

Esther Ch 1&2

Just so that you know, as far as the flow goes that interweaves the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, the book of Esther is out of chronological order. The events recorded in this book take place before the book of Nehemiah begins, and before the book of Ezra ends. It most likely finds its place in history between Ch's 6-7 of the book of Ezra, after the initial release of the Jews (of which about 50,000 returned to Jerusalem) but before the 2nd round up when Ezra came on the scene and made his way to Jerusalem with a couple thousand more.

And Really the best way to read the book of Esther is in one sitting, and I encourage you to do that it wouldn't take you any more than 30 min or so to sit down and soak this book up, and if you do that I think you'll find it fascinating. It's got all the characteristics of an epic saga, excitement, intrigue, romance, deception, a hero, a villain, palatial parties, poetic justice, a King and more than one Queen, why it hasn't become a film yet I couldn't tell you.

But as you sit down and soak it up there may be another interesting detail that sort of jumps out at you, or perhaps I should say that *won't* jump out at you because you won't find it, and we sort of scratch our heads to find that we don't find it. And It's the *only* book of the bible in which you won't find it, in the book of Esther you *will not* find the name of or the mention of God anywhere. Now some would say that you don't find it in the Song of Solomon either, but it's there, it just wasn't translated as such, but it's in Ch 8 Vs 6. We read there, "*Set me as a seal upon your heart, As a seal upon your arm; For love is as strong as death, Jealousy as cruel as the grave; Its flames are flames of fire, A most vehement flame.*" Song 8:6 There where it's rendered "A most vehement flame," it's literally "A flame of Yah" or "YHWH" and why it wasn't translated as such I'm not sure. But my point is that God is mentioned in the book of the Song of Solomon, in the book of Esther He's not. You won't find anyone praying in the book of Esther, no reference to faith in the book of Esther, those things just aren't there. But make no mistake, *God is*, the overwhelming emphasis of the book of Esther is the providential hand of God. I'm sure you remember that Sunday morning we touched on Rom 8:28, "*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*" and I can't think of another book of the bible that so graphically portrays that particular principle. In the book of Esther God is "In the shadows" (if you will) "behind the scenes" working the various scenarios and circumstances for the nation of Israel's good and His glory.

The question comes up, why *isn't* God mentioned, why *isn't* there direct intervention via prayer, and all of those things? and It's a good question and not one that I'm sure can be answered, but people have speculated on that and I believe that there are some good possibilities as to why. As I mentioned a minute ago the book of Esther takes place after the initial release of the captivity. The Jews had been in captivity for 70 yrs due to their idolatrous ways, they'd neglected their Sabbaths for 490 yrs. And So God sent them into captivity, into Babylon 1 yr for every Sabbath yr they'd neglected and to "cure" them (if you will) of their idolatry once and for all.

When Babylon fell, and the Persian empire arose into power, you recall that Cyrus the king of Persia issued a decree that not only allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem but he funded the trip. And That was God's will, God's desire for His people, they were to return, rebuild, and restore their worship in Jerusalem. Therefore in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (the record of those who did just that) you find God mentioned, prayer and worship taking place, God's Word being read, and people repenting all over those books. But the book of Esther chronicles a particular event that took place in the lives of some people who *didn't* return to Jerusalem, who *didn't* follow God's perfect plan and desire for their lives. You might say that of the couple or so million Jews who were there in Babylon, only the 50,000 of them who returned to Jerusalem were in God's *perfect* will, the rest of them were in God's *permissive* will.

Or another way to understand that; those who remained were in essence backslidden. When they were carried into captivity they wept, longing for Jerusalem, saying, "How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?" We read in Ps 137:1-6 "*By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept When we remembered Zion. We hung our harps Upon the willows in the midst of it. For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, And those who plundered us requested mirth, Saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How shall we sing the LORD's song In a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth --If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy.*" They couldn't fathom life in a foreign land, away from Jerusalem their God appointed place of worship, they left saying, "How can we sing" but apparently at this point the vast majority of them had forgotten the song...had grown rather comfortable in Babylon, no longer longing to return to the place God would have them be. And Isn't that the way it is? When a certain sin, or situation overcomes us, at 1st we grieve, but if nothing gets done about it, if there's no real repentance, it doesn't take long before we grow quite comfortable right there in our backslidden, compromised position. There's no longer a real longing for the things of God, and we sure don't mention God, not like we used to, perhaps that's the deal here. They're not where God would have them be so that nearness of God, the mention of God, the longing for God, isn't mentioned in this book. They'd forgotten those songs, now they were in tune with what was happening there in their present state.

But here's the good news even though they were faithless, God is faithful, He's still a loving faithful Father, and providing protector, where sin abounds grace abounds still more and God will watch out *over* and be there *for* His own, He will never leave nor forsake you, even when we can't see Him, or don't make mention *of* Him, He's there. And This book definitely communicates that reality, God is still there for His children, caring for them *passionately*, committed to them *emphatically*. And In His providence He'll defend and preserve their *nationality*. God cares *for*, watches out *over*, protects and preserves His own, He's the One in control.

So basically he threw a feast for all the nobles in his kingdom (which eastward stretched through Afghanistan, Pakistan, and into India, and southward to Saudi Arabia and north Africa including Egypt, obviously representing multiple cultures and languages,) this was the global dominating force of the world at the time. The Persian Empire was the global superpower, though it wouldn't be too much longer in the grand scheme of world history before Alexander the Great would take the Grecian kingdom towards the forefront. But for now Ahasuerus is the man, now that's not his name, it's his title, much like Pharaoh was for the Egyptians, most historians tell us that Xerxes was the man on the throne at this time.

And It's doubtful that he brought all of the nobles in at the same time, that would've weakened his kingdom, but he probably brought them in on a rotating schedule over the period of 6 months. But to do this sort of thing would've cost millions of dollars, a 6 month open ended feast for all the princes and nobles, officials and powers of the 127 provinces over which he reigned, along with their wives as the case may be. And As you begin to glean what was happening in secular history at this same time you realize that he was more than likely seeking muster support, and assuring those in positions of authority of his wealth and power because he was preparing to launch an all out/unparalleled full scale war effort against Greece which his father had done previously and failed and he was going to follow up and follow through on that whole situation. So he was seeking to assure these guys of his ability to finance the war, and getting them behind him in his effort. Kinda like a salesperson who wants your business taking you out to a nice restaurant, things haven't changed that much.

But unfortunately money doesn't guarantee military success and he would wind up losing the war he instigated as well. The Persians sought to win wars based on sheer overwhelming volume, he would take some 2 ½ million soldiers to war in his campaign against Greece. But the Greeks focused on the quality/skill of the individual soldier, so that 1 Greek soldier may be equivalent militarily speaking to 10 Persian soldiers, both his navy and his army was ultimately destroyed and he would come back from his campaign a defeated man (but we're ahead of ourselves, that takes place between Ch 1 and 2).

Vs5-9

This wasn't uncommon in that culture, the Queen was throwing a separate banquet for the women. But you get a glimpse of the ornate/luxurious banquet that he was throwing of which the last week he just opened it up to anyone there in the immediate area, or community in which the palace was. All the vessels were of gold and each one was custom crafted, not one person had a goblet that looked exactly like someone else's, no need to write your name on the various foam cups, they were all custom made. And In Vs 8 we begin to get a glimpse into an area that's going to begin this whole ball rolling, this is what begins to make for the background of what leads up to Esther becoming Queen. The king has an open bar, it's not a 2 drink minimum kinda of a gathering, but nor is there any limit, you could drink as much, or as little as you wanted to.

Now remember this isn't a godly situation, this is simply a historical account of a particular happening in a secular society. And All its going to make for is problems, now is God able to take of those situations that would otherwise simply destroy and make of them something that He is able to use for His own glory? Absolutely, but does that give you or me a license to do whatever we want, sinning all the more that God might display His grace all the more? God forbid, how can we who are dead to sin live any longer in it? So just be aware that this isn't something that's happening in a god fearing society, it's not like the feasts of Israel. This is just a worldly, drunken, godless party, the bible says, "*Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, And whoever is led astray by it is not wise.*" Prov 20:1 Jesus said, "...take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life" Luke 21:34 Does the bible command abstinence from alcohol?

No, but it sure emphasizes it, the priests and the Levites weren't to be mingling drinking with their service at the tabernacle, the Nazirite wasn't to even eat the skin of a grape, Paul tells leaders in the body, those serving in the body, to just steer clear. The proverbs warn against it for people in general and tells kings to stay away from it period which you are, the bible says that we've been made kings and priests to our God, just stay away from it, it'll serve as a snare to you. "Well Jesus drank." Don't you love that one, that's one of the dumbest offers of justification that could ever be uttered out of someone's mouth. Not only were there completely different cultural connotations, medical realizations, dysentery in much of the water and all the rest. But how many of these same people who try to say they want to drink like Jesus drank do you suppose pray like Jesus prayed, or study and apply the Word like Jesus applied the Word, or for that matter do any other thing in life the way Jesus did it? If your prayer life mirrors Jesus' and your walk in life of sacrifice and service mirrors Jesus' than I suppose I'd be ok if your drink now and then mirrored Jesus. But here's the deal, if you want to truly be like Jesus, you can't drink at all, because Jesus hasn't touched any fruit of the vine for over 2,000yrs. Want to be like Jesus when it comes to drinking? Than wait till your with Him to do it, because He said, "*I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.*" Matt 26:29

So those who offer Jesus as their justification don't really want to use Jesus as their model, or they wouldn't be drinking at all, notice.

Vs10-12

What are we seeing here? Alcohol mixing with anger, inciting anger, and the 2 never make for a good combination. The Queen is really the one who for all intents and purposes is in the right, he's drunk, wants to put her on display in the midst of a bunch of other drunk men like a trophy, and she doesn't want anything to do with it. And If he weren't drunk he'd have never requested this kind of thing from her, but now he feels as though he's been disrespected, and the snowball begins to roll. Prov 14:17 tells us, "*A quick-tempered man acts foolishly,*" alcohol will cause you to do things you regret, quick irrational temper will cause you to do things you regret, now what do you suppose will be the outcome of combining the 2? It won't be anything good.

Vs13-22

So this one act gets blown up to a kingdom wide epidemic (as if someone in a Podunk village in the remote parts of Egypt would've ever even had a clue of this happening) that ultimately ends in their divorce. He appeals to some friends of his whom I'm not certain weren't American, "Get rid of her you deserve someone better" "Hey dump that jerk and get someone good for you" it's the American way of life right? and Though he blames the circumstance on her, the divorce and destruction really result from what? His drinking, had he stayed sober none of this would've happened.

Ch2

Vs1

Now as I mentioned earlier between Ch's 1 and 2 you can find through secular history that he went off to war, launched his invasion of Greece, suffered defeat and his naval fleet of around 300 ships were destroyed at Salamis his army devastated at a place I couldn't pronounce and he comes back having lost the war. Then he begins to think about Vashti, oh he's got his harem don't be deceived, but he really doesn't have anyone special in his life, and the wife he had he got rid of. There's no one for him to confide in, no one there by his side, he's bummed about his loss and he begins to think back on what happened, his stupidity for getting rid of his wife, he's regretting it.

Vs2-4

And So we see why this background information was needed because ultimately how Esther will come into the equation. But these guys are quick to deflect his thoughts from Vashti because they know if she comes back into power, they're more than likely dead men. And So they offer more American advice, "Hey king, play the field a little, check your options, you've got to look for Mr. or Ms. Right," and so people are encouraged to date around, become intimate with all sorts of people until they find the person they're "compatible" with. And That really couldn't be any more contrary to what the Word of God teaches. "...*from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh.*" Mark 10:6-8 There was no, "Try this gal out," or "See if this guy works for ya" God brought them together and that was it. I'm not saying you shouldn't know where a persons relationship with the Lord is, what their priorities are. But what I am saying is that to follow the world's pattern, you take a complex path that leaves in its wake a trail of violated bodies, crushed spirits and broken hearts. If you do things the Lord's way there's simplicity, stability, and purity. These guys say, "We need to have a beauty pageant, Ms. Persia, the winner becomes Queen, everyone else gets a miserable consolation prize of a lifetime spent in your harem."

The king says, "I can live with that," so that's what they did.

Vs5-7

Esther means “Star” which is exactly what Esther is, Hadassah means “Myrtle” which is a plant, or a shrub. And It seems that when Nebuchadnezzar carried away so many of the Jews that Esther’s parents were killed, so Mordecai (her cousin) took her as his own and raised her. And Of course here we find out she’s a knock out so when the king’s representatives knocked on Mordecai’s door, it was a no brainer, they took Esther with them. It really doesn’t appear as though this was a contest you could enter by choice. You were drafted into it. But you can begin to see the dominos being stacked, God’s hand setting the stage.

Vs8-11

So you get the idea that much like Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon, Esther (by the divine hand of God) was given favor in Shushan, now we realize that it seems that she had no choice in this matter of being there. But we’re coming into some major conflicting/compromising issues here with the Mosaic law and what’s going on here. #1 As a Jew, they were to in no way shape or form marry a pagan Gentile, which is what she’s being positioned to do, there were also certain dietary restrictions that they were to uphold of which if she concealed her identity as a Jew (perhaps for fear of anti-Semitism or whatever) she’d have had to compromise those things. Now having said that I suppose its possible that they were somewhat ignorant of exactly what the Word said since they were so far out of touch having been so long in captivity, but again I suggest to that had they gone back to Jerusalem like they should have, none of these things would’ve even been an issue. They’d be enjoying revival with the completion of the temple with the other’s who returned. So remember that just because God’s moving, that doesn’t mean God’s approving, in His providence He’ll overrule and watch out for His own, but that in no way indicates that He approves of the circumstances we get ourselves into due to compromise in our lives. Mordecai is freaking out, everyday, pacing back and forth in front of the women’s quarters, wondering what’s happening to his daughter (for all intents and purposes). And I would imagine that’s the concern of every man who’s been in compromise himself as his daughter comes of age. The best way to combat that would be to stay out of compromise yourself, lead your family in an upright way that complies with the word of God and perhaps you won’t find yourself pacing back and forth wondering what’s to become of your daughter now that the world’s got a hold on her.

Vs12

As you know myrrh was an ancient embalming perfume, brought to Jesus at His birth speaking of the death that He would die for the sin of the world. And Though the Persians used it to supposedly extract toxins and various imperfections from the skin, there are those who paint a picture here a bride being adorned for her king, and likening that to our being prepared for our King, Jesus as his bride. Soaking in that which speaks of death to self, death to the flesh, which makes for a sweet smelling aroma to the Lord, when the flesh was burned on the altar of sacrifice, it made for a sweet smelling aroma to the Lord. Now whether or not that’s proper exegesis I have my questions but it makes for a good picture in that we’re to be spending this time preparing ourselves for our King, dying to self, bathing in myrrh, and of course after that comes the perfumes.

The perfumes weren't applied until 1st going through the myrrh, before honor is humility, as I said there are some frailties with that whole take, but yet the principle is valid.

Vs13-14

And This means exactly what you think it does, they'd prepare all year for this one encounter with the king, they would be taken to the king that evening, the king would sleep with her, and after that it would be into the harem they'd go. And If the king didn't delight in her, or call her out by name, she'd pretty much live out the rest of her life in a miserable state of loneliness. So you can see why Mordecai is so worried, there's just really nothing good about this scene, the only sense of hope being that perhaps the king will like her and she'll become the Queen, if there's a silver lining around that cloud, that's it.

Vs15-18

When it says the king "loved" Esther it's not necessarily speaking of some sort of love at 1st sight thing. It's a word that covers the whole scope of affection much like our English word love. Whether it be a love for my wife, my favorite food, a friend, they're all a different type of love but that's the only word I can use, you have to discern the context to determine what I mean. Same thing here, all this is saying is that his affection for her was greater than his affection for any of the other women.

But God is going to take these things that are twisted and immoral in the world and sovereignly overrule them and make from them a way to spare the nation once again. They may be floundering around out of God's will, but they're not going to thwart God's will, He's the One who's ultimately in control. Same holds true for us, we may step outside the confines of God's will from time to time, but that's not God to thwart God's plan ultimately, He's in control whether I'm where He desires me to be or not, and to the degree I avail myself to Him, He'll use me.

Vs19-23

We don't know why they were planning to do in the king, perhaps they were in favor of Vashti and couldn't get beyond what the king had done. But Mordecai essentially saves his life, and what's his reward? Nothing, zero, zilch, zip, not a thing. "Well we'll write your name here in this book." "Yippy" but that's ok, God seen it, and God will reward it, you see he can't have his reward yet because that won't favor the ultimate providential hand of God, the day will come here in a few Ch when Mordecai will be rewarded, but it's not time.

Sometimes we can't see why things happen the way they do, but in hindsight its perfectly clear. We're to trust in the Lord who sees the end from the beginning for the details of our lives. God's going to do the right thing with this whole situation, and He'll do the right thing in yours to, you watch, you wait, and you'll see.

Prayer Points: Lord God thank You for being in control, that even when we're faithless, You remain faithful, still loving *on* us, caring *for* us, watching out *over* us. It blows us away to see how you can take lives like ours, as messed up as we may at times be, and still use us for your glory, God we give You praise, teach us what You'd have us know as we study Your Word in the book of Esther, in Jesus name.