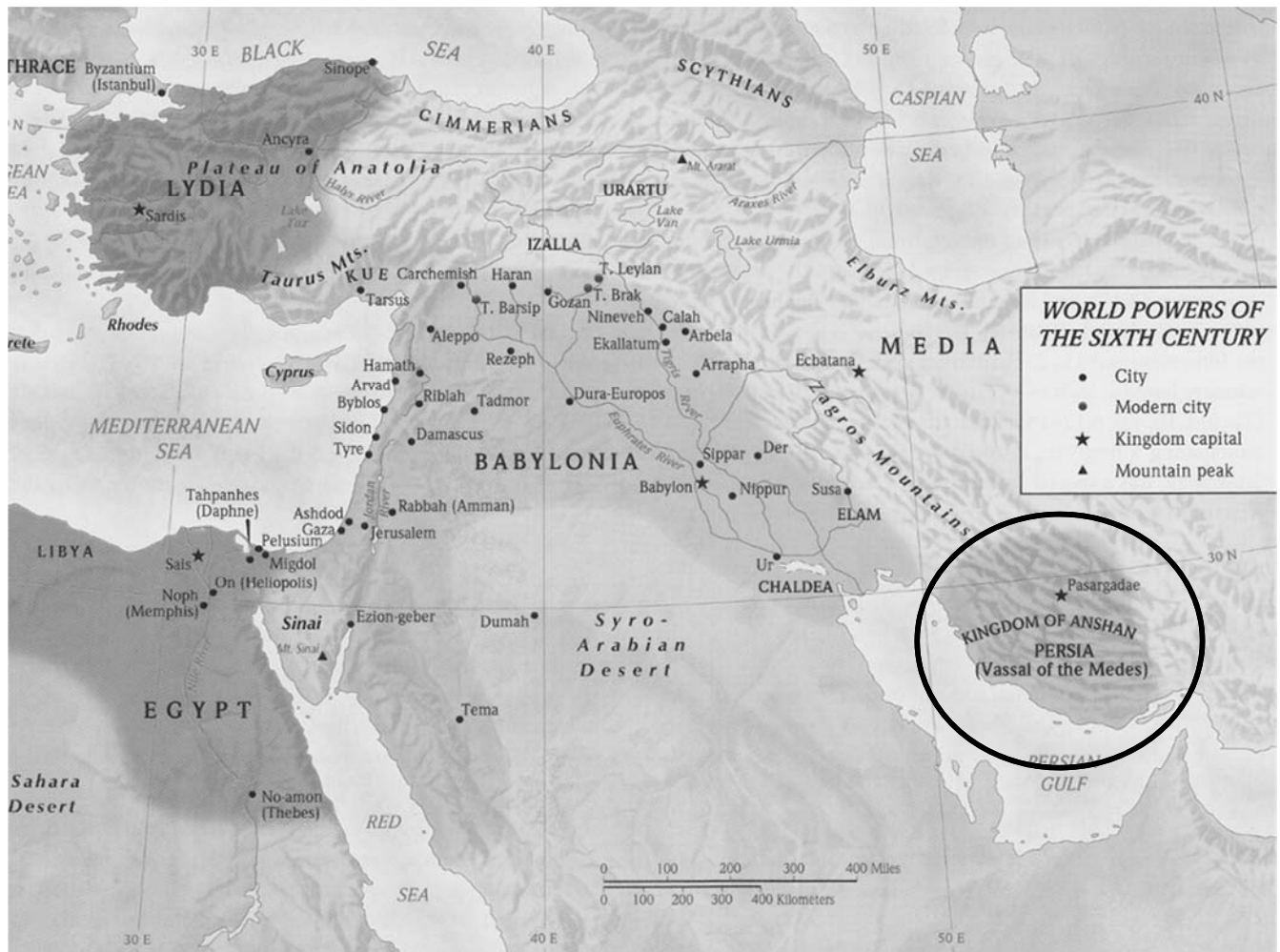




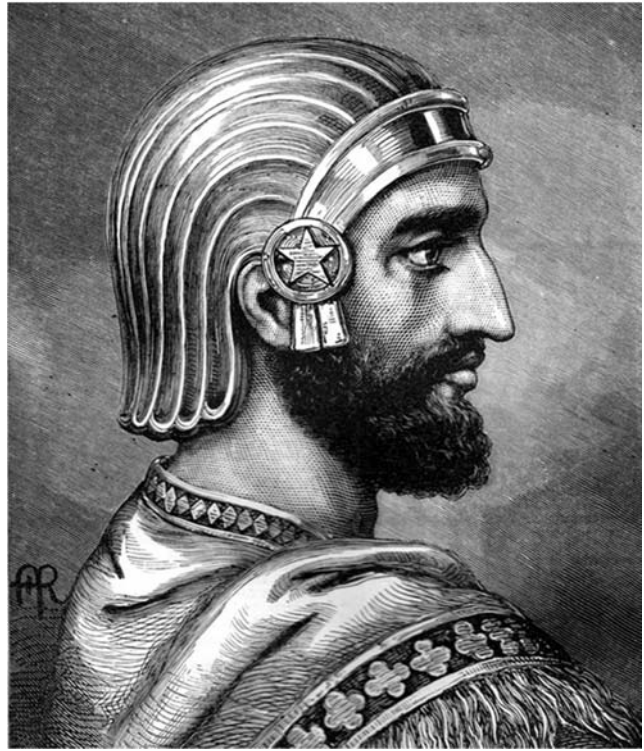
# Lesson 3-1

## Ezra & Nehemiah: Return from Exile

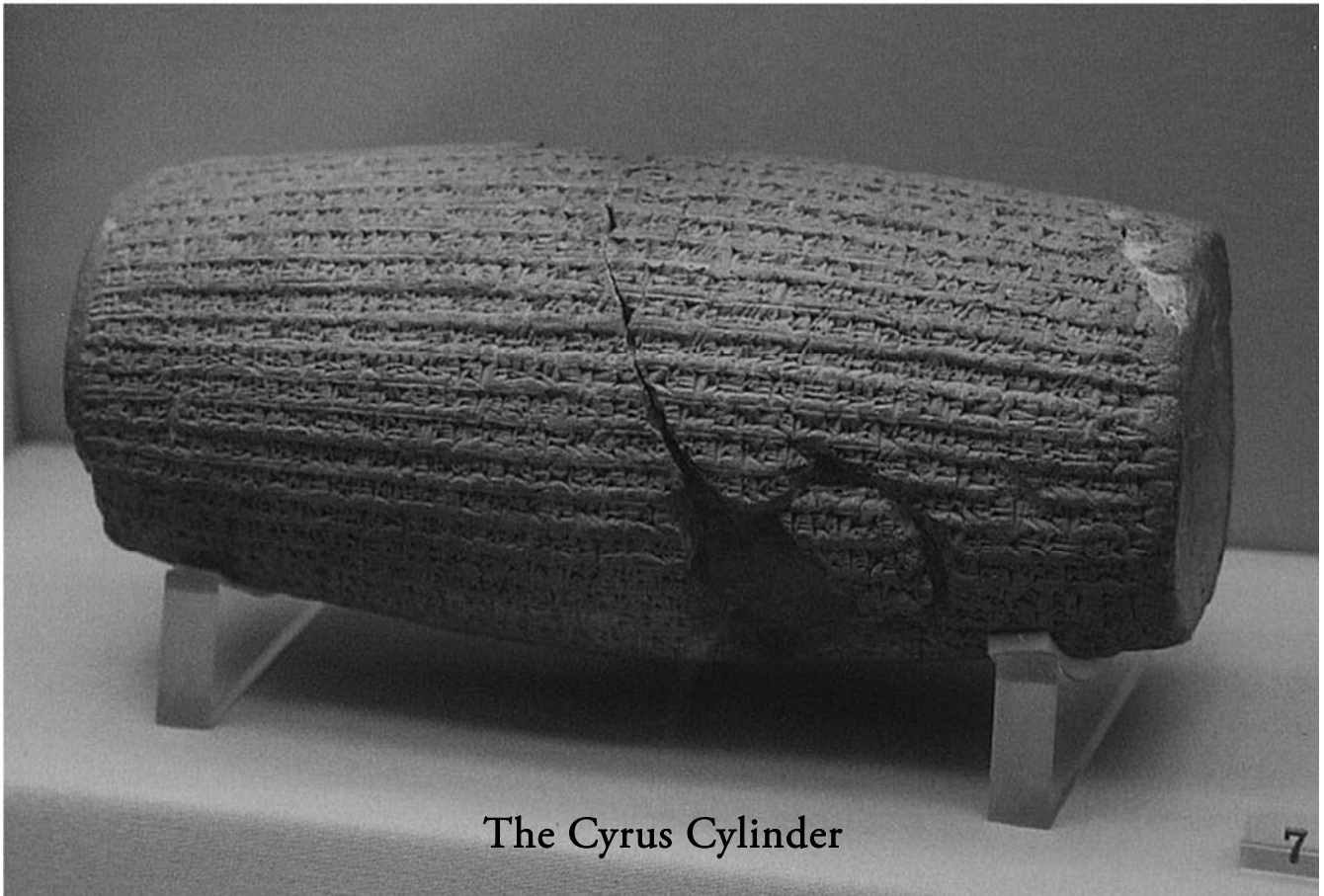


# Post-Exile

- ✦ In 539 BCE, the Persians under the rule of King Cyrus (“Cyrus the Great”) conquers Babylonia.
- ✦ According to the books of Ezra and Chronicles, King Cyrus issues a decree for the Jews (who had been exiled to Babylon since 586) to return to Judah and rebuild the temple.



King Cyrus of Persia (576-530 BCE)



The Cyrus Cylinder

# Post-Exile

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- ✦ While this period of history is difficult to reconstruct, the return from exile may have happened in stages:
- ✦ In 538 BCE Sheshbazzar leads an initial group of returnees, who begin the process of rebuilding the temple. People living in the land of Judah oppose the construction of the temple; Sheshbazzar abandons the project.
- ✦ Cyrus the Great's successor, Darius I, reaffirms his predecessor's decree. Sheshbazzar is replaced with a new Judean governor, Zerubbabel, who is assisted by the high priest Jeshua. Rebuilding of the temple continues until it is completed in 516 BCE.
  - This period (536 BCE - 70 CE) is sometimes referred to as the "Second Temple Period"
  - While the temple regains immense power, the people also continue to reconstitute themselves as followers of the Torah scriptures.
- ✦ A third group, led by Ezra in 458 BCE under the reign of Persian ruler Artaxerxes I reestablishes the Torah as the authority for Jews in Judah.
- ✦ In 445 BCE, Artaxerxes I sends Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

# Ezra-Nehemiah

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- ✦ What's the story with Ezra and Nehemiah?
  - The books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which originally formed a single literary work, portray the return from exile, under the edict of King Cyrus.
  - A major concern in Ezra-Nehemiah is to establish rigorous boundaries between the returning Jews and other cultures, in order to protect their ethnic and religious identity.
    1. This concern is based on the view that the community might repeat the mistakes that caused the exile (e.g., worshipping other gods), resulting once again in destruction.
    2. Ezra-Nehemiah views the returnees as a righteous remnant with a renewed commitment to the covenant.

# Ezra-Nehemiah

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## + What's the story with Ezra and Nehemiah?

- As a result Ezra-Nehemiah reflects a twofold interest in religious practice.
  1. A restoration of pre-exile institutions, such as the temple, its sacrificial system, and the city itself.
  2. The establishment of religious practice conforming to the scriptures, namely the *Torah*.

# Ezra-Nehemiah

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## + What's in Ezra-Nehemiah?

### + Accounts of returning and rebuilding

- Return and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1-6)
- Return and rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 1-7)

### + Accounts that identify and authorize individuals and groups

- Returnees/Settlers (Ezra 2, 8, 10; Nehemiah 7, 11)
- Levites/Priests (Ezra 8, Nehemiah 7, 12)
- Ezra & Nehemiah (Ezra 7, Nehemiah 2)

### + Accounts of separation from outsiders

- Repentance & Breaking Ties with Outsiders (Ezra 9-10, Nehemiah 7-9, 13)
- Strengthening Ties to the Covenant (Nehemiah 9-10; 12)

# Ezra-Nehemiah

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- ✚ How is Ezra-Nehemiah arranged?
- ✚ Ezra-Nehemiah depicts a three stage fulfillment of God's promise to build the house of God (i.e., the temple) in Judah:
  - Each stage/section of the book begins in exile and ends in Jerusalem.
  - Each stage/section expands the concept of the "house of God"
    1. The Temple (Ezra 3-6)
    2. The Community (Ezra 7-9)
    3. Jerusalem as a whole (Nehemiah 1-7)
    4. Jerusalem as a holy city (Nehemiah 11.1)
- ✚ In this manner Ezra-Nehemiah is arranged theologically, rather than chronologically.