

Esther

“The Providence of God”

I. Introduction to Esther

- A. The purpose of this book is to demonstrate the providence of God
 - 1. Providence – from the Latin “videre”; means “to see before”. Speaks of God’s divine intervention in the affairs of men.
 - 2. From the shadows, God keeps watch over His own.
 - 3. He might be out of our sight, but we are never out of His
 - a. “Behold He who keeps Israel shall never slumber nor sleep.” Psalm 121:4
 - b. “My Father has been working until now and I have been working.” John 5:17
 - c. Earthly life is filled with heavenly guidance.
 - i. History is His –story
 - 4. Sometimes God’s Hand is unmistakably evident
 - a. Met Moses at the burning bush
 - b. Parted the Jordan River for Joshua
 - c. Wrote on Belshazzar’s wall
 - d. Appeared in Mary’s manger
 - 5. Other times, as in the book of Esther, He seems to work in the shadows
 - a. Seen or unseen, His guidance, deliverance and care are no less effective
 - b. While the name of God is not found directly in Esther, His work is seen on every page
- B. In Esther, God orders the elements of the universe so:
 - 1. His purpose is accomplished
 - 2. Creation serves its divine purpose
- C. The miracle of Esther is that God is able to manipulate all non-miraculous events to accomplish His purpose.
- D. Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther record God’s dealing with the Jews after the Captivity
 - 1. Ezra and Nehemiah deal with those who returned to Jerusalem
 - 2. Esther deals with the masses who remained spread throughout Persia
- E. The events of Esther fit between Ezra 6 and 7.
 - 1. Historically our Bibles would read:
 - a. Ezra 1 – 6
 - b. Esther
 - c. Ezra 7 – 12
 - d. Nehemiah
 - 2. These events take place between 486 – 474 B.C. and cover approximately twelve years.
 - 3. The book focuses on events that happen in the capital of Persia
- F. Esther never directly mentions God
 - 1. His work is evident throughout the story
 - 2. Some notice His name in four acrostics scattered throughout the story
 - a. Esther 1:20
 - b. Esther 5:4
 - c. Esther 5:13
 - d. Esther 7:7
 - 3. Those were perhaps designed to show God working from behind the shadows.
 - a. “God is in the book of Esther, not in syllables, but in events. Not in miraculous intervention, but as the guiding wheels of providence. Not in open communication, but as the unseen power over all.” J.S. Baxter
- G. Esther focuses upon five main characters.
 - 1. King Ahasuerus or Xerxes
 - 2. Queen Vashti

Esther

“The Providence of God”

3. Haman the Agagite
 4. Mordecai
 5. Esther
- H. Standing in the background are more than one million Jews on the verge of extinction.

II. Outline of Esther

- A. The book focuses upon one major crisis: the extermination of the Jews
- B. It tells one continuous story, but may be divided into two parts
 1. Section 1 Esther 1 – 5 The Crisis Anticipated
 2. Section 2 Esther 6 – 10 The Crisis Prevented
- C. The main purpose is to show how the hand of God rescued His People from annihilation.
- D. **Section 1** Esther 1 – 5 The Crisis Anticipated
 1. Chapter 1
 - a. We are introduced to two of our five main characters
 - i. Ahasuerus, the king
 - ii. Vashti, his wife
 - b. Ahasuerus, also known by the Greek name Xerxes was the fourth king of Persia
 - i. Reigned from 485 – 465 B.C.
 - ii. Son of Darius I
 - iii. Father of Artaxerxes (King during Nehemiah)
 - iv. Ruled over an empire from India to Ethiopia, to Iran and Greece
 - v. The empire consisted of 127 provinces
 - vi. He was assassinated in 465 B.C.
 - c. He obtained the throne upon the death of his father, Darius I
 - i. Darius had led a campaign of 50,000 soldiers against Greece, but was unable to subdue and conquer
 - ii. This battle took place in Greece at Marathon on September 9, 490 B.C.
 - iii. Grecian soldiers withstood the onslaught and caused the Persian army to retreat
 - iv. The Persians planned to set sail for Athens and destroy them
 1. Herodotus (the “Father of History”) records that a soldier named Philipedes ran 140 miles in two days to Sparta to muster forces and defend Athens.
 2. The battle is significant for it was the beginning of the rise of Greece and Europe
 3. Legend: Since Marathon is approximately twenty-six miles from Athens, a story is told of a man who ran the distance in three hours in order to warn Athenians.
 - a. This was the site of the first Marathon
 - d. Xerxes desired to finish where his father, Darius, left off. He sought to muster an army to defeat Greece.
 - i. His father brought a wave, he would bring the ocean
 2. The Great Feast
 - a. For six months leaders from 127 provinces gathered to explore the great wealth of Persia
 - b. A seven day feast for the entire empire followed
 - c. Purpose was to unite Persia in an endeavor to conquer Greece

Esther

“The Providence of God”

- d. Soon became a drunken party.
 - i. The Bible warns of the danger of drunkenness
 - 1. Proverbs 20:1 and Proverbs 31:4
 - e. Xerxes, as many do, ignored the warnings and in his drunken state called for Queen Vashti.
3. Vashti: The Queen also had a celebration for the royal wives
- a. She was summoned before the king
 - i. Jewish tradition says wearing only a crown
 - b. She refused to comply with the summons.
 - i. A counsel was called
 - ii. Vashti was stripped of the title and a new queen would be sought
2. Chapter 2
- a. Four years transpire between Chapters 1 and 2
 - b. Where the Bible is silent, history is loud
 - c. Xerxes led a massive army against Greece at the Battle of Thermopylae (Thermopile)
 - i. Ancient history records there were as many as one million soldiers and 10,000 special forces
 - ii. A vastly inferior army led by 300 Spartans withstood the Persian kingdom for seven days and were defeated only because of a traitor in their midst.
 - d. Xerxes' army continued, defeating Athens, but were unable to conquer all of Greece
 - e. This battle fueled Grecian hatred for Persia and led to Alexander the Great's conquest approximately 150 years later.
 - f. This is a crucial turning point in Western civilization, and fulfilled prophesy and prepared the way for the coming of Christ and the spread of the Gospel
3. The Bible picks up the story again after Xerxes failed attempt; he's lonely and misses Vashti. A plan unfolds to crown a new queen.
- a. Young women are selected from throughout Persia
 - b. They spend a year at the spa
 - c. The women were brought to Xerxes, one by one, over the course of many months
 - d. The chosen became queen
 - e. The rejected remained as one of his many concubines
4. It is at this point we are introduced to the next two main characters: Esther and Mordecai
- a. Esther is described as a woman of exceptional beauty, inside and out
 - b. Upon the death of her parents, she was raised by her older cousin Mordecai
 - i. Mordecai seems to have given up on a family of his own to raise Esther
 - c. Mordecai served in some capacity as an official in the gate of Shushan.
5. Because of her beauty and the favor of God, ester is selected as the queen of Persia
- a. We begin to see the providential hand of God at work raising an orphan to become the Queen.
6. Chapter 2 ends with Mordecai “stumbling” upon a plot to kill the King.
- a. These plots were common and later Xerxes would be assassinated by his royal guard.
7. Chapter 3
- a. Between Chapters 2-3 five years pass.
 - b. Chapter 3 introduces us to Haman
 - i. An Agagite
 - 1. A descendent of the Amalekites
 - 2. Continual enemy to Israel

Esther

“The Providence of God”

- ii. Promoted to “Prime Ministry”
- iii. Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman
 - 1. No reason is explained
 - 2. Seems hard to believe he never bowed to Xerxes as king.
 - 3. It is not a sin to show respect.
- iv. This fueled Haman’s hatred of the Jews and he plotted their extermination.
 - 1. The die was cast, selecting eleven months into the future as the date for genocide.
 - 2. Letters were sent to every province explaining the day they were to use force in killing all Jews
- v. Esther 3:8 reveals the real reason for Haman’s hatred: they were “different”

8. Chapter 4

- a. The reaction of the people of God
 - i. Mordecai put on sackcloth, ashes, crying out
 - 1. His own action of refusing to bow may cost millions of lives
 - ii. All the Jews followed suit
 - iii. Esther remains silent
 - 1. Seems she has not heard the news
 - 2. Later fear keeps her quiet
 - a. The law of Persia forbids to approach Xerxes
 - 3. Mordecai’s exhortation (Esther 4:13-14)
 - a. God will deliver
 - b. God wants to use you
 - iv. Esther’s reaction is to call a prayer meeting.
 - 1. Her courage would come from prayer
 - 2. Providence impacted by prayer.

9. Chapter 5

- a. Begins with answered prayer
 - i. Esther now has courage to approach Xerxes
 - ii. Esther finds favor with the king
 - iii. Esther is given wisdom to stop Haman’s plans
 - iv. Esther continues to hear the voice of God
- b. Esther asks to have a special meal for Xerxes and Haman. At the meal she asks for one more day to make her request.
- c. At this point, contrasting story lines develop
 - i. Haman goes home and builds a gallows to hang Mordecai
 - ii. Xerxes can’t sleep

E. Section 2 The Crisis prevented

1. Chapter 6

- a. Unable to sleep Xerxes has the court records read to him
- b. God’s hand is seen again as the record shows Mordecai had saved the King and never been rewarded
- c. Haman arrives to receive permission to hang Mordecai
- d. Kings ask how to honor a man
 - i. Haman, thinking he will be honored, suggests the king’ clothes, horse and escort

Esther

“The Providence of God”

- ii. “With consummate skill He who sits in the Heavens turns the table on the wicked and delivers His own.” J.S. Baxter
- 2. Chapter 7
 - a. Haman is escorted to the banquet where Esther declared that she is a Jewess and Haman wants her dead.
 - b. Haman is hung on his own gallows.
- 3. Chapters 8 – 9
 - a. Though Haman was dead the plot was still very much alive.
 - b. A new plan is developed to help the Jews
 - c. A letter was sent throughout Persia encouraging the Jews to defend themselves
 - i. Armed with the support of the king, the Jews held off the threat and defeated all who came against them
 - d. To celebrate, an annual feast was established, called “Purim” or Lots
 - i. Named after the die cast that first sealed their fate.
 - ii. Purim is still celebrated today
 - 1. Esther is read
 - a. Whenever Haman’s name is read (almost 50 times), people make noise to drowned it out.
 - i. Banging rocks, spinning the Ra’ashan, shouting
 - 2. Gifts are exchanged
 - 3. Became a costume party like Halloween
 - 4. Hitler hated Purim and sought to avenge Haman
 - i. On numerous occasions hostility toward Jews occurred on Purim
 - ii. Julius Streicher, head of Nazi Propaganda, just prior to his execution, declared “Primfest 1946”
- 4. Chapter 10 closes the book of Esther

III. Why Study Esther Part 1

- A. Gives insight into Jewish life in Persia
- B. Reveals the value and cost of purity
 - 1. Vashti lost her position for refusing the King
 - 2. Esther exalted for being different than all other women.
- C. The main message is the providence of God
 - 1. The promises
 - a. Isaiah 54:17
 - b. Romans 8:28
 - c. 2 Corinthians 2:14
 - 2. Often our circumstances cast a shadow over the promises of God.
 - a. What do we learn from Esther:
 - b. Her parents died, leaving her an orphan
 - c. She was raised by a cousin
 - d. She was ripped away from home to the King’s court
 - a. Josephus says reluctantly
 - e. She was chosen as Queen upon the removal from her home
 - f. Years went by with no divine purpose revealed
 - a. Often we just want to know God’s purpose
 - g. When the opportunity to do something arises, it will be at the penalty of death
 - h. When she calls for the meal she is too afraid to ask

Esther

“The Providence of God”

- i. What do we learn from Mordecai:
- 3. Gives his life to raise and protect Esther
 - a. She is taken by the King
- 4. Saves the Kings life; his deed goes un-noticed
- 5. Refuses to bow; his actions threaten all the Jews
 - a. Yet in all this we see the hand of God working to save a nation.
- D. The value of exhortation
 - 1. Esther stirred to action
- E. Self-defense encouraged

IV. Types of Christ

- A. While there is no mention of God, He is seen
 - 1. The Feast of Chapter 1 contrasts with heaven
 - a. Ephesians 2:7
 - 2. Haman the Agagite
 - a. The danger of leaving the flesh un-crucified