

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

We will now turn our attention to the "those" who stayed behind in the land of captivity. The Book of Esther takes place in "Shushan", the palace, which is Susa, the ancient capital city of Persia. Do not forget that the number who stayed behind was far greater than the number who returned to Jerusalem.

The Book of Esther teaches us about the **providence** of God. Providence means: pro - before; video - I see. God saw beforehand what the people would do and even when they were out of the will of God by not going back to their homeland, they were not beyond His care. Providence then, is God providing, directing and leading people who sometimes didn't want to be led.

The Author of Esther is unknown. The name of God is never mentioned in the Book, but Matthew Henry says, "If the name of God is not here, His finger is." Esther is never quoted in the New Testament. Perhaps a reading of Deuteronomy 31:18 may give us a reason why God is not directly mentioned.

THE BOOK OF PROVIDENTIAL CARE

The Anti-Semitic Crisis - Chapters 1-5

1. The wife Vashti - Chapter 1.
2. Esther becomes queen - Chapter 2.
3. Haman schemes to kill all the Jews - Chapter 3.
4. "For such a time as this" - Chapter 4.
5. The nobility of Esther - Chapter 5.

Providential overruling of the crisis - Chapters 6-10

1. A Jew is exalted - Chapter 6.
2. A woman gets her way - Chapter 7.
3. The Jews avenged - Chapter 8.
4. The Feast of Purim instituted - Chapter 9.
5. Mordecai becomes prime minister - Chapter 10.

We have just seen an overview of the contents based on the structure of the Book. Now we will examine the people in the story.

King Ahasuerus - We know that he was a real historical figure, but he was known in secular history as Xerxes, which is the Greek form of his Persian name. He reigned over the Persian Empire from 485 - 465 B.C. According to the first verse of the Book of Esther, he reigned over a province from India to Ethiopia, with 127 provinces under his rule.

Vashti - The name means "beautiful woman". In Chapter 1 she is queen, but when she refused to show off her beauty to the king and his drunk friends, she was set aside by decree for not honoring her husband.

Esther - Ruth was a Gentile woman who married a Jew. Esther was a Jew who married a Gentile. Ruth became an ancestor of Jesus. Esther saved the people of Israel so that the Deliverer might come as promised.

Esther, the cousin of Mordecai, was a orphan adopted by Mordecai (2:7). She was a beautiful girl and was entered into a "beauty contest" in Shushan, the palace. She was made queen (2:17) but Mordecai instructed her not to tell that she was a Jew.

Mordecai - Mordecai was in the royal service of the palace among the king's servants and the King knew him as "Mordecai the Jew".

Mordecai refused to bow before Haman and because of this, Haman launched a campaign to kill the Jews. The King gave permission and sent a letter to all provinces (3:13). Mordecai sent for help from Esther asking her to plead with the King and in 4:14 he sent another letter saying: "who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such an hour as this." Esther responded by saying that she would appeal to the king even "if I perish, I perish" (4:16).

Because of Mordecai's cry for help, Esther gained freedom for the Jews from the king. Mordecai became premier of prime minister and was

exalted to the highest honor.

We learn from Mordecai the way God deals with nations and peoples to preserve His people.

Haman - Haman was an "Agagite" which is from Amalek (1 Samuel 15:8). He was a "big wheel" under the king and apparently a man of great pride. Mordecai would not bow to him so he hated all Jews. He took his hatred of the Jews to the king and had made arrangements for all Jews to be killed.

The whole meaning of the Book of Esther is found here. God's people were about to be destroyed but God used one person, Esther, at the right time (4:14).

The slaughter would have been similar to what Hitler did in the 1940s. Haman prepared a gallows for Mordecai (5:14), but Mordecai had saved the king from harm and the king heard about it and decided to honor Mordecai. The gallows that Haman prepared for Mordecai became the death trap for Haman.

The entire story is one of God's providence in the preservation of His people.

The Book of Esther closes with the establishment of the Feast of Purim. This feast celebrates the deliverance of the Jews. It was a Thanksgiving Day, for although they had forsaken God, He spared them. The name "Purim" comes from Haman casting lots (Pur) against them (9:24-26).

In reference to the story in Esther, look up the following Scriptures so that we might understand more completely God's dealings.

Proverbs 21:1 / Esther 5:2
 Philippians 4:19 / Esther 5:3
 Isaiah 54:7 / Esther 7:9-10
 Proverbs 16:33 / Esther 9:24-26

Old Testament history closes after the account of Ezra, Nehemia and the events of Esther. The main body of the rest of the Old Testament Canon of Scripture is mainly prophecy dealing with Israel before, during and after the captivity. All of the prophets shed light on God's dealings with His people.

There is much practical teaching that may be applied from the Book of Esther. I want to give you three examples that may get you started:

HAMAN - prefigures "the man of sin":
 in his name (7:6)
 in his power (3:1-3)
 in his pride (5:11)
 in his hate (3:10, 8:1, 9:10-24)
 in his doom (7:9-10)

ESTHER - prefigures the church
 in her beauty
 in her exaltation
 in her intercession

MORDECAI - prefigures the Jewish remnant through the tribulation.

FOR NEXT WEEK
 READ THE BOOK OF JOB