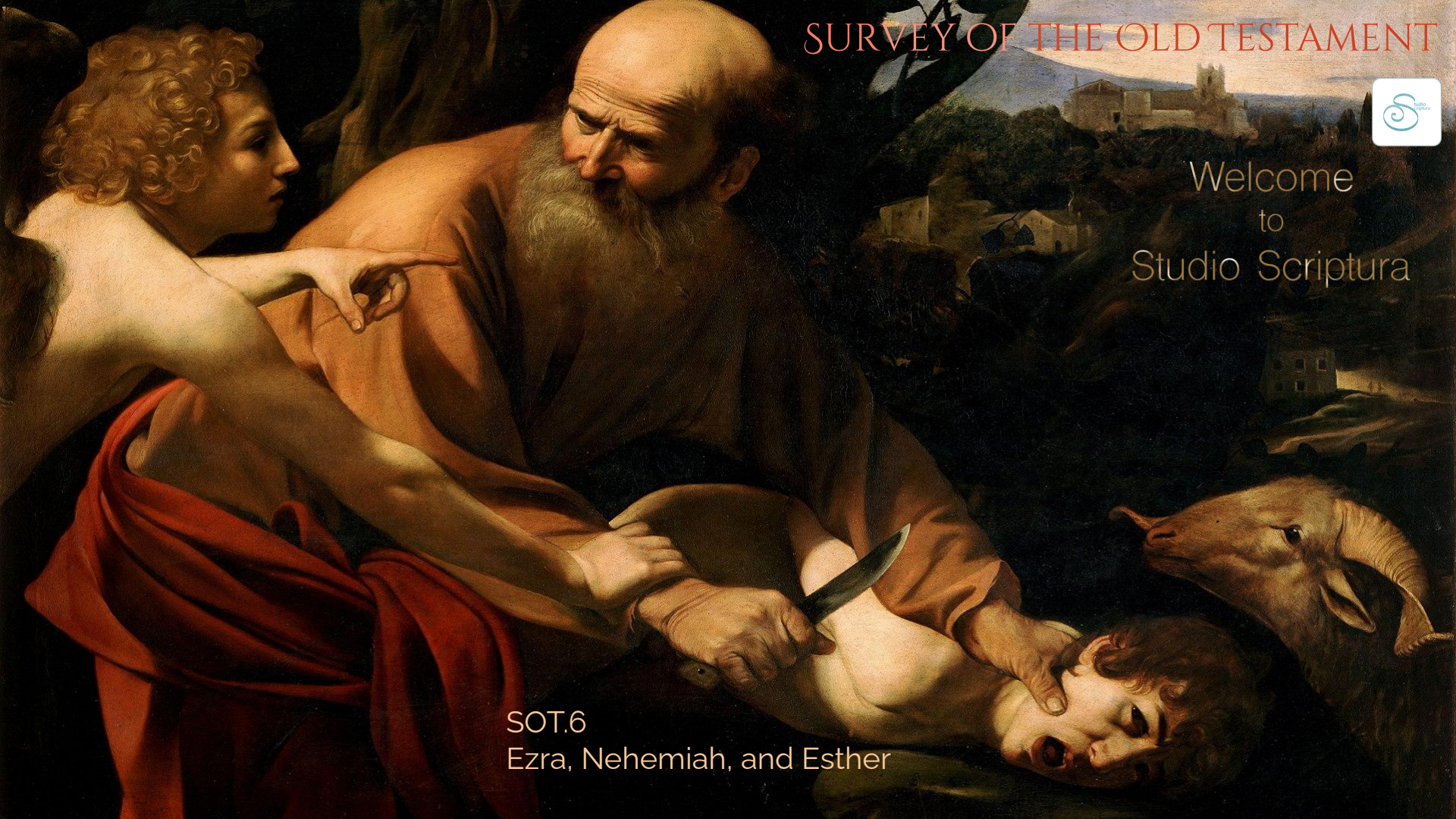


SURVEY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT



Welcome
to
Studio Scriptura

SOT.6
Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther




Logistics & Learning Objectives:

1. Participants will gain a high level understanding of the:
 - a. What & Why of exile
 - b. Historical context
 - c. Book of Nehemiah
 - d. Book of Ezra
 - e. Book of Esther
 - f. Nation's return to the Promised Land
 - g. Leadership lessons presented

New King James Version,
1988. Nashville: Holman
Bible Publishers.





Character Traits and Skills of a Leader

1. Prayer and trust in God's providence
2. Serious student of the Scripture
3. Discernment and knowing how to read, and use the existing civil power structures - how to work them to advantage
4. Focus on the interests of God and the people - front and center - never focusing on advancing one's own career or position
5. Look at life from an eternal perspective - able to crystallize issues with concise and direct communication - clear reminder to the people of their eternal focus and higher calling
6. Get to the task - Don't waste time - Visionaries with strong skills as administrators - able to delegate.
7. Courageous and persevere in midst of significant opposition.

Three World Leaders

Zondervan Atlas of the Bible by Carl G. Rasmussen



Cyrus II (Ruled c.550 - 530 BC)

Founder of the Achaemenid Empire, the first Persian empire. Expanded vastly and eventually conquered most of Western Asia and much of Central Asia - the largest the world had yet seen - influence on both Eastern and Western civilizations.

"Thus says the Lord to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: Isaiah 45:1 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, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing... 2 Chronicles 36:22

Darius I (Ruled c.522 - 486 BC)

Third King of the Achaemenid Empire - ruled at its territorial peak from the Indus River to Macedonia, including Egypt and Libya. During his reign, the construction of the temple in Jerusalem was resumed and completed (Ezra 5-6).

"Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. And at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of Media, a scroll was found, and in it a record was written thus: In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem: "Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid." Ezra 6:1-3a

Artaxerxes 1 (Ruled c.465 to 424 BC)

"Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah ... this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him." Ezra 7:1&6

"And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I (Nehemiah) took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. ... and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?" Nehemiah 2:1 & 3)

Three Biblical Players

Zondervan Atlas of the Bible by Carl G. Rasmussen



Zerubbabel (c.539 BC / Temple)

c.539 BC ~50,000 Jews go back to the Land of Judah following the decree of Cyrus, but most remained in Babylon. The second phase of the Jewish return received impetus from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, work on the temple resumed in 520 BC and was completed by 516 BC (Ezra 4: 24–6:22), at which time a joyous Passover was celebrated in Jerusalem. The providence of God was involved in the timing of the rebuilding, but it is also interesting to note that permission to rebuild was granted in 520 BC, just prior to Darius's Egyptian campaign mentioned above. Possibly, Darius was trying to secure the loyalty of the Judeans by granting them their request.

EZRA (c.458BC / People)

His name means "God helps". He was a priest, scribe, and serious scholar. "His position was Secretary of State for Jewish Affairs in the Persian Empire and this probably necessitated his return to Babylon after a period of about two years in Jerusalem. An unknown number of exiles returned from Babylon with Ezra himself and conditions in Judah were very poor upon his arrival. "Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem, and has extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes. So I was encouraged, as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me." Ezra 7:27,28

Nehemiah (c.444 BC / Walls)

In c.446 BC the dilapidated state of Jerusalem's defenses was brought to the attention of a pious Jew named Nehemiah, who was serving in the Persian court as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes responded favorably to the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. Nehemiah left for Judea in c.445 BC armed with a letter from the king granting him permission to rebuild the wall, commanding other "governors of Trans-Euphrates to allow this rebuilding. With the walls completed, Ezra and Nehemiah led the people in a time of spiritual renewal that ultimately resulted in the signing of a covenant document whereby the people committed themselves to govern their lives in accordance with the law of Moses.

Three Prophets



Haggai c.520 BC (early Darius & Zerubbabel)

He is known for his prophecy in c. 520 BC, commanding the Jews to rebuild the Temple. Zechariah was his contemporary who belonged to the period of Jewish history which began after the return from captivity in Babylon.

"Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: "Consider your ways! "You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes." Haggai 1:4-6

Zechariah c.520 - 518 BC (early Darius & Zerubbabel)

Hebrew prophet during the building of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. His prophetic career probably began in the second year of Darius the Great, king of the Achaemenid Empire (520 BCE). His greatest concern appears to have been with the building of the Second Temple.

"I will bring them back, Because I have mercy on them. They shall be as though I had not cast them aside; For I am the Lord their God, And I will hear them." Zechariah 10:6b

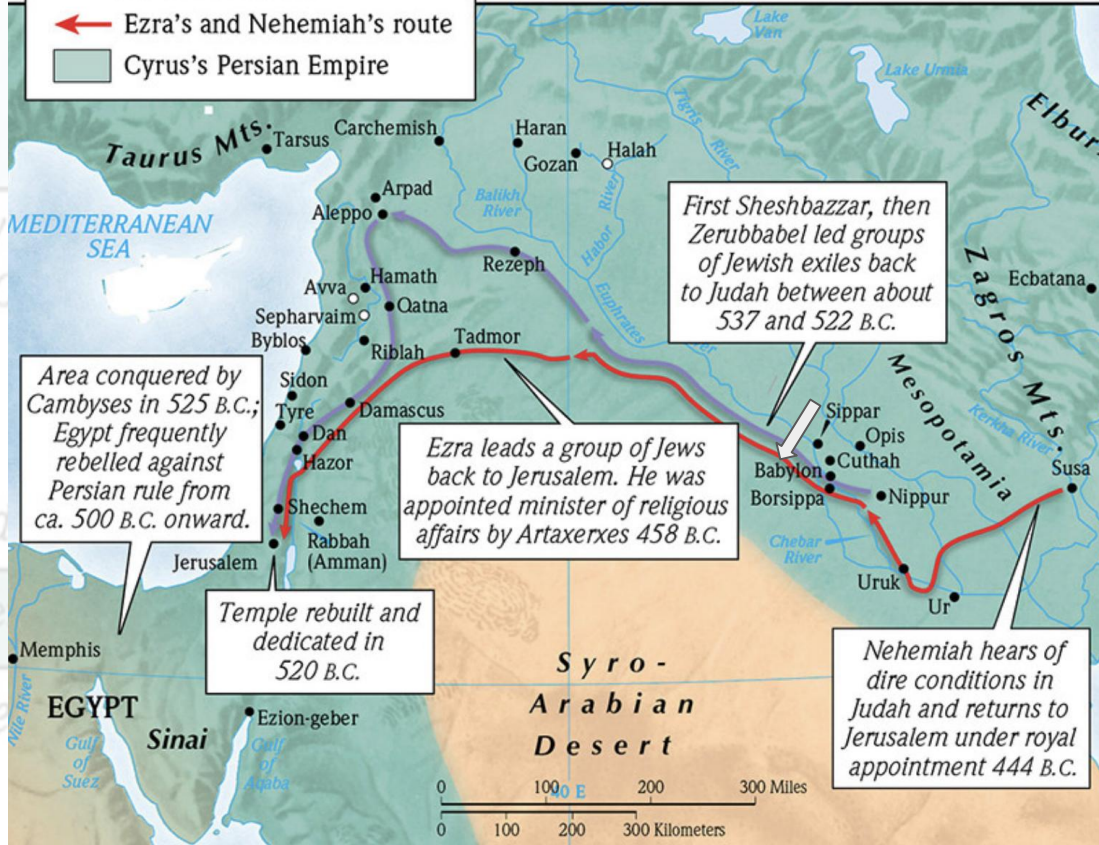
Malachi c.450 - 430 BC (Artaxerxes, Ezra and Nehemiah}

Encourages those who were dispirited that the Second Temple did not measure up to memories of the First Temple.

"Behold, I send My **Messenger**. And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the **Messenger of the covenant**, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire And like launderers' soap." Malachi 3:1-2

THE RETURNS OF JEWISH EXILES TO JUDAH

- City
- City (uncertain location)
- ← Sheshbazzar's and Zerubbabel's route
- ← Ezra's and Nehemiah's route
- Cyrus's Persian Empire



First Sheshbazzar, then Zerubbabel led groups of Jewish exiles back to Judah between about 537 and 522 B.C.

Area conquered by Cambyses in 525 B.C.; Egypt frequently rebelled against Persian rule from ca. 500 B.C. onward.




Ezra leads a group of Jews back to Jerusalem. He was appointed minister of religious affairs by Artaxerxes 458 B.C.

Temple rebuilt and dedicated in 520 B.C.

Nehemiah hears of dire conditions in Judah and returns to Jerusalem under royal appointment 444 B.C.

Area conquered by Cambyses in 525 B.C.
Egypt frequently rebelled against Persian rule from ca. 500 B.C. onward

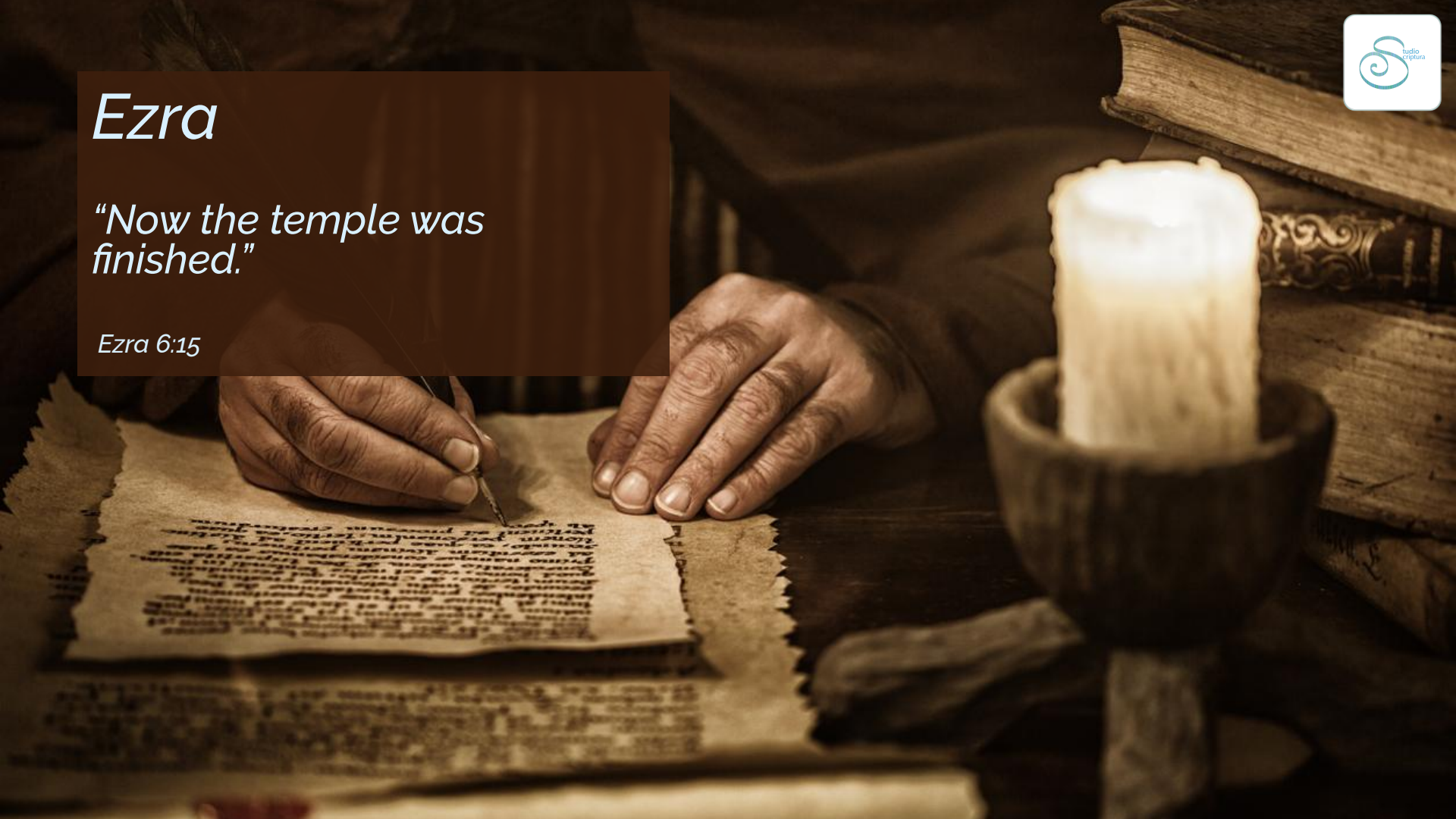


c. 2091 BC	Abraham believed God (Kish tablet dates to around 3,500 BCE)	c. 722 BC	Northern Kingdom Falls / Assyria
c. 1876 BC	Jacob Goes to Egypt	c. 586 BC	Southern Kingdom Falls / Babylon 
c. 1446 BC	Moses / Exodus	c. 538 BC	Return to the Land 
c. 1400 BC	Joshua Enters the Land	c. 515 BC	Second Temple Period Begins 
c. 1030 BC	Davidic Covenant Begins	c. 356 - 323 BC	Alexander the Great
c. 966 BC	First Temple Period Begins	c. 146 BC	Rome Ascends
c. 930 BC	Kingdom Splits	c. 4 BC	Jesus' Birth

Ezra

“Now the temple was finished.”

Ezra 6:15



- “Describes the resettlement of the Hebrew people after their 70-year exile in Babylon. Shows how God sovereignly works through human circumstances to restore the remnant of His people to the Promised Land.”
- “First contingent returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel in c. 538 BC, and a second group followed Ezra 80 years later in 458 BC. The book of Ezra centers on these first two returns.”
- RESTORATION OF THE TEMPLE 1-6 - “Concerns the return under Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple.”
- “The Gentiles living in the land retaliated by discouraging, frustrating, and intimidating the temple builders.”
- REFORMATION OF THE PEOPLE 7-10 - “Concerns the return under Ezra to adorn the temple and to reform the people by rebuilding them spiritually.”
- “After Judah's sin of intermarriage with the pagans was reported to Ezra (9:1-2), he realized that such behavior posed a threat to the spiritual and cultural survival of Israel (9:3-4).”
- “Throughout these events God was preserving the nation from assimilating into the surrounding Gentile/Pagan cultures so that her messianic purposes could be accomplished.”
- “Ezra emphasizes that God preserves His people even when there is great opposition.”

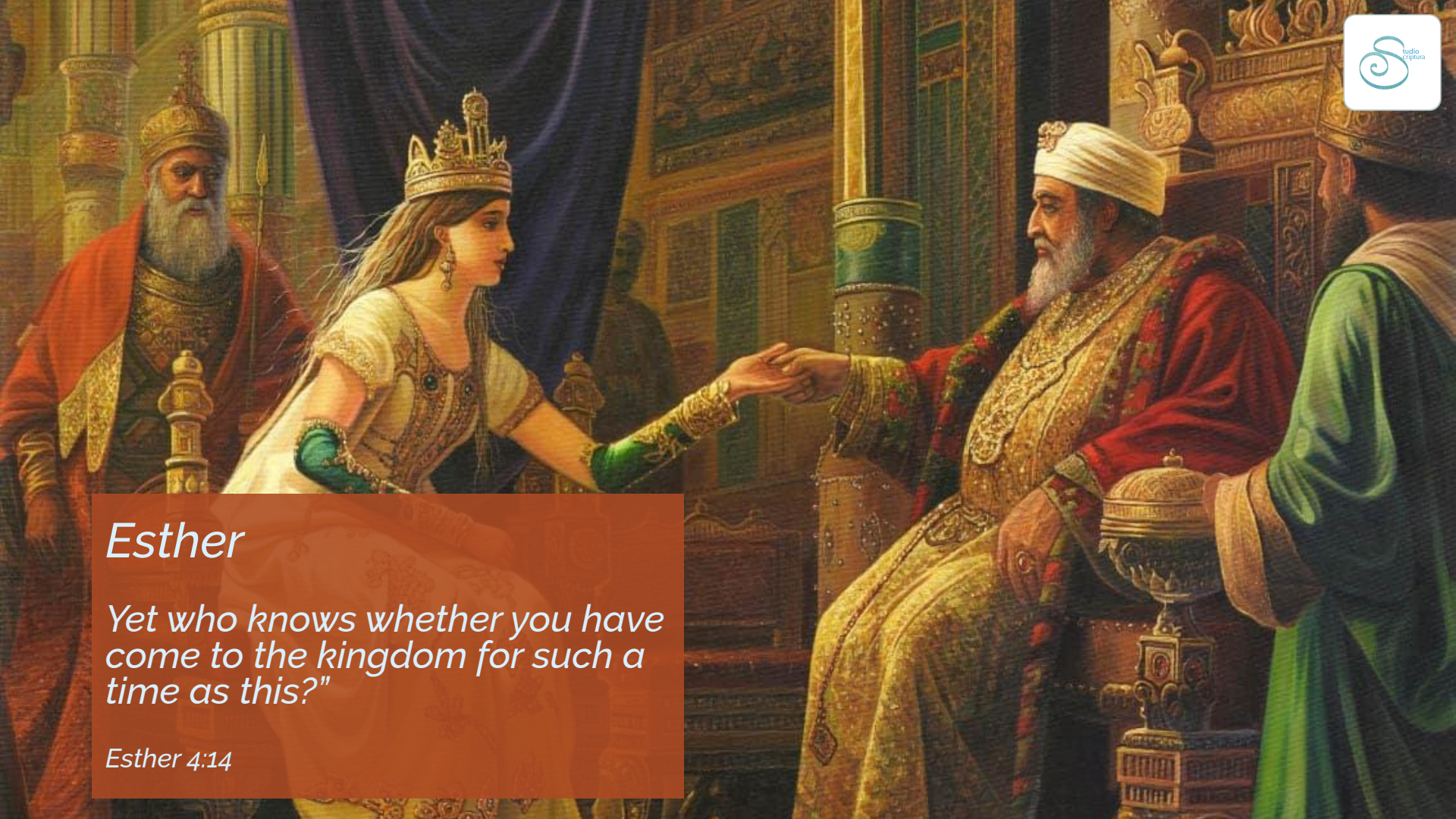


Nehemiah

"Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach."

Nehemiah 2:17

- "In 445 BC in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes I, Nehemiah learned of the terrible conditions of the people who had returned to Jerusalem." "Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer indicating that he was a man of character and integrity."
- "Nehemiah is the second in the historical sequence that describes the Jewish return after the Babylonian captivity to repopulate the land, reestablish temple worship, and rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are one book in the Hebrew Masoretic text and tell a continuous narrative of the Jewish return to the Holy Land."
- REBUILDING THE WALL 1-6
- "Against overwhelming odds Nehemiah was able to motivate the people to "rise up and build" (2:18)
- Nehemiah's prayers in Ch 1 - Repentance followed by Request.
- As the work begins "the opponents mocked, threatened, spread rumors, and used political intrigue to put fear in the hearts of those working on the wall." But "the wall was rebuilt in a mere 52 days despite the fact that it was in ruin for 94 years following the nation's first return under Zerubbabel."
- REPOPULATING THE CITY 7
- "After Nehemiah accomplished the external rebuilding of the walls, a number of spiritual reforms were necessary to bring the people back into right relationship with God. This was accomplished by the public reading and explanation of the Word of God."
- RENEWING THE PEOPLE 8-13
- "Ezra stands up on a wooden pulpit to read the Scriptures and then interprets them in order to explain their meaning to an audience of men, women, and older children *those who could understand* 8:3" "A spiritual defense for the people of God is just as important as a stone wall."




Esther

Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Esther 4:14

- “Esther is one of two books in the Old Testament in which the name of God does not appear.” Yet we see God’s providence through - from beginning to end
- “The central character is an obscure Jewish girl who became one of the queens of Persia.”
- “Esther’s Hebrew name Hadassah (2:7) means *myrtle*, but it was changed to the pagan name *Ester* derived from the Persian word for *star*.”
- The book indicates the author had a strong familiarity with Persian culture. And the events cover a period of 10 years from 483 to 473 BC. The story begins in the third year of Xerxes (Greek), Ahasuerus (Hebrew) and Khshayarsh (Persian).
- Esther takes place after Zerubbabel’s return to Jerusalem in 538 BC but before Nehemiah’s return in 444 BC.
- “Message of Esther: God loves His people and takes care of them no matter where they live and no matter what their circumstances.”
- Esther has a unique chiasmic structure:
 - a. **Prelude:** introductory information (Esther 1)
 - b. **Xerxes’s** decree to eradicate the Jews (Esther 2–3)
 - c. **Haman** seeks to gain victory over Mordecai (Esther 4–5)
 - d. **Xerxes’s** insomnia (Esther 6:1)
 - e. **Mordecai’s** victory over Haman (Esther 6–7)
 - f. **Xerxes’s** decree to rescue the Jews (Esther 8–9)
 - g. **Epilogue:** Mordecai’s ascension (Esther 10)



Character Traits and Skills of a Leader

1. Prayer and trust in God's providence
2. Serious student of the Scripture
3. Discernment and knowing how to read, and use the existing civil power structures - how to work them to advantage
4. Focus on the interests of God and the people - front and center - never focusing on advancing one's own career or position
5. Look at life from an eternal perspective - able to crystallize issues with concise and direct communication - clear reminder to the people of their eternal focus and higher calling
6. Get to the task - Don't waste time - Visionaries with strong skills as administrators - able to delegate.
7. Courageous and persevere in midst of significant opposition.

PROVIDENCE

“Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther describe the providence of God who works His will among His people. God used the exile in Babylon to punish His people, and then God used the religious tolerance of Persian kings to allow Israel to return home” and further God’s purposes.

“God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions.” *Charles Hodge*

“Providence is in certain ways central to the conduct of the Christian life. It means that we are able to live in the assurance that God is present and active in our lives. We are in his care and can therefore face the future confidently, knowing that things are not happening merely by chance. We can pray, knowing that God hears and acts upon our prayers. We can face danger, knowing that he is not unaware and uninvolved.” *Millard Erickson, Christian Theology*



PROVIDENCE *(continued)*

God is all knowing so He sees all that is going to happen. Nothing takes God by surprise. So if you are surprised, rest assured He never is.

God can, and does, work directly or through secondary causes to bring about His desired outcome. This assures us that all things will turn out according to God's plan,

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, Romans 8:28-29a

PROVIDENCE *(continued)*

A few thoughts from CALVIN

Calvin begins by saying that those who believe in God's providence will neither "murmur against God on account of their adversities in time past, nor lay blame for their own wickedness upon him..."

"For we do not follow the Stoics, and imagine a necessity which consists of an infinite and complex chain of causes within nature (and the universe), but we hold that God is the disposer and ruler of all things – that from the most distant eternity, according to His own wisdom, God decreed what he was to do, and now by His power executes what He decreed." John Calvin, *The Christian Theology Reader*

Calvin continues, "...He who set limits to our life has at the same time entrusted us with its care." This means that somehow even though all that happens, happens according to God's plan, that we as human beings still have a part to play. We are to plan for the future. We are to be careful rather than foolish. Calvin writes, "...the Lord inspired in men the arts of taking counsel and caution, by which to comply with his providence in the preservation of life itself."

"We must not forget that after the fall, the entirety of creation is under the curse of sin and groans for its redemption. And the absence of God's presence allows for disobedience to God - and allows the rulers of darkness of this age to manifest themselves in pure evil" Walter Smiechewicz

PROVIDENCE *(continued)*

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?”

“Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?”

For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Romans 11:33-36

So What & Now What?



- ❑ Before next week's class, read the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther
- ❑ Written Short Answer & Discuss:
 - ❑ What lessons of leadership do you need to pray for and incorporate into your life and ministry? (100 words)
 - ❑ How has your understanding of God's providence expanded? How should it impact your daily of walk of faith? (100 Words)
 - ❑ Discuss the following and their impact on the context and messages of Ezra and Nehemiah?
 - ❑ 3 world leaders (50 words)
 - ❑ 3 biblical players (50 words)
 - ❑ 3 prophets (50 words)

OTS.7

Thursday March 21, 2024

7pm (PT U.S.)

