

Until the kingdom of God comes in its fullness on the last day conquering all kingdoms of this world, God’s people must live “in exile” in a particular time, a particular place, and subject to a particular earthly king, while guarding themselves from the dangers of worldly glory, riches, and power.

Introduction – Are you basically comfortable making this world your home, at ease pursuing the wealth, power, and glory this world offers? Or are you basically uncomfortable, living as if in exile in a dangerous world away from your true home? The story of Esther, God calls you to choose sides.

I. Introducing the Book of Esther

A. Author & Date

The book’s authorship is anonymous. Mordecai, one of the actors in the story, is a possible candidate for authorship. Scholars date the book from 460-350 B.C.

B. Major Themes

Providence of God; Human responsibility; Conflicting loyalties & obedience vs. disobedience; Wickedness as absurd (even laughable).

C. Literary Features

It has “a beautiful and courageous heroine, a romantic love thread, a dire threat to the good characters, a thoroughly evil villain, suspense, dramatic irony, evocative descriptions of exotic places, sudden reversal of action, poetic justice, a happy ending” (Jobes). Esther is a “round” character. Although Esther’s faith is not explicit, it is probably accurate to say she develops from a fearful Jew who keeps her faith private amidst her pagan surroundings into a courageous woman of faith who sacrifices her position and prosperity to save her people.

D. Relevance for Christians

1. Esther answers the question, “How are we, God’s chosen people living in exile, still here after all these centuries?” The answer lies in God’s purpose of preserving a remnant chosen by grace to bring Christ into the world to bless the whole world through him and the Church.
2. In a sense Christians celebrate Purim each Lord’s Day. The book of Esther reminds us to celebrate salvation every time we worship. It reminds us that while we wait for Jesus to return, we should expect to suffer for our identification with him. It reminds us that while we live in exile this side of heaven, we should wage spiritual war against God’s enemies.

II. Living in Exile is Dangerous

A. The setting: a dangerous kingdom (vv. 1-2)

1. **Place.** This vast empire stretching across most of the civilized world is known as the Medo-Persian empire. Susa was one of several capitals of the empire. Daniel has one of his visions at Susa (Dan 8:2) and later Nehemiah served as King Artaxerxes’s cupbearer at Susa (Neh 1:1). The palace (citadel) was in a fortified part of the city.
2. **Time.** The third year of Ahasuerus’s reign was 483 B.C. It marked the symbolic end of opposition to the new administration, and was therefore an appropriate time to consolidate the

empire by assembling high officials in the capital to secure their loyalty. In terms of redemptive history, it was 103 years after Nebuchadnezzar took the Jews into captivity (2 Kgs 25), 54 years after Zerubbabel led the first wave of exiles back to Jerusalem (Ezra 1-2), and 25 years before Ezra led the second group of exiles back to Jerusalem (Ezra 7).

B. The stage: a dangerous king (vv. 3-9)

1. Ahasuerus was most likely Artaxerxes's father, a.k.a. Xerxes I, who ruled circa 486-465 B.C. The 180-day banquet was an immense gathering by any standard. Historians note that Xerxes's great feast took place shortly before his army invaded Greece. So it was a probably a support rally for his upcoming military excursion. Kings of this world are dangerous when they display their glory to those who powerfully serve them (vv. 3-4).

2. There is a false sense of freedom and celebration here. The feast is not for the guests, but for the king to feed his need for glory and power. Misreading the situation will put one in danger—both physical and spiritual. Kings of this world are dangerous when they display their riches and power to those (either great or small) who are impressed by such things (vv. 5-9).

III. How to Live Safely in Exile

A. Read between the lines and laugh (with God)

The original audience knew that only four years later he would return from battle a failure, with his wealth, power and glory depleted. But the author chose this snapshot in time to show the “glory” of Xerxes. “Xerxes the Great, the king of the exiles” is a subtle joke (Pss 37:12-13; 59:8).

B. Recognize what is dangerous

1. Everything about the palace and the king was beautiful, ornate, and glorious. Its description is designed to intoxicate and disarm us. This is the spiritual blindness that worldly glory cultivates. But the king's glory was only on the surface (cf. Prov 15:16-17).

2. Amazingly, the king decreed that each person was under no compulsion to drink. But read between the lines. Recognize the danger (Prov 23:1-3; 29:5).

3. Verse 9 hints at trouble in the palace. King Xerxes is giving a feast for the men of the city. Queen Vashti hosts a separate feast for the women. Although men and women could dine together in Persia, these two feasts are segregated, and there was lots of wine at the king's feast.

C. Reject worldly glory for permanent glory

Although Xerxes's wealth, power, and glory were the envy of the world, he and his kingdom were destined to fall. God had predicted it (Dan 8)! History tells the tale of world empires rising and falling. All of these empires and their leaders sought to eliminate God's chosen people, but no king in history has been able to destroy God's people or dethrone the Lord of history.

Conclusion –The rich and powerful may rattle their sabers but the Lord laughs from heaven and scoffs at them (Ps 2:1-4). God continues throughout history to accomplish his plan for the world through inscrutable means. He will turn the tables of history to fulfill his covenant in Jesus Christ. Christians may therefore take comfort in the power and glory of the Lord. To be united to Christ is to be on the right side of history, to be victorious even when you are “living in exile” with heaven still before you.