

Esther Notes

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Introduction:

Esther would be placed chronologically between Ezra chapters 6 and 7.

- The events of Esther deal with the Jews who remained in Persia despite the permission given by the king for them to return to Israel with Zerubbabel and Joshua.
- Esther comes about 40 years after the Babylonian captivity and about 40 years before Nehemiah.

Neither the name of God, worship, sacrifice, nor prayer are mentioned in this book.

- God is not named in Esther possibly to keep Himself from being seen to endorse the failure of the Jews to return to Judah when the opportunity presented itself. Or He is not named as a testimony to the fact that He is always present even when He is unseen.
- The theme of Esther is the sovereign oversight of God in the course of human history governmentally and in our personal lives individually.
- It appears that the author has deliberately refrained from mentioning God or any religious activity as a literary device to heighten the fact that it is God who controls and directs all the seemingly insignificant coincidences that make up the plot and issue in deliverance for the Jews.
- The theme of Esther is “Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Est. 4:14)

Throughout much of the story, the author calls to mind the ongoing conflict of Israel with the Amalekites (2:5; 3:1-6; 9:5-10), a conflict that began during the exodus (Exod. 17:8-16; Deut. 25:17-19) and continued through Israel’s history (1 Sam. 15; 1 Chron. 4:43).

Chapter 1:

1:1 – “Ahasuerus” – Also known as Xerxes I who reigned from 486-465 BC. He was the grandson of Cyrus, the son of Darius I, and the father of Artaxerxes.

- History portrays Xerxes as a madman. At one point, he had a bridge built that was blown down by a storm. As a result, Xerxes scourged the sea, threw shackles at the storm, and beheaded all the bridge builders.
- History also tells us that of the 3 dominant Persian kings (Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes), Xerxes was the tallest, strongest, and most handsome. But he was also given to drinking and fits of rage.
- This is at the height of the Medo-Persian Empire.

1:2 – “Shushan” – This was the winter palace of the Persian kings.

1:3 – “a feast for all his officials” – Historically, we know Xerxes was promoting and preparing for a war with Greece at this time.

- At this time in history, the Greeks are the rising world power. They defeated Xerxes’ father, Darius, at Marathon. Xerxes has already put down a rebellion in the province, but at this time he is looking at engaging the Greeks in a naval battle. This feast was an attempt to build up support and a coalition to fight against those Greeks.

- 1:4 – “one hundred and eighty days in all” – This was a 6 month party.
- The daily provision of the court of Cyrus (whose kingdom didn’t reach the heights of the kingdom under Xerxes) consisted of 400 sheep, 300 lambs, 100 oxen, 30 horses, 30 deer, 400 geese, 100 young geese, 600 small birds, 3,750 gallons of wine, 75 gallons of new milk, and 75 gallons of sour milk.
- 1:7 – “each vessel being different” – They were wealthy enough to purchase uniquely designed gold vessels for all.
- 1:9 – “Vashti” – Her name implies the meaning of “beautiful.”
- “a feast for the women” – The women had a separate party.
- 1:10 – “the king was merry with wine” – The influence of alcohol to cause people to do things they wouldn’t have done while sober.
- “eunuchs” – They are made eunuchs by the king to ensure that there would be no uprisings against the king from these men who could not produce children to hand the kingdom off to if they would succeed.
- 1:11 – “wearing her royal crown” – It seems that she is asked to come uncovered (without her veil) or completely unclothed.
- He is attempting to demonstrate his power by mistreating his wife. This is a humiliation. Instead of protecting her, he is exposing her.
- 1:12 – “Vashti refused” – She is willing to lose everything rather than to be made into a simple object of desire.
- Vashti knows her refusing could cost her her life. Xerxes is the king of man that when approached by a family asking that their son be spared from the war because they had previously lost another son in the war, took the living son, cut him in half, and marched his army through the middle of the pieces.
 - “the king was furious” – This was insubordination in his eyes. It is an offence to his pride.
 - Xerxes is trying to get the support of all these princes to go off to war, but he can’t even order his own wife.
- 1:19 – “the laws of the Persians and Medes” – Daniel 6 also refers to the unalterable laws of the Medes and the Persians.
- “Vashti shall come no more” – God is steering in a drunken party through this king’s pride to make way for Esther.
- 1:20 – “all wives will honor” – The best way to receive honor is to be honorable, not to issue a decree.
- 1:22 – “he sent letters” – Persia had the best mail delivery system of that time. It was much like the Pony Express system of the Old West.

Chapter 2:

- 2:1 – “After these things” – There are 4 years between chapters 1 and 2. For about 3 of those years, Xerxes was leading a set of failed military campaigns in Greece.
- 2:4 – “pleases the king” – In appearance and sexually as well.

- 2:5 – “Mordecai” – This is a Babylonian name. Evidently, he was born in captivity.
- “the son of Kish” – This was the family of King Saul.
- 2:6 – “Kish had been carried away” – This was during the second deportation of the Babylonians.
(2 Kings 24:8-17; 2 Chron. 36:9-10)
- 2:7 – “Mordecai” – He raises this young orphaned cousin as his own daughter.
- “Hadassah” – Her Hebrew name means “myrtle.”
 - “Esther” – Her Persian name means “star.”
 - “her father and mother died” – She has lost both parents at a relatively young age.
 - This is enough to make many a person bitter at God and the world.
 - Yet God will direct the course of human history through this orphan girl.
- 2:8 – “Esther also was taken” – She would have no say in this matter.
- Josephus records that Esther fought going and tried to hide from Xerxes’ soldiers.
 - “the custodian of the women” – A position of a eunuch.
 - Esther is silent during this entire scene.
- 2:14 – “the second house of the women...concubines” – He knows them sexually and then keeps them in his harem as concubines.
- The women in the harem were generally taken care of extremely well, but no doubt they led a lonely life.
 - All this is done to Esther long before she knows why God has allowed it or what He is going to do with it. She is unknowingly being prepared and set in place despite great personal pain and difficulty.
- 2:16 – “the seventh year of his reign” – Esther 1:3 started in “the third years of his reign.”
- God has been involved, though unseen, in this 4 year process.
- 2:19 – “the king’s gate” – Mordecai holds some position of influence in the king’s court.
- 2:20 – “Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai” – Mordecai is still a covering to Esther.
- 2:22 – “in Mordecai’s name” – He saves the king’s life and gets no honor in return.
- God is delaying Mordecai’s honor until an ideal time.
- 2:23 – “hanged on a gallows” – This is likely referring to impalement on a post.

Chapter 3:

3:1 – “After these things” – Four years have passed between chapters 2 and 3. (Est. 2:16-17; 3:7)

- “Agagite” – Haman was either a descendant of the Amalekite kings or he was from the province of Agag.
 - As an Amalekite, he is a picture of the flesh. (Exod. 17)
 - Saul was commanded to kill all the Amalekites in 1 Sam. 15, but left King Agag to survive.
 - Mordecai was a Benjamite, of the family of King Saul, and comes about 500 years after the command was given to Saul to destroy Agag.
- “advanced him” – Mordecai uncovered the plot that saved Xerxes’ life, but Haman is the one to get promoted. It doesn’t seem fair.
 - Sometimes God give people divine amnesia, like happened to Joseph for 2 years in the Egyptian prison. (Gen. 40:23-41:1)

3:4 – “daily” – They are questioning Mordecai day-by-day.

- “he was a Jew” – Mordecai’s refusal to bow has something to do with his religious convictions.
 - Mordecai has tried to hide his Jewishness.
 - Is this civil disobedience? (Rom. 13)

3:5 – “Haman was filled with wrath” – One old Jewish man keeps Haman from enjoying his promotion, wealth, and power.

3:6 – “lay hands on Mordecai” – Haman was scheming to hurt Mordecai.

- “destroy all the Jews” – The extermination of the Jews would mean the end of the messianic promise for the world. (Gen. 12:1-3)
- “the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus” – This would include Jerusalem.
 - Some estimate as many as 15 million Jews were living throughout the Persian Empire at this time.
 - Haman is the picture of a prejudiced man. He makes a broad-brushed judgment on an entire race of people based on an unfavorable experience with one man.
 - The root of anti-Semitism is Satanic.

3:7 – “Nisan” – This would correspond to April on our calendar.

- “the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus” – It has been 9 years since Esther 1:3.
- “Pur” – means “lot.”
 - There is tradition and occult attached to the Persian casting of lots.
- “it fell on the twelfth month” – This is the longest delay possible.
- “Adar” – This would correspond to March on our calendar.

3:8 – “their laws are different” – Haman is unknowingly making a complement.

3:9 – “ten thousand talents of silver” – Haman is funding this out of his own pocket, giving it as a gift to the king to fund this venture.

- The annual income of the Persian Empire at this time was 15,000 talents of silver. Silver was the currency of the Medo-Persians.
- “ten thousand talents” – That is 750,000 lbs. of silver.

3:10 – “the enemy of the Jews” – This phrase occurs 5 times in this book.

3:11 – “the money and the people are given to you” – King Xerxes releases the resources into the hands of Haman to carry out this extermination.

3:13 – “couriers” – This was the Medo-Persian Pony Express.

- “to annihilate all the Jews” – This is another potential holocaust.
- “plunder their possessions” – This was part of the incentive to destroy the Jews.
 - It is possible that Haman expected to make more money on his investment through the plundering of the Jews than he put out in the first place to King Xerxes.

Chapter 4:

4:1 – “loud and bitter cry” – Mordecai’s refusal to bow to Haman has led to the command to kill all of Mordecai’s people.

- Part of the culture of that day was to mourn openly and visibly.
- The people of God must learn to mourn at the right times.

4:2 – “no one might enter the king’s gate clothed with sackcloth” – To come before the king sad implied something bad was happening to the king, like a plot to kill him, so being sad before the king was generally discouraged.

4:3 – “great mourning among the Jews” – It doesn’t say that they prayed, but it seems to be implied.

4:4 – “she send garments...he would not accept them” – This is a picture of the world trying to abate the heart’s cry of people with external goods, but those goods being rejected because they don’t change a heart.

- Esther doesn’t understand why Mordecai is mourning.

4:8 – “her people” – This is probably the first time anyone in the court heard that Esther was Jewish.

4:11 – “I myself have not been called” – This is the problem in attempting to bring this request to the king.

- After all that has been done to Esther, now Mordecai is asking her to step up and put herself in harm’s way.

4:13 – “Do not think in your heart that you will escape” – The Persians now know that Esther is one of the Jews.

- “king’s palace” – Her place and position are not for her own comfort, but for her service of God and His people.
 - Esther will put it all on the line at this important crossroads in human history.

4:14 – “deliverance will arise for the Jews” – Mordecai trusts God’s care and God’s word. He doesn’t doubt that God will keep His covenant with the Jews to spare them.

- “for such a time as this” – This is the opportunity and responsibility of Esther’s life. All her hurts, all these events, and all this time is coming to a pinnacle in this event.
 - Esther will be able to redeem all her difficulties by stepping out in this way.
 - It is better to live a broken life and to know the Lord than to live in comfort and never be saved.
 - God has picked me to live at this time.

4:16 – “fast for me” – She is doubtlessly asking for prayer.

- “neither eat nor drink for three days” – Three days is the limit to go without water.
- “if I perish, I perish” – She makes herself a living sacrifice. She goes knowing this could cost her life.
 - If you’re going to die, might as well die doing the right thing.
 - The NT “witness” is a martyr. And a martyr isn’t something one becomes when they die for their faith, it is something one is when they are willing to lay down their lives for the cause and will of the Lord in daily life. Being killed as a martyr only proves that they were already a martyr in life.

Chapter 5:

5:1 – “on the third day” – Esther has been thinking and praying about this for three days.

5:2 – “the golden scepter” – She receives the mercy and grace of the king.

- “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.” (Prov. 21:1)
- Was Xerxes regretting his drunken foolishness that led to Vashti being sent away?
- “touched the top of the scepter” – She follows protocol.

5:3 – “What is your request?” – Esther will delay to make the request two times until God works another end to prepare for the favorable response to the request.

- The right word must be spoken at the right time for the God-given results.

5:5 – “the king and Haman went to the banquet” – This is stroking the ego of Haman.

5:6 – “banquet of wine” – This is not as significant a meal as a royal feast.

5:7 – “is this:” – The grammar seems to indicate a hesitation. Something is causing Esther to pause.

- This will delay her request 24 hours and in those 24 hours some remarkable things will occur that will pave the way for her request to be heard and received by the king.

5:11 – “Haman told them of his riches” – Haman invites all his friends over to brag about himself.

5:13 – “all this avails me nothing” – Haman has all this favor and still cannot be happy as long as one old Jewish man refuses to bow before him.

5:14 – “fifty cubits high” – This is an impaling post about 75-80 feet tall in his front yard.

Chapter 6:

6:1 – “That night” – The entire story of Esther turns on the king’s inability to sleep.

6:2 – “it was found written” – The reader picks an event that happened over 5 years ago. (Est. 2:16; 3:7)

- The king could have asked for his wife, a harp player, a hot bath, or anything else to help him sleep, but he requests the chronicles to be read.

6:3 – “Nothing has been done for him” – Showing gratitude in that culture was more of a responsibility than merely a king gesture.

- God saved Mordecai’s recompense until now.

6:4 – “Haman had just entered the outer court” – Haman gets there early to ask for Mordecai’s execution on the gallows he has just built.

- It would seem to Haman that the immediate invitation into the king’s presence was a sign of his favor before the king.

6:12 – “Mordecai went back to the king’s gate” – He resumes his post.

- What meant so much to the proud Haman means little to the humble Mordecai.

6:13 – “Zeresh” – She is the one who previously proposed Haman build the gallows. (Est. 5:14)

Chapter 7:

7:1 – “to dine with Queen Esther” – The queen finding favor with the king, gaining access to the throne, and sharing a meal with the king is an interesting picture of Christ and the Church.

7:3 – “let my life be given me” – This would play on the sympathies of the king.

7:4 – “to be destroyed” – She is speaking up for the lives of her people.

7:6 – “this wicked Haman” – The numerical value of the Hebrew letters of this phrase is 666.

7:7 – “the king arose in his wrath” – Xerxes doesn’t just explode in anger for the laws of the Medes and Persians couldn’t be changed. Xerxes must feel deceived and shocked.

- “pleading for his life” – Proud men in power are tyrants. But those same men without power are cowards.

7:8 – “the couch” – In that culture, they ate reclining on pillows at a low table.

- “covered Haman’s face” – This was with the death cloth.

7:9 – “Harbonah” – Esther 1:10.

- “Hang him” – Haman will reap what he has sown.
 - The distance between the king’s banquet hall and the gallows is incredibly short, as is the distance between earth and hell for the unbeliever who is separated from outer darkness only by death.

7:10 – “hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai” – God uses the enemy’s tools against him. He can turn the enemy’s plans for evil to prosper His people.

- “‘No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment You shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me,’ says the Lord.” (Isa. 54:17)

Chapter 8:

8:2 – “gave it to Mordecai” – Xerxes gives Mordecai the position before held by Haman.

- Mordecai, the Jew, is now prime minister of the Persian Empire.
- Mordecai is a strong believer who knows and trusts the Scriptures while living in Persia under the influence of the wicked Haman.

- 8:3 – “Esther spoke again to the king” – Haman’s influence is continuing after his death. The man is dead, but the edict still stands.
- Esther’s personal peace and prosperity haven’t lessened her care for her people or her boldness before the king.
 - It is less than 9 months until Haman’s edict was to be carried out.
- 8:8 – “no one can revoke” – This is the problem; the laws of the Medes and Persians could not be revoked. So instead they will have to be countermanded. (Dan. 6:15)
- The NT teaches that the law of the Spirit counteracts, without revoking altogether, the pertinent Law of Moses and the flesh.
- 8:9 – “third month...twenty-third day” – This is June 25, 474 BC, two months and ten days after the proclamation of Haman’s edict. (Est. 3:13)
- “in their own script and language” – This takes a lot of work to get this edict written and sent out to the entire province in all these languages.
 - This is an interesting picture of one woman kneeling before the throne and thereby moving the good news to the entire nation to annul the death sentence on her people. Just one person of prayer. (Ezek. 22:30)
- 8:11 – “protect their lives” – This is in self-defense.
- It seems that no women and children will be killed under this edict.
- 8:12 – “thirteenth day of the twelfth month” – This is March 7, 473 BC.
- 8:15-17 – “rejoiced and was glad” – Happiness of one kind or another is mentioned in this paragraph at least 7 times.
- “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” (Prov. 14:34)
- 8:15 – “in royal apparel of blue and white” – Mordecai has new clothes.
- 8:17 – “many of the people of the land became Jews” – Haman’s attempt to eliminate the Jews from the kingdom has only caused more of the people to become Jews.
- The people have accepted, appropriated, and acted on the good news that went out. The good news was not only declared, it was received.
 - “because fear of the Jews” – This is the reason many are becoming Jews at this time.
 - It seems that the people are recognizing the supernatural hand of God at work in all of this.

Chapter 9:

- 9:1 – “the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them” – The Jews aren’t safe simply because Esther is queen and Mordecai is second in command. The edict of Mordecai will only protect them if they act upon it.
- “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” (Rom. 8:37)
 - “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13)
 - “Jesus said to him, ‘If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.’” (Mark 9:23)
 - “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63)

9:3 – “all the officials” – The government is supporting the second (Mordecai’s) edict. Politics is in favor of the Jews here.

9:4 – “Mordecai was great in the king’s palace” – God has His prophet in every age.
- Mordecai, like Joseph and Daniel, was placed by God in a position of authority.

9:5 – “with those who hated them” – This is self-defense.

9:6 – “five hundred men” – These may have been loyal to Haman in the capital city of Shushan.
- It is estimated that there were probably half a million people in the capital city.

9:7-10 – “the ten sons of Haman” – The names of Haman’s sons make for an interesting picture.

9:10 – “they did not lay a hand on the plunder” – Three times in this chapter we are told that they didn’t spoil the people they killed. (v. 10, 15, 16)
- They did not want the reason for their fighting to be misunderstood; they weren’t in it for the money.
- Saul’s failure to completely destroy the Amalekites was motivated by an interest in the material possessions of the Amalekites. (1 Sam. 15:9)

9:16 – “seventy-five thousand” – These are the people who came against the Jews to annihilate them under Haman’s edict.
- There are an estimated 15 million Jews and 100 million Persians in the kingdom.

9:17 – “they rested” – God’s word proved to be true towards them.

9:18 – “a day of feasting and gladness” – Today, the Jews observe a day of fasting on the 13th and feasting on the 14th, except in Jerusalem where it is observed on the 15th.

9:26 – “Purim” – This is the plural for “lot” (Pur). Haman cast a lot, but so did God.

9:28 – “these days should be remembered” – The traditional feast is still held yearly.
- “throughout every generation” – This feast will be a lesson on the faithfulness of God to those who will follow.
- God’s word will not pass away.
- God is looking for a godly seed.

9:29 – “wrote with full authority” – Esther is sending out another edict to establish the celebration of Purim among the Jews in the Persian Empire.
- This will serve as a reminder to the Persians to keep their hands off the Jews.

Chapter 10:

10:3 – “seeking the good of his people” – This is an essential quality for those in leadership.
- The Septuagint adds 6 more chapters that are rejected as apocryphal.
- King Ahasuerus’ son, Artaxerxes, will be the one to decree to Nehemiah to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.