

The God Who is There Esther

Intro: Esther takes place about 120 years after the Babylonian exile began and about fifty years after Babylon empire fell. At the 70-year point, when the Persians conquered Babylon in 538 b.c., they allowed the exiled Jews to go back and rebuild Jerusalem (2 Chron. 36:22–23). However, most Israelites did not return to Palestine. Esther is about the Jews who are still living in Susa, the Persian capital.

There are 4 main characters:

- 1 – Mordecai
- 2 – Esther
- 3 – Ahasuerus = Xerxes the Persian king
- 4 – Haman the antagonist

The most intriguing and important element to this book is that God is not mentioned in the book.

The point is three-fold:

- 1 – To make us look for God at work – Think about looking for God in this pandemic
- 2 – To demonstrate that God is at work even though we may not see it
- 3 – To encourage our trust in an invisible God

The book's story can be told in eight steps.

First: Xerxes's Parties. 1-2

The king, Xerxes, hosts two parties that last over 100 days and they demonstrate Xerxes greatness. Xerxes has learned nothing from the history of his predecessors. There is only one King; Jehovah.

- 1 - On the last day of the party, a drunk Xerxes demands that his wife, Vashti, appear.
- 2 – She refuses
- 3 – He deposes her
- 4 – He holds a beauty contest to find a new queen
- 5 – Mordecai tells Esther to hide her Jewish identity, she wins the beauty pageant and becomes queen (2:20).
- 6 – Mordecai, Esther's cousin (2:7), overhears two royal guards plotting to kill the king
- 7 – He tells Esther. Esther tells the king. Mordecai gets credit, albeit anonymous.

2:19-22 - *Now when the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. ²⁰ Esther had not made known her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had*

commanded her, for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him. ²¹ In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. ²² And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai. ²³ When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. And it was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

It would be interesting to look at all the ways God is working behind the scenes in these two chapters

Second: Haman. 3

1 - Haman is an Agagite, (Es 3:1; 8:3) a descendent of Agag, the ruler of the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:8).

- He is called “the enemy of the Jews” (3:10).
- The Amalekites were the first to attack Israel after the exodus (Ex. 17:8–13),
- God pledged to destroy Amalek and his offspring because of their evil (vv. 14–16).
- God commanded Saul to destroy the Amalekites, but he disobeyed the Lord and preserved Agag alive for a time.
- It’s one of the reasons God rejected him as king over Israel (1 Sam. 15).
- Like Saul, Mordecai was a Benjaminite with an ancestor named Kish (1 Sam. 9:1–2; Est. 2:5–6).

2 – Xerxes makes Haman the highest official in the land and he demands universal obeisance

3 – Mordecai refuses to kneel before Haman

4 – Haman discovers Mordecai is Jewish

3:1-6 - After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him. ² And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage. ³ Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, “Why do you transgress the king's command?” ⁴ And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew. ⁵ And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. ⁶ But he disdained^[a] to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy^[b] all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

5 – He convinces the king that Jews are a threat to the kingdom and should be destroyed

6 – Xerxes rolls dice – *pur* - to determine that the Jews will die 11 months later on the 13th of Adar (3:7)

Third: Mordecai and Esther. 4

1 – Mordecai and Esther plot that she will reveal her identity to Xerxes and ask him to stop the plan to annihilate the Jews

2 – But, to approach the king unrequested, is worthy of the death penalty

3 – Mordecai – Even if you don't do this, God will rescue us

4 – Esther – If I perish, I perish

4:13-16 - *Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴ For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" ¹⁵ Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶ "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish."*

Fourth: Esther's First Banquet. 5

1 – Esther hosts a banquet and invites Xerxes and Haman

2 – Haman leaves the banquet drunk and sees Mordecai in the street

3 – He commands gallows be built to hang Mordecai in the morning

5:9-14 - *And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. ¹⁰ Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and brought his friends and his wife Zeresh. ¹¹ And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king. ¹² Then Haman said, "Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king. ¹³ Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." ¹⁴ Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows^[d] fifty cubits^[e] high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast." This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made.*

Fifth: The King's Dream. 6

1 – Xerxes can't sleep, and he has Persia's recent history read to him

2 – He hears the story of how Mordecai saved his life

- 3 – The next morning, Haman announces Mordecai’s upcoming execution
- 4 – Xerxes orders Haman to publicly honor Mordecai

6:1-11 - *On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. ² And it was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthana^[a] and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. ³ And the king said, "What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" The king's young men who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." ⁴ And the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows^[b] that he had prepared for him. ⁵ And the king's young men told him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in." ⁶ So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" ⁷ And Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor; ⁸ let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown^[c] is set. ⁹ And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.'" ¹⁰ Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned." ¹¹ So Haman took the robes and the horse, and he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor."*

Sixth: Esther’s Second Banquet. 7

- 1 – Esther announces that she is Jewish
- 2 – She reveals Haman’s plot to kill her, Mordecai and all the Jews in Persia
- 3 – Xerxes orders that Haman be hanged on the gallows intended for Mordecai

7:1-10 - *So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. ² And on the second day, as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king again said to Esther, "What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." ³ Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. ⁴ For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king." ⁵ Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has dared^[a] to do this?" ⁶ And Esther said, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. ⁷ And the king arose in his wrath from the wine-drinking and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm was determined against*

him by the king. ⁸ And the king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine, as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. And the king said, "Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?" As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. ⁹ Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "Moreover, the gallows^[b] that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman's house, fifty cubits^[c] high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." ¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated.

Seventh: Esther and Mordecai's Plan. 8

- 1 – A law of the Medes and Persians can't be rescinded
- 2 – Instead, Xerxes arms the Jews for the 13th of Adar (8:1-14)
- 3 – Mordecai is elevated to Haman's place as 2nd to the King

Eighth: The 13th of Adar. 9-10

- 1 – The Jews kill Haman's family and any Persian royalty who supported him
- 2 – The next day they kill everyone who plotted against them (8:15-9:19).
- 3 – The Jews establish the feast day, Purim – *pur* (dice), celebrated Feb 25-26, 2021.
- 4 – The book ends with a description of Mordecai's greatness and the Jews life in exile

Application:

Ninth: God's Hand in the Book

There is a lot of irony and 'lucky' circumstances in the book. Is it luck, destiny or agency?

- 1 – The king's splendor at the beginning is mirrored by Mordecai's splendor at the end
- 2 – Mordecai and Esther first save the king who then saves the Jews
- 3 – Right in the middle of the book, Haman is humiliated, and Mordecai is praised
- 3 – Haman's elevation is contrasted with Mordecai's elevation, who represents the Jews

Many people believe, as did Haman, that life is determined by luck, or by the force of human will, or a combination of both. They wish one another "good luck" or speak of "the luck of the draw." Even the phrase "my lot in life" refers to the notion of chance or luck. The Bible doesn't teach that life is orchestrated by luck or destiny but God's sovereign agency.

Proverbs 16:33 - "*the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.*"

Tenth: The Point

1 – Mordecai and Esther are not moral models –

- *Mordecai* is named after the Babylonian god *Marduk*, implying he did not come from the most devoted of households.
- Mordecai actually told Esther to hide her Jewish heritage, and she complied (Est. 2:10).
- Esther has no qualms about marrying a pagan (vv. 5–18; Ex. 12:48).
- Mordecai refuses to obey Ahasuerus and bow to Haman (3:1–6) even though Scripture orders us to honor our leaders as long as they do not ask us to disobey God’s law.
 - Mordecai, then, could be rejecting the king’s order out of pride.
 - Or, Mordecai does not care to imitate saints like Joseph and Nehemiah and submit to earthly rulers (Gen. 41:37–45; Neh. 2:1–8), revealing his lack of faith.
 - Maybe Mordecai knows Haman would hate him no matter what he did, and thus he rebuffs the king’s official.
 - We don’t know.

Like Daniel, they lived in a foreign land, but unlike him, they cared little to be known as God’s holy people (Dan. 1–6).

But this is really good news for all of us. God used Saul’s disobedience and Mordecai’s pride to work out his plan.

God is trustworthy at all times, even when our own sin has placed us in jeopardy.

2 – God is the only Hero of the book.

- * Saul’s disobedience and Mordecai’s pride create the tension in this book
- * God keeps His word even when His people do not.
- * Even in the exile, God sovereignly orchestrated history to give His people a second chance to destroy their foes.
 - * Saul failed, but another Benjaminite named Mordecai, with the help of his cousin Esther, accomplished God’s purpose against Agag and the Amalekites (Est. 7:7–10).
 - * And by the Lord’s grace, Mordecai and Esther did so without being exemplary saints.

3 – The book invites trusting sinners to trust a perfect God whose ways may be hidden but are always working

- Esther “fortunately” wins the beauty contest to become queen
- Mordecai “happens” to hear of the plot to kill Ahasuerus (2:19–23).
- Xerxes “happened” to have a sleepless night (6:1–11) the night before Haman intended to kill Mordecai

When Joseph took stock of his entire life, he could see that God intended everything that happened to him, positive or negative, for the good of many (Gen. 50:20). Yet, while living through these events it was no doubt easy for him to think the Lord's hand was not working on his behalf. God's providence is usually hidden to mankind, but He is still moving nonetheless.

4 – We are provided with divine moments to work with God, but it requires faith and courage.

- Esther put her life on the line to save her brethren, not knowing if her plan would succeed or if she would survive (Est. 4:1–5:2).
- She had to rely on God's hidden providence, trusting that He had allowed her, despite any ungodly motives, to ascend the throne in her day to save His people (4:14).
- Despite the way Esther claimed the throne, she desired to save her people once Haman's threat awakened her to what was right. And she had to do so without being sure of her own fate (v. 16).

Mordecai's confession, "Who knows?" in Esther 4:14 is one all believers must make at one time or another.

5– God uses everything and everyone to move his redemptive drama forward

- "Purim" or "dice" becomes an annual Jewish festival
- It began as "days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor" (Est. 9:20–22).
- The entire book of Esther is read aloud on Purim.

Conclusion: The book of Esther is the last historical narrative in the Old Testament. The Jews are about to enter the 400 Silent Years. God wants his people to know that just because he's not speaking does not mean he's not active. The book of Esther shows just that. While God is not speaking or spoken, God is still moving. It prepares the Jews to look out for how God is moving in the next 400 years without hearing the words of the prophet.

The point is three-fold:

- 1 – To make us look for God at work – Think about looking for God in this pandemic
- 2 – To demonstrate that God is at work even though we may not see it
- 3 – To encourage our trust in an invisible God

Can you do that?

Community Groups:

- 1 – How are you doing?

- 2 – What makes you most happy right now?
- 3 – What troubles you the most right now?
- 4 – How is your chronological reading coming along?
- 5 – What is most profitable about reading the Bible chronologically?
- 6 – What is most difficult about reading the Bible on a daily basis?
- 7 – How are you dealing with the difficulties of reading the Bible every day?
- 8 – Discuss the context of Esther.
- 9 – What is the book about?
- 10 – Where in the book do you see God's sovereignty?
- 11 – What is the difference between luck, fate or sovereignty?
- 12 – How do Mordecai and Esther not qualify as moral examples?
- 13 – How does God's work in their lives offer us encouragement and hope?
- 14 - What is your most valuable take-away from the book?