

Introduction to the Book of Esther

Introduction: Tonight, as we come to our study of Esther there are several things we must consider before we get into chapter 1 of the book.

I. Characteristics, Conditions and Date of the Book

Esther is one of two books of the Bible in which the name of God is never mentioned. The other is the Song of Solomon. There is no mention of the Law in this book. There is no mention of prayer in this book. There is no mention of sacrifices and offerings in this book. There is not even one mention of this book in the New Testament. There is no mention of Satan in this book. These points alone make this book unique.

The events of this book take place in Babylon under the rule of the Persians. At the time of the events recorded in this book, some of the Jews had returned to their homeland from the captivity. Those who had returned were struggling to get the nation reestablished and to get worship reestablished. It had taken the Jews 21 years to get the Temple completed after they returned from the captivity. While the Jews that had returned to their homeland struggled to get back to a "new" normal, most of the Jews remained in Babylon. They made the choice not to return to their homeland. They were not submitting to the Lord's command. God had revealed how long the captivity would last, and that they were to flee Babylon when the captivity was over.

Jeremiah 29:10

¹⁰ For thus saith the LORD, *That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.*

Isaiah 48:20

²⁰ *Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The LORD hath redeemed his servant Jacob.*

Jeremiah 50:8

⁸ *Remove out of the midst of Babylon, and go forth out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be as the he goats before the flocks.*

Jeremiah 51:6

⁶ Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the LORD's vengeance; he will render unto her a recompence.

These were the commands given by the Lord, but there were many who were in no hurry to return to the homeland. In the midst of this group, we find Mordecai and Esther.

In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah we are given some insight into the spiritual state of the Jews at this time.

Ezra 9:1-4

Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

² *For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.*

³ *And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.*

⁴ *Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.*

Nehemiah 13:23-27

²³ *In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab:*

²⁴ *And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people.*

²⁵ *And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.*

²⁶ *Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin.*

27 Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?

The words of Ezra and Nehemiah help us to understand the spiritual state of the Jews at the time of the events of the book of Esther. I suppose this may be the reason we do not read of any prayer being offered nor the mention of the Lord's name nor any mention of the Law. They were not living in obedience to the Word of God. The Jews had joined with the world/Babylon and they were in a weakened condition. They were experiencing the curses that God had foretold in Deuteronomy 28.

Deuteronomy 28:15, 45, 48-50

15 But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee:

45 Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee:

48 Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee.

49 The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand;

50 A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young:

II. The Purpose of the Book

Now getting back to the book of Esther, while God is never mentioned in this letter, we shall still see Him working on every page. There are two purposes of this book.

1. **To remind the Jewish remnant of the faithfulness of God in keeping His promises to the nation.** In the book we shall see God's preservation of His people even while they are living in disobedience.

Application:

This letter will contain a great amount of encouragement for our lives. We too shall see that in the ordinary affairs of life God is working. He is working while we are often consumed with the daily activities of life. He works all things after the counsel of His will.

Ephesians 1:10-12

¹⁰ *That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:*

¹¹ *In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:*

¹² *That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.*

2. The second purpose in this letter is to explain the Feast of Purium.

Each time the nation would celebrate the feast they would be reminded of how God preserved them in Babylon when they were under a death sentence.

As we study this book, let us be looking for God's providential working behind the scenes. Let us also be mindful of Satan's wicked activity, as he too is deeply involved in the affairs of men. Understanding these this will help the book to come alive with truth and meaning as never before.

Now let us step into the opening verses of the book of Esther.

III. A Queen is Deposed

Before we get into the verses let us get the proper mindset first. As we enter this book keep in mind that God has a plan and a purpose. His purpose is to place Esther as Queen of Persia. God knows all about what will transpire with wicked Haman. He knows the Jews will come under a death sentence and that they will be in need of deliverance. He could stop Haman by taking his life or by some other means, but God has another way of placing Esther in as the Queen. He will work "behind the scenes." He will control all circumstances and events, allowing men to go their own way and to do their own thing, but ultimately to accomplish His will. An example of this would be the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. God allowed Judas and wicked men to betray and crucify His Son, but in the end, they had perfectly fulfilled His plan.

Luke 22:22

²² *And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!*

Acts 2:22-23

²² Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

²³ Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

As we get into the story, we shall see that God will use an angry king and a disobedient woman to accomplish His purpose of placing Esther in the position of Queen.

Notice Esther 1:1-4

Here we are introduced to the Ahasuerus who is Xerxes. He is the king of a large domain that is made up of 127 provinces. In the third year of his reign, he holds a feast that would last 180 days. This means the feast lasted for 6 months. In verse 4 we are told that the purpose of the feasts was to show the riches of his kingdom and to show the honor of his excellent majesty. This was nothing more than a feast of boasting. This was demonstration of the king's pride as he displayed the riches of HIS kingdom and the excellency of HIS majesty. This reminds us of what Solomon wrote.

Proverbs 16:18-19

¹⁸ Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

¹⁹ Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.

These verses would be fulfilled. According to Herodotus, the Greek historian, it was during these months that Xerxes was planning a military expedition against Greece (an attempt to add to his 127 provinces!), which later proved to be a disaster!

Just to give you a little insight into what Xerxes was like I want you to notice an article from brewminate.com. This article shows how brutal this king could be. The article tells of something which happened as Xerxes and his Persian military were preparing to march against Greece.

"Prior to Xerxes' departure for the Hellespont, a bad omen in the form of an eclipse appeared in the sky but Xerxes, assured by his diviners that it meant nothing, proceeded with his plans. Pythias, however, recognized the omen as a warning of impending doom and, emboldened by Xerxes' generosity and kindness, asked if his eldest son could be released

from the army so that he would have at least one son to care for him in his old age and carry on as heir. Xerxes became enraged at this request as it meant that Pythias doubted his chances of success. He had the eldest son removed from the ranks, cut him in half, placed the two sections of the corpse on either side of the road, and marched his troops away between them."

Considering what history tells us about Xerxes and his kingdom, I believe he was a man under the power and control of Satan and the desire to expand his kingdom is another attempt by Satan to establish his global government and get his kingdom. I believe Xerxes is a type of the Anti-Christ.

At this time, the Persian Empire was the largest the world had ever seen. It covered what we call today Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel; and also, parts of modern-day Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and Arabia.

In this book we will see the attempt by Haman to destroy the Jews which is a picture of the attempt that will take place in the Great Tribulation. Here in Esther the attempt to kill the Jews is because Satan knew that from them would come the Messiah who will eventually destroy him. In the book of Revelation, the attempt to destroy the Jews by Satan is to keep Jesus from returning and to keep Him from setting up His Kingdom, because both the promise of His return and the promise of His Kingdom is to the Nation of Israel. So, Satan believes if He can destroy Israel, Jesus will not return, and He will not establish His Kingdom and then he can rule the world forever.

Notice Esther 1:5-8

At the end of the 180-day feast of boasting there was another 7-day feast. This was a drinking feast. There was royal wine in abundance and so we can only imagine how intoxicated the people were at the end of the 7 days. They were not compelled to drink but they were free to drink all they desired.

This drunken state will lead to a major shake up in Xerxes kingdom.

Conclusion:

This drinking party and what will happen afterwards brings a verse to my mind.

Habakkuk 2:15

¹⁵ Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!

God will allow sinful people to chase after the lusts of the flesh, to indulge in their sins, and in the midst of it all He will accomplish His purpose. He is doing this today.