

17 - Esther

Esther

Key Verse:

INTRODUCTION TO ESTHER

The book of Esther is about a beautiful Jewish girl who became queen of the Persian Empire, and was used by God to save her people. The Feast of Purim, which is still celebrated by the Jews, commemorates the heroism of Queen Esther and her uncle Mordecai. Although God is not mentioned in this book, it is clear that he is the sovereign ruler of empires and history, and he is in charge of these events.

The period of Babylonian Exile had ended with the Persian conquest of Babylon under King Cyrus. While many Jews had returned to rebuild Jerusalem, the vast majority remained in the land of their exile and were scattered throughout the Persian Empire. The Persian Empire under Xerxes (486-485/4 BC) ruled the world from India to Egypt.

The writer tells of how Esther saved the Jews from Haman the Agagite (an Amalekite--Israel's ancient enemy), who planned the genocide of the Jewish race. Esther's uncle Mordecai was one of the remnant who maintained his Jewish identity even while living in a foreign country. He is the behind-the-scenes hero of the story. Esther herself is an example of womanly beauty, obedience, and courage. She is a woman who accepted the mission God gave her. Mordecai's words to Queen Esther are the key verse: "...if you remain silent at this time, relief...for the Jews will arise from another place.... And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (4:14).

QUEEN VASHTI DEPOSED

Esther 1:1-22

Key Verse: 1:20

1. King Xerxes' party (1-8)

King Xerxes lived in Susa and ruled the vast Persian Empire. Once he gave a great banquet and invited high ranking officials from all the provinces. He impressed them with his splendor and vast wealth. The climax was a fabulous banquet held in the palace garden. Wine flowed freely. When the guests and the king were in high spirits, he sent for Queen Vashti. He was proud of her beauty and wanted to show her off. In a godless world, women were like slaves.

2. Queen Vashti's mistake (9-22)

Queen Vashti was having a banquet for the women. She became so involved in her own activities that she forgot that her first responsibility was to her husband. She became proud. When he sent for her, she refused to come. His pride was hurt and he was furious. His advisors

saw this as a national problem. Suppose all women hear about the queen and begin to despise their husbands! They urged him to depose her. He did so. An announcement was then made that all women should respect their husbands!

Prayer: Lord, pride still destroys homes and breaks relationships. Take foolish pride from my heart.

One Word: Pride goes before a fall

ESTHER BECOMES QUEEN

Esther 2:1-20

Key Verse: 2:17

1. Miss Persia of 485 BC (1-4)

When the king began to miss the deposed queen Vashti, his advisors suggested that an international beauty contest be held. The winner would be made queen of the empire in Vashti's place. The king liked this idea.

2. Esther and Mordecai (5-20)

Mordecai was a Jew who had been taken into exile to Babylon with Jehoiachin, king of Judah. Hadassah (Esther) was his young cousin whom he had raised as his own daughter after her parents died. She was lovely in form and features, and had the inner beauty of a humble and obedient spirit (7,10,15,20). By her humbleness and inner beauty she even won the heart of the servant Hegai. She was selected as one of the finalists, and when she was summoned for an interview with the king, he liked her best of all, and chose her to be his queen. Becoming queen did not make her proud. Still, she obeyed Mordecai, her shepherd.

Prayer: Lord, grant this nation women of God who have inner beauty that is not marred by praise, power or success.

One Word: A real queen

MORDECAI'S FAITHFULNESS

Esther 2:21-3:4

Key Verse: 3:2b

1. Mordecai uncovers a conspiracy (2:21-23)

Mordecai spent a lot of time walking back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was. After she was crowned queen, he still spent time sitting at the king's gate,

keeping his eyes and ears open. One day he overheard Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers, plotting the assassination of King Xerxes. He reported this conspiracy to Esther, who told the king, giving credit to Mordecai. The conspirators were hanged, and this event was recorded in the king's journal.

2. Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman (3:1-4)

King Xerxes elevated Haman to a high position. Haman was a descendant of Agag, an Amalekite. The Amalekites were ancient enemies of the Jews (1Sa 15:32-34; Dt 25:17-19). All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt and paid honor to Haman, but Mordecai refused to do so. He was faithful to God and to his people, and he would not compromise.

Prayer: Lord, help me to live by principle, and do what is right. Help me not to compromise with a godless culture.

One Word: Be faithful to do what is right

HAMAN'S PLOT

Esther 3:5-15

Key Verse: 3:8a

1. Haman's rage (5-6)

When he was told of Mordecai's refusal to pay him honor, Haman was furious. When he found that Mordecai was a Jew, he decided that he would make this an opportunity to destroy all the Jews. He cast lots ("pur") to find the right time. (Later, the Jews celebrated the Feast of Purim, remembering Esther.)

2. A people who are different (7-15)

Haman told the king that there were some people scattered throughout his empire who were different. They kept their own customs and did not obey his laws. He advised the king to have them destroyed and offered to make a large contribution of money to carry out this task. God's people are still persecuted if they do not follow the ways of the world or accommodate to culture. Haman issued a decree under the king's seal ordering the annihilation of the Jews. Then, he went in and had a drink with the king.

Prayer: Lord, raise up a people who love you and are willing to be different, a people who do not compromise with the world.

One Word: Dare to be different

“IF YOU REMAIN SILENT...”

Esther 4:1-17

Key Verse: 4:14

1. For such a time as this (1-14)

When Mordecai learned of the king's edict, he and all the Jews wept, put on sackcloth, fasted and prayed. Esther sent a trusted servant to Mordecai to find out what was going on. Mordecai sent her the details of Haman's plot, and told her to plead with the king for her people. Until this time, Esther had concealed her Jewish identity. Now, she hesitated. Anyone who went to the king without being summoned could be put to death. Mordecai told her two things: First, she should not think that she would escape just because she was queen. Second, God had put her in that royal position for just this purpose. She could refuse God's mission--then God would use someone else to save his people.

2. I will go to the king (15-17)

Esther made a decision. She asked the Jews to fast and to pray for her, and she would do the same. Then, after this spiritual preparation, she would risk her life and go to the king. She said, "If I perish, I perish."

Prayer: Lord, make me always available to you for your use. Give me faith and courage to do what must be done.

One Word: For such a time as this

THE GOLDEN SCEPTER EXTENDED

Esther 5:1-14

Key Verse: 5:2

1. Queen Esther's invitation (1-8)

When beautiful Queen Esther stood in the entrance of the king's court, he held out his golden scepter to her. He was not angry, even though he had not summoned her. In fact, he was really glad to see her. It was an answer to prayer. He offered to give her whatever she asked. But God gave Queen Esther wisdom. She did not state her case immediately; rather, she invited the king and Haman to a small, intimate dinner party. Then, the next day, to another one.

2. Haman builds a gallows (9-14)

Haman did not know that Queen Esther was Jewish. He was very happy to be invited to the queen's banquet to dine with the king. His high spirits fell, however, when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate. He went home in a bad mood. When he told his wife about this, she suggested

that he build a gallows and ask the king to hang Mordecai on it. So he built the gallows, and felt better.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for answering prayer. Give me faith and wisdom and patience like Esther's.

One Word: Don't give up; pray and act

THE KING HONORS MORDECAI

Esther 6:1-14

Key Verse: 6:6a

1. The king's sleepless night (1-3)

That night, the king couldn't sleep, so someone read his journals to him. He found recorded there the story of how Mordecai had discovered and reported the assassination plot. He had forgotten about this. He found that Mordecai had not been properly thanked. Just then, Haman came in to ask about hanging Mordecai. God's hand in these events is evident.

2. Haman's grief (4-14)

When Haman arrived, the king was looking for a way to honor Mordecai. He asked Haman's opinion. Haman's answer reveals his own ambition. He suggested that the man to be honored be dressed in the king's robe, placed on the king's horse, and led through the city by a high-ranking nobleman. The king then told Haman to do this for Mordecai. He obeyed, then rushed home full of grief.

Prayer: Lord, you oppose the proud and give grace to the humble. Protect your people from the evil one.

One Word: Man schemes, but God works

SPARE MY PEOPLE

Esther 7:1-10

Key Verse: 7:3

1. Spare my people (1-4)

The king was pleased with Queen Esther. He enjoyed the delicious banquet she had prepared. He asked her a third time to state her petition. She did not evade the truth. She told the king plainly about the impending disaster facing her and her people. The king demanded to know who was responsible for this, and Esther pointed to the vile enemy of God's people, Haman.

2. Haman hanged high (5-10)

Haman was terrified. The king left the room in anger and went out into the garden. Haman's pleas to the queen became ardent; when the king came back in, Haman was falling on the couch where Queen Esther was reclining. The king was enraged at Haman's rude behavior and ordered Haman hanged. Someone said, "There's a 75' gallows near Haman's house." So Haman was hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for answering prayer by raising up faithful and obedient men and women. Raise up women like Esther.

One Word: God is just

AN EDICT TO SAVE THE JEWS

Esther 8:1-17

Key Verse: 8:17

1. Esther pleads for her people (1-10)

The king's edict which Haman had sent out to all the provinces of the empire was still in effect. On the 13th day of Adar the Jews were to be attacked and annihilated. Esther again risked her life to come to the king. Again he extended his golden scepter. He gave Mordecai authority to write another edict under the king's own seal.

2. Many become Jews (11-17)

The first edict could not be rescinded, but the second one was an effective antidote. It gave the Jews the right to assemble and protect themselves. It also gave them permission to attack and destroy their enemies, and plunder their property. The Jews in every place celebrated with joy and feasting. Many people were seized with fear of God and of God's people, so they became Jews. God turned the near tragedy into a time of victory.

Prayer: Lord, help us to pray and act in faith in times of trouble so that you may turn tragedy into victory.

One Word: God turns tragedy into victory

A GREAT DAY AND A GREAT MAN

Esther 9:1-10:3

Key Verse: 9:22

1. The tables are turned (9:1-17)

On the very day they were to be annihilated the Jews were permitted to attack their enemies. They did so, and won a great victory in every place. God had given them victory. All they had to do was claim it. They killed their enemies, but they took no plunder. Haman's sons were hanged, and his property turned over to Mordecai.

2. The Feast of Purim (9:18-10:3)

The day that Haman had chosen by "pur" (lot) to be the day of Jewish annihilation became a day of joy and victory. Mordecai sent letters to the Jews scattered throughout the provinces asking them to celebrate these days with feasting and joy, and to give gifts to one another and to the poor. So the Feast of Purim was begun. It is still celebrated by the Jews. Mordecai was elevated to a high position, and he continued to speak out on behalf of his people.

Prayer: Lord, teach us to remember and celebrate the victories you give, and be filled with thanksgiving.

One Word: Render joyful victory to God