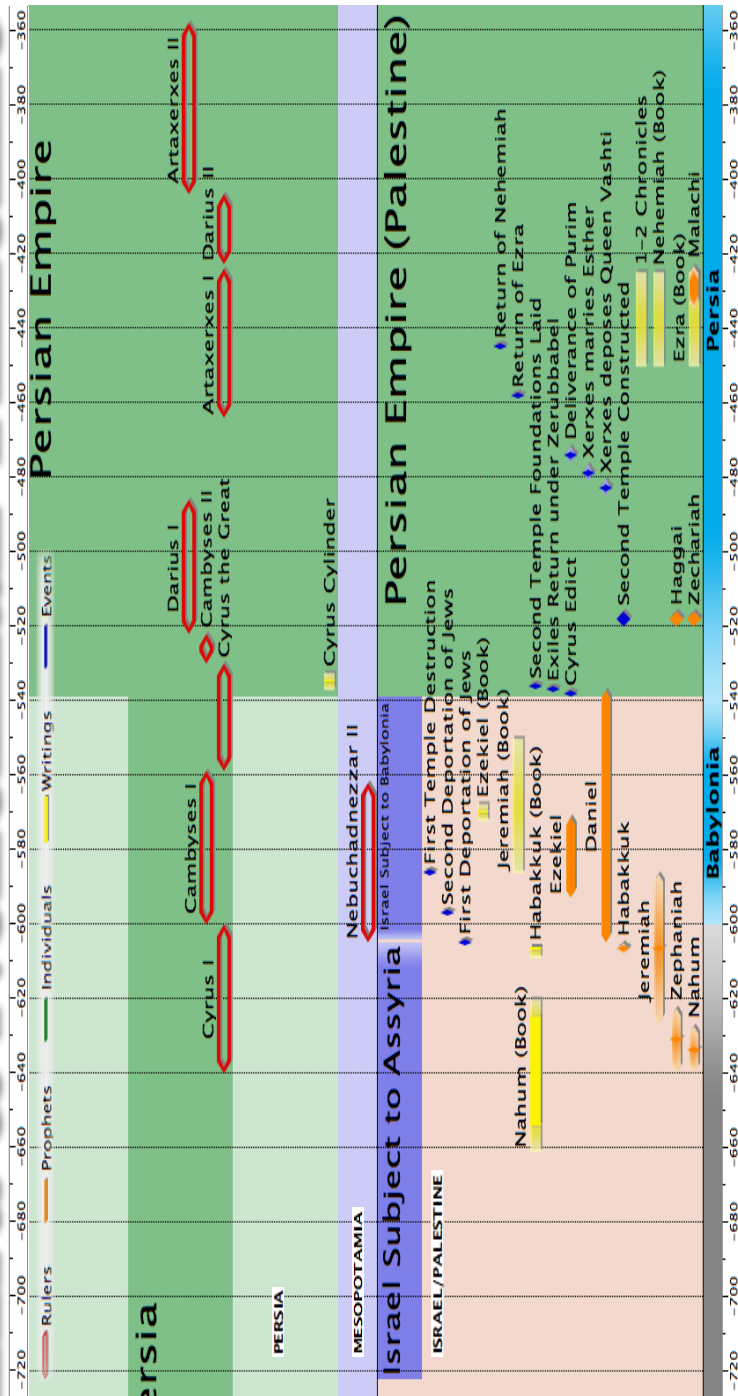


Ezra & Nehemiah Timeline



Purity Despite Pollution

Long Beach Alliance Church • April 6th, 2008 • Pastor Chris Lankford

“LET US BUILD WITH YOU, FOR WE, LIKE YOU, SEEK YOUR GOD; AND WE HAVE BEEN SACRIFICING TO HIM SINCE THE DAYS OF ESARHADDON KING OF ASSYRIA, WHO BROUGHT US UP HERE.”

~EZRA 4:2 (NASB)

1) The Gradual Slide From Penthouse To Outhouse

- A) There were many reasons for which Israel had been invaded and the Jewish people deported into exile some 50+ years earlier than the time of Ezra...
 - i) Evil Jewish kings ignored God (2nd Chronicles 36:11).
 - ii) The Jews rejected God's prophets (36:12).
 - iii) The Jews rebelled against foreign rulers (36:13).
 - iv) The Jewish religious leaders mixed foreign idolatry and practices into the Temple worship of God (36:14).
 - v) The Jews persistently ignored God and His warnings. They were stubbornly independent (36:15-16).

- B) At first glance, it might seem that God's wrath was sudden or lacked mercy. However, this downward spiral of the people began many years earlier (~500 years) with King David & Solomon (2nd Samuel 11 & 1st Kings 11).

- C) What began as an illicit affair, developed into political treaties sealed with hundreds of foreign wives and concubines, which degenerated into a divided Kingdom (1st Kings 12:16ff), invasion by foreigners (2nd Kings 17:6ff), and eventually captivity in Babylon (2nd Chronicles 36:17ff).

- D) There was not any one thing which brought down Israel. Rather, it was a gradual rejection of God which began when the people demanded a king to rule them, rather than accept the divine rulership of God (1st Samuel 8:1-9ff).

2) Let's Get Back To Business As Usual

- A) When the descendents of the Assyrian occupation (which occurred circa 680 B.C.) come to Zerubbabel to offer their help in rebuilding the temple, they "promote" their involvement as being religiously driven (Ezra 4:2).

- B) Of course, the reader is already given a "tone" that the motivation of these "helpers" is not what it appears from Ezra 4:1, where they are named as the "enemies" (or "adversaries," ESV) of the Jews (4:1).

- C) At first blush, the offer seems quite sincere. However, the true nature of the Assyrian descendents is quite well known to the Jews (2nd Kings 17:33). Their offer seems pure, but actually represents a potential pollution of God's people.

- D) Remember that God commanded His people to remain pure and not intermarry with foreign peoples (Deuteronomy 7:3), and warned them that if they did fall into this sin it would lead the people into idolatry and exile (Joshua 23:12-13).

3) Purity Despite The Consequences

- A) The response of the post-exilic leadership was unanimous and abrupt to the occupiers* of the land (Ezra 4:3). The response is clearly a choice for purity and against pollution.

- B) While the response of Zerubbabel and the leadership of the Jews was meant to cause a clear separation between the people of the land and the Jews, it was also "couched" in Persian legal terms (4:3).

- C) The response of the people of the land is both quick and decisive, and it reveals the true heart of their motives. They immediately hire counselors (Persian governors?) against the Jews and delay the building of the temple (4:4-5).

- D) The delay between Cyrus (the great) and Darius was over 20 years (cf. 4:5)! No doubt, this caused great discouragement.

* This negative interaction between the people of the land (Ezra 4:1-4ff) and the post-exilic Israelites would be easy to quickly gloss over, a simple conflict between the old and the newer residents of the land. However, in these verses we probably find the seeds of the eventual hostilities which would exist between the Samaritans and Jews in the New Testament. Most commentators agree that while the rift between the half-breed (Jewish & foreign nation) Samaritans and the Jews developed gradually, reaching its zenith later in history. However, we find the political and religious seeds of the conflict developing as far back as the pre-exilic divided monarchies of the North and Judah. The occupation of the Persians would only have increased and continued the hostilities between Samaria (to the North) and Jerusalem (to the South). The returnees wanted nothing to do with the peoples to the North, and rejected their offers for help in both less-than-diplomatic terms, but also on legal terms. This small interaction and the subsequent troubles it brings lay an insightful foundation for the conflicts we see later between the Samaritans and Jews during the time of Jesus Christ (Various sources, especially *Ezra & Nehemiah*, NICOT, F. Charles Fensham, Pages 66-68).