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## **Introduction to the Bible books of Ezra and Nehemiah**

Since both the book of Ezra and the book of Nehemiah refer to a number of emperors of Persia, it is appropriate to list a number of Persian emperors.

*The following dates are all B.C.E.*

Cyrus the Great reigned from 550-530.

Cambyses reigned from 530-522

Darius I reigned from 522-486

Xerxes reigned from 486-465

Artaxerxes I reigned from 465-424

Darius II reigned from 424-404

Artaxerxes II reigned from 404-358

Artaxerxes III reigned from 358-338

Artaxerxes IV reigned from 338-336

Darius III reigned from 336-330

The reigns of these emperors spanned a period of over 200 years.

Artaxerxes and Darius are mentioned numerous times in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, without indicating which Darius or Artaxerxes is meant. This creates a dilemma for Bible historians because there were 3 emperors named Darius and 4 emperors named Artaxerxes.

It appears that the following history as laid out in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah is reasonably accurate. After destroying the Babylonian empire, Cyrus the Great of Persia encouraged the Jews in captivity in Babylon to return to Israel. Cambyses and Darius I went along with the plan of Cyrus. Emperor Xerxes, who succeeded Darius I, heard the enemies of the Jews criticize the rebuilding of Jerusalem, but apparently took no action according to the book of Ezra. The Jews' enemies persuaded Emperor Artaxerxes I to order that the rebuilding of Jerusalem cease. Darius II, who succeeded Artaxerxes I, after consulting the plan of Cyrus, decreed that the temple at Jerusalem be rebuilt at the expense of the emperor, without saying anything about the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its walls. Artaxerxes II, who succeeded Darius II, decreed that Jerusalem be rebuilt with the financial help of the emperor.

During the reign of Artaxerxes II, the religious reformer, *Ezra the Priest*, came to Jerusalem from Babylon. Also, Artaxerxes II appointed Nehemiah as governor over Israel; and Nehemiah was instrumental in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and Jerusalem itself.