

9/23/18

The Woman Esther

The book of Esther is the record of God's providential faithfulness to His people, not because they are so good, better than others nor more in number, but simply because He chose them as His special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth because He loved them and faithful to His covenant.

* This was the testimony of Moses as he rehearsed the law to the second generation that would enter the land. Deut. 7:6-10

The book of Esther is one of the greatest evidences of God's faithful love to His people, while in danger of extermination.

So we want to study Esther in three ways.

- I. The book of Esther.
- II. The characters in Esther.
- III. The message of Esther.

I. The book of Esther.

- A. The book of Esther is found in the Hebrew canon.
 1. The book of Esther is found in the prophets, the third division of the Hebrew canon.
 2. The book of Esther is one of the three post-captivity historical books, the other two being Ezra and Nehemiah.

* The LXX makes 7 additions of 100 versus in the apocrypha called "The Rest of the Book of Esther".

3. The book of Esther is one of five rolls associated with Hebrew festivals which are read on special occasions during the year.
 - a. Song of Solomon at Passover, to commemorate the exodus from Egypt.
 - b. Ruth at the Feast of Weeks, the wheat harvest.
 - c. Lamentations for the fall of Jerusalem.
 - d. Ecclesiastes at the Feast of Tabernacle, the grape harvest.
 - e. Esther at the Feast of Purim, God's miraculous deliverance of the Jews from Haman.
4. The book of Esther gives accurate detailed description of Persian courts.
 - a. When the French excavations were discovered and compared to chapter four regarding Mordecai and how he was before the king's gate the ruins revealed that the House of the Woman was on the east side of the palace next to the city, and that a gate led from it into the "the street of the city", they were exact.
 - b. The same archeological digs confirmed the record of chapter five where Esther "stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house" and the king also sat upon his throne in the

royal throne in the royal house, over against the entrance of the house and that from there he “saw Esther the queen standing in the court”. Est. 5:1

* T.I.S. Bible Enc.

5. The book of Esther is the only other book in the Old Testament named after a woman.
 - a. The other is Ruth.
 - b. Esther is never quoted in the New Testament.
6. The Hebrew of Esther is much like Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles, with some Persian words.
7. The literary form has been described in many ways.
 - a. It has been said to be a “masterpiece of literature” a “literary treasure”.
 - a. It has been described as a “historical romance”.
 - b. It’s principle characters are described skillfully, portrayed with a minimum of words and have been compared to Shakespearean characters.
 - c. Various literature techniques are apparent: contrast, irony, humor, and poetic devices.
8. The canon was already established by the New Testament times, though Jesus did not mention or quote from Esther, He did not reject it, but affirmed it by the three-fold division of the Law, Prophets and Writings.

- B.** The argument against the book are as follows.
1. There is no mention of God or His name anywhere, but neither is there in the Song of Solomon.
 - a. Some have pointed out that the name of God “**Yehovah**” that is said to be present four times, being hidden in an acrostic form in the initial and final letters of successive words and “I am that I am” once. Est. 1:20, 5:4; 5:13; 7:7, 5
 - b. Remember, the people have disassociated themselves from God in disobedience to return, being out of the will of God.
 - c. God is behind the scenes in His providence working.
 2. There is no mention of prayer.
 - a. Prayer is implied throughout it, particularly when Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth. Est. 4:1
 - b. Prayer again is implied when Esther tells Mordecai to gather all the Jews in Shushan and fast for her to go before the king to petition for the Jews. Est. 4:16
 - c. Payer would certainly accompany the Feast of Purim as all feasts. Est. 9:19
 3. Herodotus the historian does not mention “Esther” the main character of the book, but gives the name of Amestris.

* Many believe Amestris and Esther to be the same one as Esther.

4. Therefore they are willing to call the book a historical romance, rather than recognizing it as inspired history.

* I rather see it as a historical romance between God and His people by the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

5. The historian Herodotus mentions Xerxes search for a queen after his defeat by Greece.
6. His description of Xerxes or Ahasueras as well as his character is consistent with what is known in secular history,
 - a. His drinking parties, extravagant gifts, irrational temper, etc.
 - b. The number of provinces he had 127. Est. 1:1
 - c. The length of his feast 180 days. Est. 1:4
* Assyrian records tell of 69,574 persons present at a ten-day palace dedication.
 - d. The choosing of Esther as his wife, fits his defeat by Greece in 480 B. C. and marrying her in 479 B. C.

C. The chronological order of the book of Esther is between chapter six and seven of the book of Ezra.

1. Zerubbabel returned in 536-7 B. C.
2. The temple was finished in 516 B. C.
3. Ahasuerus or Xerxes reigned from 485-465 B. C. and was the son of Darius I.

4. Ahasuerus is introduced to us in the third year of his reign, 483 B. C.
5. Ahasuerus or Xerxes made his disastrous expedition to Greece and returned from his naval defeat at Salamis in 480 B. C., in the sixth year of his reign.
6. Esther became his queen the next year, the seventh year of his reign, 479 B. C. Est. 2:16
7. Ezra returned to Jerusalem in 457 B. C.
8. Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem 445 B. C.
9. The book of Esther was probably written around 450-455 B. C.
 - a. It is obvious it had to be someone with firsthand knowledge and access to the chronicles of Media and Persia. Est. 10:2
 - b. Mordecai is a good candidate, but some object saying he could not have written the last statement about himself. Est. 9:20; 10:2-3
 - c. Augustine suggested Ezra as the author.
 - d. The divisions of the book of Esther is simple, it divides itself in two.
 - 1) The Jews in danger of crisis. Est. 1-5
 - 2) The Jews delivered from crisis. Est. 6-10

D. The purpose of the book of Esther.

1. First and foremost to declare the providence of God over His people.

- a. In Egypt God intervened supernaturally, but in Esther He overrules providentially by His foreknowledge.
 - b. In God's providence we see His perfect control over all the events without violating man's free-will.
2. Second to declare God's faithfulness to His covenant and the people of God.
* "He that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." Ps. 121:4
3. Third, to reveal a picture of God's people who are out of the will of God.
- a. All the Jews should of returned to Jerusalem when Cyrus gave the decree, but only around 49,897 returned with Zerubbabel. Ezra 2:64-65
 - b. Only 1,496 returned with Ezra. Ezra 7:7
 - c. The majority of the nation chose comfort, prosperity and seeming safety in place of concern, patriotism and certain safety.

Illustration

Have you ever seen a child that is not in line with the will of his or her parents, they are not a happy person!

The book of Esther reveals the hand of God!

II. The characters in Esther.

- A. Esther is the main character of the story.
 - 1. Esther had two names. Est. 2:7a-c

- a. Hadassah seems to be her Hebrew name, meaning "myrtle", appearing one time.
 - b. Her name is of Persian derivation and means "star" appearing fifty-five times.
2. Esther was a cousin to Mordecai. Est. 2:7d-g
- a. Esther was an orphan, when her mother and father died Mordecai raised Esther.
 - b. Esther was lovely and beautiful, rearing a woman of character and physical beauty.
 - c. Mordecai had adopted Esther as his daughter.
3. Esther was taken as one of the young virgins to Shushan the palace and placed under the custody of Hegai and God gave her favor. Est. 2: 8-9
4. Esther had not yet revealed her family or people in obedience to Mordecai's counsel as Mordecai daily inquired about her welfare. Est. 2:10-11
5. Esther like all other virgins after one years of preparation was escorted to the king and was given favor by God as Ahasuerus chose her above all others and placed the royal crown upon her head. Est. 2:12-18
8. Esther is the heroine of the story risking her life to intercede for her people in order to elicit a decree for the Jews to defend themselves against their massacre, as she replied to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me;

neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish!” Est. 4:16

* This is a key verse to the book!

9. Esther petitioned that the king and Haman his exalted servant come to a banquet she had prepared. Est. 5:1-8

B. The antagonist in the story is Haman.

1. Haman was an Agagite a descendant of Esau, a type of the flesh, he was advanced above all the princes. Est. 3:1
* Saul refused to destroy Agagite the king, this was the outcome. 1Sam. 15:8, 33
2. Haman was promoted by Ahasuerus above all the princes, but this one Jew would not bow down to him at the gate. Est. 3:1-2
* His name appears fiftyfour times in Esther.
3. Haman was told by the servants that Mordecai refused to heed their counsel and when he saw his refusal to bow he petitioned the king with a plan to exterminate a people in his kingdom who were rebellious, donating ten-thousand talents of silver of his own, so letters were sent throughout the kingdom. Est. 3:3-15
4. Haman again encountered Mordecai’s refusal to bow to him and being a very proud man his joy and gladness of heart was turned into indignation. Est. 5:9

5. Haman restrained himself and went home to tell how the Queen had requested no one but his presence along with the king at a banquet. Est. 5:10-13

* Haman reveals the proud and depraved nature of man, “Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.” Est. 5:13

6. Haman then received counsel from his wife and friends regarding Haman to make gallows of seventy-five feet high to hang Mordecai and he did so. Est. 5:14

C. Esther’s cousin is the supporting character Mordecai.

1. Mordecai means “little man” or “dedicated to Mars or worshipper of Mars” and his name appears sixty-two times in the book.
2. Mordecai was a Jew, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. Est. 2:5
3. Mordecai had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives and Jeconiah, Jehoiachin. Est. 2:6
 - a. It is grammatically possible that the phrase “son of kish” refers to Mordecai’s great-grandfather.
 - b. The most impressive evidence for Mordecai’s rise to power and reliable existence is based on the discovery of the

name “Marduka” equivalent to Mordecai on a cuneiform table from Borshippa.

* He is identified as a high official in the royal court at Susa during the early years of the reign of Xerxes.

4. Mordecai sat at the king's gate one day and he discovered a plot to kill King Ahasuerus and he told Esther and she revealed it to the king in Mordecai's name, resulting in two of the king's eunuchs were hung. Est. 2:21-23
5. Mordecai would not bow down or pay homage to Haman, as the king had promoted, so he marked Mordecai as his enemy. Est. 3:1-2
* He bow down to only One, Yahweh God!
6. Mordecai was spoken to by other servants about his actions as we have noted, but he refused to bow and Haman knowing this was filled with wrath and sought the king to destroy all the Jews, since Mordecai was a Jew. Est. 3:3-6
7. Mordecai hearing of the planned destruction lamented in sackcloth and ashes and cried out in the middle of the city and Esther's servant informed her, to which Mordecai pleaded Esther to petition the king. Est. 4
 - a. A copy of the letter was sent to Esther. vs. 8
 - b. A frightening caution was expressed by Esther, the king had not called her for thirty days and if she entered and he did

not raise his scepter, the person would be cut to pieces. vs. 11

- c. A call to surrender her life to God's providence was sent back to Esther by Mordecai, “And Mordecai told *them* to answer Esther: “Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?” vs. 13-14

* These are also key verses to the book!

7. Mordecai had been promoted by Ahasuerus and as he could not sleep one night he called for the chronicles to be read to him and discovered Mordecai's part in the discovery of the attempt on his life by two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh. Est. 6:1-3; 2:21-23

D. The instrumental character was Ahasuerus.

1. Ahasuerus was the Persian king known as Xerxes.
 - a. He reigned from 485-465 B. C.
 - b. He was the son of Darius 1. Dan. 9:1
 - c. He reigned from India to Ethiopia.
 - d. His name appears thirty-one times.

2. His reputation for cruelty and rage was well known.
 - a. He ordered a bridge to be built over the Hellispont, and who, on learning that the bridge had been destroyed by a tempest, just after its completion, was so blindly enraged that he commanded three hundred strokes of the scourge to be inflicted on the sea, and then had the unhappy builders of the bridge beheaded.
 - b. He being offered the equivalence of five million dollars sterling by Pythius, the Lydian towards the expenses of a military expedition was so enraptured at such loyalty that he returned the money, accompanied by a handsome present; and then, on being requested by this same Pythius, shortly afterwards, to spare him just one of his sons, the oldest, from the expedition, as the sole support of his declining years, furiously ordered the son to be cut into two pieces, and the army to march between them.
 - c. He dishonored the remains of the heroic Spartan, Leonidas.
 - d. He is the one who drowned the defeat by plunging himself into sensuality, offering a public prize for anyone who could invent some new indulgence.
 - e. He is the one who had the drunken party for 180 days plus seven days more and

- restrained no one to do as they willed and then ordered Queen Vashti to unveil herself before the crowd of drunken degenerates but she refused, costing her throne. Est. 1
3. Ahasuerus one night as we have noted could not sleep on night and he had one read the chronicles, discovering the deed of Mordecai regarding the assassination attempt on his life and asked what honors had been bestowed on the man and said, “Nothing had been done for him”. Est. 6:1-3
 4. Ahasuerus then asked who was in the court, at the same time Haman had just entered to petition the king to hang Mordecai, so they said, Haman and he told them to let him in. Est. 6:4-5
 5. Ahasuerus asked Haman what should he done to the man the king wanted to honor, thinking the king was speaking of him he poured it on. Est. 6:6-10
* Then the king said, “Hurry... and do so to Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king’s gate! Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken. vs. 10”
 6. Ahasuerus had been used by God to thwart to purposes of Haman and after the humiliating experience, Mordecai returned to the gate but Haman went home mourning with his head covered, only to hear from his

- own wife and friends that he would fall before Mordecai. Est. 6:12-14
7. Ahasuerus and Haman went to the banquet Esther had ordered, where she would accuse Haman before the king. Est. 7
- a. It was on the second day of the banquet that Esther told of the plot against her people and when the king asked who was the man who would dare such a thing, she said, “The adversary and enemy is the wicked Haman.” Est. 7:5-6
 - b. Haman terrified, attempted to plead for his life in the absence of the king as he went into the palace garden in raged and as he returned Haman fell across the couch where Esther was and was charged with attempting to seduce the queen before the king and was hung on the very gallows he build for Mordecai. Est. 7:7-10
8. Ahasuerus consequently gave the house of Haman to Esther and was told of her relation to Mordecai and the king gave the signet ring of Haman to Mordecai. Est. 8-10
- a. Esther pleaded with tears to counteract the evil of Haman the Agagite against the Jews. Est. 8:4
 - b. Esther wrote and sent out the decrees for the Jews to defend themselves. Est. 8:8-14

- c. Esther pleaded for a second day of vengeance and it was granted. Est. 9:13-14
- d. Esther as well as Mordecai legislated the two days to celebrate the “Feast of Purim” every year by all Jews as a commemoration of the defeat of Haman the Agagite. Est. 9:20-32
* It is the only feast along with Hanukkah that is not a Biblical feast demanded by God!
- e. Mordecai was second to king Ahasuerus and served his people for good. Est. 10:1-3

Illustration

When someone writes a story, they are the one in control and regardless of how impossible the situation may seem, they can turn it around in the very next scene and make it turn out for good.

The characters in Esther are used by God for His purposes!

III. The message of Esther.

- A. God deals with the compromise of His people to chasten, discipline and teach them.
 1. If they would have returned to Jerusalem they would not of encountered the danger.

2. If people are worldly they are going to add to their own hurt.
 3. If you have compromised there must be a point of turning and trusting God as Esther, "If I perish, I perish".
 4. If we are proudfull the fate of Haman can be our own within time.
 5. If we are faithful like Mordecai to not bow to the world, we will be protected and exalted by God.
- B.** God is sovereign and in control though He is not acknowledged or seen.
1. Ahasuerus or Xerxes reigned from 485-465 B. C.
 2. Ahasuerus in 483 B. C, dethrones his Queen.
 3. Ahasuerus made his disasterous expedition to Greece and returned from his naval defeat at Salamis in 480 B. C.
 4. Ahasuerus married Esther and becomes queen in the following year, seventh year of his reign, in the tenth month, January of 479 B. C. Est. 2:16
 4. The Jews were plotted against in the first month, April in the twelfth year 473 B. C. Est. 3:7
* Five years and two months after his marriage to Esther.
 5. The counter command written by Esther was issued in June of 473 B. C., just two months

- and ten days after Haman had given the order in April. Est. 3:12; 8:9
6. The Jews were delivered from Haman's edict in the twelfth month, on March of 473 B. C., the same month it was scheduled to take place. Est. 9:1
 - a. The entire ordeal encompassed eleven months, from April to March of 473 B. C.
 - b. The entire book of Esther covers ten years, from 483 B. C., the third years of Ahasuerus reign to the fifteenth day of the twelfth month March of 473 B. C., the celebration of the Feast of Purim. Est. 1:3; 9:17, 19
- C.** God uses who He wills to bring about His will for the good of His people.
1. God allowed Esther to be chosen Queen.
 2. God allowed Esther to have favor before the king as she enter without being called.
 3. God allowed Mordecai to discover the plot to assassinate the king.
 4. God allowed the plans of Haman to fall apart before his face.
 5. God allowed the Jews to see the protection of God, in the hanging of Haman.
 6. God allowed Esther's petition to reverse the decree of Haman and the Jews to defend themselves.

7. God allowed the promotion of Mordecai by king Ahasuerus, being second to the king.
8. God teaches us a simple principle in the book of Esther, obedience can overt many dangers and problems.

Illustration

The word crisis is defined in the American Heritage Dictionary as, A crucial or decisive point or situation; a turning point.

* The Chinese character for “crisis” means two things, danger and opportunity!

1. If we take hold of the crisis ourselves we will be in danger! Est. 1-5
2. If we allow God to work in and through the crisis for us, it will result in great opportunity! Est. 6-10

The message of Esther is that God is sovereign and in control!

Conclusion

What good lessons for life as we have studied Esther in three ways.

- I.** The book of Esther reveals the hand of God!
- II.** The characters in Esther are used by God for His purposes!
- III.** The message of Esther is that God is sovereign and in control!