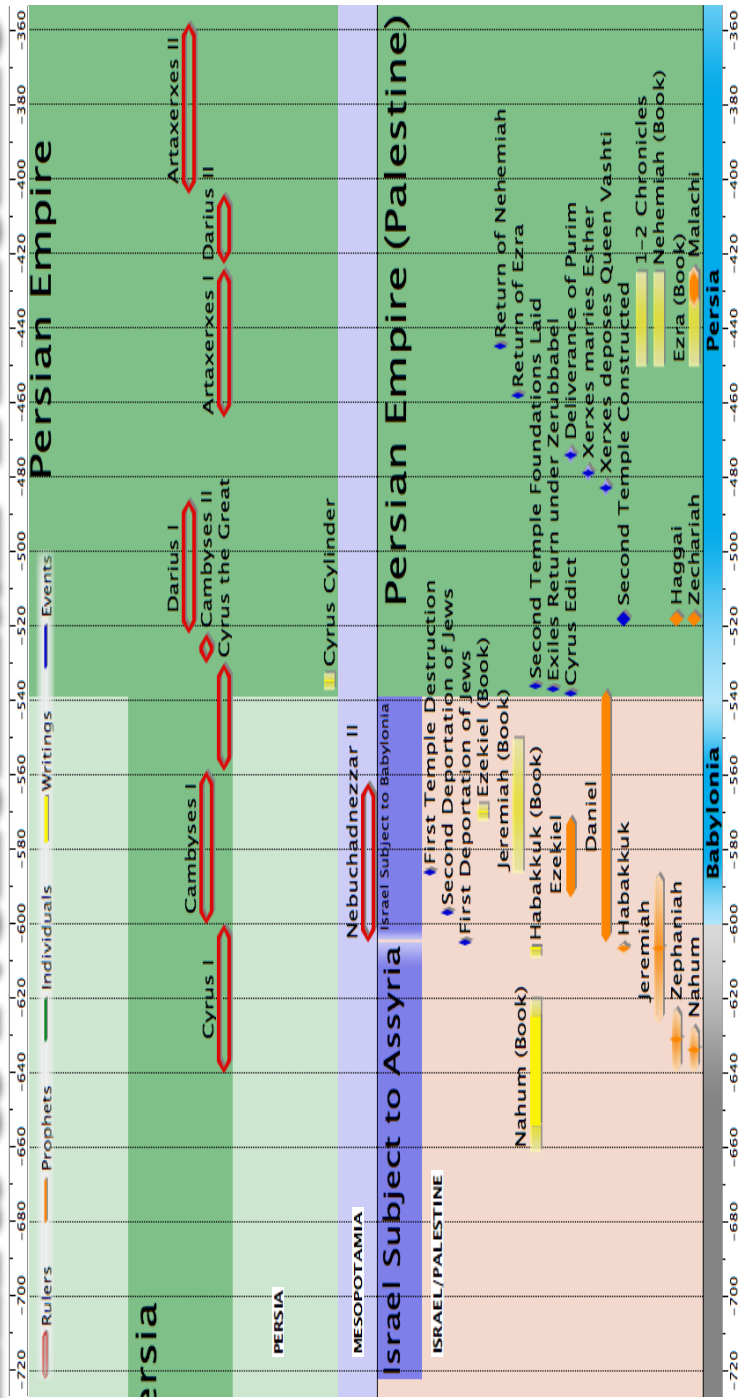


Ezra & Nehemiah Timeline



Patience Despite Persecution

Long Beach Alliance Church • April 13th, 2008 • Pastor Chris Lankford

LET IT BE KNOWN TO THE KING THAT THE JEWS WHO CAME UP FROM YOU HAVE COME TO US AT JERUSALEM; THEY ARE REBUILDING THE REBELLIOUS AND EVIL CITY AND ARE FINISHING THE WALLS AND REPAIRING THE FOUNDATIONS. NOW LET IT BE KNOWN TO THE KING, THAT IF THAT CITY IS REBUILT AND THE WALLS ARE FINISHED, THEY WILL NOT PAY TRIBUTE, CUSTOM OR TOLL, AND IT WILL DAMAGE THE REVENUE OF THE KINGS.
 ~EZRA 4: 12-13 (NASB)

1) Stubborn Resistance To God

- A) The unanimous and abrupt response to the "people of the land" (Ezra 4:3) by the Jews was a clear choice for purity which almost immediately led to overt persecution.
- B) The resistance of the enemies against the building of the Jewish Temple was substantial (Ezra 4:4-5) and delayed the building of the temple for over 20 years!

- C) Then suddenly (in English), the narrative takes a bizarre chronological turn to over 100 years in the future (beginning with Ezra 4:6-7). Was the writer confused? Did the writer flunk his Hebrew history class? Is the Bible trustworthy? Does God really exist?*
- D) In fact, the writer is providing us with some extra material, the equivalency of brackets or footnotes in modern writing. The purpose of the digression is to show that his estimation of the people of the land as "enemies" is fully justified through events which are yet to happen (4:6-23).
- E) This is further clarified in the text through a literary device known as "repetitive resumption," which tags the end of one section (Ezra 4:5) to the resumption of the section (Ezra 4:24) with similar words or phrases.
- F) In a sense, the writer is "mirroring" a future event with which the readers would have been more aware, with an older event they had only heard about. The writer is simply asserting, "see, same thing -- different building project..."
- G) All of this is meant to illustrate that the people of the land were proving to be enemies, would continue to be enemies, and were working toward humiliating the Jews (cf. 4:23).

2) Characteristics Of The Opposition

- A) The enemies of the Jews (Ezra 4:8-10), write a letter (4:11), to King Artaxerxes of Persia which makes three accusations:
 - i) The Jews who are in Jerusalem are rebuilding that "rebellious and evil city." They are almost done with the walls and foundations (4:12)
 - ii) If the Jews are allowed to finish the city, it will cost "tribute, custom & toll," it will "damage revenues" (4:13).
 - iii) If the king will search his records, he will see for himself that this city is "rebellious and damaging" and that these people "incited revolt" (4:15).
- B) Despite the inflammatory words and exaggerated claims, the king calls for a halt to the building of the walls of Jerusalem, for a temporary time (4:21).
- C) Note also that these enemies of the Jews were from "the city in Samaria" (4:10), which was Shechem, the provincial capital of the Samaritans -- bitter enemies of the Jews (which finds its source during this time period).
- D) However, the dream of the rebuilding was never lost, and much like the walls episode of Ezra 4:6-23, the temple itself would not be forgotten, despite persecution.

* The sudden chronological disjunction has been a cause for much speculation and consternation. However, the difficulty can be satisfactorily resolved once v 24 is correctly identified as a device known as "repetitive resumption." That the device may indeed be used to bracket longer sections is also established in other Semitic literature. Note that the substance (and in part the wording) of vv 4-5 and v. 24. A considerable number of examples of this kind of repetition are recognized, and in each case their purpose is to mark the resumption of a narrative flow that has been broken by the insertion of some digressory material. We could almost say that it may be understood as the ancient writer's equivalent of brackets or footnotes. If v 24 is taken in this way, its purpose will not be to add a new development to the narrative, still less to suggest that Darius followed Artaxerxes; it will simply be a device for marking out v. 6-23 as a digression from the development of the narrative. It is not difficult to explain why the writer should have wanted to include this digression here. He had just recorded an apparently harsh rejection of an offer of help with the rebuilding of the temple. Here he has sought to justify this by showing how, in the light of history, his earlier designation of this group as "the enemies of Judah and Benjamin" (4:1) was entirely justified (note how the similarity of v 10 with v 2 links together the groups referred to). The digression which this section represents from a narrative point of view is thus fully intelligible in terms of the writer's overall purpose. As a second, and lesser, consideration, it may be suggested that another factor also influenced the writer at this point. If we are correct in arguing that the author of Ezra wrote after the events of Ezra and Nehemiah had already been accomplished, but that he wished to include some reference to this material which was available to him from his collection of official documents, then it was inevitable that his inclusion of them should be chronologically disturbing, since the events recorded come down to a point later than the start of the Ezra material. Faced with this dilemma, he chose to insert the material where it could contribute positively to the development of his theme, but made clear what he was doing by using literary markers at both 4:4-5 and 4:24. (*Ezra & Nehemiah*), *Word Biblical Commentary Series, #16*, H.G.M. Williamson, Pages 56-58).