

## 1 – HISTORICAL BOOKS: EZRA, NEHEMIAH & ESTHER

### I. The Nature of the Historical Books

- The historical books are known as "narratives."
- Biblical narratives tell us about what happened - but not just any things.
- They are not just stories about people who lived in Old Testament times.
- They are stories about what God did to and through his people.
- They are not allegories or stories filled with hidden meanings.
- They do not always teach directly.
- Each narrative within a narrative does not necessarily have a moral all its own.

### II. Reading Old Testament Historical Books

- A narrative does not directly teach a doctrine.
- They usually illustrate a doctrine or doctrines taught propositionally elsewhere.
- They record what happened - not necessarily what should have or ought to have happened.
- What people do is not necessarily a good example to the reader.
- Most of the characters are far from perfect and their actions are too.
- We are not always told the end of a narrative, whether what happened was good or bad.
- All narratives are selective and incomplete.
- They are not written to answer all of our theological questions.
- They teach either explicitly (clearly stating) or implicitly (clearly implying).
- Implicit does not mean secret.
- God is the hero of all Old Testament narratives.

### III. The Book of Ezra

#### A. The Title

- Ezra and Nehemiah are one book in the Hebrew Canon.

# The Return To The Land: A Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther

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- However, there is evidence that the two books were originally separate.
- The name Ezra comes from the major person in the second half of the book.

## B. Authorship & Date

- Jewish tradition and early Christian leaders attributed the book to Ezra.
- Internal evidence points to Ezra since the author refers to himself in the first person.
- The Book of Ezra covers two distinct time periods: Chapters 1-6 (538-515 B.C.), Chapters 7-10 (458 B.C.).
- The time of writing of the completed book could not have been earlier than about 450 B.C.

## C. General Observations

- Ezra continues the history of the post-exilic, Persian Period where 2 Chronicles ends.
- The Book shows that God has reestablished the Covenant with the descendants of Jacob.
- It shows the development of a new pattern of worship which focuses on the local synagogue and scribes.

## D. Outline of Ezra

### The Structure of the Book of Ezra

	Restoration Under Zerubbabel				Reforms Under Ezra			
Chapter	1	2	3	6	7	8	9	10
	The Proclamation Of Cyrus	The People Who Returned	The Rebuilding Of The Temple		The Second Group Returns		Reformation & Judgment	

- The Book of Ezra can be divided into two main sections.

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1. Restoration under Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:1-6:22)
2. Reforms under Ezra (Ezra 7:1-10:44)

## IV. The Book of Nehemiah

### A. The Title

- The name Nehemiah means "YHWH has comforted."
- The name Nehemiah comes from the major person in the book.

### B. Authorship & Date

- Most Bible expositors agree that Nehemiah authored the book.
- Nehemiah probably wrote the book that bears his name soon after all its events were completed.
- This means the book was written about 430 B.C. or shortly thereafter.

### C. General Observations

- This book continues the history which began in Ezra.
- The book documents the reestablishment of the Covenant community in the Promised Land.
- Nehemiah is concerned with covenant (Mosaic) fidelity.
- The sins of the people of God, except for idolatry, are continued in the post-exilic community.

### D. Outline of Nehemiah

- The Book of Nehemiah can be divided into two main sections.
1. The Rebuilding Of The Wall (Nehemiah 1:1-6:19)
  2. The Reformation of The People (Nehemiah 7:1-13:31)

## The Structure of the Book of Nehemiah

	The Rebuilding Of The Wall				The Reformation of The People				
<b>Chapter</b>	The Report From Jerusalem	Preparation For The Task	Restoration Of The Walls		The List Of Those Who Returned	Spiritual Renewal	The List of Residents	The List Of Priests & The Dedication Of The Wall	Nehemiah's Second Administration
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8 10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>

### V. The Book of Esther

#### A. The Title

- It is named after the Persian Queen.
- Her name in Hebrew is Hadassah which means myrtle.
- Her name in Persian meant "star."

#### B. Authorship & Date

- The identity of the author is unknown.
- Whoever the author was knew the Persian culture well.
- Some have suggested that Ezra or Nehemiah wrote the book but no specific evidence supports that view.
- The book could have been written sometime between 470 and 465, Xerxes' reign, or in the reign of his son Artaxerxes (464-424).

#### C. General Observations

- This book had trouble being included in the Hebrew canon.

# The Return To The Land: A Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther

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- This is probably because it does not mention:
  - any name of God
  - the Temple
  - the Law of Moses
  - sacrifice
  - Jerusalem
  - prayer (although implied)
- Esther, like Ruth, is not quoted in the New Testament.
- It seems to have been included in the Jewish canon to explain the origin of the non-Mosaic feast of Purim.
- The author was describing God's unfailing preservation of His people.

## D. Outline of Esther

- The Book of Esther can be divided into three main sections.
  1. The Elevation of Esther (Esther 1:1-2:21)
  2. Mordecai and Haman (Esther 3:1-8:17)
  3. The Day of Vengeance & Feast of Purim (Esther 9:1-10:3)

### The Structure of the Book of Esther

	The Elevation of Esther		Mordecai and Haman					The Day of Vengeance		
<b>Chapter</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
	The Problem With Queen Vashti	Esther Chosen As Queen	Haman's Plot Against The Jews	Esther's Intervention	Haman's Plot Against Mordecai	Haman's Humiliation & Execution	Mordecai's Elevation	The Jew's Day Of Vengeance	The Feast Of Purim	