



Esther



THRU the BIBLE

NOTES & OUTLINES WITH

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HISTORY



Esther

This is one of the two books of the Old Testament named for a woman. While Ruth is the story of a Gentile who married a Jew, Esther is the story of a Jewess who married a Gentile.

WRITER: Unknown. Could Mordecai have been the writer? (See Esther 9:29.)

KEY VERSE: Esther 4:14

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

A STRANGE STORY: God's name is not mentioned in this book; no divine title or pronoun refers to Him. The heathen king's name is mentioned 192 times. (It is true also that God's name does not occur in the Song of Solomon, but every masculine pronoun—with a possible exception of 8:6—refers to Him.) Esther is the record of Israel in a self-chosen pathway. Opportunity had been given for the Jews to return under Cyrus, but only a very small remnant returned. Ezra and Nehemiah give the story of those who did return; Esther gives the story of those who did not return but who chose instead the prosperity and luxury of Persia. They are out of the will of God, but they are not beyond His care. Deuteronomy

31:18 explains the reason God's name does not appear. In the book of Esther His face is hidden. There is no mention of prayer nor dependence upon God in this book. Esther is never quoted in the New Testament, nor is there even a casual reference to it. However, the Jews give it a peculiar emphasis. It is one of the five books called *Megilloth* (rolls) and is placed beside the Pentateuch in importance.

SUBJECT: Esther teaches the providence of God. "Providence" comes from the same stem as "provide," and it means simply that God will provide.

Theologically, providence is the direction God gives to everything: animate and inanimate, good and evil.

Practically, providence is the hand of God in the glove of history—and that glove will never move until He moves it. God is at the steering wheel of this universe. Providence means that God is behind the scenes, shifting and directing them. Providence is the way God coaches the runner on second base. It is the way God leads those who will not be led. As recorded in the book of Esther, the entire Jewish nation would have been slain had it not been for the providence of God. God stands in the shadows, keeping watch over His own.

ANTI-SEMITISM: This book teaches how God met another satanic attempt to destroy the nation Israel, and how vengeance was wrought upon the perpetrators of the dastardly deed. (See Genesis 12:3.)

OUTLINE:

- I. The wife who refused to obey her husband, Chapter 1**
- II. The beauty contest to choose a real queen, Chapter 2**
- III. Haman and anti-Semitism, Chapter 3**
- IV. For such a time as this, Chapter 4**
- V. The scepter of grace and the nobility of Esther, Chapter 5**
- VI. When a king could not sleep at night, Chapter 6**
- VII. The man who came to dinner but died on the gallows, Chapter 7**
- VIII. The message of hope that went out from the king, Chapter 8**
- IX. The institution of the Feast of Purim, Chapters 9, 10**

COMMENT:

I. The wife who refused to obey her husband, Chapter 1

V. 1—Rather than a name, “Ahasuerus” is a title meaning “high father.” This Ahasuerus is probably the Xerxes mentioned in Ezra 4:7. The date is approximately 486 B.C.

W. 2-6—Before his disastrous campaign into Greece, Xerxes held a banquet with a great display of wealth and power to impress the nobles of his kingdom and to enlist their enthusiastic support.

V. 7, 8—There was no pressure on anyone to drink, but there was an abundance of alcoholic beverages available.

V. 9—Queen Vashti made a separate banquet for the women.

V. 10, 11—The king, evidently under the influence of wine, summoned the queen to appear at his banquet to display her beauty. This was contrary to accepted custom and she refused to come.

V. 12—Her refusal makes it evident that she was a person of nobility and strength of character.

V. 13-15—This precipitated a state crisis that could not be ignored. A crisis meeting of the cabinet was called to determine what measures were to be taken.

V. 16-20—Memucan, obviously a hen-pecked husband, suggested that extreme measures be adopted. The queen should be set aside permanently.

The example would prevent other wives from assuming too much liberty.

V. 21, 22—Under the emotional reaction of the moment, the king accepted this suggestion and made a decree to set aside Queen Vashti. This would insure the right of husbands to rule in their own homes.

II. The beauty contest to choose a real queen, Chapter 2

V. 1—After the disastrous campaign to Greece when Xerxes was soundly defeated, he returns in deep dejection to his palace. Added to his misery is the absence of his queen and the fact that the law of the Medes and Persians cannot be altered—even by the king himself. Vashti can never again be his queen.

W. 2-4—The servants of the king, seeing his deep depression, suggest a contest be conducted to choose another queen. The contest is advertised throughout the entire kingdom.

V. 5, 6—Here is where the story actually begins. Mordecai, of the tribe of Benjamin, is one of the Jews who had not returned to Jerusalem. He had settled in the capital of Persia with no thought of returning. His name means “little man.” Evidently he is a short person, which adds to the interest of the record.

V. 7—He had adopted his uncle’s daughter, Esther, and had reared her as his own. She is a beautiful young woman.

V. 8—Mordecai enters her in the beauty contest.

V. 9—Esther immediately pleases Hegai, who has charge of the contest. The hand of God is beginning to move in providential dealings with a people who no longer look to Him.

V. 10—Esther has not revealed her nationality.

V. 11—The concern of Mordecai is evident, for he feels he can no longer turn to God for help.

V. 12—Beauty treatments took an extra long time in that day—as well as today.

W. 13-18—Esther wins the contest. When the king sees her, the contest is over. He places the crown upon her head and makes her his queen.

W. 19-23—Immediately Mordecai is found “sitting in the gate,” which means he has been given a political job and is now a judge. He overhears a plot to kill the king and reveals it to Esther who, in turn, reports it to the king. The deed is recorded but no reward or recognition is given to Mordecai.

III. Haman and anti-Semitism, Chapter 3

V. 1—Haman is promoted by the king to the position corresponding to prime minister. He is an Agagite (Saul should have obeyed God and destroyed the Agagites—see 1 Samuel 15:1-9).

V. 2—Because of Haman’s position, the king commands all to bow and revere him. Mordecai refuses because of his training in the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 5:7-10). God’s people revere only God (Daniel 3:8-12; 6:4-15). Although he is walking in disobedience, Mordecai has not repudiated his God.

W. 5, 6—Haman reveals that he is a small man. He should have ignored Mordecai, but his hatred knows no bounds. Haman determines to destroy not Mordecai alone, but all the Jews.

W. 8-11—The king gives Haman permission to have the Jews killed on a certain day. The king is careless of human life and makes no inquiry as to details concerning the people Haman accuses.

W. 12-18—A decree is drawn up and sent throughout the kingdom permitting the people to slay the Jews on the 13th day of Adar (March). The people are shocked at such a brutal and senseless decree. This is one of the many attempts of Satan to destroy the people of Israel and frustrate God's purpose in sending Christ into the world. Anti-Semitic purges began with Pharaoh and continued down through the times of Herod, Hitler, the Arab world, and our present society.

IV. For such a time as this, Chapter 4

W. 1, 2—Mordecai mourns in sackcloth and ashes, but there is no mention of prayer.

V. 3—The Jews throughout the kingdom mourn, but still there is no mention of prayer.

V. 4—Queen Esther is embarrassed by the conduct of Mordecai, and she sends him a new suit of clothes. There is an application here. The covering of religion will not remove the fact that man is a guilty sinner before God. Neither will religion alter the fact that the wages of sin is death. Mordecai refuses the new garments.

W. 5-8—Esther knows now that there is some serious crisis and she sends Hatach to learn the nature of it. Mordecai returns to her a copy of the terrible decree.

W. 9-11—Esther reports back to Mordecai that there is nothing she can do, as she does not have access to the king.

W. 12-14—Mordecai sends back an SOS. Her life is in danger because she is a Jewess, her relatives are in danger, and her nation is in danger. If she refuses to accept the challenge, deliverance will come from another place. Obviously this is a veiled reference to the providence of God. Mordecai believes that God will intervene. He urges Esther to act, as he now begins to see the hand of God in bringing her to the throne.

W. 15-17—Esther accepts this challenge. Notice that she makes no reference to prayer, only to fasting. The strange providences of God are becoming evident, and there is revealed a confidence in the unnamed One.

V. The scepter of grace and the nobility of Esther, Chapter 5

V. 1—For anyone to appear before the king without permission means instant death—unless the king holds out the scepter to the intruder. Esther displays a brave nobility as she arbitrarily goes into his presence.

V. 2—The king extends his scepter toward her, and she comes near and touches it.

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water; he turneth it whithersoever he will. (Proverbs 21:1)

V. 3—The king senses that a real crisis has arisen which brings the queen into his presence. He gives her assurance by promising to grant her request even to half of the kingdom. This is the same as giving her a signed check with his permission to fill in the amount.

God gives His children the same promise:

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

W. 4, 5—Esther is still reluctant to state her case and invites the king and Haman to a banquet (luncheon).

V. 6—Again the king renews his assurance by offering her a blank check.

W. 7, 8—The queen promises to reveal her request at another banquet on the following day, if the king and Haman will accept her invitation.

W. 9-14—Haman goes from the banquet filled with joy and pride, though the sight of Mordecai dulls the edge of his joy. He returns to his home and begins to boast. But he reveals that the presence of Mordecai is the fly in the ointment. His wife Zeresh and his friends advise him to build a gallows 50 cubits high and get an order from the king to hang Mordecai on it. Haman agrees to do this.

There are several lessons in this chapter. God is holding out the scepter of grace to a lost world today. We all must stand in the presence of the King someday. A Greek proverb is illustrated in this chapter—“Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.”

The extreme hatred of Haman is revealed in the height of the gallows—remember that Mordecai is a very short man.

VI. When a king could not sleep at night, Chapter 6

In this chapter we see the strange providences of God in operation.

V. 1—That the king could not sleep seems a very small thing, but God uses small things. “God swings great doors on little hinges.” Years before, in Egypt, God brought a woman’s heart and a baby’s cry together when Pharaoh’s daughter found the baby Moses in the Nile River. By this He changed the destiny of a nation.

Evidently, hearing the uninteresting records of the kingdom was conducive to sleep. They are the king’s sleeping pill.

V. 2—The scribe “just happens” to read the record of Mordecai’s deed in saving the king’s life (2:21-23).

V. 3—The king learns that Mordecai had not been recognized or rewarded.

W. 4-6—At that early hour, Haman comes to get the order from the king to execute Mordecai. Before he can state his business, the king puts a question to him, “What shall be done for the man whom the king delighteth to honor?” The unsuspecting Haman, thinking that the king is referring to him, makes an audacious suggestion.

W. 7-9—The proposal reveals the real desire of Haman—he wants the throne. This honor would prepare the people for their acceptance of him.

W. 10, 11—Haman is stunned and humiliated when he learns that the man to be honored is Mordecai!

W. 12-14—This time Haman returns home to cry instead of boast. His wife and friends warn him that he is in grave danger. (What a wife is Zeresh!) While Haman is still bemoaning the sad turn of events, the king’s servants come to bring Haman to Esther’s banquet.

VII. The man who came to dinner but died on the gallows, Chapter 7

W. 1, 2—For the third time the king gives Esther a blank check to fill out. He loves her and wants to please her.

W. 3, 4—Esther now reveals the dastardly plot to destroy her and her people.

V. 5—The king demands to know the name of the man.

V. 6—Esther identifies Haman as the man. Haman is stunned; he did not know that Esther was a Jewess.

V. 7—The king likewise is astounded and shocked at his misplaced confidence in Haman. He goes into his garden to think things over.

V. 8—Haman pleads for his life as he falls across the couch of the queen. He is beside himself with fear. The king returns and sees Haman in this compromising position.

W. 9, 10—He orders that Haman be hanged on the very gallows he had erected for Mordecai.

No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD. (Isaiah 54:17)

I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away and, lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. (Psalm 37:35, 36)

VIII. The message of hope that went out from the king, Chapter 8

Because the first decree could not be changed, another decree is issued that permits the Jews to defend themselves. The king's government that initially demanded their execution now defends them. This brings salvation and deliverance to a people who otherwise would have perished.

A decree has gone out from God to mankind: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20). "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Although this has not been altered or cancelled, man need not perish, for another decree has gone out from God:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

IX. The institution of the Feast of Purim, Chapters 9, 10

The day that would have meant the destruction of the people of Israel is the day of their great deliverance. Darkness is turned into light; night is turned into day. This day becomes another holy day for the nation and is called the Feast of Purim (9:20-32).

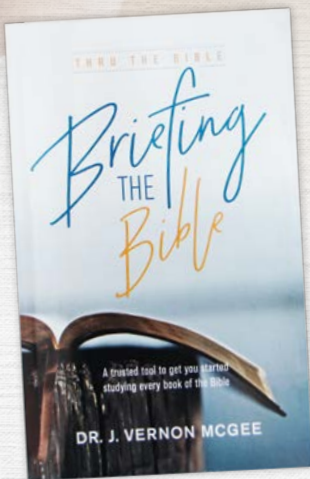
The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD. (Proverbs 16:33)

Many believers know only of a distant and strange providence. They do not learn to walk with God in close fellowship, obeying His Word. As someone has expressed it,

*He knows and loves and cares,
Nothing this truth can dim:
He gives the very best to those
Who leave the choice to Him.*

It is interesting to see that Herodotus, the Greek historian, states that the wife of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) was a cold, vindictive queen after the invasion against Greece. For an outsider, this would appear to be the fact.

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