

Old Testament Survey

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther - Overview

- Introduction

- The time span within Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther is approximately 100 years
- The books of Ezra and Nehemiah used to be one book
- The authorship of Ezra and Nehemiah is attributed to Ezra, though there are passages that come directly from Nehemiah in Nehemiah

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther - Overview

TIME LINE: [all dates BC]

Judah vassal state of Persia-----

538

516

483-473

458

444

#1 return
of the
Exiles of
Judah

Temple in
Jerusalem is
rebuilt!

Esther
Queen of
Persia

#2 return
led by the
Ezra

#3 return led by
Nehemiah

Persian Kings from the Period of the Return from Exile

| Name of King | Date of Reign | Relationship to Judah |
|--------------------|---------------|--|
| Cyrus, The Great | 559 - 530 BC | Conquered Babylon: first King of Persia. Probably knew the Prophet Daniel. He allowed the people to return to their lands. He returned what had been taken from the Temple (sacred furniture*) and financed the rebuilding. |
| Darius I | 522 - 486 BC | Continued to support the former Jewish exiles' construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The writings of the Prophet Haggai are dated in the 2 nd year of Darius I (Hg 1:1, 15; 2:10), and the writings of the Prophet Zechariah are dated in the 2 nd and 4 th years of his reign (Zc 1:1, 7; 7:1). The Temple is completed in the 6 th year of his reign (Ezr 6:15) and he is the king mentioned in Nehemiah 12:22. He may or may not be the Darius mentioned in the Book of Daniel who cast the Prophet Daniel into the lions' den (Dan 6:1; 6:6ff). Daniel may be referring to Cyrus the Mede whose other name may have been Darius before he took his throne name. |
| Xerxes [Ahasuerus] | 486 - 465 BC | Son of Darius I and Esther's husband: this Persian king gave the Jews in Persia the right to defend themselves against attack. |
| Artaxerxes I | 465 - 424 BC | Queen Esther's step-son: Nehemiah was his cup-bearer. Allowed both Ezra and Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem |

*all the sacred furniture was returned with the exception of the gold covered (inside and out) Ark of the Covenant, the Mercy Seat (the solid gold lid of the Ark), and the golden Altar of Incense. The Babylonians did not take these sacred items from the Temple. They had already been removed and hidden by the prophet Jeremiah and have never been recovered (see 2 Maccabees 2:1-8)

Ezra - Overview

- Introduction
 - The book of Ezra continues where 2 Chronicles ends
 - It is a time of excitement, hope, and optimism
 - Ezra was a scribe and a priest
 - Writes in the third person for the first part of the book, but later switches to the first person
 - Name means “Jehovah Helps”

Ezra - Overview

- Central Theme
 - *“God is renewing the covenant by restoring His people, the temple, true worship, and Jerusalem. But it’s not the end, and it doesn’t fulfill all the great prophecies. Thus His people still look to the future.”*

Ezra - Outline

- Restoration Under Zerubbabel
 - First Return
 - Chapter 1 – Preparations for the Return
 - Chapter 2 – Lists of those who Returned
 - Rebuilding the Temple
 - Chapter 3 – Rebuilding of the Temple begins
 - Chapter 4-5 – The Rebuilding halted by hostile challenge
 - Chapter 6 – Rebuilding permitted and completed

Ezra - Outline

- Reform Under Ezra
 - Second Return
 - Chapter 7 – Royal permission for a Remnant to return
 - Chapter 8 – Return of the Remnant
 - Reforming the Life of the Community
 - Chapter 9-10 – Ezra's decisiveness concerning intermarriage

Ezra – Summary and Themes

- God Initiates and the People Respond
 - From Ezra 1:5-6
 - Cyrus, king of Persia, decrees that the Jews are allowed to return to Judah and Jerusalem
 - Fulfillment of prophecy
 - Isaiah 45:1-5, 13 – calling of Cyrus as God's instrument
 - Jeremiah 25:11-12, 29:10 – 70 year exile
 - God moves the heart of his people to go as well

Ezra – Summary and Themes

- The People Return and Rebuild
 - From Ezra 1:7 – 6:22
 - God provides His people the materials to rebuild
 - 1:7 – The articles from the temple, including the golden altar, golden table, golden lampstands, golden basins, and the massive bronze pillars, stands, and basins
 - Restoration of David's line
 - With Zerubbabel as descendant of David leading back the first wave of exiles to Judah

Ezra – Summary and Themes

- The People Return and Rebuild
 - Restoration of the priests
 - Jeshua is part of the priestly line that is restored
 - Restoring of the altar and temple for worship
 - Reconstruction occurs from chapter 3 to 6
 - There is opposition from the people living in the land
 - The Temple is finished approximately 20 years from the first exile return, in the sixth year of King Darius' reign, in 516 BC

Ezra – Summary and Themes

- The People Return and Rebuild
 - Upon completion of the Temple, the Feast of Unleavened Bread (or Passover) is celebrated
 - Initially instituted by God during the exodus to be kept by future generations to commemorate the great act of salvation
 - How fitting it is the picture here, after God brings back the people from Gentile rule
 - The glory of the former temple remembered

Ezra – Summary and Themes

- The People Sin and Repent
 - From Ezra chapter 7 – 10
 - It is approximately 60 years after the completion of the temple, 458 BC
 - We learn that Ezra studies and does the word of the LORD before teaching it
 - Ezra returns to Judah from Persia and finds that the people have fallen into sin again
 - What is Ezra's reaction to the news? Ezra 9:1-3

Ezra – Summary and Themes

- The People Sin and Repent
 - Why was this so grievous to Ezra?
 - The ‘holy race’, as Ezra mentions, finds its roots from Genesis 3:15
 - Ezra prays for the people, acknowledging their sin and God’s holiness
 - Note the gravity of the confession
 - Note that repentance is not mere acknowledgement, but action to undo the sin

Ezra – Summary and Themes

- The People Sin and Repent
 - God is not completed his plan of salvation
 - There is more to come in the story of salvation and the coming kingdom

Nehemiah – Overview

- Introduction
 - He was the cup-bearer for the king of Persia
 - He was also governor of Jerusalem
 - This is sometimes named as “Second Ezra” as both this book and Ezra are a continuation of each other
 - Is not mentioned outside of this book
 - Takes place approximately 100 years after the first return of exiles (445 BC)

Nehemiah – Outline

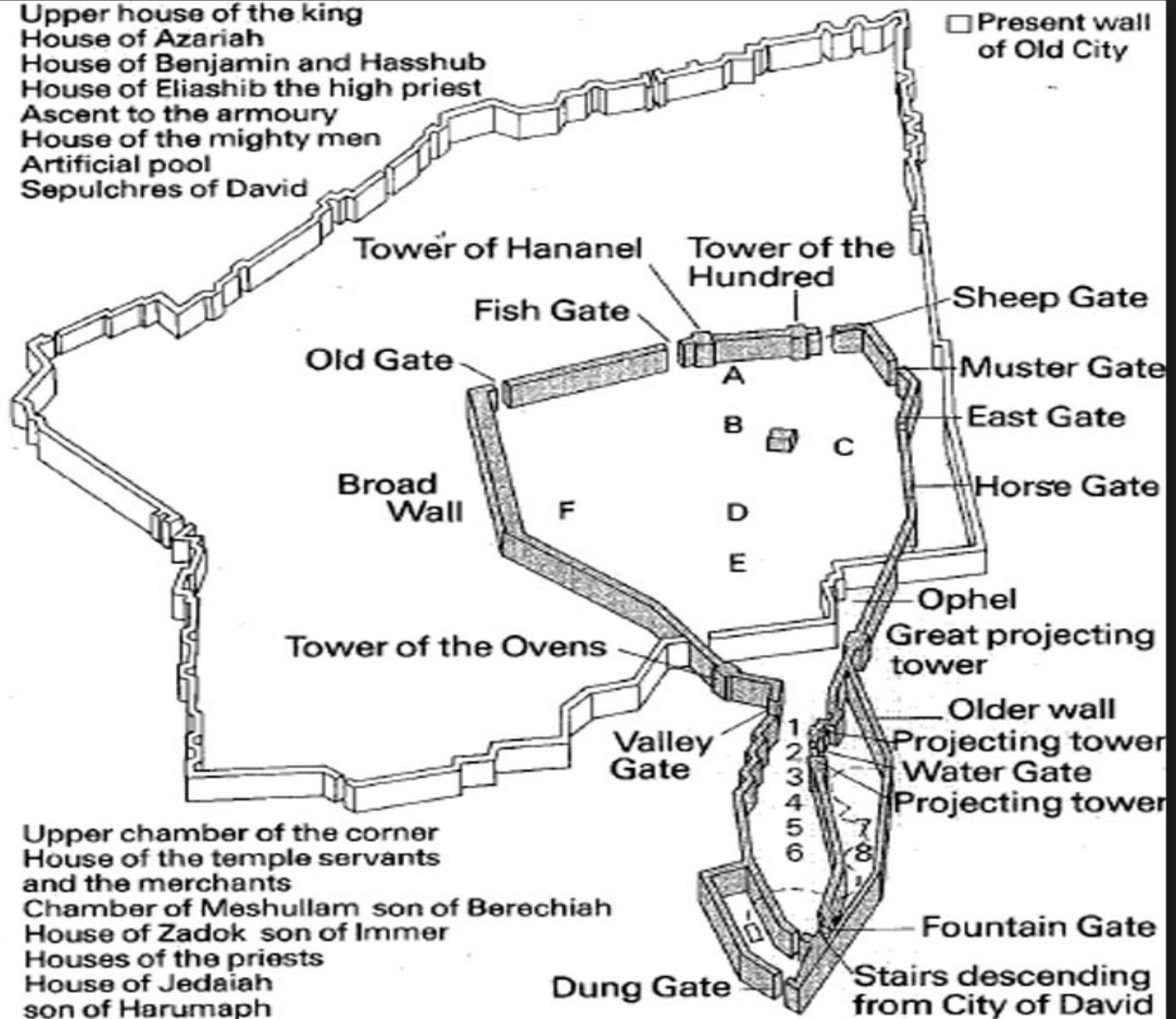
- Focus on Work
- Activity Centered on the Wall
- Civil Life of the Community
- Reconstruction of the Wall
 - Chapter 1-2 – Planning the Building
 - Chapter 3-6 – Rebuilding the Wall amidst conflict without and within
 - Chapter 7 – List of those who returned

Nehemiah – Outline

- Focus on Spiritual Renewal and Rectitude
- Activity Centered around God's Law
- Religious Life of the Community
- Reinstruction, Recommitment, and Reformation of the People
 - Chapter 8 – The Law Read and Explained
 - Chapter 9-10 – Covenant Renewal Ceremony
 - Chapter 11-12 – Resettling of Jerusalem
 - Chapter 13 – Reforms of Nehemiah

- 1 Upper house of the king
- 2 House of Azariah
- 3 House of Benjamin and Hasshub
- 4 House of Eliashib the high priest
- 5 Ascent to the armoury
- 6 House of the mighty men
- 7 Artificial pool
- 8 Sepulchres of David

□ Present wall of Old City



- A Upper chamber of the corner
- B House of the temple servants and the merchants
- C Chamber of Meshullam son of Berechiah
- D House of Zadok son of Immer
- E Houses of the priests
- F House of Jedaiah son of Harumaph

Nehemiah – Overview

- Nehemiah Returns and Rebuilds the Walls
 - From chapter 1 – 7
 - Jerusalem's walls are still broken down
 - Nehemiah hears a report that the walls of Jerusalem are still damaged and is moved to tears
 - Why is the walls of Jerusalem important?
 - City walls are more important than its army as it shields the city from attacks
 - The people in Jerusalem were still vulnerable

Nehemiah – Overview

- Nehemiah Returns and Rebuilds the Walls
 - What does Nehemiah do? He PRAYS
 - He prays that the King of Persia will allow him to go back to Jerusalem
 - He prays in a way that the ultimate goal in the asking of the LORD is that He might be glorified through giving them to us
 - Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem and begins to rebuild the walls

Nehemiah – Overview

- Nehemiah Returns and Rebuilds the Walls
 - This is not an easy task as there is opposition from both their neighbours and from within Israel
 - The neighbours see this as a threat, not only to themselves, but also to the Persian empire
 - The people within Israel oppose the rebuilding because it is costing the builders financially through the high rates of interest they must pay
 - The walls are finished within a year of Nehemiah arriving in Jerusalem

Nehemiah – Overview

- The People Rejoice – and Relapse
 - From chapter 8 – 13
 - The restoration and renewal of the city is complete
 - The renewing the of the covenant and the reading of the Law is given at this time
 - However, this is short lived and the people fall back into sin by breaking the Sabbath and intermarrying

Esther – Overview

- Introduction
 - Takes place between 483 and 473 BC
 - It is in the city of Susa, Persia
 - Within this book, there is no mention of God, the covenants, the land, the temple, or David
 - The author is unknown, though it could be one of either Mordecai, Ezra, or Nehemiah

Esther – Overview

- Central Theme
 - *“God protects his people, even if we can’t see how he is working.”*

Esther – Overview

- The Jews Threatened
 - Chapter 1 – Why the Persian King thought he needed a new Queen
 - Chapter 2 – Esther becomes Queen
 - Chapter 3 – Why and How Haman plotted the destruction of the Jews

Esther – Overview

- The Jews Rescued and Victorious
 - Chapter 4 – Mordecai pressures Esther to help her nation
 - Chapter 5 – Haman's Plot and Esther's counterplot
 - Chapter 6-7 – Esther and Mordecai thwart Haman's plot
 - Chapter 8-10 – Victory of the Jews

Esther – Summary and Themes

- God will Judge
 - God will bring judgement on the wicked
 - Haman is guilty of a multitude of sins
 - We see God’s providence working:
 - Haman wants to humiliate Mordecai, but is forced to honour him
 - Haman wants to hang Mordecai, but instead, Haman is the one who is hanged
 - Haman wants to eradicate the Jews, but instead, they are made victorious

Esther – Summary and Themes

- God will Judge
 - Christians should have peace about trials in this life, confident in the hope of God's sure judgment against the wicked

Esther – Summary and Themes

- God works through circumstances
 - Esther 4:14 – “Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”
 - God uses earthly instruments to accomplish His plans
 - God guides and directs all of his creation
 - Our circumstances are one tool for understanding God’s will in our lives

Esther – Summary and Themes

- God will save His people
 - God zealously protects His people
 - This is a major theme throughout the bible
 - It is not always clear at times how God is working, but he will deliver His people and carry his redemptive plan forward

Esther – Summary and Themes

- God will save His people
 - Mordecai is a descendant of King Saul (2:5)
 - Haman is a descendant of King Agag (9:24)
 - We understand the interaction between them, why Mordecai doesn't bow to Haman and why Haman has a strong loathing of the Jews
 - The line of Saul is redeemed, centuries after the disobeyed command

Next class

Daniel

References

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