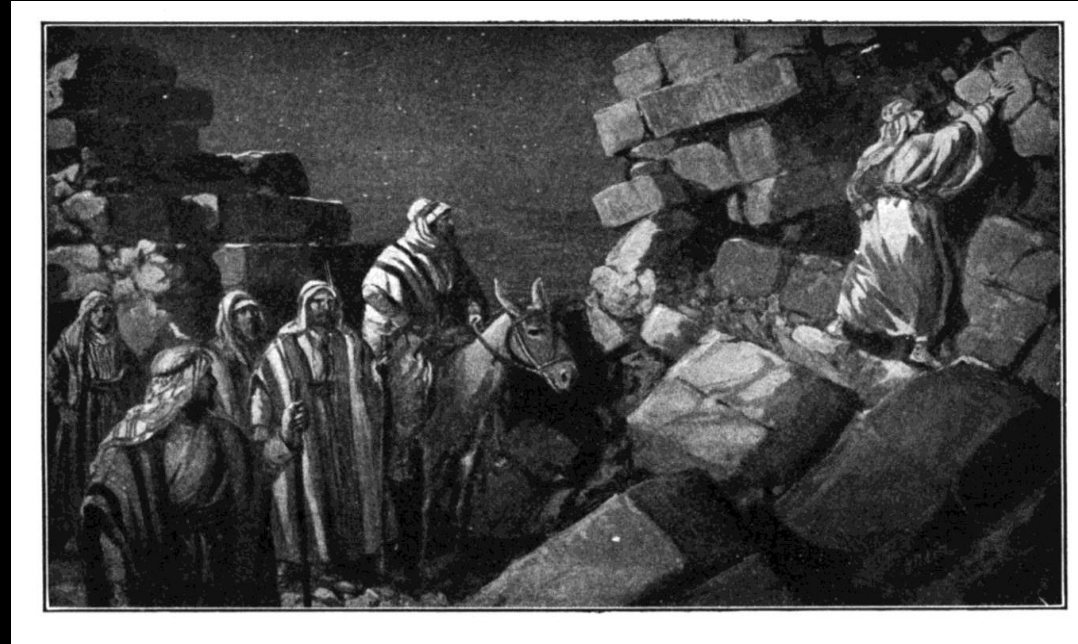


A Time to Build



A Study of the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther

The Theology of the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther

- Ezra – God is faithful to his promises and brings back his people from captivity (1:1-5) ... you can trust God
- Nehemiah – God is knowledgeable and prospers his people as they work and worship (1:11; 2:20; 4:20; 6:20) ... you can pray to God

The Theology of the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther

- Esther – God is active and alters circumstances to keep his people alive from danger and death (9:22) ... you can do your part

The Theology of the Book of Ezra

In the book of Ezra, there is an emphasis on what the Persian kings are doing with reference to the Jews who return from the captivity. For example, Cyrus gives a proclamation letting the Jews return (Ezra 1). Artaxerxes writes a letter causing the work in Jerusalem to cease (Ezra 4). Darius writes a letter to Tattenai allowing the temple work to resume and be completed (Ezra 6). Artaxerxes writes a letter giving Ezra permission to return and do his work (Ezra 7). While these Persian kings are a key part of the story, they are not the whole story. They are not the only persons working with the Jews in history.

The Theology of the Book of Ezra

The one who is behind it all and overall is the God of Israel. He is working on the Jews' behalf and he is working through the Persian kings to accomplish the restoration and return. In the book of Ezra, God is faithful to his promise to bring his people back from captivity (1:1-2), to help in that return (7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31), to help his work to be completed (6:22), and to allow his people to be a formal nation once again (9:8-9). It was God who brought his people into captivity as punishment for their sin (5:12; 9:7, 13), but God would not leave his people there. God promised through his prophets that he would keep a "remnant" of his people alive (Isa. 10:20-22; 37:31-32; Jer. 23:3) and he did just that (Ezra 9:8, 13-15; Neh. 1:3).

The Theology of the Book of Ezra

God made promises to his people of returning and restoring. A promise of return and restoration is given as far back as the time of Moses (Lev. 26:40-45; Deut. 30:1-5). Then, in the days of Isaiah (Isa. 10:21-22; 35:10; 51:11) and Jeremiah (Jer. 12:15; 29:10; 30:3, 10; 31:8; 32:44; 33:7, 11, 26; 42:12; 46:27, God promised again that his people would “return” from captivity, and they did (Ezra 2:1; Neh. 7:6). God himself also returned to Jerusalem just like he said he would (Isa. 5:8). God had said that he would “restore” his people (Isa. 49:7; 57:18; 58:12; Jer. 30:17) and the vessels of the house (Jer. 27:22) after the captivity, and they were restored (Ezra 6:5). The book of Ezra tells the story of God keeping his promises.

The Theology of the Book of Ezra

When the city of Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, Jeremiah cried out, “Turn thou us unto thee, O Jehovah, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old” (Lam. 5:21). The book of Ezra tells the story of God’s answer to that cry.

The Theology of the Book of Nehemiah

It was God who brought his people into captivity as punishment for their sin (Neh. 9:32), but God would not leave his people there. Just like God had made promises through Moses and his prophets that his people would return from Babylonian captivity, God also made promises through Jeremiah (Jer. 24:6; 30:18; 31:4) and Daniel (9:25) that Jerusalem would be “built again”. Even Nehemiah knew about these promises and he calls upon God in prayer to remember his promises (Neh. 1:8-9). The book of Nehemiah is the story of God keeping that promise.

The Theology of the Book of Esther

While it is true that God is not mentioned by name in the book of Esther, it is not true that the book is of purely secular character. There is no mention of prayer, praise, or worship to God, but the fasting of the Jews is mentioned (4:16; 9:31). So, what purpose does the book of Esther serve? In addition to telling of the origins of Purim, it serves the purpose of reminding those Jews who chose not to return, that God would watch over them. His providential care is still present in their lives. The Jews, like Daniel who remained in Babylon, were still God's people and he would watch over and protect them from their enemies and any unjust oppression. God's providence continues to overrule all things, even in a distant land away from Jerusalem. He still determines the destinies of men and nations, whether they are believers or unbelievers. God turns sorrow into gladness (9:22).

The Theology of the Book of Esther

- Esther 2:6 – carried away (2 K. 24:15; 25:21; Ezra 2:1; Neh. 7:6)
- Esther 3:8 – their laws are diverse (Deut. 5:3)
- Esther 4:3; 9:31 – fasting (Neh. 9:1; Psa. 35:13; Dan. 9:3)

The Theology of the Book of Esther

- Esther 4:14 – deliverance arise to the Jews
(Gen. 45:7; 1 Sam. 11:13; 2 Chron. 12:7; Psa. 44:4)
- Esther 6: - thou shalt not prevail against him (Jer. 1:19)
- Esther 8:17 – became Jews (Zech. 8:12-13, 23)
- Esther 9:22 – sorrow to gladness (Isa. 35:10)