

Message #1

Various Texts

She was orphaned as a young lady. She was adopted by a relative. She was Jewish in her nationality. She was beautiful in her appearance. She could be sensual in her behavior. She was godly in her character. She was bold in her faith. She became powerful in her rank. She is Esther!

Without cosmetic surgery, without becoming anorexic or bulimic, without a craving for wealth, notoriety or fame, God made Esther THE most elegant and eye-appealing woman in all the known world and He raised her to one of the highest female levels of rank in all of the Bible.

Esther proves a woman can be submissive and stunning.

Esther proves a woman can be dazzling and non-dominant.

Esther proves a woman can be powerful and pious.

Esther proves a woman can be gorgeous and God-glorifying.

Esther proves a woman can be lovely and loyal.

Esther proves an exquisite beauty can be other-oriented, not self-oriented.

Esther is this rare woman. She was dramatically and powerfully used by God. Esther is a woman worth knowing, her story is worth telling and clearly God wants us to understand the book which bears her name.

Esther is an exciting book to study. It has espionage and intrigue. It has love and hate. It has sensuality and spirituality. It has war and peace. It has people and plots. It has life and death. Esther is a galvanizing story. It is as dynamic and as dramatic as any novel one will ever read. But Esther has ONE feature that will never be found in any secular writing—the true, pure, powerful, directive and protective work of the Sovereign God. Esther is a book inspired by God.

Perhaps more than any other feature, Esther is a book that emphasizes the sovereignty of God. Esther is one of God's books and it most assuredly brings glory to Him. Although it motivates, stimulates, educates and comforts God's people, above all else Esther honors God and it is a book that moves people to do the same.

QUESTION #1 – Why study the book of Esther?

Reason #1 - Because Esther is a book found in the Bible.

Beginning with Genesis, Esther is the 17th book of the Old Testament. It is true that Esther was the last book to be accepted as belonging in the O.T..

It is also true that the great reformer Martin Luther opposed the book of Esther and did not believe it belonged in the Bible. But it is also true that in spite of all the controversy and debate, and in spite of the questions of value and canonicity, Esther was deemed as one of God's books which belonged in His Word.

We know that by the year A.D. 90 the "Council of Jamnia" deemed Esther as a book that belonged in the Bible. Prior to this we also know that Josephus, the famed Jewish historian, who wrote somewhere near the year A.D. 70, deemed Esther as a book of the O.T. because he writes quite extensively concerning the people and the events. We also know that Esther was mentioned in a list of some O.T. books called the "Baraita" in the second century B.C.. Furthermore, the "Feast of Purim" which comes from Esther 9:27-28, is a festival that has been celebrated by the Jews ever since the fifth century B.C., indicating that they believed Esther was a critical writing which should be carefully studied and obeyed even to this very day. In the N.T. age, "The Council of Hippo" (A.D. 393) and "The Council of Carthage" (A.D. 397) both list Esther as an inspired book belonging in the O.T. as an important part of the Word of God.

Even though some have argued God is not named once in the book and even though some have argued that there are immoral and unethical practices and events in the book, and even though some historical things have been questioned, which we will specifically address later, the truth is there is great evidence that Esther is an inspired book of God which clearly belongs in His Word.

George Knight, in his commentary says that a major test of canonicity is "whether it (the book) adds to our knowledge of the mighty acts of God for the salvation of the world in and through his chosen instrument and people."

Reason #2 - Because Esther is a book of God's sovereign care for Israel.

As we shall see, Esther is a book that is very practical and profitable for us, but we must always remember by virtue of the fact that it is in the O.T., it was and is a book primarily aimed at, about and for Israel.

Esther clearly informs us that God will ALWAYS preserve His nation Israel, even when the most powerful people in the world want to exterminate her (i.e. 3:8, 13).

Furthermore, there is a remarkable prophetic picture of Israel's future found in the book of Esther. In Esther 1:4 a godless Gentile leader put on a great banquet for 180 days, about three years into his reign (1:3). According to O.T. Jewish calendars, 180 days was exactly one-half of a year, 360 days. For the first half of the year, the Jews seemed to be in a good, peaceful relationship with this Gentile power, but at the halfway point things changed and there was an all out attempt to rid the world of the Jew. This book prophetically pictures exactly what will happen in the Tribulation. During the first half of the tribulation, the Jews will appear to be in a favorable relationship with Gentile powers; but precisely at the halfway point a Haman-type Antichrist will ferociously turn against Israel and try to rid the world of the Jew. This book tells us he will not be able to do it, for God will sovereignly care for His nation Israel.

Reason #3 - Because Esther is a book of God's sovereign care for His people.

Esther is a book that clearly proves God WILL ALWAYS take care of His people, even when it doesn't seem like He is anywhere present. Esther proves God will take care of us and protect us even if the most powerful people on earth turn against us. Esther proves God sovereignly controls ALL leadership, even that which seems corrupt and harmful to us.

QUESTION #2 – Who was Esther?

Esther's name in Hebrew was Hadassah (2:17) which means myrtle, a great fragrance to the world. Esther is her non-Hebraic Persian name (i.e. Daniel/Belteshazzar, Dan. 1:7), which stems from Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of love. Esther was a beautiful Jewish woman. She was beautiful in form and face (2:7).

Esther was orphaned at a young age and was raised by her cousin Mordecai (2:7). Mordecai was a Jew who had been forced by Nebuchadnezzar to leave Jerusalem and live in Susa (2:5-6). For all practical purposes, Mordecai viewed Esther as his own daughter (2:7).

Esther was a very submissive woman who was very obedient to the counsel and direction of Mordecai (2:20). It is no coincidence that there are only two books in the Bible named after women: Esther and Ruth, and both of them have humble, submissive, obedient spirits. In this push-and-shove world of ERA rights and freedom of speech feminism, Esther is a woman who shows us that in God's world, it is still the "gentle and quiet spirit which is precious in the sight of God" (I Pet. 3:4). Here is the type of woman God honors, blesses and uses.

Esther was a brave woman who was willing to lay down her own life, if need be, for the people of God (4:16). She was an extremely disciplined woman who could refrain from eating food for three days during a fast (4:16). She was highly intelligent and she knew how to properly approach a powerful king in a very serious and threatening situation (5:4-8; 7:1-6). Esther had right attitudes, right timing, right words and God gave her the right results.

QUESTION #3 – Who wrote Esther?

The book does not specifically say who wrote it and the truth is we don't really know. There have been four views as to who wrote the book:

View #1 - Some suggest that the book was written by Mordecai.

View #2 - Some suggest that it was written by Ezra.

View #3 - Some suggest that it was written by Nehemiah.

View #4 - Some suggest that it was written and compiled by wise men of God.

The truth is God has not seen fit to tell us who wrote Esther, but whoever it was, he was a man of God who knew a great deal about the Persian culture and knew the details of the story in such an eyewitness-way that remarkable inspired details are given to a very precise level.

QUESTION #4 – Why was Esther written?

Reason #1 - The National Reason.

Esther was written for the nation Israel as an encouragement to remind her that God will always care for her and protect her regardless how intimidating or hateful the political power.

Reason #2 - The Prophetic Reason.

Esther gives all people a prophetic look at what Israel's history and tribulation will be like. There will be many times when Israel finds herself subject to Gentile powers, but God has not abandoned her. Even in the middle of the Tribulation when a worldwide edict is issued to exterminate the Jew, God will see to it that the plan is thwarted. No matter how powerful the Antichrist, he will not stamp out and annihilate Israel.

Reason #3 - The Principal Reason.

Esther reveals to all of God's people the principle that no matter what the political climate, no matter how negative the threats or hostility, God will always sovereignly and providentially care for His people.

Reason #4 - The Practical Reason.

From a practical perspective, we see in Esther the type of faithfulness and attitudes that God blesses and uses.

QUESTION #5 – When was Esther written?

Just as the exact author is unknown, so also is the exact date of the writing of Esther.

Observation #1 - The events of Esther took place when the Persians and Medes were the ruling powers.

It is well to note that Esther uses the order "Persia and Media," which would seem to suggest that the Persians were the controlling power (1:3, 14, 18). Daniel, on the other hand, uses the order "Medes and Persians" (Dan. 5:28; 6:8, 15, 28). Ezra completely emphasizes the Persian power (Ezra 1:1, 2, 8; 3:7; 4:3, 5, 7, 24; 6:14; 7:1; 9:9) and so does Nehemiah (Neh. 12:22).

History tells us that Persia was, as Unger said, "a world empire that flourished from 539 to 331 B.C.."

Observation #2 - The events of Esther took place when Ahasuerus was king ruling from Susa over a massive Persian world (1:1-2).

There is no doubt that Ahasuerus is none other than Xerxes, who lived and reigned from 485-465 B.C.. Xerxes is the Greek name for the Old Persian name “Khsayarsen,” which means “one who rules over men or heroes.” The Hebrew name for Xerxes is Ahasuerus.

We may then logically conclude that these events occurred somewhere between 485-465 B.C. and were either written after this period of time or somewhere late in this period of time when all events had occurred.

Observation #3 - The events of Esther were written after Mordecai had been raised to the highest level of leadership and after the events were written down in secular history (10:2).

There is a man mentioned in secular Persian writings named “Marduka,” which many scholars believe is the Persian name for Mordecai. These writings were available during the last half of the fifth century.

Based upon these observations, we cannot be far from the date of writing if we list any date from 470-424 B.C.. If it were written from 470-465 B.C., it was written during the last years of Xerxes. If it were written from 464-424 B.C., it was written during the years of Xerxes son, Artaxerxes, who himself was very supportive of the nation Israel (Ezra 7:21-26).

We can assume that sometime during the last half of the fifth century B.C., the book of Esther was written.

QUESTION #6 – Why isn't God mentioned in the book of Esther?

There is only one other book in the Bible that does not mention the name of God, or at least mention God other than Esther; it is Song of Solomon.

Reason #1 - Because most Jews were no longer committed to God and were content to live in Persia, when they could have returned to Jerusalem; therefore, God seemed remote to the nation and is not named.

Reason #2 - Because the book was written in Persia and by omitting the name, it protects the book from Persian plagiarism in substituting a pagan, heathen deity for the true God of Israel.

Reason #3 - Because it would not offend or anger any Persian leader who might read the account.

Reason #4 - Because the book was written to introduce the Jewish festival “Purim” which required drinking and God’s name was left out so that His name could be kept removed from festival activities.

Reason #5 - Because the book is a wisdom-type literature which does not feature a major stress on the names of God (i.e. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes), but is more concerned with giving God’s guidelines for living.

Reason #6 - Some suggest that God is named in acrostic form in at least four different verses by looking at the first and last letters of certain words, which form the name “YHWH.”

Reason #7 - Because the book was designed to show that when God’s people do not obey Him or consult Him, He will seem far removed from the situation even though He is sovereignly present.

Reason #8 - Because the book was designed to show that even when God is not specifically seen, named or heard, He is still powerfully and sovereignly protecting and directing His people.

QUESTION #7 – What is the theme of Esther?

Point #1 – The Jews had opportunity to return to Jerusalem. Ezra 1:1-4

Cyrus, King of Persia, in 539 B.C., in the aftermath of the Babylonian captivity made it possible for the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Thousands did return (Neh. 7:6-73), but many others didn’t, such as Mordecai and Esther. Their decision not to return was not based on a lack of opportunity for they did have freedom to return.

Point #2 – The Jews had been instructed to return to Jerusalem. Is. 48:20; Jer. 50:8; 51:6

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah instructed the people of Israel to go back to their land in the aftermath of the Babylonian captivity. These were key prophecies both for contemporary Israel and future Israel.

Point #3 – The Jews had been told by God that it was His will to return them to their land.
Jer. 29:10

In the aftermath of Babylonian captivity, God’s will was to take a scattered Israel and regather her into her land.

Obviously many Jews did return but many didn’t, even when they had the opportunity. Baldwin writes: “Comparatively few had availed themselves of the opportunity either then or on later occasions, and sixty years later large numbers of Jews remained in the eastern half of the Persian empire, many in the great imperial cities of Persia itself.”

The historical truth is Esther is a story about God's people who have not fully obeyed Him. It is the story of God sovereignly caring for His people even when they have not heeded His Word or will.

As I see it, the key agent of the book of Esther is not Esther; it is Mordecai. The narrative concerning Israel opens with a focus on him (2:5-6), develops with a focus on him (2:19-23) and ends with a focus on him (10:2-3).

The theme of the book is this: "Even when God's people have not fully obeyed God or followed His Word, He still sovereignly controls all things and moves people He wants into key positions of power and leadership so He can continue to protect His people."

Whether it be in the nation Israel, in the church, in the job, in the classroom or in the home, God is always sovereignly caring for His people and He moves people in and out of leadership positions to accomplish His purpose.

Perhaps it seems that God has been silent in your life and in your world. Are you following the will and Word of God? Are you lining up your life with what God's Word has said? If you aren't, do so and once again you will experience the presence and power of God. If you are, know this: God is with you, He is watching over you and no matter how bizarre the circumstances, He is still caring for you and protecting you.

That is the story of Esther.

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