been working his way up the political ladder, with his evil anti-Semitic schemes and intentions to destroy the Jews. So God put a plan into operation.

Seven Day Feast following the 180 day "feast"

Esther 1:5-22, "And when these days were completed [i.e. the 180-day "business at hand" feast], the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. *There were white and blue linen curtains fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; and the couches were of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and white and black marble. And they served drinks in golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other, with royal wine in abundance, according to the generosity of the king. In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had ordered all the officers of his household, that they should do according to each man's pleasure. Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women in the royal palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.* [This queen Vashti is thought to have been queen Amestris, and according to Herodotus was known for her cruelty, having had the mother of her husband's paramour

brutally mutilated, and she also had fourteen noble Persian young men buried alive] **On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine** [probably when the king and everyone else were pretty liquored up, three sheets to the wind, I mean, hey guys, a drinking party for seven days? As you'll read, this was a real royal shindig], **he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she was beautiful to behold. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command brought by his eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.** [Understand, Vashti probably didn't like the idea of being paraded for her beauty's sake alone in front of what was probably a huge tent full of drinking and drunk men, who'd been 'at it' for almost seven days now.] **Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times (for this was the king's manner toward all who knew law and justice, those closest to him being Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who had access to the king's presence, and who ranked highest in the kingdom): 'What shall we do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus brought to her by the eunuchs?' And Memucan answered before the king and the princes: 'Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. For the queen's behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes, when they report, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him, but she did not come.' This very day the noble ladies of Persia and Media will say to all the king's officials that they have heard of the behavior of the queen. Thus there will be excessive contempt and wrath.** [This was a pretty wise man, with a very wise observation. He's showing where this action of Vashti is headed, the big picture in the realm.] **If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered, that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. When the king's decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small.'** And the reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan. Then he sent letters to all

the king's provinces, to each province in its own script, and to every people in their own language, that each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people."

Selection process for a new queen begins

Esther 2:1-4, "After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus [Xerxes] subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her. Then the king's servants who attended him said: 'Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel [fortified city], into the women's quarters, under the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch, custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given *them*. Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.' This thing pleased the king, and he did so." The date, remember, is the date that this second feast---the seven day one---took place, around 583-582BC, just as all the massive military preparations for the invasion of Europe were getting underway. As we shall see, this selection process for a new queen will culminate with the selection of Esther, a beautiful young Jewish girl. And the date is given for Esther's selection, it is the 10th month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. Tebetu is the tenth month of the Babylonian calendar, and corresponds to December/January. The tenth month of the 7th year of Xerxes reign would be 486BC minus 7, counting 1 for the year 480, gives you the month of December 480BC, when Xerxes is safely back from his defeated campaign in Greece. All these pretty women spent this period of time---from 483-482BC to the fall of 481BC---going through this selection process right up to the fall of 481BC, when Xerxes marched his massive army up into Asia Minor and wintered there, prior to marching on Greece in the spring of 480BC. So, although it is not recorded in the Book of Esther here, Xerxes took time out for war. All during this period of time from 483/482BC to the fall of 481BC these women are going through these ritual 12-month baths described in the next set of verses, along with Esther. **Esther 2, verses 5-14, "In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name *was* Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. *Kish* had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. And**

Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman *was* lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. So it was, when the king's command and decree were heard, and when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel, *under* the custody of Hegai, that Esther also was taken to the king's palace, into the care of Hegai the custodian of the women. Now the young woman pleased him, and she obtained his favor; so he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance. Then seven choice maidservants were provided for her from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maidservants to the best *place* in the house of the women. Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal *it*. And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women's quarters, to learn of Esther's welfare and what was happening to her. Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months' preparation, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women. Thus *prepared*, each young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name." Now don't forget, up until the fall of 481BC when Xerxes marched the entire massive Persian army up into Asia Minor (Ionia then) to winter prior to their spring crossing of the Bosphorus, he had this selection process going on. Then he must have taken time out from the fall of 481BC until the fall of 480BC for his attempted invasion into Greece and southern Europe. When this massive invasion failed in September of 480BC, he returned to Susa, Shushan and this selection process continued. Xerxes took time out for war, this massive military campaign he had been planning and preparing for since 483BC. So this is where we take our break to fill in some historic pieces to this miracle, for Xerxes could not be killed, and he had to be safely returned to Susa to resume viewing these beautiful young women again at the end of September 480BC, with Esther's turn coming in December of 480BC. Xerxes couldn't be killed in battle, but he had to return safely, having been defeated, safely to Susa around November of 480BC, so he could then select Esther in a little over two months time, thus placing her in a

position to “save her people” from evil Haman. I think we will see how thoroughly Yahweh inhabits history as it is taking place at the current events stage of history. Why? because at least three of Xerxes brothers were killed by Leonidas and his Spartiates at the battle of Thermopylae, right in the beginning of hostilities. Also, if Xerxes had been killed along with his brothers in battle, evil Haman could still have worked his way up to Prime Minister under whoever the successor would have been, and Esther would not have been in the picture. Xerxes had to return, alive and healthy, his military campaign a total failure, just in time to select Esther as his new queen. For if his massive military campaign in Greece had succeeded, he would be spending multiple years conquering up into central Europe and on through western Europe. All of history would have changed, been different as well, for democracy as the primary form of government in our western world would have died in its infancy. And judging from the massive preparations Xerxes made for this invasion, failure humanly speaking, just did not seem possible. Just like our Normandy invasion, failure wasn’t an option. How do we know the date for her selection and that it fits into history like this? **Esther 2:16, “So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.”** As pointed out before, 486BC – 7 = 480BC. The tenth of Tebeth (December/January on the Babylonian calendar) would equate to be around December 480BC, after Xerxes had returned to his palace in Susa from his failed military campaign against Greece.



Impossible Victory--- Xerxes, Leonidas & Themistocles

The Persians seek to invade Europe through Greece

“...Military adventures of this kind had long been a specialization of the Persians. For decades, victory---rapid, spectacular victory---had appeared to be their birthright. Their aura of invincibility reflected unprecedented scale and speed of their conquests...Europe was not to witness another invasion force to rival this until 1944, and the summer of D-Day...the Greeks had appeared few in numbers and hopelessly divided. Greece itself was little more than a geographical expression: not a country but a patchwork of quarrelsome and often violently chauvinistic city-states. [*Persian Fire*, pp. xiii-xiv] “The whole of the east was on the move...They were men of many races: Persians, Medes, and Bactrians, Arabs on camels, mountain men from Caucasus, Libyans driving chariots, and horsemen from central Iran. There were even primitive Ethiopians painted in savage style, whose Stone Age weapons contrasted strangely with the sophisticated armour and swords of the immaculate Persian royal guard. It was the year 480B.C. and Xerxes had given the order for the invasion of Europe. The King’s writ had gone forth, and when he himself went to war, every nation, tribe and race within the vast Persian Empire was expected not only to furnish its due contingent of men, but

those men must also be led by their own kings, leaders, or princes...” [pp21-23, *Thermopylae*, by Ernle Bradford]

483BC to 480BC

Xerxes, as we saw in Esther chapter 1 and from secular sources, had been planning this invasion of the European continent---through the back door of Greece---since 484/483BC. During the reign of Darius his father, on a previous military adventure attempting to expand the borders of the Persian Empire northwestwards, he had lost a naval fleet off the cape Mount Athos sits on. So Xerxes had actually had his engineers dig a huge ship canal, making Mount Athos an island, thus allowing a naval fleet to safely circumvent the dangerous cape Mount Athos is situated on. That was one of the two major military engineering projects Xerxes had his ‘army corps of engineers’ undertake in preparation for his invasion of Europe through Greece. People think Xerxes’ invasion of mainland Greece was merely a vengeance deal due to their assisting the Ionian Greeks in their rebellion against the Persian Empire under his father Darius, and also due to their defeat at Marathon (less than 200 Athenians had fallen, but Persian dead, carefully counted, numbered 6,400!). It wasn’t vengeance, per se, but Xerxes’ desire to expand the borders of the Persian Empire thousands of miles northwestward where his father, and Cyrus before him had failed to do so. This was a major military invasion of Europe.



Persian stockpiling for the Invasion of Europe

...quoting Theopompus of Chios, records:

“Tens of thousands of stands of arms, both Greek and oriental; vast herds of baggage animals and beasts for slaughter; bushels of condiments, and boxes and sacks, and bales of paper and all other accessories. And there was so much salt meat of every kind, that it made heaps, so large that people approaching from a distance thought they were coming to a range of hills.”

Bradford Ernle says in his book *Thermopylae*:

“They were among the forerunners in the large-scale use of paperwork---under which so much of the world groans today...provision was made in the way of stores for the army when it should have crossed into Greece. While in Asia Minor they might be expected to feed off the land to a great extent, since all of the area came under Persian rule. Such could not be expected in Greece itself once the army was south of the pro-Persian north...in several parts of this region of Thrace great provision dumps were established. The largest of these was at the White Cape on the Thracian coast and another was at the mouth of the Strymon near

the new bridge. Yet others were sited to the south, in parts of Macedonia...evidence of forethought, excellent logistics, and planning superiority over the Greeks of the period. The small Greek city-states could not understand what the organization of a great empire and the movement of many thousands of men entailed: they themselves thought in terms of hundreds or at the most a few thousands...The principle source of amazement, not untinged with some reluctant admiration, was the great bridge of boats which Xerxes ordered to be constructed across the Hellespont at the narrows between Abydos on the Asian side to a point near Sestos on the European side: a distance of about seven furlongs or 1400 yards [3/4 of a mile]. "There were two bridges supported on 674 biremes and triremes which were used to form the floating platforms upon which the carriageway itself was laid. There were 360 vessels on the side towards the Black Sea and 314 on the southern section...[he had them] erect palisades on either side of the bridges so that the animals which were to pass over would not take fright at the sight of 'the bitter water'...nothing until amphibious operations of the twentieth century, was to equal the skill and technical ability of these engineers and craftsmen of the Persian Empire---working in the fifth century B.C." [*Thermopylae*, Bradford Ernle, pp.27-30.]

Spring of 480 B.C.

In 481BC Xerxes started his massive Persian multinational army northwards through the Middle East and on into Asia Minor, where he encamped for the winter months. Then by the spring of 480BC he received word that his two huge ship-pontoon bridges spanning across the Hellespont and the large ship canal at Mount Athos had been completed. (His 'army corps of engineers' first attempt at the massive ship-pontoon bridges had failed, at the cost of the leading engineers' heads. But the 2nd attempt succeeded. Xerxes was not a very forgiving emperor.) Now an estimated 75,000 to 150,000 pack animals conveying the supplies of huge supply depots which had been assembled in Asia Minor across the Hellespont into northern Greece, along with an army historians estimate at between 210,000 and 500,000 or more troops, and this created what must have been the largest traffic-jam ever witnessed in ancient history. While this movement of Xerxes' army sorted itself out crossing the Hellespont (taking about a week's time), Xerxes watched his combined naval forces holding fleet exercises on the surface of the Hellespont below him. His combined multinational navy was made up of, according to Herodotus: The Phoenicians, 300 triremes; the Egyptians, 200 triremes; Cyprus, 150 triremes; Sicilia and Pamphilia, 130 triremes; Lycia and Caria, 120 triremes;

Asian (Ionian) Greeks, 290 triremes; the Cyclades Islands, 17 triremes; and the Thracian Greeks, 120 triremes. This gave Xerxes combined naval force 1,327 triremes (and biremes, an inferior version of the trireme). Understand, all these contributing 'nations' making up Xerxes' Persian armed forces were now vassal states within the Greater Persian Empire (including the Ionian Greeks of Asia Minor, who had unsuccessfully tried to rebel against Persia in 500BC).

A.E. Housman said:

**The King with half the East
at heels
Is marched from land of
morning.
His fighters drink the rivers
up,
Their shafts benight the
air....”**

“...The army itself, when it was on the march, moved in columns, baggage train ahead, with half the infantry as escort; then came two brigades of Xerxes' noble guards, the Immortals; the sacred chariot of Ahuramazda drawn by ten stallions, then the Great King, followed by two further brigades of crack infantry and cavalry; the rest of the Immortals; and finally all the other infantry divisions. The whole array, it has been calculated, would have taken seven days to cross the bridges from Asia Minor into Europe.”...“The nation and the empire that Xerxes was now leading to the invasion of Europe represented a concentration of military and political power such as the ancient world had never known before...unlike those that, instead of remaining confined within the territorial limits of the Near East the Persian Empire was still expanding. From 547 B.C. onwards it continued to do so for some seventy years...Had it succeeded, the Zoroastrian creed might have been imposed upon the pagan Greeks. There would have been no fifth-century Athens, and all European history would have been different.” [*Thermopylae*, Bradford Ernle, p.40]

The Athenians

Two Greek city-states formed the central core of Greek military resistance against Xerxes' hordes from the East---Athens and Sparta. From Athens would come the naval arm of the Greek military, and from Sparta would come the core of their land-based

military expertise. One of the greatest naval strategists of all times arose out of obscurity in 483BC, only to fall back into obscurity when these crucial engagements had been won. His name was Themistocles, and he was politically and tactically brilliant, but a radical maverick amongst his peers. God definitely had a hand in the grooming of this individual. Like Winston Churchill, he was their 'Man of the Hour.' In 483BC, providentially, it would appear, a very rich vein of silver was discovered in the mining area of Laurium near Cape Sunium. Under normal circumstances the windfall profits from these mines would be divided up equally amongst the Greek citizenry (after paying the miners their just wages, of course). Themistocles somehow convinced the hardnosed Senate of Athens to divert the entire sum of money gained from this motherlode into the construction of 100 new trireme warships of a special heavier design (less maneuverable and not as fast, but with exceptional kinetic ramming force). In open waters these triremes were at a disadvantage to the faster, lighter and more maneuverable Phoenician and Egyptian triremes. But apparently this naval genius had already chosen the two major battlegrounds where his specially designed warships would operate in, and both of them were in the somewhat restricted waters along the Greek coastline (which he was very familiar with). These ships were called triremes because they were ramming-type warships containing three deck-levels of oarsmen, with a large copperclad ram projecting submerged extending off the bow of each ship. Themistocles had these triremes constructed heavier in weight than their Phoenician or Egyptian counterparts. Herodotus says about Themistocles:

“Themistocles was a man who most clearly presents the phenomenon of natural genius...to a quite extraordinary and exceptional degree. By sheer personal intelligence, without either previous study or special briefing, he showed both the best grasp of an emergency situation at the shortest notice, and the most far-reaching appreciation of probable further developments. He was good at explaining what he had in hand; and even of things outside his previous experience he did not fail to form a shrewd judgment. No man so well foresaw the advantages and disadvantages of a course in the still uncertain future. In short, by natural power and speed in reflection, he was the best of all men at determining promptly what had to be done.” Herodotus

The Spartans

Since we Christians understand that world history always fits into God's framework of Bible prophecy, it would appear that Sparta was apparently "designed" for one task and one important war--- just as it would appear that God groomed Themistocles for his special role in leading the Greek navy against Xerxes' naval forces. "The Spartans came of a different branch of the Greek stock known as Dorians, who had invaded the Peloponnese in waves about 1000 B.C., ...At the head of the rigidly stratified society which evolved in Sparta there were at the top the Dorian conquerors, the 'Spartiates'. They formed, as it were, 'The Master-Race'.

Bradford Ernle tells us in his *Thermopylae*: "They were the only people to have the vote, and they lived in military messes in the capital. Below them came the *Perioikoi* or Neighbours—free men who marched and fought along with the Spartiates, but did not have voting rights. The third stratum of the society was formed by the Helots. These, who may well have been the descendants of the indigenous inhabitants, worked on the farms that belonged to the Spartiates. They were not slaves in the classical sense of the word but cultivated the land and gave half their produce to the Spartiate citizens...But the threat of a Helot revolt, however veiled, was always there, and for this reason and because of the other conquered people around them the Spartans always had to keep a proportion of their army at home. They could never field all their fighting manpower...they became a warrior-race largely because it was essential for them. (Grundt calculated that the proportion of Free to Non-Free in the Spartan state was 1:15.) To maintain a ruling class out of such a disproportionate relationship meant that the citizen of Sparta, the Spartiate, must of necessity have made himself so hard and fine a soldier that his efficiency outweighed the balance."..."The famous discipline of the Spartan warrior caste was attributed to Lycurgus and the laws he impressed upon these people... the iron code of rules which set them apart from all other men. For one thing, no Spartiate was permitted to own gold or silver. These same laws also forbade him from indulging in agriculture, craft, or indeed in any kind of profession—except that of arms."...At seven or eight years of age boys were taken from their mothers and were enrolled in a group of their year. It is not clear whether at this age he still lived at home but, in any case, he now came under the discipline and control of a senior Spartiate. Similarly at thirteen he was transferred to yet another group under similar control, but presided over by a magistrate. Their whole life was devoted to the state...Boys slept in dormitories on rush-beds, rushes they had to cut without the aid of a knife...their rations were kept to a minimum, so much so that it was expected that

they would steal for food to supplement them but, if caught, they were severely punished. From the very beginning, it can be seen that those qualities required in a soldier—cunning, audacity and just plain ‘scrounging’—were encouraged. As might be expected, their training was largely designed to toughen their bodies; so the military arts were taught; drill, weapon-training, and of course athletics...girls received a very similar training...H.D.F. Kitto in *The Greeks* has succinctly summarized it:

“There were two kings—reminiscent of the two equal consuls in the Roman Republic. The origin was probably different, but the desired effect was the same: in each case the duality was a check on autocracy. At home the kings were overshadowed by the Ephors (‘Overseers’), five annual magistrates chosen more or less by ballot: but a Spartan army abroad was always commanded by one of the kings, who then had absolute powers.”

Aristotle describes the kingship of Sparta as a ‘kind of unlimited and perpetual generalship’. Kitto continues: ‘There was also a Senate, and there was an Assembly, but the Assembly could not debate, and it expressed its decisions—to the amusement of other Greeks—not by voting but by shouting: the loudest shout carried the day.’ This astonishing compendium of almost every kind of government from monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy to democracy was quite unique. Other Greeks,...just could not understand how such a ramshackle affair could work. The fact is that it did; one reason, perhaps, why a number of Greek writers and philosophers admired these strange soldiers of the Eurotes valley.” Based on the theory that the men must be prepared for war at any time and the exigencies of campaign food, they must not be allowed to grow soft or self-indulgent at any time...another effect which all this discipline produced—not only superlative warriors but excellent mannered citizens...The old were revered, the women respected, and the young warriors admired.”...A good illustration of this is given in a tale told by Plutarch. In a crowded throng at the Olympic games an old man was looking in vain for a seat from which to watch the events. His stumbling attempts to find one were noticed by many Greeks from other states, who mocked him for his age and fruitless endeavors. When, however, he came to the section where the Spartans were seated, every man among them rose to his feet and offered him their seats. Somewhat abashed, but nevertheless admiringly, the other Greeks applauded them for their behavior. ‘Ah’, the old man is reported to have said with a sigh, ‘I see what it is—all Greeks *know* what is right, but only the Spartans do it.’...in sexual matters, the Spartans, true to

their conservative outlook in everything, seem to have had the highest rate of monogamy in all Greece...Xenophon...found a society that was little changed since the time of Leonidas.” [Thermopylae, Bradford Ernle, portions from pp. 58-64]

It is recorded in Greek history that a Spartan army was allied to another Greek army, and that this other Greek hoplite army started to complain about how few Spartans had come to join them. The Spartan king-general had all the hoplite soldiers sit down in two opposing groups, one Spartan, one the allies. He then had a herald call out for all those that were potters to stand, then all those who were weavers to stand, and so he had the herald go through all the crafts and trades. By the end, all the allied hoplite soldiers had risen to their feet, while not a single Spartan had. All the Spartiate hoplites were still sitting. This Spartan king then said, “You see how many more soldiers Sparta has contributed to the battle than you have.” The whole Spartan attitude is contained in those few words, as the Spartans trained for war 10 to 11 months out of every year, and the Spartiate’s only trade was soldiering. I can just hear Leonidas saying this to the Thespian and Malis contingents who combined contributed 1,700 hoplites compared to his 300 Spartiate hoplites on their march north to Thermopylae. Xenophon, again says:

“...all men, I imagine, make as much money as they can. One is a farmer, another a shipowner, another a merchant, and others live by various different handicrafts. But at Sparta freeborn citizens were forbidden by Lycurgus to have anything to do with business. He insisted that they should regard as their only concern those activities which make for civic freedom. How, indeed, should wealth be considered seriously there since he also insisted on equal contributions to the food supply and the same standard of living for all, thus removing the attraction of money for indulgence’s sake?”

WEAPONRY

The story of Xerxes’ invasion of Greece, the story of its ultimate failure, cannot be understood without relating it to the arms borne by the opposing sides...

“The narrow pass below the Hot Gates of the sulphur springs was a natural choice for men to stand and fight a battle in heavy armour. The hoplite force, against which Xerxes was to throw the

flower of his army, relied on two basic qualities, solidity and weight. The Spartans and their allies stood in a close, almost unbroken, wall of armour, the shield being held on the left arm, and each man protecting the right side of his neighbour. The hoplites thus presented a line of shields and breast-plates to the advancing enemy. Under normal circumstances, which did not apply to Thermopylae, the right-hand side was naturally the weak point, so the best troops were always put in this position of trust and honour. Thermopylae, however, was an ideal situation for a hoplite battle because this weak side was guarded by the sea.

In the battle that was to follow, the force under Leonidas stood firm in the opening phase. There was no need for them to do other than stand like a rock, and let the seemingly inexhaustible waves of the enemy break themselves to pieces on their spears and shields." [*Thermopylae*, Bradford Ernle, p.67, 69]

Greek Heavy Armour

From Steven Pressfield's *Gates of Fire* we learn these essentials about Greek heavy armour: "...the armour of the hoplite was extremely heavy...The helmet in general use was of the type known as the Corinthian, named after the city which is credited with having first developed it...made out of bronze and was beaten out of a single sheet of metal. The whole of the head, including the collarbone (so vulnerable to a sweeping sword-cut) was completely covered. The cheeks were also guarded by an extension of the lower rim of the helmet which left only a narrow slit, shaped like a T, for the eyes and nose. To protect the head from bruising or concussion there was an inner lining which was secured to the bronze or iron by leather laces that passed through a series of holes in the helmet...To beat a complete helmet out of a single piece of iron (or bronze) was a highly developed skill, requiring many hours of patience and expertise...The principal parts of the body, the shoulders and trunk, were protected by a composite corselet. This consisted of two shoulder pieces (again as a protection against the overhand cut of a sword or the descent of a spear or arrow) which were laced together at the chest. Chest and stomach were covered by one or two sheets of leather which extended down below the waist. This flap was usually, though not invariably, covered by oblong metal scales made of bronze."...Another type of corselet, which it is possible that some of the Greeks wore at this period (armour, as in later centuries, may have passed down from father to son), resembled a bell. This consisted of two bronze plates, covering front and back, and laced together down the sides...it was moulded to fit the torso and often

carefully modelled to reproduce the shape of the chest and stomach. Below this hung a leather kilt to which were stitched protective oval or palm-leaf-shaped pieces of bronze similar to those in the more usual protective body-armor.”

The Shield or Hoplon



“The other and indeed the main form of protection for the Greek hoplite was the shield...the hoplite’s shield was wood covered with bronze. In order to give the arm a firm grasp there was an arm-band (*porpax*) in the centre, through which the hand and arm were

passed, the hand grasping a stout cord just inside the rim. This cord was separately knotted at about half a dozen stud points. If a cord should break, the hoplite could shift his hand around and obtain a further grip upon the next corded section. It was from this great round shield known as a *hoplon* that the Greek hoplites took their name. An average diameter of a shield was about three feet, although, to judge from one example (four feet across), shields, like the armour itself, were made to individual specifications. The outer cover of the shield, and almost invariably the rim, was made of bronze, wood only forming the base.”...What the troops of Xerxes would have seen as they approached the armoured Spartiates in the pass at Thermopylae was a row of almost identical round shields each bearing the same sign, the Greek A (Lambda or L) standing for their Lakedaemon. In this way, the Spartans with their disciplined unity foreshadowed the organised regiments of later centuries.”

The Spear, 8-footer



“In the first stages of any encounter the primary weapon of the hoplite was his spear. The shaft was either of ash or olive, and the typical spear used by the hoplite was about six to eight feet long (often called 8-footers by the hoplite)...Bronze spear-heads have been found dating from as late as the fifth century BC, but the majority undoubtedly favoured the more efficient iron tip. By the time of Xerxes invasion, it would seem that one long spear was the principal equipment of the hoplite.” The Spartan poet Tyrtaeus describes a typical battle-line such as the Persians were to encounter at Thermopylae: “Standing foot to foot, shield pressed on shield, crest to crest and helmet to helmet, chest to chest engage your man, grasping your sword-hilt or long spear.” By the time of

the Persian wars, however, a new type of sword had begun to emerge, one-edged, and designed for a cutting stroke [precursor of the Roman short-sword, who probably copied it from the Spartans]. “While the Greeks, quite apart from their corselets, wore greaves, carefully moulded to fit their wearers legs to protect them against a slashing blow under their shields.”

Fear-inspiring look of the helmet



“Adding further to the theater of terror presented by the Hellenic phalanx and, to my mind most frightful of all, were the blank, expressionless facings of the Greek helmets, with their bronze nasals thick as a man’s thumb, their flaring cheekpieces and the unholy hollows of their eye slits, covering the entire face and projecting to the enemy the sensation that he was facing not

creatures of flesh like himself, but some ghostly invulnerable machine, pitiless and unquenchable. I had laughed with Alexandros not two hours earlier as he seated the helmet over his undercap; how sweet and boyish he appeared in one instant, with the helmet cocked harmlessly back upon his brow and the youthful, almost feminine features of his face exposed. Then with one undramatic motion, his right hand clasped the flare of the cheekpiece and tugged the ghastly mask down; in an instant the humanity of his face vanished, his gentle expressive eyes became unseeable pools of blackness chasmed within the fierce eye sockets of bronze; all compassion fled in an instant from his aspect, replaced with the blank mask of murder. "Push it back," I cried. "You're scaring the hell out of me." It wasn't a joke." [*Gates of Fire*, Steven Pressfield, p.60]



the whole Greek hoplite pictured above (helmet of a later date though)

Persian Armour by Comparison

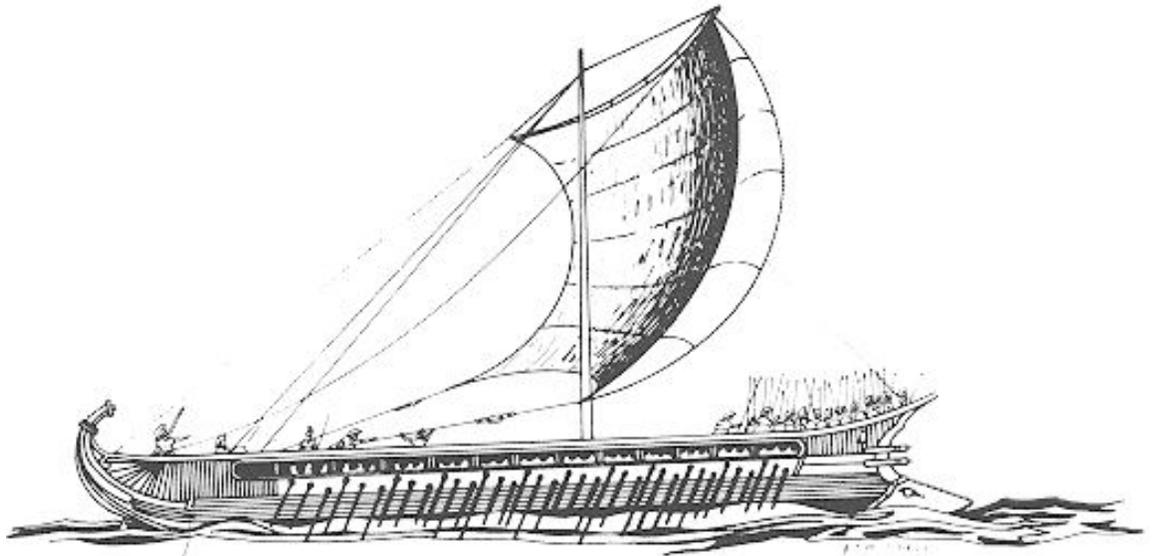
"The Persians, on the other hand, wore comparatively little armour. Although a warlike people, their methods of fighting, which had secured for them the largest empire in the world, had hardly

required more than a leather corselet, proof enough against most dropping arrows and thrown spears. The javelin—which the Greek had largely abandoned in favour of the long pike-like spear—was still their principal weapon after the arrow. Only the famous Immortals, the 10,000 men comprising the king’s personal body-guard, wore anything approaching the armour of the hoplite...rare for them to have any head covering other than a loose cloth—rather like a *burnous*, designed more for protection against the sun than anything else—and they had never adopted the metal greaves for the legs, but wore skin trousers.”

Wicker Shields

“They carried a leather or wickerwork shield and, apart from the bow and arrow, used a dagger for close-quarter work. [Yeah, right, fighting a guy with an 8-foot spear and a short-sword with a dagger, that’s really gonna work for you.] they were not a match for the heavily armoured Greek hoplite. In the great plains of Asia, where mobility was all-important, they would easily have proved their efficiency and capability against any army that the Greeks could muster. But Thermopylae, with the narrow pass between the mountains and the sea, was an area that might have been specifically designed for the kind of warfare for which the Greeks—especially the Spartans—were trained.” [*Thermopylae*, Bradford Ernle, pp. 73-74]

Ships of War



From Bradford Ernle we learn this about the warships of the era, especially the Greek warships: “...the trireme was rowed at three

levels and there was one man to each oar. ...'each sailor, taking his oar, cushion and oarstrap'...what the designers had done was to provide the vessel with an outrigger: an extension beyond the ship's side that gave the top level oarsmen (*thranites*) a greater leverage. The total crew of a trireme consisted of about 200 men, of whom 170 were oarsmen. The *thranites* at the top numbered 31 on each side (62). Below them came the second bank (*zygotes*) with 27 rowers to each side (54), and at the bottom, also with 27 men each side (54), came the *thalamites*. Both the two lower decks of oars were worked through holes or ports in the side, and it is clear enough that the least enviable position in the ship was that of the *thalamites*. They had little enough chance of escaping if the trireme was holed or otherwise overwhelmed. Aristophanes also makes the joking comment that it could be very unpleasant to be on the bottom tier if someone above decided to relieve himself. The remaining crew consisted of 15 deck hands, fourteen soldiers (some of whom were archers), and a flautist who piped the time for the oarsmen. The helmsmen, whose job was all important on the 'run-in' towards an enemy trireme, steered by means of two broad-bladed steering-paddles as had been the fashion for centuries. In command of each trireme was a *trierarch* (master, and sometimes owner)...Although the all-important oarsmen came from poorer classes, they were free citizens—quite unlike the galley-slave labour of later years in the Mediterranean. It was the oarsmen, in fact, who by their predominance in numbers over the rich land-owning citizens were to provide the basic substratum upon which Athenian democracy was to evolve.”

Key facts

“[9 feet across at the bottom, 18 feet across at the top, 117 feet long.] The ship itself...was long and narrow-gutted. On a beam of three metres at the bottom, which extended to six metres at the level of the *thranites* on the outriggers, the trireme would have been about 37 metres long (about 117 feet). Such a vessel was clearly unsuited for heavy-weather work and, indeed, there were only about four, or at the least five, months of the year in which a trireme could safely operate. **‘The limitation factor in ancient warfare’**, as I have said elsewhere, ‘was determined not only by the harvest season, when most of the nation’s population was engaged in ensuring the bread supply, **but also by the fact that armies could not be transported, garrisons maintained, or sea battles fought, except in calm weather.**’” “The principal weapon of the period, as of the centuries before, was the vessel itself. It was the great underwater ram in the bows which was the forerunner of the

cannon and guns of later days. The trireme was in fact launched at its opponent like a giant arrow. The moment of impact was 'the moment of truth' for all aboard...The tactical use of the ram later became the paramount factor in any sea battle. Ideally, of course, the objective was to catch the enemy beam on, breaking clean into the ship's side and holing him [below the waterline]. But the ram could also be used by clever maneuvering to run right down the side of the opponent snapping off the oars like matchsticks (the looms of the oars leaping back under the impact and killing or maiming the rowers). Having thus disabled the opponent, the trireme could then back off and, almost at leisure, come in and administer the *coup de grace* by holing the stricken enemy. It was, one might say, the far-distant, man-impelled, precursor of the torpedo." [Thermopylae, Bradford Ernle, pp. 75-78]

"What kind of men were these Spartans?"

training

As Steven Pressfield explains in his excellent historic novel *Gates of Fire*: "There was an exercise we of the battle train practiced when we served as punching bags for the Spartan heavy infantry. It was called the Oak because we took our positions along a line of oaks at the edge of the Plain of Otona, where Spartiates and the Gentleman Rankers ran their field exercises in fall and winter. We would line up ten deep with body-length wicker shields braced upon the earth and they would hit us, the shock troops, coming across the flat line of battle, eight deep, at a walk, then a pace, then a trot and finally a dead run. The shock of their interleaved shields was meant to knock the breath out of you, and it did. It was like being hit by a mountain. Your knees, no matter how braced you held them, buckled like saplings before an earthslide; in an instant all courage fled our hearts; we were rooted up like dried stalks before the ploughman's blade." [*Gates of Fire* by Steven Pressfield, p.2 par. 1]

8-Nighters

We continue with Pressfield's description of Spartan military training: "The Lakedaemonions are extremely shrewd in these matters....On an 8-nighter...there are regimental exercises normally, though in this case it involved a division. An entire *mora*, more than twelve hundred men with full armor and battle train including an equal number of squires and helots, had marched out into the high valleys and drilled in darkness for four

nights, sleeping in the day in open bivouac, by watches, at full readiness with no cover, then drilling day and night for the following three days. Conditions were deliberately contrived to make the exercise as close to possible to the rigor of actual campaign, simulating everything except casualties. There were mock night assaults up twenty-degree slopes, each man bearing full kit and *panoplia*, sixty-five to eighty pounds of shield and armor. Then assaults down the hill. Then more across. The terrain was chosen for its boulder strewn aspect and the numerous gnarled and low-branched oaks which dotted the slopes. The skill was to flow around everything, like water over rocks, without breaking line." [ibed. pp. 7-8] "...Wine was at half-rations the first four days, none the second two, then no liquid at all, including water, for the final two. Rations were hard linseed loaves, which Dienekes declared fit only for barn insulation, and figs alone, nothing hot. This type of exercise is only partially in anticipation of night action; its primary purpose is training for surefootedness, for orientation by feel within the phalanx and for action without sight, particularly over uneven ground. It is axiomatic among the Lakedaemonions that an army must be able to dress and maneuver the line as skillfully blind as sighted, for in the dust and terror of the *othismos*, the initial battlefield collision and the horrific scrum that ensues, no man can see more than five feet in any direction, nor hear even his own cries above the din."... "What's the difference between a Spartan king and a mid-ranker?... The king sleeps in that shithole over there, and we sleep in this shithole over here." "The more miserable the conditions, the more convulsing the jokes become, or at least that's how it seems... They could see their king, at nearly sixty, enduring every bit of misery they did. And they knew that when battle came, he would take his place not safely in the rear, but in the front rank, at the hottest and most perilous spot on the field." "The purpose of an eight-nighter is to drive the individuals of the division, and the unit itself, beyond the point of humor. It is when the jokes stop, they say, that the real lessons are learned and each man, and the *mora* as a whole, make those incremental advances which pay off in the ultimate crucible. The hardship of the exercises is intended less to strengthen the back than to toughen the mind."

The work of war

"Among the Spartans the work of war is demystified and depersonalized through its vocabulary, which is studded with references both agrarian and obscene. Their word which I translated earlier as "screw," as in the youths' tree-screwing, bears the connotation not so much of penetration as of grinding, like a

miller's stone. The front three ranks "screw" or "mill" the enemy. The verb "to kill," in Doric *theros*, is the same as "to harvest." The warriors in the fourth to sixth ranks are sometimes called "harvesters," both for the work they do on the trampled enemy with the butt-spike "lizard-stickers" of their eight-footers and for that pitiless threshing stroke they make with the short *xiphos* sword, which itself is called a "reaper." To decapitate a man is to "top him off" or "give him a haircut." Cropping off a hand or arm is called "limbing." [ibed. p. 11]

Arming of the troops

"Squires armed the warriors from the feet up, starting with the heavy oxhide soles which could tread over fire; then the bronze greaves, which the squires bent into place around the shins of their masters, securing them at the rear of the calf by the flex of the metal alone...This process of arming for battle, which the citizen-soldiers of other *poleis* had practiced no more than a dozen times a year in the spring and summer training, the Spartans had rehearsed and rehearsed, two hundred, four hundred, six hundred times in a campaigning season. Men in their fifties had done this ten thousand times. It was as second-nature to them, fitted now with the linen *spolas* corselet and bronze breastplate, proceeded to do with elaborate care and ceremony, assisting one another like a regiment of dandies preparing for a dress ball, all the while radiating an eerie presence of calm and nonchalance." [*Gates of Fire*, Pressfield, p.15]

The appearance of the Phalanx to the enemy



“Shields, helmets and foot-long spearpoints had been burnished to a mirror’s gleam; they flashed brilliantly in the sun, investing the massed formation with the appearance of some colossal machine, made not so much of men as of bronze and iron.”...”In the Spartan line the iron-bladed forest of eight-footers rose solid as a spike fence, each shaft upright and aligned, dressed straight as a geometer’s line none moving.” [p.17 *Gates of Fire*, Pressfield]

On the Persian side

In May 480BC, as Xerxes sat on his marble and gold throne watching his cherished Immortals crossing the Hellespont on his incredibly well-engineered ship-pontoon bridges---the Greeks, who had had years to prepare for Xerxes’ invasion (you can’t hide activities this large very well), were still bickering and squabbling over what to do, totally disunited toward any viable solution. God had prepared Themistocles, who had engineered and created a small but formidable battle-fleet. And Themistocles already knew how he was going to deal with the Persian navy. But his strategies were far from being accepted by the vast majority of the bickering Greek city-states. Many of you are aware of the verse that says “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the LORD.” Not to say Themistocles or Leonidas had God’s Holy Spirit, but they were about to do his bidding. The Lord GOD had certainly had a hand in preparing these two men, and the forces that followed them. Or else European history would have been entirely different from what we know it as having been. More importantly, and related to that alternate reality which never occurred, we would not have our strong freedom-loving democracies of Europe, England, America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, to say nothing about Japan, South Korea, and even to a degree, the Russian Federation right now. For our democratic western democracies were cradled and developed in Greece and Rome. It is these very democracies that have held totalitarianism at bay, allowing Christianity and the Gospel of the Kingdom of God be proclaimed from the 1800s AD onward, as well as close to a billion Bibles being distributed worldwide. The Bible prophecies of Daniel chapters 2, 7, 8 and 11 would have been stopped in their tracks if Xerxes had won, because in 130 years hence from this attempted massive Persian invasion of Europe, Greece would arise as the very next world-ruling empire under Alexander the Great. Had Xerxes’ military hordes won there would have been no Alexander the Great and no world-ruling Greek empire as the Bible clearly prophesied there would be. So, against impossible odds, these bickering,

squabbling, disunited Greek city-states must defeat Xerxes, and his military hordes from the East. The Persian hordes at this time were made up of forty-six vassal nations, under thirty Persian generals, and over them six chief marshals (five of whom were Royal sons). The crossing of the two bridges over the Hellespont took a week, one huge military traffic-jam. Supply dumps had already been set up in Persian occupied or friendly northern Greek territories, and Xerxes' army sucked streams dry as they crossed them. The army had to carry its own water until it reached the Hubris River, an estimated 1,000,000 gallons of water carried by an estimated 35,000 camels, in order to give 500,000 soldiers 2 quarts of water a day (not a whole lot, considering their average ration was dry grain). The brilliant mind of Themistocles had thought all of this through. Once Xerxes' forces finished crossing west across northern Greece, where his supply depots were located, his entire army would have to rely on an estimated 3,000 Persian supply vessels (their equivalent of a merchant-marine), and these needed the protection of Xerxes active navy, which was also supposed to be battling the Greek navy. Now we saw Xerxes' naval force of triremes and biremes consisted of 1,327 vessels. But Xerxes had used 674 of them to create his two massive ship-pontoon bridges across the Hellespont---leaving him with 653 triremes to wage war against the Greek navy as well as to protect his supply lines, those 3,000 supply ships. The strength or weakness of Xerxes' army, as with any army, was in its supply-lines---food, water and ammunition, the three essentials an army moves forward on. Napoleon said "an army moves on its stomach." The Masterplan of that great military mastermind lay on the Island of Salamis, cutting off Xerxes' supply-lines. Themistocles' strategy, let the Persians overextend themselves, and then seriously threaten their sea-borne supply-lines. But it depended on two major land-sea battles, of which, the victories of both were calculated risks at best. Time and fair weather on the Mediterranean Sea were also calculated into Themistocles' Masterplan. Ambassadors from the majority of the Greek city-states met in an improvised 'Congress' on the Isthmus of Corinth under the sponsorship of Sparta, and an alliance was formed and proclaimed amongst all those attending. Athens and Sparta were accepted as the undisputed leaders, Sparta to lead the combined Greek army and Athens under Themistocles to lead the Greek naval forces, totaling about 300 triremes and biremes at the very most.

The First Part of Themistocles Masterplan---Create a Northern Army-Navy Defensive Line at Artemisium and Thermopylae

This first military action, in Themistocles' mind, could be nothing more than to fight a delaying action---waste Xerxes' fair-weather sailing time and buy the Greeks precious time. Themistocles' naval forces were to work in concert with Leonidas' combined Greek hoplite army to do just exactly that. It is totally inconceivable that Themistocles wouldn't have somehow privately conferred with Leonidas and discussed his plans in detail well before the battle at the Hot Gates, Thermopylae, and the naval encounters off of Artemisium. General mobilization of the entire Greek navy was declared, and every ship manned. All men under 50 years of age were expected to serve. The plan, when the triremes were manned and ready, was for 100 of them to proceed north to the port of Artemisium at the extreme northern tip of the long fish-like island of Euboea, right opposite to where Leonidas and the Greek army would be fighting a delaying action at the Hot Gates---Thermopylae. In Leonidas' mind, he knew it would be a delaying action at best---and for his chosen Spartiate Knights, a suicidal one as well.

Winds of the Aegean---the critical weather-factor

“Greece is a mountainous country...its coast is singularly inhospitable. To the east and north of Athens the long fish-shaped island of Euboea lies like a defensive shield. Its eastern coast offers no harbours and any fleet finding this bleak shore to leeward in the event of a blow [gale] would be in great trouble. It was now high summer and, after the indecisive vagaries of the *prodroms*, the real ‘Greek wind’ had set in to blow. The *Meltemi*, as it is called, is almost as steady as the Trade Winds of the oceans. It can be relied upon throughout most of the summer to be constant coming from a northerly direction, as the colder air from the Black Sea and Russia beyond flows down steadily to replace the hot air which lifts over all the Aegean, the Mediterranean, and Africa. Dying away only slightly at nightfall (but still leaving a pitching and lumpy sea), the *Meltemi* can be expected to blow at anything between Force 6 to 8 on the Beaufort scale [22 knots to 40 knots windspeed], at times even reaching gale force. For the trireme, labouring under oars, and even the wind from astern, the *Meltemi* was hardly a friend.” [*Thermopylae*, Bradford Ernle, p. 94] [to see the Beaufort Scale, log onto http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaufort_scale]

Xerxes' Naval course from the Bosphorus to the northern tip of Euboea

“...Artemisium on the northernmost spur of Euboea took its name from a temple erected there to the goddess Artemis ‘Facing the East’, this attribute no doubt arising from the fact that it was from here that ships took their departure eastwards across the Aegean...North of Euboea from Cape Sepias to Mount Olympus the land presents an iron-bound coast—a wall of mountains where there is little shelter except for small craft, and certainly nothing that could remotely accommodate a fleet. The Persian armada, after they had traversed the ship-canal through the peninsula at Mount Athos and rounded the two other peninsulas of Chalcidice had a long haul of over sixty miles before they came to the strait between the island of Skiathos and Cape Sepias, with always this brooding and hostile coast on their starboard hand, threatening them if a gale from the north blew up. Confronting them, as they emerged, lay Artemisium. It was plain that the key to the whole [northern] naval campaign lay here.” [*Thermopylae*, Bradford Ernle, p. 95]

But Thermopylae was the perfect location for a small well-armed, well-trained force to stop and hold a very large force which was by comparison poorly armed. It is late June 480BC, Xerxes’ forces have just left Doriscus marching westwards while his fleet is headed for the Athos Canal. The fleet now parts company with Xerxes’ army at Acanthus, the army headed for Therma at head of the Thermaic Gulf. The fleet now through the Athos canal, had to round the two capes of Chalcidice before it could head north to rendezvous with the army at Therma. The fleet got there first. But it was now late July, and Xerxes first engagement with the Greek army at Thermopylae was a month away.

Greeks March and Sail to the North

The minute the Greeks heard Xerxes’ forces were in Pieria they hastily broke up their last conference of the Corinthian League at the Isthmus. Their allied fleet, now agreeing to Themistocles’ plan, headed north to set up their defensive line at Artemisium (which would be in line with the defensive line set up by Leonidas at the Hot Gates, Thermopylae). Their whole fleet that was going north through the Euripus Channel (between the western shores of Euboea and the eastern shores of mainland Greece) consisted of about 150 ships, 100 of which were the new heavy triremes. The Spartans, despite the approach of their most holy Carneia festival held in mid-August, sent a chosen 300 Spartiate Knights with King Leonidas leading them. It was late July. Leonidas, completely understanding the nature of this “holding action” carefully selected

only Spartiate Knights who had male offspring, not desiring to see any Spartiate family line extinguished. Xenophon tells us the Spartan procedure when one of the kings set out for war...

“...When the sacrifices are over the King summons everyone and gives out the orders of the day. If you could but watch the scene you would come to the conclusion that all other men are mere amateurs at soldiering, and that the Lakedaemonians are the only artists of warfare.”

It has been said, **“Sparta created not things in words or stone, but men.”**

“As he passed north through the small cities of Tegea and Manienea, and then through Arcadia, on his way towards the Isthmus, Leonidas gathered in other small allied contingents to the total of 2,120, Arcadia itself providing the bulk of these. He now, it would seem, had a little more than 3,000 men, hardly enough even for a delaying action in the pass. However, as Burn points out, tradition has it that he reached the Isthmus with 4,000 and the only conclusion to be drawn is that the additional 1,000 were ‘emancipated Helots, armed as hoplites...Putting the Isthmus behind him, Leonidas marched north through Boeotia, where he may have hoped for some larger reinforcements, but only the small township of Thespieae came to his support with 700 hoplites. The important city of Thebes, somewhat grudgingly, sent not more than 400 men—The Lokrians of Opus sent him all the men they had (some hundreds?) while the people of Phokis dispatched 1,000, and these of Malis possibly a further 1,100. The entire force which he took with him to Thermopylae was probably a little more than 7,000 men.”...While the nodding horsehair-crested helmets and the scarlet cloaks marched north, picking up these reinforcements on their way, the allied fleet under a Spartan admiral, Eurybiades, had rounded Cape Sunium and was on his way up the Euboea Channel. A reserve fleet of some 200 ships [triremes and biremes] had been left behind to guard the southern positions from Attica to the Argolid. There seems little doubt that the finest new ships were sent up to defend the position of Artemisium and even they, with presumably the best crews, will have made hard work of it. Under the blazing midsummer sun the oarsmen had to toil against the fast current which whips down between Euboea and the mainland, speeded at this time of year by the fact that the northerly winds have been blowing for many weeks. Ahead of them had been sent a fast 30-oared cutter with a well-known Athenian aboard, to act as liaison officer between the fleet at sea

and the army under Leonidas. [This was a joint army-navy operation—it wasn't merely Leonidas with his famous 300 at the Hot Gates.] [*Thermopylae*, Bradford Ernle, pp. 104-106]

While Xerxes was crossing the Hellespont

“...Refugees, many brides with babes, were flooding into the last of the free cities. Young mothers took flight to Lakedaemon, islanders and relations fleeing the Persian advance across the Aegean. These brides inflamed their listeners hatred of the foe with tales of the conquerors' atrocities in their earlier passage through the islands: how the enemy at Chios and Lesbos and Tenedes had formed dragnets at one end of the territory and advanced across each island, scouring out every hiding place, hauling forth the young boys, herding the handsomest together and castrating them for eunuchs, killing every man and raping the women, selling them forth into foreign slavery. The babies heads these heroes of Persia dashed against the walls, splattering their brains upon the paving stones. The wives of Sparta listened with icy fury to these tales, cradling their own infants at their breasts. The Persian hordes had swept now through Thrace and Macedonia. The baby-murderers stood upon the doorstep of Greece, and where was Sparta and her warriors?” [*Gates of Fire*, Pressfield, p. 42]

Leonidas' march north to the Hot Gates,

“All along the march north, the allied column had encountered country tribes and villagers fleeing, streaming south along the military road, or what had now become a military road. Tattered clan groups fled before the Persian advance, bearing their pitiful possessions in shoulder sacks contrived from bedcovers or bundled cloaks, balancing their ragged parcels like water vessels atop their heads. Sunken-cheeked husbandmen wheeled handbarrows whose cargoes were more often flesh than furniture, children whose legs had given out from the tramp or bundled ancients hobbled with age. A few had ox carts and pack asses. Pets and farm stock jostled underfoot, gaunt hounds cadging for a handout, doleful-looking swine being kicked along as if they knew they would be supper in a night or two. The main of the refugees were female; they trudged barefoot, shoes slung about their necks to save the leather. When the women descried the allied column approaching, they vacated the road in terror, scrambling up the hillsides, clutching their infants and spilling possessions as they fled. There came always that moment when it broke upon these dames that the advancing warriors were their own countrymen.

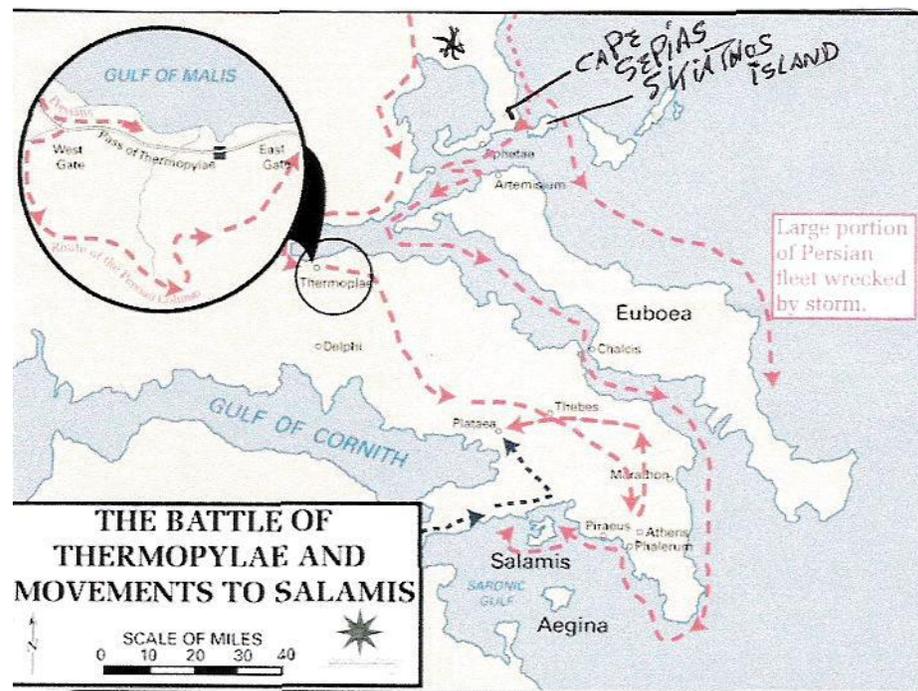
Then the alteration which overtook their hearts bordered upon the ecstatic. The women skittered back down the hardscrabble slopes, pressing tight about the column, some numb with wonder, others with tears coursing down their road-begrimed faces. Grandmothers crowded forward to kiss the young men's hands; farm matrons threw their arms about the necks of the warriors, embracing them in moments that were simultaneously poignant and preposterous. "Are you Spartans?" they inquired of the sun-blackened infantrymen, the Tegeates and Mycenaeans and Corinthians, Thebans, Philiassians and Arkadians, and many of these lied and said they were. When the women heard that Leonidas in person led the column, many refused to believe it, so accustomed had they become to betrayal and abandonment. When the Spartan king was pointed out to them and they saw the Knights about him and at last believed, many could not bear the relief. They buried their faces in their hands and sank upon the roadside, overcome. As the allies beheld this scene repeated, eight or ten, a dozen times a day, a grim urgency took possession of their hearts. All haste must be made; the defenders must at all costs reach and fortify the pass before the arrival of the enemy. Unordered, each man lengthened stride. The pace of the column soon outstripped the capacity of the train to keep up. The waggons and pack asses were simply left behind, to catch up as best they could, their necessaries transferred to the marching men's backs." [*Gates of Fire*, Steven Pressfield, pp. 49-50]

Mountain wall on your left, ocean on your right

"They came to the pass of Thermopylae, the sea on their right hand to the north, crisped with the bright waves of summer. It was a formidable place. To the left of them the heights of Mount Kallidromos rose up stark and sheer, a defensive wall brilliant at noon, and it...will have been the dark of the moon [the astronomical conjunction] when they took up their positions. The full Carneia moon that year was on 20 August. Their right flank, then, lay on the sea and their left was protected by Kallidromos, an ideal place for a hoplite line, being unturnable at either end...In 480, however, the point which was chosen for the defensive line was only about twenty yards wide...The Spartans, therefore, chose a slightly wider front, but one where their vulnerable left was protected by a sheer wall of rock." [*Thermopylae*, Bradford Ernle, p. 107]

...Demaratus cautioned Xerxes against underestimating the Spartans in warfare:

“When the Spartans fight singly they are as brave as any man, but when they fight together they are supreme above all. For though they are free men, they are not free in all respects; law is the master whom they fear, a great deal more than your subjects fear you. They do what the law commands and its command is always the same, not to flee in battle whatever the number of enemy, but to stand and win, or die.”



First Encounter by sea at Cape Sepias--three Greek triremes guarding the channel destroyed

Bradford Ernle in *Thermopylae* describes the first naval encounter between the Persians and Greeks: “Just as the first columns were

beginning their advance, Xerxes decided to send a small detachment from the fleet down to inspect the straight between Cape Sepias and the island of Skiathos, [see map] and then to reconnoitre the Gulf of Pagasae. This was to lead to the first naval engagement of the whole campaign, and one which did not auger very well for the Greeks. Ten fast ships, almost certainly Phoenician and possibly specifically from Sidon, were selected for the operation. The Greeks from their naval base at Artemisium had naturally enough despatched scouts to watch the Skiathos channel where the enemy must inevitably first be seen. There were three triremes on guard, one from Athens, one from Aegina, and one from Troezen—their task clearly being not to engage any advance squadron but to report back quickly to base. They were, however, out-manoeuvred or, as seems clear, the heavier Greek vessels were no match in speed for the lighter-built and faster Phoenicians. At the first sight of the enemy all three turned tail and fled. The Persians gave chase, and the ship from Troezen, commanded by Prexinus, was captured at once. The victors picked out the best-looking of the marines on board, took him up to the bows and cut his throat. The name of this unfortunate was Leon...[Leon means 'Lion' therefore possibly a very acceptable sacrifice?] [But Leonidas will get even.] The ship from Aegina, however, which was commanded by Asonides, put up a fierce resistance. A marine on board, Pytheas, distinguished himself in particular and, after his ship was boarded, continued to fight until he was almost cut to pieces...the Persian marines did all that they could to save his life, dressing his wounds with myrrh and binding them up with linen. When they got back to their base they displayed him with admiration to everybody there and looked after him well. The other prisoners from the ship, however, were treated as slaves...The third vessel, the Athenian, its retreat cut off, fled northward and finally ran itself aground at the mouth of the River Peneus in Thessaly [see map]. The whole crew of 200, who only got clear of their pursuers by the narrowest of margins, then made their way back through hostile Thessaly to reach Athens after a long overland march...Three of the pursuing vessels, we learn, ran aground on a small rocky reef in the Skiathos channel, which, with seamanlike efficiency, they promptly marked for the benefit of the oncoming fleet using stone blocks to form a pillar...Xerxes and his staff had calculated that it would take the army some fourteen days to get itself down to Thermopylae... If Xerxes and his staff, after all their elaborate preparations over the years and in all their efficiency on the march itself, had erred, it was in ignoring the time element. Xerxes, enjoying his triumphal progress, had dallied too long." [*Thermopylae*, Bradford Ernle, pp. 108-109]

11 day delay put on Persian fleet

Xerxes' army was now marching south along the Greek coastline leading toward the Skiathos Channel with the northern part of Euboea island and Artemisium nearby on the south side of the same channel. His fleet could reach the Skiathos Channel in one day, whereas Xerxes' army marching on foot would take him eleven days to reach the same spot, and then heading around the Malian Gulf to Thermopylae where Leonidas and his Spartiates were waiting for him would consume three or four more days. So he told the fleet to wait ten days and then to sail down to the Skiathos Channel to meet up with him. It was now mid-August.

The Weather-Element of Themistocles' Strategy

The Greek Hesiod very wisely set the limit of sailing on the Mediterranean (for sensible men) to 50 days after the summer solstice (June 20 + 50 days or thereabouts). The way it works, as the summer months progress, the Mediterranean Sea and the Aegean Sea have been heating up. Then at the right moment as a slight imbalance in barometric pressure occurs, a mass of hot air will rise over the sea, ascending like some giant hot-air balloon. When this happens, cold air will immediately rush from the north, blowing south with gale force to replace this giant mass of air that has risen over the mid-ocean. It can happen so suddenly that barometers can't even show when one of these *Hellesponters* or *Maestro-winds* is about to occur. These gales usually last no longer than 24 hours. Xerxes fleet set sail as ordered (ten days later), and after about a day's voyage out they were arriving off the Magnesium coast between Casthanea and Cape Sepias (just north of the Skiathos Channel). The lead ships beached themselves, but due to the small beach area the rest had to anchor, laying lines to each other eight-deep. They were on for the most part a rocky lee shore, and many of them being experienced mariners, felt a bit uneasy. But twenty-four hours and they'd be safely through the Skiathos Channel at the mouth of the Bay of Pagasae. Herodotus tells us at dawn the next day 'the weather was clear and calm' with a curious bright stillness which often precedes a violent northeaster, a '*Hellesponter*' or '*Maestro*' or Masterwind as the Greeks call it. This Hellesponter came raging out of a cloudless sky without warning. The luckless Persian fleet was just getting underway when it struck. They were caught on a rocky lee shore. Herodotus says:

'Those who realized in time that the blow was coming, and all who happened to be lying in a suitable place, managed to beach their vessels and get them hauled

ashore before they were damaged and before they lost their own lives as well. The ships which were caught offshore, on the other hand, were all lost: some driven down onto the place called the Ovens at the foot of Mount Pelion and others onto the beach. A number ran aground on Cape Sepias itself, and others again were driven ashore off the cities of Meliboea and Casthanea. It was a storm of the greatest violence.'

The Greeks had been praying to Boreas, their god of wind, but Yahweh answered their prayer. Herodotus says they lost 400 ships, but it's not likely they lost more than one quarter of their number, and probably 100 or so of these were cargo vessels. The Persians may have lost 50 triremes, leaving them still with 600 triremes. Their fleet was far from shattered, as the subsequent battles show. Whittled down a bit, but not shattered. Not yet. This particular storm lasted for three days, quite unusual for that time of year. Most Hellesponter's only last 24 hours. The Greek fleet had been sheltered in the lee of Euboea and sat out the storm, watching Persian wreckage float past them headed down the Euripus Channel (which flows north to south).

Xerxes tries a naval end-around

After the three-day storm, while most of Xerxes' fleet was still sorting themselves out and making repairs in the Gulf of Pagasae just north of Artemisium, Xerxes in a bold venture dispatched 200 triremes to row south along the eastern shore of Euboea island, to round its southern end and then head up the Euripus Channel. If successful, his fleet would be able to not only cut off any Greek retreat back down the Euripus Channel, but also would enable his fleet of triremes to approach the smaller Greek fleet from two opposing flanks, essentially boxing them into a confined space. He could then destroy the Greek fleet at will. A famous Greek salvage diver who happened to be working repairing Persian triremes in the Gulf of Pagasae heard about this. It is said he swam the 10 miles from the mouth of Aphetae to Artemisium (not impossible for a good swimmer) to inform the Greeks of this end-around move of 200 Persian triremes. Word was immediately sent back to the 53 Greek triremes at the southern end of Euboea and the Euripus Channel. They were supposed to be heading up the channel to join the Greek fleet, but now waited to guard the Euripus Channel. They needn't have bothered. Meanwhile at Thermopylae the three-day Hellesponter had lashed Mount Kallidromos and Leonidas' forces, which had recently arrived at the Hot Gates, with wind and

rain blowing horizontally off the ocean-side of Thermopylae. They huddled under their scarlet cloaks, protecting their campfires as best they could.



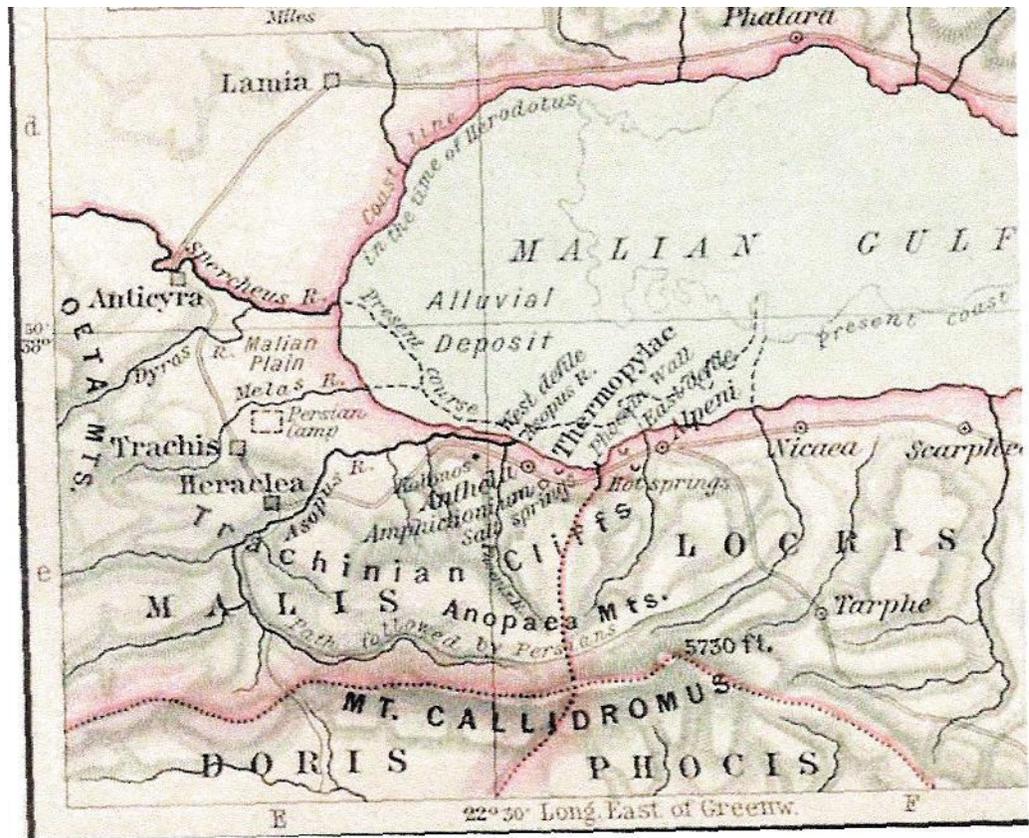
GREECE

Secure Supply-Lines to the South, Scorched Earth to the North

After arriving at the Hot Gates Leonidas got busy repairing the ancient Phokian Wall just behind the narrowest part of the Pass, behind which most of the hoplites would encamp and be marshaled as the three-day battle progressed. It would act as a defensive backdrop between the walls of Mount Kallidromos on their left and the cliffs above the Ocean on their right flank. An immediate supply dump was created behind this rebuilt Phokian Wall, with their main supply base being in the village of Alpeni a fair distance behind his lines. There was a very fertile farming valley between the Asopus River all the way north past the River Spercheius to the town of Lamia and beyond. Leonidas, wishing to deny the enemy any comforts in the way of supplies and fresh foodstuffs he could commandeer, raided the valley the night after his arrival, taking all the grain and cattle he could, and then burning all the farms and fields, even cutting down all the trees. Xerxes would take no comfort on the land, and would have to rely on his supply ships for immediate sustenance beyond what they carried with them. And these supply ships would be denied access to the Gulf of Malia by the Greek fleet at Artemisium. The next problem Leonidas faced was a tactical one. All defensive military lines can, eventually be turned. The Persians, at some point in time, would find a way to circumvent his defensive hoplite line at the Pass, and then hit his forces from both ends, frontally and at his back (just like Xerxes was trying to do with his 200 triremes heading around the southern end of Euboea). The very name of the mountains making up his left-hand defensive line gave it away. Kallidromos means in Greek "Beautiful Running Track." This trail started at the Asopus River and ran along the tops of the Kallidromos mountains and then led down to the road between the village of Alpeni and the Phokian Wall. Since the Phokian contingent of 1,000 hoplites knew of this path which Xerxes could use to circumvent Leonidas' line of battle, he dispatched the entire Phokian contingent to guard the path at a point somewhere up on the mountains, and if engaged, to hold the Persians off and send word back that his line was being turned from the rear. It would have been good if Leonidas could have spared a few Spartiates to add a degree of professionalism to the Phokian contingent, but he couldn't spare one of these highly trained professional soldiers. They were all needed to help officer the 4,000 to 5,000 less professional Greek hoplites making up his main defensive battle line. The men of Phokis were very familiar with this path---the trouble is as Bradford Ernle so aptly put it, "the dog did not bark at night."

14th August 480BC, Xerxes' massive army arrives

Xerxes army finally arrived, setting up camp in the valley the village of Trachis is located in, between the Rivers Spercheius and Asopus. It took Xerxes' army about four days to come up and regroup. Xerxes sent heralds to the Greek lines to tell the defenders that they could go in peace if they laid down their arms. Leonidas' answer is classic. He said in his booming voice, **“Tell Xerxes he can come and get them.”**



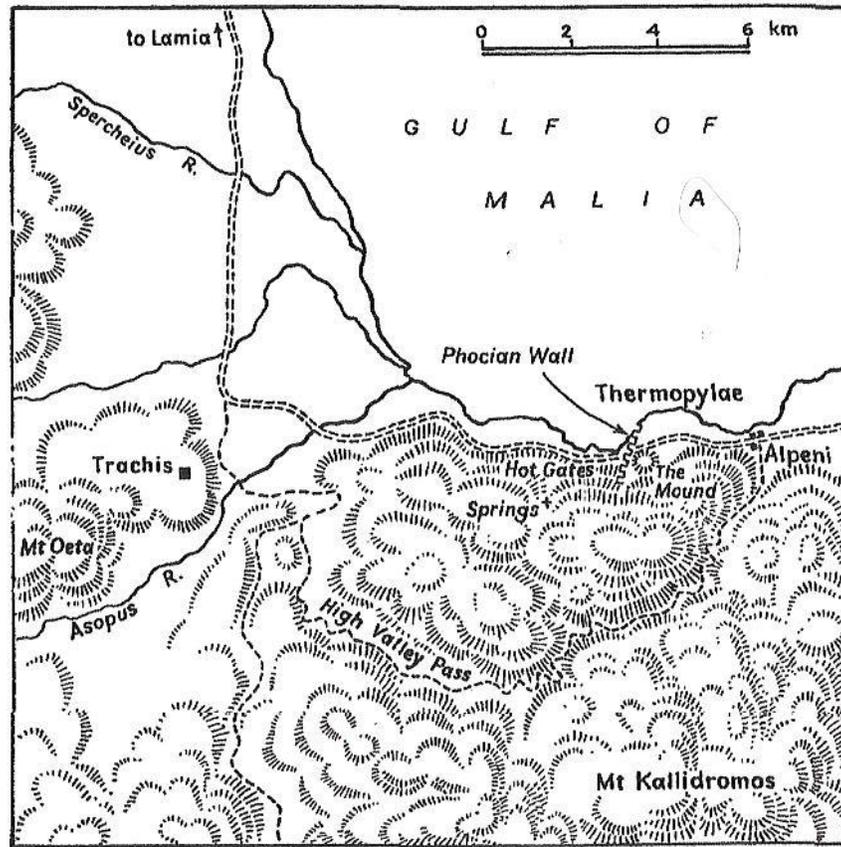
...Herodotus tells the story...

“During the conference Xerxes sent a horseman to find out the strength of the Greek force....The Persian approached the camp and made a survey of all that he could see [evidence enough that the heralds were never allowed behind the Phokian wall] and to observe what the soldiers were doing. This was not, of course, all the Greek force, for he could not make out the troops behind

the reconstructed and guarded wall. Nevertheless, he took careful note of those troops who were stationed outside the wall. At that time they happened to be Spartans, some of whom were stripped for exercise while others were combing their [long] hair. He watched them in astonishment and took due note of their numbers, and then rode back at leisure. No one attempted to pursue him and indeed, no one took the slightest notice of him.”

This “laconic” behavior must have amazed the Persians (and that very word “laconic” comes from the very name Lakedaemonian). Demaratus must have been really concerned at this point. Demaratus was an exiled Spartan general-king who was now one of Xerxes main advisors on all things having to do with Greek military matters. Herodotus tells us he said to Xerxes:

“My Lord, I only try and tell the truth when in your presence. You mocked me before, but please hear me again. These men are making ready for the coming battle and they are determined to contest our entrance at the Pass. It is normal behaviour for the Spartans to groom their hair carefully before they prepare themselves to face death. I can assure you on one point: if these men can be defeated and others of them who are still at home, then there is no one else in the whole world who will dare to lift a hand, or stand against you.”
[ie you are about to face the toughest, most fearsome army in the whole world.] [Herodotus]



3 THERMOPYLAE

The tactical ground explained—"the dance floor"

"Lizard Stone, so named for a particular fearless fellow of that species who took his sun thereupon, stood farthest forward of the Phokian Wall, closest to the Narrows, perhaps a hundred and fifty feet from the actual mouth of the pass. It had been determined by trial with our own men that a thousand of the foe, densely packed, could fit between this demarcation and the Narrows. A thousand, Leonidas had ordered, will be invited to the dance. There, at Lizard Stone, they will be engaged and their advance checked.

Crown Stone, second of the three and another hundred feet rearward of Lizard, defined the line at which each relief detachment would marshal, immediately before being hurled into the fray.

Lion Stone, rearmost of the three and directly in front of the Wall, marked the waiting line---the runner's chute, at which each relief unit would marshal, leaving enough space between itself and those actually fighting for the rear ranks of the combatants to maneuver, to give ground if necessary, to rally, for one flank to

support another and for the wounded to be withdrawn.” [*Gates of Fire*, Pressfield, p.58]

Tactical advantage

“Remember that the Persians most formidable weapons, his cavalry and his multitudes of archers and slingers, are rendered impotent here by the terrain. That is why we chose this site. The enemy can get no more than a dozen men at a time through the Narrows and mass no more than a thousand before the Wall. We have four thousand. We outnumber him four to one.” ... “War is work, not mystery.”

Early tactics

“It made further sense, so the Greeks surmised, that when making trial of an enemy for the first time, a prudent general would not commit the flower of his troops—in His Majesty’s case his own Ten Thousand, the Persian household guard known as the Immortals—but rather hold these elite in reserve against the unexpected. In fact, this was the selfsame strategy adopted by Leonidas and the allied commanders. These kept the Spartans back, choosing to honor, after much debate and discussion, the warriors of Thespieae. These were granted first position and now, on the morning of the fifth day, stood formed in their ranks, sixty-four shields across, upon the “dance floor” formed by the Narrows at the apex, the mountain wall on one side, the cliffs dropping to the gulf on the other and the reconstructed Phokian Wall at the rear.

This, the field of slaughter, comprised an obtuse triangle whose greatest depth lay along the southern flank, that which was anchored by the mountain wall. At this end the Thespians were drawn up eighteen deep. At the opposing end, alongside the drop-off to the sea, their shields were staggered to a depth of ten. This force of the men of Thespieae totaled approximately seven hundred.

Immediately to their rear, atop the Wall, stood the Spartans, Philiassians and Mycenaean, to a total of six hundred. Behind these every other allied contingent was likewise drawn up, all in full battle *panoplia*... [*Gates of Fire*, Steven Pressfield, p.61]

Evening of the 17th August 480BC

On or around the 17th of August 480BC, Themistocles having heard from Scyllias the Greek diver in what mess the Persian fleet was after the 3-day Hellespenter, they being scattered all along the coast in various separate anchorages, he decided it was high time to take the measure of the Persian fleet. Now no self-respecting

trierarch of a trireme would dare do battle at night, so Themistocles set out with his fleet in full battle-order in the late afternoon. This was so that if they got in trouble they could duck out under cover of darkness, returning to their base at Artemisium. As the Greek fleet cruised up the coast it lured out small disunited contingents of the Persian fleet, who couldn't believe such a small Greek fleet was coming against their Armada of 650 triremes (now 450, minus 50 because of the 3-day storm, and with the 200 sailing around Euboea to the south). It was still 4 to 1 in favor of the Persians. But the entire Persian fleet was not coming out to meet the Greek Fleet all in one well-ordered fleet of warships. The Greeks managed to sink a number of Persian warships before their whole fleet mustered out in battle array. Then the Persians tried an encircling movement called the "*Periplous*", used to constrict the Greek fleet, causing it to run afoul of themselves. But then the Greeks formed their fleet into a tight circle (bows facing outward, sterns tight in together)---called the "*Kuklos*" in Greek, I call it the "death-blossom." All at once, when a signal is given, each Greek trireme "explodes" outward striking the nearest enemy ship. When the Greek fleet returned to Artemisium that night they had sunk a number of Persian ships and taken 30 captive, boosting their own number of ships by 30. On land Xerxes was growing anxious for a naval victory so that his supply ships could come into the Bay of Malia with replenishments, seeing he had moved his hordes into a valley where Leonidas had practiced a scorched earth policy. It was the 18th August 480BC when he decided to move his forces against the Greeks holding the Pass at Thermopylae. He was going to try to overwhelm them with sheer numbers. But Leonidas had chosen his defensive battle-line well, in an area where Xerxes could not deploy the vast numbers of his army. The Medes under Tigranes were ordered onto "Leonidas' Dance Floor" first. What happened next is truly amazing, but quite ordinary for the Spartan warrior. What follows are some major quotes taken from Steven Pressfield's ***The Gates of Fire*** and Bradford Ernlie's ***Thermopylae***. I couldn't even attempt to describe for you what they did in their superb books about this battle at the Hot Gates, Thermopylae.

The Battle---Day 1

Just before the battle begins

Steven Pressfield carefully studied both Spartan armour and battle tactics, as well as Herodotus' description of the battle to write this astounding description of how it must have been that first day of battle. He literally puts you on the battlefield with Leonidas and

the Spartiates, and the other Greek hoplites. Let's read what he had to say about it. "The Spartans had neither moved nor made a sound. They waited patiently in their scarlet-cloaked ranks, neither grim nor rigid, but speaking quietly to each other words of encouragement and cheer, securing the final preparation for actions they had rehearsed hundreds of times in training and performed dozens and scores more in battle." [p.18]...the spears of the first three ranks snapped down from the vertical into the attack. Words cannot convey the impact of awe and terror produced upon the foe, any foe, by this seemingly uncomplex maneuver, called in Lakedaemon "spiking it" or "palming the pine," so simple to perform on the parade ground and so formidable under conditions of life and death. To behold it executed with such precision and fearlessness, no man surging forward out of control nor hanging back in dread, none edging right into the shadow of his rankmate's shield, but all holding solid and unbreakable, tight as the scales on a serpent's flank, the heart stopped in awe, the hair stood straight up upon the neck and shivers coursed powerfully the length of the spine. As when some colossal beast, brought to bay by the hounds, wheels in his fury, bristling with rage and baring its fangs, and plants himself in the power and fearlessness of his strength, so did the bronze and crimson phalanx of the Lakedaemonions now snap as one into its mode of murder." [*Gates of Fire*, Steven Pressfield, p.20]

Day 1, 18 August 480BC
The battle begins, a typical battle--How the Spartan
Threshing Engine of Death works

"As disordered as were the ranks of the enemy, so held the Spartans' intact and cohesive. Their forerank did not charge wildly upon the foe, flailing like savages, nor did they advance with the stolid precision of the parade ground. Rather they surged, in unison, like a line of warships on the ram. I had never appreciated how far beyond the interleaved bronze of the *promachoi's* shields the murderous iron of their eight-footers could extend. These punched and struck, overhand, driven by the full force of the right arm and shoulder, across the upper rim of the shield, not just the spears of the front-rankers, but those of the second and even the third, extending over their mates' shoulders to form a murderous thrashing engine that advanced like a wall of murder." [pp.21-22, *Gates of Fire*, Pressfield]

The result

“...the eye found the center, where the slaughter had achieved its most savage concentration. Here the earth was rent and torn as if a thousand span of oxen had assaulted it all day with the might of their hooves and the steel of their ploughs’ deep-churning blades. The chewed-up dirt, dark with piss and blood...Bodies sprawled like a carpet upon the earth, mounded in places two and three deep.” [p.24] [At Thermopylae, the bodies of the Persians would end up being 10 to 20 deep, forming tall mounds of dead hacked bodies from this milling machine of death.] [p37, *Gates of Fire*, Pressfield]

The Battle at the Hot Gates, how one battle-line relieves another

“The Spartans struck overhead with their spears, again and again into the faces and gorges of the enemy. The Medes’ armament was that of skirmishers, of lightly armed warriors of the plains, whose role was to strike swiftly, from beyond range of the spear thrust, dealing death at a distance. This dense-packed phalanx warfare was hell on them. And yet they stood. Their valor was breathtaking, beyond reckless to the point of madness. It became sacrifice, pure and simple; the Medes gave up their bodies as if flesh itself were a weapon. In minutes the Spartans, and no doubt the Mycenaeans and the Philiassians as well, though I couldn’t see them, were beyond exhaustion, simply from killing. Simply from the arm’s thrust of the spear, the shoulder’s heave of shield, the thunder of blood through the veins and the hammering of the heart within the breast. The earth grew, not littered with enemies bodies, but piled with them. Stacked with them. Mounded with them...Now the slaughter in the forefront became man-to-man, with only the wildest semblence of rank and formation. The Spartans slew belly-to-belly with the murderously efficient thrust-and-draw of their short *xiphos* swords. “The middle-rankers of the Lakedaemonians surged into the bedlam, spears and shields still intact. But the Medes’ capacity for reinforcement seemed limitless; above the fray, one could glimpse the next thousand reinforcements thundering into the Narrows like a flood, with more myriads behind, and yet more after that. Despite the catastrophic magnitude of their casualties, the tide began to flow in the enemy’s favor. The weight of their masses alone began to buckle the Spartan line. The only thing that stopped the foe from swamping the Hellenes outright was that they couldn’t get enough men through the Narrows quickly enough; that, and the wall of Median bodies that now obstructed the confines like a landslide.”...Steady gentlemen.”...“The Thespaianians will only last a few more minutes. They’re exhausted from killing. It’s a grouse shoot. Fish in a net. Listen to me! When our turn comes, the enemy will be ready to

cave. I can hear him cracking now. Remember: we're going in for a boxer's round. In and out. Nobody dies. No heroes. Get in, kill all you can, then get out when the trumpets sound. Behind the Spartans, on the Wall, which had been filled with the third wave of Tegeates and Opountian Lokrians twelve hundred strong, the wail of the *sarpinx* cut the din. Out front, Leonidas raised his spear and tugged his helmet down. You could see Polynikes and the Knights advance to envelop him. The Thespaians' round was over. "Hats down!" Dienekes bellowed. "Cheeseplates up!" The Spartans came in frontally, eight deep, at a double interval, allowing the Thespaian rearward to withdraw between their files, man by man, one rank at a time. There was no order to it; the Thespaians just dropped from exhaustion; the Lakedaemonian tread rolled over them [obviously without hurting them]. When the Spartan *polmachoi*, the forerankers, got within three shields of the front, their spears began plunging at the foe over the allies' shoulders. Many of the Thespaians just dropped and let themselves be trampled; their mates pulled them to their feet once the line had passed over them." Everything Dienekes had said proved true. The Medes' shields were not only too light and too small, but their lack of mass prevented them from gaining purchase against the Hellenes' wide and weighty, bowl-shaped *aspides*. The enemy's shields slid off the convex fronts of the Greeks', deflecting up and down, left and right as the metallic facings of the Greeks' shields collided with the wall of wicker thrown up by the Medes. The enemy reeled and staggered. The Thespaians' spears rose and plunged. In an instant the killing zone was obscured within a maelstrom of churning dust." [portions pp. 53-57 *Gates of Fire*, by Steven Pressfield]

The battle continues, day one

"...These closed ranks and lapped shields, shadow-to-shadow. A wall of bronze rose before the scrambled mass, buying precious instants for those who found themselves in the rear to re-form and re-marshal, surging into position in second, third, fourth ranks, and take on the station's role and rally to it. Dienekes had ever declared the supreme accomplishment of the warrior: to perform the commonplace under far-from-commonplace-conditions...with order, and self-confidence, each man knowing his role and rising to it, drawing strength from him as he draws it from them; the warrior in these moments finds himself lifted as if by the hand of a god. He cannot tell where his being leaves off and that of his comrade beside him begins. In that moment the phalanx forms a unity so dense and all-divining that it performs not merely at the level of a machine or engine of war, but, surpassing that, to the

state of a single organism, a beast of one blood and heart...From where I found myself, just behind the rear-rankers, I could see the warriors feet, at first churning in disarray for purchase on the blood and gore-beslimed earth, now settle into a unison, a grinding relentless cadence. The pipers' wail pierced the din of the bronze and fury, sounding the beat which was part music and part pulse of the heart. With a heave, the warriors' shield-side foot pressed forward, bows-on to the enemy; now the spear-side foot, planted at a ninety-degree angle, dug into the mud; the arch sank as every stone of the man's weight found purchase upon the insole, and, with left shoulder planted into the inner bowl of the shield whose broad outer surface was pressed into the back of the comrade before him, he summoned all force of tissue and tendon to surge and heave upon the beat. Like ranked oarsmen straining upon the shaft of a single oar, the unified push of the men's exertions propelled the ship of the phalanx forward into the tide of the enemy. Up front the eight-footers of the Spartans thrust downward upon the foe, driven by each man's spear arm in an overhand strike, across the upper rim of his shield, toward the enemies' face, throat and shoulders. The sound of shield against shield was no longer the clash and clang of initial impact, but deeper and more terrifying, a grinding metallic mechanism like the jaws of some unholy mill of murder...each warrior's lungs pumped only for breath; chests heaved like foundry bellows, sweat coursed onto the ground in runnels, while the sound which arose from the throats of the contending masses was like nothing so much as a myriad quarrymen, each harnessed to the twined rope of the sled, groaning and straining to drag some massive stone across the resisting earth. War is work, Dienekes had always taught, seeking to strip it of its mystery. The Medes, for all their valor, all their numbers and all the skill they possessed in the type of open-plain warfare with which they had conquered all Asia, had not served their apprenticeship in this, Hellene-style heavy-infantry combat. Their files had not trained to hold line of thrust and gather themselves to heave in unison; the ranks had not drilled endlessly as the Spartans had in maintaining dress and interval, cover and shadow. Amid the manslaughter the Medes became a mob. They shoved at the Lakedaemonians like sheep fleeing a fire in a shearing pen, without cadence or cohesion, fueled only by courage, which glorious though it was, could not prevail against the disciplined and cohesive assault which now pressed upon them. The luckless foemen in front had nowhere to hide. They found themselves pinned between the mob of their own fellows trampling them from behind and the Spartan spears plunging upon them from the fore." [*Gates of Fire*, Steven Pressfield, pp. 67-70] "In each crush of the phalanx each man could sense the sea

change as the rush of emergency passed like a wave, replaced by the steadying, settling sensation of fear passing over, composure returning and the drill settling to the murderous work of war....Somehow the warriors sensed that the Spartan left, along with the main face, had broken the Medes. A cheer swept laterally like a storm front, rising and multiplying from the throats of the Lakedaemonians. The enemy knew it too. They could feel their line caving in." [p.71]...The Spartan officer advanced into plain view of the allied reserves in position along the Wall. He stripped his helmet so the commanders could see his face, then pumped thrice with his horizontally held spear. "Advance! Advance!" With a cry that curdled the blood, they did." [ibed. p.73]

the Persian archers

"To the rear of the routed lancers stood their brothers, the Median archers. These were drawn up in still-ordered ranks, twenty deep, each Bowman in station behind a body-height shield of wicker, its base anchored to the earth with a spike of iron. A no-man's-land of a hundred feet separated the Spartans from the wall of bowmen. The foe now began firing directly into their own lancers, the last pockets of the valiant who yet grappled with the Lakedaemonian advance. The Medes were shooting their own men in the back...Of all moments of supreme valor which unfolded throughout this long grisly day, that which the allies upon the Wall now beheld surpassed all, nor could any who witnessed it place any sight beneath heaven alongside it as equal. As the Spartan front routed the last remaining lancers, its forerankers emerged into the open, exposed to what was now the nearly point-blank fire of Median archers. Leonidas himself, at his age having survived a melee of murder whose physical expenditure alone would have pressed beyond the limits of endurance even the stoutest youth in his prime, yet summoned the steel to stride to the fore, shouting the order to form up and advance. This command the Lakedaemonians obeyed, if not with the precision of the parade ground, then with the discipline and order beyond imagining under the circumstances. Before the Medes had time to loose their second broadside, they found themselves face-to-face with a front of sixty-plus shields, the *lambdas* of Lakedaemon obscured beneath horrific layers of mud, gore and blood which ran in rivers down the bronze and dripped from the leather aprons pended beneath the *aspides*, the oxhide skirts which protected the warriors' legs from precisely the fusillade into which they now advanced. Heavy bronze greaves defended the calves; above each shield rim extended only the armored crowns of the helmets, eye

slits alone exposed, which overtopping these waved the front-to-back horsehair plumes of the warriors and the transverse crests of the officers.

The wall of bronze and crimson advanced into the Median fire. Cane arrows ripped with murderous velocity into the Spartan lines. Possessed by terror, an archer will always shoot high; you could hear these overshot shafts hailing and clattering as they ripped at crown height past the Spartan foreranks and tore into the forest of spears held at the vertical; then the missiles tumbled, spent, among the armored ranks. Bronzehead bolts caromed off bronze-faced shields with the sound like a hammer on an anvil, their furious drumming punctuated by the concussive *thwack* of a dead-on shot penetrating metal and oak so the head lanced through the shield like a nail piercing a board...“The densely packed ranks advanced not in a mobbed disordered charge shouting like savages, but dead silent, sober, almost stately, with a dread deliberateness in time to the pipers’ keening wail.”...Now come a thousand arrows. The sound is like a wail. There is no space within, no interval of haven. Solid as a mountain, impenetrable; it sings with death. And when those arrows are launched not skyward in long-range arcing trajectory to bear upon the target driven by the weight of their own fall, but instead upon the target driven flush from the chute of the bowman’s grip, so that their flight is level, flat, loosed at such velocity and such close range that the archer does not trouble even to calculate drop into his targeting equation; this is the rain of iron, hellfire at its purest. Into this the Spartans advanced. They were told later by the allies observing from the Wall that at this instant, as the spears of the Spartans’ front ranks lowered in unison from the vertical plane of advance into the leveled position of attack and the serried phalanx lengthened stride to assault the foe at the double, at this point His Majesty, looking on, had leapt to his feet in terror for his army. The Spartans knew how to attack wicker. They had practiced against it in countless repetitions against squires and helots holding wicker practice shields. The enemy line must be struck, shock troop style, and overwhelmed, bowled over; it had to be hit so hard and with such concentrated force that its front-rankers caved and toppled, one rank backward upon another, like plateware in a cabinet when an earthquake hits...Closed breast-to-breast with the Spartan shock troops, the foe’s bows were useless...The ground immediately to the rear of the Spartan advance, as expected, was littered with the trampled forms of the enemy dead and wounded. But there was a new wrinkle. The Medes had been overrun with such speed and force that numbers of them, far from inconsiderable, had survived intact. These now rose and attempted to rally, only to find themselves assaulted

almost at once by the massed ranks of the allied reserves who were already advancing in formation to reinforce and relieve the Spartans...The Medes had cracked. The Tegeates and Opountian Lokrians surged in reinforcements through the ranks of the spent Spartans, pressing the assault upon the reeling enemy. It was the allies turn now. "Put the steel to 'em boys!" one among the Spartans cried as the wave of allied ranks advanced ten deep from the rear and both flanks closed into a massed phalanx before the warriors of Sparta, who at last drew up, limbs quaking with fatigue, and collapsed against one another and upon the earth."...For the first interval in what seemed an eternity, the dread of imminent extinction lifted. The Lakedaemonians dropped to the earth where they stood, on knees first, then knees and elbows, then simply sprawling, on sides and on backs, collapsing against one another, sucking breath in gasping labored need. Eyes stared vacantly, as if blind. None could summon strength to speak. Weapons drooped of their own weight, in fists so cramped that the will could not compel the muscles to release their frozen grasp. Shields toppled to earth, bowl-down and defamed; exhausted men collapsed into them face-first and could not find strength even to turn their faces to the side to breathe." [*Gates of Fire*, Steven Pressman, pp.75-78] "The wounded enemy, in numbers uncountable, groaned and cried out, writhing amid piles of limbs and severed body parts so intertwined one could not distinguish individual men, but the whole seemed a Gorgon-like beast of ten thousand limbs, some ghastly monster spawned by the cloven earth and now draining itself, fluid by fluid, back into that chthonic cleft which had given it birth. Along the face of the mountain the stone glistened scarlet to the height of a man's knee." [ibed. Pressfield, p.80]

Round two, day one, the Immortals

Leonidas' presumed speech

Tigranes and his Medes had had their chance and lost, their tattered remnants withdrawn from the battlefield, Leonidas' dance floor. What was now drawing up before Leonidas and his men were Xerxes' chosen Guard, the Ten Thousand Immortals. In a short speech to his men Leonidas probably told them that these were Xerxes' beloved, the Crème de crème of his fighting forces. "Xerxes does not want to lose these special warriors, boys. Kill 1,000 and the rest will crack, Xerxes will withdraw them. Can each one of you kill four of them for me?" And that is just exactly what the Spartans did. Herodotus memorably describes one of the Spartan battle-tactics that caused havoc among the Immortals.

“One of the feints they used was to pretend to turn and flee all at once. Seeing them apparently taking to their heels, the barbarians would pursue them with a great clatter and shouting; whereupon, just as the Persians were almost upon them, the Spartans would wheel and face them, and in this about-turn they would inflict innumerable casualties upon them. In doing this, the Spartans had some loses too, but only a few. In the end, since they could make no headway towards winning the pass, whether they attacked in companies or whatever they did, the Persians broke off the engagement and withdrew. It is said that Xerxes, who was watching the battle from his throne, three times sprang to his feet in fear for his army.”

The day was ending, Day 1. The Spartans and their allies could withdraw behind the Phokian Wall, dress their wounds, eat and get some well-deserved rest for Day 2, which was bound to be a repetition of Day 1.

Evening of Day 1--An Ill Wind for the Persians Blew From the South, back to the naval engagement--18th August 480BC

Bradford Ernle in his *Thermopylae* gives us this account: “The night, too was to prove a savage one. Yet another storm blew up, ‘with torrential rain and with loud thunder from Mount Pelion.’...When the Persian task-force had been despatched to round Euboea and cut off the Athenians from the south the *first* storm had blown over. No doubt it was reckoned, on a good average estimate of Aegean conditions, that several days or more of clear weather might follow upon this first hard gale. Herodotus remarks, as with some surprise, that ‘it was the middle of Summer’—that is, that it was a very strange thing to happen...The wind that now blew up, with its accompanying torrential rainfall, was a typical sirocco from the south-east. The result was yet another disaster for the Persians at sea. (Rightly had the Delphic oracle advised the Athenians to ‘pray to the winds.’ [And Yahweh, God of Israel was right there to answer the prayer, for he had prophecied through his Prophet Daniel that 130 years later, a man named Alexander the Great would sweep down across the Mediterranean Sea and conquer the mighty Persian Empire. The Greeks must, as unlikely as it looked, win these battles and win this war. With his help, and through Sparta whom he had raised up, and Themistocles, they would. Next act of God, the Persian fleet must be whittled down.] The 200 ship force which, showing remarkable speed, had nearly rounded Euboea was caught off the

area known as ‘the Hollows’ near Carystus, at the very southern end of the island. A few hours more and they would have been into the Euboea Channel but, as it happened, they could not have been in a worse place when the roaring southerly struck. ‘It found them in the open sea—and miserable was their end. The storm and rain caught them...and every ship, unable to see where they were going for the rain, was forced to drive before the wind and ran upon the rocks.’ ...But of one thing there can be absolutely no doubt; they never rounded Euboea. The southerly gale finally put paid to the clever, but always risky stratagem of dispatching the 200 ships to take the Athenians in the rear. Of this we can be quite certain, for the fifty-three Athenian ships which had been guarding the approaches by Chalcis picked up some of the storm-shattered advance-guard of the Persians, interrogated them and, having discovered the extent of the disaster, the Athenians promptly sailed north to join Themistocles at Artemisium...The southerly that had wreaked havoc on the enemies boosted the Athenians up the Euripus Channel to give Themistocles fifty-three new vessels at the very moment that he most needed them. Emboldened by this great good news the reinforced Athenian fleet (and this time, one imagines, there were no protests from Eurybiades) proceeded to adopt the same hit-and-run tactics they had found fruitful before.” [*Thermopylae*, Bradford Ernle, pp. 130-131]

End of Day 1, Artemisium

This very same storm coming from the south (which was unusual) that had just destroyed the 200 Persian triremes that were attempting to round the southern tip of Euboea left the Persian fleet in the north huddled around Aphetæ. At this moment Themistocles and his naval commanders came out of the blue and struck the unexpecting Persians, and again withdrawing as darkness fell. It was a small victory, but the Greek navy was learning how to take on the Persian navy, and learning how to use their slower but more devastating triremes against the lighter, faster and more maneuverable Persian ships. This marked the end of Day 1.

19th August, Xerxes army, Day Two at Thermopylae

Bradford Ernle describes day two in the Pass: “On the morning of this day, 19 August, Xerxes threw in fresh crack troops, encouraging them with lavish promises of the rewards that would be theirs if they succeeded, but dire warnings of what would happen to them if they failed. He had calculated also that since

the Greeks 'were so few in number, they would be too exhausted and too worn down by wounds to put up much of a resistance.' The Great King was to be bitterly disappointed. The Greeks, as we have seen—with the exception of the Phokians guarding the pass—were organised in divisions according to their states [officered by the 300 Spartiates, of course] and, in the intervals between the attacks, were able to replace the narrow front line with men who had come up fresh (or as much so as possible) from behind. To judge from a later observation of Herodotus, it seems likely that even by this second day the Persian morale was so low that they had to be driven forward by the whips of overseers (military police have never been over-popular!). In the confusion of those in front trying to turn back from the bronze wall bristling with spears and those at the back running forward to escape the blows across their shoulders the chaos was complete. Yard upon yard in front of the Greek line was piled with slain and wounded while the sickly sweet smell of death was everywhere on the air. 'So, finding that they were doing no better than on the previous day, the Persians again withdrew.' [*Thermopylae*, Bradford Ernle, p. 132] By the end of Day 2 Xerxes is getting worried. He can't even get supply ships into the Bay of Malia to resupply his army, and this Spartan king's army is chewing through his army like a road-grader chews up tar roads and spits out the pieces at the other end in chunks. Something's got to break, and up to this point it's been his army that's been breaking.

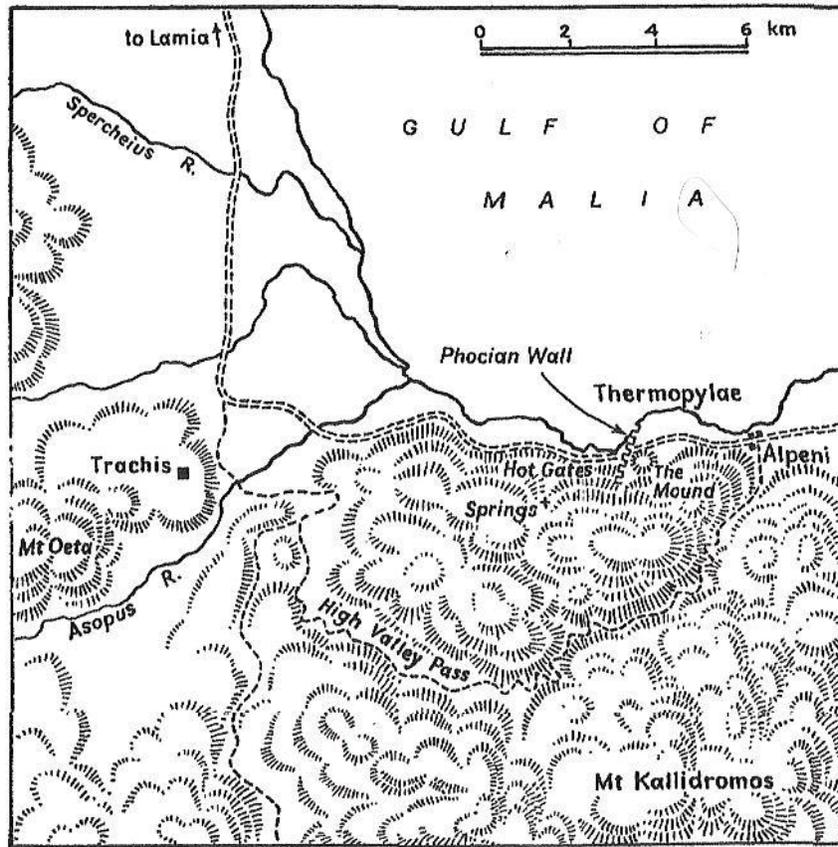
Ephialtes and over the mountain

At this gloomy moment for the Great King Xerxes, in walks a Greek whose name is etched into the Greek consciousness as the word that is listed as a synonym in Greek dictionaries for the word "traitor." Ephialtes knew exactly where to get on "the Beautiful Running Track" at the Asopus River, and where exactly to head down off it to the road between the Phokian Wall and the town of Alpeni. Immediately, without wasting a moment, Xerxes summoned Hydarnes, commanding general of the Immortals. This mountain trek was well-suited to the type training and warfare the Immortals were used to. They waited until after dark to embark, so as to avoid being seen by any observant Greek scouts. As they were moving swiftly along the path they came upon the Phokian contingent of hoplites---sleeping, with their armour off! In a hail of arrows being fired by the advancing Persians, the Phokians all fled to a nearby mountaintop. They were quite literally caught with their pants down. Ephialtes himself led Hydarnes and the Immortals as they circumvented Leonidas' forces. **"By this path, then," Herodotus continues, "having crossed the Asopus, the**

Persians marched all night. They had on their right the mountains of the Oeitians and on their left those of the Trachinians. By the time they reached to top of the mountain dawn was just breaking.” One deserter, an Ionian Greek by the name of Tyrrhastidas, escaped and told Leonidas he was about to be outflanked by Hydarnes and the Immortals, who would be coming off the Mountain around mid-day.

Leonidas' last speech to his men

With the knowledge that Hydarnes and his Immortals were about to circumvent their position Leonidas made a crucial decision to send all but his chosen 300 Spartiate Knights back home to Greece and the Isthmus line at Corinth. The Thespians (700 hoplites) and Thebans (400 hoplites) decided to stay and fight alongside Leonidas and his 300 Spartiates. Leonidas probably would have said something like this in his booming voice, for all his beloved Spartiates to hear: “If we cut and run now, men, regardless of the glorious victories we have achieved up to this point in time, everything we’ve accomplished up to this point in time will be looked upon as a big defeat---demonstrating to the rest of all Hellas the utter futility of resisting Xerxes and his Persian Hordes. But if we stand and fight, and die with honor, we will transform defeat into victory. Our allied brothers I am sending home, with their precious knowledge of how to fight and defeat the Persian. The victory will be theirs, nor ours. We must at all costs cover their retreat south. If we fail to do this, Xerxes’ cavalry will sweep past us through the Gates and run down our comrades-in-arms before they’ve gotten ten miles. We must tie up the enemy which will be coming at us from both sides, for as long as we can. We must, according to our Laws of Lycurgus, hold and die.”



3 THERMOPYLAE

Raid on the Great King's Tent (evening Day 2)

According to Diodorus, Leonidas did one other thing. He carried out a raid on Xerxes' tent, probably traveling along a mountaintop pass like the one the Immortals were using, maybe the same one. This probably did occur, but Leonidas would not have gone on this raid---the laws of Lycurgus wouldn't have allowed it. He had to stay with his men, to stand and die. But he would have dispatched a band of Spartan Rangers to attempt the raid on Xerxes tent to assassinate him. Rumour has it they did succeed, but Xerxes tent was like the size of a small town, and he was never located. As we'll see, Xerxes has to make it back to Susa in Persia, alive and well, and before December 480BC. Two of his brothers never made it back alive, they were killed by Leonidas' men in battle. In December Xerxes, unbeknownst to him, had a date with a beautiful Jewish princess named Esther. But that's getting ahead of the story. The force that would remain probably didn't number more than 2,000 (400 Thebans, 700 Thespians and 300 Spartiate Knights, not counting the losses they had suffered). Hydarnes and his Immortals would be coming off the "Beautiful

Running Track” in late morning to early afternoon. The Spartans, with their great helmets placed near them found time to groom their long hair before the battle---something they always did. Leonidas probably affectionately said to them: “Have a good breakfast, men, for we dine in Hades!” It was probably between 9 and 10am when Xerxes ordered his troops to cross the plain leading to the Hot Gates. Within a few hours Hydarnes and the Immortals would be coming around the rear of the Pass, outflanking Leonidas. Leonidas, in a move designed to kill as many Persians as possible while he yet had time, ordered his men to move out into the wider part of the Pass, so as to engage as many of the Persian foe as was possible. As a result, multiple thousands more would die before he and his men were outflanked from the rear by Hydarnes. Leonidas wanted to send a last message to Sparta. He asked one of his Spartiates but the man answered him “I came here to fight not to act as a messenger.” The king turned to another who answered him “I shall do my duty better by staying here, and in that way the news will be better.” It is thought that a Helot finally took Leonidas’ last dispatch back to Sparta.

Second evening, final decisions

“It is said that Leonidas himself dismissed them in order to spare their lives. As for the Spartans it would be not in their code for them to desert the post which they had been entrusted to guard.”

Last stand of the 300

“The first attack now developed and ‘many of the invaders fell, while the company commanders behind them drove them forward, plying their whips relentlessly.’...‘Many of them were driven into the sea and drowned, while still more were trampled under foot by their own comrades. No one could count the number of dead.’ As the attack carried on relentlessly, many of the Greeks’ spears were broken, and it was now that they drew their swords [Xiphos] and came up hand to hand against the enemy. Helmets and shields dented and cut about, the brave plumes slashed away, the Spartans still fought on. ‘During this part of the action Leonidas was killed, having fought most gallantly...A savage battle now developed over the king’s body, the Persians being determined to seize so valuable a trophy while the Spartans were even more determined to deny it to them. Four times the Greeks drove the

enemy off, finally managing to drag the king back within their ranks. Among the many Persian dead 'of high distinction' who fell fighting over the body of Leonidas were two brothers of Xerxes, sons of Darius. Then came the moment which the Greeks had long been anticipating, the cry from a sentry at their rear: 'Here they come!' Hydarnes and the Immortals were in sight." Herodotus tells of the very last stand:

'They drew back again into the narrow neck of the Pass and formed themselves into a compact body all together—with the exception of the Thebans—and took up their stance on the Mound. This is the hillock at the entrance where now stands the stone lion in memory of the Lion's Son. In this place they defended themselves to the last, with their swords, if they still had them, and if not even with their hands and teeth. Then the Persians from the front, piling over the ruined wall, and those who closed in from behind, overwhelmed them with missiles.'

"The last word is significant; in Greek literally, 'thrown things,' presumably arrows, javelins and even lumps of rock. To the very last the Persians kept their distance from these dying and indomitable men. The Spartan Dienikes (he who had made the remark about 'fighting in the shade' if the arrows of the invaders darkened the sun) is especially singled out for praise, as well as two Spartan brothers, Alpheus and Maron, and above all a certain Thespian with the Bacchanalian name of Dithyrambos. The Thespians, like the Spartans, died to a man...By midday it must have been over. Xerxes was now free to inspect the battlefield, noting as he did so, the immense number of men the Spartans and their allies had cost him [20,000 dead on the Persian side]. He ordered them to be buried so that the troops following up behind would not suffer a loss of morale through the evidence of what a handful of Greeks could do..." [*Thermopylae*, Bradford Ernle, pp. 141-142]

Day Three, Corresponding Naval Engagement

The Persian army was through the Pass. A 30-oared cutter had been hanging around the shore at Thermopylae until the commander whose job it was to maintain liaison between Leonidas and Themistocles knew the battle at the Pass was lost. He then set out with all haste to inform Themistocles. The Persian fleet, probably under the coordinating orders of Xerxes, knowing the Pass would be turned by Hydarnes, ordered his fleet to gather together for a concerted attack against the Greek fleet at sea.

Day Three: Final Naval Battle at Artemisium---the Greeks hold their own against the Persian fleet

Bradford Ernle tells us in his *Thermopylae*: “It was essential to the Persian master-plan that the army and fleet should work in concert together and, once it was clear that the pass would be breached that day, the word had gone to the fleet to take action against the Greeks at Artemisium. The failure of the force sent to round Euboea and take them from the south had been a considerable setback; what was now needed was a major fleet action where the Persian superiority in numbers must, so it seemed, inevitably win the day. [Yeah, right] By now they will have completed their re-fitting and, even if it is correct that none of the Euboea squadron returned to join the fleet, the Persians still had a considerable edge in numbers over the Athenians and the allies. Allowing for losses on both sides, the Persians would still seem to have had some 450 ships (possibly more) while the Greeks, even after the squadron from the south with its 53 fresh triremes had joined them, can scarcely have had more than 300.” [probably closer to 200 Greek triremes]...the Persian objective must have been to clear the Greeks out of their way in order to secure the Euripus (the Euboea Channel) while correspondingly the Greek objective must have been to deny it to them. The Greeks will not have been ‘by Artemisium’ as Herodotus says, but farther west where they could oppose the enemy in the strait, most probably with their lead ships pointing towards the Gulf of Pagasae and their wings laid back so as to form a crescent-moon formation. At about noon—somewhere near the hour when the Spartans were making their last stand on the mound—the Persian fleet, having completed their preparations, moved out from Aphetæ. They were also in a crescent formation but, with their superiority of numbers, they will have been able to throw their wings *forward*, the object being to envelop the Greek wings and constrict the smaller fleet in upon itself. On that hot bright summer afternoon the initial collision must have exploded across the bay. Trireme met trireme head on, the great bronze rams crashing against one another like prehistoric beasts in combat, the forward oars snapping off as an enemy insinuated himself one side, and the marines on both sides standing ready to board, or fighting across the interlocked bows of their ships. As has been seen, at this stage in naval warfare, once the initial maneuvering was over and the ships had been engaged, what developed was a miniature land-battle between ship and ship...Nevertheless, things did not go all one way, for if they had, Artemisium would have gone on record as the Greek defeat that led to an over-all victory for Xerxes. As it was, a fact which is well

commemorated by Plutarch and Pindar, Artemisium—though something of a stalemate—had produced the desired effect of compelling the enemy to withdraw. ‘Both sides were glad when they parted and made all speed back to their moorings.’ Far from being pursued, the Greeks even seem to have found the time on the way back to their station to collect their dead from the water and to salvage some of the wreckage.” [*Thermopylae*, Bradford Ernle, pp. 144-145]

***With Defeat at the Hot Gates, the Army-Navy
Thermopylae-Artemisium Line becomes untenable***

“The Greeks found that the people of Euboea had decided on evacuation and, with this in mind, had driven their sheep down to the shore. Themistocles wasted no time, but told his men to ‘kill as many sheep as they pleased, for it was better that they should have them than the enemy.’ Wreckage was burned, great fires were lit for funeral pyres; at the same time, with practical sense, the sheep of the Euboeans were roasted to put heart into the exhausted oarsmen and the battle-weary marines. It was at the end of this hard-fought day while all were busy at their base that the news came in from Thermopylae. Habronichus, the trusted lieutenant of Themistocles, who had been acting as liaison officer between army and fleet, had waited by the pass until the last possible moment. When he saw that all was lost, he had slipped [anchor] and made off fast up the channel in his thirty-oared cutter. With Thermopylae lost, Artemisium to the north was no longer tenable. It was the end of the Themistoclean strategy of the land-sea defensive line to the north.” [ibed. p. 146]

***The Fleet Vacates Artemisium, Moves South to
Salamis---Xerxes Advances South***

Artemisium had been a training-ground for Themistocles’ Greek fleet, to prepare it for his Master-stroke of genius---Salamis. As Plutarch puts it,

‘how they would behave in the face of danger [and] that men who know how to come to close quarters and are determined to give battle have nothing to fear from mere numbers of ships, gaudily decorated figureheads, boastful shouts, or barbaric war-songs; they have simply to show their contempt for these distractions, engage the enemy hand to hand and fight it out to the bitter end.’

With the fall of the Hot Gates to the Persians, the Greek fleet's landward flank was exposed to Xerxes hostile forces, and the Thermopylae-Artemisium Defensive Line became untenable. Themistocles knew he had to move his fleet south through the Euripus Channel and on to Salamis Harbour as fast as he could go. He had to oversee the evacuation of Athens to the Island of Salamis with all haste, as well as get his fleet into Salamis Harbour and get repairs of the battle damage underway immediately. All this in preparation for Round Two of his Masterplan. There was no time to waste. In each ship, rowers were dead, oars ported, rams damaged and in some cases torn right off, planking around their bows opened up and leaking. The southerly flowing current of the Euripus Channel aided their retreat southward to Salamis.

Xerxes' fleet moves into a deserted Artemisium, but does not give immediate pursuit--21 August 480BC

On the next day as the sun rose the Persians learned that the Greek fleet had vacated Artemisium. So they sailed over, to find smoldering wreckage and campfires containing the roasted bones of Euboean sheep the Greek sailors had feasted on the night before, after their successful stand-off with the Persian fleet. The Persian fleet did not give immediate pursuit but instead effected needed repairs, the battle not having been a success for them, but instead more of a stalemate they were more than happy to break off from. Besides, Xerxes had invited all in his fleet who wanted to see the battlefield to come and see it for themselves, to see what the Great King does to those who dare oppose him. According to Herodotus (and this is a reliable figure) 20,000 Persians and their allies had died at the hands of Leonidas' hoplite allied Greek army. Xerxes had ordered the burial of all but 1,000 of the Persian dead while leaving all the Greeks unburied. He did not want his army or navy demoralized and so he played the propaganda game. Themistocles knew well how to play that propaganda game too. Every port city and town down the Euripus Channel where there was fresh water to be had he stopped his trireme and wrote in Greek this message to his Ionian Greek countrymen under Xerxes' control, who were manning 290 Ionian Greek triremes in Xerxes' Persian navy:

'The best thing for you to do is join us, but if this is impossible you should at least remain neutral. On the other hand, if you are under such constraint that you can do neither of these things, at least, when it comes to battle, remember we are of the same blood—that our

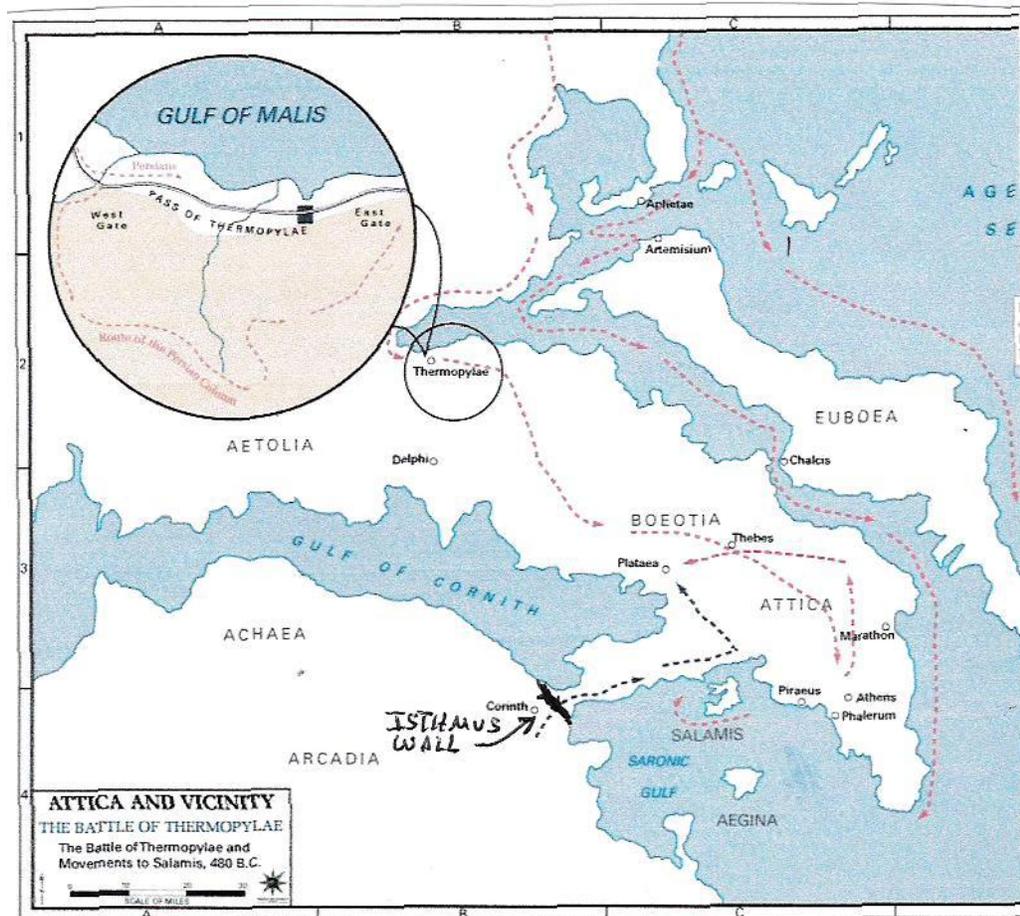
quarrel with the Persians originally began on your account—and make sure you fight badly.'

Xerxes' Advance

It did seem that it took Xerxes' massive army three or four days to get moving, chewing up precious time he could not afford to waste, due to the limited safe sailing time on the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. Thermopylae and Artemisium had thrown a very costly and critical time-delay into Xerxes invasion timetable. So three or four days after the fall of the Hot Gates Xerxes army got moving.

In Athens, panic city

Although Themistocles had set plans in motion earlier to evacuate Athens, many people had dragged their feet, never believing the fall of their city was imminent. Now they learned that a Spartan army, whose soldiers were the best and most fearsome in the world, had fallen, along with the death of their king, Leonidas. Everything that could float was used now as a conveyance to transport the remaining population of Athens to the Island of Salamis. Cleombrotus, younger brother of Leonidas, manned some 30,000 Peloponnesian hoplites at the defensive line they had agreed upon at the Isthmus of Corinth (to the west of Athens and Salamis).



Into Attica

Xerxes' army crossed over into Attica around the 30th of August, and Athens was taken around the 7th of September with the sacking and burning of the Acropolis. The population of Athens had evacuated just in time and were huddled around open fires as refuges on the island of Salamis. All the while the Greek admirals held conference after conference and debate after debate---to the utter frustration of Themistocles, who already knew exactly what needed doing, when and where. And he had known this for three years, when construction of those 100 heavy triremes had begun and been completed, paid for by that Greek silver-mine windfall discovery. Plutarch tells an anecdote which shows how high passions were running:

'Themistocles, however, opposed this plan and it was then that he uttered a remark which became famous. Eurybiades had said to him: 'You know, Themistocles, at

the games they thrash anybody who starts before the signal?’ To this Themistocles replied, ‘Yes, but they do not crown anybody who gets left at the post.’ At this point Eurybiades lifted up his staff of office as if to strike him. Themistocles, maintaining his self-possession, said: ‘You can hit me if you like, but still you must listen to me.’

The last speech of Themistocles carried real menace. Herodotus says Themistocles even went as far as to name the place where the Athenian population would relocate to---Siris in the Gulf of Taranto. He concluded his speech, according to Herodotus, with these words:

‘It is quite true that we have given up our houses and our city walls, because we did not choose to become enslaved for the sake of things that have no life or soul. But what we still possess is the greatest city in all Greece, our 200 ships of war, which are ready to defend you, if you are still willing to be saved by them. But if you run away and betray us, as you did once before, the Greeks will soon hear the news that the Athenians have found for ourselves as free a city and as fine a country as the one they have sacrificed.’

Herodotus now records the conclusion of his speech...:

‘Now for my plan: it will bring, if you adopt it, the following advantages; first, we shall be fighting in narrow waters, and there, with our inferior numbers, we shall win, provided things go as we may reasonably expect. Fighting in a confined space favours us but the open sea favours the enemy. Secondly, Salamis, where we have put our women and children, will be preserved and thirdly—for you the most important point of all—you will be fighting in defense of the Peloponnese by remaining here just as much as by withdrawing to the Isthmus—nor, if you have the sense to follow my advice, will you draw the Persian army to the Peloponnese. If we beat them at sea, as I expect we shall, they will not advance to attack you on the Isthmus, or come any further than Attica; they will retreat in disorder, and we shall gain by preservation of Megara, Aegina, and Salamis—where an oracle has already foretold our victory. Let a man lay his plans with due regard to common sense, and he will usually succeed.’

Within a night or two of the Acropolis burning the Greeks decided it would be wise to listen to Themistocles. These were their home-waters, and they knew every fathom of depth and every cable-length of distance, every shoal of rocks.

The Masterplan

1. The Persian army needed supplies, a steady flow of them. The Greeks had practiced a policy of scorched-earth in Attica. 2. Xerxes' fleet was now moored in Phaleron Bay (previously the main Greek Naval Base). Phaleron Bay is 4 to 5 miles to the east of Salamis Island and Harbour, where the entire Greek fleet is currently moored (repaired and ready for action). 3. Xerxes wants to move his army to the Isthmus of Corinth to the west of Salamis so that he can engage and conquer the remaining Greek armies and wrap up this opening phase of his major invasion of Europe before the nasty fall weather totally disables the movement of his 3,000 supply ships. 4. The Greek fleet is safely moored in Salamis Harbour. The channel between Salamis and the mainland are constricted waters, a somewhat narrow channel for triremes to operate in as compared to the open ocean. How could Xerxes supply an army at the Isthmus with a strong Greek fleet at Salamis which could strike out at any moment? So to Xerxes and his generals, Salamis represented the key or problem to the whole campaign. It was to the Persian navy's advantage to lure the Greek navy out into the unconstricted open waters of the Saronic Gulf, south, east or west of Salamis Island. It was to the Greeks' advantage to stay right exactly where they were and to lure Xerxes' fleet into the constricted waters immediately to the north of Salamis island, into the channel that leads to the Bay of Eleusis.

Bradford Ernle tells us of an incredible woman in Xerxes' fleet: "The lone voice opposing a naval action was that of an exceptional woman, Queen Artemisia of Halicarnassus in Caria...Although she had a grown-up son, she had still decided that she herself would sail in command of her fleet, which consisted of five triremes from Halicarnassus together with contingents from the off-lying Aegean islands of Cos, Nisyros and Calymnos. 'Her own spirit of adventure and manly courage', comments Herodotus, 'were her only incentives...Her grasp of the whole situation was so extensive that the kernel of her speech deserves quoting:

"Have you not taken Athens, the main objective of the war? Is not the rest of Greece in your power? There is no one now to resist you....Let me tell you how I think things will now go with the enemy; if only you are not in too great a hurry to fight at sea—if you keep the fleet on the coast where it is now—then, whether you stay here or advance into the Peloponnese, you will easily accomplish your

purpose. The Greeks will not be able to hold out against you for long; you will soon cause their forces to disperse—they will soon break up and go home. I hear they have no supplies in the island where they now are; and the Peloponnesian contingents, as least, are not likely to be very easy in their minds if you march with the army towards their country—they will hardly like the idea of fighting in defense of Athens.”

Persians fake a move west

As a compromise to Artemisia’s wise advice Xerxes tries two ploys to lure the Greek fleet out into open waters, as well as throw the Greek admirals into another round of senseless debates (Xerxes knew the Greeks). He assembled a squadron of his fleet, 100 triremes, outside Salamis Bay, east of Salamis in the Saronic Gulf. The Greeks stayed pat right where they were. Then Xerxes sent a corps of his army marching noisily west on the mainland, toward the Isthmus (doing everything but banging pots and pans). The Greek admirals, much to Themistocles’ chagrin, started right up again with their endless rounds of debates and conferences. Herodotus gives us:

“The smothered feeling broke out into open resentment, and another meeting was held. All the old ground was gone over again, one side urging that it was useless to stay and fight for a country which was already in enemy hands, and that the fleet should sail and risk action in defense of the Peloponnese [just what Xerxes hoped], while the Athenians, Aeginetans, and Megarians still maintained that they should stay and fight at Salamis.”

Themistocles sets Xerxes up

late 18th September 480BC

Themistocles left the final debate when he was finished speaking and sent immediately for his Asiatic Greek slave, Sicinnus and ordered him to take a small boat and cross over to the Persian lines under cover of darkness. Herodotus writes:

“...Sicinnus made his way to the Persian commanders and said: ‘I am the bearer of a secret communication from the Athenian commander, who is a well-wisher to your king and hopes for a Persian victory. He has told me to report to you

that the Greeks are afraid and are planning to slip away. Only prevent them from slipping through your fingers, and you have at this moment an opportunity of unparalleled success. They are at daggers drawn with each other, and will offer no opposition—on the contrary, you will see the pro-Persians amongst them fighting the rest.'

Obviously Sicinnus didn't have an audience with Xerxes, but his message made its way up to Xerxes, some time in the early hours of the 19th September 480BC. The message itself was sold to the Persians "as the conclusions of the Greek's last council of war." Apparently Xerxes fell for it "hook, line and sinker" as the saying goes. Xerxes must have thought he had done the trick in sowing discord and division within the Greek naval commanders by marching his 30,000 troops westward toward the Isthmus. The Greeks hadn't taken the bait of his 100 triremes to the east of Salamis in the Saronic Gulf. So he thought the Greeks were demoralized and making ready to flee with their fleet westward through the Bay of Eleusis and then down through the Megarian Channel into the Saronic Gulf west of Salamis. Nothing could be further from Themistocles mind, but he wanted Xerxes to believe that's what the Greeks were up to. It was the 3rd week in September, when the weather could break into nasty gales at any time now. Xerxes reasoned that there were two ways that the Greek fleet could escape from Salamis Harbour. One, as mentioned before, west through the Megarian Channel. The other way was east past Psyttaleia island and on into the eastern Saronic Gulf. Following Xerxes line of reasoning (which Themistocles had set in motion like a chess-master) he wanted to trap and engage the Greek fleet no matter which way they fled. ***So Xerxes makes the decision to divide his fleet in half, ordering the strong Egyptian Squadron of 200 triremes to row south and then come up northwest and stand guard at the Megarian Channel.*** The Phoenician squadrons of 200 triremes would then row northwestward just north of Salamis Harbour in the hopes of catching up to the fleeing Greek fleet sailing into the Eleusis Bay, blocking them in from both east and west. If the Persian fleet did this, Themistocles had them just where he wanted them. Xerxes should have had both fleets wait outside of either end of Salamis and not enter the straits or channel north of Salamis harbour. But Xerxes wanted action. He thought he had the Greeks on the run, and he wanted to chase them. Interestingly enough, a trireme from the Persian occupied island of Tenos (commanded by a Greek named Panaetius son of Sosimenes) slipped quietly out of the Persian lines and joined up with the Greek fleet at Salamis. Panaetius brought Themistocles the awesome news that Xerxes

had divided his fleet and that the powerful Egyptian squadron of 200 triremes was off to the west uselessly guarding the Megarian Channel. This confirmed Themistocles' battle-plan and brought all the doubters onboard. It was now 300 Greek triremes against the 200 Phoenician triremes which Themistocles hoped to lure into the constricted channel just north of Salamis Harbour. As the hours ticked by on the evening of the 19th September 480BC, the Greeks rested comfortably in their rocky lair, as the Persians, probably wet and cold, manned their oars, waiting in their triremes on station either side of Psyttaleia island outside the eastern mouth of Salamis Harbour. As dawn approached the well-rested Greeks manned their triremes, preparing to engage Xerxes' pared-down fleet of 200 triremes in the chosen narrows of Salamis Channel. The Persians to the east must have been wondering "No escaping Greeks, what gives?" The bulk of the Greek fleet of triremes was hidden behind St. George's island right off Salamis Harbour, the Athenian heavy triremes to the left of the line. To the extreme north, near the eastern mouth of Eleusis Bay was the Corinthians, with the ships of the Peloponnesian contingents next to the Athenian line. The ships of Magera and Aegina in Ambelaki Bay northwest of the town of Salamis. The Persian ships numbered 400 in all, but remember 200 of these were not there, but uselessly guarding the Megarian Channel. The Greeks had 300 triremes, against the remaining 200 Phoenician triremes.

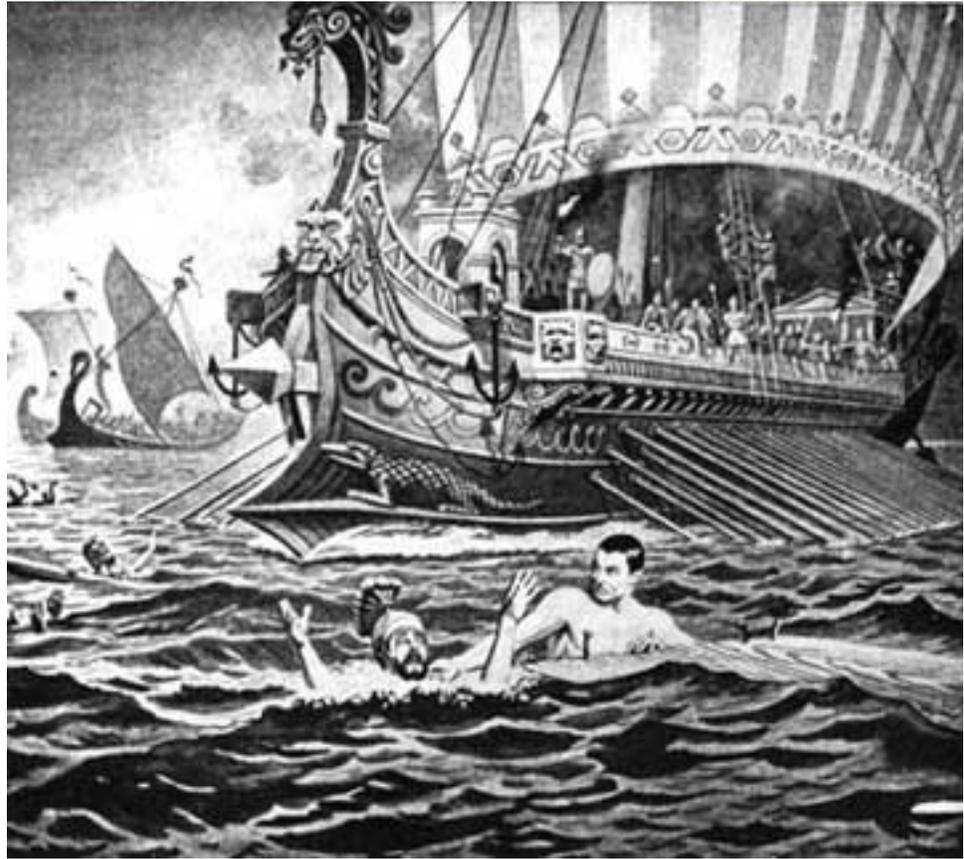
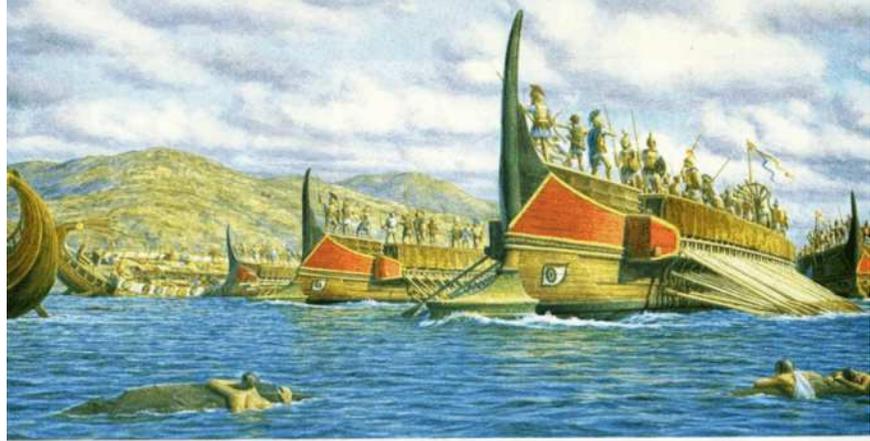
The Trap, and how it was sprung

Once the order had been passed on to the various units within the two major squadrons of Xerxes' fleet to move forward the die had been cast. The fate of Xerxes' fleet was sealed and there was no reversing it. With no radio, no radar, only line of sight vision, with long rows of your own ships in front of you obscuring your vision, turning around was virtually impossible without running afoul of the ships moving up behind you. 200 Phoenician triremes entering in one, maybe two well-ordered rows all following each other in single file into the narrow Salamis Channel with the Greek mainland on their starboard side (to their north) and St. George's island and Salamis Harbour on their port side beam. To their northwest the Corinthian fleet had just hoisted masts and square-sails and was **sailing** toward Eleusis Bay. Sails were never hoisted going into battle, so the Persians "assumed" the whole Greek fleet was in the process of fleeing, headed for the Bay of Eleusis and the Megarian Channel to the west (most of the rest of the Greek fleet was still hiding behind St. George's Island). Nothing could be

further from the truth. The Corinthian commander, Adeimantus, and his Corinthian triremes were the bait. Immediately upon seeing the Persian fleet had swallowed the bait and was pursuing him, now totally committed, having entered the Salamis Channel, his fleet downed sails and masts, and turned and headed straight for the lead elements of the Persian fleet. At the same time that this occurred, the entire Athenian and Peloponnesian fleet came storming out from behind St. George's island and Salamis harbour, heading straight for the port flanks of the Persian fleet, a perfect deflection shot. All the ships within the Persian fleet could not maneuver to the right or left to avoid the oncoming impact of the Greek rams. If they backwatered, as some invariably did, they ran afoul of their own ships coming up behind them. The Greek Aeschylus, who was in the battle, puts into the mouth of a Persian aboard one of their lead ships: (The translation is by A. R. Burn.)

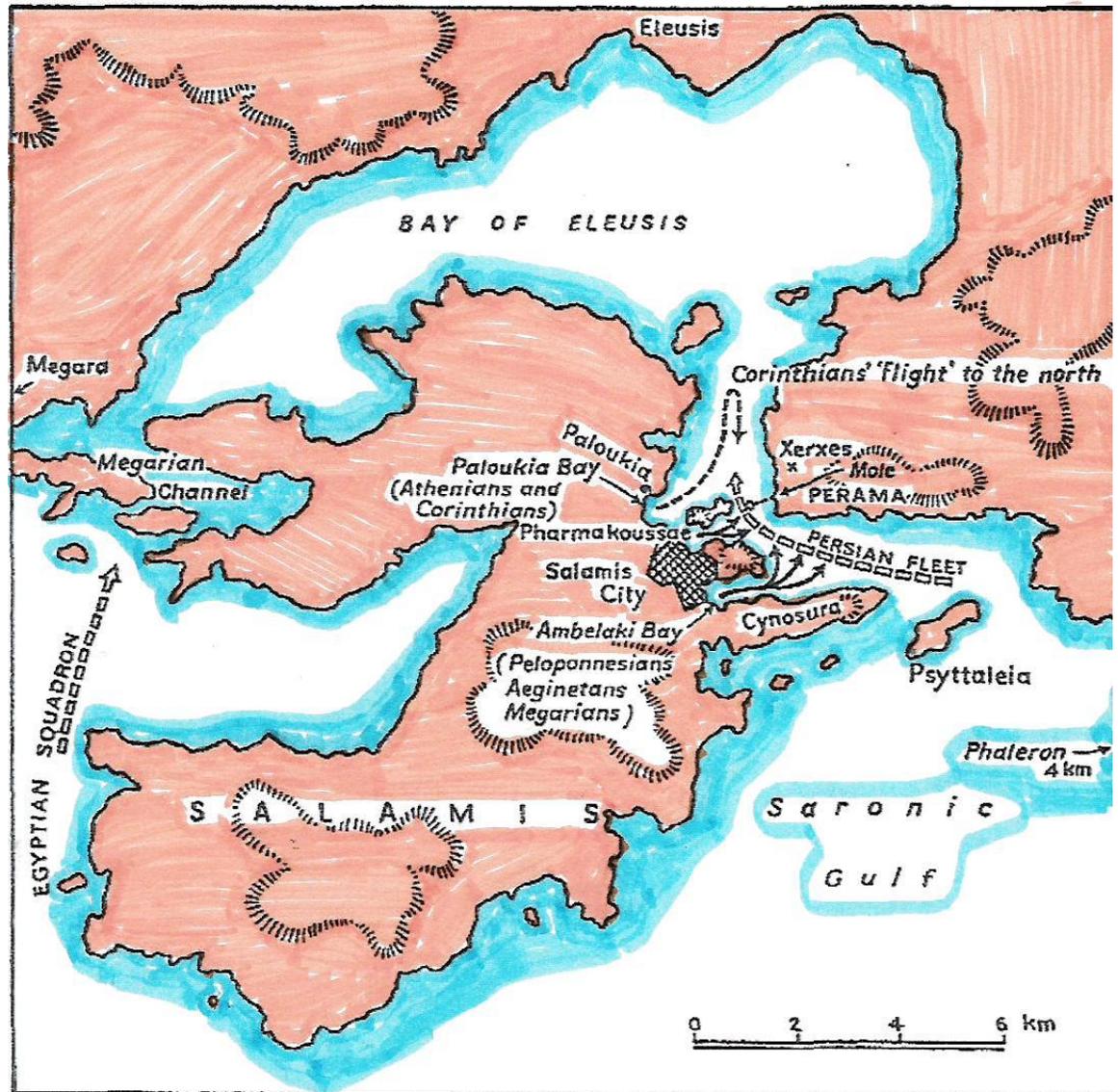
“Night wore on and still no Greeks out in secret flight; But when at last the sun's bright chariot rose, Then we could hear them—singing; loud and strong rang back the echo from the island rocks, And with the sound came the first chill fear. Something was wrong. This was not flight; they sang the deep-toned hymn, Apollo, Saving Lord, that cheers the Hellene armies into battle. Then trumpets over there set all on fire; then the sea foamed as oars struck all together, and swiftly, there they were! The right wing first, led on the ordered line, then all the rest came on, came out...”

“As the main body of the [Corinthian squadron of the] Greek fleet moved down from the north, seeing the enemy well committed into the narrows, the ships from Ambelaki were able to strike out, roaring the Paeon to Apollo, catching the enemy broadside on as they moved confidently down channel after what they had assumed were the fleeing Greeks. This right wing, suddenly emerging on to their exposed flank, must have seemed like a bolt from heaven, accompanied as it was by the thunder of the hymn. Shortly after this devastating flank attack developed, throwing the Persians into disarray because in their close-ordered ranks there was little or no chance of manoeuvring, the main attack at the head of the column developed. What the Persians had seen as a demoralized and fleeing enemy suddenly became a noose that tightened around their advance guard. ...once the main battle had developed, each trierarch very largely exercised his own initiative.” [Thermopylae, Bradford Ernle p. 199]





It was ship for ship, 200 Persian triremes, their flanks exposed to 300 heavy Greek triremes---all hitting them with 90-degree deflection shots, rams crashing against portside hulls, the sounds of crushing impacts thundering across the Channel into Xerxes ears. From his vantage point 200 feet up on an adjacent hill, sitting on his gold throne, he watched as his fleet---all 200 Phoenician triremes---got demolished.



. CAT A MTC

'the Athenians and Aeginetans accounting for a great many of their ships. Since the Greek fleet worked together as a whole, while the Persians had lost formation and were no longer fighting on any plan....Nonetheless they fought well that day—far better than in the actions off Euboea. Every man of them did his best for fear of Xerxes, feeling the kings eye was on him.' [Aeschylus]

Aftermath
22 Sept 480BC

The Greek Ephorus gives us the losses for both sides, Persian and Greek. The Greeks lost 40 triremes, while the Persians lost 200 triremes. Even if the Egyptian fleet of 200 triremes returned from their unnecessary watch over the Magarian Channel, the Greek fleet would still outnumber the Persian fleet by 60 triremes! (300 – 40 = 260, verses the 200 remaining Egyptian triremes.) Xerxes knew now that his supply vessels, now exposed to a powerful enemy Greek fleet, would not be able to supply his army in a hostile foreign land. Also it was the 3rd week in September, when the nasty gales of fall and winter were about to begin. Themistocles and Leonidas, working quite obviously together, had over-extended the Persian supply-lines, and then threatened to cut them off completely, leaving Xerxes' grand army, going hungry, in a hostile foreign land. There was only one thing Xerxes could do, and that was retreat, going back to Susa to attend to the Affairs of State. For 24 hours the Greeks did not realize the extent of their victory. They returned to Salamis harbour to effect repairs, rest and eat. Then the next day Greek scouts came with the news, ***“Phaleron Roadstead is deserted! The Persians are gone!”*** Forty-five days later Xerxes and the bulk of his army had crossed over into Asia Minor, heading for Persia and Susa, his vast army happily dispersing into the vassal states from which they had come. Xerxes left behind his brother-in-law, general Mardonius, along with 100,000 elite Persian infantry and cavalry to winter in Thessaly to the north. Mardonius would attempt to conquer mainland Greece in the Spring of 479BC. But a combined allied Greek and Spartan hoplite army, with Athenian archers now, and commanded by a nephew of Leonidas, would conquer this Persian army, killing general Mardonius in the process. In another 130 years the disunited, bickering Greek city-states would be united under Alexander the Great, bringing about the rise of the 3rd Gentile World Ruling Empire prophecied in Daniel chapters 2, 7, 8, and 11, improbable as that would have appeared to anyone living in Greece or Asia Minor in the spring of 480BC. Now we will connect back into a historic section of the Bible in the books of Esther and Ezra, picking up with Xerxes in Susa in December 480BC, just two months after he had fled out of Greece.

credits

This whole article is based upon the facts found within and gleaned from Bradford Ernlie's ***“Thermopylae, the battle for the west”*** and Steven Pressfield's ***“GATES of FIRE”***, both available at <http://www.amazon.com>. For a very complete treatment of the subject I highly recommend the first. For an awesome, fast-paced

page-burner of a historic novel, I highly recommend the second. It places you right smack in the middle of the battle, front-row seat. Also, Steven Pressfield did extensive research, making his historic novel extremely accurate to the actual history and the historic and actual re-enactment use of ancient Greek hoplite armour and weaponry, how it and the Greeks actually functioned in battle.

Back to the Book of Esther

Xerxes Retreats From Greece

Bradford Ernle tells us “The time taken by Xerxes to reach the Hellespont, forty-five days, half that of the advance, is made to suggest a panic-stricken rout. On the contrary, since there was not opposition to deal with at any point---no Thermopylae, for instance---and since the fleet had been able to make its way up to the Hellespont to receive the army [and don’t forget they still had 200 Egyptian triremes, and who knows how many supply ships which never fought in the battles of Artemisium and Salamis], with no Greek fleet interposing, it sounds like a reasonable speed for withdrawal. The bridges of boats, as might have been expected, had been broken by the onset of winter’s gales. Nevertheless the army passed over into Asia without any significant incidents being recorded...” So, from 20 September, the defeat of Xerxes’ navy at Salamis, plus 45 days takes us to around the 5th of November to reach the Hellespont and on into Asia Minor. Given another month’s travel would have seen Xerxes estimated arrival back in Shushan (Susa) in December of 480BC. And that is exactly where we find Xerxes in Esther 2:15-18, meeting Esther for the first time, being smitten by her beauty. **Esther 2:15-18, “Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king’s eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. The king loved Esther more than all the *other* women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed**

a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king.” The tenth month of the seventh year of Xerxes was December 480BC! How astounding. He’s safely back at Shushan (Susa), just after his stunning defeat at the hands of Leonidas and Themistocles. And what’s more, he’s alive and well, unlike his two brothers. Miracle? I’d say.

Part IV: Esther chapters 2 through 10, Esther Saves the Jews

Mordecai uncovers a conspiracy against Xerxes

Esther 2:19-22, “When virgins were gathered together a second time, Mordecai sat within the king’s gate. Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him. In those days, while Mordecai sat within king’s gate, two of the king’s eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai’s name. And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.” It is interesting that Xerxes did not reward Mordecai for his loyalty and for his uncovering this plot against the king’s life. This will all play into events later. Herodotus records that it was a point of honor for Persian kings to reward promptly and generously those who had benefited them. This was a major oversight of Xerxes here, but one orchestrated by God, and God will use that oversight.

Esther 3, Haman’s plot to commit genocide against the Jewish race

A few years have gone by since the events of Esther 2 and Xerxes marriage to Esther. We don’t know the exact date of Haman’s promotion to what would amount to be the office of Prime Minister of the Persian Empire, but we do know his casting of lots soon afterward to determine when he was going to destroy the Jews occurred in the first month of the 12th year of Xerxes, verse 7, which would have been in the spring of 474BC. Haman is referred to as the son of Hammedatha the Agagite. It is thought by some Bible scholars that this could indicate he was a descendant of king

Agag of the Amalikites in the days of Saul (cf. 1st Samuel 15). Josephus lists Haman as being “by birth an Amalikite (*Antiquities of the Jews, Book 11, chap. 6, sec. 5*). Amalikites were a branch coming from the Edomites, a race descended from Esau, Jacob’s brother. The Edomites hated and despised the Israelites, of whom the Jews were a part of. It would explain why Mordecai would not bow down to Haman, who was an ancestral enemy of the Jews. Also Haman’s desire to “ethnically cleanse” the Persian Empire of Jews could very well be explained by his Amalikite heritage and lineage, it was an issue of revenge. The Jews get the word Purim from the Akkadian word *puru*, which means *die* or *lot*, for the casting of lots which Haman performed to determine when he would ethnically cleanse the Jews from the earth. Another reason the Jews were hated was because they had at least tried to practice God’s moral laws, as a moral people, and this set them aside from the ‘sinful world’ and its practices. The sinning world doesn’t like God-obeying believers living amongst them, because it makes them “look bad” by comparison. That’s one reason the world hates Jews and Christians alike. Immoral people just don’t like moral people being around them, makes ‘em look bad. Also, Satan himself stirs this hatred of the world against believers in Jesus and the Jews alike. But why would Satan want to stir hatred against the Jews for thousands of years before the birth of Christ? Herein lies the answer, as pointed out to me by a Messianic Jewish believer in Yeshua, Jesus. Satan has known since the beginning (Genesis 22:18; 49:8-12) that Yeshua haMeshiach [Hebrew for Jesus Christ] would come from the Jewish race, he’d be a Jew. Yahweh, the arch enemy of Satan, was the pre-incarnate Christ. The Satan-inspired source of anti-Semitism is intrinsically tied to Satan’s hatred of the very race the Messiah would come through. Satan wanted to destroy that race of people before the Messiah could be born from a Jew. Satan also, remember, tried to destroy the baby Jesus right at the time of his birth, acting through Herod the Great. The hatred of Jews and Christians is not a new thing, it didn’t start with Adolf Hitler. But it did originate from Satan influencing the rulers of this world, who are under his evil authority and sway, to hate both Jews and Christians. Now lets read the account about Haman in Esther 3. **Esther 3:1-15, “After these things king Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him. And all the king’s servants who were within the king’s gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage. Then the king’s servants who were within the king’s gate said to Mordecai, ‘Why do you transgress the king’s command?’ Now**

it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told *it* to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for *Mordecai* had told them that he *was* a Jew. When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay homage [sort of like a descent German not giving the Hitler salute in Nazi Germany], Haman was filled with wrath. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who *were* throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus---the people of Mordecai. In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus [that would be 486 - 12 = 475/474BC], they cast Pur (that *is*, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until *it fell on the twelfth month*, which *is* the month of Adar. Then Haman said to king Ahasuerus, 'There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all *other* people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore *it is* not fitting for the king to let them remain. If it pleases the king, let *a decree* be written that they may be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring *it* into the king's treasuries.' [So thus began the plans to carry out and attempt the first holocaust against the Jewish race by a Gentile world-ruling dictatorship. Nebuchadnezzar had been used by God to conquer the Jews in Judea and Jerusalem, and that was a part of God's punishment. Nebuchadnezzar never tried to annihilate the Jewish race, he took care of them in Babylon. Cyrus had been used by God to allow some of the Jews, the ones who wanted to, to return to Judea and Jerusalem so that they could rebuild the Temple. But this marks Satan's first real organized governmental attempt at genocide against the Jewish race.] **So the king took the signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. And the king said to Haman, 'The money and the people *are* given to you, to do with them as seems good to you.'** Then the king's scribes were called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and *a decree* was written according to all that Haman commanded---to the king's satraps, to the governors who *were* over each province, to the officials of all people, to every province according to its script, and to every people in their language. In the name of king Ahasuerus it was written, and sealed with the king's ring. And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth

month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions. [Now that is exactly what Adolf Hitler attempted to do within all the German occupied territory during World War II. I highly recommend the movie *Schindler's List*, which graphically depicts what Hitler did, and what would have occurred had Haman's evil decree succeeded back in 474BC.] **A copy of the document was to be issued as law in every province, being published for all people, that they should be ready for that day. The couriers went out, hastened by the king's command; and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the citadel. So the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed [margin: *in confusion*]."**

"For such a time as this, is the salvation of the Jews come"

Mordecai himself was appointed to a high position within the Persian government. "Sitting at the gate" is a term used in the ancient Middle East for a position similar to our judges in a courtroom. Mordecai was in a position to learn and find out what was going on in the government of Persia, so this decree would not have gotten by Mordecai unnoticed. **Esther 4:1-17, "When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry. He went as far as the front of the king's gate, for no one *might* enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, *there was* great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed. Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept *them*. Then Esther called Hathach, *one* of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai, to learn what and why this *was*. So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square that *was* in front of the king's gate. And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people. So Hathach returned and told**

Esther the words of Mordecai. Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command for Mordecai: ‘All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, *he has* but one law: put *all* to death, except one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days.’ So they told Mordecai Esther’s words. And Mordecai told *them* to answer Esther: ‘Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?’ Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai: ‘Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish!’ So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him.” As Pastor Chuck Smith commented about these verses, “The interesting thing to me is that in three days, Esther fulfilled the whole purpose of God for her life. The rest of it, she could cruise and enjoy being queen. But all of the preparation up to that point was for these three critical days. God brought her to the kingdom for such a time as this. [In] These three momentous days, God was going to work, God was going to deliver His people.” We see Mordecai’s message succeed in getting Esther to act. It wasn’t coincidence she was in the position she was in as the head queen of king Xerxes. As the rabbis love to say, “With God there is no such thing as coincidence,” and in this case it most certainly proved true.

Esther’s Banquet

Esther 5:1-8, “Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on *her* royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace, across from the king’s house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house. So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, *that* she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that *was* in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter. And the king said to her, ‘What do you wish, Queen Esther? What *is* your request? It shall be given to you---up to

half the kingdom!’ So Esther answered, ‘If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him.’ Then the king said, ‘Bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said.’ So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared. At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, ‘What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!’ Then Esther answered and said, ‘My petition and request is this: If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said.’ Esther initially did not reveal anything to Xerxes, except to invite him and Haman to a banquet of wine, apparently on that same day. Then at this banquet she invites the king and Haman to another banquet that she has prepared for the next day. She’s being very careful on how she’s going about exposing Haman. Xerxes is no fool, he realizes Esther has risked her life in coming to him uninvited. He must realize something’s up. She’s also leaving room for God to work in this situation, rather than just blurting out that she’s a Jew and what Haman is intending to do to all the Jews. And God does work, as we’ll see in chapter 6. If ever there was a story of palace intrigue and counter-intrigue, this is one.

Haman’s Plot Against Mordecai, the Suspense Builds

Esther 5:9-14, “So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, and that he did not stand or tremble before him, he was filled with indignation against Mordecai. Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh. Then Haman told them of his great riches, the multitude of his children, everything in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king. Moreover Haman said, ‘Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king. Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.’ Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, ‘Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet.’ And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made.”

Xerxes has a sleepless night

Esther 6:1-11, “That night the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. Then the king said, ‘What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?’ And the king’s servants who attended him said, ‘Nothing has been done for him.’ So the king said, ‘Who is in the court?’ Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king’s palace to suggest that the king hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. The king’s servants said to him, ‘Haman is there, standing in the court.’” Now if ever there was a Divine setup, this qualifies as one. First, God makes sure that Xerxes, I’m sure on his part as a pure oversight, does not honor Mordecai for his exposure of two people in the Great King’s inner court who had been plotting his murder. Then God, just at the right time, the evening before this second banquet of Esther, causes Xerxes to have a sleepless night. As a believer, have you ever had God do that with you? I have. Now let’s see what happens, as it follows the normal pattern for Persian kings, according to Herodotus. **“And the king said, ‘Let him [Haman] come in.’ So Haman came in, and the king asked him, ‘What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?’ Now Haman thought in his heart, Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?’ And Haman answered the king, ‘For the man whom the king delights to honor, let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal crest placed on its head. Then let this robe and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king’s most noble princes, that he may array the man whom the king delights to honor. Then parade him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him: Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!’ Then the king said to Haman, ‘Hurry, take the robe and the horse, as you have suggested, and do so for Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king’s gate! Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken.’ So Haman took the robe and the horse, arrayed Mordecai and led him on horseback through the city square and proclaimed before him, ‘Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!’”** Boy, has God turned the tables on Haman. Did you notice Esther

didn't try to take control of the situation all on her own, but left God time to work? And God did work. He had already been working things out, by first inspiring Mordecai to overhear a conspiracy plot against king Xerxes and expose it to the king, probably saving his life. Then he inspired Xerxes to have a lapse of memory, so that he did not immediately reward Mordecai. Then he probably inspired Haman's wife to tell him to build a gallows to hang Mordecai when he expressed his hatred of Mordecai to her. This was such a well-orchestrated God-thing. We humans often try work things out on our own for God, instead of trusting the Lord to work out the details, which he will wonderfully do, if we just give him the time. Time and prayer, that's what it takes. Do what you can, but leave room for God.

By now Haman begins to realize 'his goose is cooked'

Verses 12-14, "Afterward Mordecai went back to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. When Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, 'If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him.' While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs came, and hastened to bring Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared." Now realize, Mordecai's suddenly being honored in such a way by Xerxes, through Haman, gave Esther the green light that God had prepared the way for her to tell Xerxes the truth about what was going on. She had waited on the LORD, waited for his timing. And he revealed to her when it was time to expose Haman's plot, and that it was against her and her people, the Jews.

Queen Esther's Banquet

Esther 7:1-10, "So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther. And on the second day, at the banquet of wine, the king again said to Esther, 'What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted to you. And what is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!'" So now, after Haman having had to bestow high honors upon Mordecai, Esther knows God has prepared the way for her to divulge to Xerxes her plight. Xerxes knows something's up, because Esther had risked her life to come to him uninvited, and so he's asking her what's up for a second time within two days. Now is the time, the God-time, to present her case against Haman. And as we'll read, she goes

right to the heart of the matter, no wasted words. **“Then Queen Esther answered and said, ‘If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king’s loss.’ So king Ahasuerus answered and said to Queen Esther, ‘Who is he, and where is he, who would dare to presume in his heart to do such a thing?’ And Esther said, ‘The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!’ So Haman was terrified before the king and queen. Then the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the palace garden; but Haman stood before Queen Esther, pleading for his life, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, ‘Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?’”** Haman, in his attempt to plead with Queen Esther for mercy and his very life, had apparently fallen on or over the couch where Esther was seated, and just then Xerxes walked back into the room to see Haman in this apparently compromising position. If his goose wasn’t quite cooked before it was well-done by now. **“As the word left the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face. Now Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said to the king, ‘Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king’s behalf, is standing at the house of Haman.’ Then the king said, ‘Hang him on it!’ So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king’s wrath subsided.”**

Esther Saves the Jewish Race Within the Persian Empire

Esther 8:1-2, “On that day king Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. So the king took off his signet right, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther appointed Mordecai over the house of Haman.” Under Persian law, the state had the right to confiscate the property of people who were deemed to be criminals or enemies of the State (cf. Herodotus 3.128-29). We find Queen Esther giving Haman’s property, which must have been substantial, to Mordecai, making him a rich man. This was a touch of poetic justice, since Haman

had sought to confiscate all the property of the Jews. Also by Xerxes giving Mordecai his signet ring, which had been worn by Haman, Mordecai took over as Prime Minister of all Persia, under Xerxes himself. Mordecai was number two man in the realm, “second to king Ahasuerus” (Esther 10:3).

Second Decree Written to Cancel Out the Decree of Haman

Verses 3-10, “Now Esther spoke again to the king, fell down at his feet, and implored him with tears to counteract the evil of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme which he had devised against the Jews. And the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king, and said, ‘If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor in his sight and the thing *seems* right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, which he wrote to annihilate the Jews who *are* in all the king’s provinces. For how can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people? Or how am I endure to see the destruction of my countrymen? Then king Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, ‘Indeed, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he *tried* to lay his hand on the Jews. You yourselves write *a decree* concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king’s name, and seal *it* with the king’s signet ring; for whatever is written in the king’s name and sealed with the king’s signet ring no one can revoke.’ So the king’s scribes were called at that time, in the third month, which *is* the month Sivan, on the twenty-third *day*; and it was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces *in all*, to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language. And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed *it* with the king’s signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horseback, riding on royal horses bred from swift steeds.” As Scriptures in Daniel 6:8, 12, 15 show, Persian law could not be altered or changed. But depending on how a decree was worded, a second decree could be written that would countermand the first decree, making it ineffective. This is exactly what Xerxes told Esther and Mordecai to do, to write another decree making Haman’s decree invalid. In verses 11-12, some people say this second decree is allowing the Jews to kill all the women and children of those who sought them harm, which is not what the second decree said at all. The second decree allowed

the Jews to protect themselves from all those who would have come against them, and all their women and children. History shows the Jews did not harm or kill the women or children of those who would attack them as a result of the first decree (cf. Esther 9:6, 12, 15). This second decree was written and sent out on the month of Sivan, the third month of the Hebrew calendar, so there was about nine months before the time when the first decree calling for the destruction of the Jews would be enacted. This allowed sufficient time for the Jews, now allowed to protect themselves from all attackers, to prepare for these attacks. Essentially the Jews were allowed to arm themselves and defend themselves, even to the point of preemptively, against all attackers. **Verses 11-14, “By these letters the king permitted the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives---to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions, on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on which is the month Adar. A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province and published for all people, so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. The couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king’s command. And the decree was issued in Shushan the citadel.”**

The Holiday of Purim is about to be born

Esther 8:15-17, “So Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, with a great crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor. And in every province and city, wherever the king’s command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them.” Boy had the tables turned. Now, at least in the eyes of the pagan Gentile Persians, it wasn’t safe not to be a Jew. Obviously the whole story must have leaked out. Stories of palace intrigue, murder and death always spread fast in a powerful monarchy. The very couriers riding on horseback, being human, would have spread these stories far and wide as they were delivering the second decree, it’s only natural. So we see the foundation has been laid for the Jewish holiday of Purim. Later in the Book of Esther, Purim becomes an “authorized Holiday” in the Bible for all those of Jewish descent. It is not a Levitical Holy Day,

but a holiday. The Jews and Israelis regard it like we do our 4th of July in the United States of America. But unlike our 4th of July, it is Biblical. It is a holiday celebrating freedom and deliverance from oppression, which also follows the very same theme of Passover in the Israelite's Exodus from Egypt (see <http://www.unityinchrist.com/lamb/exodus1.html>).

*The Jews Destroy Those Who Would Have Destroyed
Them*

Esther 9:1-17, “Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day, *the time* came for the king’s command and his decree to be executed. On the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them. The Jews gathered together in their cities throughout all the provinces of king Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could withstand them, because fear of them fell upon all people. And all the officials of the provinces, satraps, the governors, and all those doing the king’s work, helped the Jews, because fear of Mordecai fell upon them. For Mordecai *was* great in the king’s palace, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for this man Mordecai became increasingly prominent. Thus the Jews defeated all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, with slaughter and destruction, and did what they pleased with those who hated them.” This twelfth month, Adar, corresponds to March of 473BC. This was the date determined by Haman’s superstitious casting of lots, but God made sure the time for the intended slaughter of the Jews was sufficiently far away, 9 months, so that the Jews could properly determine who their enemies were. To carry something out like this, with fair justice, would have taken that amount of time, to prevent the slaughter of innocent people who intended no harm to the Jews. The Jews were not killing women and children, as Haman had intended to happen to them, and they didn’t even keep the plunder, as this chapter states at least three times. **“And in Shushan the citadel the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. Also Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Ariddatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vajezatha---the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews---they killed; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. On that day the number of those who were killed in Shushan the citadel was brought to the king. And the king said to Queen Esther, ‘The Jews have killed and destroyed five**

hundred men in Shushan the citadel, and the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what *is* your petition? It shall be granted to you. Or what *is* your further request? It shall be done.' Then Esther said, 'If it pleases the king, let it be granted to the Jews who *are* in Shushan to do again tomorrow according to today's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows.' So the king commanded this to be done; the decree was issued in Shushan, and they hanged Haman's ten sons." Now it says that Haman's ten sons had already been killed in verse 7. So it is thought by some that this further request that they be hung on gallows was for their bodies to be publicly displayed as a warning to all who would think of harming the Jews. **"And the Jews who were in Shushan gathered together again on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and killed three hundred men at Shushan; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder."** In other words, the women and children of those who had been slain would not lose their homes and possessions and become displaced or homeless persons. This was justice tempered by real mercy. **"The remainder of the Jews in the king's provinces gathered together and protected their lives, had rest from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of their enemies; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. This was on the thirteenth day of the month Adar. And on the fourteenth of the month they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness."**

The Holiday of Purim is established for all time for the Jews

Esther 9:18-32, "But the Jews who were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day, as well as on the fourteenth; and on the fifteenth of the month they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. Therefore the Jews of the villages who dwelt in the unwalled towns celebrated the fourteenth day of the month of Adar with gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and for sending presents to one another. And Mordecai wrote these things and sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, who were in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, to establish among them that they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and fifteenth days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor. So

the Jews accepted the custom which they had begun, as Mordecai had written to them, because Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews plotted against the Jews to annihilate them, and had cast Pur (that is, the lot), to consume them and destroy them; but when *Esther* came before the king, he commanded by letter that this wicked plot which *Haman* had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. So they called these days Purim, after the name Pur [Purim is plural for Pur, as Lot is plural of Lots]. Therefore, because of all these words of this letter, what they had seen concerning this matter, and what had happened to them, the Jews established and imposed it upon themselves and their descendants and all who would join them, that without fail they should celebrate these two days every year, according to the written *instructions* and according to the *prescribed* time, *that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city, that these days of Purim should not fail to be observed among the Jews, and that memory of them should not perish among their descendants.*" God never established the feast of Purim in his law as one of his sacred Holy Days, but he did allow it to be recorded in his Word, canonized into the Old Testament, as a legitimate holiday for those of the Jewish race, and the holiday is celebrated yearly on the 15th Adar. One other set of days have been kept by the Jews in similar fashion, commemorating God's miraculous deliverance which he brought about through the Maccabee brothers from the wicked Antiochus Epiphanes, a forerunner of the future Beast person to arise during the tribulation. We find Jesus, Yeshua of Nazareth coming to Jerusalem and standing in the Temple during the festival of lights, or Chanukah. These are national holidays, similar to our Thanksgiving and 4th of July which we celebrate in the United States of America. Jews continue to celebrate these holidays, even as American citizens, because they are Jewish, just as those of Latin American descent in the U.S. celebrate Cinco de Mayo (the Mexican Independence Day). There is nothing wrong with these, Jesus did it. But it's interesting, Purim is actually included as a holiday in the Word of God. It is a holiday celebrating deliverance, and in this case, Divine deliverance. For Christians, our Divine deliverance came and comes through Jesus, our Passover lamb. And Passover itself is a story of Divine deliverance, first for the Israelite race, and then through Jesus' sacrifice on Passover day, for the whole world. When God is in the picture, these holidays can have great meaning, even for Christians. But our greatest deliverance was and is through Jesus Christ, who sacrificed

himself as our Passover Lamb, and who lives to make us truly free. **Verses 29-32, “Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim. And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews, to the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus [Xerxes], with words of peace and truth, to confirm these days of Purim at their appointed time, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had prescribed for them, and as they had decreed for themselves and their descendants concerning matters of their fasting and lamenting. So the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim, and it was written in the book.”**

Mordecai’s Advancement Under Xerxes

Esther 10:1-3, “And king Ahasuerus imposed tribute on the land and on the islands of the sea. Now all the acts of his power and his might, and the account of the greatness of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? For Mordecai the Jew was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen.”

Xerxes---who was full of the ambitions of his father Darius the Great to expand the Empire north into the Russian steppes and northwest into Europe---had to have those ambitions dampened by defeat at the hands of the Greeks (all without killing him), and then be sent home to mind the affairs of hearth and home---which would involve the salvation of the Jewish race from an evil plot within the Persian government that would have killed them all. Ezra and Nehemiah would have died, along with all other Jews in the vast Persian Empire, had God not intervened through Mordecai and Esther, and yes, Leonidas and Themistocles. Now we will continue the story-line in the Book of Ezra where we left off. Xerxes and Esther lived from the period of time at the end of the book of Esther, 473BC until 465BC, when Xerxes was assassinated within his bedchambers. Xerxes’ son Artaxerxes I then took over the reigns of the Empire. Maybe Esther and Mordecai ended up in Jerusalem with Ezra and Nehemiah, history does not tell us what happened to them. But as we will see, Xerxes son, Artaxerxes continued to be friendly towards the Jews, so Esther and Mordecai were probably safe no matter where they ended up, as this Artaxerxes was also friendly with Ezra and Nehemiah. So that is where we will pick up the story again, in the 7th chapter of Ezra.

Part V: Ezra chapter 7 through 10

Second Wave of Emigrants, Ezra and two thousand Jews return to Jerusalem, 458BC

Currently the most widely accepted period for the arrival of Ezra in the “seventh year of Artaxerxes, the second return of the exiles to Jerusalem, is 458BC, the 7th year of Artaxerxes I, son of Xerxes. We’ve just been through the history of Xerxes attempting to expand the Empire, and getting literally evicted out of Greece in 480BC via the stunning military victories of Leonidas, Themistocles, and finally the battle of Plataea. We witnessed Esther become Queen of Persia, Xerxes wife, and save the Jews in the Persian Empire from annihilation. In 465BC Xerxes died and his son Artaxerxes I began to reign. He was apparently quite friendly with Ezra and later Nehemiah, and subsequently the Jews in Judea. He reigned from 465BC to 424BC. So between Ezra chapter 6 and 7, you had the reign of Xerxes, whose wife was Queen Esther. Now we’re moving on in the Book of Ezra.

The Beautification of the Temple

Ezra 7:1-10, “Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah [this would be the priestly line, and this Hilkiah was the father of Jeremiah the prophet, as well as the high priest while Jeremiah was young], the son of Zadak, the son of Ahitub, the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, and son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest---this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he *was* a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him. *Some* of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim came up to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which *was* in the seventh year of the king [465BC – 7 = 458BC, so this is 7 years after the death of Xerxes, husband of Esther]. On the first *day* of the first month he began *his* journey from Babylon, and on the first *day* of fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of God upon him. For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in

Israel.” Again, the word Israel is used to denote the returning tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi. Ezra’s priestly lineage is established here, going all the way back to Aaron, the very first high priest. Pastor Chuck Smith has an excellent comment about verse ten here (which I underlined):

“Do It How do you prepare your heart to seek the law of the Lord? I think you prepare your heart through prayer, meditation, and commitment. You make a commitment, ‘I’m going to seek the Lord. I’m going to study the Word of God. I’m going to commit the Word of God to my heart and learn what God has to say about Himself.’ I think it’s through commitment, dedication, and prayer that a person prepares his heart. Notice Ezra was preparing his heart, first of all, to seek the law of the LORD, and, then, second, to do it. Paul the apostle said that the Jews were making a serious mistake in their day because they thought that just because they had the law of the LORD, they were justified. Paul said that having the law of God doesn’t justify anybody. It is the keeping of the law that justifies a man (Rom. 2:12, 13). Sometimes we make the same mistake, thinking, *Well, I go to church, I partake of the sacraments of the church, and therefore, I am saved; I’m all right.* Yet, we are not really doing the things the Lord commanded. Jesus said, ‘Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?’ (Luke 6:46). It is really obedience to Him---the doing of the Word of God---that is important. As James said, ‘Be doers of the word, and not hearers only’ (James 1:22) because if you’re just a hearer of the Word you can deceive yourself. You start to think *I know all about the Bible. I studied under Pastor Chuck. I’ve really gone though the Bible.* That won’t do it. Are you obeying the Bible? Are you obeying the precepts of the Bible? We hear stories that grieve our hearts. Stories of those who say they attend Calvary Chapel and yet are living in fornication or in adultery. Somehow they feel attending Calvary is going to do something for them. I’m always reading about some far-out person, who says, ‘Well, I attend Calvary Chapel,’ as if that’s going to buy them something. Not with God. It is doing the Word that is important.” [p. 596, *The Word For Today NKJV Bible*] [For a whole section on Law & Grace, log onto:

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/whatisgrace/whatisgraceintro.htm>]

“Ezra had prepared his heart for the day that he would return to his land. He knew it was coming because he had faith in God. So he prepared his heart and studied the Law of Moses (the first five

books of the Bible) and the book of Joshua, which were in existence in that day. It is the belief of many that Ezra wrote 1 and 2 Chronicles. Ezra not only studied God's Word, he also did what it said. Oh, my, that is so important! It is one thing to *study* God's Word and another thing to **do** it. Ezra also wanted to **teach** the Word. He wanted God's people to know God's statutes and judgments. In Ezra 7, verses 11-26 Artaxerxes [Artaxerxes I, son of Xerxes, 465-424BC] made a decree which allowed Ezra and his followers to return to their land. It was not a commandment that they go, but it was permission to return according to their own particular desires and according to the leading of the LORD. Evidently Ezra had a real witness in the court [of Artaxerxes], because the king and his counselors made this offering to "the God of Israel." Ezra was given the authority to appoint magistrates and judges. They got together all this material, Ezra was given the king's decree, then preparation was made for them to leave. The decree reveals a tremendous reverence of God. Notice how it concludes [see verse 26]. This law, of course, was in reference to the Jews after they arrived in the land. In other words, if they return to their land, they must mean business as far as their relationship to God is concerned. Notice now the thanksgiving of Ezra [see verses 27-28]. Not only was the temple rebuilt, it was also to be beautified. I think God's house ought to be made beautiful, as beautiful as it can possibly be according to the ability of the folk who are identified with it. Ezra led a fine delegation back to the land. It was not as large as the first delegation, but a great many of the leaders were in the second group." THRU THE BIBLE, Vol. II, p. 493, col.1, and col. 2, **Ezra 7:11-28, "This is a copy of the letter that king Artaxerxes gave Ezra the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel:**

'Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven: Perfect peace, and so forth. I issued a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you. And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which is in your hand; and whereas all the silver and gold that you may find in all the province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and the priests, are to be freely offered for the house of their God in Jerusalem---now therefore, be careful to buy with this money bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the

house of your God in Jerusalem. And whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do it according to the will of your God. Also the articles that are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver before the God of Jerusalem. And whatever more may be needed for the house of your God, which you may have occasion to provide, pay *for it* from the king's treasury. And I, *even I*, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who *are in the region* beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, let it be done diligently, up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred kors of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribed limit. Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? Also we inform you that it shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God. And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who *are in the region* beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know *them*. Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether *it be* death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.'

Blessed *be* the LORD God of our fathers, who has put *such a thing* as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem, and has extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes. So I was encouraged, as the hand of the LORD my God *was upon me*; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me." Israel again refers to the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi, and not "the ten lost tribes". Notice what Artaxerxes is richly enabling Ezra to do with this smaller second wave of émigrés back to Judah and Jerusalem, ***the beautification of the Temple***. Also Ezra's return brings a lot of priests and leaders back, including himself, a real scribe and expert in the Law of Moses. An interesting point to notice, the Law of Moses was dual in purpose, it was designed as a national law for the governing of a people in a land, as well as a church law, for the governing of the central 'church and religion' of the Jewish nation. The core of that law, for both Israel's church and state was the Ten Commandments. All the statutes and judgments were specific

applications of those Ten Commandments, explaining how they were to be applied, not just in a spiritual sense, but physically in the Promised Land, and punishments were included in these statutes and judgments for disobedience. In that sense, these statutes and judgments don't apply to a modern church, they were for the land. The Law of God, also called the Law of Moses, was the Constitutional 'Law of the Land' for all of Israel, which now was only Judah, Benjamin and Levi. As Hebrews 10 brings out, Christ's sacrifice on the cross now takes the place of all those required sacrifices, in the church sense. In Leviticus 23 the 7th Day Sabbath is the first Holy Day mentioned, and thus the 4th Commandment is inseparably tied to the Holy Days of God commanded in Leviticus 23. So if you are a Sabbath observing church or person using the Sabbath as your chosen day of worship, you ought to be a Holy Day observing church or person as well, observing God's Holy Days which are spelled out in Leviticus 23. It's that simple. One interesting thing, and this comes out in the prophetic writings of Zechariah during the time of Zerubbabel and Joshua, but in Zechariah chapter 14, verses 16-19 show that right after the 2nd coming of the Messiah (Jesus Christ) the observance of the Holy Days as well as some of the sacrifices (i.e. the whole Old Testament Law of God contained in the Five Books of Moses) will be re-instituted. Also, that same set of Laws will become the International Law of the Land, for all nations on earth. So those of you who entertain or have an anti-Law of God, super-grace oriented attitude, you'd better rethink your belief system, for it is askew from the actual Word of God. For one thing, the major difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is that in the New Covenant God promises to ***write his laws in our hearts and minds***, not to do away with them. The real bone of contention between Sunday and Sabbath observing believers comes in whether the Sabbath command still stands, as part of the Ten Commandments. The other nine of the Ten Commandments are re-commended and brought to a higher spiritual level throughout the New Testament, they're not done away with at all, so the controversy is not about them for all but the most "liberal" Christians. For more about this controversial subject that divides Sabbatarian and Sunday-observing believers in Jesus, see: http://www.unityinchrist.com/romans/Romans12-14_2.htm. Also consider this, the historic observance of Sunday/Christmas/Easter were forced upon the early Judeo-Christian churches in Asia Minor, which were descended from the first Christian churches in Judea and Jerusalem. This occurred in 325AD, brought about by Constantine, acting on behalf of the proto-Catholic Church. So Jesus, who was the pre-incarnate Yahweh, will just be returning the Church under his authority

during the Millennium to the original Law of God, and the days of worship he originally instituted, days of worship the early Church had been observing. Need proof about the Early Church, and how the proto-Catholic church supplanted the “days of worship” the Early Church was observing? See <http://www.unityinchrist.com/history2/index3.htm> and <http://www.unityinchrist.com/history2/earlychurch3.htm>.

For a whole section on the oft-confusing subject of Law & Grace, see:

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/whatisgrace/whatisgraceintro.hmt>.

But the bottom line, as clearly seen in the Book of Zechariah, written in the time of Zerubbabel and Joshua, the Church in the Millennial Kingdom of God will be a Sabbath/Holy Day observing, Law of God observing Church. There will be no room whatsoever for anti-Semitic feelings and attitudes in the Millennial Kingdom of God which Jesus will set up on earth at his return. If you entertain any of those attitudes, you'd better dump them fast. If you have been believing world sentiment that has been more or less pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli, you'd better back off on your judgments, and just leave the judging of the Israeli nation and it's Jewish inhabitants in the LORD's hands. He's a far fairer and more impartial judge than you could ever be.

Heads of the Families Who Returned with Ezra

Chapter 8 lists all the companions that went with Ezra on this second wave of returning captives from Babylon who were leaving in 458BC. Notice Ezra is bringing back essential personnel for a completed Temple, probably all of the remaining Levites, it mentioned the Nethinims, who were the servants. I have often wondered who the Nethinims were. Remember in Joshua when the Gibeonites had fooled Joshua and Israel into making a peace treaty with them, saying they were from a far off land? When Joshua discovered the ruse, too late to undo his promise of protection, they, all of the Gibeonites, were made temple woodcutters and water carriers for the Temple service. I think, this is just my speculation, but these Nethinims could be none other than these Gibeonite servants of the Temple. Of course this is just my speculation.

Ezra 8:1-14, “These are the heads of their fathers’ houses, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of king Artaxerxes: of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom; of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel; of the sons of David, Hattush; of the sons of Shecaniah, of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah; and registered with him were one hundred

and fifty males; of the sons of Pahath-Moab, Eliebeonai the son of Zechariah, and with him two hundred males; of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males; of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males; of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him eighty males; of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males; of the sons of Shelomith, Ben-Josiphiah, and with him one hundred and sixty males; of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty-eight males; of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him one hundred and ten males; of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names *are* these---Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah---and with them sixty males; also the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zabbud, and with them seventy males.”

Servants for the Temple, Priests, Levites and Nethinim

Verses 15-20, “Now I gathered them by the river that flows to Ahava, and we camped there three days. And I looked among the people and the priests, and found none of the sons of Levi there.” Oops! Big oversight here. Don’t forget, when Nebuchadnezzar captured the southern kingdom, called The House of Judah, this southern kingdom was made up of three tribes, the half-tribe of Benjamin, the tribe of Judah, and the priestly tribe of Levi. Levi, the priestly tribe was especially assigned by God during Moses time, right after the Exodus from Egypt, to supply the priests of God for the whole 12 tribes of Israel, as well as to supply all the Temple workers. The high priesthood would always come from the direct descendants of Aaron, the first high priest, and the descendants of one of his sons afterward. Ezra takes a quick census of those with him and discovers there are no Levites, “sons of Levi”, in the group returning to Judah and Jerusalem with him. He’s supposed to be bringing back more things to beautify a completed temple, as well as essential personnel for the running of that temple. So Ezra takes action here, before he gets too far along in the journey. The river Ahava was a river in Babylonia, a tributary of the Euphrates named after a place by which it flowed. **“Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leaders; also for Joiarib and Elnathan, men of understanding. And I gave them a command for Iddo the chief man at the place Casiphia [Casiphia, a place near the river Ahava, a tributary of the Euphrates, a place where exiled Levites lived.], and I told them what they should say to Iddo and his brethren the Nethinim at**

the place Casiphia---that they should bring us servants for the house of our God. Then, by the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, the son of Israel, namely Sherebiah, with his sons and brothers, eighteen men; and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Marari, his brothers and their sons, twenty men; also of the Nethinim, whom David and the leaders had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinim. All of them were designated by name.”

Fasting and Prayer for Protection, Ezra shows his human side

So now “Ezra calls for a fast and a great prayer meeting at the river of Ahava. He wanted to know God’s will. He said, ‘You know, I went before the king and told him that the hand of our God was with us, that he will be against our enemies and will lead us back to our land.’ Then Ezra looked at the delegation gathered by the river ready to go on that long march. He looked at the families and the little ones, and he knew the dangers along the way. The normal thing would be to ask the king for a little help---for a few guards to ride along with them. Then the king would say, ‘I thought you were trusting the LORD.’ Sometimes some of us become very eloquent about how we are trusting God and how wonderful he is, but when we get right down to the nitty-gritty, we don’t really trust him [as much as we thought we did]. Ezra is that kind of individual. He surely is human. He says, “I was ashamed to go ask the king.” What was the alternative? He called for a prayer-meeting and a fast. He said, “Oh, LORD, we just have to depend on you.” You know, the LORD puts many of us in that position many, many times.” [THRU THE BIBLE, Vol. II, pp. 493-494] **Ezra 8:21-23, “Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, ‘the hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek him, but his power and his wrath are against all those who forsake him.’ So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and he answered our prayer.”**

Artaxerxes’ Gifts for the Temple

“We find that the king sent a great deal of gold, silver, and vessels with this delegation. This wealth was put in the care of the priests, and they needed protection, you see. And God did watch over them, and they arrived safely at their destination. They stayed in Jerusalem three days and took the treasure into the temple---into the house of God.” [THRU THE BIBLE, Vol. II, p. 494, col. 2, par. 3] **Ezra 8:24-34, “And I separated twelve of the leaders of the priests---Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them---and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the articles, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes, and all Israel *who were present*, had offered. I weighed into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver [at the talent weight of 120lbs per talent, 650 talents x 120lbs comes out to be 36 tons of silver], and one hundred talents [6 tons] of gold, twenty gold basins *worth a thousand drachmas*, and two vessels of fine polished bronze, precious as gold. And I said to them, ‘You *are* holy [consecrated] to the LORD; the articles *are* holy also; and the silver and the gold *are* a freewill offering to the LORD God of your fathers. Watch and keep *them* until you weigh *them* before the leaders of the priests and the Levites and heads of the fathers’ houses of Israel in Jerusalem, *in* the chambers of the house of the LORD.’ So the priests and the Levites received the silver and the gold and the articles by weight, to bring *them* to Jerusalem to the house of our God. Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth *day* of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road. So we came to Jerusalem and stayed there three days.”** I’d say they stayed there three days, resting up. They’d just carried 42 tons of gold and silver hundreds of miles. No wonder Ezra had everybody fast and pray for protection from enemies and highway robbers. Anyone who has had to make a night deposit of thousands of dollars at an outside bank deposit box knows how Ezra and his group must have felt, and they all must have breathed a huge sigh of relief when they had entered Jerusalem proper. ‘Rest up for three days, boys, you’ve earned it. Then we’ll take this stuff to the Temple once you’re rested up.’ **“Now on the fourth day the silver and the gold and the articles were weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him *was* Eleazar the son of Phinehas; with them *were* the Levites, Jozabad the son of Binnui, with the number *and* weight of everything. All the weight was written down at that time.”**

Celebratory Offerings Given at the Temple

Ezra 8:35-36, “The children of those who had been carried away captive, who had come from captivity [i.e. those in this 2nd wave of returnees, the 2,000 who came back with Ezra], offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and twelve male goats as a sin offering. All *this* was a burnt offering to the LORD. And they delivered the king’s orders to the king’s satraps and the governors *in the region beyond the River*. So they gave support to the people and the house of God.” Notice they offered 12 bulls, and 12 goats, for all Israel, all 12 tribes, as a sin offering. All 12 tribes weren’t there, only three of the 12. But they had offerings offered for them, in remembrance, as well as to seek God’s favor on those missing 10 tribes, wherever they were. Josephus remarks that the 10 tribes were residing north in the region of the Russian steppes as late as during the time of Jesus of Nazareth. This was a generous gesture and action on the part of the Jews and Levites toward the missing tribes. Now today they won’t even so much as publicly admit they exist (even though they debate amongst themselves as to where in the world they could be).

Discouragement Leads to a Dropping of Standards

Ezra 9:1-2, “Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, ‘The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.” Now the Jews, Levites and Benjamites ought to know better. Intermarriage with pagans had brought Solomon down, had brought Baal worship severely into Israel under Ahab and Jezebel. The House of Israel, and then the House of Judah went into captivity and deportation because of these sins. The whole section on Kings and Chronicles is about that, and the punishment it brought. (see <http://www.unityinchrist.com/kings/1.html> and read through that whole six part section if you haven’t already.) These

intermarriages with the pagans would bring them right back into idolatry and ultimately Baal worship if something wasn't done, and fast. J. Vernon McGee's comments are good on this section, so I'll give them. "Note that the Egyptians are mentioned and so are other pagan peoples. The Hittite nation [empire] was discovered after I was in school, and I have been interested in reading about them. Throughout Asia Minor, especially along the coast, great cities like Ephesus, Smyrna, and Troy were first established by the Hittites. They were indeed a great people, but they were heathen. The people of Israel [Judah, Levi and Benjamin] had not separated themselves from these folk. When the first delegation of Jews returned to the land, they met discouragement. We will learn more about this when we come to the prophecy of Haggai. We will see how he helped them overcome hurdles of discouragement that were before them. Believe me, they ran a long line of hurdles, and through Haggai [and Zechariah] they were able to clear them. With the help of Nehemiah [later], the active layman, the walls...of Jerusalem were rebuilt; but there was discouragement on every hand. It is at times like this that you let down. It has happened to many Christians. Someone has said that discouragement is the devil's greatest weapon. [I can personally attest to that.] The Jews let down their guard and intermarried with the surrounding heathen and enemies of God...That in turn led to a practice of the abomination of the heathen. The lack of separation plunged them into immorality and idolatry. In some cases I don't think these people took the trouble to get married because the heathen of that region and time did not pay much attention to the formality of marriage any more than the heathen in our contemporary society pay attention to it. We have new freedom. We are civilized people. My friend, we are no different from the pagan peoples of Ezra's day...**Ezra 9:3-5, "So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished. Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. At the evening sacrifice I arose from my affliction; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God."** "Even the leadership was involved in this. They were all the more guilty before God, because privilege always increases responsibility. The returned remnant is in a sad, sordid, and squalid condition...I want you to notice what he did. It is something that we don't see much of in our day. Remember that Ezra did not arrive in his native land until about seventy-five years after the first delegation [emigration] of fifty thousand led by Zerubbabel [536BC to 465BC, 71 years precisely].

When Ezra arrived with his delegation of two thousand, he found that the temple had been rebuilt, but not the walls of the city. And the population was in a sad, sordid condition. They had intermingled and intermarried with the heathen. Immorality and idolatry were running rampant. There was a lack of separation, and the Jews were a miserable and bedraggled lot. When all of this was brought to Ezra's attention, and he found that it was accurate, he was absolutely overwhelmed and chagrined that God's people would drop to such a low level. Today we talk about the apostasy of the church---at least I do. But I wonder if we are as exercised about it as we should be. Since I have retired [J. Vernon McGee speaking here] and am on the outside looking at the condition of the church from a different view, I must confess that I would like to wash my hands of it and say, 'Well, it is no affair of mine.' But it is an affair of mine. And, friends, it is so easy for you and me to point an accusing finger at that which is wrong, but notice what Ezra did. He was so overwhelmed by the sin of his people that he tore his clothes and tore out his hair. Instead of beginning a tirade against them (which would have been characteristic of many people today), notice the next step Ezra took." [THRU THE BIBLE, Vol. II, p.495] If you are a believer, and are living by the standards of this world, this applies to you. Next we have Ezra's prayer, showing what Ezra did next. Instead of doing what most Christian leaders would do, he did the only thing which would solve the problem, something that would bring on a spiritual revival amongst these Jewish refugees.

Some Christians Misapply Ezra 9 Through 10

But before we get to Ezra's moving prayer, I want to address something to put this into modern perspective for the Body of Christ. "They had intermingled and intermarried with the heathen." And in Ezra 10 we see Ezra commanding everyone to put away their pagan spouses, divorcing them and sending them away. Some will try to use this Biblical example and command to try to teach and enforce amongst their congregants racism, condemning interracial marriage. In the case of ancient Israel and Judah, interracial marriage brought idolatry and immorality (which was an integral part of the pagan religious sexual practices, which also made marriage a kind of informal thing amongst the pagans). That is the **only reason** God was against interracial marriage back then, because of what it did to the nations of Israel and Judah, to their societies. For a Christian, what would be the modern context for Ezra chapter 10, how should we apply it today? Paul says that believers in Jesus Christ are not to be "unequally yoked, to nonbelievers" which means **getting** married to

nonbelievers, with the word **getting** being the operative word here. In modern-day context, nonbelievers are the “pagans, heathen” in the Ezra-Nehemiah passages. For example, in God’s eyes, say you are a Caucasian believer in Jesus, and you are in love with a African-American believer in Jesus. In God’s eyes, it is perfectly fine for the two of you to marry. But if the person you intend to marry, regardless of race, is not a believer in Jesus Christ, an active Christian or Messianic Jewish believer, indwelt with the Holy Spirit, then Paul says you are not to marry that person. Believers must marry believers. Even in Ezra’s day, the real issue was Jewish believers in Yahweh marrying non-believers in Yahweh. Rahab was a Canaanite from Jericho, and the LORD blessed her marriage with Salmon, continuing the kingly line of Judah from which Christ came through that union. Rahab had exhibited a godly faith in Yahweh, demonstrated through her actions. The same thing happened with Ruth, who was a Moabitess, her marriage to Boaz continued the kingly line, and she was the great-grandmother of King David, and her son was in the line of kings leading to Jesus Christ as well. Both Rahab and Ruth were believers in Yahweh, both had the Holy Spirit indwelling them, and both are mentioned in Hebrews 11, the Hall of Faith for believers. To read an excellent expository sermon covering the subject of marriage for believers in Jesus, log onto: <http://www.unityinchrist.com/corinthians/cor7.htm>. If you are currently married to a non-believer, you will find Paul’s instructions for you (and it isn’t to go and divorce that person, like you would think, mis-applying Ezra 9 and 10). So log onto that excellent study and resource for marriage and learn how Ezra 9 and 10 apply to the Body of Christ in today’s New Testament times. God created the races, he loves the races, all of them equally. God is not a racist, demanding physical, genetic racial purity. He desires above all for spiritual purity, not racial purity. The nation of Brazil, over a hundred years ago, encouraged it’s people, composed of Spaniard whites, freed Black slaves, and South American Indians, to freely intermarry. After awhile racism died, and they all look pretty much the same today. God is not angry with them. They are a wonderful people, and there are probably hundreds of thousands of genuine believers in Jesus in Brazil. Now back to Ezra’s solution to the problem he uncovered in verses 1-2.

Ezra’s Prayer

Ezra 9:5, “And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness [affliction]; and having rent my garment and my

mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God.” “What does it mean to spread out your hands to God? It means that you are not concealing anything. It means when you go to God in prayer, friend, that your mind and soul stand absolutely naked before Him. Ezra went to God with his hands outspread. He was holding nothing at all back from God. The apostle Paul put it this way, “I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Tim. 2:8). We need to remember that in *our* prayer lives.” **Ezra 9:6-7, “And I said, ‘O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to you, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day.”** “Listen to Ezra. This is a great prayer. He knew what it was to be a captive in a foreign land. He either had been born in captivity or he had been taken captive as a little boy, and he knew what it meant. That is why he trembled when he recognized that God would judge him.” **Verses 8, “And now for a little while grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg [nail] in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage.”** “This is a great verse. Ezra says “We have had just for a little space grace.” The seventy years of captivity is over. God has permitted his people to return to their land, and off they go again, following the heathen---doing the very thing that had sent them into captivity in the first place. Ezra says, “There is just a *remnant* of us.” These Jews obeyed enough to return to the land---most of the Jews did not return to the land; those who did were just a remnant. “To give us a nail [NKJV “peg”, Old KJV “nail”] in his holy place”---do you know what that “nail” is? That nail is Christ. “My anchor holds within the veil.” Do you know why? Because I am nailed there. Christ was nailed on the cross down here so that I might be nailed [anchored] yonder at the throne of God for eternity. Consider what Isaiah 22:22-23 says, “And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open. And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father’s house.” So believers are nailed up there, not on a cross, but in heaven for eternity. [Don’t forget, God’s throne will end up on earth when the heavenly Jerusalem comes down to earth after Revelation 21:1, cf. Revelation 21:1-23.] You see, a nail is fixed *in a sure place*...That he “may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving [NKJV *revival*] in our bondage.” I think this is a

true picture of revival. The term *revival* is not actually a Bible word...Technically, *revival* means “to recover life, or vigor; return to consciousness.” It refers to that which has life, then ebbs down almost to death, has no vitality, and then is revived. Romans 14:9 speaks of Christ’s resurrection this way: “...Christ both died, and rose, and revived...” Obviously the word *revival* must be confined to believers if we are going to be technical. It means that a believer is in a low spiritual condition and is brought back to vitality and power. So here in Ezra’s day a real revival is going to take place.” [THRU THE BIBLE, Vol. II, p. 496, col. 2, par. 3 through p. 497, selected lines from col. 1] Here we’re about to see how Ezra goes about bringing a true spiritual *revival* about with the Jews in the cities of Judah and Jerusalem. It is through **prayer**, first and foremost. Within churches and congregations, both personal and group prayer are the most oft ignored remedies for what ails us spiritually. You want a revival within your church or congregation. Prayer is the way to bring one about. Programs, Bible studies, sermons galore, will not do the trick. This site has a fairly large section on Prayer. Be sure to log onto <http://www.unityinchrist.com/prayer/bibleway.htm> and read through those various articles, and apply them to your personal life and your church life, from house-church to mega-church it is the only solution to what ails us spiritually. Now follows Ezra’s great prayer to the LORD, which when answered by the LORD, brought about the revival, made it possible. Why, do you ask, is prayer so important? Because revival, true revival, involves changing and cleaning up people’s attitudes. That is a “mind-thing” a thing of the mind, which only God can change within people. Now let’s read the entire prayer of Ezra here. **Ezra 9:5-15, “At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting [KJV, affliction]; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread my hands to the LORD my God. And I said, ‘O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to you, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than *our* heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day we *have been* very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, *and* our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, *as it is* this day. And now for a little while grace has been *shown* from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg [KJV, “nail”] in his holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage. For we *were* slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but he extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our**

God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem. And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their iniquity. Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace and prosperity, that you be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave *it* as an inheritance to your children forever.’ And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our guilt, since you our God have punished us less than our iniquities *deserve*, and have given us *such* deliverance as this, should we again break your commandments, and join in marriage with the people *committing* these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you had consumed *us*, so that *there would be* no remnant or survivor? O LORD God of Israel, you *are* righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as *it is* this day. Here we *are* before you, in our guilt, though no one can stand before you because of this!”

Prayer begets Repentance, which begets Revival

After this great prayer prayed by Ezra himself, a revival was born, and revival always leads to repentance and reform. An intense conviction of sin came over the Jews here in Jerusalem and Judea. We see this in **Ezra 10:1**, “**Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept sore.**” We’re going to witness the mechanics of revival here, and I’m going to use J. Vernon McGee’s commentary and let him walk through this, because this is important to understand. “**And Shechaniah the son of Jeiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, ‘We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing’ (Ezra 10:2).**” This man Shechaniah apparently became the mouthpiece for this group of people who recognized their sin and wanted to confess. He came to Ezra and said, ‘We have trespassed against our God.’ That is a very candid acknowledgement. He continued ‘We have taken strange wives of the people of the land.’

That, my friend, is nailing it down and dealing with the specifics. What they had done was absolutely contrary to the Law of Moses. They had not consulted in this grave matter, "that which was written." In other words, they had departed from the Word of God. Now he casts himself upon the mercy of God and says, 'Yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.'" **Ezra 10:3, "Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law."** "There were those who now joined in confession who likewise trembled at the commandment of God. That is, they not only read it and studied it; they let the Word of God have its way in their hearts. When the transgression was called to their attention, they confessed it. They did not attempt to rationalize, excuse, or cover over their sin. They did this according to the Word of God." **Ezra 10:4-6, "Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it. Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware. Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned [fasted] because of the transgression of them that had been carried away."** "Breaking the Law of God was a very serious thing. They went before Him with great travail of soul. What everyone went through is rather heart-rending, but the Word of God had been transgressed and the people had to repent. [Repent, means to turn around and go the other way.] Friend, that is where revival must begin. First, we must walk in the light of God's Word. When we come to the Word of God, it brings conviction to our hearts. We see that we are coming short of the glory of God. We realize that we are openly transgressing that which God has written. When we go to Him in confession, and there is real repentance, the result will be that God's children will be revived. Today we are busy preaching repentance to a lost world. I am not sure that God is asking the lost world to repent. He is saying to the world, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved..." (Acts 16:31). When you come to Christ as Savior, something happens. It happened in Thessalonica. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9 Paul says, "For they themselves shew us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serving the living and true God." Repentance does not precede faith. Faith goes before and repentance follows---it follows as surely as the night follows day. If it doesn't follow, the faith is not genuine---it isn't saving faith.

Repentance is the thing that is so lacking in the church [Body of Christ] today. Have you ever noticed that in the Bible God asks the church to repent? In Asia Minor recorded in the Book of Revelation God asks all but two of them to repent. God was talking to believers, not to unsaved people. Personally, I do not agree with these people who are constantly asking the mayor, or governor, or the president to declare a day of prayer. They say, "Let's have a national day of prayer. We need prayer." Oh, my friend, what are you talking about? I cannot believe that Ezra sent out word to the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites [Phoenicians, remember them?---Baal worshipers which brought so much destruction on Israel and Judah], the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites that they were invited to a great day of prayer. Let's face it---America is a pagan nation. Believers are a minority. This is a day when every minority is being heard except Bible-believers. I think one could organize a rally of a host of people in our nation for a day of prayer. [And this has happened, composed mostly of believers.] But what good would it do? God is saying to the lost, "Come to me and be saved through Jesus Christ." [But far more importantly, I think] He is saying to His church, "Repent. Come back to Me. Come out of your coldness and indifference." The thing that we need today is revival [within the Body of Christ], and a revival will not come without repentance among believers. In Ezra's day God's people were no longer indifferent, you see; but in our day there is indifference in the church. Lyman Abbot made this statement years ago. **"When I was a boy, I heard my father say that if by some miracle God would change every cold, indifferent Christian into ten blatant infidels, the church might well celebrate a day of thanksgiving and praise."** The trouble with the church [Body of Christ] today is that it is filled with cold, indifferent church members---perhaps many of them not even saved. If revival comes, friend, you are going to see this indifferent crowd either come over on the Lord's side or else they will make it very clear that they belong to the devil. Ezra went to God in genuine repentance [as if he personally had anything to repent of] and others followed suit. **Ezra 10:7-8, "And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; and that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away."** "They were making a real line of separation. They are under the Mosaic Law. In the church today I don't believe you could force the issue as they were doing here. They are removing

all of the chaff that they possibly can from the good wheat. It would take about “three days” to come from any section in that land, and this proclamation was directed to all those who had returned to rebuild the city, the walls, and the temple. They were to come together for a time of spiritual refreshing, but repentance must precede it. Those who would not come because they felt that things were not being done the way they wanted them to be done, or had some other objection, were to be cast out of the congregation. **The church needs housecleaning today.** [emphasis mine, but I’m sure if J. Vernon McGee were alive today, it would be his too.] I don’t mean taking from the church roll the names of members who *can’t* be located either. What the average church needs to do is get rid of some of the members they *can* locate---those who need to repent but will **not** repent.” [see and read the short introduction to this history piece at: <http://www.unityinchrist.com/history/saga.htm> and <http://www.unityinchrist.com/history/IntroChurchHistory.htm>.] **Ezra 10:9-11, “Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain. And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives.”** “In other words, don’t jut be a hearer of the Word of God but be a doer of the Word also [cf. James 1:21-25]. We are hearing a great deal today about the need for action in the church [Body of Christ], but what the church really needs is to get cleaned up. There needs to be confession. Even a lack of love needs to be confessed. “By this shall all men know ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:35).” **“Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, ‘As thou hast said, so must we do’” (verse 12).** “What Ezra asked these people to do was a bitter pill to swallow. I am confident that there was a great wrenching of the heart and a great agony of the soul as these people separated themselves from their loved ones. It is interesting that while they were gathered together quite a rainstorm came up.” **Ezra 10:13, “But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing.”** “A rainstorm came up and everybody wanted to scatter. Now Ezra had a whole lot of sense. He said, ‘We don’t want to stand out here in all of this rain,

especially because of the women and children. Instead of doing this in a slipshod manner, what we want to do is come back another day and do this thing right.” **“Ezra 10:14, “Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us.”** “Ezra wanted things to be done in an orderly way, and this is what they did.” **“And they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass” (verse 19).** “The offering mentioned speaks of the fact the people are united as one. They are united in this tremendous effort to set things right with God. Following this verse is a list of those who agreed to put away their foreign wives. They entered into a solemn agreement and pledged to do it.” **“All these had taken strange wives: and some of them had wives by whom they had children” (Ezra 10:44)** “This verse tells a sad story, does it not? The sins of the fathers will be visited on the children. We see here just how thoroughly this separation was to be carried out. Ezra was God’s man for the hour. For this generation, at least, he helped preserve the testimony of the Jews for the fulfillment of God’s plan.” [THRU THE BIBLE, Vol. II, pp. 497-500] I couldn’t have covered this chapter better than J. Vernon McGee did in his THRU THE BIBLE commentary. He has squarely put his finger on the major problem within the Body of Christ. That is why I used his comments here almost exclusively in covering Ezra chapter 10. After Ezra’s coming to the land of Judah, Nehemiah came somewhere around 445BC, which was the date of the 2nd decree of Artaxerxes I, given to him, and the third decree given by the Persian monarchs altogether for the Jews to return. Nehemiah returned and helped the Jews rebuild the walls around Jerusalem, and helped Ezra continue the spiritual revival which was taking place here. See <http://www.unityinchrist.com/nehemiah/nehemiah.html> to cover this book and subsequent continuation of the revival Ezra started, and don’t forget, started through prayer and fasting. From this point on after Nehemiah, historically, Judah endures into the time of Alexander the Great, then the various Hellenist Seleucid kings leading up to Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean period, which is covered in my section on Daniel 11. See <http://www.unityinchrist.com/Daniel/daniel1.htm> to follow this historic-prophetic thread right to the end-times, the times in which we are coming into.

end