



‘Building out of Brokenness’

**A series of studies in the
Old Testament book
of Nehemiah**

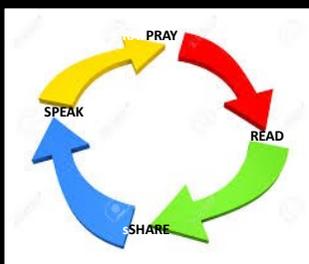
Term 1, 2018

St Alban’s Press

Our Vision:
Building Christian Community



A Vision for Personal Spiritual Growth (MP3's)



ACCOUNTABILITY: Expectations – Evaluation - Consequences

Personal Challenge: Be a mission partner

- Pray for 5 non-believers specifically (weekly)
- Prayerfully seek to have a gospel conversation with 1 non-believer (1 x week)
- Once a month commit to have lunch/dinner/coffee with 1 person on prayer list.
- Meet monthly with 2 others in a MP3 support group to pray! (Build accountability)
- Seek to read gospel 1-2-1 with non-believer (disciples making disciples!)

Nehemiah: 'Building out of Brokenness'

- Study 1. Prayer of the Broken-Hearted
Nehemiah 1.1-11
- Study 2. Building out of Brokenness
Nehemiah 2.1-3.31
- Study 3. The God who fights for Us!
Nehemiah 4.1-23
- Study 4. The Fear of the Lord
Nehemiah 5.1-19
- Study 5. Power to Persevere
Nehemiah 6.1-19
- Study 6. Walking in God's Words
Nehemiah 8-9.12
- Study 7. A Time to Celebrate!
Nehemiah 12.27-47
- Study 8. When the Temple has Termites
Nehemiah 13.1-30

Introduction

Nehemiah's name means, 'The Lord comforts'. His parents in giving him this name were expressing their deep hope in God, and that perhaps in some small way the Lord might use their son to achieve this desire.

The life and ministry of Ezra the Priest & Nehemiah overlap as they each play a significant part in the restoration of Jerusalem and her people.

Ezra was committed to rebuilding the Temple and the establishment of the law, while Nehemiah was instrumental in the rebuilding of the walls and re-establishing community within the city.

Whilst this book focusses on the actions of a man named Nehemiah, it is a glorious narrative that is really about the greatness of God, and his faithful, steadfast love to a wayward people.

It also speaks of the possibilities for the people of God to have a significant impact in their community when they truly walk in faith and obedience.

The book focuses on the renovation of the city walls in Jerusalem, but God's real concern is for the renovation of the hearts of his people. God is indeed the one who not only rebuilds city walls but the lives of all who trust in his promises.

It is a book about building out of brokenness and points us forward to the ultimate building/restoration work done through the Lord Jesus, God's final & everlasting comforter.

Michael

Dates

The events in this book occur at a time of the Exile. The following dates and charts place them in their Biblical and historical context.

2000 BC Abraham

1300 BC Moses & Exodus

1000 BC King David & King Solomon

922 BC Divided Kingdoms (Israel & Judah)

721 BC Northern Kingdom conquered by Assyria

597 BC Jerusalem captured—First deportations

586 BC Jerusalem falls—further deportations to Babylon

538 BC First exiles return by edict of Persian King, Cyrus

537 BC Temple rebuilding starts; not completed till 516 BC

458 BC Ezra returns to Jerusalem (7th year of Xerxes reign)

445 BC Nehemiah returns by edict of Artaxerxes

Study 1.**Nehemiah: Building out of Brokenness****PRAYER OF THE BROKEN HEARTED****Nehemiah 1.1-11**

1. What coping mechanisms come into play for you in the challenges of life? Where do you turn for comfort or escape?

What part does prayer realistically play?

What does your daily practice of prayer say about its importance in your life as a Christian?

2. **Read 2 Chronicles 36.15-23**

This is helpful background to the books of both Ezra & Nehemiah. What do we learn about God and his people?

3. **Read Nehemiah 1.1-11**

Nehemiah was in Susa and cup bearer to the King. Consider what his life and circumstances may have been like?

In contrast, how would you describe the conditions for God's people back in Jerusalem? v3-4

How do you think they may have felt towards God? The remaining exiles in Babylon, Susa etc.

4. What does Nehemiah's response in v4 reveal about him? When was the last time you wept or fasted about some aspect of your Christian life or experience? Our church? Or over the trials of other Christians? The Kingdom of God?

Discuss this quote from the sermon:

‘You pray as your face is set – towards Jerusalem or Babylon. The very egotism of craving life is prayer. The great difference is the object of it. The man whose passion is habitually set upon pleasure, knowledge, wealth, honour, power is in a state of prayer TO these things or FOR them. He prays without ceasing. These are his real Gods on whom he waits day and night...he prays to an unknown God for a selfish boon... Beware lest the whole trend of the soul fix on a deity that turns a doom.’ p89-90

P.T. Forsyth in his book, ‘The Soul of Prayer’

5. What strikes you most about Nehemiah’s prayer & why?

What was his request? v6; v11 Does it seem unusual in any way?

6. When you recognize the God of the Bible as ‘Lord of heaven’ & ‘great & awesome’ how should that affect your:
- a. prayers
 - b. daily living
 - c. your relationships

7. Nehemiah demonstrated a real solidarity with his people and identified with them as a whole, even in their sin.

Do we today as the people of God suffer from a lack of a sense of corporate responsibility and identity.
Why? Why not?

8. Do you feel any responsibility for our church community as a whole or just for yourself? How is that evident?

Do we lack mutual accountability in our church family?
If so, why are we reluctant to hold each other accountable?

9. Do we need to be more repentant in our life together as a church or has Jesus changed all that?

Is it ever appropriate for us as a group of Christians to pray as Nehemiah did in v7. When?

10. Nehemiah bases part of his prayer on the promises of God. v8-10 See 2 Chronicles 6.36-39 Deut. 30.4; 1 Kings 8.48-49

Do you ever use God's promises to us in Christ as a basis for your prayers? What sort of promises do you think we could use?

11. Author John White 'Excellence in Leadership' p23, suggested that there are three prerequisites for our pleading with God:
- i. Jealousy for God's reputation
 - ii. Love for one's fellow believers
 - iii. An indifference to one's own life and destiny. **Discuss.**

12. Nehemiah lived in exile but his face was set to Jerusalem We too live in exile but where is our face set (Jerusalem = KOG) or Babylon (Kingdom of this world)?

What can we do to guard against having our face (prayers and lives) focused on Babylon? What needs to change?

Study 2**Nehemiah: Building out of Brokenness****BUILDING OUT OF BROKENNESS****Nehemiah 2.1-3.31**

1. Most people seem to find great satisfaction by being able to 'build' something? Why do you think that is the case? Can you give personal examples?

2. **Read Nehemiah 2.1-10**

Note: Kislev Neh. 1.1 = Nov/Dec. 446 BC

Nisan Neh. 2.1 = March/April 445 BC

What indications are there that Nehemiah and the King had a good relationship? 1,2, 4

3. If Nehemiah had a good relationship with the King why would he be afraid? v2c What is the risk?
4. What three requests did Nehemiah make of the king? v5-8

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

What does this tell us about Nehemiah?

5. Read Nehemiah 2.11-20

Why do you think Nehemiah surveyed the scene in Jerusalem under the cover of darkness? v11-16 (See map on page 31)

6. How do we explain Nehemiah's confidence in announcing his intention to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem? v8, 18
7. Do you lack confidence in your Christian life or ministry? If so why do you think this is?

Nehemiah was both afraid v2c and yet confident v8, 18
How do you explain this? Do you have that sort of experience?

8. In v18 we are told, 'They replied, 'Let us start rebuilding.' So they began this good work.'

Why do you think it is called this '**good**' work?

Consider the following passages:

- * 2 Cor. 9.8
- * 2 Tim. 3.16-17
- * Phil. 1.6

What is the good work we are called to do?

What is the good work God is going to bring to completion in all his people? How does this encourage you?

9. The enemies of God's people Sanballat & Tobiah are concerned. Why? v10 How do they respond? v19

Have you ever been mocked or ridiculed for taking a stand for Jesus and his kingdom? Share.

10. Can you think of other Biblical or historical examples where doing a 'good work' for God is portrayed as betraying an earthly king?

Read Nehemiah 3.1-31 (or 1-16 if time is short)

11. What strikes you about the building work done by the people on the walls? Does anything seem unusual?

Is there a model here for us to learn from? See 1 Cor. 12.1-20

12. What keeps people in our church from 'putting their shoulder to the work' v5. of Building Christian Community. What can we do to ensure everyone is playing their part?

13. In what ways is Nehemiah a forerunner to Jesus Christ?
A clue: Both are committed to building the people of God and the City of God. (Rev.21.1-5)

Study 3.**Nehemiah: Building out of Brokenness****THE GOD WHO FIGHTS FOR US!****Nehemiah 4.1-23**

1. William Carey said, 'Attempt great things **for** God, expect great things **from** God!'

Nehemiah would have identified with this statement.

Can you think of a time when you did either of these things?

What keeps us from doing this?

Read Nehemiah 4.1-23

2. What forms did the opposition to the work take?

Which of these do you experience in your Christian life?

3. How do you respond to those who oppose you or simply look down on you for following the Lord Jesus?
4. Note Nehemiah's prayer in 4.4-5

Do you ever feel like this? Do you think we should pray like this about our enemies? Why/Why not? See Matt. 5.43-48

5. If we faithfully represent Jesus in our community, should we expect to be despised?

If we are NOT despised does that mean we have somehow compromised our witness?

Note: John 15.18-21; 1 Peter 4.19

6. How can we best encourage each other to 'remember' the Lord who is great and awesome? v14

Consider Romans 8.31-39

7. What are the consequences (in your life) of forgetting the sovereignty of God—that he is in control?

8. Nehemiah 4 sets before us the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

Site examples from this chapter where we see trust in God partnered by human action.

9. How is the death of Jesus the ultimate example of the tension between human responsibility and divine sovereignty? See Acts 2.23

10. Who are (our enemies) the enemies of God's people today?
Do we forget that our battle is essentially a spiritual one?
See 1 Peter 5.8-11

11. Consider Ephesians 6.10-20. How does Paul encourage us to combat our enemies today?

12. Do you think opposition to Jesus and his Kingdom is increasing in our community? Give examples.

What is the best way for us to respond—taking into account both divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

13. Nehemiah was a man of prayer but also a man of practical action. How do you keep the balance between these? Are you more a person of prayer or of action?

What is the problem with being too much one or the other?

14. Many times the people of God could have given up. There was a combination of things that helped them to persevere to the end of the task. What were they? Compile a short list.

What does this have to teach us?

Study 4**Nehemiah: Building out of Brokenness****THE FEAR OF THE LORD****Nehemiah 5.1-19**

1. Can you identify examples of greed or exploitation in our world that contribute to the suffering of others?

What is it that motivates greed in humanity?

Read Nehemiah 5.1-19

2. What was the 'new' challenge facing the people in their efforts to rebuild the city? v1-5
3. How did Nehemiah respond?
4. Nehemiah gets angry at the injustice he sees. Do you get angry at injustice to God's people in the world? Are you able to do anything?
5. How do we know when our anger is a righteous anger and when it is not? How do you know the difference?

6. Nehemiah recognized that the fear of the Lord was critical to right human behavior. v9.

See Neh. 1.11; Proverbs 28.14

Why is the 'fear' of the Lord foundational to conduct (living a life) that is pleasing to God?

7. Nehemiah 'took counsel with himself' (pondered them in his mind) v7. How can we develop this skill when dealing with our anger?
8. Nehemiah was dealing with conflict within the people of God. Conflict and differences of opinion are a normal part of life. Does Nehemiah have anything to teach us in this regard?
9. What 'principles' do the following New Testament passages give when dealing with conflict?

i.) Matthew 18.15-17

ii.) Matthew 5.23-24

What can we do to encourage each other to put these principles into practice?

10. What impresses you about Nehemiah's leadership and his example? 14-18

What message do you think Nehemiah was sending to the people by not taking up the privileges of his position?

Is there something for us to learn from this about Christian leadership?

11. **Read Philippians 2.3-11**

Paul talks about a mindset that we need as we follow the example of Jesus. Summarize this mindset in a few words.

12. Nehemiah closes this chapter with a short prayer. v19. Do you think it is unusual?

In what context would it be appropriate for you to pray like this?

Study 5**Nehemiah: Building out of Brokenness****THE POWER TO PERSEVERE****Nehemiah 6.1-19**

1. Recap the story of Nehemiah Ch. 1-5. What has been the most striking aspect of the story for you?

2. Can you think of situations in your life when you have had to persevere in some sort of trial? Share.

What gets you through the challenge/s you faced?

Read Nehemiah 6.1-19

3. Nehemiah continues to come under attack. List the ways his enemies seek to keep him from continuing the work.
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
 - iii. _____
 - iv. _____

4. Is there evidence of divided loyalties among those building the wall?

When God's people are divided what are the potential consequences?

How can we combat disunity if/when it arises in our Church?

5. Sanballat and his cohorts sought to intimidate and then distract Nehemiah from completing the task.

What forms of intimidation & distraction do you face in the good work God has called you to do?

6. Why is it especially dangerous for Christian leaders to be distracted from the primary task God has called them to do? What do you think that primary task is?

Can you think of things/activities that may be an unhelpful distraction for Church leaders?

How can you encourage them to stay focused?

7. Nehemiah came up against a false prophet in Shemaiah. How did Nehemiah know he was not sent from God?

How can we test the prophecies and claims of people today?
See 2 Peter 1.16– 2.3

8. The place of prayer in Nehemiah's life continues to be a powerful example.

What do you make of Nehemiah's two prayers in this section? In what situation would you find yourself praying such prayers?

v9. _____

v14. _____

9. What is the surprising impact of the completed walls on the surrounding nations?

What do you imagine was the reaction of the people of Jerusalem to the other nations' response?

10. Why is a completed work of God such a strengthening thing for God's people?

Can you sight an example of such an event?

Can you think of a possible future project or event that could have that effect here at St Alban's?

11. What would you say to a person who was thinking about giving up on Christianity because of opposition?

- 12. Read Romans 5.1-5, James 1.2-4, Hebrews 12.1-3**

What incentive or encouragement do these readings give us to persevere?

Study 6**Nehemiah: Building out of Brokenness****WALKING IN GOD'S WORDS****Nehemiah 8-9.12**

Leaders: Please note there is a lot of material to cover in this study. You WILL need to be selective!

Read Nehemiah 8.1-18

1. We are now introduced to Ezra who had been back in Jerusalem for 13 years.

What did Ezra read and what is the significance of the day? See Leviticus 23.23-24 Also Numbers 29.1-6

2. How did the people respond to the reading of God's word? See v3, 6, 9. Discuss.
3. What do you think the phrase 'the joy of the Lord is your strength' means? v10

How do we give full expression to our joy in the Lord?

4. What was the significance of the Festival of Tabernacles? See Lev. 23.33-40

Do we have similar festivals as Christians to help us remember God's great saving acts?

Do you think we give them the reverence and honour they deserve? Should we do something else?

Read Nehemiah 9.1-12

5. Why would the reading of God's word precede the confession of sin?

If, as Christians, we believe we are forgiven by Jesus and his amazing grace, why should we still confess our sins?

See 1 John 1.8-2.2

Do you think we struggle to understand the seriousness of sin, because we know we are saved by what Jesus has done?

What can we do to make sure we don't treat sin flippantly or casually & yet not carry around a burden of guilt?

6. What does the concept of God being from 'everlasting to everlasting' mean to you? v8. Why does it matter?
7. What other aspects of God's character are we reminded of in these verses? 1-12 Make a list! Discuss.
8. The rest of chapter 9 is a recount of Israel's history. It highlights their disobedience and yet God's faithfulness.

In three or four words summarize the characteristics of their sinfulness.

Why is looking back before moving forward often a helpful thing to do for God's people?

9. Can you think of lessons from Church/Biblical history which we need to be reminded of and learn from?

Read Nehemiah 9.32-38

10. What is noteworthy in these verses?

What value is there in putting our commitment to God in writing? v38.

11. The word of God was central to the community going forward in faith. How can we encourage each other to make sure we walk in the word of God?
12. If we are to grow as disciples of Christ, we need to be held accountable to each other as a community of believers.

Break into prayer pairs. Share:

- i. How are you going spiritually?
- ii. What has God been teaching you from his word lately?
- iii. How can I best pray for you?

Study 7**Nehemiah: Building out of Brokenness****A Time to Celebrate!****Nehemiah 12.27-47**

If your group has to miss a study for some reason then go from study 6 to study 8.

1. Do you come from a family that is good at celebrating special events?

Does our Church have a sense of celebration at appropriate times as a family of God's people?

Read Nehemiah 12.27-47

2. What was the significance of the ceremonial purification? v30.

Do we need to be 'pure' before we offer acceptable worship to God? How is that possible? Rom. 12.1-2

3. How do you think the Jewish people felt when they heard the singing coming from the walls of Jerusalem?

How do you think the non-Jews felt?

Why is worship such a powerful witness?

4. Singing God's praises has always been an essential part of worship for God's people throughout history.

Does music & singing have the place of importance it should in our Sunday gatherings?

5. How can we be sure our worship comes from the overflow of our hearts and is not just perfunctory? (ie. Just going through the motions)

6. What do you think the dedication ceremony is trying to achieve or acknowledge?

7. During the ceremony there is repeated references to King David. Why do you think that is the case?
Consider: 1 Chronicles 16.8-36

8. Do people see your joy in the Lord? What have you got to be joyful about?

Is there anything that inhibits our joy?

9. There are many roles listed at the end of the chapter.

Does this have anything to teach us about the way the church should function? If so, what?

Read Philippians 4.4-9

10. Do we have more reason to rejoice than the people of Nehemiah's time? Why? What about?
11. According to Philippians 4, there is a connection between rejoicing, anxiety and prayer? What is it?
12. In Christ we have the privilege of experiencing the peace OF God and peace FROM God?

Do you experience God's peace in the way it is described in Philippians? Discuss.

Why is Jesus the key to us having any chance of experiencing this kind of peace? Rom. 5.1-5

Study 8**Nehemiah: Building out of Brokenness****When the Temple has Termites**
Nehemiah 13.1-30

1. There is an old saying, 'Be in the world but not of the world'. That would seem to be good practical advice for Christians.

Do you find it difficult being in the world—and not becoming of the world?

Is there evidence of the world, getting into the life of the church? Discuss.

Read Nehemiah 13.1-30

2. What was the problem that arose while Nehemiah was away?
v1-5

How do you think Nehemiah would have felt?

3. Which enemies of God's people have reappeared?
(v4, 28 See Neh. 2:10; 6:17-19)

What does Eliashib do wrong?

4. God's people Israel made three promises in Chapter 10.

Identify a.) the promise; b.) How was it broken?
c.) Who broke it?

i.) 10.30:

ii.) 10.31

iii.) 10.39

Are you surprised at the relapse of the people? How do you explain it?

5. This episode raises the question of leadership and the appointment of people to positions of influence in the community of God's people.

On what basis should people be appointed to positions of responsibility & leadership in the life of the Church?

Do you know who has the authority to appoint people to ministry positions in the life of St Alban's?

Why don't we hold elections for ministry positions?

6. Why is it important to remember that the church does not function as a democracy? Why is that sometimes difficult?

7. 'Old habits die hard' is another popular saying. As Christians we sometimes fall back into old habits that are not pleasing to God. What can we do to combat this?

When we 'relapse' into sin, are we in a better position than the people of Nehemiah's time? Are the consequences different for us?

8. Nehemiah was bold and swift in confronting the problem of sin by the people in breaking God's law.

As Christians, we are meant to encourage and also hold each other accountable. Research shows that we are poor at doing this with each other.

Why is that the case? Don't we love each other enough? Who should do the confronting? (See Matt. 18.15-20)

If we don't hold each other accountable what are some of the possible consequences? If we do, what are they?

9. Does Jesus' teaching in Luke 6.41-42 act as a deterrent or an encouragement to act in the face of sin?

10. Why is Nehemiah so strong on the issue of mixed marriages? v23-29 Is it as important an issue for Christians today?

What is the danger of Christians marrying non Christians?

11. Nehemiah's prayers are again noteworthy in this final chapter. v14,22,29 & 31.

Should we pray like this? See Luke 23.42-43

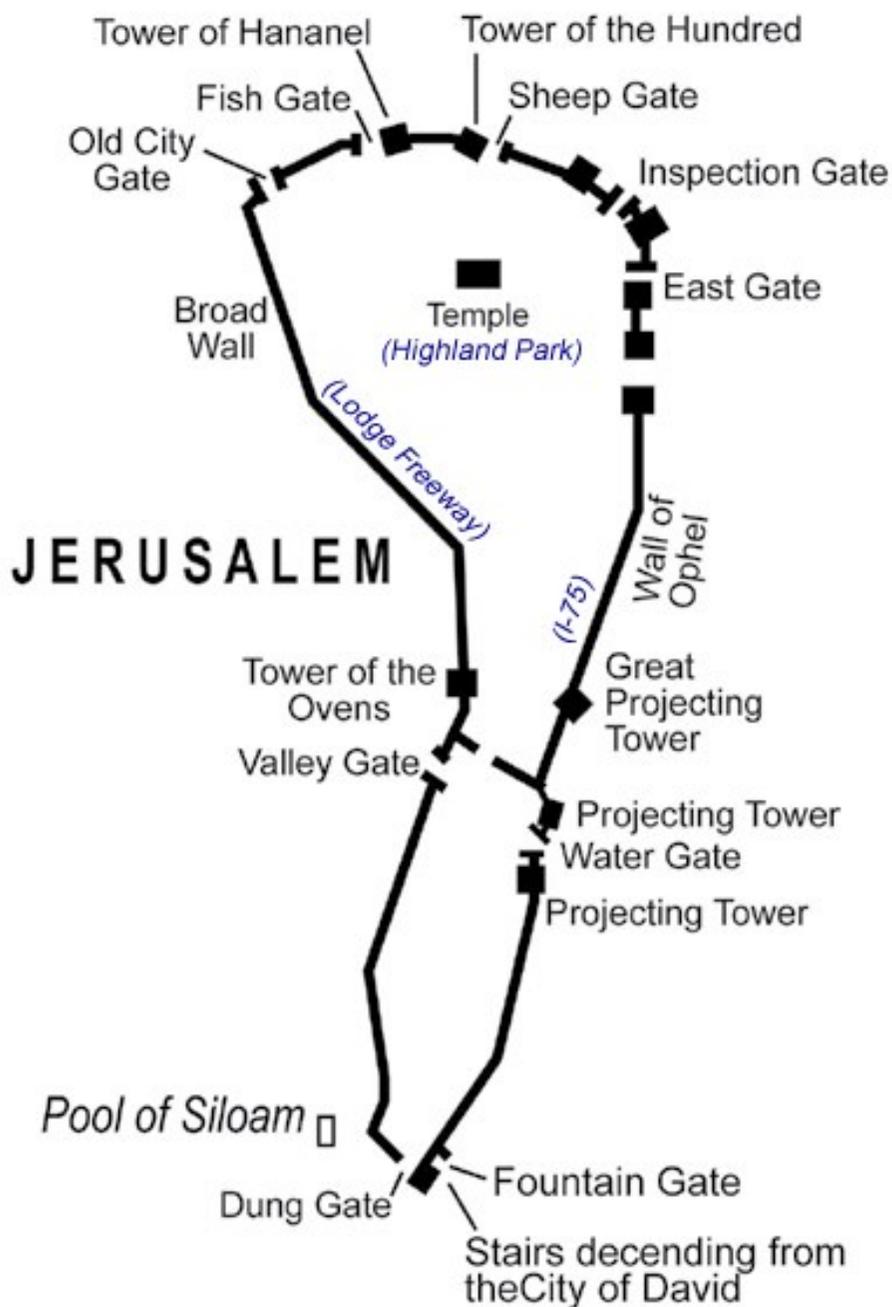
What do these prayers tell us about Nehemiah? Or about his view of God?

12. As the book of Nehemiah closes the Canon of Old Testament scripture is almost closed— only Malachi comes later. What promise of God to Abraham still remains unfulfilled? (Gen. 12.1-3)

13. As the book of Nehemiah closes we see that God has taken a broken city and rebuilt it through his servant Nehemiah. The Temple and the City of God are again functioning. But Nehemiah shows us that building a wall is a lot easier than building and transforming the hearts of God's people.

As the book of Nehemiah closes it looks forward to the day when God's Messiah will come, and he will transform the idea of an earthly Temple and the city of God into a heavenly one. See Heb. 12.22-29; Rev. 21.1-4

What aspect of this amazing book has spoken to you most clearly? What does God want you do about it?



Chronology of the Persian Period

PERSIAN KING	DATES	BIBLICAL CORRELATION	GREEK CORRELATION
CYRUS	539-530	Return of Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 1-3)	
CAMBYSES	530-522	Rebuilding at Jerusalem stopped (Ezra 4)	
DARIUS I	522-486	Haggai and Zechariah prophesy (520) Temple completed (516) (Ezra 5 & 6)	Greeks defeat Persians at Marathon (490)
XERXES	486-464	Story of Esther (Esther 1-9)	Greeks defeat Persians at Thermoplae (480) and Salamis (479) Herodotus 485-425
ARTAXERXES I	464-423	Return of Ezra (458) (Ezra 7-10) Return of Nehemiah (445) (Neh. 1-2) Prophecy of Malachi (433)	Golden Age 461-431 Pericles 460-429 Athens rules.
DARIUS II	423-404	B I B L I C A L S I L E N C E	Peloponnesian Wars 431-404 Athens falls (404) Sparta rules.
ARTAXERXES II	404-359		Socrates 470-399 Plato 428-348 Aristotle 384-322
ARTAXERXES III	359-338		Philip II of Macedon defeats Greeks at Chaeronea in 338
ARSES	338-335		
DARIUS III	335-331		Alexander the Great overthrows Persian Empire
ALEXANDER	336-323		Establishment of Greek Empire

TIMELINE

Date	Kings of Babylon, then Persia	God's people	Ezra/ Nehemiah	Other Bible books
606–587 BC	Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon	Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, and the people were taken to exile in Babylon.		Jeremiah and Ezekiel; 2 Kings; 2 Chronicles
587–539 BC	Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar of Babylon	The people were in exile in Babylon.		Daniel
539 BC	Cyrus, King of Persia, conquered Babylon, so also King of Babylon	Sometime after 539 BC the first group returned, led by Sheshbazzar/ Zerubbabel, and Jeshua the priest, and the altar was rebuilt.	Ezra 1–6	Promised in Isaiah 40–66; Jeremiah 32, 33; Ezekiel 35–48.
530 BC	Cambyeses conquered Egypt.			
522 BC	Darius I	515 BC—the temple was rebuilt.		Haggai and Zechariah
485 BC	Xerxes/Ahasuerus			Esther in Persia
465 BC	Artaxerxes	458 BC—the second group returned, led by Ezra.	Ezra 7–10	Malachi?
		445 BC—the third group returned, led by Nehemiah. The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt.	Nehemiah 1–12	Malachi?
		432 BC—Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem after a short visit to Babylon.	Nehemiah 13	Malachi?
			? about 400 BC, the book of Ezra was collected and edited.	

PRAYER POINTS

PRAYER POINTS

