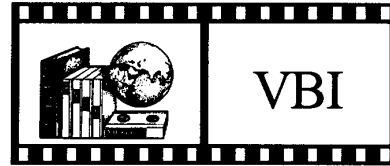
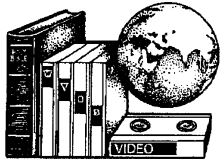


World Video Bible School®

Established 1986



OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY - FOUR

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**OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY FOUR
EZRA, NEHEMIAH, ESTHER
SYLLABUS**

I. GENERAL INFORMATION.

- A. Instructor: Chuck Horner.
- B. This course consists of 9 lessons on 3 DVDs.
- C. Each class is approximately 38 minutes long.

II. DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE.

- A. To make an in-depth study of the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.
- B. To give the background information on the times, circumstances and need for these books.
- C. To understand the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.
- D. To understand how God's providence was at work in Old Testament times.
- E. To understand the "admonitions and learnings" presented in these books and how to apply them today.

III. INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS.

- A. Required.
 - 1. Bible (ASV, KJV or NKJV).
 - 2. 9 video lessons.
 - 3. Course notes.
- B. Optional: Any conservative commentary on Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

IV. REQUIREMENTS.

- A. Read the entire books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther at least twice.
- B. View all 9 video lessons in their entirety.
- C. Read the class notes in their entirety.
- D. Complete all memory work (explained below).
- E. Submit a term paper (explained below).
- F. Take one written test.
- G. Have a combined grade average of at least 70.

V. MEMORY WORK.

- A. Memory verses must be written (or typed) from memory, then mailed to VBI for grading. Verses must come from the ASV, KJV or NKJV, according to what you indicated on your VBI enrollment application.
- B. All verses must be written out or typed at one sitting. You may study more and start over if you make a mistake, but you must still start again from the beginning and write all the verses at one sitting.
- C. For this course, the following verses must be memorized:

Ezra 7:10	Nehemiah 8:8
Ezra 10:10-12	Nehemiah 13:23-24
Ezra 10:44	Esther 4:14
Nehemiah 4:17	Esther 7:10
- D. Memory work is due when you mail VBI your written test.
- E. Hint: A good method of memorizing is to write the verses on flash cards that can be easily reviewed throughout the course.

VI. TESTS.

- A. There is one written test covering all three books.
- B. When you near the end of the course, contact us and request the test.
- C. When you receive the test, you have permission to look at it and study it.

- D. However, when you take the test, you must do so completely from memory, with no help from notes, Bible, etc.

VII. TERM PAPER.

- A. Write a paper on the story of Mordecai, Esther and Haman. Draw at least three lessons we can learn from this account.
- B. The paper should be a minimum of four pages, typed and double spaced. If handwritten, the paper should be a minimum of six pages, single spaced.
- C. The paper is due when you mail VBI your test and memory work.

VIII. GRADING.

- A. Memory work, term paper and tests will be graded separately.
- B. Final grade is based on an average of all assigned work.
- C. You may request that a grade be explained or reconsidered, but in any case VBI will have the final say.

IX. CREDIT.

- A. Credit will be issued, including a certificate, only after all work has been successfully completed, tapes have been returned (if rented), and all fees for this particular course have been paid in full.
- B. We hope this study has been helpful in your journey to heaven!

PROPHETIC LITERATURE

The writings of the prophets have not been “done away with,” but are vital, timely, interesting, spiritual and badly needed.

Value of prophetic literature:

1. Gives a more complete idea of the history of the ancient world, particularly the Hebrews.
2. Gives a better understanding of the social, cultural and economic conditions of the ancient oriental world, especially the Hebrews.
3. Gives a better understanding and appreciation of the laws and rituals of the Hebrews.
4. Gives some of the greatest moral and ethical teachings the world has ever known.
5. Gives some of the greatest religious and doctrinal conceptions known to man; e.g., the doctrine of man, God, sin, salvation.
6. Gives some of the finest specimens of literature the world has ever produced.
7. Gives expression to some of the loftiest conceptions, the deepest emotions and most beautiful sentiments known to man.
8. Gives a background for a better understanding of parts of the New Testament.

Some purposes of prophetic literature:

1. To call back God’s people to a religious, moral and spiritual condition from which they had fallen.
2. To lead them on to a higher moral and spiritual level.
3. To warn them of approaching calamity or punishment.
4. To encourage and strengthen by giving promises of a better day to come; e.g. to help prepare them for the Messianic age.
5. To preserve records of the activity and ideals of the Hebrews.

6. To direct the nation of Israel (or other nations) through sermons, personal advice and divine revelations.

The work of the prophets:

1. Religious and moral teachers.
2. Advisers of rulers.
3. Promoters of the doctrine of Israel.
4. Reformers of their age.

The Biblical meaning of “prophet” or “prophecy:”

1. Prophecy is not limited to, nor primarily concerned with, the foretelling of future events. The message might refer to the past, present or future.
2. Prophecy is not limited to the prophet’s own time. The prophet spoke primarily to his own time and about the things of his own time, but could and did predict the future through divine revelation.
3. Prophecy consisted of any message of instruction given by God to man through a representative of God. The representative or agent in this message was a prophet or divine teacher. The true prophet was a speaker or spokesman for God, the agent through whom God spoke to his people.
4. Prophecy must be preceded by revelation, vision or message from God. Before a prophet could speak the will of God, he had to “see, perceive or receive” a message from God.

THE RESTORATION PRINCIPLE

RESTORE: “To return to a former state or condition.”

Our object is always to bring people back to the former condition – the perfect standard of the New Testament.

I. THERE MUST BE A DIVINE STANDARD.

- A. There was for Cain and Abel – Gen 4:4, 5; Heb 11:4; Rom 10:17.
- B. There was for Noah – Gen 6:22.
- C. There was the Law of Moses – Deut 30:11-20; Isa 66:1-4.
- D. Now there is the Gospel of Christ – Heb 10:8,9; Jas 1:25.

II. WHEN DEPARTED FROM, GOD IS DISPLEASED.

- A. Previously from the Law of Moses – Deut 31:29; Deut 28:1, 2, 15; Deut 29:24-28.
- B. Today from the gospel – 1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 4:1-4.

III. GOD DESIRES RESTORATION.

- A. Previously for Israel – Ezek 36:22-25; Neh 1:8, 9.
- B. Today for the church – Eph 2:4, 5, 15,16, 19-22; 3:3, 15-19.
- C. Today for the individual – Lk 15:11-32; Acts 8:18-23.
- D. Examples:
 - 1. Hezekiah – 2 Chron 29 and 30 (especially 30:9b, 27).
 - 2. Josiah – 2 Chron 34:26-28.
 - 3. Simon – Acts 8:24.

IV. THE PRESENT APOSTASY FORETOLD – 2 Thess 2:1-12.

- A. To precede the day of Christ's return – vv. 1-3.
- B. To happen to the church – v. 4.
- C. To continue until Jesus returns – v. 8.
- D. Do not be deceived! – vv. 9, 10.

Deut 13:1-4; Mt 24:24; Isa 8:19, 20; 2 Cor 11:13-15.

CONCLUSION:

Restoration is:

Valid,

Needed,

Possible and

Approved by the Lord!

EZRA BACKGROUND

I. INTRODUCTION:

- A. Captivity.
 - 1. Judah came under Babylon's control and the first captives were taken out of the land in 606 B.C. - Dan 1:1-7.
 - 2. Two subsequent deportations of captives occurred in 597 and 586 B.C.
 - 3. Jeremiah, a contemporary of these events, prophesied the captivity would last 70 years - Jer 25:12; 29:10.
 - 4. Although we have no details of these seventy years, the books Ezra and Nehemiah pick up the history with the events of their return home - Ezra 1:1-4.
- B. Ezra and Nehemiah filled different roles yet worked compatibly to effect a spiritual renewal in the land.
- C. This book is named for the person whose career it traces.
- D. The book traces events from 536 B.C. when Cyrus of Persia instituted procedures for Israel's return from captivity.
- E. It is likely that during this time the term "Jew" replaced the term "Hebrew" as the common name for designating Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob.
 - 1. The Northern Kingdom was gone and the surviving nation was composed of the people of Judah primarily.
 - 2. The word "Jew" is the result of a linguistic process involving the word "Judah."
 - 3. Originally it signified "one from Judah."

II. BACKGROUND

- A. Ezra and Nehemiah were treated as one book until just recently in history.
 - 1. In Baba Bartha 15a Ezra and Nehemiah were considered as one book. This was with the understanding that Ezra began the writing and then Nehemiah finished it.
 - 2. The Vulgate calls Nehemiah the Second Book of Ezra.
 - 3. In a Hebrew manuscript dated 1448 the division into two books was introduced and it is still maintained this way in modern Hebrew Bibles.
- B. The books were probably written by the men whose names they bear.
 - 1. Both have their central characters speaking frequently in the first person - cf: Ezra 8:15ff; Neh 1:1ff.
 - 2. Both used a number of sources to produce their books - Ezra 1:2-4; 4:8ff; 6:3.
- C. Just as the people had gone into captivity in three stages, so was their return in three stages.
 - 1. 536 B.C. - Zerubbabel led the first group home and the temple was rebuilt and dedicated in 515 B.C.
 - 2. 458 B.C. - Ezra brought home a second group of captives and a great spiritual revival occurred.
 - 3. 445 B.C. - Nehemiah led the last group of exiles home and rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem.
- D. Ezra's name is from the Aramaic form of the Hebrew "ezer," "help."
- E. Traditions:
 - 1. Ezra assembled the books of the Old Testament which were written before his time.
 - 2. He helped organize the early Sanhedrin which governed Israel even as late as Jesus' time.

3. He is linked to the establishment of the Pharisees, particularly the group called Scribes. Their duty was to copy and teach the Scripture.

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF EZRA

- A. The book tells of the restoration of the Jews to their homeland.
 1. Ezra shows God as a keeper of promises to His people.
 2. It emphasizes the people's duty to be holy.
- B. Ezra was a priest and a scribe - Ezra 7:1-6.
 1. His book reflects his interest in the restoration of the temple to its central place in the nation's life.
 2. He also wrote to give account, from the religious or priestly point of view, of the restoration of the nation of Israel to its land.

EZRA OUTLINE

- I. Restoration Under Zerubbabel. Ch 1-6**
 - A. Cyrus' Proclamation Concerning the Temple. Ch 1
 - B. List of Those Who Returned from Babylon. Ch 2
 - C. Rebuilding the Temple Begins. Ch 3
 - D. Adversaries Hinder the Work. Ch 4
 - E. The Work Resumed - Tattenai Writes to Darius. Ch 5
 - F. The Temple Finished and Dedicated. Ch 6
- II. Reforms Under Ezra. Ch 7-10**
 - A. Ezra Authorized to Lead a Return. Ch 7
 - B. Ezra's Return. Ch 8
 - C. Ezra Grieves Over the Mixed Marriages. Ch 9
 - D. Mixed Marriages Abandoned. Ch 10

EZRA EXPOSITION

- I. RESTORATION UNDER ZERUBBABEL. CH 1-7**
 - A. CYRUS' PROCLAMATION CONCERNING THE TEMPLE. CH 1**
 - 1. CYRUS ISSUES A DECREE. 1:1-4**

1,2) The character of Cyrus is shown in the "Inscription of Cyrus:"

- a. Returned many captives to their homelands.
- b. Returned their gods to their lands.
- c. "May all the gods, whom I have returned to their dwellings . . . May all the gods, whom I have returned to their cities, pray before Marduk and Nabu for the prolonging of my days, may they speak a kind word for me."

Cyrus = "sun."

Persia = "Horseman."

"Commanded" is the equivalent of "stirred up" in Isa 44:28; 45:1, 13; 2 Chron 36:22,23.

This is in fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy - Jer 25:12; 29: 10. Cf: Dan 9:1ff.

Cyrus is the only Gentile referred to as an "anointed one" or "savior." Cf: Isa 45:1.

3) A call for workers.

4) Those who stay:

- a. Support those returning and the rebuilding!
- b. Most were treated well where they were and did not want to return. Cf: Jer 29:4-7.

2. THE PEOPLE RETURN AND BEGIN TO REBUILD. 1:5-11

5,6) The response - How God moved their spirits we are not told.

7-11) Cyrus sends back all the utensils of the temple.

“Sheshbazzar” (v. 8) is believed to be Zerubbabel. Cf: 5:16; Zech 4:9.

B. LIST OF THOSE WHO RETURNED FROM BABYLON. CH 2

1) “Of the province” - they were leaving one province to go to another. Both were still under Persian rule and control.

2-20) Men of the people.

Zerubbabel = “a seed of Babylon.”

21-35) Men of certain towns.

23) Priests cf: Jer 1:1.

36-58) Men of certain classes - priests, etc.

43) “Nethinim” = those given.

59-63) Men whose ancestral records were lost.

63) “Governor” = [Tirshatha].

64,65) Grand total: 49,897.

66,67) Numbering of their livestock.

68,69) Their offering for the temple restoration.

70) Their location in the land.

C. REBUILDING THE TEMPLE BEGINS. CH 3

1. THE ALTAR AND THE SACRIFICES ARE RESTORED. . . . 3:1-7

1) “Seventh month” = our September.

2) “As it is written in the Law of Moses.” They went into captivity because they ignored the Law. Now they are taking care to see they are doing things right.

536 B.C.

“Law” = Torah: to throw, throw out the hand, to point out, to direct or instruct.

“Altar” = Mizbeach: slaughter for food or sacrifice.

- 3) “On its bases” - the original site and base. This is done even prior to laying the foundation of the temple.

- 4) “Feast of Tabernacles” - how appropriate!

“Ordinance” = [custom] = commandment.

“Tabernacle” = tent, booth, hut, temporary shelter.

- 5) “All the appointed feasts” means they reinstituted all of the prescribed offerings and holidays.

- 6,7) Preparing for the construction of the temple.

2. THE FOUNDATION OF THE NEW TEMPLE IS LAID..... 3:8-13

- 8) Levites are appointed over the work from age twenty and older.

“Levite” = to join, cleave to, to entwine.

- 10) 535 B.C.

- 13) Great Joy AND great Sorrow!

D. ADVERSARIES HINDER THE WORK..... CH 4

1. OPPOSITION DEVELOPS..... 4:1-5

- 1) Adversaries - most likely Samaritans. Cf: v. 2.

- 2) Opposition from those who are only partially godly. Cf: Rev 3:9,15-22.

- 3) Purity is required in the laborers.

- 4,5) Hired resistance - “Lets go to court!”

“Discouraged” = [Weakened the hands] = to make the hands lay down, to relax, to let fall, to weaken.

2. THE OPPOSITION WRITES LETTERS..... 4:6-16

- 6-10) Those writing.

11-16) The letter itself.

13) "Tax" = [toll] = privilege to walk.

"Tribute" = a measured out gift.

"Custom" = payment in kind (a portion of crops, etc.).

14) "Support from the palace" = [maintenance from the king's palace] = Lit. "We eat the salt of the palace." The meaning of the word is "rubbed small, pulverized" - in salt as an enduring quality. Therefore it is a symbol of perpetual bond of loyalty.

3. STOP THE REBUILDING. 4:17-22

17-22) King Artaxerxes replies - stop the rebuilding!

4. RESTORATION STOPS. 4:23,24

23) A victory for evil - hurry to enforce it!

24) The work stops, BUT only at the point of arms.

E. THE WORK RESUMED - TATTENAI WRITES TO DARIUS. CH 5

1. THE WORK IS RESUMED BY DARIUS. 5:1-5

1) Two prophets: Haggai and Zechariah.

This is over-ruling direction from Jehovah.

2) Zerubbabel is leading.

3) Opposition is still coming from high places.

5) God's will will be accomplished!

Force the issue to the top of the government!

2. A LETTER FOR CLARIFICATION..... 5:6-17

This appears to be an honest letter because it is not derogatory in nature.

Three reasons given by the Jews:

- a. They are serving the God of heaven - v. 11.
 - b. They are only doing what a former king had directed them to do - v. 13.
 - c. They are obeying a decree from Cyrus - v. 13.
- 15) Jerusalem = possession of peace, foundation of peace, city of peace.
- 17) Then a request for a file search (for confirmation) is made.

F. THE TEMPLE FINISHED AND DEDICATED..... CH 6

1. DARIUS FINDS THE ROYAL EDICT..... 6:1-5

- 1) "Darius" = preserver, conservator.
- 2) It was found in Achmetha of Media.

Darius had three capitals:

- a. Ecbatana (Achmetha) in Media,
 - b. Susa in Persia and
 - c. Babylon.
- 3-5) The edict itself.
- 3) Measurements:

1 Kgs 6:2

Here

60 cubits	Length	Not stated
20 cubits	Breadth	60 cubits
30 cubits	Height	60 cubits

These are felt by most commentators to be maximum sizes.

- 4) Cf: 1 Kgs 6:36 where these same details are given.
To be funded by the Persians (they funded only part of the cost).
- 5) Darius must honor the decree - cf: 1:7-11; Esther 1:19.

2. DARIUS' DECREE: BUILD THAT TEMPLE!..... 6:6-12

- 6) "Keep yourselves far from there" = "stay away and leave them alone!"
- 8) Take the money from local AND surrounding territories.
- 9) Cf: Lev 1:5,10; 2:1 - same list of supplies.

"Burnt offering" = that which ascends:

- a. The priest to the altar or
 - b. The smoke to God.
- 10) Darius' reasons for continuing:
 - a. The Israelites can offer acceptable sacrifices and
 - b. The Israelites are to pray for him and his sons.

"And his sons" = the total government.

Prayers for government: Jer 29:7; 1 Tim 2:1,2.

- 11) Any who go beyond this decree:
 - a. Killed and
 - b. His house made into a public toilet.
- 12) Darius invokes a curse from Jehovah on all who would interfere.

3. THE COMPLETION AND DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE..... 6:13-18

- 13) "Yes Sir!! And right now!"
- 14) The two helping prophets are mentioned:
 - a. Haggai and
 - b. Zechariah.
- 15) 516 B.C. - In February or March.

16-18) Worship restored.

16) Joy only!

18) According to the pattern!

The portion in Aramaic ends here.

4. PASSOVER AND FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD OBSERVED..... 6:19-22

19) "Passover" = to leap over, or pass over a stream, etc.

Cf: Ex 12.

20) Priest now kill the lambs as a service to the people.

21) Cf: 2 Cor 6:14-7:2.

22) Joy again!

"Unleavened" (Matzoth) = something sweet, unleavened or unfermented.

NOTE: THERE WAS A PERIOD OF SEVENTY YEARS BETWEEN CHAPTERS SIX AND SEVEN.

II. REFORMS UNDER EZRA..... CH 7-10

A. EZRA AUTHORIZED TO LEAD A RETURN. CH 7

1. WHO EZRA WAS AND WHAT HE WAS DOING.. 7:1-10

1-5) He is a priest of the lineage of Aaron.

6) He was also a scribe.

"Scribe" = to scratch, scrape, write, thus a secretary.

8) A four month trip.

10) For Ezra had:

a. Prepared his heart,

b. to seek the Law of the Lord,

c. to do it and

d. to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

“Teach” = (“Lamad” - then - Talmud), to beat with a rod, chastise, to train, teach, accustom.

Cf: Mt 23:3; Rom 2:21; Jas 3:1.

2. ARTAXERXES: DEAR EZRA -. 7:11-26

13) Only those who want to go back should.

21-24) Help from the Persian treasury up to a limit.

23) Let there be no cause for wrath from Jehovah.

24) No taxes on the Levites!

25) Judge yourselves.

“Teach” = (“yeda”) to cause to see, perceive, understand, know (our word “idea” comes from this word).

“Do not know them” = ignorant, not to know. THESE represent good soil for teaching unless they are wilfully ignorant - cf: Hos 4:6.

26) Death penalty authorized.

3. EZRA’S PRAISE AND OBEDIENCE. 7:27,28

27,28) All praise goes to Jehovah!

B. EZRA’S RETURN. CH 8

1. LIST OF RETURNEES. 8:1-14

1) “Babylon” = gate of Bel, court of Bel.

2. LEVITES ARE ADDED. 8:15-20

15) A quick look around - no Levites were among them.

16,17) Ezra sends back a message to the leaders of the Levites.

18-20) Excellent leaders of the Levites join them.

3. FASTING AND PRAYER. 8:21-23

22) Put your life where your mouth is!

4. THE TREASURES ARE ENTRUSTED TO THE PRIESTS. 8:24-30

26,27) Total weight about thirty tons.

Value in the millions of dollars.

29) Take care of what God entrusts you with!

5. THE JOURNEY IS A SAFE ONE..... 8:31-36

31) Jehovah is their protector.

36) Help along the way.

C. EZRA GRIEVES OVER THE MIXED MARRIAGES..... CH 9

1. A PROBLEM OF SIN IN THE CAMP..... 9:1-5

1) The princes are honest.

2) Mixed marriages - an impure line.

Mixed - foreign - impure - immoral - possibly even adulterous. Cf: Prov 2:16; 5:20; 7:5; Mal 2:11,14.

Intermarriage brings idolatry! How about in the church?

3,4) Cf: Isa 66:2.

5) Take it to the Lord in prayer.

2. EZRA'S PRAYER..... 9:6-15

6) "I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to you" - the language of a mediator or priest representing all Israel.

7) Confession of sin.

8) God's having extended His grace is mentioned.

"Peg" = nail, tent-peg, something that is firmly driven in or fixed fast.

A good ruler would be as a tent-peg. Cf: Zech 10:4.

9) Israel is still in bondage.

"Wall" = that which surrounds or encloses, a guard, a garden. Jehovah "guards" His people as a "wall" around a "garden."

11,12) Quotes from Scripture:

- a. The land you are going to possess - Deut 4:5ff.
- b. A polluted land - Lev 18:25ff; 20:22ff; Lam 1:17.
- c. Their abominations - Deut 18:9; 2 Kgs 16:3; 2 Chron 28:3; 33:2; Ezek (various).
- d. Have filled it from one end to the other - 2 Kgs 21:16.
- e. Do not give your daughters - Deut 7:3.
- f. Do not even seek their peace or welfare - Deut 32:6.
- g. That you may be strong - Deut 11:8.
- h. Eat the good things of the land - Isa 1:19; Gen 45:18.
- i. Bequeath it to your sons forever - Ezek 37:25.

We should know the Scriptures as well as Ezra did!

13) Their punishment was just and God was gracious to give them release from captivity.

14) To go back into sin is foolishness. Cf: 2 Pet 2:20-22.

15) Jehovah is righteous.

D. MIXED MARRIAGES ABANDONED. CH 10

1. A DECISION IS REACHED. 10:1-4

- 1) Many joined Ezra.
- 2) Confession - Now there is hope.
- 3) "Covenant" = (Berith) to eat, to cut a covenant, to cut up a peaceful animal and arrive at good fellowship.

Fear God and....

- 4)keep His commandments! Cf: Eccl 12:13,14.

2. THEIR LEADERS AGREE..... 10:5-8

- 5) "Oath" = (Sheba) swear, to seven oneself - seven is a perfect or "sacred" number, therefore an oath.
- 8) To refuse to come to the meeting was to lose all.

3. THE DECISION IS ACCEPTED BY ALL PRESENT. 10:9-15

- 11) Now therefore:
 - a. Make confession to the Lord God of your fathers and
 - b. Do His will;
 - c. Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and
 - d. From the pagan wives.

- 12) Yes...so we must do.

4. THE DECISION IS CARRIED OUT. 10:16-19

- 19) "Trespass offering" - these marriages must have been made in ignorance for there is no offering for presumptuous sin. Cf: Num 15:30.

**5. A LIST OF THOSE WHO OBEYED JEHOVAH AND
PUT AWAY THEIR PAGAN WIVES.. 10:20-44**

- 44) There had been children by some of these pagan wives.

QUESTION: Does verse 10:1 indicate, in this context, the Israelite women put away their pagan husbands also?

NEHEMIAH BACKGROUND

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Captivity.

1. Judah came under Babylon's control and the first captives were taken out of the land in 606 B.C. - Dan 1:1-7.
2. Two subsequent deportations of captives occurred in 597 and 586 B.C.
3. Jeremiah, a contemporary of these events, prophesied the captivity would last seventy years - Jer 25:12; 29:10.
4. Although we have no details of these seventy years, these books of Ezra and Nehemiah continue the history with the event of their return home - Ezra 1:1-4.

B. Ezra and Nehemiah filled different roles yet worked compatibly to effect a spiritual.

C. This book is named for Nehemiah as it is his career it traces.

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3. In a Hebrew manuscript dated 1448 the division into two books was introduced and it is still maintained this way in modern Hebrew Bibles.

B. The books were probably written by the men whose names they bear.

1. Both have their central characters speaking frequently in the first person - cf: Ezra 8:15; Neh 1:1ff.

2. Both used a number of sources to produce their books - Ezra 1:2-4; 4:8ff; 6:3.
- C. Just as the people had gone into captivity in three stages, so was their return in three stages.
1. 536 B.C. - Zerubbabel led the first group home and the temple was rebuilt and dedicated in 515 B.C.
 2. 458 B.C. - Ezra brought home a second group of captives and a great spiritual revival occurred.
 3. 445 B.C. - Nehemiah led the last group of exiles home and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem.
- D. Nehemiah's name comes from the Hebrew "Nehem-yah" which means "the comfort of Jehovah," or "whom Jehovah has comforted."

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

- A. Ezra and Nehemiah tell of the restoration of the Jews to their homeland.
1. They show God as a promise-keeper to His people.
 2. They emphasize the people's duty to be holy.
 3. The major subject of Nehemiah is the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.
- B. Nehemiah was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I of Persia - Neh 1:11-2:1.
1. Though secure in a position of honor, he grieved over Jerusalem's desolation and wanted to restore it.
 2. Thirteen years after Ezra began his work at Jerusalem, Nehemiah appeared in the role of civil governor and set about his task.
 3. Nehemiah was obviously held in high esteem in his position in Persia or he could not have asked for the governorship of Judah and received it.
 4. Nehemiah held the governorship twice:
 - a. First governorship in 445 B.C.

- b. Second governorship in 433 B.C.
- C. The book records Nehemiah's mission to Jerusalem and the reforms he instituted there. Unlike Ezra, Nehemiah was a layman. But his work complimented Ezra's and the two of them were used by Jehovah in establishing the post-exilic nation.
- D. Even liberal scholars say this book is historically accurate.
- E. Restoration is a continuing process!

Work and prayer is the key!

NEHEMIAH OUTLINE

- I. THE WALL IS REBUILT AND REFORMS ON NEHEMIAH'S FIRST VISIT..... Ch 1-7**
 - A. Nehemiah Hears of Jerusalem's Helplessness..... Ch 1
 - B. Nehemiah Comes to Jerusalem. Ch 2
 - C. Rebuilding of the Wall Described. Ch 3
 - D. Enemies Try to Block Construction..... Ch 4
 - E. Internal Difficulties Arise and are Overcome..... Ch 5
 - F. More Resistance from Enemies but the Wall is Completed. Ch 6
 - G. Nehemiah Finds the Last of First Returning Exiles..... Ch 7
- II. THE LAW IS READ IN PUBLIC AND ITS CEREMONIES ARE RESUMED..... Ch 8-10**
 - A. The Law is Read and the Feast of Tabernacles is Kept. Ch 8
 - B. The Levites Lead in a Psalm of Confession. Ch 9
 - C. The People Make Vows of Faithfulness. Ch 10
- III. REFORMS ON NEHEMIAH'S SECOND VISIT..... Ch 11-13**
 - A. The Residents of Jerusalem and Names of Other Cities are Listed..... Ch 11
 - B. Priests and Levites are Listed and the Wall is Dedicated..... Ch 12
 - C. Foreigners Expelled and Religious Reforms Instituted to Purify the Nation. Ch 13

NEHEMIAH EXPOSITION

I. THE WALL IS REBUILT AND REFORMS ON NEHEMIAH'S FIRST VISIT..... Ch 1-7

444 B.C.

A. NEHEMIAH HEARS OF JERUSALEM'S HELPLESSNESS. Ch 1

1. THE REPORT ON JERUSALEM..... 1:1-4

- 1) "Month of Chisley" = our December.

"Shushan" = Susa - approximately 200 miles east of Babylon.

"Shushan" = lily, something brightly colored - English names of Susan or Susanna.

"Citadel" = [palace] - of Artaxerxes.

- 2) "Hanani" - Nehemiah's brother - 7:2.

It appears Nehemiah made the inquiry, not that they approached him with grievances.

- 3) "Distress" = [affliction] - physical.

"Reproach" - mental.

Therefore complete desolation.

- 4) Nehemiah's reaction:

- a. Wept,
- b. Mourned certain days,
- c. Fasted and
- d. Prayed.

2. NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER..... 1:5-11

- 5) He opens with praise and adoration.
- 6) Personified as a mediator - this time by a layman, not a priest such as Ezra (Levites - 9:6).
- 7) "Acted corruptly" - sins of commission.

"Have not kept" - sins of omission.

"Commandment" = (mitzvah) something put up (a monument), something established, confirmed, appointed, ordained, commanded (bar-mitzvah - son of commandment).

"Statute" = to cut in, hew, engrave, carve, something decreed or prescribed because it is set in stone.

"Ordinance" = to set upright, erect or render justice, to rule or govern therefore law or ordinance.

8-10) Nehemiah knew the Scriptures:

- a. If you are unfaithful I will scatter you - Lev 26:33.
- b. But if you return to Me - Deut 30:2f.
- c. I will gather them from there and will bring them - Deut 30:4; 9:29.
- d. To the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell - Deut 12:5.
- e. Whom you have redeemed - Ex 32:11; Deut 9:29.

This is a layman - should we do less?

11) "Desire" = delight. Cf: Psa 12:2; Rom 7:22.

"This man" = Artaxerxes.

"Cupbearer" = very high office and personal attendant.

B. NEHEMIAH COMES TO JERUSALEM..... Ch 2

1. NEHEMIAH IS GIVEN PERMISSION TO MAKE THE TRIP..... 2:1-10

- 1,2) “Sad in his presence” - it was the duty of those around the king to be cheerful. To be caught being sad would have been a very frightening experience or even death.

This thrust great responsibility on Nehemiah as the king provides him with the opportunity to put forth the cause of Israel.

- 3) Nehemiah answers with great respect and the mentioning of his ancestors would strike a response in an oriental king.

- 4,5) He prayed while making the request to the king.

- 6) “How long” and “when” show permission.

“I set him a time” shows this is to be a temporary mission.

“The queen also sitting beside him” - indicates this was a social time as she was not a part of the official government.

It is possible this is Esther. If it is, she would have been an encourager for the king to grant the request.

- 7) He then requests the necessary passport papers.

“Permit me to pass” = [carry me over] = let me pass through.

- 8) The king gave him supplies to:

- a. Rebuild the citadel (palace - fortress) by the temple,
- b. Repair the walls (gates, etc.) and
- c. Build himself a house (as governor).

“Forest” = (“pardes”) = paradise - a park, a place planted with trees, enclosed hunting ground. This could have been in Lebanon or in Solomon’s ancient gardens.

God’s hand is in all of this!

- 9,10) Notice he has a guard detail with him.

“Sanballat” - governor of Samaria. His name means “Sin (an Assyrian moon god) gives life.”

“Tobiah” - governor of the Ammonites. His name means “pleasing to Jehovah.”

“Official” = [servant] = slave.

2. SURVEY AT NIGHT..... 2:11-16

- 11) Three days could be just 26 hours.
- 12) Secrecy - a few men and only one animal.
- 13-15) This tour was on the south part of town.
- 16) His secrecy restated.

3. BUILD THE WALL!. 2:17-20

- 17) Notice “we,” “us” and “we.” Nehemiah identifies himself with them. This is the way of all good leaders!

“Reproach” = pulling, plucking, picking or gathering (as fruit), to pick at or pull people apart.

- 18) The formula for success:
 - a. God is with us,
 - b. The king is with us and
 - c. We can do it!
- 19) Opposition! You rebel against the king!
- 20) His answer:
 - a. God will help us,
 - b. Because we are Jehovah’s we will build and
 - c. You have no just claim in Jerusalem.

THE TOOLS OF OPPOSITION:

I.	Scorn	2:19
II.	Mockery	4:2
III.	Conspiracy	4:8
IV.	Compromise	6:2
V.	Slander	6:5
VI.	Hired traitor	6:10
VII.	Internal corruption	6:17

REMEMBER: Oppose God's people and you oppose God Himself 4:15.

C. REBUILDING OF THE WALL DESCRIBED..... Ch 3

The description of Who, What part and How they built the wall.

- 5) Laziness within - "Did not put their shoulders to the work" means they did not support the work or put forth any honest labor.
- 8) Those of refined occupations entered into the hard labor.
- 12) Even some of their daughters labored hard.
- 27) Some must work twice as hard to see the work gets finished. These are ahead of their leaders!

NOTE: Much of the material needed would have been all about them from the old wall when it was torn down.

D. ENEMIES TRY TO BLOCK CONSTRUCTION..... Ch 4

1. MOCKERY..... 4:1-6

- 1) Sanballat takes the lead.

The wall would not present any problem to Samaria unless he wanted them vulnerable to attack and pillage.

- 2) "Army" - better "wealthy" - Ruth 2;1. It means strength, valor, might, forces, army, ability, wealth, etc.
- 3) How heavy is a fox (jackal)?
- 4,5) Go to Jehovah! Nehemiah is angry!
- 6) But the work goes on!

2. CONSPIRACY!..... 4:7-12

- 7) Opposition literally comes from all directions.
- 8) Only to hinder and stop the rebuilding - they would not have had enough armed forces because of the Persian rule over them.
- 9) Watch and pray. Cf: Mt 26:41.
- 10) But it is not easy! Is the Lord's work always easy?
- 11) Their plan is known.
- 12) How - they told the Jews themselves.

"Ten times" = repeatedly.

3. WATCH AND WORK!..... 4:13-23

- 13,14) Defensive action.
- 15) Oppose the people of God and you oppose God!
- 16) "My servants" - these may have been his Persian bodyguard.
- 17,18) Weapons at the ready.
- 19,20) An alarm system is set up.

"Trumpet" = ("shofar") to scratch, scrape, rub, polish - the idea is of brightness, brilliant tone, etc.

- 21) Longer hours.
- 22) Strength and comfort when together.

- 23) Urgency - take off your clothes only when washing.

E. INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES ARISE AND ARE OVERCOME. Ch 5

1. MISTREATMENT WITHIN. 5:1-5

- 1) Opportunists within God's people.
- 2) Hunger.
- 3) Mortgages.
- 4) Borrowed money for taxes.
- 5) They had sold their children to be able to eat.

2. THE SOLUTION.. . . . 5:6-13

- 6) Anger again!
- 7) He sat down and talked to himself.
"Usury" - cf: Lev 25:36; Ex 22:25; Deut 23:19.
- 8) Nehemiah had purchased their release from others only to be sold again?
- 9) You are aiding the enemy.
- 10) Do as I do!
- 11) Restore all! Cf: Jas 5:1-6.
- 12) He required an oath from them.
- 13) "Fold" = folds of his garment in which he would have carried some personal belongings.

3. NEHEMIAH'S EXAMPLE.. . . . 5:14-19

- 14) "Governor's provision" = [bread of the governor] = the income due him.
- 15) The ones before me extracted what was due them.
- 16) He and his bodyguard worked and did no investing.

- 17) His expenses went on just the same!
- 18) A large food bill!
- 19) A prayer! Can we make this prayer? Would we be satisfied with the results if we were answered?

F. MORE RESISTANCE FROM ENEMIES BUT THE WALL IS COMPLETED. Ch 6

1. COMPROMISE.. 6:1-4

- 1) The wall is not complete without the gate being hung.
Geshem - his name means violent storm or severe shower.
- 2) "Come to the plain of Ono" is an invitation to death or at least severe punishment.
- 3) Nehemiah has his priorities in order.
This is not a refusal to come later after the work of building the wall is completed.
- 4) Resistance - but to no avail.

2. SLANDER. 6:5-9

- 6,7) Rumors:
 - a. "It is reported,
 - b. And [Gashmu] (could be Geshem),
 - c. You (singular) are rebuilding the wall,
 - d. You want to be king,
 - e. You have appointed prophets for yourself,
 - f. This will be reported to the king,
 - g. Therefore, let us talk it over."
- 8) You, Sanballat, are the source of these rumors.

- 9) Prayer!

“Strengthen” = (“chazag”) means to bind fast, to gird tight, to cleave to or adhere firmly to something.

3. HIRED TRAITOR WITHIN. 6:10-14

- 10) “Secret informer” = [shut up] = under duress or pursuit.

“Go in the house of God” this shows two things:

- a. Shemaiah is a priest - 13:28,29 and
- b. Nehemiah would have been slain by his own people.

Only priests could enter the temple proper without being killed.

- 11) Nehemiah’s answer:

- a. Should a Persian official flee like this?
- b. “Could one such as I go into the temple and live?”

- 12) A prophet of Jehovah would have said, “Thus says the Lord.”

- 13) To kill Nehemiah would have only been an incidental happening.

To cause him to sin would have been the best thing they could do:

- a. It would have discredited him and
- b. It would have destroyed his effectiveness as a leader.

A false prophetess. Cf: Ezek 13:17-23.

“Remember” = [think thou upon] = picking, piercing or penetrating therefore remembering, recalling, considering.

4. SUCCESS. 6:15,16

- 15) “Elul” - middle of September. Only 52 days!

- 16) The result:

- a. Their enemies were humbled and

- b. God was glorified.

5. INTERNAL CORRUPTION. 6:17-19

- 18) The reason - intermarriage!

When your father-in-law is Satan you will always have trouble!

Here ends the building of the wall!

G. NEHEMIAH FINDS THE LIST OF FIRST RETURNING EXILES. . . . Ch 7

**1. ARRANGEMENTS FOR ADMINISTRATION AND
DEFENSE OF JERUSALEM 7:1-4**

- 1) "Gatekeeper" = [porters] - they would be very important people at this time.
- 2) "Hanani" = gracious.

"Hananiah" = whom Jehovah has graciously given.
- 3) Normally the gates would have been opened at dawn but Nehemiah wants the city awake and active before opening the gates to the world.
- 4) A reminder that the city is not as great as it once was.

**2. NEHEMIAH TRACES THE GENEALOGIES OF THE
FIRST RETURNING EXILES 7:5-73**

Ninety-one years between the listing here and when it was first recorded in Ezra 2.

**II. THE LAW IS READ IN PUBLIC AND ITS CEREMONIES ARE
RESUMED. Ch 8-10**

**A. THE LAW IS READ AND THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES
IS KEPT. Ch 8**

1. EZRA INSTRUCTS THE PEOPLE IN THE LAW. 8:1-8

NOTE: In every genuine revival of God's people the Word of God is always in the forefront!

- 1) The people gathered themselves - they were not summoned.

The people call for the Scriptures.

Ezra comes forward again.

- 2) “All who could hear with understanding” shows the Bible is understandable by all and therefore can be obeyed by all.

“Understanding” = to separate, to distinguish and therefore discerning and understanding.

- 3) This was a five or six hour reading with explanations.

Why can we sit still for only a 20 minute sermon?

- 4-8) Expands the information given in verse 3.

- 8) We can understand the Scripture!

Memorize this verse.

2. THE PEOPLE CELEBRATE. 8:9-12

- 9) “Wept” - they were learning how far they had fallen.
- 10) “The joy of the Lord is your strength!” There is power that comes through joy.
- 12) Understanding and obeying God’s Word brings joy!

3. THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES (BOOTHS) IS REDISCOVERED..... 8:13-18

- 13) Teachers’ meeting!
- 14) The feast found in the Law.
- 15-18) The feast reinstated.

Lev 23:33-36 indicates this was a sabbath year.

B. THE LEVITES LEAD IN A PSALM OF CONFESSION. Ch 9

NOTE: Neither Ezra nor Nehemiah are mentioned in this chapter.

This indicates the people are still the motivating force and they are not just following their leaders.

1. THE OCCASION. 9:1-5

- 1) After 9 or 10 days of assembly for reading the Law they are still coming together.

The fasting and sackcloth shows deepening repentance.

This is a true remnant!

- 2) Purity!

- 3) Confession and worship.

“Worship(ed)” = to bow down, sink down, fall prostrate, do honor or reverence to someone (either equal or superior), to worship, to adore, therefore to do homage or yield allegiance to someone.

Worship is incomplete without commitment!

- 5) “Name” = a sign, monument or memorial of a person, thing or event.

God’s Name, then, is His Person, His authority, the knowledge of Him, His fame or glory, His character or the memory of all He has done.

2. THE PRAYER. 9:6-38

NOTE: This is the longest prayer recorded in the Bible.

- 6) God’s power in creation.

“Host of heaven:”

a. First time = physical stars, planets, etc.

b. Second time = angels.

- 7,8) God’s goodness to Abraham.

- 8) “You have performed your words” shows God keeps His promises.

The land promise is therefore fulfilled.

- 9-15) God’s hand in the exodus.

- 13,14) This shows the Law:

- a. Was not given in the garden of Eden.
- b. Was given at Sinai.

This shows the Sabbath:

- a. Was not an eternal, unchanging law.
- b. Was a national celebration of Independence.

16-21) God works His providence even when we rebel!

16,17) Cf: Num 14:4.

22-25) God leads them to Canaan.

25) “Delighted themselves” - reveled, this has the word for Eden contained within it.

26-31) Cycles of Sin during the time of the judges and kings.

26) Cf: Jer 26:20-23; Mt 23:37.

27) “Deliverers” = [saviors] = judges.

30) Cf: Acts 7:51-53.

32-38) Give us mercy now!

32) “Now therefore” shows the conclusion or petition is about to begin.

35,36) “They” (v. 35) versus “we” - v. 36.

“Servants in it” - they were still under Persian rule!

38) An oath in writing!

C. THE PEOPLE MAKE VOWS OF FAITHFULNESS. Ch 10

1. THE NAMES OF THOSE WHO SIGNED THE DOCUMENT..... 10:1-27

1) “Seal” - there were two methods:

- a. The imprint of the thumbnail or

- b. The impression of a person's private seal in clay attached to the document by a string.

"Governor" = ["tirshatha"] = Nehemiah's official title of "governor." The meaning was - "His Severity."

2-8) The priests who signed.

14-27) The leaders of the people who signed.

2. A VOW OF PURITY..... 10:28-31

28,29) Those not actually signing were represented by those who did sign so were therefore included in the oath.

30) Purity of Israel's heritage sworn to.

31) All sabbaths to be honored.

"Sabbath" = to cease, interrupt or stop.

3. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE TEMPLE IS PLEDGED. 10:32,33

32) Compare 1/3 shekel with 1/2 shekel of the Law. The Persian weight may have been used here which would have been the same as the previous requirement.

Cf: Ex 30:11-16; Mt 17:24-27.

4. SUPPORT FOR LEVITES AND PRIESTS..... 10:34-39

34) Wood to be supplied.

35) Food to be supplied.

36,37) The firstborn and firstfruits are Jehovah's.

38) A tithe of the tithe for the Priests.

39) The people are to bring their gifts. The Levites are not to go out and collect them.

III. REFORMS ON NEHEMIAH'S SECOND VISIT..... Ch 11-13

A. THE RESIDENTS OF JERUSALEM AND NAMES OF OTHER CITIES ARE LISTED Ch 11

1. THOSE WHO WILL LIVE IN JERUSALEM..... 11:1-9

- 1,2) Jerusalem is still a despised city by those surrounding it so they draw lots to see who will dwell there.

But we also see the remnant within the remnant stepping forward.

- 3-9) Families who dwell in Jerusalem.

- 4-6) Sons of Judah listed.

- 7-9) Sons of Benjamin listed.

2. PRIESTLY LEADERS. 11:10-14

- 14) Mighty men of valor - priests were excluded from military service. But just like all through their history there are the few who volunteer.

3. THE LEVITES. 11:15-19

- 19) "Gatekeepers" = [porters] - here would be for the temple not for the walls.

4. OTHER GROUPS. 11:20-24

- 23) Persian king's command.

"Pethaliah" - their man in the royal court.

5. TOWNS OCCUPIED IN JUDAH AND BENJAMIN. 11:25-36

- 25-30) Towns of Judah.

"Kirjath Abra" = Hebron.

- 31-35) Towns of Benjamin.

- 36) Levites in both areas.

B. PRIESTS AND LEVITES ARE LISTED AND THE WALL IS DEDICATED..... Ch 12

1. PRIESTS AND LEVITES WHO RETURNED WITH ZERUBBABEL..... 12:1-9

8,9) “Across from them” = [over against them] - these are singers.

Those in verse 9 are antiphonal to those in verse 8.

2. PRIESTS. 12:10-26

10,11) The high priests.

12-21) The priests.

22-26) The Levites.

22) These are prior to Daniel 5:31.

23) This is not our biblical book of Chronicles.

24) Antiphonal singers again.

25) “Thresholds of the gates” = storerooms of the gates - at the temple not on the walls.

3. LEVITES ASSEMBLE FOR THE WALL’S DEDICATION..... 12:27-30

27) “Dedication” = (“hanukkah”) to choke - like a collar on an animal to bring it into subjection. Therefore it becomes dedicated or consecrated to a certain service. So this wall was “collared” for Jerusalem’s service.

30) A dedication for any object is in reality a dedication of those who will use it.

Notice the order of purification process:

- a. Priests,
- b. Levites,
- c. People,
- d. Gates then

- e. Walls.

Purify = brightness or spender, to become clean or pure.

There are three types of purity:

- a. Physical,
- b. Ceremonial and
- c. Moral.

4. DEDICATION CEREMONIES DESCRIBED. 12:31-43

- 31) A parade.
- 36) Ezra is in one group.
- 38) Nehemiah is in the other group.
- 43) This must have been a great celebration with great joy in order to be heard afar off.

5. THE SUPPORT OF THE LEVITES TAKEN CARE OF. . . 12:44-47

C. FOREIGNERS EXPELLED AND RELIGIOUS REFORMS INSTITUTED TO PURIFY THE NATION. Ch 13

1. PURIFICATION OF THE NATION. 13:1-9

- 1-3) Foreigners are expelled according to the Law.

“No....should ever come” = [for ever] = hidden or secret, where the beginning and end are obscure.

Apply this to the earth, any age, the Law of Moses!

- 4-9) Tobiah is driven out.
- 4) Allied by virtue of his son being married to Tobiah's daughter. Cf: vs. 28,29.
- 5) Nehemiah was back in Persia during this time.
- 7,8) The wicked cast out. Cf: Jn 2:13-17.

- 9) House cleaning.

2. LEVITE'S SUPPORT REINSTATED. 13:10-14

- 10) Budget problems.
- 11) To not give was to forsake God's house!
- 13) Faithful men appointed.
- 14) Prayer - Nehemiah indeed prays without ceasing!

3. BREAKING OF THE SABBATH FORBIDDEN. 13:15-22

- 15) Their own labor condemns them.
- 16) Strangers in the land are to obey the Law also.
- 17,18) "Additional wrath" = [more wrath].
- 19) Enforces the Sabbath and uses his bodyguard to make sure there are no violations.
- 20,21) The desire for personal gain is strong. But threat of force solves the problem.
- 22) Only the Levites were allowed to labor on the Sabbath (religious labor). The Levites are therefore used to enforce this Sabbath duty on the people.

4. MIXED MARRIAGES AGAIN. 13:23-29

- 23,24) The children would have spoken their mother's language as they were with them more.
- 25) No divorce mentioned here, only to stop giving their children into mixed marriages.

Cf: Ezra 10 - these must have also put their wives away or there would have been a double standard.

- 26,27) If Solomon, with all his knowledge, did not keep from sinning because of his mixed marriages, how can you?

"Pagan" = [outlandish] = (foreign - ASV) - the idea is of something to which one is not accustomed to and would be unusual or odd and very much out of place.

28) The enemy is purged from the priesthood.

29) Prayer !

5. SUMMARY OF NEHEMIAH'S WORK. 13:30,31

Nehemiah wants to be remembered by God not by men!

Could we do better?

ESTHER BACKGROUND

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. This book is in the third division of the Hebrew canon called the Sacred Writings.
 - 1. It is grouped with the Five Scrolls (Heb., Megilloth) which are read by the Jews at their annual feasts:
 - a. Song of Songs at Passover.
 - b. Ruth at Pentecost.
 - c. Ecclesiastes at the Feast of Tabernacles.
 - d. Lamentations at a ceremony on the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple.
 - e. Esther at Purim.
 - 2. The Feast of Purim originated in this time and is still observed. The name Purim comes from the Persian word "Puru" which means "lot."
 - 3. While being read at Purim, the audience responds with appropriate expressions of approval or disapproval at the book's high and low points.
- B. The English Bible places it after Ezra and Nehemiah because it shares a Persian background with them.
- C. The book is named for the Jewish orphan girl who became the Queen of Persia.
 - 1. Esther is a Persian word which means "Star" and her Hebrew name is Hadassah which means "Myrtle."
 - 2. The fact of Esther's popularity among Jews is evidenced by the many Jewish women's societies which are named Hadassah.
- D. The events of the book fall within the reign of King Ahasuerus about 486-465 B.C.

1. Thus it would fit in the sixty-year interval between the sixth and seventh chapters of Ezra.
2. The events take place totally in Gentile territory.

II. BACKGROUND.

- A. When Cyrus permitted the Jews in exile to return to their homeland many of them stayed in their new homes in exile.
 1. Mordecai, Esther and thousands of others remained in the territory of the Persians away from Palestine.
 2. This book demonstrates God's presence with those people as well as with the returnees to Judah.
- B. Herodotus, a non-biblical source, gives us additional information about King Ahasuerus' reign.
 1. He is better known to history by his Greek name, Xerxes or Xerxes I, King of Persia from 486 to 465 B.C.
 2. In the gap between his third (Esth 1:3) and his seventh years (Esth 2:16) he undertook a disastrous invasion of Greece.
 3. The feast in Esther 1:1-9 corresponds to the assembly called in his third year (Herodotus, *History* 7.8) to explore the possibility of a campaign against the Greeks.
- C. The following time frame can be given:
 1. 486 B.C. - Ahasuerus comes to the throne of Persia.
 2. 483 B.C. - the feast (war council) in his third year. Vashti is deposed and the search for a new queen starts - Esth 1:16.
 3. 480 B.C. - the Greeks defeat Ahasuerus at Salamis. Esther marries the king upon his return in the seventh year of his reign.
 4. 475 B.C. - Haman's plot against the Jews in the twelfth year of his rule - Esth 3:7.
- D. The writer of the book is unknown.

1. The writer is obviously a patriotic Jew whose background was in Persia rather than in Judah.
2. According to Baba Bathra 15a the men of the Great Synagogue wrote the book of Esther.
3. Josephus (Ant 11.6.1) considered Mordecai the author.
4. "Whoever the author may have been, he shows such intimate knowledge of Persian customs and of the fifth century historical situation that he may well have lived in Persia and been an eyewitness of the events recorded." G. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*.

III. THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF ESTHER

- A. The book gives the historical background of Purim.
 1. Haman, Grand Vizier of Persia and a wicked man, had plotted the annihilation of all the Jews in Persia - Esth 3:1-6.
 2. Superstitious as he was he "cast the lot" (Persian 'puru') to select the best time for his evil deed - Esth 3:7.
 3. The lot fell on Adar 13 - Esth 3:7.
 4. Through Esther's intervention another decree was issued which allowed the Jews to defend themselves on Adar 13 and to avenge themselves against their enemies on Adar 14 - Esth 8:11,12; 9:11-15.
 5. Because of this deliverance the Jews were urged to keep Adar 14-15 as a memorial - Esth 9:20-22.
 6. Adar corresponds to our February-March and the Jews still celebrate Purim as a joyous time of gift-giving and feasting.
- B. The major purpose of the book is to show the providence of God in action.
 1. It was no mere lucky set of circumstances which prevented the destruction of the Jewish people in Esther's time.
 2. Even in a distant land God's people are still in His hands - Esth 4:14.

3. Providence may be defined as the foreseeing care and guardianship of God over His people.
4. The stories of Joseph and Esther are outstanding cases of divine providence.
5. The doctrine is clearly stated in Rom 8:28; 1 Cor 10:13; Heb 4:16; 2 Pet 2:9.

ESTHER OUTLINE

- I. The Feast of Ahasuerus. Ch 1
- II. Esther Becomes Queen.. . . . Ch 2
- III. Haman's Plot. Ch 3
- IV. Mordecai Persuades Esther to Intervene.. . . . Ch 4
- V. Esther's Success. Ch 5-7
- VI. The Downfall of Haman's Plot. 8:1-9:16
- VII. The Feast of Purim. 9:17-32
- VIII. The Prominence of Mordecai.. . . . Ch 10

ESTHER EXPOSITION

I. THE FEAST OF AHASUERUS. Ch 1

A. THE BANQUET. 1:1-8

- 1) "India" = the River Hindu.

"Ethiopia" = Cush.

"Over 127 provinces" - Cf: Dan 6:1 with 120 provinces.

Herodotus states there were twenty tax districts. But there is no need to understand that one tax district = one province.

- 2) "Shushan" = Susa.

- 3) "Powers" = armies.

This is not to be understood as an entire army being present. It was present only in that it was represented by its leaders.

- 4) A fantastic "public relations" job!

This was a six-months feast.

The guest list would have changed regularly until all he wanted to impress had been included.

- 5) This feast is the concluding episode of the 180 days.

These days could have been included in the 180 day count or could have been in addition to them.

"Great to small" = the greater and lesser servants.

- 6) Keil translates: "White stuff, variegated and purple hangings, fastened with cords of byssus and purple to silver rings and marble pillars; couches of gold and silver upon a pavement of malachite and marble, mother-of-pearl and tortoise-shell."

Blue and white were the royal colors of Persia.

"Gold and silver" - woven into the cloth of the couches.

- 7) What wealth when each cup is unique and made of gold!
- 8) Persian law: drinking at these feasts was to be done in moderation and at the bidding of the host.

B. THE QUEEN'S REFUSAL. 1:9-12

- 9) The queen gave a party of her own for the women who were at the palace at that time.

"Vashti" = Beautiful woman. This may be a description of her rather than her name, as Herodotus records another name for her.

- 10) "Seven eunuchs" were the ones who carried the king's communications to and from the harem.

- 11) "To show her beauty:"

- a. Fully dressed but without her veil (a great insult to her).
- b. Nude except for the crown.
- c. Either could be correct with this king's reputation.

- 12) She chose not to give up her dignity as a queen and a wife before the king's inebriated guests!

Deep anger on his part but he does control it which is to his credit.

C. THE KING'S QUESTION. 1:13-15

- 13) "Wise men who understood the times" = astrologers and magi.
- 14) These are the ruling princes.
- 15) According to law!

D. THE VERDICT. 1:16-22

- 16-18) Her example will spread! Especially if their wives were in their banquet at the time of the incident.

- 19) Unreversible laws had to be written laws.

“Give her royal position to another” = remove her as queen and put another in her place.

Writing the law would also keep her from finding favor in the king’s eyes later and returning to power where she could be a force against these men.

20) The reason given: so all the wives will be in subjection.

21,22) This judgment pleases the king. He did what was recommended.

II. ESTHER BECOMES QUEEN. Ch 2

A. A BEAUTY PAGEANT. 2:1-4

1) “Remember Vashti” - she had been a pleasing wife to the king and his remembrances would have been difficult for him.

2-4) Therefore go about the selection of a replacement.

B. THE RAISING OF ESTHER. 2:5-7

5) These need not mean the direct father, grandfather, etc. There may be others in the lineage who are not mentioned here.

6) If it were Mordecai who had come in the deportation rather than his father he would be approximately 120-127 years old at this time.

7) Esther and Mordecai are cousins.

C. ESTHER’S PURIFICATION. 2:8-14

8,9) Esther pleases the keeper of the virgins - he is not the head of the harem - v. 14.

10,11) Mordecai and Esther are in close communication.

Her race would not be a help but a hindrance at this point.

12) “According to the regulations for the women” - which was according to Persian law.

It took at least one year for this process.

13) “Whatever she desired” - clothing, ornaments, oils, etc. which she felt would attract the king to her.

- 14) She is assigned to the keeper of the harem.

D. ESTHER IS MADE QUEEN. 2:15-20

- 15) She accepts the advice of Hegai as to apparel, etc.

She pleases everyone.

- 16) This is four years after the feast - 1:3.

History tells us this is after the king went to war with Greece, lost and came back home.

- 17) Esther is made queen.

- 18) "Proclaimed a [release] holiday:"

- a. Remission of taxes.
- b. Remission of labor (a holiday).
- c. More likely "b."

- 19,20) We do not know what this second gathering of the virgins is.

Still silence on her nationality at this time.

E. MORDECAI DISCOVERS THE PLOT TO KILL THE KING..... 2:21-23

- 22) Esther gives the message to the king in Mordecai's name.

- 23) The plot including Mordecai's interception and loyalty is permanently recorded.

III. HAMAN'S PLOT. CH 3

A. HAMAN'S PROMOTION AND MORDECAI'S REBELLION..... 3:1-6

- 1) "Set his seat above" = gave him the most important position in the kingdom.

- 2) Haman was to be treated as the personal emissary of the king and given honor just as the king himself would be.

Mordecai could not show honor to that man which was due to Jehovah only.

To the Persians this honor was due the king because he was a divine being in their thinking. He was the incarnation of the god Oromasdes.

- 3-5) Mordecai's conduct is reported to Haman and he then sees it for himself.
- 6) Haman would have thought Mordecai's refusal was because he was a Jew, therefore the whole Jewish community would have thought and acted in the same way.

B. THE PLOT. 3:7-11

- 7) Astrology played a very important part in Persian life.

No major decisions were made without checking with the astrologers.

The exact day is not given.

- 8) "A certain people" - the Jews are not specifically named.

The king also projected Mordecai's actions to the entire Jewish people.

"To let them remain" = let them live.

- 9) Haman will pay for the tax collectors to collect the booty from the slain.

This should net millions for the king.

- 10) Permission granted.

- 11) The king said for Haman to keep the spoils. The king would not have anyone say he had approved of this for his own personal gain.

C. THE DECREE WRITTEN AND SENT TO THE PROVINCES. ... 3:12-15

- 13) "By couriers" = this would take three weeks at the most with their system of "Pony Express."

- 15) "Perplexed" - why are the Jews suddenly to be killed? There had been no uprisings, etc.

IV. MORDECAI PERSUADES ESTHER TO INTERVENE. Ch 4

A. MORDECAI'S PLEA TO ESTHER FOR HELP. 4:1-8

- 1-3) Mordecai mourns but still does not break the law by entering the king's gate in mourning.
- 4) She sent garments to Mordecai - not to cheer him but so he could change clothes, enter the king's gate and not be killed. This way she could learn directly from him what the problem was.
- 5,6) Esther sends a trusted servant to receive the message.
- 7,8) The entire plot is told and Mordecai asks her to go before the king with Israel's request.

B. ESTHER ACCEPTS HER DUTY. 4:9-17

- 11) "He has but one law" - for all, high and low, great or small.

The golden scepter raised to the intruder would spare his life.

Heb 1:8 Cf: 2 Thess 2:13,14.

"These thirty days" - she has not been summoned therefore she can only assume he does not want to see her.

- 13,14) "Relief" = recovery.

"Kingdom" = royalty.

- 16,17) This was a severe fast - neither food nor water.

She will allow God's plan to work - resignation to do her duty, even if it costs her life!

Pray for yourself and all who will do God's will with resolve! Cf: Lk 10:2.

Fasting:

- a. Pray without fasting? - Yes.
- b. Fast without praying? - No!

V. ESTHER'S SUCCESS..... Ch 5-7

A. ESTHER'S ACCEPTANCE BEFORE THE KING AND HER INVITATIONS..... 5:1-8

- 1) The king was on his judgment seat in the gate.
- 2) Acceptance.
"Touched the top" - this was usually a kiss showing homage and gratitude.
- 3) He assumes she has a request since she had taken such drastic action to see him.
- 4,5) Her first invitation.
Haman is included.
- 6) This was called a wine banquet and would be a joyous occasion.
The king repeats his offer.
- 7,8) She tells the king she indeed does has a request, but to please honor her by attending another banquet at which Haman is included again.

B. HAMAN'S BITTERNESS EATS AT HIS SOUL. 5:9-14

- 9) It is a short step from the peaks of joy to the depths of depression.
- 10) Haman exhibits control and seeks counsel.
- 11,12) A great ego trip.
A great and final triumph - even the queen singles him out for personal honor.
- 13) Never satisfied!
The fortune and honor Haman enjoys fail to satisfy him when Mordecai refuses to show him the reverence he claims and desires.
When you hate someone they own you, your thoughts, your sleep, your actions and ultimately with the same results as if they owned your soul.
- 14) Hanging Mordecai is the solution.

Make the request of the king tomorrow and you will be rid of Mordecai forever.

C. AN UNEXPECTED TURN OF AFFAIRS..... 6:1-11

1,2) No sleep? Try reading!

Providence that Mordecai's name comes up?!

3) The Persian kings were noted for rewarding people when special services had been rendered.

4) The night has past - Haman rises early to do evil.

5,6) Pride!

Who would the king honor except me?

7-9) The king's own:

- a. Clothes,
- b. Horse,
- c. Crown and
- d. Chief prince.

10,11) The haughty Haman was compelled to honor this Jew whom he hated above all others.

D. TOTAL HUMILIATION. 6:12-14

12,13) "With his head covered" - a token of great confusion and mourning.

This must be a sign of total defeat to come. What kind of friends are these?

14) No time to regroup - the summons to the second banquet has come.

E. ESTHER'S REQUEST. 7:1-6

1,2) The king and Haman come to the banquet. The king again seeks her request.

3,4) The plot exposed.

"Compensate" = [countervail].

“Terrified” = [afraid] - Cf. 1 Chron 21:30; Dan 8:17.

F. POETIC JUSTICE - HAMAN’S DOWNFALL AND RUIN. 7:7-10

- 7) It is obvious there is no chance for mercy from the king, so go to the source of his present trouble for help.

- 8) When one is evil it is easy to suspect the worst of them.

“Covered Haman’s face” - the beginning of carrying out of the death penalty.

- 9,10) The eunuchs remind the king again of Mordecai’s goodness and then tell him of the gallows.

Haman hanged according to his own scheme and method.

VI. THE DOWNFALL OF HAMAN’S PLOT. 8:1-9:16

A. MORDECAI PROMOTED AND THE COUNTER-EDICT ISSUED. . . CH 8

- 1) All that had been owned by Haman is given to Esther.

- 2) Mordecai’s relationship to Esther is told to the king.

Haman’s position and ring of office are given to Mordecai.

- 3,4) Esther’s request to spare the Jews.

Holding out the scepter to her at this time indicates he will grant her request.

- 5,6) The idea of her request is, “If the request is admissible, proper, convenient and advantageous.”

“Revoke” = [Reverse] = frustrate.

- 7,8) Write the letter!

- 9-14) The same process Haman used.

- 10) “Royal horses bred from swift steeds” - these were Arabian horses!

- 11) Gather together and defend yourselves.

- 15-17) Joy in the kingdom!

- 15) The garments of his new office.
- 17) When the power of faith and trust in God is shown to all, many will want what we have!

Many became Jews especially after the turn of events showing all the world that the God of the Jews is the only true God.

B. THE JEWS AVENGED OF THEIR ENEMIES. 9:1-16

- 1,2) The fear of the Jews returns. Cf: Josh 10:8.
- 3,4) Better to fight on the winner's side.
- 5) "And did what they [would] pleased" = retaliated upon their enemies at their discretion.
- 6-11) Complete victory!
- 6) Five hundred killed in Shushan.
- 10) The ten sons of Haman are slain.
- 12-15) A second day of revenge in Shushan is granted.
- 13) Hang the bodies of the ten sons of Haman.

Let Shushan have one more day for vengeance.

There naturally would have been more enemies in Shushan because of Haman's having been in such high office.

- 14,15) Haman's sons hanged and three hundred more are slain.
- 16) How the Jews in the provinces fared:
 - a. 75,000 of their enemies slain, but
 - b. They also took no booty!

VII. THE FEAST OF PURIM.. . . . 9:17-32

- 17) The 14th is made a holiday by the Jews in the provinces.
- 18) But in Shushan the 15th is made a holiday because of the extra day of fighting.

20-22) Mordecai writes to the Jews to keep the holidays.

23-25) The Jews comply.

26) The reason for the name "Purim."

27) All posterity is to celebrate this holiday also.

29-32) A second letter from Esther and Mordecai confirming the holidays.

VIII. THE PROMINENCE OF MORDECAI. CH 10

1,2) The greatness of Ahasuerus.

3) This, in turn, shows how great Mordecai was.

Mordecai sought the good of the people!