

NOTES ON QUIZ 4

1 One of the sections in today's reading is called "How Not to Run an Empire". Why? What did the Assyrians do wrong?

The Assyrians of the Iron Age (Neo-Assyrians) were constantly concerned with how to control an empire of such great size and diversity. Their empire was held together by means of a vast, powerful, and well-equipped army with a revolutionary organization combining engineering and fighting capabilities; meticulous organization of imperial administration and correspondence; and occasional calculated acts of brutality. To break local ties and identities, entire peoples were deported to new locations and urged to assimilate and intermarry in their new lands, while the old lands were repopulated with strangers. In extreme cases entire cities might be destroyed. This oppressive approach backfired as the conquered peoples fought back to protect their cultures, religion, and property—the basic components of identity.

The Persians, in contrast, set up an empire that avoided oppressing and inciting their subjects to rebellion, by not attacking the customs, heritage, religion, and identities of conquered territories, or imposing the religion and language of the Persians. Taxes were kept from becoming intolerable, and safeguards reduced the risk of satraps (governors) abusing their power. In addition, the Persians did not keep large standing armies in the satrapies as occupying forces. Finally, the Persians elevated their Great King in a way that allowed the conquered nations to have the Great King in common as a unifying force.

2 For what reasons do you think the Persian king released the Judeans to rebuild in Jerusalem?

At the times, the Jews were in exile in Babylon, confined there by the Babylonians that Persia had conquered. By allowing the Jews to return to Judea, Cyrus gained a new province inhabited by loyal and grateful subjects.

In addition, Judea was in a strategic location vital to the Persian empire, on the western frontier against the Persians' rival in that area and its next target, Egypt. This helped make it possible for Cyrus's successor to conquer Egypt.

3 Describe three factors that you think most helped make the Persian Empire stable and successful.

Possible factors include the following:

- The Persians lowered the chance of rebellion by ruling with as little oppression as was feasible, and by tolerating local religion and culture rather than forcefully imposing theirs.
- The Persian king was explicitly not a god, but through ritual, trappings, and seclusion was converted into an abstract symbol that served as a focus of identity for all the diverse and unconnected peoples of the Empire.
- The Persians did not keep standing armies, which tend to exploit and oppress local populations, and did not often go to war, having extended their frontiers to natural geographic barriers, so that the Empire's subjects enjoyed a sense of peace and protectedness.
- The system of satrapies was designed to ensure a sense of benevolent and protective rule in each region and culture.
- The Great King had a system of spies whose role was to ensure the satraps were not corrupt or abusive.
- Finally, the positive encouragement of local economies and vibrant trade within the empire brought about general prosperity, a higher standard of living, and improvements in the birth and death rates.

EC1 The peoples who fought against the Assyrians included all of the following EXCEPT:

(a) Samaritans

EC1 Now that you've read and written about *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, what do you think the story is truly about? What moment from the story most exemplifies this idea?

This is a subjective question. Main themes we've discussed include Sumerian ideas of universal mortality, the need for the individual must care about the community ahead of self for society to be safe, the capriciousness of the gods, the exploitation of nature for mortal benefit, the human capacity and need to grow and achieve in contrast to the immortals who do not change or grow and with the impotent dead in the House of Dust, and the capacity of mortals to create a stability and prosperity for the future beyond death, thereby creating a legacy that overcomes that limitations of death.