

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 3-11-12 PM NOTES
"ESTHER"
#18 in Series, "The Glory of God in the Old Testament"

Genesis 3:15 (ESV) "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

I. The Grave Danger to the Jews (Chapter 1-4)

A. The Vices of Xerxes (Chapter 1)

B. The Virtues of Esther (Chapter 2)

C. The Vilification of the Jews (Chapter 3)

"A slimy, power-hungry, Hitleresque character named Haman the Agagite."

—Ray Steadman

D. The Vision of Mordecai (Chapter 4)

II. The Great Deliverance of the Jews (Chapter 5-10)

A. The Venture of Esther (Chapter 5)

Proverbs 21:1 (NKJV) "The king's heart *is* in the hand of the Lord, *like* the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes."

B. The Vengeance of Haman (Chapter 6-7)

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D. The Victory of the Jews (Chapter 9-10)

"God's name is nowhere seen in this book, but God's hand is nowhere missing."

—Warren Weirsbe

Proverbs 16:33 (NKJV) "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision *is* from the Lord."

1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NKJV) "in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

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“ESTHER”
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The Holocaust which took the lives of six million Jews in World War II is a horror that the world must never forget. I remember being in the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem in 1993 and being overwhelmed with the magnitude of evil brought against the Jews. Unfortunately, the Nazi slaughter of the Jews and the torture of many more are not unique in history, nor has it ceased to exist today. In most Muslim countries today there is an intense hatred for the Jews and most leaders of Muslim countries in the Middle East (such as Iran) would be delighted if the whole nation of Israel was annihilated. Perhaps the main reason that the United States of America is hated by those same Muslim nations is because of the history of our support for the nation of Israel. How do we explain this hatred? I believe it is supernatural in nature. I think that it is satanically induced. Why is Satan so intent on destroying the Jews? Remember that he was there in the Garden of Eden when God the Father gave the first prophesy recorded in the Bible in **Genesis 3:15 (ESV)** “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Satan knows that the offspring or seed of the woman is the Jews and so before the birth of the Messiah he tried to wipe out the seed and after the Messiah and His death that gave an ultimately fatal head blow to Satan, Satan inspires hatred against the Jews from revenge for what God has done through them. How did Satan seek to wipe out the seed of the woman? Pharaoh sought to drown the Jews; Queen Athaliah tried to wipe out all of the seed of David and almost succeeded except for one little boy that was hidden away in the Temple; Herod tried to kill Christ by having all the boy babies slain and Jesus escaped only by God giving Joseph a dream to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt for a time to escape Herod’s murderous wrath. That is only a sampling of the ways that we see the enemy seeking to thwart God’s purposes. Another of those attempts to wipe out the Jews is recorded for us in the book of Esther. In this book we meet a “Hitleresque” character named Haman who desired to wipe out the Jews. The only thing from a human standpoint that stood between Haman and success in his evil endeavor was a woman named Esther. You will not find a book anywhere with more drama and emotion than in the book of Esther.

The book of Esther is not fiction. It is an accurate book historically. The characters referred to in Esther existed in the latter part of the 5th century BC. Some of the Jews had gone back to Judah, but most of the Jews (several million of them) still lived in the place they had been taken to when the Babylonians had brought them there as captive in the years between 606 BC and 587 BC. The Babylonian Empire had now been absorbed by the Persian Empire and the king that is referenced is the King of Persia.

By way of introduction let’s look at the purpose of the book of Esther. Why did God inspire it to be written and then assure that it made it into the Hebrew canon? I believe that there was a three fold purpose that God put Esther in the Bible. First, there was an historical purpose. Since the time of Esther the Jews have celebrated the Feast of Purim. Esther gives the basis of that feast and explains what the feast celebrates. Second, there is a doctrinal purpose. The doctrine of the providential working of God to carry out His purposes is clearly taught in the book of Esther. We will summarize this purpose at the end of the message. Third, there is a Christological purpose that we have already alluded to. Esther shows us how the line from which the Messiah would come was preserved from annihilation [These three purposes and the outline of the book of Esther is taken from *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament* by Norman Geisler, pages 177-182].

I. The Grave Danger to the Jews (Chapter 1-4)

To better understand these chapters, let’s identify the historical setting. The King of Persia is referred to as Ahasuerus and Xerxes. Which is his name? Ahasuerus is the title of the Persian ruler (such as Pharaoh for the Egyptian ruler) and Xerxes was the King’s name. He was the son of Darius the Great and he ruled the Persian Empire from 486-465 BC.

A. The Vices of Xerxes (Chapter 1)

[Read 1:1-4] Here is what was going on in Persia. History tells us that Xerxes held a meeting of all of his leaders to plan for his invasion of Greece. The gathering lasted 180 days and concluded with a giant party that lasted for seven days. The custom of the Persians was that the women had a separate banquet. After Xerxes had drunk freely of the wine, he had a wine-induced idea [Read 1:10-11]. The name Vashti means “beautiful woman”. It is doubtful that Vashti was being asked to do anything immoral, but for her it was degrading to be paraded before the ogling eyes of her husband’s drunken buddies. Here was her answer [Read V12]. This is hard for us to understand, but kings over empires were treated much like gods by the people under them. You just didn’t tell the King of Persia “no”. Vashti’s refusal caused a dilemma for Xerxes. How could he persuade the princes and nobles that he could keep Greece in line when he couldn’t keep his own wife in line? The King sought advice from the wise men [Read 1:16-18]. In other words, “If you let the Queen get by with this, none of the rest of us will have a chance”. The king followed his counselors’ advice and deposed Vashti and declared that she was never again to come into his presence. The rulings of the Meads and the Persians were irrevocable. Here was a King with no Queen.

B. The Virtues of Esther (Chapter 2)

Chapters 1 & 2 are separated by four years. The Persians had gone to battle with Greece as planned, but it was a disaster. Xerxes navy was destroyed at the battle of Salamis and his army was defeated a year later at the battle of Plataea. Xerxes came home from the battle a bitter man. He came home to a home without a queen. Oh he had a harem, but he missed his beautiful queen [Read V1]. The implication is that he missed Vashti, but his decree could not be undone. His counselors advised him to get a new Queen [Read V2-4]. It is at this point in the story that we see Esther come into the picture [Read V5a, 7-8]. This was likely not a “beauty contest” where young women applied for the honor of possibly being chosen as Queen. It is likely that Esther and the other girls were forcibly removed from their home and conscripted into the king’s harem. The losers likely were not allowed to go back home but became a part of the king’s harem. Esther had been instructed by Mordecai not to reveal that she was a Jew (this becomes important later on). Of all the women brought before the king, Esther was chosen to be the queen [Read 2:15-17].

Something is recorded in 2:21-23 that seems out of place, but it becomes very important a little later on [Read V21-23].

C. The Vilification of the Jews (Chapter 3)

Let’s meet a man who is a key character in the history of the Jews in this period [Read V1]. Ray Steadman in his commentary on Esther describes Haman this way: “A slimy, power-hungry, Hitleresque character named Haman the Agagite” [Ray Steadman, *Adventuring through the Bible*, Page 230]. An Agagite was an Amalekite and a descendent of Esau. They were a group that God said there would always be war between them and the descendents Jacob (Exodus 17:16). Haman likely hated the Jews because of his being an Agagite, but something stirred up that hatred even more [Read V2, 5-6].

Haman hatched a plan that undoubtedly was instigated by the Satan [Read V8-11]. Xerxes who was known for being impulsive immediately bought in to Haman’s evil plan (even though it was based on lies that Xerxes didn’t bother to check out) and even told Haman that he could have the money taken from the Jews that were killed. The date for this to massacre to take place was determined by the casting of lots (similar to dice used to determine the will of the gods). The date that resulted was almost a year away which gave time for Esther and Mordecai to execute a plan to save the Jews. This, we will see, became the basis for the Feast of Purim we will look at in a moment. Once the King signed on this evil scheme, it could not be reversed. This meant that on the day determined by Haman’s casting of lots that the Jews would be annihilated which would mean no fulfillment of a Messiah or of the Millennial promises for the Kingdom. [Read V15]

D. The Vision of Mordecai (Chapter 4)

It seems that Esther was isolated from what was going on in the kingdom of Persia. When Mordecai hears about the decree instigated by Haman, he goes into action [Read V1-3]. Esther, not knowing the gravity of the situation is embarrassed by Mordecai’s actions and sends some clothes to him but he would

not accept them. Esther sent someone to find out what was wrong with Mordecai. Mordecai told the messenger about the situation and told him to tell Esther to go petition the king concerning the coming annihilation of the Jews. Esther sends word back to Mordecai in verse 11 [Read]. Esther is struggling. We shouldn't interpret this as cowardice. She is simply counting the cost. To appear before the King without being summoned meant certain death unless the King took the initiative to raise his scepter and thus spare the uninvited guest.

In verses 13 and 14 we see Mordecai's faith in his sovereign God and yet he knew God had placed Esther where she was to be God's instrument in deliverance of the Jews [Read V13, 14]. Mordecai knew that God's promises would be fulfilled and that the Jews would not be wiped out. He simply reminds Esther that if she refused to speak for God's people, God will raise up another instrument, but Esther and her relatives will perish. Esther's courage from God rises up and she gives Mordecai instructions to have the people fast and pray for her (prayer is not stated but is understood). Then Esther utters the best known words from the book of Esther [Read v16b].

II. The Great Deliverance of the Jews (Chapter 5-10)

In these next chapters we see the amazing providence of God on display. We see God working behind the scenes to bring about His sovereign will. Chapters 5-7 needs little commentary or explanation.

A. The Venture of Esther (Chapter 5)

First, Esther goes to appear unannounced to the king [Read V1-2]. As we see so often, God has turned the king's heart like he says in **Proverbs 21:1 (NKJV)** "The king's heart *is* in the hand of the Lord, *like* the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." Acting wisely, Esther doesn't reveal her reason for coming before the king immediately. Knowing the king's delight in food and drink, she invites him to a banquet. She also asks him to invite Haman. The king accepts the invitation and Haman is delighted that that the queen has invited him. At the banquet, the king asks Esther what he can do for her and she asks them both to come back to another banquet the next day. The king agreed. When Haman left the banquet with the king and queen, he was probably strutting like a peacock and then he saw Mordecai [Read V9]. After sharing with his wife how Mordecai was always raining on his parade, she suggests that Haman build a 75 foot high gallows and hang Mordecai on it. That sounded like a great idea and he went out and had a gallows for hanging Mordecai built before he went to the second banquet. The gallows was 75 feet high so that it could be seen from all around the city.

B. The Vengeance of Haman (Chapter 6-7)

In chapter six we see the amazing providence of God at work in what seems like simple ways. That night the king couldn't sleep. Since there were no sleeping pills to take, the king did what students have done for centuries that make them to go to sleep – he read history. Actually he asked that the chronicles, the records of what had happened in the kingdom to be brought to him and read. It is likely that there were hundreds of volumes of chronicles and yet the servant picked out a certain one and it was the one God would use to save the Jews. Remember earlier in the message that we read in 2:21-23 about Mordecai hearing of a plot on the king's life and reporting it to Esther. It was found that the plot was real and the would be assassins were hung on the gallows. It was this book of the records that was read to Xerxes that night. Persian kings were known for richly rewarding loyalty. Xerxes asked what had been done to reward Mordecai and he found that nothing had been done. He resolved to remedy that. We need to do no more than read what happened next [Read 6:3-14].

Things went from bad to worse for Haman in chapter 7 [Read V2-10].

C. The Vindication of the Jews (Chapter 8)

In chapter 8 we find the king giving great riches, honor and authority to Mordecai, but there was still the problem of the edict about killing the Jews and confiscating all their property. That edict could not be cancelled. King Xerxes took care of the situation by allowing Mordecai to write another edict in the king's name that effectively superseded the first edict. The new decree permitted the Jews to defend themselves and to destroy anyone in the Persian kingdom that was an enemy of the Jews. This stopped the aggression against the Jews [Read V17].

D. The Victory of the Jews (Chapter 9-10)

Look what happened when the day came for the edict put out by Haman went into effect [Read 9:1]. The last part of Chapter 9 deals with the feast of Purim. The word “Purim” is the plural of Pur and refers to the lots that were cast when God providentially caused the date for the destruction of the Jews to be almost a year out so that there was time for Esther to petition the king and another edict to be issued (3:7). The book closes with a verse that would have seemed impossible earlier [Read 10:3].

Conclusion

One of the criticisms of the book of Esther is that the name of God is not used in the entire book. This has led some to say that the book of Esther should not have been included in the Old Testament Canon. I would counter by saying that though God’s name is not in the book; God is all through the book! Warren Weirsbe puts it this way: “God’s name is nowhere seen in this book, but God’s hand is nowhere missing” [Warren Weirsbe, *Weirsbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*, Page 399]. Think with me of just a few of the places we see the providential working of God in the circumstances in Esther. I will use the word “happens” or “happened” in a sarcastic way to emphasize how God was in control of every detail:

- Esther happened to be chosen to be the queen and happened to be Jewish.
- Mordecai happened to hear the plot against the king
- A report of Mordecai’s deed happened to be put in the book that the servant happened to pick up and happened to turn to just the right page to read to Xerxes when he happened to have insomnia
- When Haman plots his revenge against the Jews, the dice for determining the date that the Jews would be wiped out happened to be almost a year away. **Proverbs 16:33 (NKJV)** “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision *is* from the Lord.”
- Haman happens to come into the king’s presence just as the king was looking for an way to honor Mordecai

There are so many more evidences of the providential working of God in the book of Esther. Are you aware of the providential working of God in your life. Many of the things we stress out over and become angry over are the providence of God. Cooperate with Him is what He is doing. Because of His providential working, we can joyfully obey **1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NKJV)** “in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (2929)