

Between the Testaments Babylon and Persia

Introduction:

At the end of the prophecy of Malachi the scriptures are silent, God does not communicate with his people, does not send them instruction in any form until the angel speaks to Zacharias in the temple some 400 years or a little more. Then:

Luke 1-11-13 “AND THERE APPEARED UNTO HIM AN ANGEL OF THE LORD STANDING ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE ALTAR OF INCENSE. ¹²AND WHEN ZACHARIAS SAW *him*, HE WAS TROUBLED, AND FEAR FELL UPON HIM. ¹³BUT THE ANGEL SAID UNTO HIM, FEAR NOT, ZACHARIAS: FOR THY PRAYER IS HEARD; AND THY WIFE ELISABETH SHALL BEAR THEE A SON, AND THOU SHALT CALL HIS NAME JOHN.”

This is the fulfillment of the very last prophecy that Malachi recorded:

Malachi 4:5-6 “BEHOLD, I WILL SEND YOU ELIJAH THE PROPHET BEFORE THE COMING OF THE GREAT AND DREADFUL DAY OF THE **LORD**: ⁶AND HE SHALL TURN THE HEART OF THE FATHERS TO THE CHILDREN, AND THE HEART OF THE CHILDREN TO THEIR FATHERS, LEST I COME AND SMITE THE EARTH WITH A CURSE.”

We know this without any doubt whatever because Jesus confirms it:

Matthew 11:14 “AND IF YE WILL RECEIVE *it*, THIS IS ELIAS, WHICH WAS FOR TO COME.”

Due to the fact that God gave no further revelation, raised up no prophets, gave no further instruction to the remnant of Israel during this period of time; it is easily understood why many men might think that God left man to his own devices during this period. As a result; the happenings of this period are not normally taught except in colleges and schools of preaching so consequently the average person knows little about this period of time in the history of God's relationship with man. But God was not idle and the events of this period shaped the political world, influenced the remnant of Israel greatly and set the stage for the coming of the promised Messiah. This is the reason for our decision to attempt, in our own humble way, to conduct a study of this period of time.

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Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Early in the book of Daniel the inspired scripture records a situation much the same as that of Joseph in the court of Pharaoh. The ruling monarch has a dream that his advisors, magicians and astrologers cannot interpret for him, especially since he can't remember the details. In his anger the king orders all of these men destroyed because they have failed him. When the captain of the king's guard comes to carry out this order he encounters Daniel who volunteers to give the king an interpretation. Daniel can provide the proper interpretation because this dream is the work of God.

Read **Daniel 2:31-35**

In his dream the king saw a great image of a man. An image that Daniel describes whose "BRIGHTNESS **was** EXCELLENT" and whose "FORM **was** TERRIBLE". The image has a head of gold, breasts, shoulders and arms of silver, torso and thighs of brass and then legs of iron and feet of iron mixed with clay. So Daniel proceeded to describe what each part of the image meant. At the end of the dream a great stone was "CUT WITHOUT HANDS" and destroyed the image so completely that it "BECAME LIKE CHAFF OF THE SUMMER THRESHINGFLOORS."

Read **Daniel 2:36-45**

So the four sections of the image represented four kingdoms or empires. The first being that of Nebuchadnezzar himself, the second that would replace him would be slightly inferior, therefore silver, the third, of brass, more inferior yet and then the fourth of iron and iron mixed with clay the most inferior of the four. All would be overcome by an all powerful kingdom represented by the great stone "CUT WITHOUT HANDS".

The four empires or kingdoms represented by the image were first of all Babylon ruled by Nebuchadnezzar. The period of time covered by the Babylonian kingdom that is related to the history of Judah is basically from 587 BC when Jerusalem was conquered and the third wave of captives that were carried to Babylon to 538 BC when Babylon was taken by the Persians. The Persian kingdom lasted from 538 BC until about 331 BC when Philip and his son Alexander conquered the Persian Empire and most of the known world.

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Philip was killed, Alexander died very young and the Greek or Macedonian Empire was divided between the four most powerful generals of his armies. They ruled most of the known world, including Judah from 331 BC until 167 BC. From 167 BC until 63 BC Judah enjoyed some measure of independence for about 100 years. I use the term “some measure” of independence because they did pay tribute to various rulers, primarily Egypt and Syria. The rulers of these two sections of the former Macedonian Empire fought each other almost continually during this period of time. But their armies and battles basically restricted themselves to the maritime plain along the Mediterranean coast while Jerusalem and much of Judah is in the mountains between the plain and the Jordan River. Then in 63 BC the area was consolidated under Rome and Judah and several other provinces came under the rule of the family of Herod. In our further study we will look at these kingdoms in more detail and the events that shaped the world of the New Testament.

The Synagogue

Before we leave the time of Nebuchadnezzar and move on into the time of Persian rule there was a most important development in Judaism that bore a tremendous influence on the events of the next six centuries. Under the Mosaic Law the major events of the worship of God were in the Jerusalem temple. They offered daily sacrifices, they honored, part of the time, the major feast days that God commanded. But with the destruction of Jerusalem that all ended.

Especially during their captivity the Jews gathered in groups to worship God and try to preserve their identity. From these meetings the synagogue was brought into existence. The word simply means “congregation” or “assembly” and is applied both to the people and to the facility in which they met. During this period of time we also have the first canonization or gathering together of scripture into one body of writing.

The following is one historian’s description of that process. “There (in the synagogues) the sacred *Torah* was read and explained. It comprised of the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch. The word “Torah” is usually translated “law”, but might better be rendered “instruction”. The *Torah* gave instruction by example as well as by precept. Ultimately other sacred books were accepted as inspired Scripture. Jeremiah was lightly dismissed during the years of his ministry in Jerusalem, but in Babylonian exile his countrymen came to see that his prophecies were true. A collection of the “Prophets” – including some of our historical books – came into being. The Synagogue also recognized a third section of Old Testament, the “Writings” beginning with the Book of Psalms and including books of poetry as well as history and prophecy. The New Testament bears testimony to the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms as the three sections of Scripture. This threefold division is still used in printed editions of the Hebrew Bible.”

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We find the first mention of a synagogue in scripture by Matthew:

Matthew 4:23 “JESUS WENT THROUGHOUT GALILEE, TEACHING IN THEIR SYNAGOGUES, PREACHING THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM, AND HEALING EVERY DISEASE AND SICKNESS AMONG THE PEOPLE.”

Throughout Matthew, Mark and Luke we have references to Jesus teaching or preaching in the synagogues of Judah and Galilee including presenting the prophecy of his own coming:

Luke 4:20-21 “AND HE CLOSED THE BOOK, AND HE GAVE *it* AGAIN TO THE MINISTER, AND SAT DOWN. AND THE EYES OF ALL THEM THAT WERE IN THE SYNAGOGUE WERE FASTENED ON HIM. ²¹AND HE BEGAN TO SAY UNTO THEM, THIS DAY IS THIS SCRIPTURE FULFILLED IN YOUR EARS.”

By the time the gospel was ready to be spread across the world there was a ready made place for the apostles and other preachers to start with a people who already knew God. James says:

Acts 15:31 “FOR MOSES HAS BEEN PREACHED IN EVERY CITY FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES AND IS READ IN THE SYNAGOGUES ON EVERY SABBATH.”

When the Apostle Paul was converted:

“...THEN WAS SAUL CERTAIN DAYS WITH THE DISCIPLES WHICH WERE AT DAMASCUS. ²⁰AND STRAIGHTWAY HE PREACHED CHRIST IN THE SYNAGOGUES, THAT HE IS THE SON OF GOD.” **Acts 9:19-20**

A synagogue could be established anywhere the Jews lived so long as there were 10 grown men available to become members. So during the time between the Testaments both the place and practice of worship and the Scripture used for study was developed. This provided a ready means to spread the gospel throughout all of the world where Jews lived. We will cover the synagogue worship and some other details in a later lesson.

The Persian Empire

The Persian Empire came into being as the result of the efforts of one man – Cyrus the Great of Persia. Cyrus first appears in history when, in 559 B.C., at the age of forty, he inherited the small kingdom of Anshan that bordered Persia. At that time Anshan was a tributary, or paid tribute, to the Median Empire. Cyrus of Persia was not of a mind to continue that relationship and conflict resulted.

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Mean while, in Babylon, a king by the name of Nabonidus, who was the father of Belshazzar, ruled that kingdom. Nabonidus is not mentioned in scripture perhaps because history records that he was a very unpopular with his people. After writing about Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel chapter 4, Daniel writes about his son, Belshazzar:

Daniel 5:1 "BELSHAZZAR THE KING MADE A GREAT FEAST TO A THOUSAND OF HIS LORDS, AND DRANK WINE BEFORE THE THOUSAND."

This is also the same king for whom Daniel interpreted the writing by the hand on the wall of the banquet hall in which this feast was being held.

Daniel 5:5 "IN THE SAME HOUR CAME FORTH FINGERS OF A MAN'S HAND, AND WROTE OVER AGAINST THE CANDLESTICK UPON THE PLAISTER OF THE WALL OF THE KING'S PALACE: AND THE KING SAW THE PART OF THE HAND THAT WROTE."

About 550-549 BC, Nabonidus had turned his throne over to his son, Belshazzar and moved to Harran. Charles Pfeiffer, in his history "Between the Testaments" records that Nabonidus thought that Media would have enough trouble with Cyrus that Babylon would not need to worry about their warlike neighbors." This would have been true if the Median generals had remained loyal to their king, Astyages. But due to the cruelty of Astyages his generals rebelled and allied their armies with Cyrus, in effect, giving the Median Empire over to the ruler of Persia. Consequently Cyrus took over all of what is modern day Iran and also the Median claims to Assyria, Mesopotamia, Syria, Armenia and Cappadocia. In the geography of today's world Cyrus the Great now either controlled or had claims to all of modern day Iran, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Central and Eastern Turkey and Armenia. Some of these claims conflicted with those of Babylon so it is quite natural that armed conflict between Cyrus and Babylon would follow very shortly.

But the first conquest of Cyrus was that of Lydia, which controlled most of western Asia Minor, what is today western Turkey. This extended his empire all the way to the Black Sea on the north, the Aegean Sea on the west and the Mediterranean on the south. The Nabu-naid Chronicle, an ancient Near Eastern Text gives this official report of Cyrus: "In the month Aiaru (May) he marched against the country Lydia...killed its king, took his possessions, but (there) a garrison of his own." Western Asia Minor then became the Persian satrapy (province or principality) of Saparda, or Sardis. It's chief city is the same Sardis that we find in Revelation 1 and Revelation 3 where Jesus speaks to the seven churches of Asia. Soon his control of Ionia and Western Asia Minor would also bring Cyrus in conflict with the mainland Greeks.

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But Cyrus had other problems to deal with first and turned his attention to the east to protect his empire from interference in that direction. He conquered the peoples that are located in northern Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on today's maps.

Meanwhile one of Nebuchadnezzar's "ablest generals", Gobryas, was given the rule of the Babylonian province by Nabonidus, replacing Belshazzar. Gobryas allied himself with Cyrus and when the opportunity came for Cyrus to occupy Babylon we find this account in the "Cyrus Cylinder":

"His widespread troops – their number, like that of the water of a river, could not be established – strolled along, their weapons packed away. Without any battle, he made him (Marduk the local god of Babylon made Cyrus) enter his town Babylon, sparing Babylon any calamity."

Of course, we know that it wasn't their god Marduk who was guiding the events of history at this time but rather Almighty God of Heaven. Gobryas was appointed the ruler of Babylon under Cyrus and took the name of Darius, a name that we immediately recognize from Scripture. The Holy Spirit gives us this account, following Daniel's interpretation of the writing on the wall:

Daniel 5:30-31 "IN THAT NIGHT WAS BELSHAZZAR THE KING OF THE CHALDEANS SLAIN. ³¹AND DARIUS THE MEDIAN TOOK THE KINGDOM, *being* ABOUT THREESCORE AND TWO YEARS OLD."

The policies of both Assyria and Babylon was to displace, remove people that they had conquered to other areas in their empires and replace them with others that they were moving for the same reason. The policy of Cyrus was just the opposite. In order to reduce the resistance to his rule he restored conquered peoples to their original homelands, restored their gods to their original temples and generally reversed a lot of what had previously been done. Since the Jews had no image of their God to be carried back to Jerusalem, they were given the temple utensils and vessels used in worship instead. In addition they were given an official decree to rebuild the House of God:

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Ezra 6:3-5 “IN THE FIRST YEAR OF CYRUS THE KING *the same* CYRUS THE KING MADE A DECREE *concerning* THE HOUSE OF GOD AT JERUSALEM, LET THE HOUSE BE BUILDED, THE PLACE WHERE THEY OFFERED SACRIFICES, AND LET THE FOUNDATIONS THEREOF BE STRONGLY LAID; THE HEIGHT THEREOF THREESCORE CUBITS, *and* THE BREADTH THEREOF THREESCORE CUBITS; ⁴WITH THREE ROWS OF GREAT STONES, AND A ROW OF NEW TIMBER: AND LET THE EXPENSES BE GIVEN OUT OF THE KING'S HOUSE: ⁵AND ALSO LET THE GOLDEN AND SILVER VESSELS OF THE HOUSE OF GOD, WHICH NEBUCHADNEZZAR TOOK FORTH OUT OF THE TEMPLE WHICH *is* AT JERUSALEM, AND BROUGHT UNTO BABYLON, BE RESTORED, AND BROUGHT AGAIN UNTO THE TEMPLE WHICH IS AT JERUSALEM, *every one* TO HIS PLACE, AND PLACE *them* IN THE HOUSE OF GOD.”

As we remember from our study of Haggai, Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest, became the leaders of this band of returning exiles. Also as we remember from our earlier study the Jews were hindered by their neighbors in carrying out the decree of Cyrus and rebuilding the temple. Northern Palestine, formerly the northern kingdom of Israel was populated by deported captives from the Assyrian conquests that were given the name Samaritan. These people mixed with the very poor and undesirable, at least to Assyria, that were left behind. In the Judean highlands, the Negev, which covers most of the Sinai peninsula and southern Judah as far north as Hebron, had been taken over by the Edomites, whom the Nabatean Arabs had pushed out of their native homeland. Another group, called the Calebites, had occupied land as far north as Bethlehem.

About 530 B.C. Cyrus placed his son Cambyses on the throne of Babylon and proceeded to the eastern reaches of his empire to squash revolts that had arisen there. He is wounded and dies in the steppes or what we might call the Great Plains of Central Asia. Cambyses, meanwhile, after assuring his rule over the Persian Empire, has taken steps to conquer Egypt and add that country to his father's empire. His ambition carried him to the first cataract of the Nile and he planned to conquer Ethiopia as well but trouble back home in Babylon demanded his attention. One item of interest in the Persian occupation of Egypt was that a garrison was established at Elephantine, an island in the Nile River located just below that first cataract. This garrison was manned by Jewish mercenaries who built a temple of their own and had correspondence and interaction with the Jews in Jerusalem.

Cambyses ruled the Persian Empire less than ten years. As he returned to Babylon to re-establish his rule there he died in route somewhere in Northern Palestine. After some of the usual intrigue, false starts and a couple of assassinations the Darius that we read about in Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah comes to the throne of Babylon in about 521 B.C.

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Though he was deficient in the sight of God in many of his ways and activities Darius did uphold and support the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple of God and the city of Jerusalem. We find the record of his command in:

Ezra 6:7-8 “LET THE WORK OF THIS HOUSE OF GOD ALONE; LET THE GOVERNOR OF THE JEWS AND THE ELDERS OF THE JEWS BUILD THIS HOUSE OF GOD IN HIS PLACE. MOREOVER I MAKE A DECREE WHAT YE SHALL DO TO THE ELDERS OF THESE JEWS FOR THE BUILDING OF THIS HOUSE OF GOD: THAT OF THE KING'S GOODS, *even* OF THE TRIBUTE BEYOND THE RIVER, FORTHWITH EXPENSES BE GIVEN UNTO THESE MEN, THAT THEY BE NOT HINDERED.”

There were at least three important developments brought about by Darius that influenced the future of the Jews, the coming of Christ and the spread of the gospel. First of all he perfected the satrap or provincial government structure that lasted throughout the Greek and Roman Empires. The governor of each satrap or province was restricted to civil authority and another, a military governor, independent of the civil governor, was given responsibility for the protection of their territory and reported directly to the king. It is speculated that this is the reason we find no further record of Zerubbabel beyond Zechariah Chapter 4 because this arrangement would have required some changes in government personnel.

In all of my prior study the Roman Empire is given credit for the establishment of the great roads that allow travel and communication within that empire. But again in the writing of Charles Pfeiffer in “Between the Testaments” we find that at least some of these great roads were established long before Rome came into power. “Several great roads were inherited from the old Assyrian Empire. One of these extended from Babylon to Carchemish, with a connecting spur to Nineveh, and was prolonged westward and southward to Egypt. Another bound Babylon to the heart of Media. Darius rebuilt the road which connected Nineveh to Ecbatana, passing over the Zagros Mountains and the road from Ecbatana to Sardis passing through Harran with a spur going down to Susa.”

In addition Darius established a postal service that was second to none, even in the early history of this country. Again from “Between the Testaments”: “The network of roads was divided into post routes with horsemen stationed at regular intervals. Any message from king to satrap, or satrap to king, was carried from one stage to the next until it reached its destination.” This is reminiscent of the Pony Express that carried mail from St. Joseph, MO to Sacramento, CA in this country. “Herodotus’ famous description of the Persian Post can be seen engraved across the front of the New York post office: ‘These neither snow nor rain nor heat nor darkness of night prevent from accomplishing each one his appointed task, with the very utmost speed.’”

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“One hundred and eleven post-stations were located along the one thousand six hundred and seventy-seven mile road from Susa to Sardis and Ephesus. The caravans took ninety days to travel this road from end to end. The royal couriers, availing themselves of the fresh relays of horses at the post-stations, covered it in a week.” This is just seven miles further than St. Joseph to Sacramento and the Express riders covered that route in seven days as well.

Darius was like many other rulers of all ages and just could not leave well enough alone. He ruled a vast empire, in fact much of the known world. The military commanders in the satrapies kept order and helped put down rebellions when they arose. Darius never conquered the Greeks but it was not for the want of trying; nor for the lack of desire. He also perpetrated military action against Scythians, a nomadic federation of tribes in Central Asia or Eastern Europe, in modern day Ukraine and Russia. He moved into western India and then turned himself to an old nemesis, Egypt. As this was taking place first the Greeks fomented rebellion in Western Asia Minor and then Egypt revolted.

When Darius died his son Xerxes had been groomed and prepared to replace him.

Esther 1:1 “NOW IT CAME TO PASS IN THE DAYS OF AHASUERUS, (THIS *is* AHASUERUS WHICH REIGNED, FROM INDIA EVEN UNTO ETHIOPIA, *over* AN HUNDRED AND SEVEN AND TWENTY PROVINCES:)”

Xerxes was called Ahasuerus in Hebrew, one of the central figures in the book of Esther and, in fact, the husband of Esther:

Esther 2:15-17 “SO ESTHER WAS TAKEN UNTO KING AHASUERUS INTO HIS HOUSE ROYAL IN THE TENTH MONTH, WHICH *is* THE MONTH TEBETH, IN THE SEVENTH YEAR OF HIS REIGN. ¹⁷AND THE KING LOVED ESTHER ABOVE ALL THE WOMEN, AND SHE OBTAINED GRACE AND FAVOUR IN HIS SIGHT MORE THAN ALL THE VIRGINS; SO THAT HE SET THE ROYAL CROWN UPON HER HEAD, AND MADE HER QUEEN INSTEAD OF VASHTI.”

In the beginning of the history of Xerxes or Ahasuerus; he was almost continually at war. He continued to pursue the dream of his father to conquer the Greek mainland. His armies were soundly defeated in 480 BC and secular history doesn't record much more about him during the other fourteen years of his reign. He was murdered by a usurper (one who wanted his throne) named Artabanus. Artabanus ruled for seven months and was killed by Artaxerxes the third son and legitimate heir of Xerxes.

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It was under the rule of Artaxerxes that both Ezra and Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt.

Ezra 7:6-8 “THIS EZRA WENT UP FROM BABYLON; AND HE *was* A READY SCRIBE IN THE LAW OF MOSES, WHICH THE **LORD** GOD OF ISRAEL HAD GIVEN: AND THE KING GRANTED HIM ALL HIS REQUEST, ACCORDING TO THE HAND OF THE LORD HIS GOD UPON HIM. ⁷AND THERE WENT UP *some* OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, AND OF THE PRIESTS, AND THE LEVITES, AND THE SINGERS, AND THE PORTERS, AND THE NETHINIMS, UNTO JERUSALEM, IN THE SEVENTH YEAR OF ARTAXERXES THE KING. ⁸AND HE CAME TO JERUSALEM IN THE FIFTH MONTH, WHICH *was* IN THE SEVENTH YEAR OF THE KING.”

The seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes is given by Ussher as 456 BC. There are some observations regarding Ezra. First of all he was a priest, a direct descendant of Aaron, and his lineage is given in **Ezra 7:1-5**. He was a “READY SCRIBE”, a teacher of the Law of Moses. He took about 1500 Jews with him from Babylon, most of whom seem to be those that would conduct the temple worship.

When Ezra arrived he found problems with the Jews that had returned earlier that Malachi would need to correct again approximately 150 years later.

Ezra 9:1 “NOW WHEN THESE THINGS WERE DONE, THE PRINCES CAME TO ME, SAYING, THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, AND THE PRIESTS, AND THE LEVITES, HAVE NOT SEPARATED THEMSELVES FROM THE PEOPLE OF THE LANDS, *doing* ACCORDING TO THEIR ABOMINATIONS, *even* OF THE CANAANITES, THE HITTITES, THE PERIZZITES, THE JEBUSITES, THE AMMONITES, THE MOABITES, THE EGYPTIANS, AND THE AMORITES.”

So Ezra, after praying to God, confessing the sins of the people and seeking His counsel determines a course of action to lead Judah to repentance.

Ezra 10:10-12 “AND EZRA THE PRIEST STOOD UP, AND SAID UNTO THEM, YE HAVE TRANSGRESSED, AND HAVE TAKEN STRANGE WIVES, TO INCREASE THE TRESPASS OF ISRAEL. ¹¹NOW THEREFORE MAKE CONFESSION UNTO THE LORD GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, AND DO HIS PLEASURE: AND SEPARATE YOURSELVES FROM THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND, AND FROM THE STRANGE WIVES. ¹²THEN ALL THE CONGREGATION ANSWERED AND SAID WITH A LOUD VOICE, AS THOU HAST SAID, SO MUST WE DO.”

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What is the scriptural definition of repentance? It is to stop doing what we need to repent of. If someone today is living in an adulterous, unscriptural marriage what then is the scriptural remedy? It is to end that relationship and even though God "HATES DIVORCE" as we are reminded in **Malachi 2:16**, the only way to repent of the sin of living in an adulterous marriage is to dissolve that marriage.

While Ezra, the priest, is dealing with the spiritual needs of Jerusalem her enemies are working diligently to keep them from rebuilding the walls of the city. Nehemiah hears of these problems and prays to God to provide the opportunity for him to go to Jerusalem to help remedy the situation. That opportunity is not long in coming. As he serves King Artaxerxes as cupbearer the king sees his sadness and asks why:

Nehemiah 2:5-6 "AND I SAID UNTO THE KING, IF IT PLEASE THE KING, AND IF THY SERVANT HAVE FOUND FAVOUR IN THY SIGHT, THAT THOU WOULDST SEND ME UNTO JUDAH, UNTO THE CITY OF MY FATHERS' SEPULCHRES, THAT I MAY BUILD IT. ⁶AND THE KING SAID UNTO ME, (THE QUEEN ALSO SITTING BY HIM,) FOR HOW LONG SHALL THY JOURNEY BE? AND WHEN WILT THOU RETURN? SO IT PLEASSED THE KING TO SEND ME; AND I SET HIM A TIME."

Nehemiah stayed in Jerusalem for twelve years and led the Jews to finish rebuilding the city and re-establish the city walls. When his task was complete and all things set in order he returned to report to his king.

Nehemiah 13:6 "BUT IN ALL THIS *time* WAS NOT I AT JERUSALEM: FOR IN THE TWO AND THIRTIETH YEAR OF ARTAXERXES KING OF BABYLON CAME I UNTO THE KING, AND AFTER CERTAIN DAYS OBTAINED I LEAVE OF THE KING:"

When Nehemiah left Jerusalem he was gone for about four years and the Jews fell right back into the same old sins and problems. He returns again to Jerusalem in 424 BC and again leads the Jews to repentance. Some of their problems were:

1. Eliashib the priest had built himself a storage chamber in the temple was hoarding the offerings given for the Levites, singers, porters and other temple workers. **Nehemiah 13:4-9**
2. Just like we studied in Malachi the Levites were forced by this lack of support to till their own fields and neglect their service to God. **Nehemiah 13:10-14**
3. They were dishonoring the Sabbath by working in their orchards and vineyards, working beasts of burden, allowing foreigners to come into the city and buy and sell generally treating the Sabbath as though it was just a normal day. **Nehemiah 13:15-22**

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4. The Jews had married wives of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Their children couldn't even speak the Jew's language because they were being taught by their foreign mothers. **Nehemiah 13:23-31**

It is with this book of history and the writings of Malachi, the prophet, that the scripture is brought to a close.

Meanwhile Artaxerxes was unable to continue the power and might of the Persian Empire that he inherited. By this time all of the lands in western Asia Minor were back in the hands of the Greeks. Artaxerxes died about four years after Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. Persia went through a series of kings and rulers including Darius II, Artaxerxes II, Artaxerxes III, who murdered all of his brothers and sisters to remove any threat to his claim to the throne and finally one named Darius III. At about the same time much of the mainland of Greece was conquered by a Macedonian named Philip, setting the stage for the next empire to rise, Egypt rebelled and was re-conquered. Persia then sought to ally themselves with Athens to challenge Philip and that started their downfall. Alexander of Macedon, son of Philip, came to power in about 336 B.C. Darius III challenged him, lost and was murdered by one of his cousins. This ended the Persian Empire in about 330 B.C.