

Grace OPC Sunday Class			
Year:	2 of 4		Date: Week 12
Quarter:	2 of 4	Bible Survey	
Lesson Title:	Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther		
Lesson Purpose:	To understand the structure and contents of these books and look at some of their main themes		

Readings for next week: Hendricksen Pp. 285-292, 448

### 1. Review and Introduction

Last week 1 and 2 Chronicles. Moving on to Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther

### 2. Who Wrote Ezra and Nehemiah, and when?

Could well have been Ezra and Nehemiah, respectively. Note in Ezra the historical approach to begin with and first person from around chapter 7 onwards. Much of Nehemiah reads as his memoirs and this represents the last historical book written in the OT.

These books were originally one book and were broken up at the time of Jerome. They continue the account begun in 1 and 2 Chronicles and consider the return from exile, the rebuilding of the temple and the city walls of Jerusalem.

The return occurs in 2 phases – first a group of 42360 who returned following the decree of Cyrus. They laid the temple foundations and built an altar but were discouraged by Samaritans from doing more.

Later under Haggai's preaching the work resumed (Chapter 5) and completed during the reign of Darius

### 3. Structure for Ezra (Unger)

Chapter	Event
1, 2	A. The First return (under Zerubbabel)
1	1. The edict of Cyrus
2	2. The enumeration of the exiles
3-6	B. The building of the Temple
	1. Construction (3:1-6:15)
	2. Dedication (6:16-22)
7,8	C. The Second Return (Under Ezra)
9,10	D. The Reinstatement of Separation

### 4. Some Themes and Applications in Ezra

#### God's faithfulness to his promises:

**Isaiah 44:28** "It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.' "

**Jeremiah 29:10** "For thus says the LORD, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.

**Ezra 1:1** Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying: **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 appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

#### Do not be unequally yoked

**Ezra 4:1** Now when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to the LORD God of Israel, **2** they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' households, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here." **3** But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of fathers' households of Israel said to them, "You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves will together build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us."

#### God overrules to help His obedient children – if God is for us....

A small and weak remnant attempts a work for God's glory.

**Ezra 5:1** When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them, **2** then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them supporting them. **3** At that time Tattenai, the governor of *the province* beyond the River, and Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues came to them and spoke to them thus, "Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?" **4** Then we told them accordingly what the names of the men were who were reconstructing this building. **5** But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until a report could come to Darius, and then a written reply be returned concerning it.

And they were not stopped but helped by Darius!

**The appeal of the world.**

Intermarriage with the surrounding nations had been one of the sins that led to the exile. When Ezra returns, he finds it happening again!

**Ezra 9:1** Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, *those* of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. **2** "For they have taken some of their daughters as *wives* for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness."

**5. Structure for Nehemiah (Unger)**

Chapter	Event
1-7	A. Nehemiah's Restoration of the Walls
1-2	1. Preceding providential events
3-6	2. The rebuilding of the walls
7	3. Watchmen set and a census taken
8-13	B. Ezra and Nehemiah's Religious Reforms
8:1-10:39	1. Revival and renewal of the Covenant
11: 1 - 13:3	2. Lists of princes, priests, and dedication of walls
13:4-31	3. Reforms of Nehemiah's second governorship

**6. Some Themes and Applications in Nehemiah**

**A heart for the honor of the Lord – do we have it?**

**Nehemiah 1:1** The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month Chislev, *in* the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol, **2** that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped *and* had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. **3** They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire." **4** When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

**The value of the "arrow prayer"**

Nehemiah had been much in prayer but then an opportunity was presented

**Nehemiah 2:3** I said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?" **4** Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. **5** I said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."

**Should believers make plans or not?**

Look what happens when the opportunity comes to Nehemiah

**Nehemiah 2:6** Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, "How long will your journey be, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time. **7** And I said to the king, "If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of *the provinces* beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, **8** and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go." And the king granted *them* to me because the good hand of my God was on me.

He was ready to take advantage of the opportunity God gave him!

**Building the wall parallels building the church – our situation at Grace**

The walls were for defence – keep the enemy out

Thorough inspection of the status – what needs to be done (2:11-16) – we need to plan too

Initial opposition from the world (2:19-20)

Those involved came from all walks of life (perfumers, officials, priests, goldsmiths!), all ages, men and women, parents and children alike (Chapter 3)

Some were noted for being zealous – 3:20

Many built what was closest to them (“opposite his house”) – what lay closest to hand

How strong was the finished wall? As strong as the weakest part that was built

What if one part were left as rubble?

Do you think they inspected the wall and offered help to those building the weaker parts?

How strong are the defences of the local fellowship?

What happens if we leave one part unrepaired?

As the work progresses, the hostility increases

**Nehemiah 4:1** Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews. **2** He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy *men* of Samaria and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore *it* for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?” **3** Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, “Even what they are building—if a fox should jump on *it*, he would break their stone wall down!”

Nehemiah prays; the work progresses. The wall reaches half its finished height

**Nehemiah 4:7** Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, *and* that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry. **8** All of them conspired together to come *and* fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it.

But the plans of the enemies become known the people in Jerusalem keep watch for the assault of the enemy

**Nehemiah 4:9** But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night. **Nehemiah 4:14** When I saw *their fear*, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: “Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses.”

So God frustrated the plans of the enemies

**Nehemiah 4:15** When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work.

The sword and the trowel – building the church, ready for the fight

**Nehemiah 4:18** As for the builders, each *wore* his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter *stood* near me.

A shift in tactics by the enemy – when head-on confrontation didn’t work, tried cunning and deceit – desperation grows

**Nehemiah 6:1** Now when it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall, and *that* no breach remained in it, although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates, **2** then Sanballat and Geshem sent *a message* to me, saying, “Come, let us meet together at Chephirim in the plain of Ono.” But they were planning to harm me. **3** So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?”

**Nehemiah 6:5** Then Sanballat sent his servant to me in the same manner a fifth time with an open letter in his hand. **6** In it was written, “It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel; therefore you are rebuilding the wall. And you are to be their king, according to these reports. **7** “You have also appointed prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, ‘A king is in Judah!’ And now it will be reported to the king according to these reports. So come now, let us take counsel together.” **8** Then I sent *a message* to him saying, “Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind.” **9** For all of them were *trying* to frighten us, thinking, “They will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done.” But now, *O God*, strengthen my hands.

**Nehemiah 6:10** When I entered the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined at home, he said, “Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming to kill you at night.” **11** But I said, “Should a man like me flee? And could one such as I go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.” **12** Then I perceived that surely God had not sent him, but he uttered *his* prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. **13** He was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened and act accordingly and sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me. **14** Remember, *O my God*, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were *trying* to frighten me.

**Human efforts will not bring salvation**

The wall is finished, revival comes.

Reverence for the Word – it was read all morning as the people stood in Ezra’s presence (Ch 8)

Confession of sin, festivals restored

Solemn covenant to keep Sabbath, to give to support levites, not to intermarry (Ch 10)

The highest point since the return from exile. Is all now well for the future?

Nehemiah leaves and when he returns,

Tobiah is living in the temple!

The people have intermarried, stopped supporting the levites and broken the Sabbath

All points to the need of a Savior.

## 7. Who Wrote Esther?

Unknown.

King Xerxes succeeded Darius

Artaxerxes, who allowed Ezra's return, succeeded Xerxes

So these events take place during the period covered in the book of Ezra, between the first return of the Jews and the return at the time of Ezra.

## 8. Structure for Esther (Unger)

Chapter	Event
1-3	A. God's People in Peril
1-2	1. Esther's rise to royalty
3	2. Haman's conspiracy to kill
4-10	B. Epic of Divine Deliverance
4-7	1. The courage of the queen
8:1-9:19	2. The Jewish revenge
9:20-32	3. The Feast of Purim
10	4. The exaltation of Mordecai

## 9. Some Themes and Applications in Esther

### **God's providential care for his people**

This is the major theme, though He is not mentioned and there is no NT reference to the events or characters in the book.

Esther's rise to the throne timely to thwart Haman

**Esther 4:13** Then Mordecai told *them* to reply to Esther, "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. **14** "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"

Mordecai's good deed in exposing the plot against the king initially unrewarded but woven into Haman's downfall when the king has a bad night!

**Esther 6:1** During that night the king could not sleep so he gave an order to bring the book of records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. **2** It was found written what Mordecai had reported concerning Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who were doorkeepers, that they had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.

### **The wonderful access we have to the king of kings**

**Esther 4:15** Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai, **16** "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." **17** So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him. **1** Now it came about on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace in front of the king's rooms, and the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room, opposite the entrance to the palace. **2** When the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight; and the king extended to Esther the golden scepter which was in his hand. So Esther came near and touched the top of the scepter.

### **Be sure your sin will find you out.**

Haman hanged on the gallows he prepared for Mordecai