

## AUGUST 18

You are beginning another book of the Bible. Time to celebrate! Esther is the second of two books that highlights the events in the lives of a godly woman whom the Lord used in His plan of redemption.

### Esther 1-3

Chronologically, the events of Esther happen between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra. There is a 57-year gap between the finishing of the temple and the coming of Ezra. In the world, a Persian king named Darius I (not Darius the Mede of Daniel) allowed the Jews to finish the temple and then went off to try to become a part of the European Union by conquering Greece. The Greeks killed Darius I at Marathon near Athens, and Persia made his son Xerxes (Ahasuerus) king. Xerxes wanted revenge, so he wined and dined all of Persia to sign up to fight against those "handkerchief dancers." That is where we begin Esther. Tradition says Xerxes went to Greece with 2 million men and returned with about 5,000. Apparently, the Greeks were in a generous mood. The famous battle with the 300 Spartans is part of that history. That war took place between chapter 1 and chapter 2 of Esther.

Regarding the book of Esther: I recommend taking it at face value. Some people read in disobedience on the part of the Jews, since they hadn't returned to Jerusalem; but it should be noted that Ezra hadn't returned yet, and I don't want to call him disobedient. Also, some people see grave immorality in Xerxes' request to have Vashti show her beauty. I don't see that. Actually her behavior might have had more to do with her repulsion of Xerxes' drunkenness and lack of character. Just read the book for yourself and get your own opinions.

The book of Esther is very unusual in that it is the only book of the Bible where God is not mentioned. In that sense, it is a test of the faith of the people to understand the unseen hand of God working on their behalf. In education there is a thing called a "close test" to test the reading comprehension of students. A page of text is given and certain \_\_\_\_ are left out. A student should be \_\_\_\_ to figure out what those \_\_\_\_ are from the context. The same is true in Esther. Since Esther is in the Bible, the people apparently saw God in the events.

One more thing: the events of Esther and the hatred toward the Jews is easier to understand if you know the first six chapters of Daniel. The Jews had favored people status in the Babylonian Empire. This protected them racially and religiously. That made a lot of people jealous of the Jews. When Persia inherited the Jews by conquering Babylon, it happened again; and, boom, the Jews were suddenly a favored people with rights that no other peoples in Persia had. Now in Esther, it will happen again. Particularly now, it was crucial that God did at this time, what He had done over the last hundred years to protect His people. The decrees at the end of Esther enabled the Jews to survive and continue that very special status, worshiping their God only. It is because of these events that Ezra was commissioned to teach the returned remnant the law, and Nehemiah was able to come to Israel and rebuild Jerusalem.

"The Three Returns from Exile" and "Chronology of the Postexilic Period" will also be helpful as you read Esther.

### Esther 1

Vs. 1-12 Notice that the time reference says this took place in the third year of Ahasuerus' (Xerxes') reign. Since the book of Esther is not about world history, it doesn't say what the party was for. The point isn't even to tell us why Vashti refused, but now we know why the king was mad. Given the event, it is Xerxes' pride that was hurt. He appears to have been a petty, childish hedonist. He lost face before all of his leaders and kingdom and now this would be news. Xerxes already had plenty of wives, with more to follow. Vashti was only national "bling" for the king.

Notice that the seven-day feast was after the 180 days of showing the royal glory. It was on the final day of the feast when the fiasco with Vashti occurred. The drunkenness surrounding this event is probably what the women were mad about.

Vs. 13-22 This judgment and edict would have taken place before Xerxes went out to face the Greeks. It was the height of his pride. He wouldn't return so proud.

Vs. 19-20 Notice that Vashti remained a wife, but was never to see the king again. It is thought that Vashti was the mother of Artaxerxes, the next king.

V. 22 Thankfully, the respect of men in the Persian Empire was saved!

## Esther 2

Vs. 1-4 Xerxes came back a defeated man. He had wives, but no queen. There was no special relationship between him and his queen, as we'll see later; but for ceremony and national appearance, Persia needed one. Persia was now shamed in the face of all nations because of those skirted gyro-chompers.

This was more than a contest to be queen. Each of the girls selected would become his wife. I don't know if there was anything official before the wedding night, but the wedding night sealed the deal. In this sense, all of the girls "won." They became a wife of Xerxes, king of Persia and whatever privileges and benefits that entailed for them and their families. It would have meant money for the family giving up the daughter. It wasn't "losing" not to be queen. And since this was marriage, becoming a part of the king's harem wasn't "immorality" as we understand it, except maybe in its sheer magnitude and excess.

Vs. 5-11 This is where the plot thickens and you begin seeing (or not seeing) the working of the Lord. Again, some of this looks familiar, if you know Daniel (which took place in captivity about 100 years earlier).

V. 5 Mordecai has a Babylonian name, suggesting, in spite of his brief genealogy, he was born in Babylon.

V. 8 Esther was *gathered* up with the other young women, meaning it was not Mordecai's doing.

V. 9 Hmmm. Sounds like Daniel chapter 1 (or the story of Joseph, if you can remember back that far). Receiving favor from others was one of the ways the Lord put Joseph and Daniel in key positions.

V. 10 I think this was because of the animosity toward the Jews.

Vs. 12-18 I'm sure you're seeing God's hand in all of this.

Vs. 12-14 This was the preparation. I can't imagine that this took a year, but then I hate having to do more than brush my hair before I go out the door. What would six months of oil of myrrh treatment look like?

Vs. 15-18 Esther won! What a surprise.

V. 16 Did you notice the hidden time reference here? Esther became queen in the 10th month of Xerxes' 7th year. Since Esther had a year of preparation, it would mean that the search for a queen probably occurred in his 6th year. So now, four years have gone by since chapter 1.

Vs. 19-23 This is now after Esther was queen. I don't know why Xerxes did this again, but I don't know much about maintaining a respectable and well-ordered harem. Esther obeyed Mordecai and didn't say she was a Jew.

What a coincidence that Mordecai saved the king's life. It is equally as important that God had them overlook giving Mordecai any reward. These are good things for us to observe and keep in

mind as we see the Lord working. Sometimes He allows us to be forgotten too, but all for good reason.

### Esther 3

Vs. 1-6 *After these things* gives us the idea of a passage of time. Notice again that Mordecai was *at the king's gate*. Some suggest that this means Mordecai had some minor post in government.

So, why didn't Mordecai bow? You get the idea that he was just a grumpy, nasty, hook-nosed little guy. Part of the clue here is that when asked why he didn't bow, he said *he was a Jew*. And they let him go, as if that explanation did the trick. So? I'm part Greek and part German. What does that have to do with anything? Now I'm going to crawl out on a limb here and suggest what might have been happening.

God's work in the book of Daniel gave the Jews the right to worship only their God. It became law. All other peoples in Babylon had to worship all the gods, including Nebuchadnezzar himself...but not the Jews. In fact, Nebuchadnezzar commanded that if anyone forced them to worship any God but their own, that person would be killed. Boy, did that save the Jews, but that was Babylon. This was Persia. So then, read Daniel chapter 6. A law was made compelling everyone to worship and pray to Darius the Mede. As a result of Daniel 6 another command was issued protecting the Jews which became a law of the Medes and the Persians *which cannot be revoked*. This became binding for the entire Persian Empire, protecting Jews from having to worship or pay homage to any god, or representative thereof, other than their own, under penalty of death to anyone who forced them.

So if showing homage to a person, king or otherwise, was actually thought of as paying homage to a god, and that person was a representative of that god, it would explain things. If this was the case, Mordecai's response totally answered their question. He was a Jew, and therefore, he was exempt. This would also explain why Haman couldn't just get off his horse and make Mordecai bow to him. According to Persian law, if my theory is right, it would have made Haman's act punishable by death.

Vs. 7-15 Here is another time reference. It is now the twelfth year of Xerxes. Four and a half years have gone by between the selection of Esther and this event. Notice how lucky it was that the lot was cast and gave the Jews a year to get ready.

V. 8 Haman mentioned that the Jews did not keep the king's laws. This was because of edicts issued by Darius the Mede and by Cyrus. See Daniel 6.

V. 9 Haman must have been extremely wealthy. This might be why King Ahasuerus was so taken up with him. A talent weighed 75 pounds. That was tons of silver. It is interesting to think that a man of this wealth and position was shaken, because one little guy wouldn't recognize him.

V. 15 After planning to kill the Jews and then having to send word throughout the entire empire, I'll bet they were beat. There is nothing like being able to kick back after a hard day's work. So what do you gather about the character of this king?

We have seen before, and it will be true of the first six chapters of Daniel, that disaster often precedes blessing. By now we should understand that this is also true of us in the harvest. The Father prunes vines that bear fruit. God often uses problems to bring us to our knees and do things that we never would have imagined possible.

### **1 Corinthians 11:17-34**

Vs. 17-19 These are the divisions Paul mentioned in chapter 1. Basically, chapters 11-14 have something to do with their public meetings.

Vs. 20-34 Apparently, this church celebrated communion as a part of a larger meal, sort of like what took place at the Passover where Jesus introduced communion. Jesus *took the cup, after*

*supper*. So, they apparently had supper first, and then celebrated communion. What was happening in Corinth was a mess.

V. 23 Paul received these instructions personally from Jesus Himself. Communion must be an important remembrance, if Jesus made sure He passed it on to Paul personally.

Vs. 27-32 Notice that this warning is aimed at believers, not unbelievers. The sin is a serious sin for someone who knows better and desecrates the body and blood of the Lord anyway. Many, if not most, of the people in the world who take communion on any given Sunday are probably unbelievers, doing it out of sheer ignorance. I think the prohibition and the penalty is for those who know better and are partaking in sin. Of course, anyone who intentionally would think to mock communion, even in ignorance, would be in danger too.

V. 30 I'm glad God doesn't do this today, or does He?

V. 31 A person is called to self-examination before the Lord, before they participate.

V. 32 This is God chastening His children. According to Romans 8, we cannot be condemned. God keeps His children from imitating the world in their utter disdain for Him by keeping us humble, in affliction if necessary.

Vs. 33-34 The abuse of the Lord's Supper was one of the issues that they wrote to Paul about to gain some clarity. Paul addressed key issues, but apparently there were other, less important, questions that he would choose to address later.

### **Psalm 35:17-28**

In one sense, when you read all of what David asks for, he is only asking God to be true to His character and to do what He has spoken in the Word. In a video/song I found for Psalm 25, there is a line that has stuck with me: "It is your reputation that makes me outrageously brave." I think this is what David means here. David knows that God will show justice and save him, and I guess he's asking God to do it sooner than later.

Vs. 17-18 I don't think David was bargaining with God, but he definitely wanted some help quickly. Praising God publicly was one of David's constant refrains.

Vs. 19-21 These are all the things David feared would come upon him if God didn't help. David's enemies didn't think God would help David. And David feared he would be shamed for having waited on the Lord.

Vs. 22-25 God had seen all of this and David knew it. David cried for vindication. I don't think it was vindication of his righteousness or innocence, as much as it was vindication of his faith in the Lord. Verse 25 seems to emphasize their arrogance and their confidence in putting David to shame.

V. 26 This is another way of saying, "Let what they have planned for me happen to them."

Vs. 27-28 David knew, in faith, that God would come through. David knew he would be telling of God's *righteousness* and praising His name. Through David, others would have the courage to wait for the Lord. We need that same kind of faith and assurance as we wait on the Lord, following Him in the harvest.

### **Proverbs 21:19-20**

It seems like both of these verses have to do with "control" issues. Or really, maybe both of them have to do with fully appreciating the blessing and love of God.