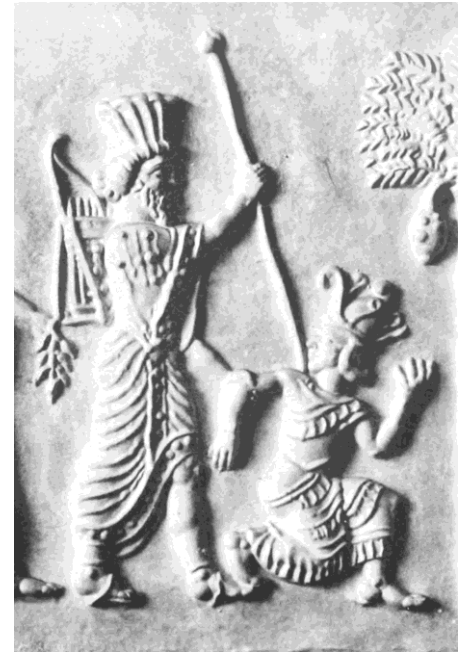


# Nehemiah 1:1-11

1. Artaxerxes came to the Persian throne in 465 BC after his father Xerxes I was assassinated in his bedchamber by Artabanus, the commander of the royal bodyguard with the help of an eunuch named Aspamitres.
2. When Artaxerxes took the throne:
  - a. In 465 BC his brother, Hystaspes, revolted in Bactria (near India west/sw of the Caspian Sea)
  - b. In 460 the Egyptian ruler Inarus led a nationalistic revolt against Artaxerxes.
    - i. The Athenians supported the Egyptian revolt by supplying them with 200 triremes (according to Thucydides).
      1. The Athenians had been at war with Persia since Darius had invaded Greece in 492 BC and ended with the Persian loss at the Battle of Marathon.
      2. Xerxes led the Second Persian invasion of Greece in 480 BC which ended in 479 with a Greek victory defeating the Persians at Salamis, Plataea and Mycale.
  - c. In 458 Ezra convinces Artaxerxes to give him authority to teach and enforce the Law of Moses and the law of Persia in the satrap of Judaea.
  - d. In 455 the Egyptian revolt had been stopped and Inarus captured and taken to Susa.
  - e. In 448 BC the satrap of Trans-Euphrates (also called the governor of Syria) named Megabyzus rebelled against Artaxerxes.
  - f. In 445 , his twentieth year on the Persian throne, Nehemiah asked to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
3. Artaxerxes died of natural causes in the winter of 424 BC. This was unusual for Persian kings.



**In this image from a cylinder seal Artaxerxes I is executing Inarus the Egyptian ruler who rebelled against the Persians and with the help of the Athenian naval fleet in 460 BC defeated the Persian army. Inarus was captured and taken to Susa where he was crucified in 454 BC.**

## Nehemiah 1:1-3

1:1 – **The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.**

**Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel,**

1:2 – **that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem.**

1:3 – **And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”**

1. The Jewish Scripture have Ezra and Nehemiah as one book. But, here in 1:1 it is clear it is a separate literary work with the opening line: “THE WORDS OF NEHEMIAH...”
2. Chislev is the winter month, or our Nov/Dec
3. “twentieth year” is the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Artaxerxes which is 445 since he began ruling in 465 BC.
4. Susa was in the fertile plain 150 north of the Persian Gulf and used as a winter palace . It is in SW Iran today.

- a. Daniel saw himself in a vision in Susa in Daniel 8:2. Josephus records that Daniel had a palace/citadel in Ecbatana. This was where Cyrus’ decree was found:

“When therefore those that had intended thus to destroy Daniel by treachery, were themselves destroyed, King Darius sent [letters] over all his country, and praised that God whom Daniel worshipped; and said, that “He was the only true God, and had all power.” He had also Daniel in very great esteem; and made him the principal of his friends. Now when Daniel was become so illustrious and famous, on account of the opinion men had that he was beloved of God, he built a tower at Ecbatana in Media. (35) It was a most elegant building, and wonderfully made: and it is still remaining, and preserved to this day. And to such as see it, it appears to have been lately built, and to have been no older than that very day when any one looks upon it: it is so fresh, and flourishing, and beautiful, and no way grown old in so long time. (36) For buildings suffer the same as men do, they grow old, as well as they, and by numbers of years their strength is dissolved, and their beauty withered. Now they bury the Kings of Media, of Persia and Parthia, in this tower, to this day: and he who was entrusted with the care of it, was a Jewish Priest: which thing is also observed till this day. But it is fit to give an account of what this man did, which ’tis most admirable to hear. For he was so happy, as to have strange revelations made to him, and those as to one of the greatest of the Prophets. Insomuch that while he was alive, he had the esteem and applause both of the Kings and of the multitude; and now he is dead he retains a remembrance that will never fail. For the several books that he wrote and left behind him, are still read by us, till this time. And from them we believe that Daniel conversed with God. For he did not only prophesy of future events, as did the other Prophets; but he also determined the time of their accomplishment. (Ant. 10.11.7)

Ecbatana was where Cyrus’ decree from 539 BC was found in Ezra 6:1-3 when Darius made a search to begin the rebuilding of the temple in 520 BC:

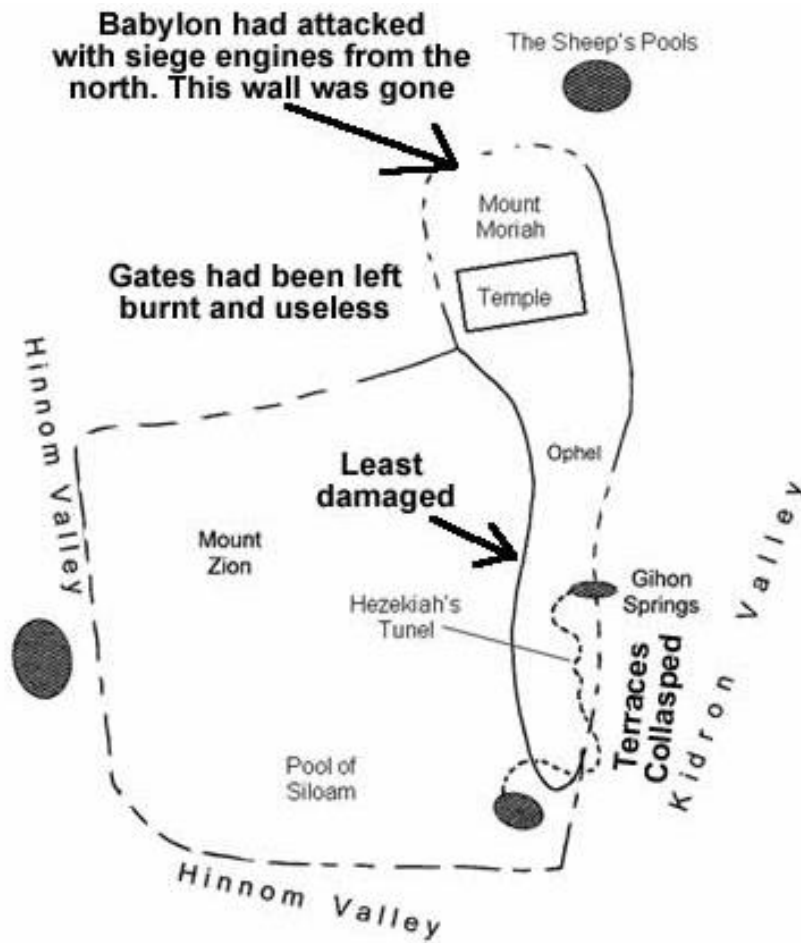
“Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in Babylonia, in the house of the archives where the documents were stored. And in Ecbatana, the citadel that is in the province of Media, a scroll was found on which this was written: “A record. In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king issued a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt.

- b. The book of Esther takes place in Susa.



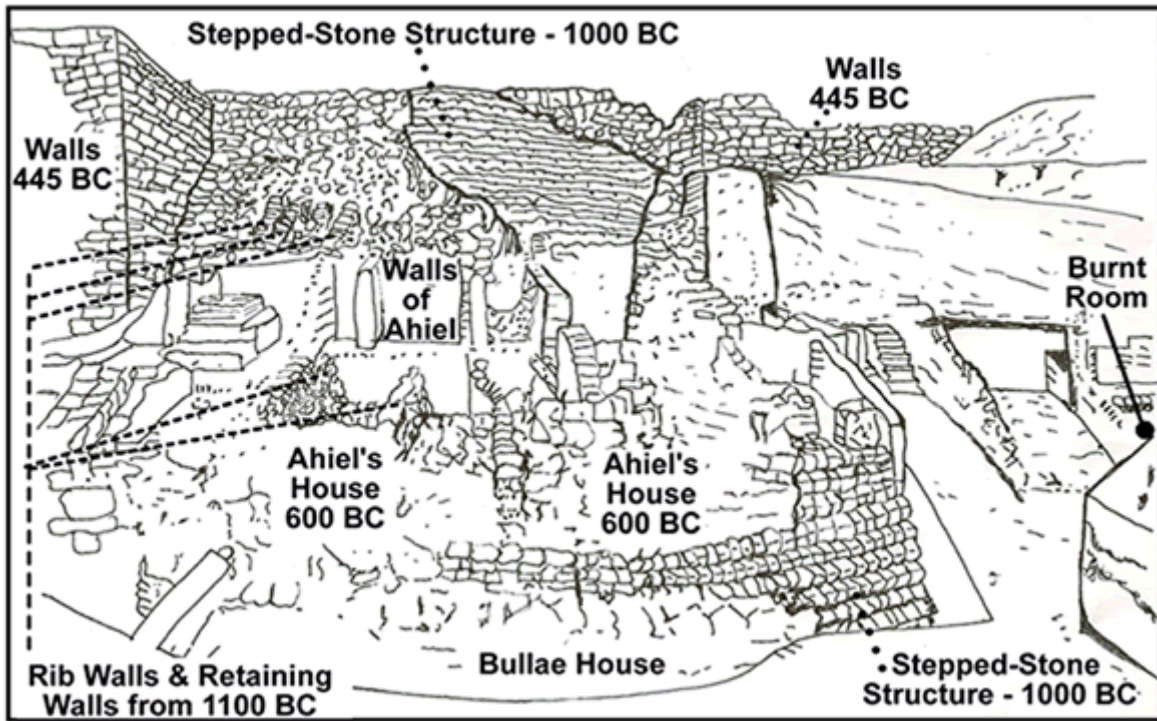
5. Hanani is the brother of Nehemiah
  - a. The Elephantine papyri refer to a Hananiah who was the head of Jerusalem. It is likely that when Nehemiah returned to Artaxerxes his brother was left in charge of Jerusalem.
6. Artaxerxes had himself stopped the rebuilding of the city in Ezra 4 when a letter was sent to Artaxerxes in 464 BC (during his first year)
  - a. During the reign of Darius the temple was built and work on Jerusalem continued during Darius' reign and during that of his son Xerxes.
  - b. Ezra 4:6 the opposition rose at the beginning and during Xerxes reign. Xerxes took no action against the Jews.
  - c. Ezra 4:7 the opposition tried again during Artaxerxes first year and it worked. See Ezra 4:7-24
7. Without the walls (and, general city works) the surrounding satraps and people of those provinces could abuse and take advantage of the Jews in Judea and Jerusalem.
  - a. They were defenseless.
  - b. The terraces that supported the east side and protected and provided the water works lay in ruins yet. Kathleen Kenyon wrote after her excavation of this area:

“The effect on Jerusalem was much more disastrous and far-reaching than merely to render the city defenseless...The whole system of terraces down the eastern slope, dependent on retaining walls buttressed in turn by the fill of the next lower terrace, was ultimately dependent on the town wall at the base, forming the lowest and most substantial of the retaining walls.”



**586 BC Destruction and Fire Damage Remained in 445 BC (141 years)**







Nehemiah 1:4

**1:4 – As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.**

Nehemiah 1:5-11

**1:5 – And I said, “O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments,**

**1:6 – let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned.**

**1:7 – We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses.**

**1:8 – Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples,**

**1:9 – but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’**

**1:10 – They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand.**

**1:11a – O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”**

**1:11b – Now I was cupbearer to the king.**

1. Cupbearer from *masqeh* which means literally “one who gives someone something to drink”
2. In Tobit 1:22 (a Jewish writing) it says” Now Ahikar was cupbearer, keeper of the signet, and in charge of administration of the accounts, for Esarhaddon had appointed him second to himself.”
3. Nehemiah would have:
  - a. Been well trained in court etiquette
  - b. Good looking, and perfect in appearance
  - c. Know how to taste and select wines. The Babylonian Talmud says, “The wine belongs to the master but credit for it is due to his cupbearer.”
  - d. He would have been in the presence of the king when he shared his thoughts and would have joined him in conversation.
  - e. Been trusted with the king’s life and privacy. Artaxerxes father had been killed by a man such as Nehemiah.
  - f. Had great influence in determining who had a meeting or audience with the king.