

1 Study of Esther

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Historic Timeline:

- 605-536 BC.... Seventy Years Of Captivity
- 536 BC.....Zerubbabel Returns With About 50,000 Jews To Rebuild The Temple. (Ez. 1-2)
- 516 BC..... The Temple Is Completed. (Ez. 3-6)
- 478 BC.....Esther Becomes Queen Of Persia. (Es. 2)
- 455 BC Ezra Returns To Jerusalem. (Ez. 7-10)
- 445 BC.....Nehemiah Builds The Wall. (Ne. 1-13)

The Sovereignty Of God

- Creation: Accounts For The Existence Of The Universe.

Ge 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

- Preservation: Accounts For The Continuation Of The Universe.

Col 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

- Providence: Accounts For The Progress And The Development Of The Universe.

Da 4:35 And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

This book is one of two in the Bible that doesn't mention the name of God (the other is the Song of Solomon). However, even though His name is not mentioned, His sovereignty through providence is seen as the events unfold. The key to understanding the book of Esther is in understanding God's providence.

Ro 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

"Providence is the hand of God in the glove of history."

The book of Esther gives the story of what takes place with those Jews who did not return to Jerusalem after the decree of Cyrus. Note: Ezra 1:1-4

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I. The Danger to God's People 1:1-3:15

A. The rejection of Vashti 1:1-22

1. Ahasuerus' (Xerxes) feast and request (1-11)

a. The probable reason for the festivities was to raise the morale of his kingdom officials,

b. NOTE: In 400 BC, Xerxe's father, Darius the Great, had led an unsuccessful campaign against Greece.

c. Now, he was planning another attack against the Greeks (which took place in 480 BC)

d. To close out the period of feasting he held a 7-day royal feast with all the wine you can drink.

Da 11:2 And now will I shew thee the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth shall be far richer than they all: and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia.

1) Cyrus 539-529 B.C.

2) Cambyses 529-522 B.C.

3) Bardiya 522-521 B.C.

4) Darius 521-486 B.C.

5) Xerxes 486-465 B.C. (Ahasuerus)

e. The women were also enjoying a feast prepared by Vashti (beautiful woman) the Queen.

f. At the close of this seven day feast came Xerxe's request.

2. Vashti's refusal and rejection (12-22)

a. She refused to come and put herself on display for the king and his drunken friends

b. It took great courage for her to deny the request of the supreme monarch

c. It resulted In her banishment and lose of her position as Queen.

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d. The men turned her refusal into a national crisis threatening family in the kingdom.

B. The selection of Esther 2:1-20

1. "After these things ..." (1)

a. Remember that between chapters one and two Ahasuerus launched his unsuccessful attack against Greece.

b. He had returned to Persia a defeated man and was thinking of his queen

c. He was, no doubt, longing for her to comfort him but she was gone and he couldn't bring her back

2. The search for a new queen (2-4)

a. The king's servants suggested that he hold a beauty contest with participants from all the provinces.

b. The king would choose one to replace Vashti c. This pleased Ahasuerus and everything was set in motion.

3. The background of Esther (5-7)

a. Her Hebrew name was Hadassah and both her parents were dead.

b. Mordecai was her cousin, and he took her in and raised her as his own daughter,

c. Mordecai's great-grandfather, Kish, had been taken in the Babylonian captivity.

d. Esther is described as being 'fair and beautiful'.

4. Esther's preparation (8-9)

a. Mordecai brought her to the palace and placed her in the custody of Hegai.

b. It was his job to prepare these young ladies for the contest.

c. The process would take 12 months cf v 12

d. Immediately Esther became his favorite among all the young women.

5. Mordecai's precautions (10-11)

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a. He had instructed her to not reveal that she was a Jew or that she was his cousin

b. He kept a close check on her throughout the entire year.

6. The process of selection (.12-14)

a. Each young lady would enter one at a time into the King's house,

b. Those who were not chosen queen would become one of the King's concubines.

c. They would only be allowed to come before the King whenever he requested.

7. Esther is chosen (15-17)

a. 'She required nothing...' means no extras in an attempt to impress the king - she relied upon her own natural beauty,

b. She was beautiful and everyone was in agreement.

c. Esther was chosen to be the queen by Ahasuerus in the tenth month (Jan) 478 B.C.

8. Ahasuerus celebrates (18-20)

a. He made a great feast - he lost his queen at the lost feast.

b. He made a release - could be a release of taxes, or prisoners, or a holiday,

c. He added to his harem - v19

d. Mordecai remains in the king's service and Esther continues to be obedient to her guardian.

C. The Devotion of Mordecai 2:21-23

1. Mordecai overheard an assassination plot against King Ahasuerus. (Why an attempt on the king?)

2. He told Esther - who told the king - who ordered their execution and recorded it in his diary. (this is a very important event)

3. Why didn't Mordecai tell the king? He could only trust Esther.

D. The Decree of Haman 3:1-15

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1. Haman's promotion (1-2a)

a. He is a descendent of King Agag cf. 1 Sam. 15:1-3, 8

1) Agag was an Amalekite.

2) Amalek was the grandson of Esau

Ge 36:12 And Timna was concubine to Eliphaz Esau's son; and she bare to Eliphaz Amalek: these were the sons of Adah Esau's wife.

3) Historically the Amalekites were bitter enemies of the children of Israel

b. He is promoted by King Ahasuerus

1) His position was above all the other princes

2) His position entitled him the same type of reverence that the King received,

3) NOTE: This was not just honor and respect - this was actual worship as a god.

Da 6:7 All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions.

2. Mordecai's Perseverance (2b-4)

a. Mordecai refused to bow and reverence Haman.

b. His basis for refusal was that he was a Jew.

c. This is reminiscent of the three Hebrew children and the fiery furnace - remember Mordecai's great-grandfather Kish was taken in the Babylonian captivity,

d. When the other servants tried to convince him to bow down to Haman he wouldn't listen to them so they went to Haman with the news.

3. Haman's prejudice (5-6)

a. When Haman heard this he was infuriated like many individuals when they receive promotions his pride had swelled considerably.

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b. He decided it wouldn't be enough just to eliminate Mordecai.

c. He set about to destroy all the Jews that were in the kingdom - remember, it was not known that Esther was also a Jew.

4. Haman's plot (7-9) Read only v 7

a. He and his fortune-tellers cast lots to determine what day should be set aside for the execution. v 7

b. The seriousness of what Haman plotted to do must not be overlooked.

1) Satan has, since the beginning of creation, tried to foil God's plan of redemption of mankind,

2) This must also be viewed as one of Satan's attempts to destroy the 'Promised seed'.

3) God could not allow this to happen - so we see the providence of God at work already.

c. Haman approaches King Ahasuerus with certain recommendations - notice how subtle he is:

1) There is a certain people - never names them.

2) Their laws are different than any other group.

3) They refuse to obey the laws of the King.

4) They are of no value to the King so let them be destroyed.

d. Haman doesn't stop there - he makes the king 'an offer he can't refuse'.

1) Haman puts the icing on his cake by volunteering to pay for the whole thing.

2) 10,000 talents of silver to be paid directly to the king: a talent = 125 lb. so 625 tons of silver = 10,000 talents.

3) Haman obviously knew the king's weakness, NOTE: just as Satan knows yours and mine.

5. Ahasuerus accepts the bribe (10-15)

a. He gave Haman his ring v10-11

1) The king's ring was a symbol of his authority

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2) If you possessed the king's ring you could do just about anything without anyone questioning your commands.

3) The king literally gave Haman a blank check.

b. His scribes were called v 12-15

1) Letters were prepared in various languages according to the provinces of the kingdom.

2) These letters were then sent by special riders so that all things might be made ready.

3) The day was set aside upon which every Jew was to be executed and their possessions stolen.

4) Haman then proceeds to celebrate his seeming victory.

II. The Decision of God's Servant 4:1-5:14

A. Mordecai's appeal to Esther 4:1-14

1. The mourning of Mordecai (1-3)

a. As soon as Mordecai found out what Haman had done he began to mourn.

b. He mourned publicly unashamed of his heritage.

c. He identified with the plight of his people and was part of a national mourning over the King's decree.

2. The concern of Esther (4-6)

a. She sent a change of clothes, but Mordecai refused them.

b. So she sent a special messenger to find out why he was still mourning,

3. The command of Mordecai (7-9)

a. He explained the particulars of Haman's plot.

b. He also sent Esther a copy of the king's decree.

c. He then commanded her to go in before the king and make supplication for her people,

4. The response of Esther (10-12)

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- a. She sends an explanation, perhaps an excuse, with regard to the royal law.
- b. Anyone who enters the king's inner court uninvited is subject to death.
- c. The only exception is when the king signals his acceptance of the individual,
- d. She goes on to explain that the king had not called for her once in the last 30 days.

5. The wisdom of Mordecai (13-14)

- a. He knew that Esther needed to be reminded of just who she was - a Jew - therefore subject to the decree as well as all other Jews.
- b. Mordecai knew God would not allow the nation of Israel to be annihilated,
- c. However, Haman would certainly make sure that all Jews in Shushan would be destroyed,
- d. Notice Mordecai's encouragement: Perhaps God allowed her to rise to her position just so she could prevent her nation's destruction.

B. Esther's answer to Mordecai 4:15-17

1. She declares three days of prayer and fasting among the Jews in Shushan.
2. After much prayer, she will go before the king, which is against the law.
3. Notice her courage now: "If I perish, I perish."

C. Esther's audience with Ahasuerus 5:1-8

1. Esther enters the king's inner court (1-3)

- a. She prepared herself for the meeting.
- b. The king saw her and held out his scepter to her.
- c. He offers her anything up to half the kingdom.

2. The first delay. (4-5)

- a. Esther was patient; she didn't immediately make her request known.
- b. Esther was not only beautiful - she was also smart.

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c. She decides to invite Haman to a banquet and then expose him before the king,

d. However, she didn't make her request known to the king instead she asked for another delay.

3. Another delay. (6-8)

a. During the banquet the King asked her again what it was she wanted.

b. He reassured her that she could have any request up to half the kingdom.

c. She lost her courage and delayed it one more day.

d. She would prepare another banquet for Haman and the King - then she would make her request,

D. Haman's arrogance over Mordecai 5:9-14

1. Haman swells with anger (9-13)

a. Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goeth before destruction,"

b. When Queen Esther invited him to another banquet he was "on top of the world".

c. But suddenly his bubble popped when Mordecai refused to honor him.

d. Like a spoiled child, Haman ran home to cry on mommy's shoulder.

e. Notice that Haman had no trouble patting himself on the back.

2. Haman takes some evil advice (14)

a. His wife and friends tempt him to take action against Mordecai.

b. Notice their lack of regard for human life.

c. Haman, because he was full of pride, agrees to this premature execution.

III. The Deliverance of God's- People 6:1-10:3

A. The defeat of Haman 6:1-7:10

1. Haman is humbled (1-14)

Why did Esther lose her courage at the first banquet and fall to speak to the king? God's providence. The events of chapter six are of primary importance to the decision of the king.

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a. A case of royal Insomnia v 1-3

- 1) Like many people - when he couldn't get to sleep he decided that some reading might do the trick.
- 2) The book of records are the same as in 2:21.
- 3) There he was reminded of what Mordecai had done for him.
- 4) And that nothing had been done for Mordecai.
- 5) Notice how the pieces are fitting together.

b. A case of mistaken identity v 4-6

- 1) By divine arrangement., Haman was at court early to seek permission to have Mordecai executed on the gallows he had built during the night,
- 2) The king heard some activity and when he found out that Haman was outside he called for him to come in.
- 3) The king asked for some advice on how to honor Mordecai for his loyalty.
- 4) But Haman, being full of pride, thought the king meant to honor him.

c. A case of hoof-In-mouth v 7-11

- 1) Since pride had impaired Haman's vision, he could only see himself and his accomplishments,
- 2) So he begins to lay it on really thick with regard to what the king should do to honor this "Individual".
- 3) He said give him the royal garments. the king's personal riding horse, and the king's crown.
- 4) Then let them be delivered by the most noble of princes 'that they may array the man'.
- 5) NOTE: what does this tell us about Haman?
 - a) His goal was to be the king
 - b) He wanted all the others to know that he was the "top dog"
 - c) He especially wanted his closest competition to be humbled by this act

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6) The king liked Haman's suggestions and ordered him to carry them out for Mordecai the Jew.

7) Haman had to fulfill them to the letter.

d. A taste of humble-pie v 12-14

1) Mordecai returns to the king's gate, dressed in royal apparel and all the rest of it.

2) But Haman couldn't stand any more humiliation and ran home to momma seeking some more sympathy.

3) Haman received no encouragement at all.

4) They told him since this first attack had failed against Mordecai, then he was destined to fall,

5) Before they had finished talking the king's servants arrived to take him to the banquet that Esther had prepared,

2. Haman is hanged (7:1-10)

a. The treachery is learned v 1-6

1) The request is revealed (1-4)

a) The king asks for a third time what Esther's request might be.

b) Once again he reminds her that she can have anything up to half of the kingdom,

c) Finally she tells him: "let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request".

d) NOTICE: she first says that her life is in danger - why?

e) Also, she never mentions that her people are the Jews - why?

f) She further explains her request by saying that she and her people had been sold - not into slavery, which she would not have protested against even though it would have been a great loss to the king - but they had been sold to be destroyed by the king's 'enemy'.

g) NOTE - Do you see the wisdom in Esther's accusation?

1. Not once does she mention the king's part in this conspiracy,

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2. He was as guilty as Haman - because he accepted the bribe and gave Haman authority.

3. But Esther allows the king an escape by referring to Haman as the king's enemy.

4. Up to this point the king probably had not made the connection, but it wouldn't be long.

2) Haman's fate is sealed (5-6)

a) The king eagerly asks who could even think of doing such a thing

b) Esther again refers to Haman as the adversary and the enemy - "...this wicked Haman."

c) At this point Haman becomes very afraid!

d) He had been listening Intently and his worst fears had now been revealed,

b. Haman was hanged on his own gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. (7-10)

1) Then the king's wrath was pacified, 2) NOTE: Why was Haman executed?

B. The decree of Ahasuerus. 8:1-17

1. Esther and Mordecai's faith is rewarded (1-2)

a. Esther received the wealth of Haman b. Mordecai received the position of Haman

2. The king's favor is received (3-8)

a. Esther once again made Intercession for her people.

b. The king favored Esther and had already promised she could have whatever she requested.

c. But once a law was made it could not be reversed.

d. However, there could be another decree sent, and he gave Mordecai the authority to solve the dilemma.

3. A new law is decreed (9-17)

a. This new decree was issued in the third month Siven or June,

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- b. That allowed the Jews 8 months to prepare for what was decreed.
 - c. The decree was sent out into every province in every language.
 - d. Basically it stated that on the day previously decreed by Haman - the thirteenth day of Adar - the Jews would be allowed to defend themselves, kill the attackers., and take spoils.
 - e. The new decree was joyfully received by the Jews, but fearfully received by others
 - f. Many decided to become Jews rather than be killed
- C. The defeat of Israel's enemies. 9:1-19
- 1. The preparation for destruction v 1-4
 - a. The day of execution finally arrived - 13th day of Adar.
 - b. This was the day that the Jews' enemies had hoped to totally destroy them - but there had been a new decree.
 - c. The Jews had prepared well for this day and they were unbeatable, "...no man could withstand them for the fear of them fell upon all people." v 2
 - d. The Persian army chose to help the Jews. v3-4
 - 1) Actually there were two decrees sent by the authority of the king,
 - 2) But they wisely decided to obey the one issued by Mordecai,
 - 3) Their decision was made out of fear - not any love or concern for the welfare of the Jews.
 - 4) They were well aware of Mordecai's power and his popularity with the king.
 - 2. The retaliation by the Jews v 5-11
 - a. The Jews destroyed their enemies - they had total dominance over them.
 - b. In Shushan the Palace they killed 500 men along with the ten sons of Haman.
 - c. However the Jews did not touch the spoil.
 - 1) By the terms of the decree they could have taken the spoil. cf. 8:11

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2) Why do you think they didn't?

3) God had provided for them to be able to defend themselves and live - that was enough.

4) They didn't need their enemies' riches because God had proved over and over that He could supply their needs.

d. The casualty report was given to the king. v 11

3. The petition made by Esther v 12-16

a. The king reports the results to Esther and asks her if she has any other requests. (12)

b. Esther was aware that there were still some enemies left so she requested two things: (13)

1) That the Jews be granted authority for another day to seek and destroy their enemies in Shushan.

2) And that Haman's ten sons be hanged,

3) What is unusual about this request?

a) They were already dead, cf, v 10

b) Why would she request that they be hanged?

De 21:22-23 And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

c) Hanging wasn't the usual means of death, but a sequel to death, in order to expose the corpse to ultimate disgrace.

1Sa 31:8-10 And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa.

And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people. And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan.

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c. The king granted her request and another 300 enemies were killed in Shushan. (15)

d. The total body count throughout the provinces was 75,000 dead. (16)

4. The celebration begins v 17-19

a. The Jews in the provinces were feasting and were celebrating on the 14th day of Adar.

b. The Jews In Shushan waited until the 15th day to celebrate.

c. So they began a two day celebration.

D. The days of Purim 9:20-32

1. The first letter from Mordecai v 20-28

a. It was decreed that these days - 14th & 15th of Adar were to be official days of celebration.

b. They were to be observed by all Jews annually from then on.

c. They called it the 'feast of Purim' because Haman had determined the day by costing lots or Purim.

2. The second letter from Mordecai and Esther v 29-32

a. In the second letter they enjoined them to fast in connection with Purim.

b. This additional part of the observance was confirmed and recorded,

c. To this day the Jews observe this on the 13th & 14th & 15th of Adar.

d. The 13th is a day of fasting commemorative of the fast of Esther (4:16) and keep the feast itself on the 14th & 15th.

E. The description of Mordecai's fame 10:1-3

1. Mordecai, who once was marked for death, was promoted to the highest position possible next to the king,

2. There he continually made intercession for his people.

3. Through the providence of God, the nation of Israel was not only preserved, but also promoted and protected!