

The Empire Next Door: Persia

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[0 : 00] Hello everyone, welcome back.

This is our third and final little section on the Empire Next Door. We're going to be talking about the Persians, right? John Belts is with us again for the last time. Why don't I open and pray?

Father in heaven, we thank you for the opportunity to study the cultural background of your word. We ask that you would bless John with wisdom, that you give us ears to hear. We pray, Lord, that this would be a fruitful time for us and for our church.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen. All right. Hi, everybody. Good to see you all today. So it's been a little bit since we didn't have class last week, obviously, because we had Easter.

So I'll just start with a little bit of review from where we were previous two sessions. So we started with a little bit of introduction about the fact that the ancient Israelites in the Bible are not exactly big players on the scene.

[1 : 15] They end up sort of being the little guy between some more powerful empires geopolitically. We talked about the fact that even though they're a small power, the area, geographically, the area that they inhabit is highly desirable by those empires.

As sort of a land bridge connecting Asia, Europe, and Africa. We talked about the Assyrian Empire. That's me looking scared again.

We talked about the Babylonian Empire. Babylonian Empire. Where...

Oops. Ah! Stop that. Where's my map? There's my map.

We talked about the Babylonian Empire. And if you'll remember a little bit, we had, you know, the Assyrians kind of menaced Judah.

[2 : 22] They destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. The Babylonians finally destroy Jerusalem and carry off a lot of the people into captivity in Babylon. And now we'll get the Persians, sort of the conclusion to our trilogy.

There's sort of a metaphor that I used when I was teaching this for a class one time, where I said it's like the Star Wars trilogy, right? From the Judean perspective, this is the Star Wars trilogy.

You have the Assyrians come, right? They have a Death Star. They blow up the northern kingdom, otherwise known as the planet Alderaan. And then, right? But then Sennacherib's Death Star is destroyed outside the gates of Jerusalem.

So, you know, the Babylonian Empire is kind of the empire strikes back, right? They come in. They take out Jerusalem. Now we're going to get the return of the Judeans.

Glad you're getting the metaphor. This makes my day. Okay. So, what we're going to do today in talking about this third empire, the Persians, I'm going to start with a little bit of history of sort of the Persian Empire itself.

- [3 : 31] Then we're going to talk a little bit about their culture, so what that was like, what made them similar and different to the empires before them. And then we're going to talk specifically about some of the biblical connections that we get with the Persian Empire.
- And I wanted to start with two biblical references to kind of give us a little bit of sort of a jumping off point.
- So, they're both from Ezra. The first is from the very beginning of the book. Thus says King Cyrus of Persia, The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah.
- Any of those among you who are his people, may their God be with them, are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel.
- He is the God who is in Jerusalem. And then later in the book, in Ezra 6, we get a letter written from a Persian emperor, and he gives some instructions, and then he says, Furthermore, I decree that if anyone alters this edict, a beam shall be pulled out of the house of the perpetrator.
- [4 : 48] Who shall then be impaled upon it? And the house shall be made a dunghill. So, I bring these two passages up here to sort of, there's sort of a dichotomy that we're going to get with the Persians.
- On the one hand, the Judeans will really seem to like them, because Cyrus will issue this decree allowing the exiled Judeans, who were carried off by the Babylonians, to return to Jerusalem if they want to.
- And they tend to have pretty good relations, the Persians and the Judeans. On the other hand, the Persians are still very ruthless, and they will use this kind of very graphic public execution.
- So, we often get this sort of idea that the, you know, we talked about this in the previous sessions, but the Assyrian Empire gets this reputation for being sort of very incredibly ruthless, reveling in their cruelty.
- The Babylonians also get a reputation for that, although in their own sources, they don't seem to be quite as reveling in their sadism as the Assyrians.
- [6 : 05] And the Persians kind of, they get a little bit of a reputation in the history of being sort of the benevolent empire, the nicer empire. And in some ways, that's true, and in some ways, that's not.
- As you can see, they're still more than willing to threaten people with impalement. Right? So, but let's talk a little bit about what this history looks like.
- So, as I said before, we had, or last time, I should say, we had the Babylonian Empire. And the Babylonians had previously, if we go back even further, this is the problem, the more of these that you do, then the more you have to review every time.
- Right? So, the Babylonians had originally teamed up with a group called the Medes to take out the Assyrians when they kind of got a little bit tired of the cruelty that the Assyrians used in dealing with people.
- There's later some friction that kind of happens between the Babylonians and the Medes. A group called the Persians, probably a fairly sort of newcomer group on the scene, takes over the Medes, and there's sort of this long shared border that they have, and there's sort of a, there's a tension there for a little while.
- [7 : 27] And eventually the, this sort of coalition of Medes, Persians, Elamites, and probably a couple other groups of people united under this ruler by the name of Cyrus, invade the heartland of Babylonia there in southern Mesopotamia.

And this coincides with the reign of the last Babylonian king by the name of Nabonidus, who was very unpopular in some circles.

So, there were certain factions in Babylonia that also probably welcomed this sort of regime change. And Cyrus seems to have, when he took over, played to some of these groups, right?

There were certain priestly groups who didn't like some of the religious changes that Nabonidus had initiated. And so, they probably were grateful to Cyrus, and he, in turn, patronized them to get loyal supporters in his new territory.

And certain groups of foreign deportees as well. Cyrus seems to have patronized them as well. Not patronized in terms of they're there, but patronized in terms of giving money and support too.

[8 : 44] And the Judean exiles seem to have been one of those groups. So, Cyrus's empire, as you can tell, stretches a lot further than the previous two empires we've looked at.

It goes sort of from what is today Iran out in the east there down up through, like, to the coasts of Turkey, what is today Turkey in the west.

And his successors will actually get down in and conquer Egypt for a while, which even the Assyrians weren't really able to do. They were able to raid there, take back loot, but they weren't really able to hold that area.

And sort of like we did with the Assyrians and the Babylonians, I want to divide the history of the Persian Empire into sort of three periods.

We call this, so the first one being sort of the rise to power. This is the reign of Cyrus and his son Cambyses. Cambyses is actually the one who takes over Egypt. Then we get the reformers, or a group I have termed the reformers.

[10 : 03] Cambyses actually dies under mysterious circumstances. And a Persian noble by the name of Darius seizes control and takes out a number of potential rivals for the throne.

He claims ancestry from a royal figure named Achaemenes, which is where we then get the term Achaemenid from. So this is sometimes called the Achaemenid Persian Empire.

And Darius makes a number of major administrative reforms in the empire to kind of help keep it together. So he divides it up into a series of satrapies or sort of provinces.

He does a number of different reforms in terms of the administrative languages that they're using. Is this for Aramaic? Did they use Aramaic?

Yeah, this is probably when he is probably the one who initiates the move towards putting all their administrative apparatus in Aramaic. As opposed to, they were trying to do it in Elamite for a while, which is interesting.

[11 : 07] And is that ultimately why hundreds of years later many Jews were speaking Aramaic? Partly, yeah. We'll get to that a little bit when I get to culture. But, yeah, that helped a trend that was already happening of Aramaic being a commonly spoken sort of lingua franca throughout the Near East.

So we have Darius and then we have his son Xerxes. Both these figures, again, might sound familiar if you know some Greek history. Or, again, they both show up in the Bible.

We'll get to that later. But both Darius and Xerxes actually will campaign into the Aegean and into Greece. And that will show up in certain Greek sources like Herodotus and, I think, Thucydides and stuff like that.

So those wars between the Greeks and the Persians are well attested in the Greek sources. They talk about that a lot.

That was a big, pivotal moment for them. And then we have a period after that that I've sort of referred to as, like, the status quo. It's a lot more static than the two periods before it.

[12 : 23] It's also a lot longer, right? So we get the 460s down to about 330. Right, so that's 130-some years.

It's not really static. There's definitely things that are happening. There's sort of more politicking that happens between the Greek city-states and the Persians in the western part of the empire.

Egypt keeps trying to rebel and they keep having to smash it down. But the grand sweep of the empire and its borders remains fairly consistent.

Again, there's a few, like, attempted coups and things like that. But the empire sort of continues to function. And this is probably a result of some of these administrative reforms that were made under Darius.

It kind of allowed the empire to sort of continue to function. And we'll talk about that in a sec. But the empire continued to function basically until a guy by the name of Alexander, who is Macedonian, conquers Greece, while his dad, I guess, conquered Greece, launches a campaign into Persia at a time that was sort of politically inopportune for the Persian monarchy.

[13 : 39] And he's able to take, basically, at that point, he's able to take over the Persian empire. And so Alexander is often thought of as, like, the last Persian king, even though he's Greek slash Macedonian.

But after his death, the empire begins to fracture within a few years. And his generals kind of end up dividing up the empire between them. And we'll get a whole series of empires that are sort of carved out of this territory.

But that's kind of, and that's sort of where we put the end of the Persian empire. So in terms of culture, so this is an inscription that is, so interestingly written in, this inscription is written in Babylonian, Babylonian Akkadian.

But it is an inscription by a Persian king. So the Persians tended to be a lot more decentralized than a lot of the previous empires, like the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

They tended to allow provinces and the governors of those provinces to be fairly independent and have a significant amount of autonomy as long as they paid taxes, provided levied troops for the royal campaigns and stuff like that.

[14 : 57] And they also drew a lot from the cultures that they conquered. So they sort of have this model that, you know, if they take over your region and you have really good metal workers, they'll say, hey, why don't you send us some metal workers?

If we ever have any metalworking needs, we come to you, right? Just pay your taxes, send troops when we need them, don't rebel, everything's going to be good. So this is sort of that, like, lighter touch that historians sometimes talk about with the Persian Empire, that they weren't quite as demanding or quite as cruel.

They were, again, a little bit easier to deal with if you're a conquered people group than the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Although, again, as we said, they do tend to do things like impale people.

In fact, most of the other claimants to the throne that Darius had to contend with after the death of Cambyses, when he captured them, he mostly just impaled them.

Or he cut off their noses and ears and paraded them around to show what happens if you go against him. So he was not a nice guy. But anyway, sorry, I digress.

[16 : 13] This, I bring this inscription up to show partly that when the Persians took over, for example, Mesopotamia, rather than instituting Persian as sort of the language that they would make everyone use, they even put, they put even royal inscriptions often in Babylonian.

And we actually have cases where we'll have, this is actually, I think, one of a set of three slabs in different languages.

So there's one that is written in Persian, there's one that's written in Babylonian, and there's one that's written in Elamite. And they will commonly do these trilingual inscriptions. And then some of them you find from Egypt, and they're quadrilingual.

They'll add in Egyptian, too, because the Egyptians were really kind of, they really wanted their language to be represented. So the Persians said, well, okay, we'll start putting Egyptian on there, too. So they started to, again, sort of incorporate a lot of languages and a lot of even artistic styles from some of the peoples that they conquered.

As Tom mentioned earlier, right, so the language, the Aramaic language, which originated here in what's today Syria, was becoming sort of more of like a lingua franca throughout the Near East.

[17 : 37] And this was happening as early as the Assyrian period. There's Assyrian kings who have letters where they say, stop writing to me in Aramaic. I would like you to write to me in Akkadian.

So this was so popular that people were kind of trying to make it a more official language. And the Assyrian and Babylonian kings didn't really want to deal with that.

But the Persians saw this as an opportunity. They said, well, if everybody wants to speak this one language, why don't we just use that? And so they did. And this, of course, then accelerated the usage of Aramaic throughout the Near East.

So we have it being used down here in Egypt. We have texts from Central Asia that are written in Aramaic, although I think it's fairly bad Aramaic. It was definitely somebody who had just picked this language up fairly recently, right?

So they have this sort of sense in which they can use sort of the tools around them, right? They conquer a people group and they're like, well, what can you sort of contribute to sort of our larger conglomeration that we have here?

[18 : 50] And their art draws a lot from Mesopotamia. When they conquered Mesopotamia, they did a lot of this sort of hybridization, not hybridization isn't quite the right word, but sort of incorporating it into their own sort of style and aesthetic.

So these are some Persian columns that, along with this text, these are now in the University of Chicago. They did some excavations in what is today southern Iran and have some different Persian stuff there.

The inscription on the right here is an inscription in Old Persian. Again, one of a series that was probably a trilingual inscription. I have a quick question. Yeah.

I have two questions. First, was there like a technological innovation that allowed Persia to conquer all their lands? Like what made that so formidable? Was this a simple American army?

I don't know what the provinces is. What was so terrifying about the first part? So there's some suggest, there's certain Greek authors who suggested that they might have had some organizational innovations.

[20 : 09] We're not quite sure how much we trust them because there's, correct me if I'm wrong on this, Tom, but I think it's Herodotus who says that, it was a Greek historian, who says that before Cyrus, all of these Near Eastern armies, they had just a bunch of dudes.

They weren't organized. They'd have like archers and spearmen and swordsmen all kind of together, and they'd just sort of throw them into battle like a big, you know, sort of mass of people, like a big mob. And Cyrus was like, well, we should start organizing them and put the archers here and the spearmen there and stuff.

And we know that's actually not true, right? Because we have depictions of battles from previous empires and previous civilizations in the Near East, and we know that they organize, right? It's, any large human endeavor is going to have to organize, and the Mesopotamians were great at organizing things.

That's why they developed the cuneiform writing system, was to help them organize stuff better. So we know that that's not true, but Herodotus may be saying this because he had heard some stuff about some kind of logistical reforms that they may have done, and he kind of just didn't get the full detail of it, or he heard it second or third hand.

So the other reason, one of the other possible reasons is, again, like this sort of different alliance of peoples, the fact that you have Medes up here, Persians here, Persians take over the Medes, then they take over another group here in central Anatolia.

[21 : 39] So they kind of have a lot that they have going on, and then combined with the fact that a lot of people in Babylonia really didn't like Nabonidus, their current king, it makes that a lot easier.

It's presented in the sources as though that campaign took like a very short amount of time, like they went in and just took over Babylon like that. There's been some research in recent years that suggested that it may have been a little bit more of a slog for the Persians to get through there, but you can tell, I mean, they're already, so this is mountains right here, so it's very easy for them to kind of, they're relatively safer up in the mountains, but they can kind of swoop down into what is essentially the Babylonian's sort of core or heartland right there from the mountains.

So strategically, they have a good position, right? And it's one of the constants throughout Mesopotamian history, sorry, this is another digression, but one of the constants throughout Mesopotamian history is that these peoples here living in the sort of river valley of the Tigris and the Euphrates are always kind of at the mercy of mountain peoples, as they saw them, who live up there in the mountains and can strike and then retreat.

So they have to sort of build these larger civilizations and empires that have the resources and the infrastructure and the organization to be able to either withstand attack or in some cases, go up into the mountains and try to knock these people out before they become a problem.

So it's one of these things that, some of the things happening in Nabonidus' reign meant that he might not have contained that situation as well as he could have or should have combined with just sort of the historical factors of this ever-growing alliance of people up there.

[23 : 27] He might have been kind of doomed even if he had got his act together. Why are you on the map there? Sure. Where are the Elamites? So they're also right here. Okay.

Yeah. In fact, so the Persians kind of, it seems like they kind of come into that area and sort of mingle together with the Elamites so that when you have, sort of to the point that when you have people later calling themselves Persians, they may also be like part Elamites.

It's sort of a, it's one of these things where like ethnicity gets kind of tricky. And again, so from sort of Cyrus through the early reign of Darius, they're actually trying to, the Persians are actually trying to use Elamite as their administrative language before they got the idea to be like, you know what?

Everyone's just speaking Aramaic. Let's just use Aramaic. It's just too hard, right? You know, no one's going to learn Elamite that we only use in this one little area. It's so much easier. So many people speak Aramaic. Let's just use Aramaic.

Does it make sense with the alliances because it seemed like the Lord always chided Israel for trusting these alliances with the surrounding nations versus trusting him for their defense and their salvation.

[24 : 36] And it makes sense that Persians were really big into alliances and that we really tempted when that comes from the empire. Well, this is, well this is, and we can come back to this maybe in the Q&A; a little bit, but this comes back to the, do, do, do, do, do, this sort of thing, right?

If you're, if you're this guy, making an alliance is a good thing for you. You can do that. That's fine. If you're this guy, you're trying to make alliances to survive, but those alliances, like you don't have any power in those alliances.

So a lot of times when the prophets warn people about, you know, don't trust Egypt, it's because, don't make an alliance with Egypt, it's because you can't trust Egypt, right?

Egypt doesn't have your back. Egypt just wants you to be a buffer zone against this guy. They want you as a meat shield against that guy, and this guy wants you as a meat shield against that guy. So that's a big part of it as well.

There's a geopolitical aspect to that as well that goes into it. Whereas, again, for the bigger guys, like the alliances make more sense, you know, because they want people to sort of be part of their agenda.

[25 : 41] So the power dynamic is sort of in their favor. Okay.

The other thing I'll say before we move on from Persian culture is that the Persians also in this sort of, along with this sort of decentralized sort of model that they have, they actually have multiple, they have like five capitals.

So they have, there's two capitals, well, three over here in sort of the Persian heartland. They have Susa, which was an Elamite city, shows up in Esther, right?

That's where most of the action takes place in the book of Esther. They have a city called Pisargaday, which I think was founded by Cyrus, if I'm not mistaken, and Persepolis, which I think was founded by Darius.

Then there's also, further up here, there's a Median capital city that they used as another capital called Ekbatana. And then they also used Babylon here, or sorry, it's closer to there, closer to Baghdad, as another capital city within their empire.

[27 : 04] So that's, yeah, it's like five capitals. And they kind of, the royal court seems to have moved between these different capitals at different points, just because they could.

As I said, too, they bring a slightly different royal ideology with them. So we talked about with the Assyrians, how they have this idea that the king is the high priest of the Assyrian god Ashur, and sort of, he is the mediation between that deity and humanity.

With the Babylonians, we had a slightly different idea that the Babylonian king is the king, he's not the priest. There are also priests, and there is the king.

And so then you have these semi-independent temple estates that control a lot of, have a lot of power within Babylonian society that are distinct from the king.

With the Persian kings, they sort of continue, again, that slightly decentralized model or this model of essentially sort of provinces, in some cases, almost have their own semi-autonomy.

[28 : 19] To the point that in the status quo period, there's actually two provincial governors up here called satraps, and two of these satraps actually go to war with each other.

And the king is just like, you know what, just keep paying your taxes, I don't care what you guys do to each other. You know, the king doesn't really get involved. They were, however, like I said, just still just as, could be still just as ruthless as the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

Darius and his successors state in their inscriptions that they were fiercely opposed to what they called the lie and that all their opponents they styled as being servants of the lie.

And this seems to have been an ideological thing. It may be related to what later we will term the religion of Zoroastrianism, which they seem to have had some early form of.

It's not the same as what we see in later Zoroastrianism. That's a whole other issue. But in Zoroastrianism, there's sort of a duality between the good god, Ahura Mazda, and the evil god, Ahreman, who is sort of the, known for lying and deception, whereas Ahura Mazda is known with truth and truth saying.

[29 : 47] So, actually, this inscription here, this Persian inscription, it starts off referring to, right here, Ahura Mazda, right there.

So this is, oops, so we know that they're at least worshipping that god at that time. Whether that looks the same as later Zoroastrianism is a big question. But, these references to the lie seem to be also part of that religious and royal ideology.

Yeah, Tom? What roughly, what is that description? That is, I don't remember which king this is. I want to say that might be Xerxes.

Okay. So, yeah. Like 400s, 500s? Yeah, 400s. Yeah. I'm going to ask you a really crazy question. This looks like a different material that it's made out of than a lot of the other clay pieces.

Is this indeed a different material? Yes. So this is stone. Okay. Yeah. So we sometimes get cuneiform carved really, really nice on stone and we sometimes get it impressed on clay tablets.

[30 : 59] Yeah. So it'll look very different in those two media. Right. Even though they, if you see them out and about, you're like, it's hard to tell sometimes which is which unless you get a good look at it. But yes, they are different.

That one's also stone there. Yeah. Yeah. I have a question. In any of the Persian literature, was there any acknowledgement of there's this small nation of Israel and Judah but we heard there's some thing that this god of theirs did in Egypt back in the long time ago at the exit.

because I was reading the Exodus this past week. I'm doing this so all the nations will know that I am the Lord. And I'm just wondering if Persians, was there any sort of echo of that even during this time in 500 BC?

not that we know of. One of the tricky things for Persian history is that we have some of their royal inscriptions where they're not going to talk about how cool they think other groups are.

They're going to talk about how cool they think they are. We don't have a lot of their specific annals. We have some administrative documents. One of the tricky things is as they start writing more in Aramaic, so whereas Akkadian, so Babylonian Akkadian, and Elamite were written with cuneiform on clay, and so it was, well, Old Persian was also a cuneiform script.

[32 : 33] Aramaic was not. Aramaic was mostly written on papyrus or parchment, and so most of the time, unless it's stored in a very dry climate and we get very lucky, it mostly disintegrates.

So if they would have had it in their records or their annals or in their literature, probably we don't really have it. There's very, very little of that material that we have available to us right now, just with the sort of accidents of history.

So it would be really interesting to see if they had anything like that, but most of what we have from the Persians are these kind of royal descriptions where it's very much the king talking about himself and how awesome he is and all of that.

Let's see, anything else I was going to say there? No, okay. So let's move on to biblical connections. Oh, sorry, one more thing I wanted to mention here.

So I mentioned that Alexander was sort of thought of as, you know, Alexander the Great comes in, brings Greek culture with him, but it's still sort of thought of as kind of the last Persian empire because he rules over that whole empire, plus Greece and Macedonia as well.

[33 : 54] When he dies, there's a whole succession crisis, and it's honestly more complicated than Game of Thrones.

I have a lot of difficulty being able to understand, much less articulate, what happens after Alexander dies. But for a little bit, his half-brother is sort of the king, but ruled over by a regent because his half-brother may have had some mental difficulties.

And his half-brother's name was Philip. Well, actually, his half-brother changed his name to Philip when he became king. Again, like I said, it's complicated. But, earlier this week, I was in the collection, and I was messing around with some tablets, the collection here that we have at Yale, and I was messing around with some tablets, and I knew that this was, based on the style of this fragment, that it was from that sort of early Hellenistic period.

Because you still have in Babylonia, there's still these temple communities, the temple estates are still using cuneiform for some things, even though everybody around them is starting to use Aramaic and then eventually Greek.

So I knew that this was from that period, but I was, and I knew that this was a date formula here, but I was trying to figure out what the king's name was, and I was having trouble reading it.

[35 : 16] And then I realized that it was, read, so this is year seven of Mr. Pilipsu, which is how the Babylonians wrote Philip, Pilipsu.

And so that's, and year seven was the last year before Philip died and then everything just kind of fell apart. So I thought that was really cool. I was like, oh, perfect, this is right at the end of the time I'm about to talk about on Sunday.

I got very excited. So, because I'm a nerd and little impressed triangles on clay will get me, you know, very excited and giddy and, yeah.

Anyway, like I said, I'm a little bit of a dork. So, as I said before, and we talked about it a little bit, when Cyrus takes control of Babylonia, he allows the exiled Judeans to return to their homeland, and this might have been part of sort of his larger sort of PR campaign to sort of style himself as like, hey, I'm the benevolent ruler.

Everybody else has just been forcing you guys to do stuff. I'm not like that. I'm the nice guy, but you still better pay your taxes or I'll get really upset. You know, he had that kind of vibe to some of his PR, right?

[36 : 33] So, his allowing the Judeans to return is part of this PR campaign to sort of get, again, more various groups and sort of demographic, right?

He almost seems very modern in the sense he's sort of thinking about his demographics that he has in his empire and like, what do I need to do to get this demographic on my side, right? So, he allows Judean exiles to return to their homeland.

There's a lot of other like pro-Cyrus Babylonian texts that talk about similar things where they'll say, oh, Nabonidus did all these horrible things and he, you know, didn't support these temples and he moved all these gods, he moved all their statues around, but Cyrus put them all back in their temples, right?

So, this is something that is a wider part of his ideology. And the Judeans who return, right, so they return to this, the name of the Persian province was Yehud, which basically just means Judah, right?

So, they return here and they're sort of supported and patronized by later, not just Cyrus, but later Persian kings as well. And some of the thought with that, again, we don't know how much of it is like they were like, oh my goodness, they have a really great god, that's cool.

[37 : 49] It may have been that. Some of it, though, is sort of probably political in the sense that they want a really good, they want people they know they can trust here on that land bridge that connects to their often rebellious province in Egypt.

They want to make sure that, okay, if Egypt rebels and we have to send an army there, the people on the way are going to help us, they're going to support us, they're not going to harass our supply lines, all this stuff.

So, yeah, if they want to build a temple to their god, sure, yeah, that's worth the overhead of having to pay for their temple to make sure that we have loyal subjects there.

So, Ezra and Nehemiah is also, if you're looking for Persian connections in the Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah is a great place to look because that's when you get the history of these returning exiles.

So, both, actually, I don't know if Ezra was, I can't remember if Ezra was commissioned by the Persians or not.

[39 : 11] Nehemiah was actually a Persian appointee. He seems to have been in the royal court of Artaxerxes I, who is the first king in this status quo period.

And he, if you read through, like, Nehemiah 1 and 2, I think, Artaxerxes ends up appointing Nehemiah as a governor of the province there.

So, he's very much a part of the Persian imperial apparatus. But, again, so this restoration happens, and part of the reason it's able to happen and that the Judeans are sort of starting to sort of develop their local identity again within that region is partly because they have this relative independence from the Persian emperor.

where it's not quite as tied in as it was with the Assyrians and the Babylonians, who were a lot more sort of direct control. But because the Persians allowed for a little bit more of autonomy, it allows for this sort of restoration period to happen.

what I was going to say on that. I think that's it. We get Darius showing up in the book of Daniel.

[40 : 44] Xerxes famously is the king that shows up in the book of Esther. Right? So, unfortunately, again, we don't have enough of his records to know, like, oh, yes, and then today my courtier, Haman, turns out that he was a jerk and I had him killed.

But I really like my wife. She's cool. You know, we don't have that, unfortunately. We do get, we know a little bit more about some of his other, actually, we know about some of his campaigns into Greece, for example, because the Greeks talk about it because they were very proud of the fact that he didn't succeed.

There was a movie about it a number of years ago. Not very historically accurate, but when I was in high school, it got a bunch of us our age to actually care about ancient history.

So that was, I guess, a positive. We know that Xerxes was, Xerxes was ultimately assassinated in some sort of palace coup.

I don't remember what I was going with that. Anyway. And then within the prophets, so most of the prophetic corpus takes place before the exile or right up to enduring, right?

[42 : 02] So Jeremiah and Ezekiel are like kind of at the very beginning of the exile. But there's some of it that takes place after. So Haggai and Zechariah, for example, are, their prophetic careers are taking place during this early restoration period.

They talk about sort of the need to build, you know, Haggai especially talks about the importance of rebuilding the temple. Zechariah talks about, delivers oracles, talking about the current high priest and the current governor appointee, Zerubbabel, who was Judean exile, and sort of how God had appointed them to sort of reign over this period of restoration.

We get a few other post-exilic prophets, but those are sort of the two that I think are the most relevant here. Okay. So I think now we'll move into some more questions.

Tom, you have a question? So forgive me if this is such a huge tangent, but I want to ask about Zoroastrianism. Because most of the religious backgrounds in the Bible are these polytheistic religions that are localized and they all kind of will look to one another and be like, oh, we worship similar gods or we'll adopt our gods, et cetera, et cetera.

Zoroastrianism, though, is at least later forms of the religion. It's different because they've got this kind of doctrinal corpus of there's this one God you worship, there's this negative God.

[43 : 34] Anyway, but I've read that the, you know, you'll hear these stories of Zoroaster, the founder of Zoroastrianism from like 3000 BC, but then when you look at the actual evidence for that, I've heard similar things that you've alluded to that we actually have, I've heard like almost nothing before like 700 AD or 500 AD, like very little about actual Zoroastrian belief.

And I was wondering if you, like I know it never comes up in the Bible. There's no word for Zoroastrianism in the Bible as far as I'm aware. Right. But I was wondering if you could, I don't know. Yeah, so Zoroastrianism, it's super fascinating.

If you ever get a chance to read about Zoroastrianism, it's one of these like, it's one of these Near Eastern religions that I find absolutely fascinating. Manichaeism, we talked about Manichaeism before. That's another one. It's wild. But Zoroastrianism is really interesting to read about.

Part of the problem is, is that a lot of the sources we have for what that religion looked like are from, in some cases, the Islamic period. Yeah. Right.

So at that point, there, we know that in early, earlier forms of Zoroastrianism, they had a number of different deities. They had, you know, Ahura Mazda and they had Ahriman and then they had a bunch of other deities that were kind of like sub-deities under that.

[44 : 54] Like Anahita and Mithra and different deities like that. But they might have really sort of emphasized their sort of, their variation of monotheism, we could say, after the Islamic conquests, when they really needed to sort of present themselves as sort of people of a book so that they could sort of survive under Islamic rule by simply paying a tax, right?

Like just, just like Jews and Christians, right? So, so there was, so there was that. And so there's always a question of like, well, how, how much did that change the way that they even talked about themselves?

Right. So go back earlier. The question of like, when did Zoroaster or Zarathustra, this, this prophet who supposedly started the, even the fact that we call him a prophet, right?

That, that might be part of this, this campaign that they have to sort of make themselves sound a little bit more like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

But their, their founder, we'll call him a founder, that's a little bit more neutral, right? Zarathustra. Yeah. Some historians were putting him like back in like the early 2000s BC, but they, their evidence for that was mostly based on the fact that the, the writings supposedly by Zarathustra were called the Avestas, were composed in a specific dialect that is only of Persian that is only attested, or I should say an Indo-Iranian language, that is only attested in those documents.

[46 : 40] And there were historical linguistic arguments that they said, well, it's so different from old Persian, for example, that it has to be really, really, really early. And there were also arguments about like migrations from Central Asia and stuff like that.

Anyway, it's very complicated. I think a lot of scholars nowadays will either take sort of a hyper late view, which says if there was a historical Zarathustra, he was probably only a generation or two before Cyrus, which is probably a little extreme.

Some people would say like, well, go back a couple hundred years, but it's definitely not the early 2000s, right? So you have that. But there's definitely, there's a lot of Zoroastrian concepts that very clearly show up in these Persian royal inscriptions, even to the point that like there's certain phrases that sound like they might be old Persian paraphrases or translations of things from the Avestas, right?

So there's stuff like that. There are some references in the Hebrew Bible to things that might be sort of, they don't directly reference Zoroastrianism, but there's some things that might be sort of riffing on it.

So there's a part, for example, in a description of God in Isaiah, somewhere late Isaiah, where it has a bit about, I can't remember the exact line, but God who, describes God as someone who creates, is it creates light and, shoot, creates light and darkness.

[48 : 34] Yeah. Well-being and calamity. Yes, that's what it is. Thank you. Yeah. Thank you. Good. I'm glad somebody knew that because I couldn't remember it. Yeah. I mean, it's a great passage, right?

So that's some of my favorite stuff in the Hebrew Bible is that part of Isaiah. But there's the thought that, I mean, again, you can, this is, again, a little bit uncertain, right, you can connect that to, like, oh, Genesis 1 creates light and dark right there.

It's easy. Some people have suggested that that may also be a sort of a subtle kind of jab at the Zoroastrian god that, you know, well, you have to have two deities.

We have one who's responsible for both light and dark. We don't have a light god and a dark god. We have one who does both of those things, right? So there's certain things like that that might be sort of like little barbed jabs.

But with those kind of things, again, it's hard to know. It's hard to know unless we have more context what they may or may not be arguing for. So that's a very, very long answer to your question.

[49 : 44] Thank you. Yeah. Yeah. I'm just struck by the Persian Empire generally is that God is, like, superintending history to fulfill his promise that he made to his people.

Like, during Moses' time, Moses prophesied to the people that you're going to go to exile if you repent and turn to your God. I'll have mercy on you and I'll gather you again from your exile.

And in Maya's time, like, that's happening and they're subsidizing the temple. So it's like that actually the Persians are fulfilling the Lord's purposes even though they have completely different reasons for doing it.

I think about Daniel. He's prophesying about these kingdoms that are going to come, that are going to rise and fall. I think the Persian might be in there. But this everlasting kingdom is going to come.

So it's like the Lord is using these kings and political figures, like, as pawns in his hand. He's, he's, they want geopolitical strategy.

[50 : 49] But the Lord's purpose is, he's like, no, I'm building my kingdom through Persia. So it's actually cool to see it from the other side, like, how Persians are kind of thinking about what they're doing.

Whereas the Bible kind of sees it from the Lord's sovereign prerogatives of how he's working on history. Mm-hmm. And that's where I think this is, one of the reasons this sort of historical study can be helpful is, you know, it gets us to tease out a little bit some of this, the question of historical causality, right?

Like, why did a certain event happen? And it's, it's often hard, it's often hard to pinpoint, like, one specific, you know, you can talk about, like, World War I, right? Like, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand caused World War I, but so did the fact, but so did the fact that there were these, like, crazy system of alliances in Europe at that time.

So did, you know, like, like, European imperial colonialism, because you had, you know, all these different imperial powers kind of eyeing each other up and trying to take out their rivals, you know, like, there's so many different things, right?

And those are all just political factors, right? There's all kinds of different factors on so many different levels that go into causing a historical event. And what we're getting oftentimes in the Bible is sort of the, the, I won't say the reaction, but sort of, you know, there's things going on around them.

[52 : 16] And we're getting sort of the voices that are sort of saying, like, but actually, like, in response to that, instead of what you're seeing around you. But we only get this, we're only getting the answer to the question.

Like, we need to, it's like Jeopardy, right? You have to say the question. So we're kind of going back and sort of seeing, like, what, what are the questions they're trying to answer in the biblical text, right?

So you get this again, you know, again, in, like, the Book of Kings, for example, which seems to have been written in the early exile. And you read the Book of Kings, and it is a history of Israel and Judah, but it's also a history that focuses very much on the question of why are we in exile right now?

You know, so it's, it's, it's always, history always has a purpose. History writing always has a purpose to it, right? There's history with a capital H, which is, like, stuff that happens in the past.

And then there's history as we, as we, we talk about it, and we write about it, and we do history. And that's where we talk about causality, purposes of events, you know, all kinds of different issues like that.

[53 : 25] That's where it gets really sort of interesting. You know, it's like the type of history of the Bible is, it's not, it's a specific type of history of what God is doing in history. It doesn't mean that there are other political, like, other political factors cause something to happen, but the lens in which the Bible writers are talking about, it's a very specific type of history.

Yeah. That's why, too, yeah. I keep those things, like, it's both ends. Mm-hmm. That's why, too, I often talk about sort of what I, what I do with, with this kind of thing is, it's not so much, you know, people will ask me if I'm trying to, to, is this apologetics?

Are you trying to prove the biblical text is accurate? Or are you, you know, sometimes if I come to a conclusion people don't like, or they say, are you trying to disprove the Bible? And I'm like, well, no, no, no, no, no, I'm not trying to do either one.

What I'm trying to do is illuminate the Bible, get us to be able to read it better. Because we can illuminate more of, like, what some of those, tease out some of those, those causes a little bit further.

And as you say, too, right, the, the, the type of history being given in the biblical text is very much a, a theological history or a spiritual history, right?

[54 : 43] So, again, do look at the book of Kings, we get Manasseh, right? And Manasseh rules for 55 years. That's a very long reign. I think it's the longest reign of a Judean king, except maybe for David.

I'm not, I can't remember exactly now. But, was it 33? Okay, so he rules longer than David, right? The only thing we hear about Manasseh is that he practiced a lot of idolatry.

That's the only thing we hear about him. We don't hear about his foreign policy. We don't hear about his sort of, did he, what did he do for taxation? What did he do for, like, did he go on military campaigns?

Like, what, we don't hear about any of that. And it's because of the kind of history that we're getting in the Bible. Which doesn't mean it's bad, right? This is, it's a very good kind of history.

But we also have to keep in mind that there is a lot more that helps us get a picture of what's going on there. So, anyway, sorry, that was like a second lecture on top of all that. Yeah.

[55 : 43] Two separate things. One, what you just said is why I find the old Hebrew classification of Joshua Judges, Samuel Hines, as the former prophets.

Yes. Yes. To think of them, not as simply this is what happened, but this is God's telling. Yeah. I agree. This is part of the reason, part of the reason why I use the term Hebrew Bible.

It's part of the reason why I like their, and I don't know how familiar people are with this, but there's, the ordering of the books that we have in the Old Testament is a little bit different than the way it's organized in this sort of more, probably more original Hebrew form.

They have a different ordering of the texts, and it means that the texts get classified a little bit differently. So, what we call the history books, a large portion of those are called the former prophets in the Hebrew Bible, right?

So, it's that classification I find in some ways to be a little bit more helpful in sort of getting a sense of like, oh, that's what this text is doing. Yeah.

[56 : 47] Second question. Tyler's first question about technological innovations of Persia. Mm-hmm. I remember reading a comment here in Zechariah. They talked about how their better roads in their Pony Express mail system allowed them to respond to rebellions much faster, and that was a big part of how they came to power.

Is there a truth to that, that they were actually just really good at putting down their rebellions before they took root? Yeah. So, one of the things, I don't know if I would say before they took power, but sort of as they take over all this territory, right, they, you need to have communication, you need to have ways of moving armies, moving messengers, moving goods and supplies throughout an empire that's this big, right?

Again, this is so much bigger. I mean, you know, we had the Persian, or sorry, the Assyrian Empire, right, fairly big. Same thing with the, whoops, the Babylonian Empire, also fairly big.

But when you get something that's even larger than that, whoops, you really need to have a good way of communicating and transporting things. And so they did develop a system of roads, sort of like an early highway system, essentially, or like you mentioned, sort of like a precursor to the Pony Express.

And they were able to sort of transport a lot of, again, armies, goods, a relatively, for the time, fast communication system.

[58 : 20] You know, right, not quite the same as when I, you know, Zoom with a friend who's, you know, in Europe or something like that, you know. But still, like for that time, very, very fast. I'm willing to take more questions.

I also realize that it's 10 o'clock. So if anybody wants to leave, you can. I'm more than willing to stick around for a little while and talk about more stuff, answer more questions. So, yeah.

The only thing that I have, it has nothing to do with anything you were talking about. But you talk about how the part of the Caden, we have no idea what really happened during that time.

And I'm like, so people think, you know, our civilization. Like, you know, we really don't know. Everything's on magnetic stuff and it's all.

Yeah. I mean, like, most of what, most of our records aren't even really on anything that's going to decay. Like, you've got to have a machine to read it. Even if it makes it through the Caden process, you know, you've got to have, you know, a PC to look at it.

[59 : 29] Well, think about somebody who, you know, if, I have historian friends who talk about this. And they say, you know, if I'm studying someone, you know, people do modern history. And they say, well, a couple decades ago, right, you know, you can go through someone's papers, right?

Like, somebody will, when they pass away, you know, they might donate, their family members might donate their papers to a certain archive if the person's, like, relatively somewhat famous. But we don't have that today, right?

Or we might, but, you know, you get into the 90s and all of a sudden you're like, okay, I'm studying this person who lived in the 90s. We have his papers, but his papers include floppy disks. Right.

I don't have a floppy disk reader anymore. You know, like, what do you do with that? How do you, you know, so there's similar things that, you know, may be going, again, I have historian friends who talk about this.

And they're like, we need to do something to figure out, you know, or so much that it happens over email. Right. So much of what a, you know, you can look through, I mean, like, a lot of famous, some famous people, like, you can look through, like, C.S. Lewis's correspondence, right?

[60 : 33] Like, I'm pretty sure that's published. You can buy a book of that. Even if I become famous, which I don't think I'll ever be C.S. Lewis famous, and I kind of hope not. But, like, I have so much in email.

Like, no one's going to publish my, I hope no one ever publishes my emails, right? That'd be so boring. But, like, but. But as a historian, you know that stuff that they thought boring, you're getting a lot out of it.

Well, that's true. Yeah. You're looking at these inscriptions, and sure, it's only halves, but you're getting stuff out of it.

Yeah. That's true. But, yeah, email. And it's not even a floppy disk. I mean, like, some of the stuff, you know, some of the, you know, like, I go back to Commodore 64 days. You know, so guys that, like, are using Commodore 64 or Apple IIs or, like, that's lost.

Yeah. You know, unless you go to a museum and you find a working Commodore 64, you're really out. Yep, you're stuck. I was just going to say that this problem, it's throughout the entire ancient world that, like, if you look at, in the first century AD, what civilizations are producing a lot of historical documents that were made to this day.

[61 : 50] And there were a lot of civilizations that were writing and stuff, but there's only really, like, two. And it's China and Rome. Everybody else, Persia, the Indians, they just, their stuff is just pretty much mostly lost.

And so, like, for, and that's first century AD. If you go back further, sometimes it's better because they're writing on different materials. On clay, yeah. But sometimes, obviously, it's also hard to make it longer.

And so this is not just a Bible thing. Like, the Zoroastrians had the same problem. The Manichaeans had the same problem. Like, the Hindus, they had the same problem. The Buddhists, like, they can't, they have worse problems.

Because they don't, we have a much better archive, at least in the Christian period. That's what I'm saying. It wasn't necessarily related to the way it was talked about. Yeah, yeah. But just, like, the whole, the whole concept of, like, being able to go back to civilization, you know, and, like, literally the whole world now is on this digital system.

Yeah. But it's... I'm a discussion of people like my wife who have journals like me. The Laura Bush archives. They're all out of it.

[62 : 57] Right about this meeting, Laura. Yeah. Otherwise, there'll be no record of it, you know, once we, yeah. Yeah. Do you have your journals, too? Yeah. But I think one of the things, going off Tom's point, too, right, you know, one of the things is, you know, so we have...

There's two different kinds of, like, historical sources that we have here. We have, like, contemporary sources that survive, right?

So these are things, like, that are on stone or, like, bits of paper, parchment and papyrus that do survive. We have clay because it survives, right?

Right. We also then have... The reason that we have sources that go back from, like, the classical tradition or from the Bible or, again, like, going further afield to, like, the Hindu tradition or the Buddhist tradition is because they're texts that get copied and passed down.

Right? Right? Until either... Until modern times or until recent enough that those copies still exist. Right? So these are sort of the two kinds of historical sources that we deal with, and they each have problems, right?

[64 : 02] The problem for the transmitted text is they're usually pretty complete, but then we always have to sort of figure out, like, what happened to this text along the way? Like, did somebody mess up when they were copying it?

Did somebody, you know, scribes... Before the printing press, scribes often felt, you know, that it was okay for them to add stuff into a text or sort of clarify something that didn't make any sense or update what seemed like an outdated verb form or something, right?

You know? Sort of updating these and vows to you and your, right? You know? So that's the problem with transmitted text. The problem with sort of contemporaneous excavated texts is, like this one, is that they have holes in them.

Right? And also, again, sometimes they're in formats that don't make sense to us or that take a while for us to kind of figure out, right? This one, like, this is an astronomical text.

I can't really read astronomical texts. It's partly I don't have the mathematical brain, too, and I haven't tried as much. I have a friend who does, and I'm trying to get him to explain it to me. But also, like, again, like, they're using all this kind of format, formatting conventions for it that I just don't know.

[65 : 15] Right? So there's always... There's a learning curve there, whereas transmitted texts are usually made easier, right? They can be translated. They can have, like, commentaries added to them.

They can have other things added to them to make them easier for later generations of readers to understand. Any other questions?

Thoughts? Yeah? Are there any... Is there any light you can shed? I've understood that the Magi, because of the Jesus, were understood to have come out of some sort of Persian tradition, which I've heard said originated in Daniel, from Daniel.

Mm-hmm. Were the Persians really big into astrology, or, like, are there any interesting things?

Yeah. So we do know... And, Tom, you can jump in and correct me at any point, since this is closer to your wheelhouse than mine. But, so part of the reason that we think that they may have been associated with Persia is because of the term magi, right?

[66 : 29] Magus in Greek that's used to describe it, which is... Which is a... Like, magush is a technical term that comes from Persian. It's used in the Greek tradition, both to refer specifically to people that the Persians would have said, yeah, that's a magush.

And also, in general, in... Correct me if I'm wrong, but in Greek, it also becomes a term that can be used for any kind of... Sort of priest or magician or ritual specialist who is kind of outside of...

Kind of whatever the author thinks is orthodox. Right? So in the same way we use, like... We might... We might refer to somebody as a magician or a sorcerer, right?

But then suddenly, if, you know... If you go to a Catholic church, for example, you're not going to call the priest... You're going to call him a priest. You're not going to call him a magician.

Even though he's, you know... Doing communion and saying, this is Christ's body, we're not going to be like, oh, what is this? You know, like... So there's sort of... There's kind of a...

[67 : 41] There's sort of an us and them that goes on. So people... One of the things is, with the Magi in the New Testament, is we're not entirely certain if that term is being used to say, like, these were people from just some other kind of Eastern culture.

Could have been Persian. Could have been Babylonian. Could have been Nabataean. Could have been who knows. Or were they specifically Persian Magush priests?

I don't know if you have any further light on that, Tom. I have a similar thing. There's an ancient Greek historian named Josephus. And I think he talks about the Magi.

Not those... Not the three Magi. But just the concept of Magi. And he mentions that... So he's writing in, like, 90 AD. So it's a pretty good source for us in the Bible. And he mentions kind of the same thing.

He's like, some of these guys are just astronomers. They're just... But then some of them are more, like, what we would call, like, magic people. Like, they're casting spells.

[68 : 40] Like, ritual healers or things like that. Yeah. They're very much from astrology. And... But I will say that astronomy in the ancient world was more closely went with astrology than it is today.

So there were some ancient astronomers that were pretty straight cut and dry math folks. But a lot of them also got involved in some other things.

So I think, though, the... So some people theorize. They wonder if these Magi who came to visit Jesus really, really... I'll move forward to the same here.

That were really... If it's talking about, like, another religious tradition. If this is coming from Persia and it's showing that, like, the Jews were living in Persia for hundreds of years.

And there may have been some traditions about this. That's why they're interested in Jesus. Could have been they saw this crazy thing in the sky. That's all it was. And so they're coming. It's a little mysterious.

[69 : 39] So regarding whether Matthew's trying... He hopes his audience thinks that there was something in the sky that was seen. Or if he's trying to show there was... Even alternative religions are acknowledging the Christ who is coming.

Or both. It's a little... It's not entirely. And it is... I will say, too, with Persians and astrology and astronomy, right? So it does...

Again, because they probably wrote most of this stuff on papyrus or parchment, we don't have a ton of Persian astronomy. Stuff that I've read from people who sort of look at the diffusion of astronomical knowledge in the ancient world, there does seem to be relative consensus that this Babylonian astronomy was probably what was sort of passed on to the Persians.

So the... Passed on to the Greeks, right? And on to the Greeks, yeah. So I think I mentioned this last time when we did Babylonia, but I'll just say it again. So Babylonian priests over this time, over a couple hundred years, would every night go to the top of their temples and look up at the night sky, and they would just record where things were.

And eventually they noticed patterns, and they developed mathematical models to sort of analyze those patterns and describe those patterns and be able to predict stuff. And that's when it got exciting for them, when they realized they could predict things.

[71 : 05] And they actually passed on a lot of this knowledge to other cultures. So, for example, the Greek astronomer Ptolemy, who wrote this book called The Almagest, which was kind of like the textbook that you read for astronomy, basically up until Copernicus, essentially.

Ptolemy has, in the back of his book, he has a bunch of, like, tables of data.

And he says that he got this data from... He calls them Chaldean priests. What he means is Babylonian astronomers. And even the way that they're dated, right, because they didn't have, like, a sort of consistent, sort of like we do, right, you know, 536, you know, B.C. and 57, A.D., you know, A.D. 57.

You know, they didn't quite have that, so they dated by, you know, the fifth year of King X, right? And when Ptolemy has these listed out this way, he uses the names of these Babylonian kings, and later Persian kings, and so forth.

So we know that this is the... It corroborates the idea that this is data that he's getting from these kinds of records, right? He, in whatever form, somebody brought this data to him, and he put it in his book.

[72 : 22] And that's been used ever since, to some extent. And he's writing after Matthew, so that just shows that that tradition was still alive during Matthew and Jesus' age.

This... So they could have been these Caldean astronomers. Mm-hmm. King. Yeah. Well, I think the Septuagint, when he talks about the magicians that Moses and Aaron are from Egypt, he's just a word that he can.

Yeah, probably. Probably, yes. Which corroborates the... It can also just be a majority in terms of... Yeah. Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's where we get the word magic from.

Yeah. That whole issue in sort of study of the ancient world is interesting in terms of what we term... How we use the term magic, right? Some people don't even like using the term magic for describing things in the ancient world because it can be a term to sort of mean, like, anything that we don't think is legitimate.

Right? Sort of like, we have priests, they have magicians. Right? We have, you know, we have doctors, they have magicians. You know, it becomes sort of a term.

[73 : 38] You know, we don't talk about our own magicians unless we're talking about, like, stage magicians, you know, who we all know do tricks. Right? You know, so some people try not to use the term because it can be a little bit slippery.

I go back and forth on it. I think if you define what you mean, I think it can be okay, but you have to be really careful to define what you mean by it and then stick to that.

But anyway, that's a whole, like, scholarly issue of definitions. So, any last questions or should we stop it there? Thank you, John.

All right. I'll be around if anybody wants to talk. So, thanks for coming. Hope you all enjoyed.