

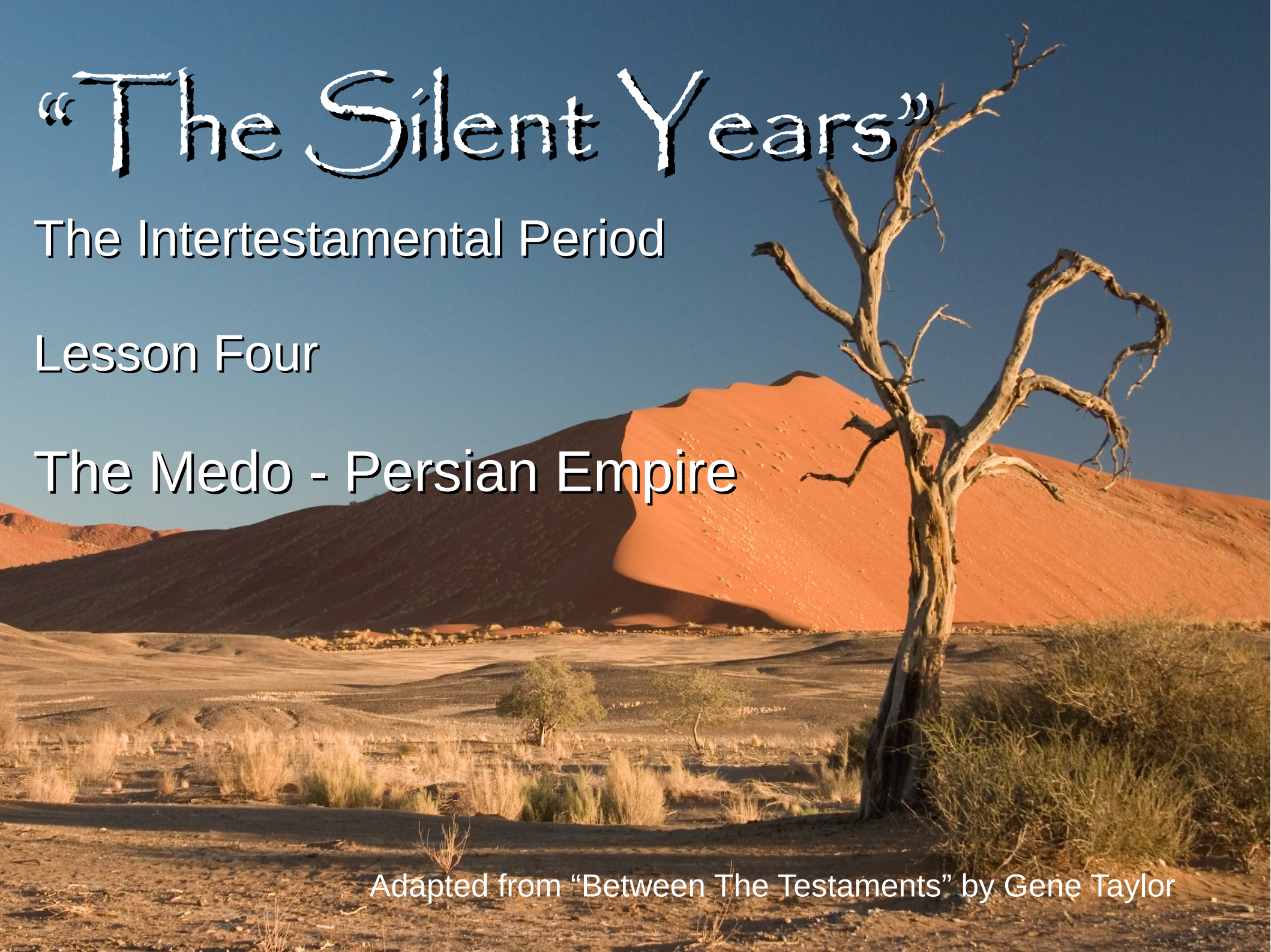
“The Silent Years”

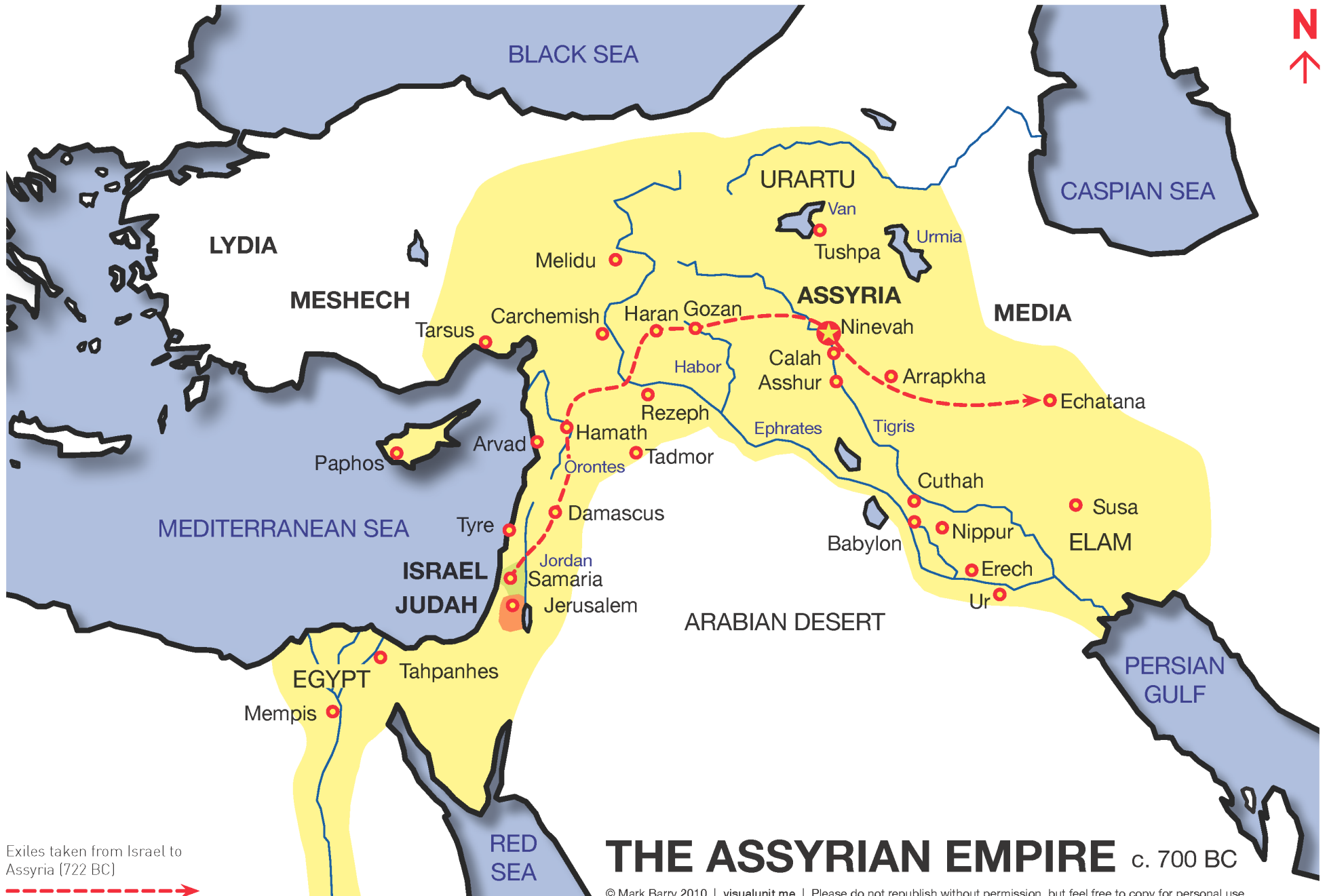
The Intertestamental Period

Lesson Four

The Medo - Persian Empire

Adapted from “Between The Testaments” by Gene Taylor





Exiles taken from Israel to Assyria (722 BC)



THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE c. 700 BC

© Mark Barry 2010 | visualunit.me | Please do not republish without permission, but feel free to copy for personal use.



Exiles taken from Judah to Babylon (597 & 586 BC)



THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE c. 600 BC

© Mark Barry 2010 | visualunit.me | Please do not republish without permission, but feel free to copy for personal use.



Introduction

1. Persia was an ancient world empire that flourished from 539-331 BC
2. The Babylonian Empire fell to the Persians, setting the stage for the return of the Hebrew people to Jerusalem about 538-445 B.C., following their long period of captivity by the Babylonians.
3. The Old Testament contains many references to the nation of Persia and its representatives.
 - a. Ezra 9:9 refers to the “kings of Persia.”
 - b. Ezra 6:14 cites “Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.”
 - c. Daniel 8:20 speaks of the “kings of Media and Persia.”
 - d. Daniel 10:13 mentions the “prince of the kingdom of Persia.”
 - e. The Book of Esther refers to the “powers of Persia and Media” (1:3), the “seven princes of Persia and Media” (1:14), and the “ladies of Persia and Media” (1:18).
 - f. Daniel 5:28 prophesied that Belshazzar’s kingdom would be “given to the Medes and Persians.”

Persia

A. The Persians apparently sprang from a people from the hills of Russia known as Indo-Aryans. As early as 2000 B.C. they began to settle in Iran and along the Black Sea coast.

1. Two of these Indo-European tribes settled on the Elamite border and to the east of the Zagros mountain range.
2. The first references to them are made in the inscriptions of Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.).
3. They are noted as the Parsua (Persians) and Madai (Medes).

B. The first mention of a Persian chieftain refers to his role as an ally aligned against Sennacherib of Assyria.

1. His son was called “King, Great King, King of the City of Anshan.”

2. His grandson fathered Cyrus II, who was one of the most celebrated kings of history.

a. He is called by the prophet Isaiah “My shepherd.” (Is. 44:28)

b. In another passage he is referred to as “His [the Lord’s]

Anointed” (Isa. 45:1), a

term used in the Old Testament of the Messiah.

Media

A. Media was an ancient country of Asia situated west of Parthia, north of the Persian Gulf, east of Assyria and Armenia, and south of the Caspian Sea.

1. The country is now included in parts of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey.
2. A mountainous country, Media contained some fertile sections; but much of it was cold, barren, and swampy.
3. In the southern area lush plains were used as pasture land for the large herds of horses used in the Median cavalry.

B. The history of the Medes is complex, because it involves many entangling alliances and the rise and fall of several nations.

1. The Medes were an Indo European people who invaded the rough mountain terrain south of the Caspian Sea.

2. In the ninth and eighth centuries B.C., Assyrian kings conducted campaigns against these people, forcing them to pay tribute.

3. The mighty Tiglath-Pileser (745-727 B.C.) invaded Media and added part of it to the Assyrian Empire.

4. By 700 B.C., the era of the prophet Isaiah, a prosperous realm had been established.

C. Media is first mentioned in the Old Testament as the destination to which Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, deported the Israelites from Samaria around 721 B.C. (2 Kin. 17:6; 18:11)

1. Medes are mentioned in Ezra in connection with Darius' search for the roll containing the famous decree of Cyrus that allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem. (Ezra 6:2)

2. Laws of the Medes are mentioned in the Book of Esther (1:19) and in Daniel (6:8,15).

3. The prophet Daniel prophesied that King Belshazzar's Babylonian kingdom would fall to "the Medes and Persians." (Dan. 5:28)

4. Medes were also among the people from many different nations in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:9)

D. About 710 B.C. Sargon II of Assyria defeated the Medes and forced them to pay a tribute consisting of the thoroughbred horses for which Media was famous.

1. The Medes, however, increased in strength and joined forces with Babylon.

2. The Medes under Cyaxares and the Babylonians under Nabopolassar captured Asshur, the ancient capital of Assyria, in 614 B.C.

3. In 612 B.C. this alliance overthrew Nineveh, the proud capital of Assyria, causing the crash of the Assyrian Empire. The seventh century Hebrew prophet Nahum expressed the great relief felt by neighboring nations at Nineveh's fall. (Nah. 2:3; 3:19)

4. Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar, married Cyaxares' daughter, strengthening the bond between the two countries.

E. During the era of Nebuchadnezzar and the time of Jeremiah (about 605-552 B.C.), the Median kingdom reached the height of its power.

F. Persia was dominated by Media until the time of Cyrus II who was founder of the Persian Empire. In 549 B.C.

1. Cyrus defeated Media.

2. Under the Persians, Media remained the most important province of Persia.

- a. As a consequence, the dual name, "Medes and Persians," remained for a long time. (Esth. 1:19; Dan. 5:28)

- b. The expression, "The laws of the Medes and the Persians," depicted the unchangeable nature of Median law, which even the king was powerless to change. (Esth. 1:19)

The Medo-Persian Empire

A. Cyrus II, founder of the mighty Persian Empire, ascended the throne in Anshan in 559 B.C.

1. He conquered the Median King Astyages.

a. He then defeated Lydia (about 546 B.C.) and Babylon (about 539 B.C.), finally establishing the Persian Empire.

b. This last conquest is referred to in Daniel five.

2. Cyrus' rule was a result of the sovereignty of God.

3. In contrast to previous rulers, especially the Assyrians, Cyrus was humane and benevolent toward those whom he defeated.

4. He was the Persian king who issued the decree restoring the Jews to their homeland, following their long period of captivity by the Babylonians. (2 Chr. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4)

5. Cyrus was the founder of the system under which each province, or Persian satrapy, was governed by an official who answered to the great king.

a. He allowed a remarkable degree of freedom of religion and customs for the vassal states, including Palestine.

b. He developed roads, cities, postal systems, and legal codes, and treated the subject nations kindly and humanely.

6. Cyrus accomplished all of this because he was God's tool.

a. Just as Assyria, who conquered Israel, was God's rod of anger.

b. Thus the Bible refers to Cyrus in favorable terms. (Isa. 44:28 - 45:3)

B. Cambyses II (530-522 B.C.), the son of Cyrus, reigned after his father.

1. During his reign, Egypt was added to the list of nations conquered by Persia.

2. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, Cambyses accidentally wounded himself with his own sword in 522 B.C. Some believe he committed suicide.

C. The next Persian king, Darius I (521-486 B.C.), was not a direct descendant of Cyrus but was of royal, Achaemenid blood.

1. He defeated nine kings to claim all 23 Persian satrapies. This was recorded on the famous Behistun Inscription, which was written in the Akkadian, Elamite, and Old Persian languages.
2. Darius I further unified the Persian Empire by using an efficient gold coinage, state highways, and a more efficient postal system.

3. He was defeated by the Greeks at the Battle of Marathon in 490 B. C.

4. In the second year of his reign, he ordered the Jewish Temple at Jerusalem to be rebuilt after work on it had been discontinued for 14 years. (Ezra 4:24; 6:1) He also gave a generous subsidy that made it possible to complete the Temple.

5. The extent of the Persian Empire under Darius is reflected in Esther 1:1 and 10:1. The vast territory was nearly 4,900 kilometers (3,000 miles) long and 800-2,400 kilometers (500 to 1,500 miles) wide.

D. Xerxes ruled Persia from 486 to 465 B. C.

1. He was the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther.

2. Esther did not become queen until the seventh year of his reign, which would be about 478 B.C. This was two years after his devastating defeat at Salamis (480 B.C.), which ended Persia's last hope for conquering Greece.

E. Next in line was Artaxerxes I Longimanus (464-424 B.C.).

1. According to historians, he was a minor Persian king but he was of major importance because of his connection with the Hebrew people.

2. Two of the three returns of the Jewish people from captivity in Babylon occurred during his reign.

a. The second return was apparently under Ezra. This was made possible because of the generosity of Artaxerxes.

b. The third return occurred in 445 B.C. (Neh. 1:1). The specific purpose of this return to Jerusalem was to rebuild the city walls.

F. Among the kingdoms of the ancient world, Persia is remembered because it built many important cities.

1. Persepolis was a showpiece of Persian power.

2. Pasargadae was the ancestral capital rapidly supplanted in importance.

3. Ecbatana served as the capital of the Median Empire and became a resort area for the Persians.

4. Susa (the Shushan of Esther) was the former capital of the Elamite Empire.

G. The religion of the Persians centered around are Formation Of The old Iranian religions developed by Zoroaster.

1. He believed in a dualism in which Ahura Mazda (or Ormazd) headed the gods of goodness (Amesha Spentas) and Angra Mainyu (or Ahriman) headed the gods of evil (daevas). Some of this is revealed in the Jewish apocryphal literature which developed from the fifth century B.C. to the time of Christ.

2. Its adherents believed that spiritual reality was divided between Ahura Mazda, the god of light and goodness, and Angra Mainja, the god of darkness and evil.

3. Influenced by the moral teachings of his religion, Cyrus II of Persia was known for his humane attitude toward conquered peoples.

H. The Medo-Persian empire ruled Asia until it was conquered by Alexander the Great (330 B.C.). After Alexander's death, Medo-Persia became part of Syria and later a part of the Persian Empire.

“The Silent Years”

The Intertestamental Period

Lesson Four

The Medo - Persian Empire

Adapted from “Between The Testaments” by Gene Taylor

