**Session Seven: Ezra, Esther, and Nehemiah – Post-Exile History**

**Book of Ezra**

**Cyrus King of Persia**

* Captured Babylon on October 12, 539 BC without a battle.
* Isaiah 44:27-28
* Isaiah 45:1,2
  + 46 nations were subdued by Cyrus – brough peace to the middle east.
* Isaiah 45:3-5
* Ezra 1:2 – Temple authorized to be rebuilt.
* Ezra 1:7-11 – the gold and silver vessels taken from Jerusalem were returned.

**The Cylinder of Cyrus** – London Museum of Natural History

**Exiles who returned were just under 50,000**.

* Altar and sacrifices (law of Moses) were restored.
* Building the Second Temple was begun.
* Resistance against the rebuilding of the Temple from the local inhabitants.
  + They have a history of rebellion.
  + They will not pay their tribute.
* Darius (new King) discovers Cyrus’ proclamation, allows the building to proceed.
* Temple is completed – consecrated and dedicated.
* The Passover is observed.
* A second wave of Exiles return with Ezra (about 2000) with gold, silver, food, animals, and the kings decree that they are to be “tax free”.

**The Restoration of the People**

* Ezra began to study God’s Law
* Mixed marriages (the Jews had intermarried with the nation around them) were forbidden the Law.
* Ezra entered into a time of confession, repentance, and correction.
* The people responded with separation and reaffirmation of obedience to God’s ways.

**Book of Nehemiah**

**King Artaxerxes**

* Nehemiah’s request
* Kings’ permission
* Daniel 9:25

**Nehemiah Inspects the Walls:**

1. Sheep Gate – Worship
2. Fish Gate – Evangelism – fishers of men
3. Old Gate – put off the “old man.”
4. Valley Gate – trials – Psalm 23
5. Refuse Gate – sin, confession, repentance.
6. Fountain Gate – Baptism
7. Water Gate – daily watering to grow in God’s Word.
8. Horse Gate – spiritual warfare, battle, intercession, etc.
9. East Gate – Resurrection, new life

**Sanballat and Tobiah** – work to stop the walls and gates being restored. Type of Satan.

* Verbal attack – mocking
* Physical attack – violent assaults against the workers.
* False Peace – compromise

**Reforming the Community**

* Usury abolished, restoration of lands, fields, vineyards, olive groves, and houses.
* Teaching God’s Law – Nehemiah 8:2-3, 7-8.
* Confession of Sin – Nehemiah 9:1-3 (entire chapter contains the specific sins they confessed)
* Renewal of the Covenant
* Foreigners Excluded
* Tithes Restored – care, maintenance of the Temple, and provision for Levitical Priests.
* Sabbath Restored – gates closed for commerce on Saturday.
* Mixed Marriages forbidden.

**Psalm 119** – probably written during this time.

**Book of Esther**

**Main Characters**

* Esther – Replaces Queen Vashi.
* Mordecai – descendant of Shimei who King David spared.
* Haman – descendant of King Agag of the Amalekites – King Saul’s failure (1 Sam 15)
* King Ahasuerus

Mordecai saves King Ahasuerus from a plot to kill him.

* Haman plots to kill all the Jews – Mordecai refuses to pay Haman homage – becomes the target.
* The Kings grants permission to Haman to kill all the Jews.
* Esther to Intercede – key verse in the book Esther 4:11-14. “For such a time as this.”
* Esthers Banquet – Hamans’s pride and folly.
* Mordecai is honored.
* Haman is exposed and hanged along with his 10 sons.
* Mordecai is promoted.
* The Jews destroy their enemies.
* Feast of Purim Instituted.