

# The Story of God

Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah

## All 3 books

- Tell God's story about Israel during the captivity, or at the very end of it (The Persian period of Israeli history).
- This would include Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes (Ahasuerus), and Artaxerxes
- Esther is the only book to talk specifically about the Jews who lived in Persia while they are under captivity

- In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are one book—to the Jews there is no disconnect between religion and politics
- Both tell of rebuilding: Ezra focuses on the temple, and Nehemiah focuses on Jerusalem's wall.
- The issue they address, however is not, “will the work be done?”
- The issue they address is, “Will Israel be faithful to God?”

# God's Sovereignty

- Ezra 1.1: Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,

- This is the story of Esther— “Has God abandoned the Jews during the captivity?” Every event: from the selection of Esther, the unmasking of Haman, and the edict of self-defense, proves God’s silent but sovereign protection of His people.
- It is seen in “small things,” like the preservation of many sacred vessels (Ezra 1.6-11), and the book of genealogy (Nehemiah 7.5-6)

- It is seen even in the raising up of Ezra and Nehemiah—two men who saw many things very differently
- Both men are portrayed as Godly men, not simply energetic men with “can do” attitudes
- Ezra 8.21-22
- Nehemiah 2.7-9
- Ezra 9.3
- Nehemiah 13.25

- It is seen in God's protective hand in building the wall and the temple.
- Ezra 5.5 But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter.
- Neh 4:9 Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. .

# Syncretism

- “Mixing” with other cultures was something the Jews were not permitted to do
- But it was something they did regularly—they never abandoned the worship of Jehovah; they simply incorporated the worship of other gods into their lives

- The danger of this is why an offer of help was refused. Ezra 4.1-4
- The danger of this is why there is the account of the divorces. Ezra 9-10
- This is why there is the separation of the Ammonite and the Moabite.  
Nehemiah 13.1-9

# Satan

- Satan has been an adversary since the Garden of Eden, and has been hostile to God's people and God's work
- Ezra 4.4-7: in the days of Cyrus, Darius, Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes
- So they opposed the rebuilding of the wall and temple. Ezra 4.8-16
- And mocked the people of God, Neh. 4.1

- And seek to destroy all Jews: Esther 3:8  
And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus,  
There is a certain people scattered  
abroad and dispersed among the  
people in all the provinces of thy  
kingdom; and their laws are diverse  
from all people; neither keep they the  
king's laws: therefore it is not for the  
king's profit to suffer them.

# Sinfulness

- Israel's tendency is to focus upon the adversaries and the "situation"
- But their real problem is a lack of commitment. Ezra 5.1; 6.14
- Nehemiah 5.1-9
- There is a renewing of commitment to the Law. Nehemiah 10.28-31
- Which is soon broken. Neh. 13.6-31

- These Moses like men, who led the people back into the promised land, had no power to fix their sinful hearts