Purim Part I in Fresno

Purim is a festival celebrating the salvation of the Jews from a Persian pogrom/mass execution by the saving act of Esther under King Xerxes

The biblical festival of Purim is celebrated in March

Two day celebration.

They dress up in costumes

Give to the needy (next week: giving at the food pantry)

Give food gifts to one another

And read the entire book of Esther

The Jews created Purim as a festival to commemorate their salvation. God is big on holidays and parties.

Passover to celebrate God saving Israel from Egypt,

Pentecost to celebrate the Spring harvest

Yom Kippur/Day of Atonement to celebrate our forgiveness from sins

Rosh Hoshannah/Feast or Trumpets to prepare for the return of the Messiah

Tabernacles to celebrate God’s presence with his people in the wilderness, Purim, Hanukkuh to celebrate God saving his people from Antiochus Epiphanes

And, Purim!

Studying the festivals has informed me that, as a Christian, I need to celebrate and to enjoy my salvation and my relationship with God. If I am not enjoying my Christianity, there is something wrong.

God wants us to have lost of parties to celebrate the victories He gives us.

**Notes on Book of Esther:**

Only book in the Bible to not mention God.

Only book not found in Dead Sea Scrolls.

Probably included by the Jews because it is the motivation for the festival Purim.

Yet (to quote a famous Bible scholar Gary Simmons, “God is everywhere in the book.”

Theme #1 of Esther: God is in control. He is always working behind the scenes to save his people.

Theme #2 of Esther: God uses a righteous woman to save Israel

There is messianic significance to Esther, as Esther is a prefigure of the Messiah, because, like Jonah, like Moses she offers her life to save God’s people from death.

Esther: Queen of Xerxes (485-465 BC)

Theme of Esther: God saves his people.

Esther 1:1-3 From India to Cush - largest empire in the world at that time! 127 provinces (20 Satrapies - Judah was a province of the Satrapy of Syria). Where’s God? His people aren’t ruling.

3rd year of Xerxes’ (485-465 BC) reign 482 BC. Xerxes the Great, son of Darius the Great. He is the emperor who won the Battle of Thermopylea (famous from the movie 300) in 480 BC, 55 yrs after 1st return from captivity (Cyrus)

The temple was rebuilt in 516 BC, but the city has no walls! Where’s God? People scattered / unfocused / limbo / stuck. Been there? Christian for 15 / 25 yrs, but in a rut.

Esther 1:4-12 Vashti refuses Xerxes. She is beautiful, but also prideful.

Esther 1:13-22 The queen’s conduct will become known to all the women… All women will disrespect their husbands. Vashti deposed as queen.

Esther 2:1-7

Our two protagonists: Esther (Hadassah), who is very beautiful and Mordecai Esther’s cousin/foster parent. Both names come from pagan Persian gods Mordecai/Marduk, Esther/Ishtar. Way out of their comfort zone in exile. Where is God is all this?

Esther 2:8-14 Esther is prepared to meet Xerxes. V. 10 Notice her submissiveness to Mordecai. She is young and inexperienced, but she is a humble and righteous woman.

2:15-18 Esther is very humble. Xerxes chooses her. God is in control.

God is always working, even in very stressful and dangerous times, even if we cannot see it.

2:19-23 Esther keeps her nationality secret. Being Jewish was a risky thing. Esther submissive to Mordecai. Mordecai happens to overhear a conversation. Uncovers a plot to assassinate Xerxes and saves his live. (by the way, Xerxes was assassinated in 564 BC)

Again, God is in control. God is working. Faith is belief in things unseen.

Here we see God working behind the scenes to save his people. This is biblical predestination. But Mordecai gets no credit and favor from Xerxes.

Esther 3:1-4 Enter the villain, Haman! Totally prideful. Chief minister to Xerxes. Mordecai, the Jew refuses to bow to Haman.

In this messianic story, Haman is Satan. He is the equivalent of Pharaoh in the story of Moses.

Esther 3:5-15 Haman conceives a plot to commit genocide on the Jews in Persia!!! If we are different from those around us, non-Christians might not appreciate that! Jews under a death penalty.

There is an analogy to the Jews in Egypt whom he saves through Moses (who willingly left the palace to save the Jews), to sailors on the boat with Jonah (who willingly offered his life to save the Gentiles), but also to us who were dead in our sins.

God’s solution: He sends a Savior/Messiah prefigure Esther who will willingly offer her life to save the Jews.

Esther 4:1-8 Mordecai learns of the decree. Calls out to God to help his people.

Mordecai does two things: 1. He prays—calling on God. 2. He takes action. He does not just sit around waiting for God to do something.

Esther 4:9-11 Apparently, there was a law of the Persians that anyone who came into the king’s presence without being asked could be summarily executed.

Esther: Do you realize what you are asking me? You are asking me to move to Bakersfield! You are asking me to change careers to help the kingdom.

Esther 4:12-17 Esther is in a tough spot. It reminds me of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

v. 14 A famous verse.

Look at Mordecai’s faith. Faith is belief in things not seen. Heb 11:1 God is always working, even when we cannot see it—even when things seem to be going totally against us.

 Mordecai challenges Esther. Maybe God put you in this position for a purpose.

American: Maybe God put you in the wealthiest country in the world for a reason.

College graduate: Maybe God allowed you to get that degree for a reason.

Athlete: Maybe God made you athletic so that he can use you to do something great.

Beautiful woman: Maybe God made you beautiful for a reason.

v. 16 If I perish, I perish. I love Esther’s faith here!!!

Wow! This little girl that Mordecai raised is taking a stand for what’s right! Isn’t that what we hope with our children? When faced with dilemmas, they will have such confidence in the invisible God! Impress it on them .

More important: exemplify it!

Esther is like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Willing to give their lives for the honor of God and to save God’s people.

Are you in a situation that requires much faith and belief that God is in control, despite all appearances? Lost a job? Lost a loved one? Spouse unfaithful? Broken relationship? Covid in your family?

God is always working, even if we cannot see it.

Esther 5:1-8. Notice: On the 3rd day. 1 Cor 15:4 (like Abraham, like Jonah)

Esther fasts 3 days, waits outside the door. Xerxes sees her and holds out his scepter to her. (whew!!!)

This = God sending a ram to save Isaac from death—also on the 3rd day.

Esther: Let me put on a banquet for the king, and invite Haman. Xerxes: What do you want—even up to half my kingdom. God is totally in control!!!!

Esther to put on a second banquet. What faith!!!!

Esther 5:9-14 God intervenes again.

Haman is so confident! Satan was sure that he had eliminated the problem of Jesus.

But then Haman sees Mordecai, not bowing, and vows to ask Xerxes to impale Mordecai on a pole. (the parallel to Jesus, also impaled on a pole is significant here) A foreshadow of the cross of Jesus. God is working behind the scenes.

We are stopping our story just when it is getting good. But we will stop there. What will happen? Will God save his people through the Messiah-like faithful act of Esther. Stay tuned!