

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther



St. Rose Community Church EQUIP

Context

- Ezra and Nehemiah were originally written as **one** book.
- The history recorded in Ezra-Nehemiah spans from the time the Jews began to **return** to Jerusalem, around 538 BC to a century after the first return.

¹In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: ²“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. ⁴And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.” Ezra 1:1-4

God Initiates, People Respond - Ezra 1:1-6

Ezra 1:1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord **by the mouth of Jeremiah** might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing:

Jeremiah 29:10 “For thus says the Lord: When **seventy years** are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

God Initiates, People Respond - Ezra 1:1-6

Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit **God had stirred** to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem.”

Ezra 1:5

God's People Return & Rebuild - Ezra 1:7-6:22

- God provides everything the people need to rebuild.

Ezra 1:7 “Cyrus the king also brought out the **vessels of the house of the Lord** that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem”

Items of the House of the Lord (1 Kings 7): The golden altar, golden table, golden lampstands, golden basins, and massive bronze pillars, stands, and basins, so large they could not be weighed.

God's People Return & Rebuild - Ezra 1:7-6:22

Now these were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried captive to Babylonia. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town. They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

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-God preserved David's line & is still committed to his promises.

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-God preserved the priesthood by protecting the Levites.

God's People Return & Rebuild - Ezra 1:7-6:22

“And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the Lord had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria [that is, Darius, king of Persia which had conquered Babylon which had conquered Assyria] to them, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.”

Ezra 6:22

God's People Return & Rebuild - Ezra 1:7-6:22

“But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid..... though many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away.”

Ezra 3:12

The People Sin & Repent - Ezra 7-10

“The good hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”

Ezra 7:9-10

The People Sin & Repent - Ezra 7-10

“The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations... For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that **the holy race** has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost.”

Ezra 9:1-3

The People Sin & Repent - Ezra 7-10

“O Lord, the God of Israel, you are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is today. Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this.”

Ezra 9:15

The People Sin & Repent - Ezra 7-10

“But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery.”

Ezra 9:8

Nehemiah Returns and the People Rebuild the Walls

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hakaliah. Now it happened in the month of Cisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, **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.

Nehemiah 1:1-2

Nehemiah Returns and the People Rebuild the Walls

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.

Nehemiah 1:3

Nehemiah Returns and the People Rebuild the Walls

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 1:4

Nehemiah Returns and the People Rebuild the Walls

“Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses.”

Nehemiah 1:6-7

Nehemiah Returns and the People Rebuild the Walls

“The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build.”

Nehemiah 2:20

Nehemiah Returns and the People Rebuild the Walls

“So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all Israel, lived in their towns.”

Nehemiah 7:73

The People Rejoice & Relapse -Nehemiah 8-13

8:6 And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, **“Amen, Amen,”** lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

8:9 For all the people **wept** as they heard the words of the Law.

The People Rejoice & Relapse -Nehemiah 8-13

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The People Rejoice & Relapse -Nehemiah 8-13

[All the people now] join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his rules and his statutes.

Nehemiah 10:29

The people are in the land.

The line of David and the seed of the woman lives on.

Priests are making sacrifices on the altar.

The temple is rebuilt.

The walls around Jerusalem are secure.

The law is publicly read and explained.

The people formally renew their commitment to God's covenant.

Esther

Context

Time: After the return of the first wave of exiles but before Ezra's return.

Location: Susa, Persia's capital, where some Jews still live in exile.

Key Themes

God **Protects** His People

- God's acts of providence are often with His hidden hand.
- We can easily overlook or miss his work.

Key Themes

God Will **Judge** Those Who are Wicked

- Haman wickedly, pridefully & arrogantly plots and attempts to kill God's people, yet his plans backfire and he has to publicly honor them and is killed.

The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could stand against them, for the fear of them had fallen on all peoples.”

Esther 9:2

Key Themes

God Will **Judge** Those Who are Wicked

- God's people can have peace in trials, confident that He will bring justice.

Key Themes

God Works Through Circumstances

Who knows whether you have been brought into the kingdom for such a time as this?

Esther 4:14

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Key Themes

God Works Through Circumstances

- God uses earthly instruments, like people's actions, to accomplish His plans.
- God does not need any particular person to achieve his purposes.

Key Themes

God Will Save His People

- How God will accomplish his plans is not always clear.
- God always delivers his people and carries his redemptive plan forward.

King Saul did not wipe out the Amalekites and King Agag as God commanded. (1 Samuel 15)

Mordecai is a descendant of King Saul. (Esther 2:5)

Haman is a descendant of King Agag. (Esther 9:24)

- God's People are threatened by the very same line that he previously commanded King Saul to destroy. Yet, God saves them once again.

Summary

God used Esther for the sake of saving his people.

- Esther listened to her cousin when he informed her how to present herself to the king.

God used Esther for the sake of saving his people.

- Esther spoke to the King without being called to enter the court after becoming queen.

“Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.”

Esther 4:16

God used Esther for the sake of saving his people.

- Esther revealed Haman's plot to kill her uncle and the Jews.

7:3 'If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request.'"

7:6 And Esther said, 'A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!

God used Esther for the sake of saving his people.

- Esther was brave enough to plead with the King to save the Jews.

“she fell at his feet and wept and pleaded with him to avert the evil plan of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had devised against the Jews.” Esther 8:3

Takeaways

- God is at work, even when his people **can't** see it.
- God's people are called to be faithful with the opportunities they **can** see.
- God is the one who **empowers** his people to be obedient.