

Ezra:

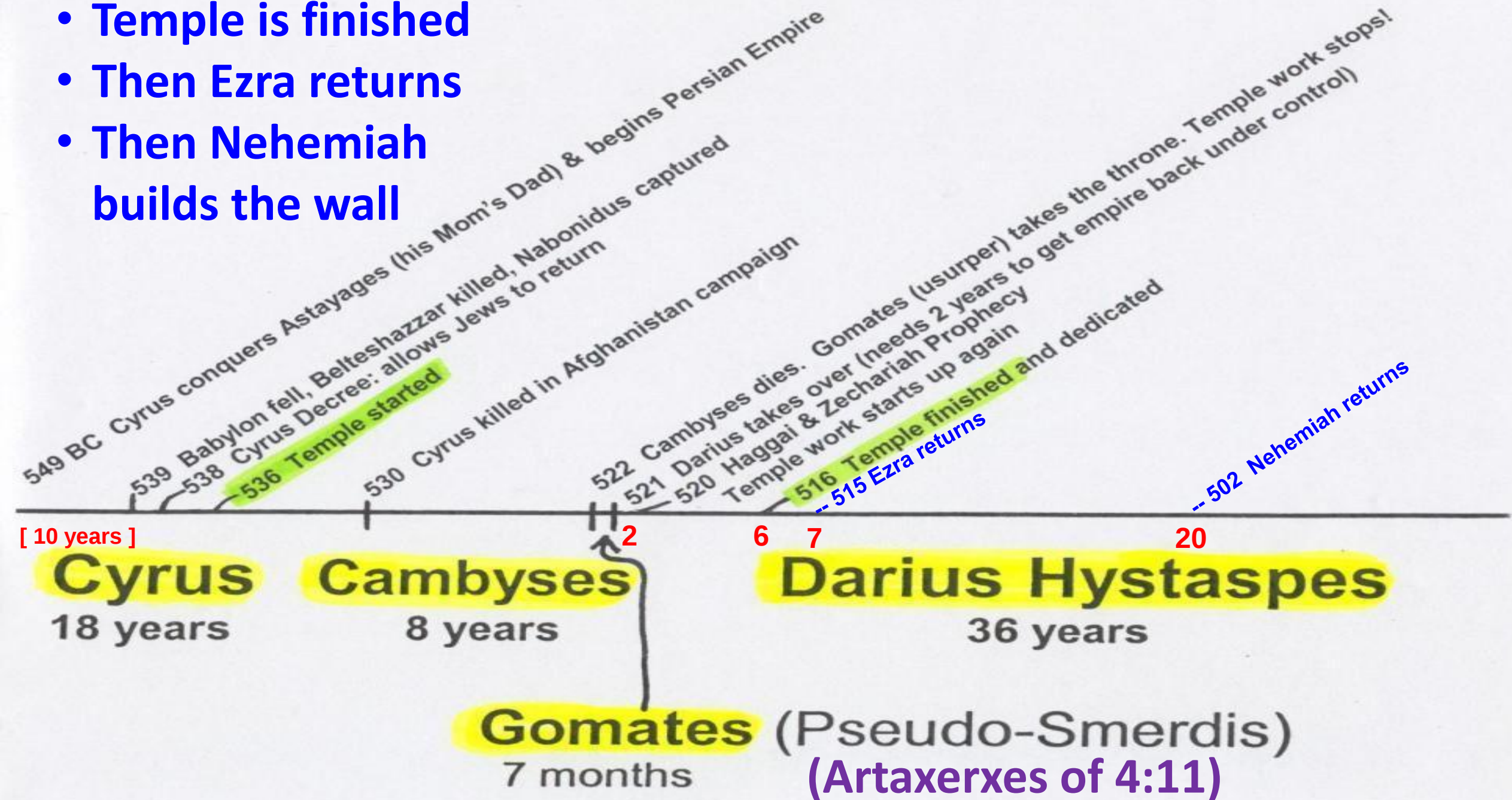
Working together in God's service



**Class 5: Preparation
for Service is Essential**



- Temple is finished
- Then Ezra returns
- Then Nehemiah builds the wall



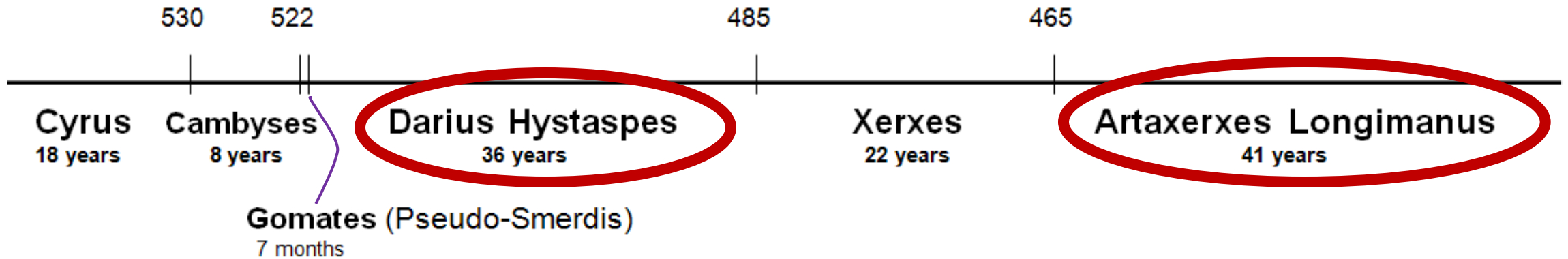
Ezra is ready to go!

Ezra 7:1-7

1 Now after these things, **in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah** (*high priest when Babylonians invaded & he was killed*), the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, 2 the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, 3 the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, 4 the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, 5 the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, **the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest** — 6 **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.** 7 Some of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim came up to Jerusalem **in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.**

God blessed Ezra & prospered his plan

Who is Artaxerxes of Ezra 7?



Neh 5:14; 13:6 indicates that Artaxerxes reigned at least 32 years. Darius Hystaspes & Artaxerxes Longimanus are the only Persians kings to reign that long.

That narrows it down to only 2

Ezra 6:14 is the key

Ezra 6:14 (RSV)

They finished their building by command of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia

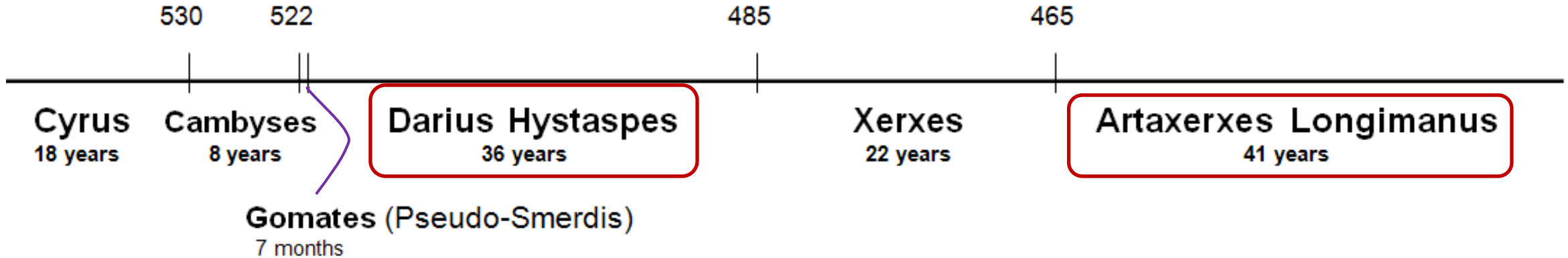


Ezra 6:14 (H.P.M. & others)

They finished their building by command of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius *even* Artaxerxes king of Persia.

Cyrus & Darius were the only Persian kings to make decrees about finishing the temple, so Darius & Artaxerxes must be different titles for the same king

Who is Artaxerxes of Ezra 7?



- **Artaxerxes is just a title**, not a specific individual (there was another Artaxerxes in 4:7 Pseudo-Smerdis.) Now the 7th year (v.7)
- **Most older expositors say Longimanus** (*but he is 58 years after Hystaspes*)
 - But.....Longimanus did not build the temple
 - Longimanus was not mentioned before this in Ezra
- **Probably Darius Hystaspes**
 - Darius & Artaxerxes are titles like: President, Prime Minister, Premier, Chancellor, King, etc.
 - Ezra compiled information from returned exiles in Israel and added his own experience. Different sources probably used different titles for the King. Remember Zerubbabel was also called Sheshbazzar.

Ezra returned as soon as the temple was finished!

Evidence that Artaxerxes is Darius Hystaspes

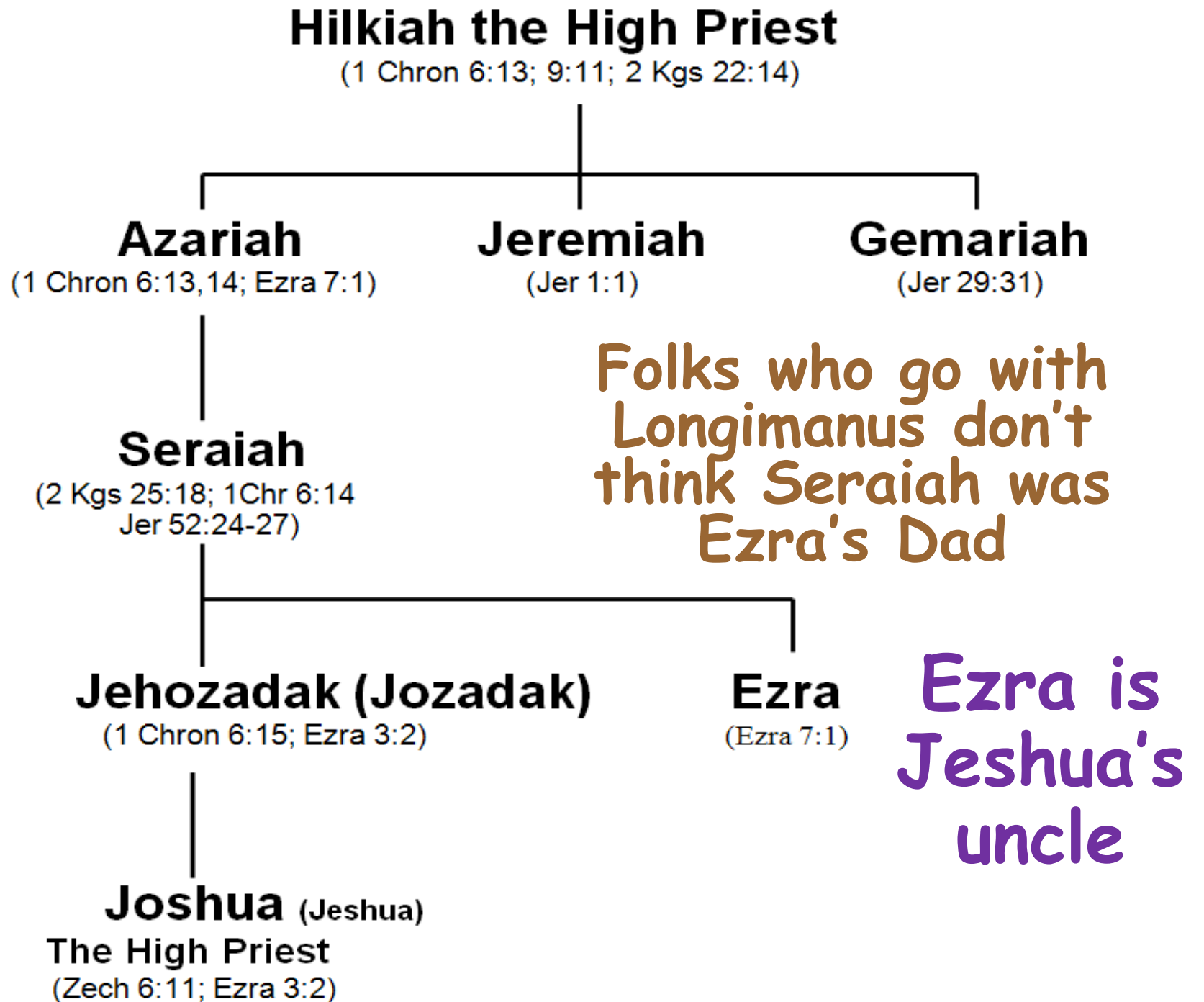
- **Temple finished in his reign.** Ezra 6:14 says “Cyrus and Darius and [even ?] Artaxerxes king [singular] of Persia”
- **Artaxerxes sends Ezra back in 7th year** to work in Temple, offer sacrifices & teach Jews how to worship Yahweh.
Why wait 58 years to do this?
- **Ezra’s age:** he was born before captivity began [son of Seraiah]. In 7th year of Hystaspes he would be at least 71 years old. In 7th of Longimanus he would be over 129, and over 144 when he walked in the procession at the dedication of the wall in Neh 12:36 - possible, but not very likely.
- **Compare Neh 10:2-10 with Ezra 2.** Out of 30 priests & Levites who returned with Zerubbabel, 20 of them signed the covenant with Nehemiah. In Longimanus’ reign they would all be alive 92 years after Zerubbabel’s return – possible, but not very likely!



Artaxerxes is just a title

Family line of Ezra

Ezra's Dad
was killed at
Riblah a
month after
Zedekiah



Ezra travels for 4 months to Jerusalem

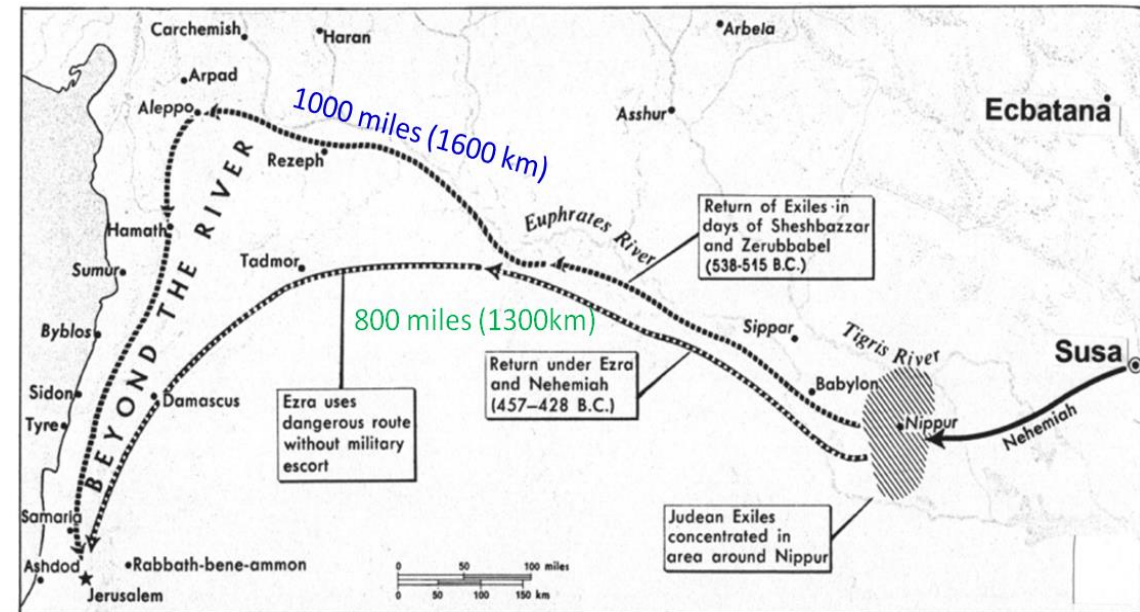
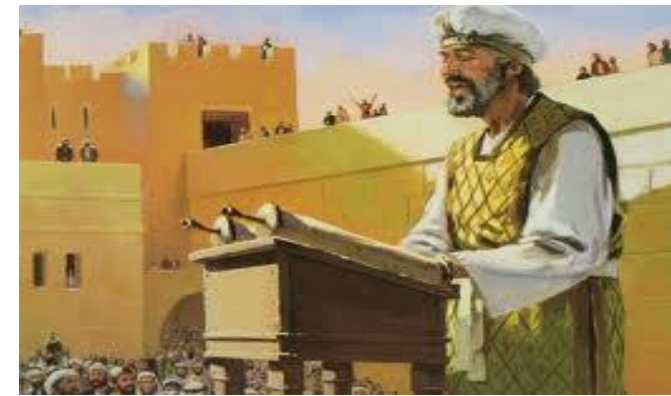
Ezra 7:8-10

8 And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. 9 On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. 10 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.

Ezra prepared to fulfill his service

Ezra's Preparation & Return

- **Skilled in Law of Moses (v.6):** requires time & effort, like any other skilled job (carpenter, seamstress, etc)
- **Hand of God on him:** from 1Kgs 18:46 when Elijah prayed for rain & ran before Ahab – time of national reformation.
- **Journey:** 800 miles [1300 km]. Took 4 months (v.8-9)





Ezra's Preparation (7:10)

His heart was immersed in the Law of the Lord

- 1) Seek** [study (RSV, NASB, NKJVmg)]: *“to tread or frequent” (Strong's) – He poured over the Scriptures*
- 2) Do it** – *he lived his message, it was not just an academic study! [like Paul showing Gentiles Jesus Christ crucified - “reveal His son in me”]*
- 3) Teach** – *he felt the responsibility and privilege to share with others – that's the goal*

**This helps us today to be effective
workers in God's ecclesia**

A circular arrangement of hands of various skin tones, symbolizing unity and community. The hands are stacked in a circle, with fingers pointing towards the center. The skin tones range from light to dark, representing diversity. The background is plain white.

**Unity grows when
we seek God's word
and do it**

Artaxerxes' Letter sent with Ezra

Ezra 7:11-17

11 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:

12 **Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, a scribe** of the Law of the God of heaven: Perfect peace, and so forth.

13 I issue 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.** 14 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;** 15 and whereas you are to carry **the silver and gold which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel**, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem; 16 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 — 17 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. *[money was not for the temple]*

King encouraged Jews to return with Ezra

Lots of Financial help!

Ezra 7:18-26

18 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**. 19 Also the articles that are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem. 20 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**.

21 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**, 22 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. 23 **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?**

24 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**. 25 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. 26 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.

Lot's of Power for Ezra

Purpose of Artaxerxes' Decree in Ezra 7

- Allowed any Jews to return (13)
- Inquire about Judah keeping God's laws (14)
- Convey silver and gold offered by King and counselors & Jews to buy animals, grains & wine for offerings (15-18)
- Convey vessels to temple for service (19)
- Buy anything else needed out of King's treasury (20)
- Told treasurers in province to supply silver, wheat, wine, oil & salt (21-23)
- Treasurers not to tax temple workers (24)
- Gave Ezra authority to appoint officials & judges, and to impose judgements (25-26)



**God is able to do far more abundantly
than all that we ask or think (Eph 3:20)**

Give thanks & glory to God

Ezra 7:27-28

27 **Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers**, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify *[normally translated “glorify”]* the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem, 28 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**. *[clearly Ezra wrote this!]*

Ezra assembles his group

Artaxerxes helps Ezra out!

- **7 counselors (v.14)** = 7 princes of Esther 1:14
- **Silver & gold** – amounts in 8:25-27
- **Lest His wrath be against the king:**
 - Ezra used this as a motive in 8:22
 - Pray for the King and his sons (back in 6:10)
- **Note use of “me” and “I”** – implies Ezra was the author of the book.



Ezra prepared to seek God's law, then God did more than Ezra could have imagined

Those who returned with Ezra

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: 2 of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom; of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel; of the sons of David, Hattush; 3 of the sons of Shecaniah, of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah; and registered with him were **one hundred and fifty males**; 4 of the sons of Pahath-Moab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerahiah, and with him **two hundred males**; 5 of the sons of Shechaniah, Ben-Jahaziel, and with him **three hundred males**; 6 of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him **fifty males**; 7 of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiah the son of Athaliah, and with him **seventy males**; 8 of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him **eighty males**; 9 of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him **two hundred and eighteen males**; 10 of the sons of Shelomith, Ben-Josiphiah, and with him **one hundred and sixty males**; 11 of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him **twenty-eight males**; 12 of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him **one hundred and ten males**; 13 of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names are these — Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah — and with them **sixty males**; 14 also of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zabbud, and with them **seventy males**.

1496 Males & Families – not a huge group. Even with the temple finished, motivation to return was low.

When opportunities arise, our faith can motivates us to jump in, trusting God to make it work



- **Get more involved** in your ecclesia and family
- **Volunteer to lead** CYC, teach Sunday School, play music, organize Sisters' class.
- **Take on an ecclesial project** – witnessing, hall clean up or fix up, meals and snacks
- **Be brave** – help out with pastoral work

**God is looking to see if we want serve
in His family - not be a spectator**

Ezra gathers some Levites

Ezra 8:15-20

15 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.** 16 Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leaders; also for Joiarib and Elnathan, men of understanding. 17 And I gave them a command for **Iddo** the **chief man at the place Casiphia**, 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. 18 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; 19 and **Hashabiah**, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brothers and their sons, **twenty men**; 20 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.

Sometimes we need a little pressure!

The Exiles that Returned with Ezra (Ezra 8)

- **Phinehas & Ithamar (v.2)** = families
 - Nadab & Abihu were killed (Lev 10)
 - Eleazar was in the line of Phinehas
- **Made it to River Ahava (v.15)** – took 9 days & stayed 3 (see 7:9 & 8:31)
- **No Levites! (v.15)** Similar problem back in 2:40-42
 - Rough life in Israel. Couldn't own land.
 - Depended on people for support (Neh 13:4 Tobiah takeover temple storerooms that were supposed to store food for priests!0
 - Some (38) did come when pressured a bit!



**Some folks need a push to get involved.
Start out gently!**

God had warned them to get out of Babylon

Zechariah 2:6-7

6 "Up, up! **Flee from the land of the north,**" says the Lord; "for I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven," says the Lord.

7 **"Up, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon."**

God tried to warn them. Haman's plan to destroy the Jews was coming soon. It was time to return to Israel, but many did not want to go

A photograph of a gravel path in a park. The path starts from the bottom center and splits into two paths that curve outwards to the left and right. The path is surrounded by green grass. In the background, there are several trees with green and yellowing leaves, suggesting autumn. A large tree trunk is visible in the center-left of the path. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

Faith motivates
us to let God
guide our
decisions

Some of the returning Exiles (Ezra 8)



- **Iddo (v.17)** = Zechariah's Dad or Grandpa (5:1)
 - **Casiphia** = settlement village of Jews
- **Sherebiah** = Faithful worker for Nehemiah
 - See Neh 8:7; 9:4; 10:12; 12:24
- **Hashabiah (v.19)**: mentioned in Neh 10:11; 12:24 [involved in wall dedication]

These people returned to work in God's service!

Ezra starts with Humility

Ezra 8:21-23

21 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. 22 **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." 23 **So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.**

God heard their prayer & blessed them

Ezra starts with humility (8:21)



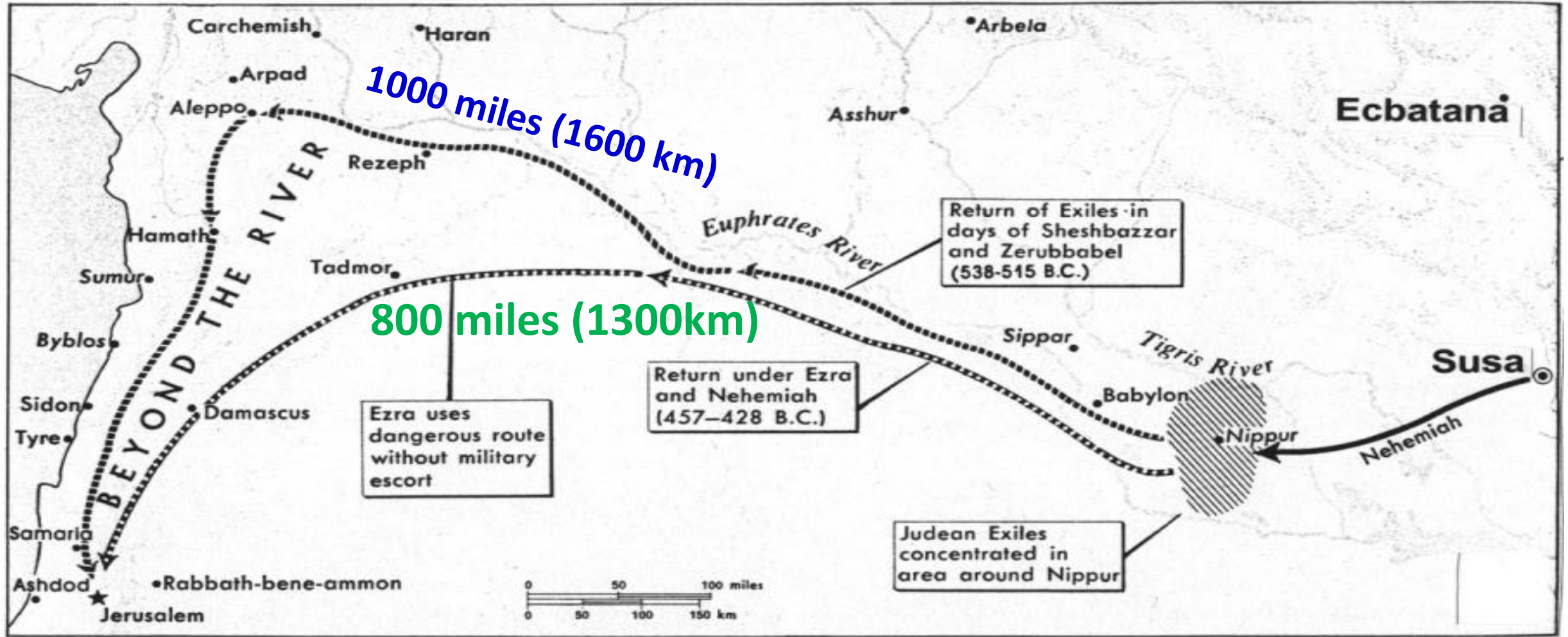
- **Ezra proclaims fast to humble themselves**
 - Ezra starts with humility – good lesson for us!
 - Contrast Nehemiah who brought whole army (2:9)
 - Nehemiah was faithful too.... Not only one way!
 - Ezra backed his word with actions showing great faith! (note ambushes in v.31)
- **Fasted & prayed (v.23):** Actions that allowed God to act for them
 - Isa 58: purpose of fast – neglect self & serve others

**Ezra completely trusted God's involvement in his life.
He was willing to accept God's direction & decisions**

A circular arrangement of hands of various skin tones, symbolizing unity and humility. The hands are stacked in a circle, with each hand resting on the arm of the person next to it. The skin tones range from light to dark, representing diversity. The background is plain white.

**Unity grows when we
all humble ourselves
before God**

The Exiles Return



Ezra took the shorter, dangerous route,
and trusted in God to protect them!

Gifts for the Temple

Ezra 8:24-30

24 And I separated **twelve of the leaders of the priests** — Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them — 25 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. 26 I weighed into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver articles weighing one hundred talents, one hundred talents of gold, 27 twenty gold basins worth a thousand drachmas, and two vessels of fine polished bronze, precious as gold. 28 And I said to them, "You are holy 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. 29 **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." 30 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.

**It's good to not provide opportunities
for people to give in to Sin**

God blessed their Journey!

Ezra 8:31-36

31 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.** 32 So **we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days.**

33 **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 Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui, 34 with the number and weight of everything. All the weight was written down at that time.

35 The children of those who had been carried away captive, who had come from the captivity, 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.

36 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.**

They came to give support, not take over!

The Journey & Arrival

- **12th day of 1st month (v.31)** – they still had a 3.5 month trip
- **He delivered us:** Ezra gave God the credit
 - We make plans & carry them out, but it's God who gives the increase
- **3 days (v.32):** Ezra probably rested & prayed
- **12 bulls for all Israel** → some from all 12 tribes returned
 - **Sin offering:** acknowledged sins, especially captivity
 - **Burnt offering:** commitment to dedicate our lives to God
- **Everything counted & weighed**
 - Good idea to safeguard ecclesial funds for everyone's sake
 - 2Kgs 22:7 Josiah didn't make workers account for money
 - Use discretion: may depend on circumstances



**A man's heart plans his way, but the
LORD directs his steps (Prov 16:9)**

A circular arrangement of hands of various skin tones, symbolizing unity and support. The hands are stacked in a circle, with each hand resting on the arm of the person next to it. The skin tones range from light to dark, representing diversity. The background is plain white.

**Unity is maintained
when we all aim to
support, not take over**

Flexibility: a key characteristic in families and ecclesias



- Many times in life there is more than acceptable way to get a job done.
 - Ezra versus Nehemiah
 - Ezra versus Josiah
- **It's our responsibility to look at the options**, pray about it, and *ask God to bless the choice* we think will work best for our family or ecclesia.
- **When ecclesias make choices that differ from ours, be flexible** and realize that God can work in either decision if we proceed in faith, asking God to make it work

**Even God is flexible! He listens to
our prayers & modifies His plans.**

Next class we will consider how they solved an Ecclesial Problem:

It's good to have some examples in mind

- 1) **Joshua 22:** The 2nd altar the 2.5 tribes built
- 2) **Lev 10:** Moses angry at Eleazar & Ithamar
- 3) **Acts 15** Problem of fellowshiping Gentiles
- 4) **Joshua 9** Gibeonites deceive Joshua & leaders
- 5) **Judges 20-21** Levite & concubine. Benjamin nearly wiped out completely! People emotionally reacted, rather than patiently discussing a solution
- 6) **Num 27 & 36** Daughters of Zelophehad's inheritance

God has given us examples in the Bible so we
can use them as patterns to solve our problems



2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)

15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, **handling accurately the word of truth.**

16 But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness,

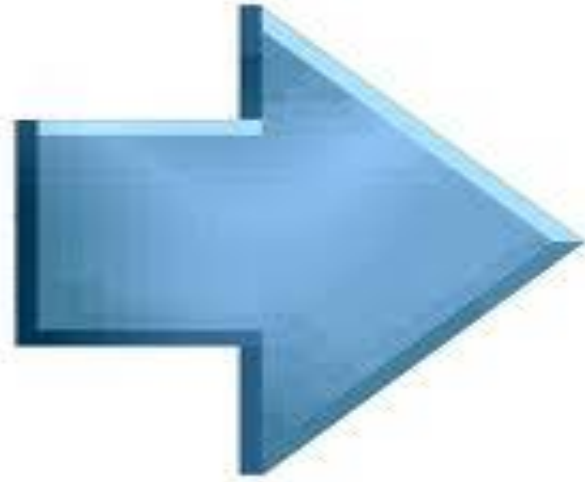
17 and their talk will spread like gangrene.

Now is our time to prepare so we can be faithfully involved in God's service in our families & ecclesias

Lessons from This Class

- We must prepare to properly fulfill our service to our God in our families & ecclesias – read God's word to know His will
- To be effective, we must be prepared to “do it” – walk the walk
- God can provide finances & whatever we need to get His work done when we trust Him and are willing to do our part
- Let your faith make you brave to get involved in God's work in His family
- Remember to give God the credit!

Next



Class 6: We must provide an inheritance for our children



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