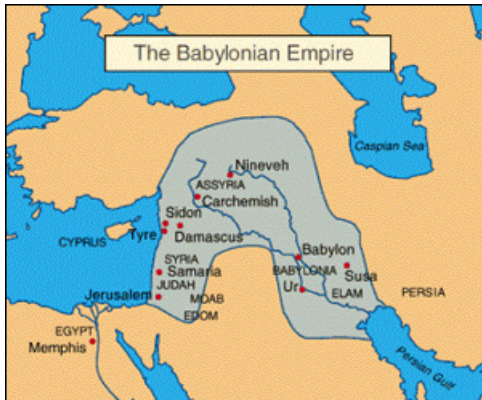
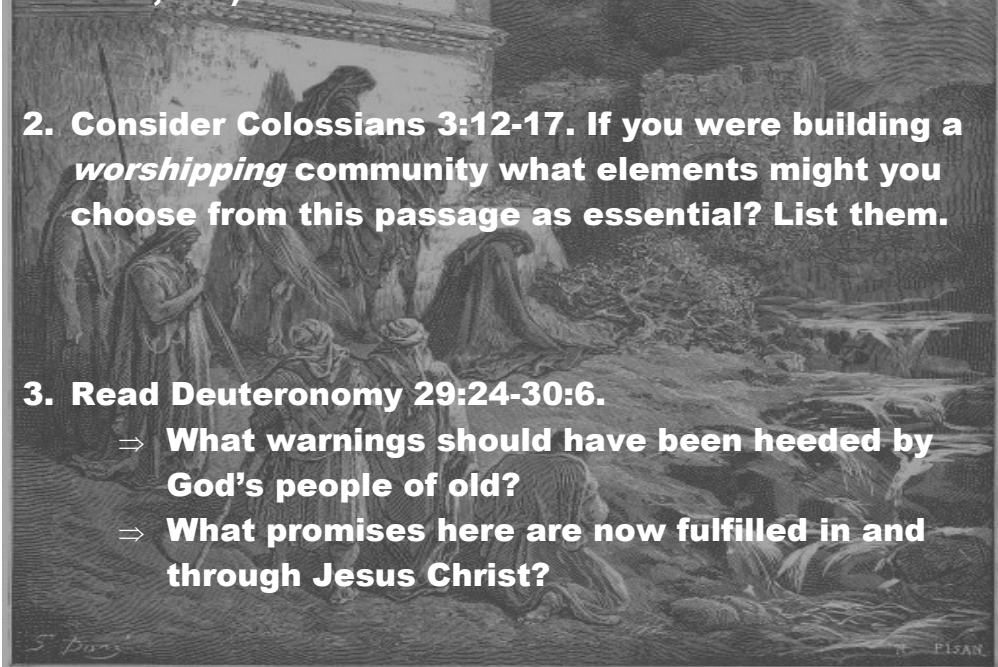


## GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Imagine you are rebuilding a devastated community. Where would you begin? What important foundations would be needed for a healthy and life-giving community? (e.g. values, laws, etc)
2. Consider Colossians 3:12-17. If you were building a *worshipping* community what elements might you choose from this passage as essential? List them.
3. Read Deuteronomy 29:24-30:6.
  - ⇒ What warnings should have been heeded by God's people of old?
  - ⇒ What promises here are now fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ?



### NEHEMIAH SERIES—MARCH/APRIL COMMUNITY UNDER CONSTRUCTION

- March 14  
Neh 1:1-3 Building a new community  
March 21  
Neh 1:4-2:8 Praying & Planning  
March 28  
Neh 2:9-20 Facing Opposition  
April 4 Easter Sunday  
Holy Communion  
Neh 4:1-14 Pain and Progress



5.30pm Sundays

# Community Under Construction



## Introduction to the times of Ezra & Nehemiah

The people of Judah had been taken into captivity in Babylon in 587-586BC as a consequence of an extensive list of wrongdoing. 2 Chronicles 36 summarizes the uprising of Babylon and points to an act of God's judgment. The city of Jerusalem was raided and burned; the protective walls knocked down and the temple decimated (Neh. 2:3). The community of Jerusalem was dismantled and people taken east to work for foreign powers in what is now the regions south of Bagdad in Iraq. Nearly 50 years later, Cyrus II came to power; the Persians took the place of Chaldeans. He was a generous ruler and became an instrument of God's mercy, permitting Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem and allowing great freedoms regarding religion and culture.

### Nehemiah

Nearly a century later, a man named Nehemiah was personal butler to King Artaxerxes of Persia (Nehemiah 1:11) just as Joshua had been to Pharaoh many centuries earlier in Egypt. He too gained favour with his boss and was given leave and authority to be part of the rebuilding of community in Jerusalem. Nehemiah had the physical construction of community life in his sights.



### Ezra

More than a decade before Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem ready to work with bricks and mortar, a scribe and priest had led a band of Jews back to Jerusalem in 457BC with a different aspect of community building in mind. Ezra intended to base the life of the people of this city upon the teaching of the first 5 books of the Bible. He was trained in the Torah while living in Babylon. The King had granted Ezra great freedoms to re-establish life around worship at the temple and to put together a community of priests and servers. A critical feature of Ezra's work was the translation and explanation of God's Word to the people for the 1st time in years in a common language.



### Rebuilding the Temple

Ninety years before Ezra's arrival, Zerubbabel headed the first return of exiles to Jerusalem and did the preliminary work of rebuilding a temple on the same site as the one Solomon had built so gloriously (Ezra 3:8). The prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged his work and the temple was back in operation, albeit in an unprotected city by 516BC and was dedicated with great celebration (Ezra 6:16).

## Background Reading

Chapters 1-6 of the Book of Ezra give a summary of the historical background before Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem. 2 Chronicles 36 sets the scene in general and the Books of Daniel, Jeremiah 21-52, Ezekiel 26-30, Haggai and Zechariah add information to the time and setting.



### Study 1—Nehemiah 1:1-3

- 1 The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa,
- 2 Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.
- 3 They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." (NIV)

- ⇒ Nehemiah = "the comfort of Yahweh". Perhaps from a prominent family.
- ⇒ Several calendars existed in parallel
- ⇒ A fertile region of southwest Iran, Persian Gulf. A winter palace for kings & the site of the story of Esther.
- ⇒ Lit. "Jews who had escaped". "Jews" became a common term after the exile.
- ⇒ Though the temple was re-constructed & worship was taking place the absence of a city wall meant they were defenceless against hostile intrusion and that the physical structure of the temple terraces had no retaining buttresses.
- ⇒ Nehemiah would have known of the episode recorded in Ezra 4:7-23 and how the Jews were called to stop their building because their reputation was so bad.
- ⇒ The walls of Jerusalem had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (Neh. 2:17; Ezra 1:7; Isaiah 64:11) and remained in ruins for almost 150 years.

607 Captivity Dan.1 2Ch.36  
 586 Fall of Jerusalem Temple destroyed  
 537 1st Exiles return  
 520 Zechariah Haggai  
 516 Temple rebuilt Ezra's reforms  
 458 with Nehemiah  
 445 Nehemiah rebuilds Jerusalem's walls