

Introduction and Historical Overview from *The Old Testament for the 21st Century: A Concise Guide* (Insight Press, Covington, LA) 2017

Introduction

Why attempt to understand and explain the Old Testament?

Many believe that Abram's (Abraham's) call to leave his country and journey to the Promised Land dates to 1800 B.C. That being true, some might state that the Old Testament has little to no value. They might ask: Why should we attempt to understand and explain the Old Testament if it is centuries old? We live in a technologically advanced world. Cell phones, iPads, electronic readers are ubiquitous. Innovations that appeared to be science fiction fifty years ago are commonplace today. Within our technological world some might ask: Why read the Old Testament at all? If, from a news perspective, yesterday's newspaper has no value, then why read the books of the Old Testament? Why attempt to understand and explain the Old Testament?

It is easy to see why many people turn exclusively to the New Testament. We turn to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to learn of the life of Christ. We turn to the book of Acts to learn of the early episodes of the church and to the letters of the apostle Paul (and other New Testament books/letters) regarding the latter happenings of the Christian church. Why then, as New Testament Christians, should we attempt to understand and explain the Old Testament? Why not simply read and study the New Testament? I will offer five reasons why reading and studying the Old Testament should be a part of the life of every believer (and why teaching and preaching the Old Testament should be a part of the work of every minister).

The Old Testament is vital for our understanding of God. Where do believers get much of our understanding of creation? Where do believers get much of our understanding of God's love for his creation? Where do Christians first learn about the nature of God? Where do believers first learn of humanity's sin and God's concern? The Old Testament helps believers understand God.

The Old Testament is vital for our understanding of life's greatest questions. Why do some books become classics while others are relegated to library attics and basements? Because these books (normally referred to as "classics") deal with life's greatest questions. Where do we come from? Why are we here? Is there any hope in this life? Is there a life to come? No collection of books better fits the designation "classics" more than the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament (coupled of course with the New Testament). The great questions of humanity are covered within these books.

The Old Testament is vital for our understanding of the New Testament. How many Christians have started to read the Old Testament through in a year, only to stall in Leviticus? The minutiae of Leviticus 1-7 challenge even the most dedicated readers. Another question: how do believers hope to understand the sacrificial death of our Savior apart from at least a cursory understanding of Leviticus? How can Christians understand the prophetic role of John the Baptist without understanding the role of a prophet in the Old Testament?

The Old Testament is vital for our understanding of Christian living. The Old Testament offers a treasure trove of practical advice for Christian living. In a world of promiscuity,

Christians can learn from King David, who, in a moment of weakness, caused great pain for himself as well as others. Along with numerous other issues, the Old Testament records helpful advice regarding the selection of a life mate, child rearing, business practices, and determining and doing God's will. Technology has changed much about the way we live and think. But human nature has changed very little (at all?) from the time of creation. People today struggle with many of the same issues as the people of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is saturated with practical insights for Christian living.

The Old Testament is vital for our understanding of Jesus. How do Christians hope to understand Jesus if we don't have a basic understanding of the Old Testament? As a Jewish boy reared in a Jewish home, Jesus' parents taught him the Jewish Bible. Initially, Satan tempted Jesus, after Jesus had fasted forty days and nights, to "tell these stones to become bread" (Matthew 4:3). Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 in rebuttal of Satan's temptation: "man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (see Matthew 4:4). Jesus stood on the pinnacle of the temple and Satan tempted him a second time "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down" (Matthew 4:6). Satan quoted Psalm 91:11-12: "For he will give his angels orders concerning you, to protect you in all your ways. They will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." In response, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Jesus ended these temptations by saying "Go away Satan," (Matthew 4:10a) and adding a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:13: "Fear Yahweh your God, worship him." Jesus commissioned the twelve by saying, "Don't take the road leading to other nations, and don't enter any Samaritan town. Instead, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6). Most likely Jesus referred to Isaiah 53:6. In all probability, Jesus interpreted much of his own identity and ministry through what scholars call the "Suffering Servant" passages of Isaiah (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12).

Christians should be appreciative for the New Testament. Within the New Testament, believers read of Christ, his birth, life, teachings, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and, one day, return. But if Christians limit ourselves to the New Testament, believers will miss much of God's revelation. The Old Testament provides valuable insight to God, our world, who we are and what we should be doing. The Old Testament tells humanity of our lostness, laws that we have broken, and the judgment that will come. The Old Testament also reveals God's love and care as well as his plan to one day provide for our ultimate deliverance in the form of his Son.

Believers should attempt to understand and explain the New Testament. Teachers and pastors should teach and preach the New Testament. But believers, teachers, and pastors should not neglect the Old Testament!

A word to teachers and pastors: your hearers will love you for teaching and preaching the Old Testament. For your hearers, listening to the Old Testament being taught and being preached should make them spiritually healthier believers.

Historical Overview

The Patriarchs

The Old Testament identifies Abram (Abraham), Isaac, and Jacob (Israel) as the Patriarchs (check Exodus 6:3), the physical and spiritual ancestors of the Hebrew people. The history of the Hebrews began with God's "calling" Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans. God demanded that Abram leave country and kindred. Genesis 12 records no reservations or hesitations by Abram. Abram obeyed. God made numerous promises to Abram including, "I will make you into a great nation" (Genesis 12:2). This promise weighed heavily upon Abram because "Abram's wife Sarai had not borne any children for him" (Genesis 16:1). Previously, God had reassured Abram that indeed he would become a father in that "one who comes from your own body will be your heir" (Genesis 15:4). Abram believed God's promise. God changed Abram's name to Abraham. God changed Sarai's name to Sarah. Again God promised, "I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her" (Genesis 17:16). In Abraham's one hundredth year, Sarah gave birth to a son. The couple named the child Isaac. In one of the most dramatic illustrations of faith in the Bible, Abraham obeyed the Lord when God demanded Isaac's sacrifice. Abraham laid Isaac upon an altar and "took the knife to slaughter his son" (Genesis 22:10). God stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, saying: "Do not do lay a hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son" (Genesis 22:12). The Lord provided Abraham with a ram for the sacrifice instead.

Isaac married Rebekah and the couple had twin boys they named Jacob and Esau. Rebekah and Jacob deceived Isaac and obtained the family's blessing for Jacob. Esau comforted himself by promising to kill Jacob. In order to protect Jacob from Esau's intent Rebekah sent Jacob to live with her brother Laban. Jacob married two of Laban's daughters, Leah and Rachel. Jacob had four wives before his death. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel came from Jacob's sons (10) and grandsons (2). Jacob spent a restless night before his first meeting with Esau since Esau's murderous threat. Jacob wrestled with an angel and in the process the angel changed Jacob's name to Israel. Israel named one of his sons Joseph. Some refer to Genesis 37-50 as the "Joseph Stories."

Israel's partiality toward Joseph created animosity between Joseph and his brothers. The brothers intended to kill Joseph by throwing him in a pit. A group of traveling merchants rescued Joseph and sold him as a slave in Egypt. Accused of the attempted rape of his master's wife, Joseph found himself imprisoned. Years later Pharaoh had a dream. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream to indicate a future famine. An impressed Pharaoh made Joseph the second most powerful person in Egypt. When the famine struck, Israel instructed ten of his sons to leave the Promised Land and travel to Egypt to purchase food. The brothers made two trips to Egypt. On the second trip Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers and asked, "Is my father still living?" (Genesis 45:3). Learning that Israel was still alive, Joseph encouraged his father to move to Egypt in order to avoid the devastating famine. Israel consented and "set out with all that was his" (Genesis 46:1) and "went to Egypt" (Genesis 46:6).

The Exodus

Abraham's descendants lived in Egypt for 430 years (Exodus 12:40). Matters worsened for the Hebrews when "A new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt" (Exodus 1:8).

In an attempt to curtail an unprecedented population explosion, the Egyptian Pharaoh enslaved the Hebrews. When harsh labor failed to achieve the results Pharaoh desired, the Egyptian king attempted to have the Hebrew male children murdered. In these dangerous times Amram and Jochebed had a son. Jochebed proposed a bold plan in an attempt to save the infant. Jochebed placed the child in a basket and placed the basket on the Nile River in a location where Pharaoh's daughter bathed. Pharaoh's daughter noticed and sent for the basket. Pharaoh's daughter named the child "Moses" and enlisted the aid of Jochebed to care for him. Moses enjoyed the best of both Hebrew and Egyptian worlds. Moses enjoyed the security and luxury of being raised as an Egyptian, and the nurture and discipline of being raised by his biological mother. When Moses grew to be an adult he identified not with the Egyptians, but with the Hebrews. Moses observed an Egyptian abusing a Hebrew. Moses murdered the Egyptian and attempted to conceal his body. "When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses" (Exodus 2:15). Moses fled to the land of Midian. God called Moses to return "to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10). Reluctantly, Moses agreed. Moses informed Pharaoh: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go...'" (Exodus 5:1). Pharaoh refused. An epic struggle, including ten miraculous signs, ensued. As the tenth sign concluded, Pharaoh released the Hebrews. Moses and the once-enslaved Hebrews marched out of Egypt, free men and women. Their jubilation was short-lived. Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued the Hebrews. Once again the Lord delivered his people. Moses led the Hebrews to the wilderness of Sinai. Many refer to Exodus 19:1 through Numbers 10:12 as the Sinai Story. The events recorded between these two references took place as the Hebrews camped at Sinai. These events include the giving of the Ten Commandments, instructions for and building of the Tabernacle, instructions for the sacrifices, clean and unclean animals which the Hebrews could and could not eat, instructions of the Day of Atonement, and miscellaneous laws referred to as the "Holiness Code" (Leviticus 17-26). The Sinai Story also records Moses' appointment of twelve men sent into the Promised Land to determine livability. Ten of the twelve men did not believe the Hebrews had the ability to conquer the land. Due to their unwillingness to try, the Hebrews wandered in the Sinai wilderness for forty years. Eventually Moses and the Hebrews departed from Sinai and arrived in the plains of Moab (Numbers 33:49). The book of Deuteronomy records three sermons preached by Moses on the plains of Moab. Deuteronomy concludes with the death of Moses.

The Conquest

With the Hebrews encamped on the plains of Moab, Joshua succeeded Moses. Joshua led the Hebrews across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. The arduous task of conquering the land began. The Hebrews conquered the Promised Land in three major military campaigns, the central, the southern, and the northern campaigns.

The Hebrews conquered Jericho and Ai in what is known as the central campaign. The Hebrews followed the instructions of the Lord and marched around the walls of Jericho. The walls collapsed, leaving the city vulnerable to Joshua and his army. An initial reconnaissance of Ai revealed a small city that the Hebrews believed could be defeated with minimal effort. Such a decision proved disastrous as the men of Ai routed Joshua's force of 3,000 soldiers. Upon inquiry Joshua learned of disobedience in his ranks. A soldier, Achan, had stolen loot from Jericho in

violation of the Lord's command. The Hebrews capitally punished Achan and his family. Then the Hebrews conquered the city of Ai.

Joshua and his army conquered the cities around Jerusalem in what is known as the southern campaign. Five kings united their armies against the Hebrews. Joshua won the initial battle but the men fought late into the afternoon. Joshua knew that the next day's battle could be very different from the first day's battle. Joshua knew that his enemies could be rested and could be refreshed overnight. Joshua understood the importance of completing the battle on the first day and prayed for additional sunlight: "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon" (Joshua 10:12). The Lord answered Joshua's prayer in that "The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a man. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!" (Joshua 10:13-14).

The conquering of Hazor has become known as the northern campaign. Joshua 11:16 summarizes Joshua's victories: "So Joshua took this entire land: the hill country, all the Negev, the whole region of Goshen, the western foothills, the Arabah and the mountains of Israel with their foothills." Recorded in Joshua 13-19, after conquering the Promised Land, Joshua divided it among the twelve tribes.

The book of Judges records the effort to defeat the remaining enemies inside the Promised Land as well as some of the surrounding nations, including the Moabites, the Canaanites, and the Midianites. While the Hebrews defeated many of the peoples living inside (and some enemies who lived outside) the Promised Land, the Philistines proved to be a threat. Many understand this Philistine threat as a motivating factor for the Hebrews' request for a king.

The United Kingdom

Moses and Joshua led the Hebrews through the Exodus, the Conquest, and Israel's early days in the Promised Land. At the death of Joshua, the judges became the leaders of the nation. Although the judges provided adequate leadership, the judges could not lead the Hebrews to conquer the Philistines. Samson, perhaps the most famous of all the judges, lost his life to the Philistines.

Some of the Hebrews believed that the Philistine threat warranted a new type of leadership. Modern readers can easily see how some of the Hebrews believed that, without a king, the Philistines might piecemeal destroy the young, fledgling Hebrew nation. Additionally, some of the Hebrews wanted a king to reign over them "such as all the other nations have" (1 Samuel 8:5). Some of the Hebrews requested: "Give us a king to lead us" (1 Samuel 8:6). Reluctantly (1 Samuel 8:7-9) God allowed the Hebrews to opt for a monarchy.

Saul became the first king of Israel. Saul, handsome and tall, began the monarchy with potential for success. Unfortunately Saul made numerous poor decisions including his failure to destroy Agag, King of the Amalekites, in direct violation of God's command to Moses (Deuteronomy 7:1-6). Saul's last poor decision culminated in his death by a self-inflicted wound.

David, Israel's greatest king, succeeded Saul. David conquered the city of Jerusalem. David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, making Jerusalem not only the nation's political capital but its spiritual capital too. King David united the twelve loose-knit tribes into a powerful monarchy. Politically, economically, and militarily, David had few, if any rivals. In family matters, David had limited, some might say no, skills.

At the death of David, his son Solomon inherited the throne. Israel continued to enjoy peace and prosperity under King Solomon. Solomon built the Temple, in all its splendor. Solomon built his own residence (taking thirteen years), and other major projects. Some refer to the Davidic and Solomonic times as Israel's "Golden Era."

The Divided Kingdom

Israel's "Golden Era" came to an abrupt end with the death of King Solomon. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, inherited the throne. Solomon had slave labor camps, forcing individuals into harsh working conditions. The Hebrews saw a window of opportunity at the death of Solomon and requested of Rehoboam: "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you" (1 Kings 12:4). Rehoboam sought counsel with the Hebrew elders who advised him to "give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants" (1 Kings 12:7). Rehoboam sought additional advice from the young men. In all likelihood, these young men had never worked in the labor camps and had no means to identify with the forced laborers. Almost inexplicably, Rehoboam accepted the counsel of the young men. Rehoboam placed additional burdens on his people, saying "My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions" (1 Kings 12:11). For reasons easily understood, the Hebrews rebelled against the imprudent decision of Rehoboam. The ten tribes to the north seceded, became known as Israel, and made Jeroboam (Solomon's labor leader) their king. The two tribes in the south (Judah and Benjamin) became the Kingdom of Judah, with Rehoboam as their king.

Nineteen kings reigned in the history of the Northern Kingdom. Some of the more prominent kings included Omri and Jehu. Omri purchased a hill in Samaria upon which he built the capital of the northern kingdom. Jehu attempted to purge the northern kingdom of pagan worship (especially Baalism). The prophet Hosea (1:4-5) condemned Jehu's butchery. Of the final six kings of Israel (Zachariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea), four died violently. One (Zachariah) reigned for six months and another (Shallum) reigned for a grand total of one month. The Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. As an entity, the Northern Kingdom forever disappeared.

Twenty kings reigned in the history of the Southern Kingdom. Prominent kings included Hezekiah and Josiah. Both Hezekiah and Josiah led the southern kingdom into religious reforms. Both Hezekiah and Josiah "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD" (2 Kings 18:3; 2 Kings 22:2). Regarding Josiah, the Bible records: "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength..." (2 Kings 23:25). At Megiddo, Pharaoh Neco murdered Josiah in 609 B.C. Although the Southern Kingdom lasted another twenty-three years, the death of Josiah marked the beginning of the end. The Babylonians destroyed the Southern Kingdom of Judah in 586 B.C.

The Assyrian Period

Although records date the rise of Assyria from around 2000 B.C., historians recognize Tiglath-pileser III (745 B.C.–722 B.C.) as the true founder of the Empire. Also known as Pulu, Tiglath-pileser III instituted aggressive policies of regional conquest.

In the wake of the Assyrian threat, in 735 B.C., Israel's King Pekah and Syria's King Rezin formed a military alliance. Known as the Sennacherib Crisis and lasting until 732 B.C., Pekah and

Rezin encouraged Judah's King Ahaz to join the alliance. When Ahaz refused, Pekah and Rezin marched on Judah in an attempt to place a new king on the throne of Judah. Against the advice of the prophet Isaiah, Judah's King Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-pileser III. Pulu, more than willing to assist, moved on Syria and Israel. Tiglath-pileser III reduced Israel to the area immediately around Samaria. In approximately 725 B.C., Israel's King Hoshea failed to pay tribute to Assyria. Shalmaneser V, Tiglath-pileser III's successor, laid siege to Samaria. Ultimately, Sargon II (722 B.C.–705 B.C.), Shalmaneser V's successor, destroyed Samaria in 722 B.C.

Beginning in 714 or 713 B.C. and ending in 711 B.C., the inhabitants of Ashdod rebelled against Assyria. The prophet Isaiah encouraged Judah's King Hezekiah not to get involved. Whereas King Ahaz refused Isaiah's advice in the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis, King Hezekiah heeded Isaiah's counsel. The Assyrians crushed the rebellion. Arguably, the Assyrians might have destroyed the Southern Kingdom had Judah participated. Bible students refer to this as the Ashdod Rebellion crisis.

Sennacherib (704 B.C.–681 B.C.) succeeded Sargon II as King of Assyria. Judah's King Hezekiah rebelled against Assyria. Hezekiah strengthened the defenses around Jerusalem and had a tunnel dug (over 1700 feet in length) to protect the city's water supply. The Tunnel of Hezekiah, an engineering marvel, twisted its way under Jerusalem's wall and connected the Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam. Sennacherib led his forces to the gates of Jerusalem. Sennacherib's ambassadors attempted to negotiate the surrender of Jerusalem. Hezekiah, strengthened by Isaiah, refused to capitulate. The Bible records the miraculous annihilation of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Assyrian records do not record this defeat. But Sennacherib never returned to Jerusalem although he reigned for more than twenty years. Bible students refer to this as the Sennacherib crisis. Assyrian dominance ended in 612 B.C. when the Babylonians, aided by the Medes, captured Nineveh, Assyria's capital.

The Babylonian Period

The nation of Babylon came into prominence in approximately 2000 B.C. Babylonian power ebbed and flowed throughout its history. During the reign of Tiglath-pileser III and beyond, the Assyrians dominated Babylon. The fall of the Assyrian Empire made possible the rise of the Babylonians. With the fall of Nineveh, initially, the Egyptians challenged the Babylonians as the rightful heir to the vast Assyrian Empire. In 605 B.C., the Babylonians, led by Nebuchadnezzar, repelled the Egyptian threat at Carchemish. Babylonian supremacy began in 605 B.C. and concluded with the rise of the Persian Empire in 539 B.C.

In 604/603 B.C., Judah's King Jehoiakim (609 B.C.–598 B.C.) became a vassal to Babylon. Probably encouraged by a (small) Babylonian defeat in 601 B.C., Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon. The Judean King rebelled against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar marched on Jerusalem in 598 B.C. Suspiciously, Jehoiakim died while under siege. Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin (598 B.C.–597 B.C.), surrendered Jerusalem in 597 B.C. The Babylonians deported Jehoiachin, the royal family, and many Judeans.

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah (597 B.C.–586 B.C.) king. Prompted by an Egyptian promise for aid, Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon in 589 B.C. Zedekiah's actions exhausted Nebuchadnezzar's patience, resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem in August, 586 B.C.: "So in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of

Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army...the Babylonian army pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his soldiers were separated from him and scattered, and he was captured. He was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where sentence was pronounced on him. They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. Then they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. On the seventh day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He set fire to the temple of the LORD, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down. The Babylonian army broke down the walls around Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guard, carried into exile the people who remained in the city, along with the rest of the populace and those who had gone over to the king of Babylon" (2 Kings 25:1-11).

Followed by weak successors, the Babylonian Empire began to decay after the death of King Nebuchadnezzar in 562 B.C. In 539 B.C., without opposition, the Babylon Empire opened its gates to Cyrus the Persian. Known as "Cyrus the Great," Persian dominance continued until the rise of the Greek Empire (334 B.C.).

The Persian Period

Little historical documentation has been found regarding the early Persians. Historians assume that the Persians originated from Central Asia around 1000 B.C.

The structure of the Middle East changed dramatically in the third quarter of the sixth century B.C. Under the admirable leadership of Cyrus the Great (559 B.C.–530 B.C.), the Persian Empire began rapid expansion. Persian dominance began with the victories of Cyrus over Babylon and ended with the conquests of the Greeks, under Alexander the Great (356 B.C.–323 B.C.).

In contrast to the Assyrians and Babylonians, Cyrus adopted a more lenient policy toward his captives. In 539 B.C., Cyrus issued a decree that allowed the exiled Hebrews to return to their native land. Cyrus encouraged the Hebrews to rebuild their homes. Cyrus also encouraged the Hebrews to rebuild their place of worship: "In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: This is what King Cyrus of Persia says: 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has appointed me to build Him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. Whoever is among His people, may his God be with him, and may he go to Jerusalem in Judah and build the house of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem'" (Ezra 1:1-3). Cyrus authorized the Hebrews to draw funds from the imperial treasury in order to finance Temple reconstruction (Ezra 6:8). Fortified by the decree of Cyrus, the returning Hebrews constructed the Temple's foundation. Due to opposition, however, work on the Temple ceased for the next fifteen or sixteen years. Encouraged by Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1ff), the Hebrews again began work on the Temple during the reign of Darius I (522 B.C.–486 B.C.).

Evidently unaware of Cyrus' edict, the Persian governor of Jerusalem's province attempted to delay the Temple's reconstruction in 520 B.C. The governor sent a letter requesting an inquiry as to Jewish authorization to rebuild the Temple. An initial search revealed nothing in the archives of Babylon but further examination discovered the decree. Ezra 5:6ff records that the Persian King Darius I verified Cyrus' declaration and allowed work on the Temple to resume. Ezra dated the

completion of the Temple, “on the third day of the month of Adar in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius” (6:15).

Nehemiah’s efforts to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls date during the reign of the Persian King Artaxerxes I Longimanus (465 B.C.–424 B.C.). Nehemiah requested permission to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild its walls, “in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes” (2:1). Artaxerxes I Longimanus’ twentieth year dates to 445 B.C. No record remains as to relations between Persian kings and the Hebrews after the time of Nehemiah.