RRRR VII Esther I

**Notes on Book of Esther:**

Only book in the Bible to not mention God.

Only book not found in Dead Sea Scrolls.

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

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

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

Today and next week, I will do what the Jews do for Purim, which is read (nearly) the entire 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 a remnant of 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 1:1-3 From India to Cush - largest empire in the world at that time! 127 provinces

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.

They have partially repented and partially returned, and God has partially restored and partially rebuilt. Esther is a photo of the situation between Ezra Part I, Haggai and Zechariah and Ezra Part II, Nehemiah and Malachi

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. This is all worldly thinking, but there is some wisdom here. Vashti deposed as queen.

Esther 2:1-7

Xerxes furious. Not exactly Christian behavior.

v. 4 Xerxes: I get to choose the most sexy and alluring girl in the kingdom. Sure!

Our two protagonists: Esther (Hadassah), who is very beautiful and Mordecai Esther’s cousin (Esth 2:15) /foster parent. Mordecai great grandson of Kish who was carried into exile in 597 BC. 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. How does she feel? Honored or scared to death? A young girl ripped whose parents have died, ripped from her family and her people to be paraded in front of a lecherous king.

v. 9 God is watching over Esther.

V. 10 Notice her submissiveness to Mordecai. She is young and inexperienced, but she is a humble and righteous woman.

2:15-18 v. 16 Four years after the scene with Vashti.

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.

Can you see God working behind the scenes is subtle and surprising ways in your life?

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 or Herod is the story of Jesus.

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.

But remember Zechariah 2:1-13 God has measured Jerusalem and the Jews. “Jerusalem will be a city without walls.” God will take care of his people if we repent and return to him. Or remember Zechariah 12:2-5.

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.

Illustration: That time at CU getting housing….

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. You are asking me to not go to Montreal. You are asking me to change my major to one that I can use to serve God.

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.

God will find a way to save people here in Merced. Hopefully, He will use us, but if we are not faithful, He will find another way. Daisy, maybe sent you to Merced for such a time as this.

v. 14 So, will you remain silent at this time?

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? Bad health diagnosis?

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.

Sure, she is faithful, but she is also very nervous.

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.

Esther 6:1-3 Again, God is working behind the scenes. Xerxes cannot sleep. Reading the record of reign.

What did he find? The story of Mordecai saving his life.

God’s providence at work here.

Esther 6:4-9 Who just so happened to enter the court? Haman.

Xerxes: How should I honor the one who saved my life?

Haman: Put a royal robe on him and put him on a horse you have ridden.

v. 7 Irony: He is assuming Xerxes is talking about himself.

Esther 6:10-14 Xerxes: Put a robe on Mordecai!

The world expects honor and glory. This is what Haman wanted!!!, but the honor and glory will go to God’s people on judgment day.

Message: Do not seek honor and glory for yourself, but for God and he will lift you up in due time (James 4:17)

v. 12 Afterward, Mordecai returned to the king’s gate. Did not seek any special honor.

Esther 7:1-10 (Read v. 2-6)

You know the rest of the story. Haman was impaled on the pole intended for Mordecai.

This is a story about what God will do to those who are faithful to Him and those who are prideful and do not obey Him.

Esther 8-9 Xerxes allows the Jews to defend themselves and their enemies are destroyed.

The Jews created Purim as a festival to commemorate their salvation. God is big on holidays and parties. Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, Yom Kippur, Purim, Hanukkuh. Let’s celebrate the victories God gives us.

Lessons from Esther:

God is in control. God is always working behind the scenes and he will use those who will faithfully trust in him.

God blesses faithfulness, but also humility. Neither Esther, nor Mordecai sought great position, but God gave it to them. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. 1 Peter 5:5-6 …that he may lift you up.

Last: Esther is a prefigure of the Messiah. She was a queen, she, nevertheless, willingly offered her life to save the Jews. God is saving a remnant.