

Unraveling the Chronology of 536-486 BC in the Bible

By Phillip G. Kayser

King Year	BC Date	Key Events in Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi
Cyrus		
1 st	536	Ezra, Nehemiah, Mordecai make first trip to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:7; 12:3,26). Worship is restored in Jerusalem in 7 th month (Ezra 3:1) (Note: All three go back to Babylon sometime prior to 515 BC for unknown reasons.)
2 nd	535	Work on foundation of temple begins in 2 nd month (Ezra 3:8) and work on walls begins (Ezra 5:3,8,9)
8 th	529	Cyrus dies
Cambyses		
1 st	529	Cambyses becomes Emperor, and thus the title of Ahasuerus (Ezra 4:6).
8 th	522	Cambyses dies
Gaumata		Also called Pseudo-Smerdis (because he pretended to be Smerdis, the brother of Cambyses). It was a revolutionary move. He lasts seven months and is killed at the order of Darius.
1 st	522/1	Pseudo-Smerdis claimed the title of universal emperor (Artaxerxes) for seven months (Ezra 4:7-24).
Darius		
1 st	521	Darius becomes king but loses the empire due to revolt of provinces (thus he only has the title of King of Persia, not emperor – Ezra 4:5,24; etc). Fights to regain provinces during years 1-2.
2 nd	520	Darius allowed temple construction to be continued (Ezra 4:24). In 6 th month people are slow to do so until God rebukes them through Haggai (Haggai 1:1-15).
2 nd	520	In 7 th month Haggai rebukes them for thinking that this will never be as good a temple as Solomon's temple (Hag. 2:1-9; see Ezra 3:1,12-13).
2 nd	520	In 8 th month Zechariah calls people to repentance (Zech. 1:1-6).
2 nd	520	In 9 th month Haggai explains the famine as discipline for backslidden condition (Hag. 2:10-19).
2 nd	520	Later in 9 th month Haggai predicts the conflict that will happen in 509 BC and that Israel will come out victorious (Hag. 2:15-23).
2 nd	520	In 11 th month Zechariah commands Jews to flee Babylon (2:6-8), predicts Jewish spoiling of nations in 509 BC (2:8-9 – for fulfillment see Esther 9), predicts Gentile converts (2:11 – for fulfillment see Esther 8:17), gives encouragement to Joshua the high priest (Zech 3), and gives many predictions of the future (1:7-6:15)
3 rd	519	Darius made a feast (Esther 1:3). Darius has conquered 19 kings and regained most of the empire (120 provinces by year 3), so he now wears the title of Ahasuerus, the Old Persian title for emperor. (By year 5 he will conquer the Greek states and have a total of 127 provinces.)
4 th	518	Further rebuke and instruction from Zechariah as well as predictions of future history, Messiah, AD 70 destruction, and permanent kingdom of Messiah (Zech. 7:1-14:21).
6 th	516	Temple finished on 3 rd day of 12 th month, Adar (Ezra 6:15). By now (probably 5 th year) Darius has incorporated all the Greek states, and now wears the title of Artaxerxes (Greek form of Ahasuerus) (Ezra 6:14 ¹ ; 7:1). He is the only emperor to rule over 127 provinces (see my studies of Esther 1).
7 th	515	Ezra starts his trip from Babylon to Jerusalem on the 1 st day of the 1 st month (Ezra 7:9).
7 th	515	Ezra stops in Ahava to pick up Levites and leaves Babylon on 12 th day of 1 st month (Ezra 8:31).
7 th	515	Temple dedicated at Passover on 14 th day of 1 st month (Ezra 6:16-22).
7 th	515	Jeshua the high priest dies shortly after temple is dedicated. (See James Jordan for extrapolation.)
7 th	515	Ezra arrives at Jerusalem to beautify the newly dedicated temple on the 1 st day of the 5 th month (Ezra 7:8-9)
7 th	515	9 th month. The walls that had begun under Cyrus (Ezra 5:3,8,9) and that were continued under Pseudo-Smerdis (Ezra 4:12-13) are declared by Ezra to now be finished (Ezra 9:9) or nearly finished..

¹ Ezra 6:14b should be translated as “And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus and Darius (even Artaxerxes king of Persia).” This reconciles with the next verse, which makes it clear that the temple was finished “in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.” There could hardly be a decree to build the temple two kings after Darius has already finished it. But since Darius had the title of Artaxerxes himself, it is reconciled. This verse is giving the first indicator that Darius will start being referred to from here on in as “Artaxerxes.”

12 th	510	Haman cast pur to destroy the Jewish people (Esther 3:7)
13 th	509	Gog and Magog war to annihilate Israel, the emperor's counter-decree allows Jews to try to defend themselves. It is during this time that the gates of temple and walls are once again burned (Ezek. 38-39; Esther 8-9; cf. Neh. 1:1-3). Apparently, there are the deaths of some Jews and now there are "survivors who are left from the captivity" (see remembrance of Nehemiah in 20 th year - Neh. 1:3)
14 th	508	According to Elephantine papyri, Johanan becomes an apprentice high priest
17 th	505	Johanan becomes high priest
20 th	502	In the 9 th month of sacred calendar Nehemiah hears that the city is still in distress and walls ruined (Neh. 1:1f))
20 th	502	In the 1 st month of sacred calendar (but still 20 th year of Darius) Nehemiah gets permission to go to Jerusalem (Neh. 2:1-10)
20 th	502	Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem and begins a 12-year project on walls and city (Neh. 13:6). See detailed accounting of time in James B. Jordan's papers.
21 st	501	Some say that the wall was finished in 52 days. If so, it is 501 BC. However, see below on the twelve years that it took for Nehemiah to fulfill his mandate.
21-31		Passage of time. See "seventh year" (Neh. 10:31) "year by year" (Neh. 10:34). Also see that he only got permission to stay until wall project is finished and was to report back after that (Neh. 2:5-6). Logic shows that it took him twelve years to build the wall (see Neh. 5:14) and an additional 52 days to finish the doors in the gates (Neh. 5-6).
32 nd	490	Nehemiah has finished his mandate of rebuilding walls and returns to Babylon. We are not told how long he is gone, but "during all this I was not in Jerusalem" (13:6) implies plenty of time for things to go bad.
??	489, 487???	Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem and has to begin reforms all over again (Neh. 13:6-13). How long he stayed in Babylon (13:6) we are not sure. See the previous note. Also see note of uncertainty below.
36 th	486	Darius dies.

Uncertainty and division among conservatives on the following issue

The following issues still have uncertainty about them with scholars on various sides:

1. Does the strong Hebrew in Ezra 9:1a ("When these things were faded away" or long past?) imply that chapters 9-10 occurred at a much later time (perhaps after 489 BC in Nehemiah 13)? Or do they occur four and a half months (cf month note in Ezra 7:9 and 10:9) after Ezra arrives (515 BC)?
2. Does Nehemiah 13:14-31 come sequentially after Nehemiah 13:4-13), or is Nehemiah summarizing all the reforms performed, including those in 515 BC (a topical arrangement of his history)?
3. If the answer to the previous question is a topical arrangement, does Nehemiah 13:14-31 come at the same time as Ezra's reforms in Ezra 9-10 (whenever those are dated)?
4. Do Malachi's rebukes occur in 515 BC (in connection with Ezra's reforms) or after 489 (in connection with Nehemiah's reforms)?

Notes:

Since some authors speculate that one or more of these books uses a civil calendar rather than a sacred calendar (making everything off by six months), the following notes help to anchor the chronology:

1. **Ezra uses sacred calendar.** See identification of Tabernacles as occurring in the seventh month (Ezra 3:1,4)
2. **Nehemiah uses sacred calendar.** See identification of Tabernacles (which is in month Tishri) as being the seventh month (Neh. 7:73; 8:2)
3. **Esther uses sacred calendar.** See identification of tenth month as Tebeth (Esther 2:16).

This chronology follows the view that Esther's Ahasuerus (Old Persian title for emperor) is Darius. It also assumes a sequence in Darius' life where he is only "king" during the time that he trying to gain the empire back, becomes emperor (Ahasuerus) when he conquers the kings, and then becomes Artaxerxes when he incorporates the Greek states into his empire. See scholarly works of Sir Isaac Newton, Martin Anstey, Floyd Nolan Jones, James B. Jordan, David Austin, Philip Mauro, E. W. Faulstich, and others for helpful detailed work. While these authors disagree with each other on some details, they have moved chronological studies forward immensely. Of particular value is Anstey (very detailed argumentation), Jordan (helpful on Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther connection), and Jones (on Esther). Floyd Nolan Jones is my favorite go-to on Chronology up through Darius, though I disagree with his take on Artaxerxes in Ezra 7. Nevertheless, his views are worth considering.

Ptolemy's chronology has been shown to be grossly inaccurate by many scholars from Isaac Newton and on, yet the establishment still holds him as being 100% correct. In 1977, NASA scientist, R.R. Newton published a journal article showing how NASA (by backdating of all lunar eclipses) has shown that some of Ptolemy's lunar eclipses could not have been viewed anywhere in Babylon, making Ptolemy's chronology a fraud. This was followed by his book, Robert R. Newton, *The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy*, (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Uni. Press, 1977. This was followed by "The Strange Case of Claudius Ptolemy"
https://www.jhuapl.edu/techdigest/views/pdfs/V16_N2_1977/V16_N2_1977_Newton.pdf