

The Book of Esther

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General Information

The name of God is not found in the book, neither is there any indirect reference made to Him. But nowhere in the Scripture is God's care for His people more evident. The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther were written about the same time and record events around the same period of history.

The Jews had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar. Then his kingdom was conquered by the Medes and the Persians. They were good to the Jews.

In Ezra 1 we find that Cyrus issued a proclamation calling together those who had the desire to return to Jerusalem to build the house of the Lord. There were those who responded, a feeble remnant, but the majority chose to remain in Babylon. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell of the experiences of this faithful remnant as they struggled against great difficulties to build the Temple, the wall and the city.

The book of Esther tells of the experience of those who chose to stay in Babylon. As a point of interest those who stayed in Babylon became so involved in the affairs of the world that they were swallowed up in the nations and lost their identity. They are known today as the "lost ten tribes of Israel." That is, lost so far as man is concerned, but not lost to God.

Let me make one comment here about the problems which the Jews encountered at this time. They were brought upon them because they had chosen a path which was in their own self-interest rather than God's.

So that much of the trouble they encountered was of their own making.

Chapter 1

Read verses 1-4 and note the extent of the Persian kingdom. This is the “silver kingdom which succeeded the “load of gold.” See Daniel 2. This first put on by Ahasureus was a lavish affair, but was very orderly.

v. 9—At the same time as the men were feasting, Vashti the queen was having a feast for the women.

v. 10-12—The king sent for the queen, but the queen refused to come to him.

The rest of the chapter tells of the wrath of the king, the advice of the wise men, the banishment of Vashti from the king’s house, and the decree sent into all the empire that the man was to be the head of his house.

Let me try and apply this. These Jews were happy in their worldly surroundings. They had what the NT calls a “form of godliness.” But despite the declension there were a few faithful ones. This would approximate to the conditions laid down in Revelation 3:1-6, which of course would apply to us today.

v. 1—The church lives in name only, it is really dead.

v. 2—The faithful remnant is instructed to strengthen the things that remain, lest they also die.

v. 3—We should be vigilant in the things of the Lord, because He may come at any moment.

v. 4—There were a few who had not become contaminated with the world.

v. 5—For our faithfulness our Lord will confess our name before His Father and before His angels.

Chapter 2

In the early part of the chapter a search for a successor to Vashti is commenced. In verses 5-7 we are introduced to two more of the principals of the story: Mordecai and Esther.

v. 9—Esther is brought to the king's house and is prepared for a year before she is presented to the king as a possible successor to Vashti.

v. 10—Esther was a Jew, but she told no one.

v. 15—She is presented to the king and to her credit she added nothing to her natural charm. She obtained favor in his sight.

v. 17—The king loved Esther, and put the crown on her head and made her queen.

v. 19—Mordecai sat in the king's gate. He had been promoted to a petty judge.

v. 21-23—Mordecai saves the king's life.

God can work for His servants under any circumstances.

Esther 2 & 3

Esther had been married to the king for four years. During these 4 years the king had fought many battles and suffered humiliating defeats. Esther gave him the measure of consolation that he required. In honor of the occasion the king gave some kind of tax relief to the provinces.

Verses 21-23 show how Mordecai saved the king's life. He told Esther of the plot, and she in turn told the king. The two would be murderers were taken and hanged. The act of Mordecai was recorded in the book in which valiant deeds were recorded.

In chapter 3 we are introduced to the fourth of the principals in the story: Haman. The chapter is taken up with his plot to exterminate the Jews.

v. 1—Haman is promoted.

v. 2—All the king's servants were required to bow down to him, but Mordecai refused to do this. The reason was the Mordecai was a Benjamite and refused to honor a descendant of Agag who was Israel's bitter enemy. See verse 10. Haman was infuriated at this. Also, the nationality of Mordecai was exposed.

v. 6—Haman, after discovering that Mordecai's refusal to bow before him was based on religious motives, decided that there was only one solution to the problem, "destroy all the Jews."

v. 7—The astrologers and magicians were called to determine which day would bring destruction on the Jews. They cast lots and the day was fixed. Compare

Proverbs 16:33—"When the lot is cast into the lap, the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord."

v. 8-11—Haman reveals his great cunning. He made the proposition to the king that he exterminate the people who were displeased in the kingdom, who had laws of their own, and who disobeyed the king's laws. When the subjects of kings bowed down and worshipped them they did so as deity. The proud Jew, though they obeyed the laws of the land, could not and would not do homage to mere man—they worshipped God.

v. 9—Haman offered to bribe the king to massacre the Jews (10,000 talents = 18 million dollars).

v. 10—The king took his ring and gave it to Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Investing him with kingly power.

v. 11—The king refused the bribe but gave Haman the authority to slaughter millions of his subjects. Modern instances of the same brutality.

v. 12—The scribes were called to prepare the death warrants.

v. 13—The letters were sent by parts. There were men on Persian horses, who could not be hindered by snow, rain, heat or by the darkness of the night. These letters contained the order to slaughter the Jews and all who helped could take their property for a reward.

v. 15—The capital city Shushan was perplexed.

Amalek

His origin—Genesis 36:12.

Timna bore a son to Eliphaz, Esau's son, whose name was Amalek. Amalek sprang from Esau.

Esau and Jacob were twins and when they were being born they struggled together. This is a picture of the flesh warring against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. Esau was the first-born, then Jacob. 1 Corinthians 15:46.

The true character of Amalek is seen in Exodus 17. They were the constant enemy of Israel, forever preying upon the weak and those who could not keep up with the movements of the nation.

1 Samuel 15—Saul was asked to slay the Amalekites. He was to “utterly destroy them and spare them not.” He disobeyed and spared Agag, the king. The prophet Samuel carried out God’s instructions and killed the king. Someone of the family somehow escaped and six hundred years later, a royal Amalekite and a descendent of King Saul confront each other again.

Haman is promoted, and all fall down and worship him, except one old unyielding man, Mordecai.

Mordecai’s stand for God was the beginning of his rise to power. At first it would seem that Mordecai’s stand jeopardized the whole nation. Men of God in all dispensations have acted in this fashion. Noah built a great ship on dry land. Moses forsook Egypt. Caleb cried, “We are well able to overcome.” Gideon went forth to war with lamps and pitches. David fought a giant with a shepherd’s sling and stones. Daniel opened his windows toward Jerusalem to pray to the God of heaven. Paul lived for God in the midst of opposition.

With people of this caliber God is well pleased. Mordecai became the savior of his nation because God so honored him. Satan’s motive was to destroy the people of God

through Haman. God's desire was to preserve His people through Mordecai.

Esther 4 & 5

Esther 4

At our last meeting we considered with you Haman's promotion and Haman's plot to exterminate the Jews. Before we made the application we saw the postman on horse delivering the edict that sealed the doom of the Jews.

Chapters 4 and 5 could be entitled "Esther's intercession before the king."

v. 1-3—The decree to kill the Jews may have brought gratification to Haman, but among the Jews it produced some heart-rending scenes. This proclamation was final because it had been sealed with the royal signet.

v. 4—Esther's maid tells her of Mordecai's conduct. She also sent other clothes for him to wear which he did not accept.

v. 5—Esther sends a trusted servant to find out the reason for Mordecai's conduct. Notice Esther's ignorance of the real situation.

Verses 6-9 contain Mordecai's reply to the queen's inquiry.

v. 8—Finally Mordecai asked that Esther intercede for her people. Mordecai's request was most unorthodox.

Verses 11-12 explain this and also gives the penalty for disobeying court etiquette. To further complicate matters she had not been summoned by the king for thirty days. One can understand Esther's reluctance.

v. 13-14—In these verses Mordecai reminds Esther of her own position. She is a Jew and she will lose her life anyway.

v. 14—Furthermore the salvation of the Jews depended on her action. Then Mordecai suggested to her that perhaps God had put her in the position of Queen to save her people.

v. 15-16—Esther's reply to this strong appeal was to ask Mordecai to gather all the Jews together in Shushan and fast for three days and nights. Then she would go in to the king, contrary to the law, "and if I perish, I perish."

Esther 5

The days of fasting are finished and the Queen ventures into the king's presence. Esther has laid her life on the line. She has practically forfeited her life to save her people.

v. 2—Esther's youth and beauty touched the heart of the king. He held out to her the golden scepter. She drew near and touched the scepter and was received. God had worked on her behalf.

v. 3—The king knew that some special request had brought the Queen into his presence.

v. 4—Esther's request. She asked that Haman be present at the feast.

v. 5—The king ordered Haman to attend. This was a great honor for Haman.

v. 6—The king reaffirms his promise to his beloved queen.

v. 7-8—Esther has not the liberty or perhaps the courage to put her case to the king. So she requests a postponement for 24 hours.

v. 9—Haman has honored and rejoiced at being invited to meet with the king and queen again. On his way here he saw Mordecai sitting in the king's gate. Everyone jumped to attention except Mordecai.

v. 10-12—Haman restrained himself. On arriving here he called all his friends together and boasted of his riches, the number of his children, his promotion, and finally, being invited to attend with the king, banquets arranged by Esther the queen.

v. 13—There was a fly in the ointment. "All this availeth me nothing as long as I see Mordecai sitting in the king's gate."

v. 14—In the eyes of his friends and his vindictive wife this was not a difficult situation to deal with. They said to hang the upstart. The gallows were approximately 75 feet high. They said, "When you get rid of the obnoxious Jew then go and enjoy yourself at the Queen's banquet."

Applications

Chapter 4

Picture the Jews under the sentence of death. They knew it and their hearts were filled with fear. This is accomplished by the work of the Spirit. See John 3:36—"The wrath of God abideth on him." "Death has passed upon all men for all have sinned." "It is appointed unto men once to die, after this the judgment." People can and do ignore this. The judgment of God with regard to sin is far greater than the judgment placed upon the

Jews. "Because there is wrath, beware lest He take thee away with His stroke, then a great ransom cannot deliver thee."

Our Lord Jesus not only took his life in His hands, but He gave it willingly to deliver all who will believe from everlasting damnation.

Chapter 5

v. 3—The king gave Esther "a signed, blank check." What will our Lord not give us? "My God shall supply all your needs." God is not enriched by withholding nor impoverished by giving. He says to us, "What is your request?"

v. 13—Pride. "The feet of sinners are set in slippery places." "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." "When cometh pride, then cometh shame: but the lowly is wisdom." Esther was an intercessor. We should be also. 1 Timothy 2:1. Christ also is our intercessor—Romans 8:27; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 11:25; Romans 8:26.

Esther 6 & 7

Esther 6

v. 1—The king's insomnia. "Although the name of God is not mentioned in this book, the hand of God is plainly to be seen throughout." "God is behind all the scenes, but praise His name He moves all the scenes that He is behind."

To all appearances Satan was having his own way. The day was fixed for the destruction of the Jews. The day was fixed for the hanging of Mordecai.

See verse 4 here. Haman also could not sleep, so he comes to the king early for permission to slay or hang Mordecai.

For a king not to sleep was nothing unusual. When sleep had left him he asked for the book of chronicles to be brought and read to him. As his servants read, they came to the record where Mordecai had saved the king's life.

v. 3—Ahasuerus asks what reward had been given Mordecai. His servants informed him that no reward or honor had been given him.

v. 4—At this point Haman arose to speak to the king about Mordecai's death.

v. 5—Haman is invited into the king's presence.

v. 6—When Haman was in the king's presence, the king asked the question. Haman thought that he was the man concerned and his wicked scheming heart went to work quickly.

v. 7—Is the beginning of Haman's answer.

v. 8—Haman fell to the same sin that caused the fall of Satan. PRIDE. Ezekiel 28:17. Haman is the very incarnation of this one.

Verses 8 and 9 contain what Haman suggests should be done to the man the king delights to honor. He reckoned he was fixing his own destiny, he was even aiming to be as prominent and powerful as the king himself.

v. 10—Think of how Haman must have felt. "Let nothing fail of all that you have spoken."

v. 11—Then Haman took the house, etc.

v. 12—Mordecai came to the king's gate, and all men were bowing before him. Haman ran to his house mourning and covered his head and mourned in the deepest sense. He saw the gallows.

v. 13-14—What happened when Haman reached home.

1. He told his wife and friends all about the turn of events.

2. They told him that this was serious, that he could not possibly stand against Mordecai the obnoxious Jew.

3. As they were talking the king's servants came to escort him to Esther's banquet. Had things been right he would not have required to be reminded or escorted to this banquet. Haman's pride was gone and he was a very humble man. Little did he realize what would befall him ere the day was over.

Esther 7

The queen's second banquet.

v. 1—The honored guests are mentioned. There is no lack of confidence, because in presenting her case Esther had probably heard of the morning's proceedings.

v. 2—"What is your request Queen Esther?"

v. 3-4—Esther's request.

1. She pleads for her own life.

2. She pleads for her people's lives.

3. For she says that she has been sold and her people had been sold to be slain.

4. She said if we had been sold as bond-servants, I would have never made this request.

v. 5—This whole thing came as a surprise to Ahaseurus. Who would seek to kill his beloved queen? Who would seek to destroy her people? Esther's nationality was not yet known. He did not know she was a Jew. Who is the man who would dare to do this?

v. 6—The adversary, the enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid.

v. 7—Ahaseurus is charged for a moment as he begins to realize how Haman has used him. He gets up and goes out into the garden to think this over. Then Haman stood before the queen to plead for his life.

v. 8—In desperation Haman oversteps the bounds of court etiquette and ordinary decency by throwing himself on the couch where the queen was reclining. At this point the king returned and saw Haman on the couch. He took the wrong meaning out of it. Then the servants covered Haman's face, a token of the death sentence.

v. 9—Harbonah, one of the king's servants, was quick to discern the king's mind. He informed him of the gallows that Haman had made to hang Mordecai on. The king said, "Hang him on it."

v. 10—Haman was hanged immediately. The king's anger died down.

Applications

The king's sleeplessness.

His calling for the book of records. It was noted that Mordecai had never been rewarded, but had also never complained.

Note God's hand in all that.

As God worked for Mordecai in the past, He still works for His people today. 1 Peter 3:12, 5:7; Proverbs 3:5-6; Jeremiah 17:5-8; Luke 11:9-10.

The actions of Haman depicts the wickedness of the human heart. Jeremiah 17:9-10; Psalm 37:35-36; Psalm 73.

The prosperity of the wicked. Asaph could not understand how the wicked could prosper. When he thought of this it was too painful for him. In the presence of God his problems were settled, he understood their end.

Esther 8, 9 & 10

In the book of Esther, we find many characters and a valuable story with lessons of application to our own spiritual lives. Let us look specifically at Esther 8-10 and what these events teach us.

First, in Esther 8:1-4, we see that Mordecai is exalted after his run-in with Haman, who has been hanged as a punishment by the king. Esther has been given all of Haman's possessions, and has reported her relation to Mordecai to King Xerxes; thus, Mordecai is brought into his presence. The king gives Mordecai Haman's ring he has taken from him, and Esther sets Mordecai over the house of Haman (meaning he gives him control of his estate and possessions). This event describes Mordecai's sudden rise in power and identifies Esther as a suppliant. We also see the beautiful display of grace extended by the king in this circumstance, despite the fact that he is not a Jew like Esther and Mordecai.

Later, we see Esther petitioning the king, pleading for the Jews. We should note that she does not plead for them because of what they have done, but because of who they are. She calls them "my people" and "my family." (Esther 8:6) We see Esther's plea avails with the king, because Mordecai is authorized to write a decree assuring the Jews' safety, which no man can remove. Then, the scribes are called in to write out the decree. This decree is to be sent to the furthest points of his kingdom with a copy written in every language; the Jews are to receive a copy of the decree as well. Now, Mordecai has the authority and power of the king behind him! These letters holding the decree were sent

by every conceivable mode of transportation since it needed to be accomplished in a hurry - less than nine months remained before the Jews would be exterminated. These decrees were holding the message of salvation for the Jews, so they hastened the mission. (See Esther 8:9-14) Then, far exceeding the grace already extended to the Jews, the decree from the king also allows the Jews power to defend themselves against their enemies! Now we see Mordecai as beloved and exalted before the people. He arranges for the dispatch of the decree, and then goes out to the people as the second in power. (See Esther 8:15) This message is an indication that the Jews experienced great joy during this prosperous time. Many people probably abandoned their heathen religions and became Jews. (See Esther 8:17)

Now let us take a look at the events of Esther 9. This chapter begins by telling us of the deliverance of the Jews on the day that they were supposed to be conquered by their enemies. They have gathered themselves together and destroyed their enemies, and now the people who once have hated and opposed them now fear them and bow before Mordecai's authority! (See Esther 9:1-4) Mordecai's power has become great; even authorities are responding to Mordecai and helping the cause of the Jews. (See Esther 9:3) We also see the Jews' victories over their enemies, where they slay five hundred men in Susa in one day! Haman's sinful opposition of the Jews indeed serves to terminate his family, when all his sons are slain by the Jews. We have even more evidence of the king's continued grace to the Jews through Esther's relationship with him, when the king asks if Esther has any other requests! (See Esther

9:12) She requests that, since the job is not finished in Susa, that there be an extension in order to defeat her people's enemies, and that the bodies of Haman's sons be hung up for all to see as an example. This request is almost immediately done, and the following day, another five hundred are killed in Susa! Then, we see that out in the provinces, Jews have defended themselves and killed 75,000 Medes and Persians who are their enemies.

Notice that they do not take any of the possessions of those whom they kill. (Esther 9:5-16) Then, the Jews feast and rejoice in Susa when these victories have been won, celebrating throughout the land and giving gifts to one another as a remembrance. This celebration initiated is now called the feast of Purim, recollected by Jews today. (See Esther 9:18-22) Finally, in Esther 10, we read the record of the advancement of Mordecai that is said to have been recorded in "the annals of the kings of Media and Persia." (Esther 10:2)

This story of the exaltation of Mordecai has a spiritual application for us today. We know that Mordecai goes from being a poor, unknown Jew, to second in the kingdom of this great monarch of Xerxes. He never pushes himself or exalts himself, yet God is fully responsible for exalting him. In Philippians 2:3-4, we see this same directive from Paul, when he says we should "do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." Also in Matthew 23:12, Jesus teaches, "He that humbles himself shall be exalted, he who exalts himself shall be humbled."

We should be encouraged by Esther's supplication and the King's acknowledgment of her in granting her

request in Esther 8. This should show us the value of prayer and exhort us to pray fervently and ask for great things from God. Furthermore, the men carrying the good news of the edict are commanded to go quickly and deliver the message of life. We have likewise been commissioned to take the message of life to the perishing. Jesus commands us to “Go into all the world.” (Mark 16:15) The Jewish population receives the message in Esther with great joy, just as today the Christian population should joyfully receive this great gospel message of salvation!

We learn from the deliverance of the Jews that God is able in every circumstance and nothing is impossible with Him. God Himself asks Jeremiah, “Is anything too hard for me?” (Jeremiah 32:27) Scripture is rife with examples of God doing and performing seemingly impossible things. Daniel in the lion’s den, the walls of Jericho, and Isaac being born to Sarah when she is ninety years old are just a few examples of God’s performance of miracles in the history of Scripture. We can also learn from the joyous feast of Purim, which remembers this great story of Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews’ salvation in a miraculous event by recalling the sacrificial and redeeming death of our Lord Jesus for us.